

**The**  
**BANALITY**  
**of**  
**DENIAL**

Israel and the Armenian Genocide



Yair Auron

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*In memory of my grandmother Sima Yarlicht and other members of my family, whom I never knew, who perished in the Holocaust, and in memory of the anonymous victims of all genocides.*

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## Preface

It all began during Passover vacation when I had to write the introduction to my school project, “Roots,” about the history of my family. My father dedicated his first book to the memory of his parents (that is, my grandfather and grandmother). Right now he is finishing writing his fifth book, which deals with the attitudes of the State of Israel towards the Armenian Genocide. He had thought to dedicate it to the memory of his grandmother (that is, to my great grandmother) who was murdered—so he heard from his father—in the Holocaust, and to the memory of the anonymous victims of all genocides.

Since my father was not sure about the name of his grandmother, he checked it with his sister, Sarale, who is named after one of their grandmothers, Sarah. After examining the issue in the “Roots” of her own daughter, she found out that she was named after the mother of their mother, who died in Palestine in 1937. She added that in the “Roots” her daughter wrote, her grandmother Sima (the mother of their father) died in Poland in 1938, which, as far as she remembers, was what our grandfather, Mordechai, or “Motek” Yarlicht, told her. This did not fit with my father’s memory about what our grandfather had told him.

The fact that what my father remembers contradicts what is written in the “Roots” of his niece greatly bothered him. Finally, he telephoned the only cousin of his father, Malka, who lives in the United States, and checked with her. Malka, who was in her early twenties during the Holocaust, has a very sharp memory. She gave my father a very unequivocal answer that his grandmother, Sima, was *murdered* in the Holocaust together with her mother and father. She also told my father that my grandfather had fourteen sisters, stepbrothers, and stepsisters, and that all of them were murdered in the Holocaust—a fact that my father and his brother and sister never knew.

We still have no answer as to why my grandfather did not tell these facts to his children. Also, we have no answer as to why my father and his brother and sister never really asked him to tell them the story of the family during the Holocaust, even when they were adults. I will try to answer these questions in my “Roots.”

The above was written by my thirteen-year-old son Yuval in March 2002 in the preface of his “Roots” (a research study that has been part

of the Bar Mitzvah—the Jewish celebration marking a child’s entrance into adulthood at the age of thirteen—program in the Israeli school system for the last two decades). We have continued our quest to discover the exact details about the history of my father’s family during the Holocaust—which is not yet finished. But now we are sure that my father lost all his family in the Holocaust. This personal and family story is mainly about unawareness and suppression of very relevant aspects of the history I have inherited. It surely involved some direct or indirect denial by my father and us, his children, concerning the history of our family.

\* \* \*

It seems that different behaviors of denials are present in our lives as individuals and as collectives much more than we are ready to admit. Apart from political and other interests, the tendency to deny uneasy facts is rooted in every one of us, as human beings. It is important for an understanding of personal behavior as well as societies to examine it.

I myself was born and raised in Israel after the Holocaust, a son of parents who had immigrated from Poland before the Holocaust, during the 1930s. For many years I did not know, or at least did not internalize and realize, that close members of my family—aunts and uncles (I do not know even now how many), and even my own grandmother—were murdered during the Holocaust. Even in my thirties, when I was working in Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, I used to say that my interest in the Holocaust had nothing to do with the specific history of my family, who had not suffered directly—so I thought then—from the Holocaust.

Later I realized that, as an Israeli, I had been raised and educated according to Zionist ideas and the social (mainly socialist) attitude that was related to them, namely, the advantage, if not to say the superiority, of the Israelis over the “exilic Jews.” I realized then that in my upbringing, as well as the upbringing of my whole generation, the Holocaust played a very significant role in consciously, and maybe even more so in unconsciously, creating this attitude. Accordingly, we were educated with the example of the heroism of the active resistance of the young Jews in the ghettos of Europe—”Holocaust” was always associated with “Heroism,” with emphasis on the latter. I also noticed that I knew al-

most nothing about the suffering of my own family, and practically nothing about the suffering of other people caused by the Nazis, as well as about other genocides that happened to other peoples.

The Six Day War, in which I participated, raised in me, as in many young Israelis, fundamental questions about the essence of our existence in Israel, our attitude toward “the other”—the Arabs, especially the Palestinians—and other non-Jews, our relations with the Diaspora, and obviously, our attitude toward the Holocaust.

Only then did I also start to become aware of the suffering of the Palestinians and realize that the ruins and traces I had observed in many places in Israel are traces of the Palestinian (we used to say Arab) villages. I am not sure that I have really completed this process regarding our relations and conflict with the Palestinians.

It seems to me that since then I have examined in different ways both the tension between the particularistic characteristics of Israeli and Jewish identity vis-à-vis the universal-human components of it, and the tension between particularism and universalism that divides Israeli society.

This research is the result of an ongoing effort to examine a subject that has been repressed and ignored in my own memory, Israeli historical and collective memory, as well as in the collective memory of the whole world, and thus has almost disappeared from our historical consciousness. I became involved in the subject in the framework of my activity as a researcher of contemporary Jewish studies and as an educator. Over the years I have been troubled by a sense of oppressive discomfort and criticism of the evasive behavior, verging on denial, of the various governments of Israel regarding the memory of the Armenian Genocide, and decided to examine both the overt factors and the deeper and more complex factors leading to such behavior, which to me seems morally unacceptable, particularly since we Jews were victims of the Holocaust.

After I began to explore the motives for the present behavior regarding the Armenian Genocide, I realized that the issues must be examined from the beginning—from the period in which they occurred. I have been involved in the subject for almost fifteen years, and my research has carried me to unanticipated places and events. It has revealed to me, I must confess, a reality that I did not expect. I had hoped to find a greater degree of identification with the suffering of the Armenians, more empathy, and more attempts to help, within the scope of the very limited possibilities of the Jewish people, especially the Zionist move-

ment and the Jewish community of Palestine before the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. Instead, I found, as will be elaborated later, much indifference and an attitude that stressed the particular rather than the universal. The results of the first part of the project were published in my book *The Banality of Indifference: Zionism and the Armenian Genocide*.

After the book was published I turned to study in detail the attitude of the State of Israel toward the Armenian Genocide. It seems to me that every society—as well as every human being—should explore his or her personal and collective history and identity. Knowing and facing our own history should be part of our behavior and consciousness in both the present and the future. In my opinion, we can not avoid this self-examination, including looking through the difficult and black pages of our individual as well as our collective past.

In 1993 I wrote the book *Jewish-Israeli Identity*, in which the main sub-identities in Jewish-Israeli society are described and analyzed: a secular identity, a traditional identity, a religious-national identity, and the religious ultra-orthodox identity. I found that there are only a few common points between these sub-identities and a lot of tensions. One of the rare common points is the Holocaust, which has, as we will see, a very significant role in Jewish-Israeli identity. But the memory and the lessons of the Holocaust have aroused many polemics and debates during the last two decades (the same tension between specific national and religious ramifications vis-à-vis the universalistic ones). The tension in Jewish-Israeli identity, I found, has two poles:

- (a) the complicated relations between Jewish religion and modern Jewish nationality;
- (b) the relations between Jewishness and Israeliness.

Those tensions (which are elaborated more in the first chapter of the book) are a menace for the democratic, tolerant, and pluralistic character of the State of Israel. Some sub-identities (some sectors) have difficulties in accepting the legitimacy of the other sub-identities. There are also tensions between the “democratic character” and the “Jewish character” of the State of Israel.

After I published *The Banality of Indifference* in Hebrew in 1995, I wrote *We Are All German Jews: Jewish Radicals in France During the Sixties and Seventies*. I was attracted by the hidden and often repressed components of Jewish identity of this generation, which was affected

deeply by the Holocaust. I focused my study here not on the history of the New Left, but rather on the personal Jewish identity of the militants of the New Left as Jewish radicals. The Jewish identity of those radicals is the story line of the book, and it is a fascinating story. For me their identity is another example of the relation between particularism and universalism.

To write the present book has been, in many respects, my most challenging intellectual task so far. It was a painful and difficult process to look inside the conscious and also the subconscious of myself and my society. In many respects it is not a book about the Armenian Genocide, but rather what is sometimes considered, rightly or wrongly, “Jewish values” and their fulfillment or lack of fulfillment; it is a book about the character and nature of the State of Israel. I sometimes regret that I began this process so late, but on the other hand, I feel quite satisfied to have completed this study. It was for me a fulfillment of responsibility and obligation toward myself as human being, toward my people, my society, and toward every member of the Armenian people.

Let me finish this short prologue by quoting from Primo Levi’s magnificent last book, *The Drowned and The Saved*, published in 1986, where he wrote about the SS:

...they were made of the same cloth as we, they were average human beings, averagely intelligent, averagely wicked: save the exceptions, they were not monsters, *they had our faces, but they had been reared badly.* (my emphasis)<sup>1</sup>

Levi’s claim is very clear and very frightening: “This event happened so it can happen again.... It can happen, and it can happen everywhere.”<sup>2</sup> For me, this is the central moral observation to be derived from the Holocaust and other acts of genocide: human beings committed it against other human beings and therefore they can do it again everywhere. Therefore, following Levi and others, we have to ask ourselves what can each of us do to prevent or at least to minimize this threat. And then, less than a decade after this visionary statement, and when the Holocaust was present more than ever in the consciousness and memory of the world, which kept saying, “Never again,” all of us have witnessed the genocides in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The latter could have easily been prevented.

In this regard we can clearly say that we, *humanity*, did not learn anything from the lessons of the Holocaust. Learning from the past,

trying to understand what in many ways cannot be understandable, is our duty as scholars and intellectuals, and even more—as it will be repeated throughout the book—as educators.

I hope that this book will be a modest contribution to the struggle against the occurrence of such acts in the future. In this regard, denying a committed genocide, or supporting, directly or indirectly, the denial of the Armenian Genocide, the genocide of the Roma, or any other genocide, is factually wrong, a sin morally, and sometimes also a crime legally. In my opinion, it also betrays the legacy of the Holocaust, at least as I understand it. Unfortunately, my country, Israel, is committing this sin.

I would like to thank Professor Israel Charny, a colleague and friend, for his encouragement and very helpful comments.

I extend my thanks to The Zoryan Institute of Canada, Inc. in Toronto and to The Zoryan Institute for Contemporary Armenian Research and Documentation, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for providing some of the source material. I would especially like to thank Kourken M. (Greg) Sarkissian, President of the Zoryan Institute, for his vision, his invaluable discussions and insights, and for making all the resources of the Zoryan Institute available. I would also like to thank George Shirinian of the Zoryan Institute for his devotion to this project and for research and editorial assistance in the preparation of this book. I would additionally like to thank Arsinée Khanjian of the Zoryan Institute for her many very helpful comments and her encouragement.

Thanks also to Ruth Ramot for her sensitive editing and to Michael Paley of Transaction for his meticulous co-editing.

No one else should be held accountable for the book's shortcomings, for which I alone take responsibility.

### **Notes**

1. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and The Saved* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pp. 202-203.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

## Introduction

*We Zionists look upon the fate of the Armenian people with a deep and sincere sympathy; we do so as men, as Jews, and as Zionists.*—Shmuel Tolkowsky, 1918

In April 1918, Shmuel Tolkowsky, secretary of Chaim Weizmann (who later became the first president of the State of Israel), wrote, with the approval of Weizmann and Nachum Sokolov, who were two very important leaders of the Zionist Movement at that time, an article entitled “The Armenian Question from the Zionist Point of View.”<sup>1</sup>

We Zionists look upon the fate of the Armenian people with a deep and sincere sympathy; we do so as men, as Jews, and as Zionists. As men our motto is “Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto” [“I am a human being. Whatever affects another human being affects me.”]. As Jews, our exile from our ancestral home and our centuries of suffering in all parts of the globe have made us, I would fain say, specialists in martyrdom; our humanitarian feelings have been refined to an incomparable degree, so much so that the sufferings of other people—even alien to us in blood and remote from us in distance—cannot but strike the deeper chords of our soul and weave between us and our fellow-sufferers that deep bond of sympathy which one might call the solidarity of sorrow. And among all those who suffer around us, is there a people whose record of martyrdom is more akin to ours than that of the Armenians?

This study seeks to examine the current attitudes of the State of Israel and its leading institutions toward the Armenian Genocide. It is the second part of a project that examines Jewish-Israeli attitudes toward the Armenian Genocide. The first part of this study can be found in *The Banality of Indifference: Zionism and the Armenian Genocide*.<sup>2</sup>

The first part explored the attitude of the Jewish community (the *Yishuv*) in Palestine (*Eretz Yisrael*) before the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and that of the Zionist leadership toward the massacres committed by the Turks against the Armenians in the early twentieth



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century. The study had a dual purpose: to raise awareness of the genocide of the Armenian people, and to raise theoretical and philosophical questions that relate directly and indirectly to the specific debate in Israel and throughout the world regarding the concept of genocide, and the uniqueness of the Holocaust in comparison to other instances of genocide.

The principal part of the first book is the chapters that discuss “The Reactors” to the destruction of the Armenians and “The Indifferent” to it. The categorization into two groups should not mislead us: in reality, the vast majority of the Yishuv was indifferent; only a small minority reacted.

Both parts of this study offer an opportunity to explore a particular case of a general phenomenon that goes beyond the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish attitude: that of the reaction of the bystander who remains on the sidelines while atrocities take place. To the question implicit in these pages—why does one person react while another does not?—there is no one, definitive answer. An abundance of emotions, opinions, and differing circumstances shape one’s decision, conscious or unconscious, to take action. Individuals who are absorbed in themselves, in their peers, or in their nation tend to have difficulty relating to the distress of other individuals, movements, or nationalities.

The leaders of the Yishuv and the Zionist Movement, as described and analyzed in the first part of this study, were involved in a battle, existential in many senses, to preserve and advance the nascent Zionist enterprise. During the period of the First World War, they were struggling for survival. The Zionist Movement won this battle. However, the almost total absorption in the Zionist cause appears to be one of the main reasons why the leaders of the Yishuv and the Zionist Movement ignored or remained indifferent to the Armenian tragedy. For the most part, their Zionist perspective caused them, it must be admitted, to take the side of the “Young Turks,” the side of the perpetrator, or to remain on the sidelines. Considerations of *realpolitik* tipped the scale.

Those among the Zionists who reacted, those who protested, those who felt a moral and humane, and sometimes explicitly Jewish revulsion toward the genocide of the Armenians, shared two characteristics. The first related to their origin—the majority of them were born in Palestine. They were connected to the land; they spoke Hebrew, Arabic, and French; and they were more critical of, and less submissive to, the Turkish ruler than the new immigrants, mostly Russian-born, who

arrived in the second wave of immigration after 1904. These Palestinian-born Jews were open to Western culture; some had studied in France and were familiar with and influenced by French culture. They displayed more sensitivity and openness to the suffering of the Armenians. The second, and even more significant characteristic related to their individualism. Those who reacted and those who extended a hand of support were, in one way or another, exceptional people. They did not follow convention; they were people of independent mind, characterized as “troublemakers,” and also critical in their approach to the Zionist establishment.

I concluded the first book by referring to Hannah Arendt’s concept of the “banality of evil.” In her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she describes Adolf Eichmann’s last minutes before his execution: “He [Eichmann] was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness has taught us—the lesson which could not be verbalized and comprehended—the banality of evil.”<sup>3</sup>

Arendt’s important, original, and controversial book was rejected by Israeli intellectuals and the Israeli academic community, which included some of Arendt’s close friends. Despite its wide publication around the world, her book was not translated into Hebrew until the year 2000, thirty-seven years after its first publication, and even then it raised a debate in Israel. The book is critical of the role of the Jews and implies that they had retrospective responsibility for their own destruction. But the central claim of the book, and what makes it original and important, is the thesis of the “banality of evil,” which holds that evil is part of the experience of all human existence. Even though she referred to it only at the end of the book, Arendt reiterated throughout that Eichmann was a normal person, frighteningly so, and that he was unable to put himself in the position of another, had no regrets, and claimed that he was a victim. This claim has almost never been meaningfully discussed in Israeli society. For years, Israeli society preferred, due to its own needs and considerations, to place evil on “a different planet,” to stress a dichotomous Manichaeic world of good and evil and not to view evil (in which the Nazis’ deeds represent the epitome) as a diffuse element, existing on different levels, and refused to acknowledge the existence of a “banal evil.” Only in the last two decades have different voices begun to be heard in Israel’s public debate.

But it is important to clarify that Arendt did not claim that the Nazis’ crimes were banal. On the contrary, they were unprecedented

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crimes that humanity had never before faced. What was banal were the characteristics of the people involved in those terrible crimes. “[T]hey were made of the same cloth as we, they were average human beings, averagely intelligent, averagely wicked...they had our faces,” wrote, as was quoted, Primo Levi.<sup>4</sup>

Some scholars claim that the phrase “the banality of evil” was secondary to Arendt’s preoccupation with problems of moral issues and moral judgments, and that she may not have even coined the phrase. These scholars hold that Arendt wanted to try to reconcile the universal and the particular, the ideal of humanity and the fact of human particularity and diversity. In this regard, the concept of “crimes against humanity” was more representative of her main preoccupation.<sup>5</sup> It should be remembered that the term “crimes against humanity” was first utilized in international law in the 1915 joint declaration of the Allied Powers—Great Britain, France, and Russia—in response to the extermination of the Armenian population in Ottoman Turkey. The term was formally defined by the Nuremberg charter during the prosecution of the Nazi war criminals.

With all due caution, I suggest that, when we examine the attitude toward acts of genocide, we consider adopting the concept of “the banality of indifference.” The reaction of the multitudes located in the space between the immolator and the victims is, for the most part, characterized by indifference, conformity, and opportunism. The Jews, too, in various circumstances, are guilty of this, with several exceptions.

It is beyond the scope of this study to attempt an extensive review of the very ideas of indifference or denial and of what is banal within them. The concept of “banality” is not clearly defined. In one of its modern meanings, banality connotes a lack of originality; it represents boredom, tediousness, and the absence of creativity. Banality is the extent to which the “accepted” mundane world has infected our feelings, cognitions, and acts, and how it has influenced our values; it means common, ordinary.

In this regard, it is meaningful to mention the concept of “ordinary people” as perpetrators of genocide, that “normal,” “everyday” people were the perpetrators. Studies of the personalities of well-known Nazi leaders from a psychiatric-psychological perspective conclude that one cannot view their personalities as abnormal. We must avoid surrendering to the conformist rationalization that only “particular” people are capable of committing genocide. The rank and file who participated in

the executions were “ordinary men,” to use the title of Christopher Browning’s outstanding work,<sup>6</sup> in which he shows that the typical participant, and hence the majority, of the German army police battalion that executed many Jews were everyday people who went about the tasks assigned them with considerable indifference.

In his study presenting a psychological perspective on genocide and mass destruction, Israel Charny concludes that we need a basic theory of psychology in which all of us “normal human beings” must confront the universal potential for genocidal destructiveness, on one or another level of perpetrator, accomplice, or bystander, and it is incumbent upon all of us to confront this potential.<sup>7</sup>

It is a well-known fact, for example, that physicians actively participated in the genocides of the Armenians, the Jews, and the Roma. Recently (2001), nuns were condemned for participating in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. If evil-doers are neither demonic nor monstrous, and if it is not true that only particular people are capable of genocide, then this is even more applicable to the indifferent, the deniers of evil, the supporters of the deniers, or those who are indifferent to the denials of evil.

The word “banal” in itself does not have an evaluative connotation. But indifference and denial are both political and moral, for people who are indifferent or deniers have specific motives, which may be expediency, sectarianism, envy, irritation, or fear. Consequently, linking the banal with indifference or with denial adds moral implications to both everyday ordinary life and politics.

When the majority of a society, or a society as a whole, decides it would rather do nothing against evil because only then can it continue to survive (in most cases, even to prosper and flourish in materialist terms), the result is moral collapse. As the twentieth century repeatedly showed, evil is not just participatory; it also taints those who merely stand by and observe its spread. In many societies and states—in fact, in the great majority of humanity—there is a clear inclination not to exercise the faculties of thought and justice. One outstanding example is that of Rwanda. This was undoubtedly a case of genocide that could have been prevented, since many warnings were given by the UN peacekeepers and others, and stable, prosperous countries could have provided aid. However, the world, including wealthy western countries, chose to ignore the situation, or even to “feed the fire,” by making arms deals during the genocide.

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A most significant statement was made by General Romeo D'Allaire, who headed the UN peacekeeping mission to Rwanda during the genocide and was considered by some to be the only hero in this event, in spite of his inability to prevent the genocide. Between July 1993 and August 1994, D'Allaire commanded the United Nations Observer Mission—Uganda and Rwanda (UNOMUR) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). He informed the world about the genocide and demanded that his superiors take direct action to prevent, and then to stop the genocide. He stated that if the international community, especially the west, “will not commit to viable strategies and back them up, instead of living by indulgent rhetoric and superficial action doomed to fail and by definition morally flawed, we cannot prevent the first genocide of the next century.”<sup>8</sup>

\* \* \*

The attitude of the State of Israel towards the Armenians and their tragedy has special significance and deserves an attentive study. It was briefly mentioned in *The Banality of Indifference*. The current work seeks to continue to examine the *passive*, indifferent, Israeli attitudes towards the Armenian Genocide. It also explores *active* Israeli measures to undermine attempts at safeguarding the memory of the Armenian victims of the Turkish atrocities. As in the first book, moral, philosophical, and theoretical questions are paramount.

This inquiry into *The Banality of Denial* is not merely a continuation of its forerunner, *The Banality of Indifference*. The instrument of this study remains the same: an analysis of Jewish and Israeli attitudes towards the Armenian Genocide. Nonetheless, the differences between the two are significant, numerous, and thought provoking.

The very nature of our research has been markedly transformed. *The Banality of Indifference* is, essentially, a retrospective historical, social, and literary study; *The Banality of Denial* is, primarily, a political, ideological, and values-oriented inquiry into current affairs. The analysis of the Jewish community in Palestine includes the examination of speeches, writings, and diaries of community leaders, and the literary legacy of that era. The inquiry into attempts at denial by Israeli institutions and leading figures of Israel's political, security, and academic elite and Holocaust “memory-preservation” institutions is not merely an academic analysis; it has considerable political relevance, both symbolic and tan-

gible. No less significant are the ethical and moral considerations, which are further heightened after demonstrating that regrettable modes of behavior are not always the product of passivity or anxiety, as shown in *The Banality of Indifference*, but often represent the calculated pursuit of self-serving interests of dubious benefit, which will be elaborated on in this volume. Because of the different nature of the present study, it is based more on present sources, mainly newspapers and other media, speeches, writing, and less on archival sources. It is difficult to imagine that archival sources, when they will be available, would change the main lines of the picture we describe.

Again, the instrument of analysis in this study is principally an inquiry of Israeli attitudes towards the Armenian Genocide. But we also examine Israel's attitude towards other instances of genocide and atrocities that took place after the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, in places such as Biafra, Tibet, Yugoslavia, and Rwanda, which were also practically ignored by the Israeli State and society. Although we cannot elaborate on these significant issues in this book, we hope that they will receive systematic study. Like the Armenian Genocide, these instances demonstrate, unfortunately, that we face formidable moral and theoretical questions concerning sensitivity, denial, indifference, cynicism, and forgetfulness.

Only after a great deal of time and agonizing reflection were we able to place the word *denial* at the center of this research. It is used with considerable discomfort. And yet, accuracy overcame inhibitions due to a painful awareness of the abuse of historical narrative, especially regarding the Holocaust. We had considered using the term "denial" with a question mark: "The Banality of Denial?" in the hope that, towards the end of the 1990s, the behavior of our country would recognize the Armenian Genocide. But our hopes were not realized. Nonetheless, this contemplation has had valuable payoffs, we believe, in shaping significant contextual and theoretical insights.

In scholarly literature on the Holocaust, genocide, and large-scale atrocities, there has been considerable deliberation on and analysis of the perpetrators and those who remained idle as indifferent bystanders while the atrocities were being committed. Thorough and insightful elaborations on those who participated, personally and institutionally, in denial have only been published in the last two or three decades.

We realize that there is no simple explanation for the motives of denial; there is no single elaboration of denial processes; and there is

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insufficient understanding of the damages incurred by the efforts, actions, and results of denial. We thus believe that our empirical and theoretical contribution to the understanding of the motives for, the dynamics of, and the banality characterized by the phenomenon of denial is significant.

This part of the study, like the previous one, is, regrettably, the first of its kind. As such, it almost certainly does not encompass the full range of attitudes. It is not easy to conduct an inquiry into denial efforts relating to the Armenian Genocide; it is even more difficult and problematic when carried out within the State of Israel. We hoped to find that the legacy of Jewish values combined with the tragic memory of the Holocaust, extensively taught and ritually memorialized, would enhance sensitivity and awareness to other peoples' suffering, in light of the fact that the Holocaust was followed by an enormous outpouring of sympathy on the part of the international community and by tangible political support for the founding of the State of Israel. We hoped, accordingly, that Israel's unique legacy would not only generate higher levels of sensitivity and empathy towards the victims of atrocities, but that Israel would vehemently reject any organized denial of other cases of genocide. This assumption, sadly, proved to be both naive and mistaken!

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It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss in detail the many academic works that have been written about the Armenian Genocide; a brief summary of these is given in my previous book in the chapter "The Armenians—The Struggle for Survival."

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the Turkish slaughter of the Armenians in 1915-1916 was one of the most horrible deeds of modern times. In 1918, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., the American Ambassador to Turkey between 1913 and 1916, wrote "I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episodes as this," describing it as "the greatest crime in modern history," and observing that "[a]mong the blackest pages in modern history, this is the blackest of them all."<sup>9</sup> Morgenthau was one of the few people who tried to assist the Armenians, insofar as circumstances allowed, in reducing the extent of their destruction. American Major General James G. Harbord, chief of the American Military Mission to Armenia, who in

1919 was sent to investigate the situation in the areas previously inhabited by the Armenians, wrote: “Mutilation, violation, torture and death have left their haunting memories in a hundred beautiful Armenian valleys. The traveler in this region is only infrequently released from the evidence of the greatest crime of all times.”<sup>10</sup>

With the exception of a short period after its defeat at the end of World War I and the ensuing armistice, the Turkish State has denied, and continues to deny to this day, that there was ever a policy of intentional destruction of the Armenians. The Turks have invested considerable effort in erasing the memory of the Armenians and Armenian history in the Ottoman Empire, as though they had never been part of it. Vast sums of money have been spent and continue to be spent to deny the guilt. Armenian sites, including churches, have been neglected, looted, destroyed, or requisitioned for other uses, and Armenian place names have been changed.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless there is no question as to the proof, based on a wide variety of sources from the period, that a comprehensive mass extermination of the civilian population in various parts of Turkey (and certainly not only in the battle zones) was carried out, on the order of Turkish authorities in Constantinople. While certain facts and details can be legitimately debated, and some of the Armenian claims about the genocide can be questioned, the historical sources create an unequivocal and unshakable picture (unless there has been some fantastic conspiracy to invent thousands of documents and reports from various sources in differing countries, including the United States, which was neutral, and Germany and Austria, which were allies of the Turks, and to fabricate hundreds of newspaper items in numerous countries...).

The term “genocide” did not exist at the time these atrocities were committed against the Armenians (see chapter 2). It is essential to remember that when Raphael Lemkin coined the term in 1944, he cited the 1915 annihilation of the Armenians as a seminal example of genocide.<sup>12</sup> The Armenians relate to the “forgotten genocide” that took place under three regimes: the Sultanate, the Young Turks, and the forces of Mustapha Kemal. The Turks refer to the “alleged genocide” and charge the Armenians with treachery and subversion. Again, we can argue with some of the facts, details, or circumstances, but there can be no doubt about the fact of the genocide itself.

It appears that massive efforts of denial and contemporary political interests are part of the attempt of the Turks and their supporters to



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undermine the certitude of the claim that there was, indeed, a genocide. These efforts have succeeded in creating disagreement among researchers, seeming historical controversies, and claims of lack of proof. In addition, they created intentional neglect and repression of the subject and confusion over the events surrounding it.

Czech writer Milan Kundera once wrote that man's struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. In this sense, all of the reasons that justify remembrance of the Holocaust are valid for the Armenian Genocide as well. Furthermore, the Turkish governments that ruled after the crimes were committed deny that they ever took place. The Turks have escaped judgment for their crimes and have been partially successful in their denials, with the direct and indirect assistance of some of the world's powers, based on selfish political considerations.<sup>13</sup> The continuous denial of the genocide by Turkey after committing such terrible crimes is as terrible as if Germany had denied its crimes in the Second World War. The degree of denial by Turkey—absolute denial—is far greater than, for example, the policy of distorting, denying, and disguising conducted by Japan regarding its massive crimes against the Chinese in the 1930s and 1940s. Japan apologized, at least in vague terms, in 1995. It is also greater than, for example, the policy of not fully recognizing the genocide committed by the United States against Native Americans, or of the effects of black slavery, or the semi-recognition of the genocide committed in Australia against the aborigines after the arrival of the European settlers.

The destruction of the Armenian people in the second and third decades of the twentieth century is an undisputed fact. Forgetfulness and intentional efforts at denial have resulted, several decades later, in questions—most of them tendentious—which did not exist before. This alone raises doubts and questions about historical memory, historical consciousness, and historical research, as well as musings about the morality of the world in which we live.

Many scholars agree that the denial of genocide is the final stage of genocide. Recognition of the Armenian Genocide on the part of the entire international community, including Turkey—or perhaps, first and foremost by Turkey—is therefore a requirement of historical, moral, educational, and political significance of the first order.

The recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Israel is crucial in this regard, since the denial of the Armenian Genocide is very similar to the denial of the Holocaust of the Jews. Understanding and remembering

the tragic past is an essential condition, even if not sufficient in and of itself, for preventing the repetition of such acts in the future.

There is something extremely sad in witnessing the ongoing efforts of the Armenians and their supporters, for over eighty-seven years, to achieve the recognition of the different states in which they live in the Diaspora—very often as a direct consequence of the genocide.

In 1992, Judith Lewis Herman published a landmark work on the social impact of psychological trauma. The book, *Trauma and Recovery*, deals with the aftermath of violence, ranging from domestic abuse to political terror, which bridges the world of war veterans, Holocaust survivors, prisoners of war, battered women, and victims of incest. The author, a professor of clinical psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, was among more than 150 distinguished scholars and writers who signed a statement in 1998 asking governments, including the Turkish government, to recognize the Armenian Genocide. The statement that referred to the 1915 annihilation of the Armenians as genocide emphasized that “denial of genocide strives to reshape history in order to demonize the victims and rehabilitate the perpetrators” and urged government officials, scholars, and the media to refrain from using evasive or euphemistic terminology in an attempt to appease the Turkish government (see Appendix C).

From her psychological perspective, Herman writes that the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness, but atrocities, however, refuse to be buried.<sup>14</sup> In the first chapter of her book, *A Forgotten History*, she writes:

To study psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events. When the events are natural disasters or “acts of God,” those who bear witness sympathize readily with the victim. But when the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. *The bystander is forced to take sides.* (my emphasis)

It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering....

In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator’s first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her [the battered woman]

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absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalization. After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened; the victim lies; the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it upon herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on. The more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail.

The perpetrator's arguments prove irresistible when the bystander faces them in isolation. Without a supportive social environment, the bystander usually succumbs to the temptation to look the other way....

To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victims, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers, and family. For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the disempowered.

The systematic study of psychological trauma therefore depends on the support of a political movement.... Advances in the field occur only when they are supported by a political movement powerful enough to legitimate an alliance between investigators and patients and to counteract the ordinary social processes of silencing and denial. In the absence of strong political movements for human rights, the active process of bearing witness inevitably gives way to the active process of forgetting. Repression, dissociation, and denial are phenomena of social as well as individual consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Though the author does not discuss the Armenian Genocide directly, these powerful comments are undoubtedly applicable to the subject. The Armenian Genocide has often been described as "the forgotten genocide."

We have to realize that the recovery of the Armenians from the ongoing trauma of the genocide depends upon—largely—the world's recognition of the evil. The genocide "refuses to be buried," and denial does not work. The support of "third parties" (which is neither part of the perpetrators nor the victims) is very significant; their support could help the victims. But unfortunately, when bystanders are forced to take sides, they sometimes side with the perpetrators. By doing that, I claim, they also become guilty.

\* \* \*

As an Israeli Jew, I aspire in my academic work to describe, analyze, and comment on the attitudes of my state and society as honestly as I

can, and in so doing, to change those attitudes. My goal in writing this book, as in the first one, is to uncover the truth—with as much precision as possible.

The first three chapters of the book are short introductory chapters intended to present the reader with the context and background needed to understand the complexity of the issue. Chapter 1 deals with the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish identity and memory, and briefly analyzes the central role that the Holocaust plays in Israeli life today (a fact that undoubtedly influences the attitudes of the State of Israel toward the Armenian Genocide). The second chapter deals with the universal phenomenon of genocide denial in general and denial of the Armenian Genocide in particular. It provides us with part of the theoretical framework needed to understand this extraordinary phenomenon. The third chapter deals briefly with the relationship between Israel and Turkey. This relationship is considered one major factor underlying the Israeli attitude toward the Armenian Genocide. In the game of interests and considerations of *realpolitik*, Armenian political weakness greatly hinders the chances for official recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

The core of the study explores the attitudes of the State of Israel and its leading institutions toward the Armenian Genocide. Due to the fact that no previous studies have dealt with these or similar issues, an original methodology was employed to analyze the subject in regard to four spheres of attitudes toward the Armenian Genocide: the political, the educational, the media, and the academic. As we will see, the division between these spheres is not always clear nor is it absolute; they are interconnected. For example, there are crossovers between the political and the educational arenas regarding Jewish identity and formal ideology relating to the memory of the Holocaust, its interpretation, and legacy.

Two chapters deal with political aspects. The first deals with issues related to the phenomenon of genocide in general, in the past and in the present, including international agreements on genocide and some concrete case studies (Biafra, Tibet, the former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda), during which the Israeli attitude is briefly analyzed. The second deals in detail with the attitudes of the political establishment in Israel to the Armenian Genocide.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with education, a domain that seems to me the most important. Chapter 6 deals with Holocaust and genocide education in Israel and chapter 7 concerns the debate about a statement made

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by the Israeli Minister of Education in 2000 regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and his promise that the subject would be taught in Israel.

Chapter 8 examines the media. Because of the importance of the media as a source of information and awareness, this chapter analyzes how the Israeli media have dealt with the Armenian Genocide and describes the public debate about the attitude towards the Armenian Genocide by examining four prominent media events.

Chapter 9 confronts the attitudes of Israeli academia toward the Armenian Genocide. It analyzes and explains what, in my view, is one of the great failures of Israeli intellectuals and academia—a failure that is more significant than the moral failure of Israel's political behavior, as it concerns intellectual freedom and the responsibility to state the truth.

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I cannot end this introduction without referring, albeit briefly, to the debate about the uniqueness of the Holocaust and its relation to other genocides. I dealt with this, though not exhaustively or comprehensively, in the first volume, and it touches the core issues of the present book as well. Therefore the subject merits further discussion. I do not intend to analyze the scientific and moral debate over the uniqueness and singularity of the Holocaust. Countless articles and books have been written about it. My purpose here is to briefly clarify my own personal moral and academic point of view.

One dimension of the various interpretations of the Holocaust and the different morals that Jews have learned from the Holocaust parable is reflected in the debate regarding the uniqueness and universality of the Holocaust that has divided scholars, survivors, and civic leaders on three continents for more than two decades. In 1990, Michael Berenbaum, who for many years was the director of the United States Holocaust Research Institute, the scholarly division of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, wrote, "Israeli historians have vehemently opposed the representation of non-Jewish victims in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, fearing that this inclusion diminishes the singularity of Jewish fate."<sup>16</sup> Things have not changed since then; on the contrary, the polarization has been aggravated.

The question of the uniqueness and universality of the Holocaust is being debated with increasing frequency, not only in scholarly quarters

whose focus is on historiography, but also in communities all over the world. Holocaust memorials and commemorative services raise consciousness of the Holocaust, which then enters the mainstream of American and world culture. The debate over the place of the Holocaust in history is being conducted in the streets among ethnic politicians and community leaders, in schools by educators developing curricula, within academia, among the cultural elite in literature and the arts, and in religious and philosophical circles.

These attitudes have undoubtedly influenced the relationships among groups of victims. This is discussed in *La Concurrence des Victimes* [The Concurrence of Victims: Genocide, Identity, Recognition] by philosopher Jean Michel Chaumont. The book analyzes the role of the Holocaust in the identity of the European Jews as well as Jewish communities in the U.S. and Israel, and sparked a wide debate across Europe. In his introduction he writes:

As to the victims of the Nazis, nothing is managed properly. Under an external veil of agreement such as “Never Again,” the sacred obligation to remember or struggle against anti-Semitism and racial intolerance, strong differences divide the groups of victims of the Third Reich as to the nature of the memorial sites: Jewish deportees against underground fighters, Jews against Gypsies, homosexuals against political prisoners, antifascist Jews against Zionists. The list of confrontations and counter-arguments is long and goes beyond the crimes of the National-Socialists, especially in the United States where it involves a myriad of groups such as: Jews against Armenians, Jews against blacks, Jews against Native Americans and even Jews against Tutsi, etc...”<sup>17</sup>

The author believes that at the heart of these arguments is the debated claim (or demand) regarding the absolute uniqueness of the Holocaust.

The immediate importance of the Holocaust to its Jewish victims, claims Chaumont, does not concern its uniqueness, but rather its problematic entrenchment within Jewish history, for it has to remain an important component in the Jewish historical consciousness. What would have been changed in the Jewish historical consciousness, asks Chaumont, if the murder by the National-Socialists had not been described as unique?

I tend to agree with these reflections, at least in part. Yehuda Bauer claims that it is important “to confront the central issue of comparisons with other genocides.”<sup>18</sup> This is, in my view, a significant quest, but not the central one. I ask, rather, what is the essential

importance of this quest? What does the knowledge that the Holocaust is unique or unprecedented give us, except historical and scientific significance? Rather, I argue, we have to try to understand why it happened, from the perspective of preventing something similar from happening in the future. Nevertheless, I agree with Bauer that the scholars of the Holocaust [and genocide therefore] need to address “the really important question: Why [did it happen]?”<sup>19</sup>

Like in any historical event, there are unique historical factors and characteristics involved in the Holocaust. These should be applied to the construction of historical observations, conceptual frameworks, and categorical definitions concerning the Holocaust and the possibility (in my opinion, the need and the obligation) of comparing it to other instances of genocide. This kind of work has enormous significance from a scientific point of view. But then, I argue, in the category of genocide, we have to ask ourselves what is unique in any genocide. Each genocide has its unique historical, political, and legal factors and characteristics, and its moral consequences. Regarding the uniqueness of the Holocaust, the issues of the intentionality of the perpetrators to exterminate an entire people—all the Jews that they could reach—racial ideology, and the theoretical conception can be raised. The same is true for the question of how the terrible crime was committed—the industry of death.

These issues can also be analyzed as three unique historical dimensions: the goal of the Holocaust was unprecedented, the rationalization of the processes of extermination was without parallel, and the terrible result—six million dead, more than one million of them children—was unmatched.

I am aware of the fact that various forces in the world, with a variety of motives—some of them racist and anti-Semitic—have tried and will continue to try to blur the unique nature of the Holocaust. We must continue to be on guard against this point of view. The phenomenon of historical, scientific, and popular revisionism with regard to the Holocaust may yet become more acute.

Totally different aspects come to the fore, I believe, in the Jewish-Israeli context. Israeli society tends to arrive at conclusions and lessons from the Holocaust that have an essential Zionist and Jewish meaning and tend less to reflect on the universal lessons of that terrible experience: the tragedies of the other victims are considered to have only minor importance. In Israel, as we will show in the next chapter, the Holocaust

has become a primary component of our collective identity as Jews and Israelis, particularly for secular Jews.

Thus, arguments for the singularity of the Holocaust appear in conscious and subconscious contexts, sometimes—probably usually—inappropriately. There can be factual bases for the legitimate claim for uniqueness, but there are, without question, also deeper impulses in some sectors of Israeli society. These are drawn sometime from biblical sources and the belief in our being “the chosen people,” “a people that dwells alone,” and the xenophobic notion that “the whole world is against us.” Indeed, significant parts of Israeli society nurture the feelings of isolation and separation from the world, and the claim of uniqueness of the Holocaust helps foster this. Israeli society tends to greatly emphasize that we *are* (not were) victims, and for many, that we Israeli-Jews are even *the* victims (while, at the same time, we victimize others).

I tend to agree with the views of those, such as Simon Wiesenthal, a survivor of the Nazi death camps, who dedicates his life to documenting the crimes of the Holocaust and hunting down perpetrators still at large. Wiesenthal agreed to give his name to a center that was to be built in Los Angeles in 1977 (Beit Hashoa/Museum of Tolerance of the Simon Wiesenthal Center) on the condition that it would be dedicated to the six million Jews and millions of others who had suffered with them. A chorus of hateful people accused him of wanting to reduce the memory of the Holocaust. In Wiesenthal’s view this expanded emphasis only increased the Nazis’ guilt.

There are countries where the victims’ organizations are not solely Jewish, such as Holland, Denmark, Norway, and Italy. These organizations definitely do not belittle the uniqueness of our Holocaust because it is undisputed. It simply does not suffice to stress just the uniqueness of our Holocaust and not to think about the future, about those who have been and will remain our friends.<sup>20</sup>

They are also needed, according to Wiesenthal, in order to fight anti-Semitism and racist tendencies.

No doubt, the stresses and needs of the present affect our view of the past. The “ideology of survival” and the feeling of being victimized that were cultivated, paradoxically, just after the great military victory of the 1967 war, represents, as we will see in the next chapter, one explanation for this.



As Jews, or perhaps more strictly, as Israeli-Jews, we must ask how we relate to the tragedies of others. While not losing sight of the enormity of the Holocaust, are we not obligated, nonetheless, to examine the similarities; are we not obligated to identify with the suffering of other victims of genocide?

Furthermore, only by taking a comparative approach can one conclude that the Holocaust is not identical to any other genocide of the past or present. But Israeli society has emphasized the uniqueness of the Holocaust, usually without comparing, knowing, or learning about genocides perpetrated against other peoples.

From the perspective of the victims, it does not matter if they were condemned to death because of their membership in a particular racial group or because they are part of a national minority or social class. It does not matter if they were part of 600,000, of 6,000,000 or of 60,000,000 victims. The moral has to be, in my view, *that each human being is a world in himself, and has an equal right to live*. From this perspective, condemnation of acts of genocide must be total, with no room for limitation. In this sense, the study of the tragedies of others can highlight the universal significance of the Holocaust. Only a dialectical approach that combines the particular with the universal will enable Israeli society to create the necessary integration of attitudes towards the Holocaust with attitudes towards other acts of genocide. Regarding recognition or denial of genocide, we should seek to preserve not only the historical record, but also a sense of tragedy and moral outrage over these events.

We need to admit that inadvertent denials of a given genocide occur whenever representatives of a given people, however good their intentions, are so involved in claiming the uniqueness and “specialness” and the “true nature of the genocide” of their own people that they make odious and invidious comparisons to the genocides of other peoples. The result is a diminution of the significance of the genocide of the other people that, in effect, constitutes a degree of denial of that genocide.<sup>21</sup>

When there is excessive involvement with definitions, writes Israel Charny, the involvement of the scholars is with micro-aspects of information, and the experience of moral sensitivity to the tragedy and infamy of killing of masses of people is lost. While not intending to deny the genocide, these scholars, in Charny’s opinion, become *functionally equivalent* to deniers, for they eliminate the moral sensitivity to the terrible crime and tragedy that has taken place.

When there is insistence on the incomparability of a given genocide, the understandable desire to memorialize and to emphasize—often rightly—the unique aspects of a given people’s genocide (usually one’s own) can lead to a process of minimizing and devaluing the genocide of another people, especially when the claims of uniqueness go so far as to entirely exclude other cases of mass murder from the very category of genocide.

This description of what Charny calls “obsessive obfuscation and denial in the service of national hubris” is applicable, unfortunately, to the behavior of the State of Israel and some of its most respected scholars. The latest case of an official Israeli statement, that of February 2002, discussed below is a useful example. Israel insists on the uniqueness of the Holocaust and claims that “the [Armenian] events cannot be compared to genocide, and that does not in any way diminish the magnitude of the tragedy.”

I, myself, use the term “Holocaust” (with a capital H) to label the Jewish genocide, even though I have certain personal reservations regarding this term, which has a religious connotation.\* At the same time, I use the term “Armenian Genocide,” but refer to the genocide in Rwanda or the Rwandan genocide. Some members of non-Jewish groups of victims may be offended by this, and I admit that it is somewhat inconsistent. In this regard it is worth mentioning Pierre Vidal-Naquet who wrote:

Is it necessary to state or repeat that one explains neither one of the events by speaking of a Holocaust? A Holocaust supposes priests. Neither in 1915 nor in 1943 where there any priests; there were, rather, servants of a totalitarian order of two nation-states, armed with varying techniques.<sup>22</sup>

But as an Israeli Jew, I am aware of the special sensitivity to this matter of my own society, which is a traumatized, frightened, and anxious society. While practicing this usage, I hope that, after a process of recovery, Israeli society will change.

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\* Holocaust is from the Greek “holokaustos,” a compound word consisting of the root “holos,” meaning “whole,” and “kaustos,” meaning “burnt,” hence meaning either “burning whole” or “total consummation by fire.” In my view, the religious connotations of the term “Holocaust” diminish the terrible crucial fact and its humanistic meaning: that the Holocaust and all other genocides were committed by human beings against other human beings.

The above reflections and comments are related, no doubt, to an inherent tension that has existed throughout Jewish history and has become very pronounced in modern times—the tension between particularism and universalism that I mentioned in the Preface, and which will both be in the background and specifically mentioned throughout the book. This tension is manifested in the debate over the uniqueness of the Holocaust, its significance and lessons learned, and the relation between the Holocaust and genocide. Also to be discussed in the next chapter are the differences manifested between a particular Jewish or Jewish-Zionist memory of the Holocaust versus a Jewish-universal memory of the Holocaust: a universal concept of the Holocaust, beyond the Jewish question and the specific Jewish problem connected to man as he is, and arriving at the universal conclusions to be derived from it—mainly the war against fascism, repression, and injustice wherever it may be.

My claim is that the two poles (universalism versus particularism) are not contradictory but complementary. This is the desirable synthesis between the particular and the universal. Even more, I claim that the road to universalism has to pass through dealing and acceptance of the particular characteristics of every human being and every particular group and not by destroying them.

To return to the quotation that opened this introduction, I regretfully find that we are very far from the sincere sympathy for the suffering of the Armenians and other victims of genocides that was the “official” attitude of Zionism about eighty-five years ago. Instead of solidarity of sorrow, we unfortunately compete with each other for the record of martyrdom. It is up to us to choose between the competition of victims and the solidarity of sorrow.

We need to return to the moral values articulated so poignantly in Tolkowsky’s statement. The Holocaust is firmly recognized by the world. The State of Israel is strong and self-assured. We can recognize the Armenian Genocide now and we need to do it *now*. We need to do it as human beings, as Jews, and as Zionists.

### Notes

1. Shmuel Tolkowsky, “The Armenian Question from the Zionist Point of View,” *Ararat* No. 57 (April 1918), pp. 346-347 (for the full article, see Auron, *Banality of Indifference*, pp. 389-390, Appendix B).

2. Yair Auron, *The Banality of Indifference: Zionism and the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000). The attitude of the State of Israel was dealt with briefly in this book and is now the core of the present book.
3. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (revised and enlarged edition) (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 252.
4. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pp. 202-203.
5. Seyea Benhaviv, "Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, edited by Dana Villa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 75-76, 79.
6. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).
7. Israel W. Charny, "Genocide and Mass Destruction: Doing Harm to Others as a Missing Dimension in Psychopathology," *Psychiatry*, 49(2), 1986, pp. 144-157.
8. Romeo A. D'Allaire, "The End of Innocence: Rwanda 1994," in *Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention*, edited by Jonathan Moore (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 80. Especially illuminating is the interview with him broadcast on July 3, 2000 on CBC Radio in Ottawa.
9. Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (New York: Doubleday and Page, 1918), p. 321.
10. James G. Harbord, *Report to the Secretary of State*, October 16, 1919. Excerpted from *International Conciliation* CIL (New York: June 1920).
11. Dickran Kouymjian, "The Destruction of Armenian Historical Monuments as a Continuation of the Turkish Policy of Genocide," in Permanent People Tribunal, *A Crime of Silence; The Armenian Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 1985), pp. 173-185; Anoush Hovanesian, "Turkey: A Cultural Genocide," in *Studies in Comparative Genocide*, edited by Levon Chorbajian and George Shirinian (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 147-154.
12. Raphael Lemkin, unpublished papers, written when Lemkin was lobbying for the acceptance of the UN Genocide Convention at the end of WWII. Used with permission of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.
13. The post-World War I Turkish government, during the Armistice Period, which started in October 1918, did actually investigate the "crimes against humanity" committed in the Ottoman Empire during the war, and established a military tribunal in December 1918. Prosecutions did take place—more than forty in Istanbul alone—and three people were hanged. The prosecutions ended when the Kemalists took control of Istanbul.
14. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 1.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.
16. Michael Berenbaum, "The Uniqueness of the Holocaust," in *After Tragedy and Triumph: Modern Jewish Thought and American Experience*

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(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 17-32.

17. Jean Michel Chaumont, *La concurrence des victims—génocide, identité, reconnaissance* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), p. 9.
18. Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. xiv, 39.
19. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
20. Simon Wiesenthal, “Why is it Important to Learn about the Holocaust and the Genocides of All People?” in *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, edited by Israel W. Charny (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), p. lix (Foreword).
21. Israel W. Charny, “Psychological Satisfaction of Denials of Holocaust and Other Genocides by Non-Extremists or Bigots, and Even by Known Scholars,” *IDEA-A Journal of Social Issues* Vol. 6, no. 1, 2001.
22. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “By Way of Preface and by a Power of One Word,” in Permanent People’s Tribunal, *A Crime of Silence: The Armenian Genocide*, op. cit. p. 3.

# 1

## **The Holocaust in Jewish Identity and Memory**

*From Auschwitz came, in symbolic terms, two people: a minority which claims it will never happen again; and a frightened and anxious majority which claims it will never happen to us again.—Yehuda Elkana, 1998*

Jewish history in the post-Holocaust era cannot be understood without an awareness of the profound and lasting influence of the Holocaust. The Second World War and the Holocaust on one hand, and the establishment of the State of Israel on the other, fundamentally changed the history of the Jews. The Jewish people experienced its greatest disaster and three years later lived to witness the birth of the Jewish state and Jewish sovereignty. In spite of the passage of time, Jewish attitudes toward the Holocaust and its implications remain today a crucial element in contemporary Jewish identity. In many respects, Holocaust awareness has increased over the years in the consciousness of Jews in Israel and the Diaspora. It is a central factor today in the attitudes of young Israeli Jews toward themselves as Jews, Israelis, and Zionists, and its influence is felt in many other aspects of their lives. The Israeli educational system also views the Holocaust as a central component of Jewish and Zionist life, as will be discussed later. Therefore, an understanding of the attitudes of Jews in Israel and abroad toward the Holocaust is essential to understanding their Jewish identity overall. Because of the crucial part the Holocaust plays in Jewish-Israeli identity, it goes without saying that it is very interesting, even essential, to understand Israel's attitude toward other genocides. One would expect that the trauma of being a victim in a mass-slaughter like the Holocaust

would reflect on the basic responses of any Jew toward other victims. But in reality things are very different and, as we will see, more complicated.

### **Jewish-Israeli Identity**

Addressing Jewish-Israeli identity as a single-coherent identity presents numerous difficulties. Practically, it is a fragmented and divided identity and so is the educational system. It is divided into three sectors: the State secular population, which is the biggest sector, the state-religious sector, and the independent sector, which is identified with the ultra-orthodox elements in Israeli-Jewish society. This sector has been growing significantly in the last two decades. The State religious sector is Zionist, and the independent sector is not Zionist. The division by sectors of education and by religious tendencies (the two variables are virtually congruent) reveals meaningful differences with regard to most aspects of Jewish-Israeli identity. From studies on Jewish identity in Israel, it emerges that this identity could be examined from four perspectives:

1. Attitudes toward the Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora;
2. Attitudes toward the Holocaust;
3. Attitudes towards the State of Israel and Zionism; and
4. Attitudes towards the Jewish religion.<sup>1</sup>

These are not the only aspects that form the structure of Israeli-Jewish identity, but they are the essential ones for an analysis of this identity. It should be emphasized that the identity of a Jewish citizen of Israel is neither purely Israeli nor purely Jewish; it is a synthesis of both, and the proportion between one component and the other depends on the sub-group or sub-identity. For example, the seculars tend to define themselves more as Israelis, while the religious tend to define themselves more as Jews. Likewise, a Jew living in America, for example, is usually regarded, by himself and by others, as an American-Jew or a Jewish-American.

The religious tendencies variable emerged as the most significant factor affecting Jewish-Israeli identity. Its influence is greater than that of other independent variables, including country of birth, ethnic origin, and so forth. It is possible to speak of four sub-identity models, or profiles, of the Jewish-Israeli identity:

1. The non-religious (secular) identity;
2. The traditionalist (religious-tradition oriented) identity.  
These two sub-identities compose the state sector population;
3. The national-religious identity (State-religious sector);
4. The ultra-orthodox identity (independent sector).

The Holocaust has turned out to be the one meaningful factor shared by all sub-identity groups in Israeli society. Moreover, today, unlike in the 1950s and 1960s, it also constitutes a major component of all sub-identities, despite variations in the specific componential aspects of attitudes towards the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup> Let us demonstrate this by briefly analyzing some significant attitudes.

### **The Lessons of the Holocaust**

Ideological movements endeavor to learn lessons from historical events, especially the most important historical events, and usually want to incorporate them into their historical collective memory in a way that fits their ideologies.<sup>3</sup> There can be no doubt that the Holocaust is perceived as a watershed event that has had a decisive effect on the destiny of the Jewish people in the recent past, the present, and has profound implications for its future. This is how the Zionist movement and its leaders perceived the Holocaust as it occurred and in the years that have since passed. The same is true in the Jewish religious world, both Zionist and non-Zionist.

As a terrible and complex tragedy in the recent history of the Jewish people, the Holocaust raises many poignant questions. One way to confront such an event is to try to learn “lessons” from it. Even when the Israeli educational system did not teach the Holocaust as a subject in the curriculum, in the first decades (as we will see later) it was deemed very important to commemorate it and teach its lessons, in order to prepare students to take their place in Israeli society. Undoubtedly, the Israeli political and educational systems tried to influence the young Israelis’ attitude toward the Holocaust in a Zionist direction. Some would even go so far as to charge that the Israeli educational system’s preoccupation with the Holocaust was intended to serve the needs and interests of the State.

The Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance (Yad Vashem) Law of August 19, 1953, which defined the function of Yad Vashem as the State Memorial Authority, is one of the most important laws adopted by the



Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) on this subject. One of the functions and responsibilities of Yad Vashem, according to Article 2, Paragraph 1 of the law is: "To collect, examine and publish testimony of the disaster and the heroism [of the Jewish people during the Holocaust] it called forth, and to bring home its lesson to the people." The Law implies that there is only a single lesson and does not say what the lesson of the Holocaust is. It is clear from a reading of the debates in the Knesset at the time that this was not an accidental omission.

"Lesson" means, in this context, drawing conclusions from the experience of the past, in order to be aided by it in the present and the future.<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that people tend to talk about the lessons of the Holocaust, but not about the messages or significance of the Holocaust. Ruth Firer sums up her study of the lessons of the Holocaust as they appear in various Israeli textbooks, as well as the changes in them from 1948 to 1988, as follows: "I believe it is possible to turn the textbooks from "purveyors of lessons" into "purveyors of significance."<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the intended lesson of the Holocaust in Yad Vashem Law is the Zionist one (see below).

But is there really only one lesson of the Holocaust? The answer is an unequivocal no. The Holocaust can provide lessons, meanings, messages, and different interpretations. The fact is that different personalities and circles in Israeli society, in the Jewish Diaspora, and in the world disagree over the lessons and significance to be found in the Holocaust.

Generally the lessons can be divided into three categories, which are not necessarily exclusive: Zionist, Jewish, and Universal. The Zionist lessons could include:

1. Every Jew in the Diaspora must immigrate to Israel;
2. There is no security for Jews in the Diaspora;
3. Israel is the safest place for Jews to live; and
4. There is a vital need for the existence of a strong, secure, sovereign State of Israel.

The first two lessons are Zionist in the extreme, going far beyond the other two. They express the doctrine known as "negation of the Diaspora," or more precisely the "negation of Exile" ("Diaspora" is a chosen situation whereas "exile" is a forced situation). There are Zionists who see the Holocaust as the most extreme manifestation of the failure of the Diaspora. Consequently they preach eliminating the

Diaspora with slogans just like the first two above. The lesson that “Israel is the safest place for Jews to live” is far more moderate and relative than “there is no security in the Diaspora,” while the fourth lesson would be accepted by most Jews in the Diaspora, including those who do not see themselves as Zionist or even pro-Zionist.

The Jewish lessons, not necessarily connected to Israel, include:

1. Jewish solidarity, self-defense, and reliance on ourselves alone are essential; and
2. We must be on our guard for any manifestation of anti-Semitism and fight it as soon as it appears.

The universal lessons, related neither to the specific Jewish nor to the Israeli-Jewish reality, but to the general human condition, include:

1. The Holocaust teaches us about the baseness and dangers that are part of human nature;
2. Anti-democratic phenomena and racism must be fought; and
3. The rights of minorities must be protected throughout the world.

Studies conducted in Israel indicate that few young Israelis see the most important lesson of the Holocaust as a universal one. We can assume that these Israelis would be more sensitive to other genocides than the ones leaning towards the Jewish or Zionist “lessons,” but this issue was never examined. It was found that young Israelis’ conclusions regarding the Holocaust lean much more to the Zionist “lessons” than to Jewish ones, and even less to universal ones. For the most part, young Israelis reach Zionist conclusions: the need for the existence of a strong and sound Jewish state, the lack of security in the Diaspora, that Israel is the safest place for Jews, and that every Jew in the Diaspora must immigrate to Israel.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, it is worth quoting one sentence from “In Praise of Forgetting,” a controversial article by Israeli philosopher Yehuda Elkana, himself a survivor of the Holocaust, which appeared in the Hebrew daily newspaper *Ha'aretz*, (March 2, 1988). Elkana wrote: “From Auschwitz came, in symbolic terms, two peoples: a minority which claims ‘it will never happen again,’ and a frightened and anxious majority which claims ‘it will never happen to us again.’” Between these two versions, in the tension between particularism and universalism, fluctuates Israeli society, and the public debate within it. Realizing and understanding this tension is very significant to our issue in this study.

The Israeli writer Boaz Evron, in a sharp criticism, wrote the following in 1983:

Two catastrophes have hurt the Jewish people in the twentieth century: the Holocaust and the lessons drawn from it. And today, illogical and anti-historical interpretations of the genocide of the Jews are being used, either deliberately or out of ignorance, as propaganda, in the non-Jewish world, the Jewish Diaspora, and within Israel's own Jewish nation. This propaganda has now become one of the most serious threats to the Jewish people and the State of Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Evron refers to the claim about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, as well as to the fact that the Holocaust is taught in Israel (in his view), as an instrument of Zionist education.

The ideas of most Israelis are different from views such as that of Elkana and Evron. This is indicated clearly in a survey conducted for Yad Vashem in November 1999 about the Holocaust and its significance to Jewish-Israeli society, with the participation of 508 persons chosen from a national sample of the adult Jewish population in Israel.<sup>8</sup>

To the question "What is the importance that we have to relate to the Holocaust in Israeli identity?" a great majority (81 percent) answered "very great importance," much less (16 percent) answered "great significance," and very few (less than 3 percent) answered "little significance," "no significance," or "I do not know."

Another way to examine the impact of the Holocaust upon Israeli society is by analyzing, although briefly here, the three contexts of the Holocaust significance and memory that are widespread in Israel:

1. Holocaust and rebirth—the connection between the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel;
2. Holocaust and heroism; and
3. Holocaust and redemption—the view that the Holocaust is a stage in the Jewish redemption by God, which is limited to some of the religious viewpoints.

The first two contexts, which are much more widespread, can be seen clearly in the discussions around the laws of the Knesset: the Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Ghetto Rebellion Law of 1951; the Yad Vashem Law of 1953; and the Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Heroism Law of 1959.<sup>9</sup>

The Israeli and Jewish viewpoint obliged Yad Vashem to convey the heroism and spiritual courage of the Jews to future generations and to teach the lessons (or practically, the lesson) of the Holocaust, although there were no definitions of what those lessons might be. The laws had to formulate the patterns of remembrance for Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day), which would then pass from Israel to the Jewish communities in the Diaspora as well. By law, Yad Vashem had also to grant all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust “Israel memorial citizenship,” a symbolic status created to connect the victims to the State of Israel. This was a very unusual assignment, laden with emotional and ideological meaning. Yad Vashem was also charged with taking the lead in cooperating with other Jewish (and perhaps non-Jewish) institutions that commemorated the victims of the Holocaust and representing Israel on the different international commemoration projects that might arise. James E. Young, in his comprehensive book *The Texture of Memory*, about the Holocaust memorial and its meaning, described the end of the exhibition in Yad Vashem’s museum (a new museum is presently being built).<sup>10</sup>

In fact, as we exit the last room of the exhibition, the hall of names, we pass alongside the Baal Shem Tov’s [the founder of the Hassidic Movement] words, gilded in gold lettering, a distillation of this memorial’s *raison d’être* on Israel: “Forgetting lengthens the period of exile! In remembrance lies the secret of deliverance.” With these words in mind, we walk outside into the blindingly bright light of Jerusalem, the present moment. The memorial message [exile] is reinforced further still: “That has all come to this,” the museum seems to be saying. “That was the *galut*, where Jews had no refuge, no defense only death and destruction; this is Israel, its people alive.”

Members of the Knesset who took part in the deliberations about the laws emphasized certain principles in accordance with their own political inclinations. The presentation of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel—*Shoah Utekumah* (Holocaust and Rebirth)—in the context of cause and effect (Israel was created “because” of the Holocaust, “thanks” to or “despite” the Holocaust) illuminated the main agreements and differences between the speakers of the various parties.

The final wording of the laws clearly reflected the wish to minimize the political rifts among the various parties. The recognition that Israel

has to manifest Jewish life and culture was expressed in the general debate about those laws, a recognition that was decisively expressed by Haim Ben-Asher, one of the Knesset members: “The existence of the people and the existence of the State (of Israel) are one.”

Following the ratification of the Yad Vashem Law (1953), the government set aside a site for the Yad Vashem complex. It was located on the western side of the Mount of Remembrance (Har Hazikaron, later renamed Mount Herzl—in memory of Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism and “prophet” of the modern Jewish State), on which Herzl’s tomb had been built in 1950. On the eastern side, a cemetery for the soldiers who fell in Israel’s wars was established. The institutions built on this mountain created an historical focal point for the new nation that embraced the meaning of Holocaust and rebirth.

In order to make the remembrance of the Holocaust a national observance, the lawmakers in 1951 endeavored to choose a date that would unite all segments of Israeli society. In settling on the twenty-seventh day of Nisan, the legislators followed the Jewish tradition and selected a date according to the Hebrew calendar. April 19, the non-Jewish date of the start of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, was not acceptable.<sup>11</sup> Over the years, other memorial days were added during this period of the month of Nisan to commemorate all the Jews who had died in pogroms during the Crusades and during the Chmielnicki massacres in Poland in the seventeenth century. Thus, the selection of the twenty-seventh of Nisan answered the needs of both the religious and the non-religious. The Knesset accepted this date unanimously. Since seven days, the traditional period of mourning, or *shiv’ah*, for Jews, separate the twenty-seventh of Nisan from Israel’s Independence Day, the fifth day of Iyyar, the date chosen complemented the conceptual framework of *Shoah Utekumah* and *Shoah* and Heroism. From the thousands of days during which the Holocaust took place, one particular day was chosen to commemorate it—a day that is connected to heroism, and particularly to physical heroism. Although there have been significant changes in the attitudes of Israelis towards the Holocaust over the years (especially in the meaning of the term “heroism”), those contexts remain irrefutable.

To demonstrate briefly the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish-Israeli identity, I have chosen to deal with two more related issues: the prominence of the Holocaust in Jewish-Israeli historical consciousness and the level of identification of young Israelis with the survivors of the Holocaust.

### **The Perspective of Time: Attitudes Towards Jewish History and the Prominence of the Holocaust**

In a comprehensive study about Jewish-Israeli identity conducted in the early 1990s, the first question (an open one) asked the respondents, young Jewish-Israeli students from the three sectors of education (second and third generation since the Holocaust) to name (a) three historical events that affected the destiny of the Jewish people, and (b) three historical events that you feel affected you or your destiny in particular.<sup>12</sup> The young secular Israelis answered both parts of the question with reference only to events in recent Jewish history, especially in the twentieth century. The events named most often in both categories were identical: the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and Israel's wars (in this order).

All these events are connected with Jewish national history, in many respects with Zionist history, and perhaps also with Israeli history. Although the Holocaust is a different kind of event in this context, many young Israelis viewed it largely from a Zionist and Israeli viewpoint rather than a Jewish one, and almost not at all from a universal point of view.

The table shows that, with one exception, the Holocaust is the event most frequently mentioned by all three sectors as having influenced the destiny of the Jewish people and the participants' personal life. In other words, the students attributed to the Holocaust the greatest objective historical and personal-subjective significance. The one exception to this pattern was that students in the State religious sector mentioned the establishment of the State of Israel most frequently as the historical event that affected their personal destiny (76 percent compared with 51 percent for the Holocaust). Almost every participant in the secular sector and religious sector mentioned the Holocaust, or much less frequently, the Second World War.<sup>13</sup>

Students in the State religious sector mentioned the Holocaust as the event that influenced the destiny of the Jewish people more frequently (77 percent) than their own destiny (51 percent). In contrast, the establishment of the State was mentioned less as an event that influenced the destiny of the Jewish people (63 percent), and more as one affecting their own destiny (76 percent). In the secular sector, the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel were mentioned (in that order) as events that most affected the destiny of the Jewish people; and in the

**Table 1****Historical Events that Influenced the Destiny of the Jewish People and Your Personal Destiny (partial list)**

Event	Events that affected Jewish Destiny	Events that affected Personal Destiny
	(in percentage)	
<b>Ultra-orthodox</b>		
Holocaust	65	72
Establishment of the State of Israel	12	21
Jewish dispersion (the Jewish people going into exile)	23	18
Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai	60	48
<b>State Secular</b>		
Holocaust	91	64
Establishment of the State of Israel	69	55
World War II	11	5
<b>State Religious</b>		
Holocaust	77	51
Establishment of the State of Israel	63	76
Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai	36	39

same order, but to a lesser extent, as events affecting their own destiny. The ultra-orthodox also mentioned the Holocaust most frequently, but it scored higher on influencing personal destiny (72 percent) than national destiny (65 percent). The establishment of the State was viewed as much less important on both levels, and was mentioned less than the giving of the Torah and the dispersion as events that influenced Jewish destiny.

This question illustrates also the changes that have taken place since earlier studies were conducted, when the Holocaust was mentioned much less frequently. In Farago's 1985 study, 44 percent of the students mentioned the Holocaust as the historical event that affected their destiny more than any other event. In previous studies conducted by Herman

(1965, 1968, 1974) the Holocaust was ranked in most cases as the third most important event. The establishment of the State and the nearest Israeli war usually ranked first or second: The War of Independence occupied second place in 1965; the Six Day War was second in 1968; and the Yom Kippur War was second in 1974.<sup>14</sup> Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, as we see, the Holocaust has become the most conspicuous event in Jewish history for all three sectors, even more than the establishment of the State. For the secular and ultra-orthodox, the Holocaust has also become the historical event that most affects the students personally, despite the passage of time that might have been expected to produce a reverse trend.

Whereas earlier studies uncovered the interesting phenomenon of the growing prominence of the Holocaust in the historical consciousness of young Israelis, this study shows a marked increase in its prominence. The central position occupied today by the Holocaust in Israel's national consciousness probably reflects the effort invested by the Israeli educational system in teaching the Holocaust (which will be discussed later). It seems that there is a transformation of the event into a central component of Israel's "civil religion," as well as a tendency to find in the Holocaust a unifying consensual factor in Israeli society.

Some elements in Israeli society, notably in the secular sector but also in the State religious sector, believe the Holocaust should be central in the Jewish and Zionist education of the young Israeli. They believe that if the Holocaust is made a central factor in the Israeli national consciousness and in the Jewish and Zionist education of young Israelis, and if the students are made aware of the relevance of the Holocaust for them as Israelis, this might reduce the scale of emigration from the country and the confusion surrounding Zionist education, especially after the Six Day War and its consequences, which will be discussed below.

The debates in Israel surrounding the goals of organized youth visits to Poland are significant in this regard. The Ministry of Education initiated in 1989, after some private initiatives, a program for high school students that includes a visit to Poland and the extermination camps. The program has become popular in recent years, and a number of studies have demonstrated the strong impact these visits have had on students' perception of themselves and their Jewish identity. But there are educators, historians and intellectuals who criticize the strong emotional component of the tours and claim that they are Zionist oriented.



**“We Are All Holocaust Survivors”**

In the past, the Israeli attitude towards Holocaust survivors lacked empathy and sympathy and was rather one of criticism, contempt, coldness, and even alienation. The young Israeli frequently asked, “Why did they go like lambs to slaughter?” Zionist educational ideology influenced, during the formative years of the State, the young Israeli to see the Holocaust as the extreme and absolute expression of the period of the Diaspora (rather the Exile)—meaning the “ultimate failure,” as though Jews cannot live among the non-Jewish peoples.

The Israeli education system has tried in recent years to present a different picture of the lives and behavior of the Jews during the Holocaust, highlighting the many instances of heroism among the Jews, even in comparison with the resistance of the non-Jews. At the same time, it claims that there were a variety of forms of heroism and resistance to the Nazis besides resisting physically: martyrdom, belief in God and observance of the commandments under the most terrible conditions, retaining elements of humanity under such conditions, maintaining welfare organizations, etc. in time of chaos.

Today a decisive majority of young Israelis are proud of the behavior of the Jews during the Holocaust. The cause of this new attitude is mostly that the Holocaust is now regarded as a major element in the national and Zionist image of Israeli society, and a central component in its “civil religion.”

In a study conducted among teacher training college students (Auron, 1993), it was found that a very high percentage of students agreed with the statement: “Every Jew in the world should view himself as though he were a Holocaust survivor” (80 percent in the secular sector, 84 percent in the religious sector, and 90 percent in the ultra-orthodox sector). The rest agree with the statement only for Jews of European extraction, or only for those who were there. Five percent disagree with the statement. The extensive agreement with this phrase, which has actually increased in recent years, indicates that many young Israelis view the Holocaust not only as a chapter in a rapidly receding Jewish past, but also as an event affecting the present and the future of the Jewish people. Over the years the general level of identification with the victims of the Holocaust has increased, no doubt, at least at the declarative level, in all sectors of Israeli society.

The Israeli scholar Yeshayahu Liebman points to the relationship between Israelis and the religious tradition as he tries to explain the changes in the attitude in Israel toward the Holocaust. He maintains that “Israel is no longer as cut off from religious tradition or from the Holocaust as it once was.” Moreover, “according to the new civil religion, Israel is the continuation of Jewish history and it is directly linked to the suffering of Jews in the Diaspora.”<sup>15</sup> But the current study corroborates that Israel is no longer cut off from the Holocaust, which has become a central component in what Liebman terms “the civil religion” of the State of Israel. It contradicts Liebman’s assertion regarding Israelis’ sense of continuity with all of Jewish history: that the young Israeli feels “directly linked” to the Holocaust, which he perceives as encapsulating the entire experience of the Jew among the Gentiles, but he is not “directly linked” to Jewish history and the Jewish people as such, before or after the Holocaust. The fact that the Holocaust increasingly takes a prominent place in Israeli consciousness is not in itself evidence of a comprehensive and balanced historical consciousness of the Holocaust and its ramifications. It shows, at best, a partial understanding of the event. As mentioned earlier, historical consciousness, historical understanding, and historical research and truth are not synonymous. Young Israelis, generally speaking, are not aware, for example, of the character of National Socialism and the non-Jewish victims of the Nazism (we will come to this subject in the chapter about education).

Furthermore, the assertion sometimes heard now in Israel that “all the Jews during the Holocaust period were heroes” is no less problematic in my view than the lack of understanding and alienation displayed in the former “lambs to slaughter” accusation. “They were all heroes” reflects a non-historical perspective of the Holocaust, because in this statement there is a judgment and evaluation not based on the real historical circumstances. The same is true of the gulf between current attitudes towards the Holocaust and towards the pre-Holocaust period of the *shtetl* (the Jewish community in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust). The preoccupation with one and the complete indifference to the other also reflect a non-historical perspective.

There can be no doubt that significant changes have taken place in the attitude of young Israelis toward the Holocaust, on a declarative level, although the extent to which these changes have been internalized is not entirely clear. It has not been determined by studies whether

these changes are accompanied by a change in attitudes toward the Jewish people and the history of Diaspora Jewry.

Another significant question should be raised regarding the impact of the Holocaust on Israeli society—from the point of view of Jewish and Israeli identity, as well as from an educational point of view: is it possible in the long run to foster an identity on the basis of elements that are fundamentally negative? The Holocaust represents the ultimate negative aspects in Jewish history, but we cannot base our identity exclusively on it (and on our wars for survival). What are the positive, vital contents and values in our heritage? Is not a balance called for in terms of positive Jewish elements?<sup>16</sup>

To summarize the actual situation of this issue: points of contact between all the sub-identities in Jewish-Israeli society are few, if any, and a solution in the near future appears doubtful. Tensions develop mainly around two focal points: the relationship between the Jewish religion and the Jewish nation and its influence on Jewish identity; and the relationship between Jewishness and Israeliness. The hope and declarations expressed by people from the educational and political establishment during the 1980s and 1990s that Israel will be “united” by a common memory of the Holocaust does not function any more. Historians and educators actually speak about “privatization” of the memory of the Holocaust. Israeli society has to accept the different groups and sub-identities that compose it. In the future there will be, no doubt, different “narratives” about the Holocaust also inside Israel.

Over the years the Israeli components of identity have been reduced while the Jewish components have gathered strength. It is not clear, however, whether a weakened sense of Israeliness underlies the increased strength of Jewishness, or whether there has been a meaningful change in attitude towards ourselves as Jews. Does today’s young Israeli feel more Jewish only because he feels less Israeli, or has his Jewishness been enhanced?

There can be no doubt, on the other hand, that a significant change has taken place in the attitude of the young Israeli towards the Holocaust. This change, which could already be detected in previous studies, has been strikingly obvious since the 1980s. The Holocaust has become a major factor in Jewish identity. From this point of view, the prevailing attitude to the Holocaust indicates a strengthening of Jewish identity. The Holocaust largely fills the void created by the weakening of Israeli identity and the trend towards Jewishness. At the same time,

palpably Zionist elements are stressed by the students (Auron, 1993) in their attitudes to the Holocaust. It should be mentioned that the significant change in the students' attitudes to the Holocaust—inter alia in their identification with the victims and pride in their behavior—is not accompanied by a change in their attitude to other periods in the history of Diaspora Jewry, nor in their somewhat negative attitude to Diaspora Jewry, as such.

### **The Impact of the Holocaust and the Traumas of the 1967 and 1973 Wars**

The reason the Holocaust has become such a significant factor in Israeli-Jewish identity cannot be found simply in the time that has elapsed since the Holocaust. It is sometimes argued that, as the years passed, Israelis gradually and in a natural way internalized the Holocaust and confronted it. But this is only a partial explanation. The question of the importance and of the influence exercised by the educational system will be discussed later in the chapter about education (chapter 6). The hypothesis needs to be substantiated by research, but it does appear that the socialization system, including the educational system, strived to turn the Holocaust into a dominant element in Israeli-Jewish identity, and judging by the results, it succeeded.

The trauma of the Six Day War in 1967 and then the following trauma of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 are very relevant and crucial in this regard. In the waiting period on the eve of the Six Day War (about three weeks in which the Israeli army, including the reserve units, composed of civilians, was mobilized), Israeli society witnessed feelings of great anguish and insecurity. Many Jews, both in Israel and in the Diaspora, felt that Israel, surrounded by mobilized Arab armies on all sides (and Arabs' radio stations diffusing songs about throwing the Jews to the sea), faced annihilation. The memory of Auschwitz became acute. The sense of encirclement preceding the war and the abandonment by Israel's Western allies caused many to describe their situation in terms of the Holocaust: They perceived themselves—even though the objective situation and the power relations were completely different—facing a "second Auschwitz." Some similar feelings came back in the first days of the Yom Kippur War, when the Egyptian and Syrian armies succeeded in taking back, temporarily, some of the territories Israel had occupied in 1967.

Until 1967, the Holocaust was generally regarded by young Israelis as something that had happened to *them* (the Jews in exile), over *there*. Suddenly it began to be perceived more and more as an event that could also happen to *us* (the Israelis) *here*. Since then the Israeli collective memory has portrayed the six million victims no longer like “lambs to slaughter” but rather like “sacred lambs,” innocent victims who died for martyrdom. So they were included among the victims of Israel’s wars for independence and survival and thus became heroes.<sup>17</sup>

Changes in the attitude of young Israelis toward the Holocaust were noticed in the early 1960s following the Eichmann trial. This was, no doubt, one of the main purposes of the trial. Nevertheless, the Six Day War was, I suggest, the real watershed that has had a decisive effect regarding Jewish identity and Zionist ideology as well as many other aspects in Israeli society.

After the great military victory, and the euphoria that followed it, that self-consciousness changed very quickly. The feelings of impotence turned to feelings of almost total omnipotence. The 1967 war left Israel in control of most of the biblical land of Israel, namely, the West Bank of the Jordan River (referred to in antiquity as Judea and Samaria, the name that the Israeli governments used), and the Golan Heights, in addition to the whole Sinai Peninsula. At the same time Israel has dominated another people—then more than one million Palestinians—a fact that many Israelis have had difficulty in realizing. There was a quick and dramatic change from feelings of horror and anxiety on the eve of the Six Day War to feelings of exaggerated powerfulness after it occurred in only a few days (but continues to influence the psyche of Israeli society up to the present day).

The impact of the Holocaust in this regard is, in my view, one of the most important factors in understanding the process. Following the 1967 war, the Holocaust supplied in different contexts—Zionist ideology and Jewish history—the justification for the “occupation” (for some), or the “liberation” (for others) of the territories, and the justification for the domination of another people, the Palestinians. On the other hand, the Holocaust was also a source of moral criticism against this occupation of the territories and the domination “imposed” upon us to exercise.

Paradoxically, when the military superiority of Israel became very obvious, the authentic (but also manipulated) feelings of insecurity increased. The Yom Kippur War, in spite of the military victory at its conclusion, added to this feeling of weakness. Since 1967, in my view,

Israel no longer struggles for its survival. Nonetheless, Israeli society is traumatized by the Holocaust and the wars. Thus, a “siege mentality,” “Masada mentality,”<sup>18</sup> or “ghetto mentality” that “the whole world is against us” was cultivated. Foreign Minister Abba Eban was quoted as calling the 1967 borders of the State of Israel “Auschwitz borders.”

The Shoah has been raised since then in many political debates, and its implications have had different interpretations by different political and social groups across the whole spectrum of the Israeli political arena, from the left to the right wing. Moreover, Israeli politicians, educators and others instrumentalize the Holocaust and use it for political, ideological, and educational purposes, sometimes without realizing the unfortunate effect of this approach on Israelis, and others as well.

Not a few Right-wingers see Arabs, and especially Palestinians, almost as Nazis. (Some Palestinians also see Israelis as Nazis). During the siege of Beirut by the Israeli army as part of the Lebanon War in 1982, Prime Minister Menachem Begin discussed the ethics of bombing the city with a large civilian population in terms of the Holocaust, by comparing Palestinian leader Arafat in Beirut in 1982 to Hitler in his Berlin bunker: “Would it have been justified to destroy a house with innocent people if Hitler were holding them hostage?” (*Jerusalem Post*, August 3, 1982).

Left-wingers accuse the Israeli army on the West Bank of resembling the German *Wehrmacht* in an occupied land. Israeli policemen are insulted as Nazis by Jewish-Israeli citizens when they are doing their jobs.

Some Orthodox rabbis say that what the Reform Movement (a trend in Judaism that tries to combine religion with modernity) is allegedly doing to the Jewish people is worse than the Holocaust. Another shocking example of the use of the Holocaust for political ends was in a right-wing demonstration held in 1995, in which some protesters held posters of Prime Minister Rabin in SS uniform. Sometimes it seems that we, the Israeli-Jews, have banalized and trivialized the word Holocaust more than any other people, a process that can damage the memory of the Holocaust in the future.

### **Jewish-Zionist Memory versus Jewish-Universal Memory**

The Holocaust has become a central component in Jewish identity and Jewish consciousness all over the world. The memory of the Holo-

caust that developed in Israel, and the Jewish memory that developed in the organized communities of the Diaspora, were gradually built and modeled also by the Israeli and Jewish political and educational establishments into collective memories. I define it as the “Jewish-Zionist memory” of the Holocaust.

The elements of Jewish-universalistic memory of the Holocaust were modeled in the margins of the Jewish communities and were often in conflict with them. Yet, the Jewish universal memory, like the Jewish-Zionist one, usually recognized the uniqueness of the Holocaust but did not emphasize it. This is not an institutional or doctrinaire remembrance, but an individual one, with various expressions. The three principal features of this Jewish pattern of commemoration may be outlined in three separate contexts: Holocaust-resistance, Holocaust-anti-fascist struggle, and Holocaust-identification with the victim.<sup>19</sup>

There is at least one common theme between the building of a Holocaust memory in Israel and the fostering of a Jewish-universal Holocaust memory, and that is the connection between the Holocaust and heroism. The other two contexts that are widespread in Israel—the connection between the Holocaust and the rebirth of the State, and the Holocaust and redemption—do not form central elements in the Jewish-universal memory of the Holocaust. In the Jewish-universal moral of the Holocaust, as it developed in the generation of 1968 in France for example, the focus of identification is on different figures from those within Israel. At the center stands *l’Affiche rouge* [The Red Poster underground group] and the figure of Marcel Rayman, which are practically unknown in Israel.<sup>20</sup>

For those who hold the Jewish-universal memory, it is clear that the Holocaust has additional meanings beyond the specifically Jewish problem. For many of them, the Holocaust embodies the uniqueness of Jewish history, but, unlike the Zionists, they wish to derive universal lessons from it, using it, for example, to justify their war against fascism, repression, and any injustice.

The Jewish-universal remembrance of the Holocaust carries a moral command that emphasizes the significance of the activity on behalf of human rights. It is therefore not surprising that these people play an important part in the humanitarian institutions striving to protect the rights of minorities anywhere in the world. They are involved in activities against totalitarian regimes and repression in various places in the world. Some of them were active, for example against the Soviet occu-

pation in Afghanistan, and in a different example, in the cancellation of the World Cup soccer games in Argentina during the period of the military regime there. At the beginning of the 1990s, some of them, especially in Europe, were involved in an attempt to prod public opinion and governments into actions to stop the genocides in Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia, and were active on behalf of the Bosnian cause, and, in 1999, the victims of ethnic-cleansing in Kosovo.

The memory of the Holocaust will continue to be a central component of Jewish identity in Israel and elsewhere, and rightly so; we cannot avoid this chapter in history. Therefore, I argue, a more proper balance must be found between the Zionist, the Jewish, and the universal parts of it.

### **A Short Comment on the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide**

The study of the impact of the Holocaust on Israeli identity, Jewish identity, and its specific impact on “the second generation” and “the third generation” have developed quite considerably over the last two to three decades. Important as it is, no doubt about it, it lacks, in my opinion, the comparative aspects that can add special meaning to this field of study. The effect of genocidal trauma on victim groups, like the Armenians and the Roma, is undoubtedly a continuing and cross-generational phenomenon. Comparative studies, which would take into consideration that every act of genocide is “unique” with its political, legal, historical, moral, and psychological consequences, can be very illuminating.

In the same way that Jewish history in the post-Holocaust era cannot be understood without an awareness of the profound and lasting influence of the Holocaust, Armenian history in the post-genocide era cannot be understood without an awareness of the profound and lasting influence of the Genocide on the first, second, third, and now even fourth generations.

In spite of the passage of time, and even maybe because of it, the Armenians’ attitudes toward the Genocide and its implications remain a crucial element in contemporary Armenian identity in Armenia and, even more, in Armenian communities all over the world. The genocide is today a central component in the attitude of young people when viewing themselves as “Armenians,” be it in Armenia, Australia, Europe, America, Israel, or elsewhere.



Furthermore, for the Armenian there is also the painful fact that the Genocide is unfortunately not recognized. By this denial, the Armenians, in some regards, including cross-generational psychological trauma, have been victimized twice. There is something depressing, even despairing, in witnessing the ongoing efforts of the Armenians and their supporters for eighty-seven years to gain recognition from the international community for the event whose direct consequence was their living in Diaspora. I myself have learned about it in Israel for the past fifteen years, and later on in many other Armenian communities all over the world.

### Notes

1. See, among others, Yair Auron, *Jewish-Israeli Identity* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1993).
2. Simon Herman, *Jewish Identity, A Social Psychological Perspective* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977); Uri Farago, "Jewish Identity of Israeli Youth, 1965-1985," *Yahadut Zemanenu* 5 (1989), pp. 259-85; Yeshayahu (Charles) Liebman, "The Holocaust Myth in Israeli Society," *Tefutsot Israel* 19:5 and 6 (Winter 1981), p.110. (Originally published as "Myth, Tradition, and Values in Israeli Society," *Midstream* 24:1 [January 1978], pp. 44-53.)
3. See among others, Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). For elaboration of these issues regarding the Holocaust see: Yair Auron, *The Pain of Knowing: Reflections on the Teaching of the Holocaust and Genocide* (Tel Aviv: The Open University of Israel, 2003).
4. Ruth Firer, *Agents of the Lesson* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1989), p. 149.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 152. See also p. 106, which deals with the distinction between "lesson" and "significance."
6. Yair Auron, "The Holocaust and the Israeli Teacher," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 8, No. 2 (1994), pp. 225-259.
7. Boaz Evron, "The Holocaust Reinterpreted: An Indictment of Israel," in *Granta (A Literature for Politics)*, 6, 1983, p.54.
8. Rachel Israeli, "The Holocaust and Its Significance to the People of Israel," survey presented to "Yad Vashem," November 1999.
9. The following paragraph is based on Dalia Ofer, "Israel Reacts to the Holocaust," *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, edited by David Wyman (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 861-864.
10. James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory, Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 253.

11. The Hebrew date of the beginning of the uprising—the fourteenth day of Nisan—was not appropriate for commemoration because it was the day before the festival of Passover. However, the month of Nisan itself was most suitable. The uprising had lasted more than six weeks, and, according to Jewish tradition, the seven weeks from the first day of Passover until the holiday of Shavu'ot (Pentecost) contain a stretch of thirty-three days of mourning commemorating the persecution of the Jewish sages and their pupils in the second century.
12. The study sample consisted of 564 students, men, and women from Teacher Training Colleges all over Israel. See Yair Auron, *Jewish-Israeli Identity*, 1993.
13. The Holocaust or the Second World War was mentioned by 354 out of the 360 respondents in the secular sector. In aggregate, the Holocaust and the Second World War were mentioned by all the students who answered the question. The percentages are based on the total number of answers given. There were few students who mentioned the Holocaust and the Second World War separately.
14. See Uri Farago, "The Identity of Israeli Youth," p. 274; Simon Herman, *Jewish Identity*, p. 84.
15. Liebman, "The Holocaust Myth in Israeli Society," pp. 110-111. See also Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
16. In contrast, there is a perceptible trend towards giving less prominence to the creation of the State of Israel, and towards a more ambivalent attitude in comparison to the past to Israeli identity, to the Lebanese war, and events connected with the State of Israel (for example, the Intifada). This is true at least with respect to some of the students.
17. Don Handelman and Elihu Katz, "State Ceremonies of Israel: Remembrance Day and Independence Day," in Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 191-239, 290-295.
18. The Jewish fighters at Mount Masada, by the Dead Sea, in the year 73 CE took their own lives rather than surrender to the Romans. It became a metaphor for the Zionist movement and later for the State of Israel, surrounded by bitter enemies.
19. One of the groups in which this memory developed was that of the former Jewish radicals in France in the generation of 1968. On the fascinating subject of the Jewish radicals in France during the 1960s and 1970s, see Yair Auron, *Les Juifs d'Extrême Gauche en Mai 68—Une Génération Révolutionnaire Marqué par la Shoa* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).
20. "The Red Poster" was the name of a communist underground group, many of whose members, including Jews, were immigrants. "The Red Poster" was, as far as we can tell, the first group to carry out underground activities in Paris against the Germans. The members of the group were caught at the end of 1943, tried, and condemned to death by the German military court in Paris, and on February 21, 1944 they were executed. In February

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of 1944 the Germans posted their pictures on the walls of Paris and all over France, in what was referred to as “The Red Poster.” Out of twenty-three people condemned to death, twenty were “foreigners” (without French citizenship), and eleven were Jewish. The leader of the group was the Armenian Misak Manouchian, and the group was sometimes called “le Groupe Manouchian.”

## 2

### Denials of the Armenian Genocide

*...A bold plan was formulated in my mind. This consisted of obtaining the ratification [of the UN Genocide Convention] by Turkey among the first twenty founding nations.... I know, however, that in this consideration both sides will have to avoid speaking about one thing, although it would be constantly in their minds: the Armenian.”—Raphael Lemkin, Totally Unofficial Man*

The purpose of this chapter is not to deal in detail with the phenomenon of denial in general, but to introduce an analysis of denial before studying the attitudes of the State of Israel towards the Armenian Genocide that will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

In academic discussions, the definitions and uses of specific terms rarely carry the weight that the term “genocide” does in our monograph. A large body of literature has been written about the definitions of genocide, its uses and abuses, sometimes its frivolous uses (similar uses and misuses occur with the word “Holocaust”), and there is a wide range of definitions of genocide by various scholars. I do not intend to analyze these debates, but rather wish to briefly clarify the use of the term here.

The definition of the act of genocide is both a legal and a political question, and has significance for social science classification and research.<sup>1</sup> Genocide was first defined in 1944 by the Jewish Polish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, who lost all his family in the Holocaust. Lemkin wrote that “This new word, coined by the author to denote an old practice in its modern development, is made from the ancient Greek word *genos* (race, tribe) and the Latin *cide* (killing).” The term genocide was subsequently codified legally in the aftermath of the horrors and destruc-

tion of the Holocaust. In 1948 the United Nations enacted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (which entered into force in 1951), defining genocide as a crime under international law, not only in times of war but also a crime in times of peace.

The Convention defines genocide as follows: “In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group.”

The Convention, however, has not been accepted as the last word on the definition of genocide. The definition of the crime of genocide has provoked much scholarly and legal argument. Alternative or complementary terminology, such as democide, politicide, and ethnocide, has been proposed. Discussion has been focused on a number of main themes: the types of victim groups to be included (possibly the most discussed issue); what it means to “destroy” and the meanings of “in whole” and “in part”; the level of “intent” required; whether genocide is committed only by governments; whether there are different types or levels of genocide; whether genocide must be systematic and sustained action or can be sporadic; whether the time period is an issue; what does “as such” mean?

I just want to note two points: (a) I am convinced that what happened to the Armenians is genocide according to the United Nations Convention. (b) As mentioned in the Introduction, we have enough evidence to note that even though the term “genocide” was codified legally in the aftermath of the Holocaust, Lemkin was fully aware of the destruction of the Armenians.

Many observers feel that the Turkish Republic, established in 1923, is not legally responsible for the genocide of the Armenians; nevertheless that country continues to this day to deny that the Young Turk government of its predecessor state, the Ottoman Empire, engaged in massive destruction of Armenians from 1915-1917, resulting in the deaths of over one million men, women, and children. Scholars also argue, however, that acts of genocide continued under Ataturk’s Turkey, in the years 1919-1923, before it became a republic.

Despite the vast amount of evidence that points to the historical reality of the Armenian Genocide, denial of this genocide by successive regimes in Turkey has continued from 1915 to the present. Unlike the Holocaust, which has been denied by various fringe groups and individuals, the Armenian Genocide has been officially denied by Turkish governments for almost ninety years. Out of political expediency, other governments, including that of the United States and Israel, have aided and abetted Turkey in its rewriting of history.

In the period immediately after World War I, the tactic was to find scapegoats to blame for what was said to be only a security measure gone awry. This was followed by an attempt to avoid the whole issue, with silence, diplomatic efforts, and political pressure used where possible.

In the 1960s, efforts were made to influence journalists, teachers, and public officials by telling “the other side of the story.” Foreign scholars were encouraged to revise the record of the Genocide, presenting an account largely blaming the Armenians or, in another version, wartime conditions. In the 1970s Turkey was successful in its efforts to prevent any mention of the Genocide in a report of the United Nations (in 1985 a sub-commission of the U.N. did acknowledge the Armenian Genocide), and in the 1980s and 1990s, in pressuring the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations to defeat Congressional resolutions that would have authorized a National Day of Remembrance of the Armenian Genocide in the United States. The Turkish government has also attempted to exclude any mention of the Genocide in textbooks and to prevent its inclusion in Holocaust and human rights curricula.

The Turkish government has attempted to disrupt academic conferences and public discussions of the genocide, notably a conference in Tel Aviv in 1982, with demands backed up with threats to the safety of Jews in Turkey, which we will discuss in detail later. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council reported similar threats over plans to include references to the Armenian Genocide within the interpretive framework of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

Since the 1980s, the Turkish government has supported the establishment of “institutes” affiliated with respected universities, whose apparent purpose is to further research on Turkish history and culture, but which also tend to act in ways that further denial. The volume and extent of these activities have been described by one scholar as “an industry of denial” and by another one as “an industry of denialism.”<sup>2</sup>

In the last couple of decades, many studies have been written about the phenomenon of denial of genocide in general. Much has been written about the denial of the Holocaust, and there is also a substantial literature on denial of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>3</sup>

As of today we have witnessed the denials of the Jewish Holocaust, as well as the genocides of other non-Jewish peoples during World War II, the Armenian Genocide, the genocides of the Native Americans and the Australian aborigines, and even recent genocides, such as the ones committed in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and East Timor. Furthermore, the phenomenon of “historical revisionism” has been applied to some of the genocides including the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide.<sup>4</sup>

Denial of genocide may reflect a variety of motives. There are of course “universal reasons” or explanations for such denials: the acts of genocide are so terrible, that it is difficult for people to believe that human beings have really committed them. Primo Levi, a survivor of the Holocaust, relates that people in the concentration camps were anxious that if they survived people would not believe their stories. His last book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, centers on the collective memory of the Holocaust as a whole and around the victim’s point of view, in particular. He quotes Simon Wiesenthal in the last pages of *The Murderers Are Among Us*, where he describes the SS militiamen cynically enjoying admonishing the prisoners:

However this war may end, we have won the war against you; none of you will be left to bear witness, but even if someone were to survive, the world will not believe him. There will perhaps be suspicions, discussions, research by historians, but there will be no certainties, because we will destroy the evidence together with you. And even if some proof should remain and some of you survive, people will say that the events you describe are too monstrous to be believed: they will say that they are the exaggeration of Allied propaganda and will believe us, who will deny everything, and not you. We will be the ones to dictate the history of the Lagers [concentration camps].<sup>5</sup>

Levi adds that:

Strangely enough, this same thought (“even if we were to tell it, we would not be believed”) arose in the form of nocturnal dreams produced by the prisoners’ despair. Almost all the survivors, orally or in their written memoirs, remember a dream which frequently recurred during the nights of

imprisonment, varied in its detail but uniform in its substance: they had returned and with passion and relief were describing their past sufferings, addressing themselves to a loved one, and were not believed, indeed were not even listened to. In the most typical (and cruelest) form, the interlocutor turned and left in silence.<sup>6</sup>

Jared Diamond, professor of physiology at the UCLA School of Medicine, related another original and highly interesting perspective on genocide in his book, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal*. He explains that although as human beings we share 98 percent of our genes with the chimpanzee, our species evolved into something quite extraordinary: Less than 2 percent of our genes has enabled us to *found* our civilization and acquire the capacity to *destroy* all our achievements overnight. He traces the phenomenon of genocide in human history and analyzes the uniqueness of the cases of the twentieth century and asks: “Why have so many cases attracted so little attention?”<sup>7</sup> Trying to answer the question why people kill and at the same time deny it, he proposed the mechanism of dividing the world’s people into “us” and “them;” the “others” are so defined so the assassin could feel that he was killing one of “them” rather than one of “us.”<sup>8</sup>

To the question as to how today’s genocidists wriggle out of the conflict between their actions and the universal code of ethics, Diamond gives a clear answer: “They [the murderers] resort to one of three types of rationalizations, all of which are variations on a simple psychological theme: ‘Blame the victim!’”<sup>9</sup> The three types of rationalizations are: self-defense, possessing the “right” religion or race or political belief, and comparing their victims to animals.

Diamond tries also to explain the odd passivity of third parties, claiming that most people simply do not care about injustice done to other people, or regard it as none of their business. This is undoubtedly part of the explanation, but not all of it. The other part of the explanation, he proposed, is “psychological numbing.” When confronting extreme pain (yours as well as others), you just become numb. It can be found in an extreme mode, in the reaction of surviving victims, but also in the non-reaction of third parties. “Just as intense physical pain numbs us, so does intense psychological pain: there is no other way to survive and remain sane.” Hundreds of thousands of Americans who fought in Vietnam suffered this numbing.

This reaction may also explain some of the responses of the descendants of perpetrators; descendants who have of course no responsibil-



ity. Many of them feel a collective guilt—the mirror image of the collective labeling of the victims that defines genocide—and often rewrite history to reduce the pain of guilt for what happened.

Even to listen to first-person accounts of genocide is unbearably painful. Therapists who have been trained professionally to listen to human misery often cannot bear to hear the sickening recollections of those involved in genocide, or those of the survivors: “If paid professionals can not stand it, who can blame the lay public for refusing to listen?” writes Diamond.<sup>10</sup>

Diamond proposes to consider the reactions of Robert Jay Lifton, an American psychiatrist who interviewed survivors of the Hiroshima A-bomb and had much experience with survivors of extreme situations:

...now, instead of dealing with “the atomic bomb problem,” I was confronted with the brutal details of actual experiences of human beings who sat before me. I found that the completion of each of these early interviews left me profoundly shocked and emotionally spent. But very soon—within a few days, in fact—I noticed that my reactions were changing. I was listening to descriptions of the same horrors, but their effect upon me lessened. The experience was an unforgettable demonstration of the “psychic closing off” we shall see to be characteristic of all aspects of atomic bomb exposure...

Denial behavior is more widespread than we are ready to admit, in individual life as well as in collective life, and sometimes it is, as we will see, “innocent denial.”

Interesting examples can be found in the book by Amos Funkenstein and Adin Steinsaltz, *Sociology of Ignorance* and the book *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* by Stanley Cohen.<sup>11</sup> The sociology of ignorance, they claim, is not the opposite mirror of the sociology of knowledge. The authors do not refer to a temporary or accidental situation of non-knowing, but to ignorance caused by a society, and reserved by the society and its institutions purposely.

There are, of course, also specific motives for denial. The perpetrators of past genocides try by denial to be absolved from responsibility for their actions. Another motive for denying (by third parties) that a case of mass killing constitutes genocide is to avoid responsibility for stopping the action. Thus, the Clinton administration resisted labeling the Rwandan genocide as “genocide” from April to October 1994 in

order to avoid having to become directly involved in trying to stop it or punish the perpetrators.<sup>12</sup>

We found it useful to define three categories of “the intensity of denial” to describe the level of involvement and the attitude of institutions and individuals. The first category relates to actions of denial carried out knowingly and unabashedly. The second category relates to calculated but superficially disguised actions. The third category relates to pernicious actions resulting from ignorance or naive efforts to assist those in the first and second categories.

Israel Charny has proposed a wide-ranging classification system for distinguishing different types of denials. He proposes that denials can be measured in two dimensions. The first dimension represents a range of knowledge from the denier truly *not* knowing the facts of the genocide to having increasing and full knowledge of the facts while denying them. The second dimension represents a range of sincerity from the denier consciously and sincerely disavowing, condemning, criticizing, and regretting the violence of a genocide to increasing and malevolent celebrations and encouragement of genocidal violence as a thinly disguised or even more blatant accompaniment of the “denial” of the genocide.

Some deniers, claims Charny, are genuinely ignorant that certain genocides occurred, and he suggests that these be considered “innocent denials.”<sup>13</sup> He argues that there is much more “innocent denial” than we may realize, and that in effect it reflects the readiness of large numbers of people to remain silent and/or play facilitating roles in genocides when they take place in their society, without realizing or acknowledging the full meaning of the genocidal process they are tacitly or actively supporting. Another form of “innocent denial” is permission to express denial of a genocide based on the insistence on unlimited free speech, which allows revisionists of genocide full access to university campuses, publications, and so on. However, serious caution is called for in such cases because there are also entirely purposeful denier propagandists who pose as “innocent,” for example, those claiming the right of free speech and the right to present the “other side” of an issue as a contrived way of infiltrating denials into academic circles.

Another proposed category of denial, claims Charny, is “definitionalism,” which refers to the practice of defining genocide in such a narrow way that certain cases of mass killing are excluded.

A fourth form of denial that Charny proposes is “the insistent refrain of any people that the genocide that befell them is the only true and ultimate form of genocide, while the mass murders of other people have to be defined as some lesser crime and tragedy.”<sup>14</sup>

Roger Smith, Eric Markusen, and Robert J. Lifton, in a now-classic article,<sup>15</sup> include as motivations for denial of genocide: self-serving ideology; bigotry; hostile attitude, sometimes racist, toward the victims’ group; intellectual confusion; careerism; identification with power; and a particular conception of knowledge. They base their argument on a case that exposes some of the machinery of Turkish government efforts for denying the Armenian Genocide. The direct cause for the article to be written was the activity of Heath Lowry, who worked during the 1970s and 1980s as a director of the Turkish government-funded Institute of Turkish Studies in Washington, DC. In 1990 it was found that he was working closely with the Turkish ambassador to the U.S. to influence distinguished genocide scholar Robert Jay Lifton, who had made references to the role of Turkish physicians in the Armenian Genocide in his 1986 book, *The Nazi Doctors*.<sup>16</sup> The authors describe the Lowry-Turkish ambassador denial strategy. A three-page memorandum was written by Lowry to the Turkish ambassador that discussed this strategy, which was to deny the Genocide and question the authority of the scholars Lifton cites on this subject. The memorandum was sent by mistake to Lifton himself, along with a ghost written letter drafted by Lowry for the ambassador to send to Lifton. In 1994 Lowry was awarded the Atatürk Chair in Turkish studies at Princeton University.<sup>17</sup>

It seems unlikely, however, that any case of denial rests on only one of the motivations that Smith, Markusen, and Lifton list; moreover, the combinations of motivations may vary with individuals. What prompts denial may vary with different examples of genocide. Anti-Zionism, for example, may help explain denial of the Holocaust, but “in terms of its content” tells us nothing about why the Armenian Genocide has been denied by others. On the other hand, if we focus not on the content of the motivation, but on its form (ideology) and goals (political and psychological purposes), then the motivations for denial in these two cases may have more in common than appears at first glance.

Scholars who have analyzed deniers of the Holocaust have concluded that they are primarily motivated by ideology. Thus, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, in his examination of Faurisson and other French “revisionists,” asserts that, unlike the classic French anti-Semitism that is declared pro-Is-

raeli, “all revisionists are resolute anti-Zionists.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, on the basis of her comprehensive survey of Holocaust deniers, Deborah Lipstadt concludes, “It is clear that deniers have no interest in scholarship or reason. Most are anti-Semites or bigots.”<sup>19</sup>

These answers are no doubt correct, write Smith, Markusen, and Lifton, but they admit that they are incomplete. It may be that all revisionists are anti-Zionists, but there are surely anti-Zionists (some of them Jewish) who do not deny the reality of the Holocaust. Similarly, there are people who are highly anti-Semitic, but acknowledge that the Holocaust took place.

The way academics and intellectuals relate to that issue is especially interesting. Clues to the thinking of academics who question the reality of the Armenian Genocide have been provided by Israel Charny and his colleague Daphna Fromer.<sup>20</sup> The authors sent questionnaires to sixty-nine American scholars who signed an advertisement that appeared in several newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in December 1985, which, in the words of Charny and Fromer, “questioned insidiously the evidence of the Armenian Genocide.” In analyzing the comments of the seventeen scholars who provided “active responses” to their mailing, Charny and Fromer discerned a number of “thinking defense-mechanisms” that enabled the scholars to engage in “the denial of genocide.” These mechanisms are based on two components. The first is what the authors term “scientificism in the service of denial,” i.e., the claim that not enough substantial evidence is available to justify an unequivocal position on the reality of the genocide. The second is what the authors term “definitionalism,” i.e., acknowledging deaths, but denying that they were the result of “genocide,” thus shifting responsibility for the genocide away from the Turkish government and trivializing the killing of over a million Armenians as the inadvertent result of famine, war, and disease. Whether anyone is led into denial by such reasoning, say the authors, is an open question, but there is no doubt that such thinking does serve to make denial easier thereafter, while, at the same time, it preserves the appearance of objectivity.

Intellectuals who are engaged in the denial of genocide may be motivated in part by one or two types of careerism proposed by the authors. The two types are non-exclusive. While the first is oriented towards material goals, the other feeds the need for power and control. The more insidious form, however, is the second type of careerism.

Here material rewards are important, but more so, the opportunity for certain psychological and social satisfactions: a sense of importance, of status, of being in control—all of which can come through identification with power. The price to be paid for subordinating intellect to the service of denial, however, is a particular conception of knowledge, one in which knowledge not only serves the ends of those in power, but is defined by power. To define truth in terms of power, however, as the authors argue, is to reveal the bankruptcy, irrationality, and above all, danger of the whole enterprise of denial of genocide. Inherent in such a view of knowledge is both a deep-seated nihilism and an urge to tyranny. These comments and reflections will be relevant later in chapter 9, when we will analyze the attitude of the Israeli academy toward the Armenian Genocide.

After these brief comments about denials of genocides in general, we will now look at the denials of the Armenian Genocide in particular.

Richard Hovannisian analyzes the methodology, the mechanism, and the strategy of denial and surveys the shifting patterns of denial of the Armenian Genocide from one of absolute denial to more sophisticated approaches of rationalization, relativization, and trivialization. Where stubborn denial was unconvincing, the negationists hope to use rationalization and relativization to make their case more persuasive and acceptable. Hovannisian, who also compares deniers and relativizers of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust, finds that these same approaches are now being used in the case of Holocaust denial as well. Trivialization, or banalization, is the latest head of the hydra, as it does not deny mass destruction and killing but tries to put it into the context of continuous violence in the twentieth century. According to Hovannisian, the trivialization that emerged in Germany in the 1980s from the “Historians’ Debate” about the historiography of Nazism and the Holocaust has strengthened the tendency of some Holocaust scholars to downplay other genocides of the twentieth century, including the Armenian Genocide, as a way of responding to the inherent dangers of the trivialization. Yet, he believes that there are some signs of hope, as more and more scholars of the Holocaust and human rights activists come to recognize that success in denying the Armenian Genocide will open the doors wider to denial, rationalization, and trivialization of all crimes against humanity.<sup>21</sup> In another article, “Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Comparison with Holocaust Denial,” Hovannisian claims that even if deniers and rationalizers of the Armenian Genocide and of

the Holocaust may not be acquainted with one another and may not even have read each other's publications, there are striking similarities in their methodologies and objectives.<sup>22</sup> In the Armenian case, denial is far more advanced and has gained a foothold in the mainstream of the historical profession. Nevertheless, in time the strategy has changed from one of absolute negation of intentional mass killing to that of rationalization, relativization, and trivialization. These forms of denial are intended to create doubts and cloak disinformation by appealing to a sense of fair play and of "lending an ear" to the other side of a misunderstood and misrepresented issue. Prejudice and stereotyping, the deniers maintain, are residues of historical scapegoating or wartime propaganda and the machinations of the alleged victims to enrich themselves personally and collectively at the expense of others.

Hovannisian concludes that this comparative analysis shows that the strategies of negators, rationalizers, relativizers, and trivializers of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust have crossed many common thresholds. Denial of the Armenian Genocide has penetrated far deeper within academic and political circles than has rejection of the truth of the Holocaust, but the arguments used are nonetheless the same. These include the assertions that the "alleged" genocides were actually invented as wartime propaganda; that the presumed victims were mainly provocateurs and enemy collaborators; that legitimate preventive measures are taken by all governments; that there never was the intent to victimize either group; that the numbers of dead have been grossly exaggerated and are in fact not out of proportion with the overall wartime casualties; that the postwar trials of indicted organizers of the genocides were rigged and meant to gain vengeance against the defeated powers; that a definite connection existed between the supposed victim groups and Russia or the Soviet Union, so the attempts to exploit the genocide issue were really aimed at destabilizing the NATO alliance and countries aligned with the "free world;" and that the very fundamental principle of academic freedom—the right to unfettered investigation and expression—is at stake and requires an active defense against those who cannot tolerate the view that there are two sides to every story.

The ongoing, concerted campaign of repudiation of the Armenian Genocide, claims Hovannisian, may be taken as a preview of things to come regarding remembrance of the Holocaust. This lesson has begun to be heeded by Holocaust scholars and human rights activists. Although an initial reaction of some scholars and public figures to trivialization

of the Holocaust was to set apart and even diminish the scope of the Armenian Genocide, this trend seems to be changing, and concerned researchers and writers about both crimes are being drawn together by the common threat posed by the four-headed hydra of negation, rationalization, relativization, and trivialization. The underlying motives of all these aspects of denial are deep-seated and range from historic prejudices to current political agendas. In the face of this ugly reality, emphasizes Hovannisian, it is incumbent on people of good conscience to unite in combating bigotry and upholding the precept that academic freedom does not mean lack of academic integrity.<sup>23</sup>

Roger Smith analyzes the special characteristics of the denials of the Armenian Genocide, emphasizing the role that the Turkish government plays in it. He writes that, in general, those who initiate or otherwise participate in genocide typically deny that the events took place, that they bear any responsibility for the destruction, or that the term “genocide” is applicable to what occurred. But denial can enter into the very fabric of a society, so that those who come after sustain and even intensify the denial begun by perpetrators. The most strident and elaborate denial of genocide in history follows this pattern.

The basic argument of denial has remained the same: it never happened; Turkey is not responsible; the term “genocide” does not apply. The current emphasis is on the last argument—removing the label “genocide” from the Armenian experience. This is done, in part, by describing the genocide as a civil war within a global war. Paradoxically, this approach attempts to deny the Armenian Genocide also by acknowledging the Holocaust. In part, this involves the claim that Turkey saved many Jews from the Nazis, the unstated premise being that a people who did such acts of kindness could not have killed a million Armenians. It also attempts to exploit the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust argument to discredit the 1915 genocide; from this perspective, the Holocaust is the *only* example of genocide. Moreover, Turkey has also gone to extraordinary lengths, including threats and disruption of academic conferences, to prevent Jews from learning about the Armenian Genocide. It is important for Turkey to stifle awareness among Jews, because for victims of Nazism to state publicly that Armenians and Jews have both been subjected to genocide carries a kind of moral persuasiveness that non-victims may lack, writes Smith. During our study, we will see how these arguments are raised from the Jewish and Israeli perspectives.

Denial is an argument, he claims, but it is also a set of tactics, which, in the Turkish case, has shifted over the years. Despite its past success, Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide has come under increased scrutiny in the last few decades. It continues to spend millions of dollars trying to protect its image and to fend off any demands for reparations or restitution of property. On the other hand, as scholarship on the Armenian Genocide has expanded dramatically, the Genocide has been officially recognized by many governments and international entities (see chapter 5 for the list). Furthermore, the U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly in 1996 to withhold three million dollars of foreign aid to Turkey as long as it refuses to acknowledge the Genocide.

The facade of denial has cracked, but much remains to be done, concludes Smith: scholars, journalists, and teachers, in particular, have vital work ahead of them. In part, it is a matter of exposing and opposing the denials, but more fundamentally of placing the Armenian Genocide as fully and truthfully on record as possible. Turkey may continue to deny that the Genocide took place, but the world will know. Denial keeps the wounds of genocide open, but through solidarity with the victims and the restoration of a people's history, a process of healing can begin.<sup>24</sup>

In these circumstances the attitude of the State of Israel toward the Armenian Genocide has, of course, special significance. Once again, we wonder and think about the possible implications of the attitude of the State of Israel (changing, as will see later, from an attitude of avoidance to passive denial, and then to possibly active denial) on the general phenomenon of denying genocides and even denying the Holocaust in particular.

It is clear to all those who are involved overtly and covertly in the controversies regarding Israel's attitude to the Armenian Genocide—Jews, Turks, Armenians—and also to the rest of the world, that the issue has special moral significance. The fact that the country in question is of a people that was the victim of the Holocaust, and the unique problems that resulted, come to the fore. Nonetheless, to the best of my knowledge, this special issue has never been—so far—studied, either empirically or theoretically.

### Notes

1. This paragraph is based on the article, "Definitions of Genocide," in *The Encyclopedia of Genocide*, p. 11-12.



2. Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The Key Elements in the Turkish Denial of the Armenian Genocide: A Case Study of Distortion and Falsification* (Cambridge, MA and Toronto: Zoryan Institute, 1999), p. 1; Taner Akçam, *Dialogue Across an International Divide: Essays Towards a Turkish-Armenian Dialogue* (Cambridge, MA and Toronto: The Zoryan Institute, 2001), p. 10.
3. There is a substantial literature on denial of the Armenian Genocide. See, among others, Rouben Adalian, "The Armenian Genocide: Revisionism and Denial," in *Genocide in Our Time: An Annotated Bibliography with Analytical Introductions*, edited by Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann (Ann Arbor: Pierian Press, 1992), ch. 5; Marjorie Housepian Dobkin, "What Genocide? What Holocaust? News from Turkey, 1915-1923: A Case Study," in *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, edited by Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1986), ch. 5; Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Armenian Genocide and Patterns of Denial," in *ibid.*, ch. 6; Clive Foss, "The Turkish View of Armenian History: A Vanishing Nation," in *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, edited by Richard Hovannisian (New York: St. Marin's Press, 1992), ch. 11; Vahakn N. Dadrian, "Ottoman Archives and Denial of the Armenian Genocide" in *The Armenian Genocide*, edited by Hovannisian, ch. 12; Vigen Guroian, "The Politics and Morality of Genocide," in *The Armenian Genocide*, edited by Hovannisian, ch. 13; Roger W. Smith, "Genocide and Denial: The Armenian Case and Its Implications," *Armenian Review* 42, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 1-38; *idem*, "Denial of the Armenian Genocide," edited by Israel W. Charny, *Genocide*, vol. 2 (New York: Facts On File, 1991), ch. 3; and "The Armenian Genocide: Memory, Politics, and the Future," in *The Armenian Genocide*, edited by Hovannisian, ch. 1. See also the wide-ranging discussion by Israel W. Charny, "The Psychology of Denial of Known Genocides," in Charny, *Genocide Vol. 2.*, ch. 1; Israel W. Charny, Daphna Fromer, "Denying the Armenian Genocide: Patterns of Thinking as Defence-Mechanism," *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 32 No 1, 1998, pp. 39-49.
4. Historical revisionism is historical research that mandates rethinking and rewriting the understanding of specific historical events as more material and interpretations become available. However, "historical revisionism" regarding the Holocaust or the Armenian Genocide wants intentionally to raise doubts and questions in the unsuspecting, the fair-minded, and those whose knowledge of the facts is limited.
5. Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pp. 11-12.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
7. Jared Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), p. 277.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 305-306.

11. Amos Funkenstein and Adin Steinsaltz, *Sociology of Ignorance* (Tel Aviv: The Broadcast University, Ministry of Defence, 1987); Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001). I read this important book only after my own book went to press.
12. Douglas Jehl, "Officials Told to Avoid Calling Rwanda Killing Genocide," *New York Times*, June 10, 1995.
13. Israel W. Charny, "Innocent Denials of Known Genocide: A Further Contribution to the Psychology of Denial of Genocide," *Human Rights Review*, 1 (3), 2000, pp. 15-39.
14. Israel W. Charny, (1991). "The Psychology of Denial of Known Genocides," in *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review. Volume 2*, edited by Israel W. Charney (New York: Facts on File, 1991), pp. 3-37; Idem, "Commonality in Denial: Classifying the Final Stage of the Genocide Process," *International Network on Holocaust and Genocide*, 11(5), 1997, pp. 4-7.
15. Roger W. Smith, Eric Markusen, and Robert Jay Lifton, "Professional Ethics and the Denial of the Armenian Genocide," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 9(1), 1995, pp. 1-22.
16. Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).
17. Roger W. Smith, Eric Markusen, and Robert Jay Lifton, (1995) op.cit.
18. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory: Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 57.
19. Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Free Press, 1993), p. 206.
20. Israel W. Charny and Daphna Former, "Denying the Armenian Genocide: Patterns of Thinking as Defence Mechanisms," *Patterns of Prejudice*, 32(1), 1998, pp. 39-49.
21. Richard Hovannisian, "L'hydra à quatre têtes du négationnisme: négation, rationalisation, relativisation, banalisation," *l'Actualité du Génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Edipol, 1999), pp. 143-176.
22. Richard Hovannisian, "Denial of the Armenian Genocide in Comparison with Holocaust Denial," in *Remembrance and Denial*, edited by Richard Hovannisian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), pp. 201-236.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-231.
24. Roger W. Smith, "Denial of the Armenian Genocide," in *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review, Volume 2*, edited by Israel W. Charny (1991), pp. 63-85, as well as other articles of the same author mentioned in note 1 of this chapter.

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## 3

### Israel-Turkey Relations

*I think that our attitude toward such a dreadful historical event [the Armenian Genocide] cannot be dictated by our friendly relations with Turkey, even though this relationship is particularly important to me as one who worked so hard to develop it.—Israeli Minister of Justice, Yossi Beilin, April 2000*

It is difficult to overestimate how important the position of the Jews, and especially the attitude of the State of Israel, towards the Armenian Genocide is for the Armenians. Yet the State of Israel has consistently refrained from acknowledging the genocide of the Armenian people.

How is it possible that the Israeli state, established by a nation victimized by genocide, partakes in the denial of another people's genocide, namely the Armenian? Two main reasons are generally given: (a) constant pressure by the different Turkish governments; and (b) strong pressure from groups within Israeli society that are afraid that the recognition of the Armenian Genocide would damage the concept of the uniqueness of the Shoah.

The policy of denial is expressed formally by the fact that, except for two specific cases,<sup>1</sup> government representatives do not participate in the memorial assemblies held every year on April 24 by the Armenians to commemorate the Armenian Genocide. Political leaders and government representatives of many other countries, even those that do not officially recognize the Armenian Genocide, do send messages of acknowledgement and sympathy or even participate in the ceremonies. The Israeli policy of avoiding participation in memorials or consciously refraining from acknowledging the Genocide is not what Israel Charny defines as “innocent denial,”<sup>2</sup> yet it also might not be

defined, at least not at the beginning, as “active denial” or “direct denial.” Nonetheless, the behavior of the State of Israel since the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s did become an *active* denial in one way or another.

No doubt, the geopolitical considerations of Israel have to be noted. One might argue that they have to be given greater weight. One can surely appreciate that Israel stands between a variety of rocks and a hard place. The need to generate allies is great. Turkey, as a secular Muslim, highly militarized state, permits a certain latitude towards Israel with respect to countering fundamentalist ambitions to annihilate Israel as a sovereign entity—and even its population of Jews.

In order to understand the pragmatic *raison d'État* and *realpolitik* considerations that have influenced the Israeli attitude toward the Armenian Genocide, a brief overview of Israel-Turkey relations is needed. However, it is beyond the scope of this survey to go into Israel-Turkey relations in depth.<sup>3</sup>

Turkey and Israel have, since the 1990s, forged an unlikely alliance that baffles many observers of the region. On the face of it, there would seem to be little historical or contemporary logic to a close relationship between the two; one is the well-established successor of a vast and long-lived empire; the other an embattled state whose boundaries and very existence are constantly challenged by neighbors; one is Muslim, the other Jewish; Turkey is just emerging from what is considered Third World status and aspiring to join the European Union, while Israel is thoroughly modernized and well entrenched in Western culture; Turkey is notoriously deficient with regard to international norms of human rights and the rule of law, while Israel is a liberal democracy (with its internal deep tensions between being a democracy and a Jewish state); Turkey is highly influenced by its military, while Israel is civilian in its demeanor; one is large in size and population, the other comparatively tiny.

The origins of this momentous shift may be found in a triad of new contingencies: the end of the Cold War, the Persian Gulf War of 1991, and technological development in Israel. The new configuration of regional and global forces unleashed by these three contingencies has enabled Turkey and Israel to pursue a partnership in military and civil, strategic and economic, institutional and human affairs—a close relationship founded on shared interests that has the potential to develop into an intimate and lasting rapport.

## The Background

The amazing development of bilateral relations between Turkey and Israel in the 1990s stands out against the backdrop of the tenuous connection between the two countries during the preceding forty years. Turkey recognized Israel upon its establishment in 1948, and in the following year, diplomatic relations began at the level of legation, meaning that ministers, not ambassadors, were exchanged. However, in November 1980, when the Knesset's passage of the Jerusalem Law (which legislated the unification of the city of Jerusalem, including the east side, as part of Israel) caused outrage throughout the Islamic world, Turkey recalled its minister and downgraded relations to the level of second secretary, one step short of breaking off diplomatic ties completely. The Turkish consulate general in Jerusalem was closed, allegedly under the pressure of Erbakan's Islamist party. Turkish Airlines and Turkish Maritime Lines ceased transport between Turkey and Israel. It was not until 1986 that relations were informally restored to the ministerial level. Relations between Turkey and Israel began to improve dramatically after the Gulf War and the announcement of the international Madrid peace conference in 1991, which dealt with the peace process between Israel and the Arab countries. The two nations exchanged ambassadors in November 1991.

There is a certain irony of history in the fact that from the 1950s through the 1980s, when Israel was isolated and desperately sought an alliance with "outer ring" states (including Iran and Ethiopia), Ankara shunned the Israelis, whereas in the 1990s, when Israel was actively pursuing peace, breaking up the siege that had enclosed it, and opening its doors to representatives from many nations, Turkey should be so eager and forthcoming.

As a Muslim country and a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Turkey has always had to walk a tightrope between its interest in maintaining a relationship with Israel and its cultural, economic, historical, and emotional commitment to Islam (despite the fact that Turkey vociferously holds itself out to the West as a strictly secular state). For most of the period preceding the Turkish-Israeli rapprochement, Ankara tilted toward its Islamic neighbors. However, the worldwide process of globalization and sustained development that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf War drew

Jerusalem and Ankara closer together. Many Arab and Islamic countries and societies, however, opposed such all-encompassing changes and distanced themselves from their Turkish ally.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of Azerbaijan in 1991 and the five republics of Central Asia, Turkey looked eastwards and appeared to entertain its old pan-Turanist dreams. Nevertheless, Turkey understands that in doing so, it risks abandonment by Europe. This is precisely where Turkish interests coincide with those of Israel. Turkey recognizes the value of Israel's cooperation in shaping the future of Central Asia.

Furthermore, Turkey, as many other countries, saw Israel as an important conduit to the only remaining superpower, the United States. In short, the road to Washington leads through Jerusalem. This belief derives in part from the fact that Israel enjoys a privileged and intimate relationship with the United States, and in part from the idea of America's "redoubtable" and "omnipotent" Jewish lobby. Turkish analysts often complain that Arabs, Greeks, Kurds, and Armenians use their respective lobbies in America to pursue their political causes. The conclusion therefore was: "We have nobody but Israel...and the Jewish Lobby" to depend on for support. (Later on we will see how the Jewish lobby is involved in the debate over the Armenian issue in the U.S.). Thus, it was in Turkey's national interest to collaborate with Israel, believing that it could relieve Turkish isolation and balance the Greek and Armenian lobbies in American politics.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Turkish-Israeli Alliance**

There are numerous elements in the Turkish-Israel alliance, each of them complex and deserving of in-depth treatment. It is beyond the scope of our survey, however, to do more than identify them as factors affecting Israel's response to the Armenian Genocide. These factors include the following:

1. The Jewish community in Turkey;
2. The provision of water, gas, and oil to Israel by Turkey;
3. Turkey as a military ally against Syria, Iraq, and Iran, with whom Turkey does not maintain cordial relations;
4. U.S. policy towards Russia and Turkey's role in that policy;
5. U.S. policy in the Middle East, especially regarding oil, and Turkey and Israel's role in that policy.

Of all the complex issues affecting Turkey's relationship with Israel, security, strategy, military, and technological collaboration are perhaps the most acute and certainly the most important ones for the Turkish generals, who monitor their country's politics. It is therefore no wonder that the most striking and rapid advance in the relations between the two countries has been in the military-strategic domain. Turkey has purchased advanced Israeli weaponry and electronics, engaged in joint maneuvers, cooperated in counter-terrorism and intelligence gathering, and exchanged high-level visits with the Israeli military. These initiatives rest on the assumption that Turkey, surrounded by hostile, authoritarian, unpredictable, and anti-Western regimes, would be foolish not to cooperate with the only other power in the Middle East that is democratic, stable, strong, and pro-Western.

Israel, for its part, continues to believe—as it has since the 1950s—that it must forge ties with the strong, stable, and pro-Western peripheral states surrounding the Arab world, thereby “leap-frogging” past the hostile ring of front-line Arab states. Iran and Ethiopia played this role for decades, but by the end of the 1970s the Islamic revolution in the former and the Marxist takeover of the latter eliminated those two pillars, leaving Israel to rely on Turkey alone.

There is no doubt, writes Raphael Israeli, that the most menacing issue in the Turkish-Israeli partnership in the long term is the prospect that ultra-nationalist or ultra-religious factions in Turkey may agitate to return their country to its Anatolian-Asian or even Islamic roots, undoing the Kemalist heritage so jealously guarded by the military. An insoluble dilemma would then confront Israel and the West. Is the partnership with Turkey so important that it would be worth maintaining even under the bayonets of the Turkish military? Or would it be preferable to allow “democracy” to triumph, even at the cost of Turkey's slipping into the anti-Western Islamic camp? No doubt that if the strategic partnership between Israel and Turkey is perceived as resting on the coercive power of their arms rather than on the democratic principles they claim to uphold, its longevity would be anyone's guess.<sup>5</sup>

Predictably, writes Israeli, all elements of Turkish society, not just the Islamists, view the Armenian issue as proof of the unreliable Jewish State's tendency to side with Christians against Muslims (for example, Israeli Minister of Education Yossi Sarid's statement of April 2000, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 7). Beside this, die-hard nationalists also seized upon the on-again, off-again negotiations at that



time between Israel and Syria as a sign that Israel would always subordinate Turkey's strategic interests to its own. Israel's explanations to the effect that it could maintain its growing relationship with Turkey even as it evoked the Armenian massacre (just as it does with Germany despite recurrent references to the Shoah) fell on deaf ears in Ankara. For, unlike Germany, which has recognized its past and accepted its responsibility, Turkey continues to treat the Armenian Genocide as a taboo and does not acknowledge any guilt.<sup>6</sup>

No doubt, the dilemma of morality versus policy is at the core of the issue. The close relations between Israel and Turkey are based upon the mutual interests of the two countries. The question is whether Israel erred in the Armenian issue in the early stages of its relations with Turkey. In the 1970s and 1980s, the rationale of the Israeli government as to why it should yield to Turkish pressure was that it is important to keep relations with the only Muslim country willing to do so. More important (and mysterious) was the claim regarding Jewish interests: it was explained by Israeli officials that supporting the Armenian issue could endanger the lives of Jews in Turkey, as well as in some other countries (saving Jews from Syria was once mentioned, as was saving Jews from Iran). This was sometimes described as a "vital interest."

We do not presume to judge if these issues are really in the "vital interest" of Israel or the Jews. Suppose, however, the pretext of "vital interest" was not used. What would Turkish-Israeli relations look like if Israel had explained from the beginning that the memory of genocide—*any genocide*—is not a negotiable issue in the relations between two sovereign states, especially when one of them is the country of the survivors of the Holocaust? What would have happened if Israel had explained to Turkey that what our children learn in school and what we see on our televisions is our own internal concern?

I am aware of the fact that in my view Israelis are held to a higher standard than other nations on the Armenian (and related) question. The question arises: should Israel be held to a higher standard than other countries? I think it should, and I think that doing so is appropriate because it is, in my view, the legacy of the Holocaust and the Jewish legacy.

### **Israel-Turkey Relations and Armenian Political Weakness**

The Armenian issue has been, from the outset, one marked by political weakness. After the Genocide, the Armenians continued their struggle

for survival. Contrary to explicit public promises made as early as 1915 by the Allied Powers, the Armenians were ignored by the West. In the face of adamant denials of genocide by the Turks, the determined nationalistic attitude of Ataturk, and the struggle among the Allies over their own particular interests, diplomatic agreements after World War I made no mention of the words “Armenian,” “Armenians,” or “Armenia.” The refugees were not given the right to repatriation, and no mention was made of compensation or rehabilitation. The cooperation between the Russian Bolsheviks and the Turkish nationalists also played a role in destroying the nascent Armenian Republic.

The Armenians believed that with the war’s end and the victory of the Allied Powers—the United States, England, and France—these nations would help them attain sovereignty. Indeed, during the course of the war, explicit declarations were made to them to that effect. However, the declarations were not realized. After the calamity they were abandoned and the Armenians remained without a sovereign state of their own.

The tiny Armenian Republic, a territory of 30,000 square kilometers (with the capital city of Yerevan), located within the domain of the Soviet Union, was to become a limited expression of Armenian sovereignty over an area that was less than 10 percent of the territory of historic Armenia. Even Mount Ararat, Armenia’s emblem, remained under Turkish rule. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia became an independent country, and shortly afterward became entangled in a war with neighboring Azerbaijan. Vestiges of the conflicts and controversies of the First World War period, which had lain dormant during seventy years of Soviet domination, reemerged from the ruins.

The number of Armenians in the world is not very well documented. While a figure of 7.5 million is suggested, the Armenian Foreign Ministry’s web page estimates 10 million. Though a figure of 3 million Armenians living in the Armenian Republic is given, others estimate its current population at about 3,300,000. At least an additional four and half million are scattered around the world, including substantial communities of some 2,000,000 in Russia and some 1,000,000 in North America. There are large concentrations of Armenians in the Middle East—in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Iran. Approximately 400,000 Armenians live in France.

The world has, without question, mostly forgotten the destruction of the Armenians. Questions about the event also arise, as we will see, in

the academic and intellectual world. Despite the abundance of publications and the mass of evidence from the war years and the 1920s, the memory of the Armenian Genocide has gradually dimmed over the years. The Armenians were caught up in a struggle to survive and to rebuild their individual and communal life; some underwent a process of acculturation, assimilating into the five continents to which they were dispersed after they were expelled from their homeland. After the Second World War the world was stunned and absorbed by the horrors of the Holocaust. There are some Armenians who assert that interest in the Holocaust was at the expense of the Armenian tragedy, which became “the forgotten genocide.” In this case, the Western world, in my view, slightly embarrassed by its abandonment of the Armenians, and the indifferent world preferred, and continues to prefer, to ignore their fate, and within international *realpolitik*, the Armenians were utterly powerless.

### **The Armenian Community in Israel**

In the Armenian Quarter of the old city of Jerusalem there is an Armenian community that has lived there for centuries. Even though this community has always been small, it has special significance to Armenians all over the world because of the holiness of Jerusalem and the magnificent Armenian church there.<sup>7</sup>

While the Jewish community in Palestine shrank during the World War I years, as did the Christian and Muslim communities, the number of Armenians grew significantly with the arrival of the refugees from the Genocide during the war and after it. In addition to Jerusalem, they settled in Jaffa, Haifa, Acre, and a few families in some villages in the Galilee. An Armenian village composed of survivors of the genocide was established close to Athlit, near Haifa, after World War I and existed until the late 1970s.

The little Armenian community in the State of Israel, after its creation in 1948, numbered around 1,000 people. They commemorate their Memorial Day privately inside their communities, usually in the Armenian clubs of Haifa and Jaffa. The 1965 Memorial Day, when the Armenians in Israel, and in other countries as well, decided to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of their genocide, was the first public ceremony regarding the genocide. There was a gathering of the Armenians from all over the country in Jaffa. After the Six Day War in 1967, the Armenians of Israel established ties with the Armenians of the West Bank,

especially the organized community of Jerusalem. Since 1972, the Armenians in Israel commemorate their Memorial Day together in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. The processes of reconstruction of the memory of the Armenian Genocide in the Armenian Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem were painful, complicated, and gradual.<sup>8</sup>

Nowadays, the small Armenian community in Israel of around 3,000 members, divided between citizens of Israel and Armenians living in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, has very little political power. The Armenians of East Jerusalem live amongst the mosaic of different communities, and their future is uncertain if a political agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians is implemented—who will control the Armenian Quarter?

During the 1950s and 1960s, Israeli officials avoided participating in the Armenian Memorial Days, claiming that it is commemorated “privately” inside the community. But once the commemorations became public, this avoidance ceased to be an “innocent avoidance” and became one with political and moral significance. Different ministries avoided participation (for exceptions see note 1 at the end of this chapter), claiming that it is the responsibility of another ministry—the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Religions, or the Office of the Prime Minister. In considerations of *realpolitik*, the small Armenian community, its tragedy, and its memory have no weight.

### Notes

1. The presence of Minister Yair Zaban in the memorial ceremony of April 24, 1995 and Minister Yossi Sarid in the ceremony of 2000 will be discussed later in detail (see chapter 7).
2. Israel W. Charny, “Innocent Denials of Known Genocides: A Further Contribution to a Psychology of Denial of Genocide.” *Human Rights Review*, 1 (3), 2000. op. cit.
3. Many articles and books have been written about this in Israel. Our short survey is based mainly on Raphael Israeli, “The Turkish-Israeli Odd Couple,” *Orbis*, volume 45 issue no. 1 (winter 2001), p. 65-79. See also: Alon Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East, Oil Islam Politics* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1994); Alon Liel, *Turkey—Military, Islam and Politics 1970-2000* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999); Aryeh Shmuelevitz, *Turkey in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Between Modernization and Tradition* (Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defence, 1997); Ehud R. Toledano, *An Introduction to the History of the Ottoman Empire* (Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defence, 1985).

## 70      **The Banality of Denial**

4. Amikam Nachmani, "The Remarkable Turkish-Israeli Ties," *Middle East Quarterly*, June 1998, Vol. V No. 2, p. 21, quoted in *Cumhuriyet*, Nov. 5, 1994.
5. Raphael Israeli, p. 77.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
7. See Victor Azarya, *The Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).
8. For a very comprehensive and illuminating description and analysis of the processes of reconstruction of this memory see: Yona Weitz, *Memory in Struggle, A Study in Collective Memory: Processes of Reconstruction of the Memory of the Armenian Genocide in the Armenian Quarter, Old City of Jerusalem*, MA Thesis, Sociology and Social Anthropology Department, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2002.

## 4

### Genocide and Israeli Politics

*You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.*  
—Leviticus 19:16

The ancient Greek philosophers did not distinguish between morality and politics. This distinction characterizes the thinkers of the beginning of modern philosophy, like Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes, and Nicholas Machiavelli, whereas the liberal philosophers tried to combine, in one way or another, politics and morality.

Acts of genocide can occur in certain circumstances. One of these circumstances is the clear power superiority of the perpetrator over his victim. But this superiority depends, to a large extent, on the behavior of the “third party.” The third party is the overwhelming majority of humanity who is not involved in the action. The third party can be divided into three sub-groups: a) those who support the perpetrator—he is powerful, and because of considerations of political self-interest, it is “good” to have contacts with him; b) those who support the victim—for example, those who tried to help the Jews during the Holocaust because of moral values and risked their lives in doing it (defined in Israel as the Righteous); this group is always a small minority; and c) the bystanders. The necessary (but of course, not the only) condition for destruction is that other forces—especially forces identified with great political, military, and economic power—do not come between the murderer and his victim. Most of the people, most of humanity, that are not involved in the genocide directly belong to the latter group: the bystander, the indifferent, and those who remain silent. Bystanders inform us of the human potential for passivity in face of evil.

In our time, it is clear that the political establishment in each country ultimately decides the attitude of the state toward any crucial issues, including acts of genocide in the past or present. The political elite is, of course, influenced by many spheres in the state—the academics, the media, the educational systems, and so on—but in the end, it is the political leaders of the country who have to make the decision. It is also the political leadership that influences significantly the attitude of the other components of society. It is therefore very important, in our context, to examine the attitude of the political leadership to the issue of genocide. We will examine here how the Israeli political system—the political parties, the Knesset, and the government—has dealt with the question of genocide in general and the Armenian Genocide in particular.

In this chapter we will briefly review chronologically some case studies of issues related to the phenomenon of genocide in the past or present, and how they were debated in the political sphere in Israel. (The Armenian Genocide will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.)

### **International Agreements**

#### *A. U.N. Convention on Genocide and the Law on Genocide in the Knesset*

On December 9, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a Convention for “The Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.” The background for the U.N.’s acceptance of the Convention, as well as the circumstances for coining the term “genocide” by the Jewish legal expert Raphael Lemkin, were the crimes of the Nazis during World War II, primarily the annihilation of the Jews. The Genocide Convention provides that persons charged with genocide can be tried by a competent tribunal in the territory where the act was committed, or before an “international penal tribunal as may have jurisdiction...” The Convention, therefore, was open to the possibility of trials involving genocide before an International Criminal Court, should such a court be created. There was very little progress, however, toward the creation of an International Criminal Court during the Cold War.

On September 17, 1948 (four months after the creation of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948), Israel signed the U.N. Convention on Genocide. This was the first international convention signed and later rati-

fied by the State of Israel. On March 29, 1950, the Knesset adopted the Law on Genocide, following the U.N. Convention, but demanding more severe punishment. This law, which was the first international agreement adopted in Israel, was described by the first Israeli minister of justice, Pinhas Rosen, when he presented it before the Knesset in December 1949, as the first law brought to the Knesset as a result of Israel becoming an equal member in the society of nations and its institutions. The Israeli Law on Genocide manifested Israel's desire to cooperate with the U.N. and contribute to the achievement of the important aims for which the U.N. was created. It is significant to note that the discussions in the Knesset on the law regarding genocide preceded even discussions that dealt with forming the patterns of the memory and commemoration of the Holocaust, such as the law of "Yad Vashem" (The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority), or the law regarding The Memorial Day for the Holocaust and Heroism, which were approved in 1953 (see above, chapter 1). Members of the Knesset criticized the unclear aspects of the U.N. Convention but emphasized the importance and significance of the fact that Israel would accept this special law on genocide and ratify the U.N. Convention. The educational significance of the law and the convention, the need to teach it in schools, and the importance of education as a factor to prevent crimes of genocide in the future were also raised in the discussions.

Long discussions were held in the Knesset about the punishment of those accused of perpetrating genocide. Finally, it was decided that the punishment for those who are guilty of the crime of genocide would be death (except under special circumstances). It was also decided that a person who committed a crime of genocide outside of Israel could be judged in Israel.

The decisions to ratify to U.N. Convention and to adopt the Israeli Law on Genocide were accepted unanimously by the Knesset.

The Israeli law distinguishes the definitions for "crimes against the Jewish people," "crimes against humanity," and war crimes. Related to these is the 1950 Law for the Punishment of Nazis and Nazi Collaborators. For instance, Adolf Eichmann, one of the chief architects of the Final Solution, who was captured in Argentina and brought to Israel to be tried under the 1950 Law for the Punishment of Nazis and Nazi Collaborators, was accused of four categories of crimes: (a) crimes against the Jewish people, (b) crimes against humanity, (c) war crimes, and (d) participation in a hostile organization. In April 1961 Eichmann's



trial began in Jerusalem, and on May 31, 1962, he was executed—the only man thus far to be executed after a trial in Israel.

There were some who had reservations about making a differentiation between “crimes against the Jewish people” and “crimes against humanity,” saying that the Jewish people are a part of humanity. Others held the opinion that the crimes against the Jews were committed against the Jews and the Jewish people as such. Hannah Arendt, in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, reflected on this differentiation.<sup>1</sup>

In the debate on the law in the Knesset, it should be mentioned, one member, Rachel Cohen, said: “As a native of Russia, I can’t forget the terrible riots against the Armenian people. I was a young child then, but I was so deeply impressed that I am unable to forget it till now. But not only in Tzarist Russia it was so. Had the Turks not committed annihilation? Are other nations innocent of this crime? The Jews had to sacrifice 6 million victims before the law was presented to the nations of the world.”<sup>2</sup>

### *B. The International Criminal Court (ICC)—the Israeli Viewpoint*

In the aftermath of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and the other war crimes trials following World War II, a permanent International Criminal Court for genocide and major human rights violations was a conspicuously missing institution in the family of United Nations organizations. An early resolution of the U.N. General Assembly affirmed the principles of international law recognized by the Charter of the Nuremberg Tribunal (UNGA Resolution 95(I), December 11, 1946). These principles included criminal punishment for acts constituting crimes under international law, specifically crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.<sup>3</sup> A second early U.N. General Assembly resolution affirmed that genocide is a crime under international law and called for an international convention on the crime of genocide (UNGA Resolution 96(I), December 11, 1946). The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly, as mentioned, on December 9, 1948.

Since the end of the Cold War, several important steps have been taken toward establishing an International Criminal Court. In 1993, the U.N. Security Council established an Ad Hoc Tribunal for Crimes Com-

mitted in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991. This Tribunal tried offenders for grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, violations of the laws and customs of war, genocide, and crimes against humanity. It has brought many indictments against suspected criminals, and has begun to try cases at its headquarters in The Hague. A similar Ad Hoc Tribunal was set up by the Security Council in 1994 to try cases against suspected criminals of genocide and other major human rights violations that occurred during the civil war in Rwanda.

Since 1993, the U.N. General Assembly has made steady progress toward establishing a permanent International Criminal Court. In 1994, the Sixth Committee of the U.N. General Assembly approved a Draft Statute for this Court. A Preparatory Committee on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court met in New York with the mandate to review the draft convention and suggest alternate language to be considered by a Conference of Plenipotentiaries. The Preparatory Committee called for a Conference of Plenipotentiaries in June 1998 in order to adopt a treaty for establishing an International Criminal Court.

The Conference of Plenipotentiaries concluded on July 17, 1998, after a month-long meeting in Rome, with the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The Statute gives the Court jurisdiction over individuals who committed the crime of genocide, as defined in the Genocide Convention, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression (if the parties signed to the treaty are able to agree upon a definition of aggression). Unfortunately, the Statute limits the Court's jurisdiction by requiring that either the case be referred to the Court by the U.N. Security Council, or that the state of nationality of the accused or the state where the crime took place be a party to the treaty. This means that if genocide or other serious crimes are committed within a state not a party to the treaty by a leader of that state, the perpetrator cannot be held accountable by the international community, even if he travels outside his country, unless the case is referred to the Court by the Security Council. Referrals by the Security Council have the constraint that they will be subject to the veto power of the Council's five permanent members. The Statute also provides a loophole for states to opt out of the Court's jurisdiction for war crimes for a period of seven years.

The Court was to be established when the Statute creating it was ratified by sixty states. This happened in April 2002, earlier than estimated. The Court began functioning in July 2002. Only crimes com-

mitted after the Statute entered into force will fall within the Court's jurisdiction. Despite its shortcomings, the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court promises to be an important step forward for humanity. The establishment of the ICC symbolizes and embodies the values of justice, human rights, and human solidarity, and is considered by many as one of the most important institutes in the modern era—a new phase in the history of international criminal justice.

Israeli and Jewish jurists were involved for decades in the efforts to establish this Court. It is therefore surprising to view the Israeli attitude toward the final stage of its establishment. Israel (under the right-wing Netanyahu government) was one of the few countries in the Rome Conference, in July 1998, that voted against the statute. This was mainly due to a paragraph regarding the settlements Israel had built in the territories occupied by it in 1967, even though they were not named. This paragraph, which was introduced into the statute following the initiative of the Arab states, claims that direct or indirect transfer of a population from an occupant country to an occupied territory is a war crime. It should be mentioned that the U.S. also voted against the statute, fearing that because of political considerations, the ICC might act against American soldiers or leaders, because of their involvement in military activities around the world. Libya, Iraq, Algeria, Pakistan, China, and Turkey also did not vote to approve it. One hundred and thirty-nine countries, up to December 31, 2000, have signed the Statute, among them all the Western countries, as well as Syria, Egypt, and Jordan. These countries are considered the “founding members” of the ICC.

In the internal debate inside Israel after the Rome Conference in 1998, the minister of justice in the Barak Labor government, Yossi Beilin, strongly encouraged signing the statute, and was joined later by the foreign minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami. The army and the judicial system, including the attorney general, were against signing. The main argument for signing was that Israel, considering the history of the Jewish people and the fact that it was created after the Holocaust, cannot align itself with countries like China, Iraq, or Libya, which are notorious for their bad record of human rights violations.

What eventually brought Israel to finally sign the Statute was the fact that President Clinton decided to sign it, ignoring the objection of the Pentagon and the Republican majority in the Senate. The signature of the U.S. had to receive the approval of the Senate and the chance for approval was low. Clinton explained his decision both as an interna-

tional responsibility—that perpetrators of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, should be judged—and by the long tradition of United States’ involvement in those issues since the Nuremberg Tribunal. (It should be noted that the U.S. ratified the U.N. Convention on Genocide only in 1988, forty years after the vote in the U.N.).

On December 31, 2000, the U.S. and then Israel, encouraged by calls from many countries, especially Europe and Canada, as well as Jewish organizations, that asked Israel to do it, signed the Statute. These two countries signed at the last moment, the last day that any country could sign the Statute without ratifying it. Joining the ICC after December 31, 2000 involved a complicated internal juridical process and ratification of the statute by the country. The signature, it should be clear, has no practical juridical meaning, but it is a declaration and an act of symbolic significance.

An editorial in *Ha’aretz* “Signing with a Heavy Heart” (January 2, 2001) said: “By signing the Statute, Israel has joined itself to the family of nations, and does not remain aside as a pariah state.” Israel (as well as the U.S., Russia, and China) has not ratified the statute, and there is no chance that it will do so in the near future. Furthermore, the Bush administration reveals a disapproving attitude towards the ICC and has been active in weakening it by, among other things, signing a non-extradition agreement with other countries, including Israel. In July 2002 the Sharon government, including the then ministers of the Labor Party, decided unanimously (with one abstention) that Israel will not join the ICC nor ratify the statute.

### **Israel’s Current Attitude Towards Acts of Genocide**

Unfortunately, the hope that the Holocaust and its lessons have been learned by mankind has been shattered. The slogan “never again” remains an empty one, for many acts of genocide have occurred since World War II.

The foreign policy of the State of Israel, since its creation, has moved between two poles. On one hand is the wish to be “a light unto the nations,” to support underdeveloped countries, to share progress in science and medicine, and to display the willingness of the new state to achieve its place among the family of nations and sovereign countries. On the other hand is the feeling that the world, even the whole world, “is against us” as was exhibited by anti-Semitism, condemnation of Israel in the

U.N., and the breaking off of diplomatic relations with Israel by many countries, especially during the 1970s.

In the 1950s the attitude of “a light unto the nations” prevailed and was part of the ethos of the new state. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, the dominant attitude of the Israeli governments—with little difference between the left and right political spheres—was, generally speaking, a realistic, pragmatic, and abusive one. The opponents of Israel, especially in the Arab world and the Soviet block, provided Israel with “reasons” to support non-democratic states that violated human rights, like South Africa, and other non-democratic regimes in Asia, South America, and Africa.

The 1990s marked a change in Israel’s attitude towards non-democratic regimes. These changes may be attributed to the first Intifada (the Palestinian uprising against Israel’s occupation) that began in December 1987, and later to the Oslo agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed in 1993—one may even see these events as a turning point in Israeli foreign policy. Nevertheless, this was only the beginning of a change. Many military, economic, and political interests have not encouraged a liberal foreign policy. The power of these interests has arisen from the secrecy of political and diplomatic activity, and even more from the secrecy of military interests. It was influenced by the weakness of the legislative branch versus the executive one (the weakness of the Knesset’s supervision of the government). It also related to the superficiality of information given by the media, which often avoided giving information about and analyses of the dictatorial regimes and leaders with whom Israel cooperates, and the essence of the relations between them and Israel.<sup>4</sup>

The popular attitude and policy, that a little state surrounded by enemies has “no choice” and must, therefore, cooperate with non-democratic regimes, have had a large impact. It caused Israel, among other acts, not to condemn the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing in 1989—the president of Israel was one of the first leaders from the West to visit China after the massacre without any public protest. Israel refused to receive the Dalai Lama with high Israeli officials or politicians, and his visits to Israel were considered private. Many Israelis thought that moral issues are the “privilege” of large and strong states, and since Israel has to struggle with its existential problems, it has no “right” to provoke great China. According to this concept, Israel has no “right” to say anything concerning the massacres (it was arguably a genocide) in East

Timor, as it would provoke Indonesia, the largest Islamic country in the world (which has no diplomatic relations with Israel).

All states are guided in their foreign policy by considerations of *raison d'État*. This is practically an international standard. But all states also set limits to such pragmatic and cynical considerations, limits that are dictated by the most profound aspects of their national ethos. Many claim that *realpolitik*, which sacrifices justice at the altar of political considerations and compromises, is no longer acceptable.

Israel arose from the ashes of the Holocaust. The question is whether the Jewish State's and the Jewish people's empathy for other peoples who have been subjected, or are being subjected, to genocides or mass killings is a substantial aspect of its own national identity and ethos. Should this empathy serve as a clear limit that we (Israeli Jews) impose upon ourselves in the conduct of our affairs in the world arena? Might we expect of Israel a certain kind of response to genocide—to *any* genocide—whenever and wherever it might be perpetrated?

A small change could be seen in the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Peace Process in the Middle East, which shows that a new trend appeared (and later disappeared) in Israel's foreign policy. A few ministers in the Israeli government, such as Yossi Beilin, Yossi Sarid, and Shlomo Ben-Ami, claimed publicly that it is good for the interests of Israel to conduct a moral foreign policy, that policy and morality can go together.

In order to trace the general reactions of Israel to world cases of genocide, we will briefly describe the attitude of the State of Israel toward some concrete acts of genocide over the past half-century and the debates about them in the Israeli Parliament and Israeli media. Unfortunately, Israel's attitude towards these acts of genocide has not been studied systematically. Such studies are surely called for. Nevertheless, the general picture is quite clear. It should be noted that in these cases we are not speaking only about the past—to recognize or not recognize a genocide that was committed eighty-seven years ago. The cases that will be reviewed do not deal only with historical occurrences of genocide, but with actual murders happening at the present time, and which involve, unfortunately, the fate of hundreds of thousands of human beings. In these cases the attitude and behavior of the "third party" is crucial. Specifically, we will survey the attitude of Israel toward acts of genocide that occurred during the last few decades in Biafra, Tibet, Yugoslavia, and Rwanda.

**Biafra**

In 1960, Nigeria became independent from British Colonial rule. Nigeria was then an amalgam of diverse ethnic and religious groups. Many Ibo, most of them Christians, left their impoverished home region to seek jobs in the north, where they had to live in segregated settlements outside the walled cities of the Hausa Muslims. In January 1966, a few northern military leaders were killed in a coup, and the Ibo were blamed for it. Rioting mobs killed hundreds of Ibo. In July 1966, another coup provoked the genocidal massacre of 8,000 Ibo when their settlements were attacked, looted, and burned. This genocidal massacre was a major cause of the secession of the Ibo, leading in July 1967 to the outbreak of civil war between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Ibo in the Eastern Region—with the wish of the Ibo to separate from the Federal Government and establish their own state, Biafra.

The warfare and subsequent famine and disease that occurred between 1966 and 1969 in Biafra caused the death of 600,000-1,000,000 people, who were killed in battle. As Leo Kuper, one of the first genocide scholars, narrated: “Biafra was born in massacre and bred in starvation.”<sup>5</sup>

The Knesset debated the genocide in Biafra three times during 1968 and 1969, following private initiatives of members of the Knesset, who wanted to raise the issue on the agenda of the parliament. In the debate of July 9, 1969, a few members of the Knesset claimed that Israel had to be clearer in criticizing the Federal Government of Nigeria, which had forbidden and prevented famine relief sent by the Red Cross and other organizations by shooting the airplanes that carried the relief. The policy of intended starvation, they said rightly, is genocide according to the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted in 1948. Article II of the Convention defines genocide as any of several “acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such,” including, “(C) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.” These members of the Knesset criticized the cynical behavior of the Great Powers, their silence, and the constant supply of weapons sold to the Federal Government by Britain and USSR. Also mentioned was the U.S. and England’s pressure on the Red Cross not to send humanitarian aid to Biafra.

They criticized the silence of the chief rabbis of Israel regarding this human tragedy committed by other human beings. Members of the opposition, from the Left and Right wings, accused the moderate behavior of the Labor government in power, because of considerations of political expediency. They emphasized the special obligation of the Jewish people in this regard after the Holocaust. "This assembly has to be the most outspoken regarding this subject...this has to be the attitude of those who grew from the ashes of Auschwitz."<sup>6</sup> Some members demanded that Israel raise the issue in the U.N. and that it recognize the Biafran state, as some countries had done.

The foreign minister, Abba Eban, answering on behalf of the government, asked what Israel could have done except for humanitarian aid and "the fact we transmit our deep anxiety to the government of Nigeria, which claimed that the issue is an internal one." He proposed that the Committee for Security and Foreign Affairs of the Knesset would deal with the issue. This proposal was accepted with some abstentions.

In spite of the cynical behavior of *realpolitik* that has characterized Israeli governments regarding such cases of genocide, Israel provided significant humanitarian support to the victims in Biafra as well as elsewhere, either officially by the government, or through private and individual humanitarian activists and institutions. For example, Abie Nathan, an Israeli bohemian peace activist, who spent all his money in different humanitarian activities all over the world, is one of the most outspoken Israeli humanitarian activists. He began his work during the Biafran war when he landed humanitarian aid on his own behalf with the assistance of volunteers and the collaboration of the *Magen David Adom* (The Israeli parallel to The Red Cross).<sup>7</sup>

### Tibet

Despite the fact that Tibet's history as a civilization goes back 1,300 years and that Tibet had at one time occupied parts of China, the People's Republic of China regards Tibet as a part of China and has brutally suppressed Tibetan efforts to gain independence. During the 1950s, China began a campaign of destroying Tibetan monasteries, and when the Tibetans tried to defend themselves, they killed Tibetan monks and civilians. By 1959, the fighting reached the capital city of Lhasa, when Chinese communist troops shelled the palace of the Dalai Lama, the leader of Tibet. As warfare between Chinese forces and those of the



Dalai Lama spread, thousands of Tibetans were killed, and monasteries, castles, and historic buildings were destroyed. The Dalai Lama was forced to flee to India with many followers, where they remain to this day. Objective reports on Tibet since 1959 indicate that China waged a systematic campaign of ethnocide, and maybe even genocide, against the Tibetan people. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, between 1966 and 1979, zealous Red Guards invaded the countryside, going from village to village to destroy every relic they could find of the old order. Tibetan architectural structures thousands of years old were not only demolished but also often dismantled stone by stone. Thousands of Tibetan civilians were massacred.<sup>8</sup>

Not all scholars accept that what has been happening in Tibet since the 1950s can be defined as genocide. Some scholars prefer to define it as ethnocide or cultural genocide. The Dalai Lama himself, speaking at the French Senate in September 2000, warned that a cultural genocide was underway in Tibet under the guise of Chinese-led development program, and that Tibet faced serious environmental problems. He said that China's drive to develop Tibetan cities was aimed at destroying its ancient culture and pushing Tibetans out. "There is a form of cultural genocide taking place in Tibet," he said. In this regard, what is happening in Tibet is an ongoing ethnocide or cultural genocide. (Ethnocide is considered as the intentional destruction of ethnic, national, religious, or other peoples, not necessarily including the destruction of actual lives.)

The Israeli government has tried, like the Western states, to find ways to cooperate with China. It has been difficult, because since 1967 China traditionally enjoyed close relations with the Palestinians and the Arab World and had long adopted a Pro-Arab attitude. A window of opportunity in this direction has opened since the late 1980s.

In the late 1980s, a huge number of private and government contracts in different fields were signed with China, including military ones. In 1982, Israel established formal relations with China. Human rights activists tried to inform the Israeli public, as was done in Europe and America, about the crimes committed by China in Tibet and about the human rights violations in China. In the beginning this information was received by the Israeli government and the public with indifference and even hostility. Even after the creation of Rabin's government in November 1992 (a coalition between the Labor party and Meretz, a party that has a civil rights agenda), the policy has not changed significantly,

although there was a slight difference in attitude. Some ministers attributed this moderate shift to the appeals and letters of human rights activists on this issue.

The government was afraid that Israel's attitude regarding the Tibetan or human rights issues would hinder the budding relations and the new horizons opened to economic collaboration, especially the sale of weapons and military technology to China. It was also afraid that indirect ways—by an intermediary (sometimes against the wishes of the U.S.)—of supplying weapons to China in secret arrangements would be discovered, or that the issue of human rights could come back like a boomerang regarding human rights violations in the occupied territories. From 1989 to 1992 the ministers of the Likud government (a coalition consisting primarily of right-wing and religious parties) were informed regularly by human rights activists about the situation in China and Tibet. Nonetheless, they did not react and remained silent.

The Israeli media also avoided, almost completely, information about the situation in Tibet and China. Many letters and much information were sent to newspapers and members of the Knesset by human rights activists, without any result. For example, not a single article or letter to the editor sent to the Israeli newspaper during October–November 1992 was published. The attitude of the ministers of the Rabin government (since November 1992) towards the human rights activists and supporters of the cause of Tibet in the Israeli public was more sympathetic. They confirmed getting the letters and sometimes expressed sympathy. Nonetheless, the changes, which seemed essential in the beginning, were only cosmetic. They reacted with general comments on the issue of Tibet, recognized its moral significance, but in one way or another, accepted the priority of economic, military, and political interests.

Politicians from the left-wing parties that were the core of Rabin's government avoided public support for the Israeli Committee for Tibet. In the meantime, Israel and China intensified their relationship and cooperation. During that period, Israel sold China sophisticated military supplies worth billions of dollars, including material that was developed initially in the U.S. and forbidden for sale to China. In 1993 Prime Minister Rabin visited China, the first, "historical," visit of an Israeli prime minister there. In 1994, Chief of Staff Ehud Barak also visited China.

On the other hand, efforts by human rights activists and supporters of the cause of Tibet in Israel to bring the Dalai Lama to visit Israel

began in 1990, but failed. The government of China was hostile to the idea, and so were the Likud and Labor governments. In the summer of 1993, Rabin ordered his ministers not to meet with the Dalai Lama if he were to visit Israel.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, in March 1994, the Dalai Lama did visit Israel, as a guest of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel and as a pilgrim. He was honored by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and also visited Yad Vashem. He said that if a human being is controlled by hatred, jealousy, and fear, he can commit unlimited destruction. He claimed that, even after the visit to Yad Vashem, he believed that the human soul is basically positive, but we human beings should not let negative forces control us. No official representative was present at any of the events during his visit. When in Eilat, where the 40<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel took place, the Dalai Lama shook hands publicly with Yossi Sarid, the minister of environment, but Sarid emphasized that the visit of the Dalai Lama in Israel was a private one and that his decision to meet him was a personal decision, for which he was solely responsible.

In 1999 the Dalai Lama visited Israel twice. During June 1999 he was on a private visit, taking part in an interfaith conference with Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Shintos. The trip was organized by an American friendship group and the Inter-Religious Coordinating Council in Israel. Again, he was not received by Israeli officials or political leaders, as China made it clear that it would be deeply offended by any official reception for him. On another visit, in November 1999, the Dalai Lama was received in the offices of the then minister of education Yossi Sarid, and the speaker of the Knesset, Avraham Burg. China did not like it, but it seems that the close political economic and military cooperation between the two countries was not damaged.

### **Israel and the Genocide in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s**

Between 1991 and 1995, Yugoslavia turned from being a peaceful, multi-ethnic nation to enduring a civil war that rapidly degenerated into reciprocal atrocities, genocidal massacres, and ultimately into actual genocide.

During World War II, nearly 500,000 Serbs, Jews, and Roma were exterminated in the so-called Independent State of Croatia. With the

dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, several ethnicities returned to their genocidal past as each group reawakened and exploited the memory of old hatreds to motivate new atrocities. The renewed conflicts and genocides are related to the collapse of Communist rule in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In the years 1991-1995, war crimes were perpetrated mostly by the Serbs, but also by Croats and Muslims.

During the 1990s, the crimes committed by the Serbs (there were also crimes that were committed by others) cost the lives of about 250,000 victims. In 1991-1992, the Serbs conducted a war against Croatia and in 1992-1995 against Bosnia. Then, in the spring of 1999, less than four years after the Dayton Agreement of 1995 had seemingly put an end to the protracted fighting in the Balkans involving the dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia, the nation of Serbia, under the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic, utilizing both the Serbian army, paramilitary forces, and police, embarked upon an ethnic cleansing campaign to rid the province of Kosovo of its dominant Albanian Muslim population.<sup>10</sup> The atrocities in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia were the most terrible in Europe since World War II, and are considered by many the first genocide in Europe since the Holocaust.

From the beginning of hostilities until the summer of 1995, the world community failed in its efforts to effectively stop the carnage, but it did alleviate the suffering of the civilian population by providing considerable humanitarian aid.

The international community condemned Serbia's aggression against Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and the crimes of war and crimes against humanity, including genocide, that the Serbs were perpetrating in the course of the conflict. It set up an international tribunal to try those responsible for war crimes, committed for the most part by Serbs, but also by Croats and Muslims. The international community imposed economic, political, and cultural sanctions on Serbia, both as an expression of condemnation of Serbia's crimes and as a means of putting pressure on the Serbs to stop their onslaught.<sup>11</sup>

The trial of Slobodan Milosevic, president of the former Yugoslavia, opened in The Hague in February 2002. This trial is considered by many to be the most important international trial since the Nuremberg trials. He is accused of crimes of genocide (the most severe accusation in international law), crimes against humanity, war crimes, and violations of the Geneva Convention.

The international Jewish community took a clear position on the issue, along with the rest of the world. Some of those speaking for major Jewish organizations emphasized that Jews have a special obligation to speak out.

In a front-page article titled “U.S. Jews Call for Action against Serb Atrocities,” the *Jerusalem Post* reported that:

American Jewish organizations are taking comparisons of reported Serbian actions to the Holocaust seriously, and have taken a public role in calling for U.S. and international action to stop the atrocities. “As Jews, we are commanded to remember and we have a historical imperative not to remain silent when we hear words such as ethnic cleansing, cattle cars, selections, concentration camps,” said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, himself a child who had been saved by a righteous Gentile during the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup>

In France, prominent French-Jewish intellectuals from “the generation of 1968,” among them Alain Finkielkraut, Bernard-Henri Levy, and André Glucksmann, were very active in regard to the issue. They even considered sending a faction to the European Parliament to act on behalf of the Bosnian cause, and, in 1999, on behalf of the victims of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. In 1999, Bernard Kushnir, one of the outstanding figures of “the generation of 1968” in France, who never hid his half-Jewish origins, and who, in his capacity as French minister of humanitarian affairs, had worked in Bosnia and Rwanda, was named U.N. Commissioner of Kosovo. The organization he created, “Doctors without Borders,” received the Nobel Prize in 1999.<sup>13</sup>

Israel did not take part in the condemnation of the Serbs. From the outset, Israel’s stand on the Balkan conflict was quite different from that of most of the world (except Russia), including the Jewish Diaspora; Israel had been clearly and consistently *pro*-Serbian. This pro-Serbian policy was supported by both the Likud and the Labor Party governments, which have held power in Israel since the beginning of the Balkan conflict. Until mid-July 1995—that is, during almost four years of massacres, “ethnic cleansing,” and genocide—Israel consistently refused to join in the worldwide condemnation of the Serbs for their war crimes and crimes against humanity. In this way, and in other, more direct ways, Israel extended political and moral support to the Serbs. The Israeli governments also bear at least some responsibility—exactly how much cannot yet be determined—for the fact that the Serbs apparently

acquired significant quantities of weapons from Israel. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs consistently adopted a strongly pro-Serbian stance. It should be remembered that while the government apparently never held a proper discussion of the war in the Balkans and of what Israel's position on it should be, the Knesset did. But the misgivings and criticisms voiced in the Knesset exerted no significant influence on the government. Some Israeli citizens and a few members of the Knesset were dismayed by the fact that the government of Israel, unlike Western and other governments (and, as mentioned, major Jewish organizations abroad), desisted from issuing any official condemnation of Serbia's crimes. On a particularly significant occasion in the summer of 1992, Israeli Arabs and Jews found a common cause and demonstrated together against the camps the Serbs were operating in Bosnia-Herzegovina. On August 5, 1992, two Knesset members (Dedi Zucker of the social-liberal Meretz party, and Rafael Ellul from Labor), both from the coalition, joined by Abdul Wahab Dahrwshe (from the Arab Democratic Party), succeeded in raising in the Knesset the issue of Israel's stand on the genocide atrocities and the death-camps built by the Serbians. (They had failed in their attempt to raise the issue some ten days before.)

Foreign Affairs Minister Shimon Peres granted that atrocities were being perpetrated, but consistently refused to identify their perpetrators and condemn *them*. Instead, he issued a condemnation of no one in particular: "The government of Israel," he said, "emphatically and unequivocally condemns concentration camps, the killing, the shocking attacks on innocent women and children." The foreign affairs minister avoided saying a single word on the repeatedly pressed question of Israel's diplomatic ties with Serbia, during a time when most European states had severed their relationships with Serbia. Nevertheless, Peres said that the news about the atrocities (without mentioning that they were committed by the Serbs) "cannot but stir up the feelings and emotions of every human being around the world, especially the sons of the Jewish people." He also added, "Israel is a state of values, not only interests."<sup>14</sup> The war in the Balkans was subsequently discussed in the Knesset on several other occasions, but none of the criticisms voiced by Knesset members succeeded in making a dent in the pro-Serb stance of the government.

The issue of women's rape and the "rape camps" established by the Serbs in Bosnia, with the intent of the destruction of Bosnian Muslims,

was raised in the Knesset on January 13, 1993. On February 17, 1993, the issue of bringing eighty-four Muslim refugees from Bosnia to Israel was also raised. It was mentioned that Israel had sent humanitarian aid to Bosnia in August 1992. Knesset members from the Right and Ultra-Right wing criticized the aid (humanitarian only) given to the Bosnians, who had supported the Palestinians in the war of 1948, and, some claim, created a Bosnian-Nazi division that exterminated Jews during the Holocaust (others reject this claim). Many emphasized that Israel's humanitarian involvement was far greater than the aid extended by the rest of the international community, which preached morals but did little to stop the atrocities in Bosnia. "We, the sons of the Jewish people, survivors of the Holocaust, are experienced with the silence and the idleness of the 'enlightened world,'" said Knesset member Avraham Hirshzon (Likud), himself a survivor of the Holocaust. The silence of the Arab countries regarding the attacks in Bosnia in comparison to the humanitarian act of Israel was also emphasized. The decision of Prime Minister Begin to accept in 1977 102 Vietnamese refugees was then applauded: We are "a light unto the nations" said some of the Knesset members.

The humanitarian aid to the Bosnians was raised several times also in January, May, and June 1993. On May 5, 1993, Knesset Member Dedi Zucker (Meretz) repeated his claim that we do not have the right to remain silent, and that what we are doing does not match our just criticisms of the behavior of the world during the 1930s and 1940s. He proposed that Israel participate in the Peace-Keeping Forces that were being created by the U.S. and European countries. The deputy foreign minister, Yossi Beilin (Labor), said that Israel supports the decision of the U.N. and participates in the implementation of the sanctions decided by the Security Council. According to him, further humanitarian relief was sent, and Bosnia had avoided the reported messages that Israel would be ready to recognize its independence.

This was to remain Israel's official position. The government would not issue the mildest condemnation of the Serbs. Prime Minister Rabin and Foreign Affairs Minister Peres withstood all attempts by reporters, in Israel and abroad, to get them to do so. All that the Israeli government could be pressured into doing was to express regret at the events, as if these were not crimes but rather a natural catastrophe. Even after a massacre in the Sarajevo market, which resulted in the death of sixty-nine victims and hundreds of wounded and shocked the world, the state-

ment of the government included utterly abstract “condemnations” that acknowledged no difference between the criminal and the victim:

Israel expects that the wave of violence in the territories of the former Yugoslavia, which has reached its peak in the terrible killing in the Sarajevo market, will soon come to an end. Israel expresses its regret at the death of innocent civilians, and its hope that the efforts being made to settle the conflict in a peaceful way will soon prove fruitful. (February 7, 1994)

On February 6, 1994, the Knesset’s speaker, Szewach Weiss (Labor), sent letters to the president of the Parliaments of the Permanent Members of the Security Council of the U.N. (U.S., Russia, China, England, and France):

The continuing acts of genocide in Bosnia are a mark of disgrace upon humanity as a whole. We, sons of a people that was a victim of such massacres while the whole world stayed silent, cannot give a hand to the silencing of this atrocity. We feel deep identification with the inhabitants of Sarajevo, and hope for an international act that will stop this horror. I turn to you to do whatever is in your power to save the inhabitants of the seized Sarajevo.

The Speaker of the Knesset, himself a survivor of the Holocaust, used the term “genocide,” but he also avoided mentioning the murderers, the Serbs, as though it was not clear yet who committed the crime.

On February 7, 1994, the Knesset debated the “Silence of the world in face of the murder of citizens in Sarajevo.”<sup>15</sup> Naomi Blumenthal (Likud) said that the message the Serbs are receiving from the world, and also from us, is that they can continue the massacre; we will stand by and will not prevent their atrocities. “It is absurd that the U.N. is creating a committee to investigate who fired the bomb. Today we know, and the Serbs know, that we know what they are doing, and we cannot proclaim that we did not know.”

The minister of environment (and later the minister of education), Yossi Sarid, who was active in the humanitarian aid to the Bosnians, said that after 672 days of the siege of Sarajevo, and after about 10,000 victims and 55,000 wounded, we have to acknowledge that, “It is not a civil war but a genocide.” It is the duty of the world, therefore, to interfere. He praised the activity of the State of Israel: “The Jewish people and the State of Israel have done more than any other country. It is little, but even so, it is more than any other country has done.” Sarid



mentioned eleven rescue missions in which 3,000 persons, mainly Jews, were rescued and that a Muslim woman, righteous of the nations (a Bosnian woman who risked her life by saving Jews during the Holocaust) would be brought to Israel in a few days.

While atrocities in Bosnia were still continuing, the issue was raised again in the Knesset in May and on December 7, 1994, as well as in May and July 1995. The policy of refusing to condemn the Serbians clearly or to name those responsible for crimes earned the government much praise from the local Serbian lobby. By sticking to this policy, the government of Israel was giving semi-official sanction to the efforts of the lobby's genocide-deniers. They were not merely voicing their own opinion; they were practically proclaiming the government's version of the events.

It was only at a very late stage of the Balkan conflict that the Israeli government deviated, for a while, from this policy. In mid-July 1995, with genocide and "ethnic cleansing" in the Balkans in its fifth year, Foreign Affairs Minister Peres, Prime Minister Rabin, and Minister for Environment Yossi Sarid finally conceded that the atrocities were being perpetrated by human agency and that that agency, for the most part, were the Serbs.

Nevertheless, the condemnation of (Bosnian) Serbs was not repeated again, and soon after the Dayton Agreement was in place in December 1995, the ties between Israel and Serbia were developing at full speed. Even before Milosevic lost power there were strong political, economic, cultural, and military ties between the two countries. It was no surprise that the circle of Serb repression, atrocities, and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo provoked no critical comments from Israel's political establishment. On the other hand, Israel sent humanitarian relief to the refugees of Kosovo.

The government of Israel has done much more than support the Serbs in this somewhat indirect way. In late summer 1991, with the Serbian onslaught on Croatia in full swing and Serbia well on its way to becoming an international pariah, the Israeli government decided to establish diplomatic ties with it. Serbia soon opened its embassy in Tel Aviv and designated an ambassador.<sup>16</sup> The sanctions imposed on Serbia by the U.N. prevented the submission of credentials and the opening of an Israeli embassy in Belgrade at the time. But that did not prevent the establishment of an embassy—first under the designated ambassador and then under a *chargé d'affaires*—from carrying on business as usual and engaging in intense lobbying and public relations activity.

For example, Ori Orr (Labor), chairperson of the Knesset Foreign and Security Committee, said, on his visit to Belgrade in July 1994: "We have a good memory. We know what it is to live under sanctions and boycott... Every U.N. resolution against us was adopted by a two-thirds majority...." He went on to promise further support for Serbia, including help in improving the latter's international position and image.<sup>17</sup> Overall, the relations between the two countries were developing so well that by the mid-summer of 1994, the U.S. administration had Vice President Al Gore summon the Israeli ambassador and warn Israel not to go any further with it (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, July 19, 1994).

On the other hand, the Israeli government has repeatedly refused to establish diplomatic relations with Croatia. The matter of arms supplies to Serbia (in breach of U.N. sanctions) also has to be mentioned, at least briefly, even though we cannot explore the issue systematically. Indications have been accumulating since 1991 from various sources in the Balkans, Israel, and elsewhere about this issue. The press in various parts of the former Republic of Yugoslavia has reported on this more than once, and the Serbs themselves have never felt the need to be secretive about it.<sup>18</sup> Some of them say that Israeli officials do not deny foreign press reports that Bosnian Serbs have regularly fired Israeli-made shells at Sarajevo and used Israeli light weapons. The only dispute is over how the weaponry gets there: pro-Bosnia activists in Jerusalem accuse the government of supporting Serbia; officials blame third parties.<sup>19</sup>

Israeli media, both printed and electronic, have shown remarkable uniformity in the way they have related to the war in the Balkans. During the conflict in Slovenia and Croatia and at an early stage of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Israeli media took a pro-Serbian position. This was clear not only in attempts to explain and interpret what was happening, but also in the way the events were being reported; the Serbian lobby in Israel was very strong. In the summer of 1992, when the reports about the camps the Serbs were operating in Bosnia-Herzegovina were in the headlines throughout the world, Israeli newspapers ran some of the stories, and state television screened some of the footage from the camps that was being shown worldwide. That marked the beginning of a change in the way the developments were being reported. Slowly but surely, the reports became more detailed and professional; the Israeli public was in a position to learn more and more about the facts of the Serbs' war on the non-Serbian civilian

population, the camps, “ethnic cleansing,” and the rest of the atrocities committed.

On the other hand, when it came to commenting on the events, explaining them to a public that knows next to nothing about Balkan geography or history, and setting out their wider implications, a pro-Serbian stand has reigned supreme, both in the press and in radio and television programs. This phenomenon is explained by Igor Primorac, an associate professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, using the “WWII argument,” which goes beyond pragmatic *realpolitik* considerations. According to Primorac, the 1990s war in Yugoslavia was understood in Israel as the direct continuation of what happened in Yugoslavia in World War II. During the war, the Croats and Muslims had taken sides with the Nazis, and helped them exterminate the Jews. The Serbs, on the other hand, fought against the Nazis, helped and protected the Jews. According to this “rationale,” the Jews have a “historical obligation” to understand the Serbs’ cause and to support it today.<sup>20</sup>

Primorac, who was very critical toward Israel’s behavior regarding the war in the Balkans, particularly toward the genocides in Bosnia and Croatia, writes: “Faced with this argument, one might want to ask two questions: Are the historical claims true and, if so, should they decide the moral and political issue here and now?” And he concludes: “What I still find quite remarkable is that today, when we are witnessing the first case of genocide in Europe since the Holocaust, there should be Jews, of all people, in the Jewish State, of all places, showing understanding, sympathy, and support for Greater Serbia, and explaining their understanding, sympathy and support in terms of the World War II argument.” (He quotes Alain Finkielkraut, the French Jewish philosopher, who wrote that the Serbs carried out the first racial war in Europe since Hitler and that the Serbs, the Nazis of this story, are trying to pass themselves off as the Jews.)<sup>21</sup> Those who have shared these views and have struggled for them publicly at that time, were a small minority in Israeli.<sup>22</sup> After Primorac published a book review titled “The Suffering of Others,”<sup>23</sup> about *Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of ‘Ethnic Cleansing’*—the first book-length scholarly study of the subject by Norman Cigar—he was attacked in Israel in a quite racial way: “It is ironic, to say the least, that just a week after Croatian troops had carried out the largest ‘ethnic cleansing,’ operation of the continuing Yugoslavia civil war, driving 200,000 Serbs out of their homes, Igor Primorac’s foul anti-Serbian diatribe was published. Primorac’s intellectual dishonesty

lies not only in his hate ridden charges against the Serbs, but in yanking the past four years events out of their historical context [WWII—Y.A.]"; and then: "Primorac is himself a Croat. His claim to some partial Jewish ancestry does not change that. His appeal to Jews to understand the suffering of others is stale and in bad taste."<sup>24</sup>

No serious introspection has been done either by the media or by political circles regarding Israel's attitude during the wars of the 1990s and acts of genocide. Even after the collapse of Milosevic and his arrest, and even after the beginning of his trial in The Hague before the Ad Hoc Tribunal for crimes committed in the territory of the Former Yugoslavia, Israel did not say anything regarding its ties with Milosevic.

### Rwanda

Since 1994 Rwanda has become synonymous with one of the worst genocides of the twentieth century. Out of a population of approximately 7.5 million, an estimated one million died at the hands of the Hutu militias (locally known as *inter-hamwe*), with "auxiliary support" from the army, party activities, communal authorities, and ordinary citizens who felt they had no other choice but to kill their neighbors in order to save their own lives. Of these, the vast majority belonged to the Tutsi minority, accounting at the time for approximately 10 percent of the population; but thousands of Hutu from the south, identified with opposition parties, also perished under the blows of the death squads.

The background to the genocide in Rwanda, as well as in Burundi, was the tension between the two major ethnic groups, the Tutsi and Hutu, which was intensified and even manipulated by the colonial rulers, paving the way for the so-called "social revolution" of 1959-1962. With the overthrow of the Tutsi monarchy and the seizure of power by Hutu elites, Rwanda became a Hutu-dominated republic. The watershed event was the 1959-1962 Hutu revolution. With substantial backing from the Catholic Church and the Belgian Trusteeship authorities, a radical shift of power took place in Rwanda in the year immediately preceding independence, resulting in the overthrow of the monarchy, the proclamation of a republican form of government, and the flight into exile of an estimated 200,000 Tutsi men, women, and children. With the Tutsi minority effectively excluded from participating in the political life of the country, the new Rwanda Republic was in fact if not in name a Hutu Republic.

The Hutu revolution found its nemesis some thirty years later when, on October 1, 1990, the RPF (the Tutsi-dominated Rwandese Patriotic Front) refugee warriors proceeded to fight their way back into Rwanda. Most of them were sons of Uganda-based Tutsi refugees of the 1959 revolution.

The really critical event, however, which seemed to confirm the worst fears of the Hutu community in Rwanda, was the assassination of the newly elected Hutu president of Burundi, Melchior Ndadaye, on October 21, 1993, by elements of the all-Tutsi Burundi army. The message that came across could be summed up in four words: "Never trust the Tutsi!" This assassination virtually destroyed all chance of compromise between Hutu and Tutsi in both states. In Rwanda it drove the final nail into the coffin of the Arusha agreements, which provided a compromise of sorts between the Habyalimana government and the RPF.

As much as the appalling scale of the carnage was, it is the element of planned annihilation that gives the Rwanda killings their genocidal quality. Although there is an obvious connection with the threats posed to the Rwandan state by the invasion of Tutsi "refugee-warriors" from Uganda, the agonies of Rwanda are not those of civil war, but of an organized butchery orchestrated by a relatively small group of Hutu hardliners closely identified with the family of the late President Juvenal Habyalimana. Anyone whose physical appearance, ethnic identity, or political affiliation offered grounds of presumed sympathy for the invaders and their political-military organization, the Tutsi-dominated Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), was fair game for the killers.

Ironically, the horrors of the Rwandan genocide have all but overshadowed in public attention another gruesome massacre—the 1972 genocide in Burundi. From May to October 1972, anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 Hutu were killed by the all-Tutsi army in retaliation for a Hutu-led localized rebellion that resulted in the deaths of hundreds (some say thousands) of Tutsi civilians. Although the scale of the Burundi genocide is of a lesser magnitude, its moral and political significance cannot be ignored, any more than its historical relationship to the Rwanda genocide.<sup>25</sup>

The genocide of Rwanda is a genocide that could have been prevented, maybe more than any other genocide in the last century. According to most experts, the Rwandan genocide could have been stopped if not prevented. But the international community refused to act.

In the Israeli parliament the issue was debated several times during 1994 while the genocide was taking place. The issue was first raised on May 18, 1994 by Naomi Chazan (Meretz), who said that in Rwanda a holocaust is actually occurring and that "The issue was raised on the agenda of the Knesset and the western world a month too late."<sup>26</sup> She emphasized the special responsibility of the State of Israel regarding this event. According to Chazan, we should be clear and unequivocal in our reaction to the tragedy; otherwise we give up a significant component of our Zionist vision. Vice Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin said that Israel supported the Security Council's decision of embargo of weapons and the sending of 5,000 troops to the area. A government resolution, which was published on May 22, 1994, regarding events in Rwanda stated: "The government of Israel is shocked by the genocide taking place in Rwanda and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of innocent people. The Jewish people, which has experienced the most bitter event of the Nazi holocaust, and its state, the State of Israel, cannot be indifferent to the horrors in Rwanda."

In July 1994, the Israeli government sent a field hospital to Rwanda (actually to Goma, Zaire) with eighty-nine staff persons ("The Blossoms of Hope Operation"). This operation was praised by all. It is estimated that about 3,000 Rwandan refugees were treated in the Israeli hospital. It is known now, that among them were also murderers, executors of the genocide, who were hiding in the refugees' camps.

On July 27, 1994, the government raised the issue on the agenda of the Knesset.<sup>27</sup> The relief Israel had sent was praised by some, while others claimed that it was sent too late. The analogies with and the differences from the Jewish Holocaust were also raised. Some members of the Knesset spoke about a hypocritical and cynical world and the fact that countries are continuing to send weapons to Rwanda (Israel was not mentioned in this regard). The right-wing MP Rechavam Zeevi said that the lesson for us is that we can only count upon ourselves (in relation to our own struggle with the Arabs). Although the terms "genocide" and "holocaust" were mentioned to define the killing in Rwanda, the unanimous statement of the Knesset—all the participants, 26 MPs of a total of 120 (the others were absent), supported the decision—spoke about "deep shock and great concern regarding the terrible human tragedy that is going on in Rwanda." It praised the relief sent by Israel, and asked other governments to join it before it would be too late. The statement also asked for the cre-

ation of an international mission's force by the U.N. The demand of the ultra-orthodox MP Avraham Rabitz to include in the statement of the Knesset that men are created in God's image (which is part of Jewish religious thought) was accepted without any objection. The events in Rwanda were raised again in the Knesset on May 9, 1995 because of a renewed eruption of violence, and the massacre of about 8,000 refugees. The relief provided by the Israeli government was praised again by members of the Knesset as an example to the whole world.

Apart from Israeli governmental relief, Abie Nathan (see the section above about Biafra), along with other Israeli volunteers, were active together with the Joint (Jewish Joint Distribution) and UNRA to rescue Rwandan refugees. Twice in the summer of 1995 the American Jewish Joint Distribution sent groups of Israeli experts to assist the local efforts to rehabilitate Rwanda's children. On the other hand, the efforts to coordinate and organize popular support were not so successful. For example, in an event organized by the Israeli office of Amnesty International that ought to have been a large and popular one, only a few dozen people were present.<sup>28</sup> The organization commented that probably the Israeli public was not yet prepared for rallies like this.

In November 1995, the local Rwanda government called for a conference, entitled "Genocide—Impunity and Accountability; Dialogue for a National and International Response," to help the country overcome the trauma of the genocide that took place the year before. The government invited fifty foreign experts in the fields of commemoration, rehabilitation, and justice, to join 150 Rwandan officials and relief workers from abroad to discuss ways of healing the trauma. From Israel, John Lemberger, director of AMCHA, an organization that offers psychological assistance to Holocaust survivors, and Efraim Zuroff, the director of the Israeli office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which is active in memorializing and documenting the Holocaust and concentrates on hunting Nazi war criminals, took up the invitation. Efraim Zuroff explained why he had to go to Rwanda: "For years we justifiably complained about the world's indifference to our suffering, both during and after the Holocaust. But will Rwandans be making those same accusations during the coming years—aimed at us as well?"<sup>29</sup> Yad Vashem declined, giving the strange explanation that "we are not a travel agency, we participate only in a conference with academic character."<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless it was ready to help the government of Rwanda in the field of commemoration and in the field of education.

Finally, the painful issue of Israeli arms supplies to Rwanda has to be mentioned. Indications have been accumulating from various sources indicating that Israel (as well as other countries) might have sold arms to Rwanda during the genocide, despite a U.N. arms embargo.<sup>31</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate this terrible charge and to examine it in detail. The mere fact that this issue (and the issue of selling weapons to Serbia during the wars in the Balkans mentioned above) was not raised and investigated in depth, either by the media and academia or—to the best of my knowledge—by the political sphere (by members of the Knesset for instance—unless it was discussed in a secret committee or sub-committee of the Knesset), is an example of severe indifference, and a severe moral failure.

### Conclusion

The brief survey of these four case studies reveals a very bleak picture. Of course, they need to be studied more systematically and in depth. I hope that in Israel, journalists, students, and scholars will become aware of the significance of these issues. Except for the humanitarian relief—and we are the last to undervalue it—that the governments of Israel and its citizens gave to the victims, the State of Israel stayed indifferent. Even more, Israel supported politically and even militarily Serbia during the atrocities. Probably in three cases, and surely in two, Israel supplied weapons to the regimes that committed the genocide, even during the genocides. Unfortunately, directly or indirectly, Israel supported the executors and the murderers. It failed in fulfilling the divine biblical moral edict, “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor,” as well as in fulfilling the moral legacy of the victim of the Holocaust, one might say. It seems to me that there is a direct connection between the failure of Israel regarding these recent acts of genocide and its moral failure regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The claim that whoever turns a blind eye to the historical occurrence of genocide is able to do the same when the genocide takes place in the present can also be formulated in the opposite direction: whoever turns a blind eye when genocide takes place in the present is able to do the same to the historical occurrence of genocide.

In criticizing Israeli policy, we have to remember that most countries behave in the same way, even big, powerful, and influential countries, like the United States. Analyzing the attitude of America to the geno-



cides in the twentieth century—the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, and the genocides in Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and other places—Samantha Power, the executive director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, wrote at the end of her comprehensive study:

What is most shocking is that Washington’s policymakers did almost nothing to deter the crimes because “America’s vital national interests” were not considered to be imperiled by genocide. Senior U.S. officials did not give genocide the moral attention it warranted.”<sup>32</sup>

The key question is, why does the United States stand so idly by? Indeed, the picture that becomes increasingly clear regarding the attitude towards acts of genocide is one of indifference, the reality of the bystander. The reaction of the multitudes—those located between the perpetrator and the victims—is characterized by indifference, conformity, and opportunism. The State of Israel, unfortunately, has not reached beyond this banality. It has stood on the sidelines, indifferent. Even worse, it has supported the perpetrator indirectly and sometimes even directly.

Increasingly, I become convinced that those who stand on the sidelines inadvertently support the murderers, never the victims. When we decide not to take sides, we practically have taken the side of the aggressor. Morally, we cannot sit idly in the face of criminal acts of genocide. We cannot accept the argument that nothing can be done, that “such things happen.” Evil does not cease to be evil when it hurts another. It is written in the Bible, Leviticus 19: 16: “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.” Morally, at least, the bystanders are responsible, and may also be guilty.

### Notes

1. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem—A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 223-224.
2. *Protocols of the Knesset [Divrei HaKnesset]*, December 28, 1949.
3. See the entry, “International Criminal Court for Genocide and Major Human Rights Violations,” (written by David Krieger) *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, op. cit., pp. 362-364.
4. See, among others, *A Light unto the Nations: Israel’s Foreign Policy and Human Rights*, edited by Daphna Sharfman (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999).

5. Leo Kuper, quoted in *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, p. 347. The above paragraph is based on the article "Ibos" in the *Encyclopedia*.
6. *Protocols of the Knesset*, July 9, 1969.
7. See P. de Bounbil, *The Death of Biafra* (Tel Aviv: Othpaz, 1969), especially the chapter about Israeli relief to Biafra, pp. 133-150; Abie Nathan, *Memories* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1998), pp. 93-104.
8. *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, op. cit., p. 543.
9. Bambi Sheleg, "Missing," *Hadashot*, July 1, 1993.
10. About the genocide in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia see, among others, the entry in *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, op. cit., pp. 633-654; Steven L. Burg, "Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina," in *Century of Genocide: Eye-witness Accounts and Critical Views*, edited by Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons, and Israel W. Charny (New York: Garland Press, 1997), pp. 424-433.
11. These paragraphs are based partly on the articles of Igor Primorac on the subject. See: "Israel and the War in the Balkans," *Mediterranean Policies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring 1999, pp. 79-94; "Israel and the Genocide in Croatia," in *Genocide after Emotion (The post-emotional Balkan War)*, edited by Steypan G. Mestrovic (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 195-206.
12. Allison Kaplan and Tom Tugend, "U.S. Jews Call for Action against Serb Atrocities," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 6, 1992.
13. About this very interesting phenomenon, related in my opinion to the impact of the Holocaust and the Jewish-universal memory of it, see Yair Auron, *Les Juifs d'Extrême Gauche en Mai 68—une génération révolutionnaire marquée par la Shoah* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).
14. *Protocols of the Knesset*, August 5, 1992.
15. *Protocols of the Knesset*, February 7, 1994.
16. The ambassador designate was Dr. Budimir Kosutic, who had been vice premier of the Belgrade government. He was about to be elected the first president of the Serb "Republic" setup in the Serb-held, "ethnically cleansed" part of Croatia, when it turned out that he might be even more useful to the Serbian cause as a Serbian ambassador to Israel. See Igor Primorac, 1999, op. cit., p. 83.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 84, who quotes Serb sources and newspapers, showing that the Israeli ambassador to Serbia kept voicing similar pro-Serbian themes also later, in 1997.
18. Igor Primorac, 1996, op. cit., pp. 197-199. See more details in the articles of Primorac mentioned above and also in "Israeli Shells on Sarajevo," *The Jerusalem Report*, February 9, 1995; "A Saga of Deep Shame," *The Jerusalem Post*, July 18, 1993; "The Serbia-Israel Connection," *Foreign Report* 258, April 1, 1999.
19. Tom Sawicki, "How Are Bosnia's Serbs Getting Israeli Arms," *The Jerusalem Report*, January 26, 1995.
20. Igor Primorac, 1996, op. cit., pp. 204-205.
21. *Ibid.*

22. On February 14, 1994, seven people sent a letter to the editor of *Ha'aretz*, demanding unequivocal Israeli condemnation of the Serbs. Prof. A. Z. Bar-On and nine other Hebrew University professors published a letter to the editor of *The Jerusalem Post*, January 20, 1992, and four others sent a letter to Shimon Peres, minister of foreign affairs, and Shulamit Aloni, minister of education and culture (August 4, 1992) regarding Israeli and Serbian relations. On April 6, 1992, Igor Primorac asked the president of Israel, Chaim Herzog, not to shake the hand of the nominated ambassador of Serbia (private archive). Prof. Shlomo Avineri also condemned publicly several times the behavior of Serbia and the ambivalent attitude of Israel toward it. Daniel Kofman, a Hebrew University lecturer, was also active in this issue.
23. Igor Primorac, "The Suffering of Others," *The Jerusalem Post Magazine*, August 18, 1995 (A book review of *Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of Ethnic Cleansing* by Norman Cigar, College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1995).
24. Elliot A. Green, "Intellectual Dishonesty" (letter to the editor), *The Jerusalem Post Magazine*, September 1, 1995.
25. The above paragraph is based on the article, "Genocide in Rwanda and Burundi," written by René Lemarchand, *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, pp. 508-513.
26. *Protocols of the Knesset*, May 18, 1994.
27. *Protocols of the Knesset*, July 27, 1994.
28. "Only dozen were present in the event organized by Amnesty on behalf of the Rwandan refugees," *Ha'aretz*, September 22, 1994.
29. Efraim Zuroff, "Why I Had To Go To Rwanda," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 29, 1995.
30. Or Kashti, "Knowledge About Genocide," *Ha'aretz*, December 4, 1995.
31. See, among others, *Leave None to Tell the Story—Genocide in Rwanda*, edited by Alison Des Forges (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), p. 636. Information about this issue was reported by the BBC on November 18, 1996 claiming that both British and Israeli arms sales were made to the Hutu government militia in April 1994. The issue was raised in the Israeli media on November 19, 1996. In a report of Amnesty International of February 14, 1998 concerning arming the perpetrators of the genocide, there was a description of four pilots employed by a U.K. company that admitted in public to having flown four large charter planeloads of small arms from Israel and Albania to Goma during April 1994. The supplies are said to have included Israeli-made weaponry, such as Uzi sub-machine guns, as well as grenades captured by the Israeli army from the Egyptian army in 1973.
32. Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 504.

## 5

### **The Armenian Genocide's Recognition by States: The Israeli Aspect**

*This is our obligation to you; this is our obligation to ourselves.*—Israeli Minister of Education, Yossi Sarid, April 24, 2000

In the debates over the Armenian Genocide, it is often said by officials in Israel and in other countries that historians, not politicians, should discuss the issue. That is what Israeli officials said to Turkish representatives after Yossi Sarid's statement in April 2000 (see chapter 7), and what the Clinton administration (like all the other U.S. administrations before it) claimed when it succeeded in preventing the United States' legislative initiative in the year 2000. This argument was also raised during the debate in France over the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and eventually adopted by the Parliament. The Armenians in the Diaspora and now also the Republic of Armenia, on the other hand, claim, in the words of Robert Kocharian, the president of the Armenian Republic, that "*Le génocide n'est pas l'affaire des historiens*" ("The Genocide is not a matter for historians") (*Le Figaro*, February 12, 2001). It is significant in this context to mention again the statement in which 126 Holocaust scholars affirmed in June 2000 the incontestable fact of the Armenian Genocide and accordingly urged the governments of Western democracies to recognize it as such.<sup>1</sup>

The claim of politicians that the issue should be left to the historians is, of course cynical, and is usually an instrument used to avoid discussion, mainly because of political interests. However, in recent years—after a stubborn struggle by the Armenians and their supporters, usually on moral grounds—the debate over the recognition of the

Armenian Genocide did enter some parliaments. The affirmation of the Armenian Genocide is mentioned in the resolutions of the Uruguayan Senate and House of Representatives (April 20, 1965), Cypriot House of Representatives (April 29, 1982), Argentinean Senate (May 5, 1993), Russian Duma (April 14, 1995), Hellenic [Greek] Parliament (April 25, 1996), Lebanese Chamber of Deputies (April 3, 1997), and Swedish Parliament (March 29, 2000), in a Lebanese Parliament resolution (May 11, 2000), and by Italy (November 16, 2000). It is also mentioned in the declaration of Vatican City (November 10, 2000) and by France (January 18, 2001). Furthermore, it was mentioned, affirmed, and recognized in one way or another (the differences are sometimes very significant) in official reports of the U.N., by the European Parliament (July 18, 1987 and again November 15, 2000), heads of states, U.S. presidential statements, twenty-five American states, several provincial governments of Canada, municipal governments across Europe and North America, international organizations, and in public petitions. The struggle for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by specific states gained momentum as recently as 2000-2001.

For example, two-and-a-half years after the French Senate refused to consider a bill that would debate official French recognition of the Armenian Genocide—as the French Lower House of Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies (*l'Assemblée*), had done in a unanimous vote on May 29, 1998—and after a long debate and struggle, the final steps of the French recognition were taken in 2000-2001. On November 9, 2000, the French Senate formally recognized the Armenian Genocide, and on January 18, 2001, the Chamber of Deputies (*l'Assemblée*) recognized it and it became a French law.

Around the same time—on March 29, 2000—the Swedish Parliament passed a formal resolution recognizing the Armenian Genocide after a Swedish parliamentary report asserted, “An official statement and recognition of the genocide of the Armenians is important and necessary.” Sweden urged Turkey to do so as well.

The Italian and Austrian Parliaments debated this issue without a conclusion. In March 2001, the Swiss Parliament also reviewed a resolution regarding official recognition of the Armenian Genocide. It was a non-binding resolution, which, if passed, would have called on the government to recognize the massacre of 1915 of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as a genocide. The resolution was rejected by a narrow margin of three votes (seventy-three votes against, seventy for).

This was the result of the fact that the Swiss government was against the pro-Armenian resolution and had urged lawmakers to reject it. In spite of that, a new bill for the recognition was deposited in March 2002 in the Swiss Parliament that is expected to be discussed, but until now the Swiss have not made a resolution specifically recognizing the Armenian Genocide. It is highly likely that the issue will also be discussed in the near future in the German Parliament.

In this chapter we focus on the Israeli attitude towards recognition of the Armenian Genocide and examine closely the involvement of the State of Israel in two debates in the American Congress regarding the Armenian Genocide, as well as some debates in the Israeli Parliament.

### **United States: 1989—A Proposal for an Armenian Memorial Day**

At the end of September 1989, fifty-four U.S. Senators proposed a bill in the Senate Judiciary Committee that read as follows:

The 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1990 will be declared a “national memorial day in commemoration of 75 years after the Armenian Genocide in the years 1915-1923”; the President will be authorized and will be asked to publish a declaration which will call upon the American People to mark this date as a memorial day for the million and a half people of Armenian descent who were victims of genocide committed by the governments of the Ottoman Empire between the years 1915-1923, before the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.<sup>2</sup>

The resolution was introduced by Senator Robert Dole, the Republican leader of the United States Senate and a former presidential candidate.

The U.S. House of Representatives had previously rejected two similar attempts, in 1985 and 1987, to establish a memorial day for the Armenian Genocide, similar to the way the U.S. commemorates the Jewish Holocaust. The Turkish Government warned that if the American government did established one this time, American interests might be jeopardized, including permission to maintain American military bases on Turkish territory. The Turks accused the “Jewish lobby in Washington” and the Jewish Representatives in Congress of involvement in the legislation for an Armenian memorial day (Hebrew-language daily, *Maariv*, December 15, 1985).

During the 1989 attempt to pass the resolution in the Senate, Jewish business people from Turkey and leaders of the Turkish-Jewish com-

munity tried to create a rift between the Jews and the Armenians. Various sources—certain circles in the American Jewish community and the U.S. House of Representatives—reported the involvement of Israeli representatives in the affair. “Jews and Israeli Diplomats Work to Prevent Commemoration of Armenian Holocaust” was the front-page headline in the respected Hebrew newspaper, *Ha’aretz* (October 17, 1989). The official denials of the Israeli Embassy in Washington, the Foreign Ministry, and the Prime Minister’s Office were received with skepticism in Israel and the United States (*Maariv*, October 24, 1989). Although there was a majority in support of determining a memorial day for the Armenian Genocide at first, the proposal was ultimately removed from the agenda: The administration of President George Bush took steps to defeat the motion.

The administration explained that, although sensitive to the “tragic suffering” of the Armenians, “we are also aware of the close relations and strong friendship with Turkey, and of the varying opinions about the question of how to properly mark the terrible events of that period.” A year earlier, when he was running for the presidency, Bush had promised to support the congressional initiative to commemorate the Armenian victims (*The Jewish Week*, October 27, 1989). At that time Bush claimed that the United States had an obligation to recognize the Armenian Genocide if it wanted to prevent such acts from occurring in the future.

The arguments in the Israeli public debate over the involvement of Jews and Israeli representatives in that affair were similar to those raised in such controversies in Israel itself regarding the Armenian Genocide. Against the pragmatic considerations tied to Israeli-Turkish relations, moral arguments were presented both in Israel and the United States. The enormous sensitivity to Jewish involvement in the affair acquired an additional dimension in the relations between Israel and Diaspora Jewry. But Jerusalem did not anticipate or understand the level of sensitivity. Senator Dole publicly expressed (October 18, 1989) his disappointment in the attitude of Jews, that although they themselves or their own families were victims of genocide, they did not react positively to that humanitarian initiative.

Liberal Jewish organizations in the United States were embarrassed. Two Jewish organizations that wished to remain anonymous stated that the Israeli intervention had embarrassed them, inasmuch as American Jewry tended to support the proposal to mark a day of commemoration:

“As a people that was the victim of extermination, we feel a sense of identification with the Armenians. But Israel wants to preserve its relations with Turkey to which it attaches exaggerated importance,” stated Jewish sources (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 23, 1989). Rabbi Kenneth I. Segal, spiritual leader of Beth Israel Congregation in Fresno, California, convened a press conference and accused the Jewish community of “moral paralysis.” In his words, a “political stench” emanated from the role played by the Israeli Embassy in the United States in the matter (*Ha'aretz*, October 27, 1989). “As American Jews,” he declared, “we do not march to orders from Jerusalem, Istanbul or Washington. We march to the commandments of our book, the Bible, out of sensitivity to justice.”

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the synagogue wing of the American Reform movement, passed a resolution at its biennial convention in New Orleans in early November 1989 in support of a Congressional motion to mark an Armenian memorial day and to support the decision of the Executive Committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to include reference to the Armenian and other genocides, to the extent that they help illuminate or relate to the story of the Holocaust. They also resolved to educate people in synagogues about the facts and lessons of these tragic chapters in modern history. The resolution declared “the massacre of over 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottoman Turks, beginning in 1915, and the subsequent exile of an additional 500,000 Armenians is one of the most shameful chapters of modern history.” The Reform Jewish organization declared its recognition that Turkey today is vastly different from the Ottoman Empire of 1915. “Our respect for modern Turkey’s traditions of pluralism should not deter us from learning the lessons of past mistakes,” it said.

Rabbi Segal, who made many efforts to win approval for the resolution, had invited an Armenian pastor to the press conference held at his synagogue before the convention, and was received after Reform’s Convention “as a hero” by the large Armenian community in Fresno, California. Rabbi Segal was joined in his efforts on behalf of the Armenian resolution by Rabbi Alexander Schindler, UAHC president, who told the gathering that Jews feel a sense of kinship with the Armenian people, who had suffered so bitterly. The resolution was also supported by Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, a Holocaust survivor and president of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. “This resolution shows solidarity with those who suffered before our own people did,” Rabbi Gottschalk



said. “It declares that these crimes cannot be engaged in again.” When the resolution passed by overwhelming voice vote, Rabbi Segal said: “Morality prevailed. I am proud to be a Reform Jew and a rabbi. The real winners are self-respect and the Armenian community. The real losers are the tyrants and despots who shed blood, who suppress human rights and dignity.”<sup>3</sup>

In a similar way, it should be mentioned that Rabbi Jacob Baaden, the leader of the South London Liberal Synagogue, invited Armenians to a special service at South London Liberal Synagogue on January 27, 2002—an official Holocaust Memorial Day in Britain’s calendar since 2001—to honor and remember all those who perished in the Shoah and *all* genocides (emphasized in the original invitation). It is regrettable to mention that no Jewish Orthodox religious leaders in Israel have expressed support for remembering other victims. I was only invited once to relate the Armenian Genocide in the framework of the Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony in the Liberal Synagogue in Tel Aviv.

Turkish Jewry’s prominent involvement in the domestic American debate added an additional dimension to the issue. The chief rabbi of Turkey sent a personal letter to every member of the U.S. Senate saying:

The new initiative greatly troubles our community. We recognize the tragedy which befell both the Turks and the Armenians...but we cannot accept the definition of “genocide.” The baseless charge harms us just as it harms our Turkish countrymen.

The rabbi’s reasoning was identical to that of the Turkish authorities. He also praised Turkish treatment of the Jews after the Expulsion from Spain, and added to it the argument that such action would diminish and relativize the significance of the Holocaust. Turkish diplomats tried at the time to intervene in Jewish circles to prevent the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.:

People all over Turkey follow with great concern the plans for the Museum of the Holocaust... It will be a terrible blow if our great friends, the Americans, will etch in marble a baseless analogy between the Turks and the Nazis. We believe that truth would not be served if the significance of the Holocaust were to be understated or diminished (*Ha’aretz*, October 27, 1989).

The board of directors of the Holocaust Museum in Washington decided in 1983, and reconfirmed its decision in 1987, to include a mention of the Armenian Genocide in the museum, but only to the extent that it was connected to the Holocaust or helped to clarify it. At the same time, it appears that there was, at one stage, an intention to give a more prominent place to the Armenian Genocide. As expected, the Turkish government objected to the inclusion of any references to the Armenian Genocide, since, "According to the official Turkish version, the anti-Armenian genocidal event never happened. The Israeli embassy lobbied on Turkey's behalf in this matter,"<sup>4</sup> using as one of the arguments the claim that the uniqueness of the Holocaust would be harmed with all of the resulting ramifications.<sup>5</sup>

The press reported that the Turkish Foreign Minister met with leaders of the Anti-Defamation League (an influential Jewish American organization) in 1989 and requested their intervention. Officially, American Jews refused to commit themselves to helping: "We have a problem helping the Turks publicly," explained a Jewish leader. "As a people which endured a Holocaust we have a problem opposing a memorial day for another people." But people from the Jewish community worked behind the scenes: American Jews were aware of the interests of the Turkish Jewish community. "A live Jew is more important to us than a dead Armenian," was the way one Jewish leader bluntly put it. But he opposed it also for another familiar reason: "a memorial day for the Armenians will lead to the approval of other memorial days, for the Indians, the Vietnamese and the Irish or for any other people. That will weaken the importance of Holocaust Day here."<sup>6</sup>

Within Israel itself, the Israeli involvement in preventing a memorial day for the Armenians aroused harsh articles in the press. In an article in *Ha'aretz* (October 20, 1989) titled "The Holocaust and Politics," Akiva Eldar claimed: "The politics of [Israeli] weapons' dealers has long since pushed morality aside. It seems that this time morality has lost to wickedness."

An editorial in *Ha'aretz* a few days later (October 23, 1989), entitled "The Holocaust Obliges Respect Toward the Armenians," compared the intention behind the attempts to deny the Holocaust to the intention of the Turkish government. It says that Israel cannot whitewash the evil implicit in such assistance: "The memory of the Holocaust which befell us commands us to display understanding for the sense of suffering

of the Armenian People, and not to be an obstacle in the path of American legislation of its memory.”

An editorial in *The Jerusalem Post* of October 25, 1989 said:

Turkey is a friendly country; and it should in the friendliest and most diplomatic of terms be advised that the attempt by the old Ottoman rulers, back in 1915, to make the traitorous Armenians into authors of their own misfortune, does not serve well as the basis for contemporary relations. Anything less could in the end only serve the cause of those who would deny the Holocaust and absolve the Nazis of their historic crime against the Jewish people.

The daily newspapers *Maariv* and *Yedioth Ahronoth* (October 23, 1989) also criticized the behavior of the government. An editorial in the popular *Yedioth Ahronoth* called Israel’s reported attempts to appease the Turks “foolish.” It said: “What was inflicted upon the Armenians in 1915 certainly belongs in the category of genocide, a terrible tragedy which the Jewish people, more than any other people in the world, must be sensitive toward.” In the issue of *Maariv* that was published the same day appeared an editorial entitled “Armenia’s Memory” and an article, by journalist Shmuel Shnitzer, “Genocide, First Edition” (October 23, 1989), which protested:

We, who struggle against the attempts of shady historians and slick politicians to deny the gas chambers and the genocide of the Jewish People, are natural allies of the Armenians in the war against erasure and denial... If we have minimal decency, if the truth is precious to us even when it is inconvenient to this government or any other, we are obliged to strengthen the American Senate in its initiative to stand up for memory—ours and that of other victims of the evil plot to exterminate a people and then to enlist a thousand reasons to cover up the horror.

Sheila Hattis wrote in the Labor newspaper *Davar* (“A Rare Commodity Called Honor,” October 29, 1989) that the reports of the involvement of Jews and Israeli diplomats in the efforts to prevent establishment of a day of remembrance of the Armenian Genocide was “one of the most nauseating reports appearing in the press in recent times... It appears that honor is not a commodity with which we are blessed these days.”

Especially harsh was Boaz Evron’s article, “No Limits” (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 20, 1989):

I am willing to bet that if we were neighbors of Nazi Germany and the latter were to take action against a different minority within its borders, and

we had good commercial relations with the Germans, we would behave like the worst of them. We would collaborate in the persecution of the minority just like the Poles and the Rumanians. We would close our borders [to the persecuted] just like the Swiss. If we can behave thus with regard to a country that truly does not affect us, such as Turkey, what would we do toward Germany! And there may be another reason: We, who recall the Holocaust every day, are not willing to allow anyone else any part or possession of his own Holocaust. Isn't it our main asset today? It is the only thing around which we attempt to unite the Jews. It is the only thing with which we attempt to frighten Israelis against leaving the country. It is the only thing by which we attempt to silence the Gentiles.

In *Ha'aretz* (October 22, 1989) it was reported that Turkey was ready to raise the level of diplomatic representation in Israel if Jewish organizations in the United States became active against an Armenian memorial day. (Ankara had downgraded relations with Israel in 1981. The two countries were then represented at the level of *chargé d'affaires*). At first there were rumors that Israel had asked American Jewish organizations to lobby against the measure. Israeli Foreign Ministry officials refused to confirm or deny these reports. Nevertheless, they confirmed that the Israeli Embassy in Washington was "studying" the situation.

As the criticism against Israel's behavior continued, the Foreign Ministry's spokesman declared (October 23, 1989) that "Israel, as the state of the Jewish people, who have suffered more persecution and oppression than any other people, is very sensitive to the suffering of the Armenian people." He added that "Israeli delegations will not intervene in questions related to this matter."

At this moment the members of the Knesset took action. Member of Knesset Yair Zaban (Meretz) initiated in October 1989 a resolution that was supported by fifteen members of the Knesset Security and Foreign Affairs Committee from six factions. The proposal stated:

The Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee believes that efforts to preserve the memory of the massacre of the Armenian People during the First World War should be viewed with understanding and support. The Committee believes that any attempt to blur or deny Holocaust or mass murder inflicted on any people is inherently invalid. As members of a people which has known suffering and persecution we understand the suffering of the Armenian People. (*Al Hamishmar*, October 24, 1989)

The statement, though, did not mention the word "Turk." Another member of Knesset, Yossi Sarid, stated that the Jewish people, who had en-

dured a terrible Holocaust, were the last who ought to sanction the denial of the Holocaust of another people, no matter what the momentary considerations might be. (*Ha'aretz*, October 19, 1989)

Another effort was made by Yair Zaban, on November 8, 1989, in a question he raised before the Knesset to Foreign Minister Moshe Arens on the activities of the Ministry and its attitude toward the denial of the Armenian Genocide. Deputy Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu answered Zaban's questions by denying any activity of Israel or American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in the issue.<sup>7</sup>

This official statement of the Foreign Ministry published on October 23, 1989 and reported by Netanyahu in the Knesset should be examined carefully, for it did not convey, in the least, all the truth. Perhaps even more significant is what he did say—he emphasized the suffering of the Jewish people: “Israel, the state of the Jewish people who has suffered more than any other people from persecutions and oppression, is very sensitive to the suffering of the Armenian people.” He was careful not to use the word “genocide” (the “G word”), but instead the vague term “suffering,” which is the word (as well as the word “tragedy”) also used by the Turks in relation to this matter.

Zaban reacted to the statement, claiming that what Netanyahu had said proves that we are in the middle of a disgraceful affair, and that the issue should stay on our agenda until we become involved, together with the American Jewish lobby for, and not against, the Armenian memorial.

Some other members of the Knesset insisted on the importance of moral considerations, and argued that sometimes moral considerations are even very useful. Netanyahu answered that Israel gets involved in the legal process of another country only in issues that are related to the State of Israel. Then he said, “there are things that are above diplomacy. Holocausts of other peoples are a clear case of this category.” But, he insisted that this was not related to the State of Israel. Still, some members of the Knesset estimated that maybe, because of their pressures, Israel, at least, would stop its involvement on behalf of the Turks. They were mistaken.

Some months later the issue was raised in another case: the affair of the documentary film about the Armenian Genocide based on the personal story of one of the survivors, *Voyage to Ararat* (see chapter 8, “The Sphere of the Media”).

### United States, 2000: The Attempt for Recognition of the Armenian Genocide

Another attempt in the struggle regarding the United States' recognition of the Armenian Genocide was made in 2000. This time, as we will see, the involvement of the State of Israel—if there was involvement—was more discreet. A bill was introduced that

(1) calls upon the President to ensure that foreign policy in the United States reflects appropriate understanding and sensitivity concerning issues related to human rights, ethnic cleansing, and genocide documented in the United States record relating to the Armenian Genocide and the consequences of the failure to enforce the judgments of the Turkish courts against the responsible officials; and (2) calls upon the President in the President's annual message commemorating the Armenian Genocide issued on or about April 24 to characterize the systematic and deliberate annihilation of 1,500,000 Armenians as genocide and to recall the proud history of United States intervention in opposition to the Armenian Genocide.

The bill was submitted on the agenda of the House of Representatives in September 2000, and came into being as part of the election campaign for the House of Representatives to be held at the end of the year. It was an unprecedented, non-binding bill, which was entirely declarative and symbolic in nature. The bill was discussed and endorsed primarily in the House of Representatives International Operations and Human Rights Committee. It was also discussed at the U.S. House of International Relations Committee at the end of September 2000.

More than the previous case, the discussion this time had some clear Jewish aspects: Democratic Party member Tom Lantos, from California—the only U.S. congressman who is a Holocaust survivor, and some of whose family members were murdered—changed the course of the discussions with his determined speech against the resolution. He insisted that the resolution would unjustly harm Turkey and damage national and strategic interests of the U.S. By putting forward an alternative proposal that would condemn all oppression in the world, he prevented the vote on the resolution. In response to the Armenian claim that Elie Wiesel (a Nobel laureate and Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, known for his struggle in preserving the memory of the Holocaust) supported their cause and signed a petition of 126 Holocaust scholars in June 2000 that called on parliaments to recognize the Arme-

nian Genocide (mentioned in the introductory chapter, see also Appendix D), Lantos said:

Wiesel is one of my friends. However, his field of expertise is limited to the Jewish Holocaust. As I do not ask basketball star Michael Jordan which telephone I will purchase, I do not ask advice from Wiesel for Armenian Genocide allegations.<sup>8</sup>

The Chair of the Committee postponed the discussion and the vote on the resolution to the following week, a decision that was criticized by Armenian lobby members.

Finally, the resolution was endorsed by the International Relations Committee, and later had to be brought to the plenum of the House of Representatives. The American administration had made clear its point of view since the beginning of the discussions: The State Department claimed that historians, not lawmakers, are the ones who should be concerned with this matter and that the U.S. was prepared to assist the efforts of the Turkish and Armenian experts, together with academics from other countries, to study their joint history.

The State Department, it is interesting to mention, has clear and general instructions not to use the expression "Armenian Genocide." Therefore, in the announcements concerning the Congressional initiative, the spokesman was careful to use the word with quotation marks, gesturing with his fingers to signify this; yet he also thought that it was fit to add that the "slaughter of the Armenians in 1915," is already mentioned in two courses for American diplomats.

The administration warned the lawmakers that if the Armenian proposal passed, it could undermine the entire Caucasus and harm American relations with Turkey, "our strategic partner in the region."

There was nothing vague about Turkey's position on the matter. It had threatened to close down its Incirlik air force base, from which American planes take off for bombing missions in Iraq. A Turkish Member of Parliament cynically suggested building a monument in Ankara to the memory of the murdered American Indians.

Turkish newspapers seemed to be loaded at the end of September and the beginning of October 2000 with articles smearing the United States: "A Knife in the Back," "An Ugly Plot," and "Betrayal," screamed the headlines in Ankara.

Washington got the hint. The pressure on Congress mounted. Finally, on October 19, 2000, just hours before the plenum of the House

of Representatives was to debate the issue, the speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, removed the bill (H. Res. 596) from the Congressional agenda, after being requested to do so by President Clinton, claiming that its consideration would endanger American lives. The president, in a letter to the speaker, wrote:

I am writing to express my deep concern about H. Res. 596, dealing with the tragic events in eastern Anatolia under Ottoman rule in the years 1915-1923.

Every year on April 24, I have commemorated Armenian Remembrance Day, mourning the deportations and massacres of innocent Armenians during that era. And every year, I have challenged all Americans to recommit themselves to ensuring that such horrors never occur again.

However, I am deeply concerned that consideration of H. Res. 596 at this time could have far-reaching negative consequences for the United States.<sup>9</sup>

The Speaker acknowledged, in his statement explaining his decision, that the resolution “would have enjoyed support among the majority of the House.” He stated:

I support this resolution and I supported bringing it to the floor. I believe that the Armenian people suffered a historic tragedy and that this resolution was a fitting condemnation of those events. But the President of the United States, the Commander and Chief of our Armed Forces, has asked us not to bring this resolution to the House floor.

The President believes that passage of this resolution may adversely impact the situation in the Middle East and risk the lives of Americans. This is not an idle request. We all know that the situation in the Middle East is unusually tense. The cease-fire now in place between Israel and the Palestinians is fragile. The Congress, while it has a right to express its opinions on critical issues of the day, also must be cognizant of the consequences of those opinions.<sup>10</sup>

In a statement released after the Speaker's decision was announced, the 596 Committee (The Coalition for the Affirmation of the U.S. Record on the Armenian Genocide Resolution) asserted that they were

deeply troubled that the Speaker had allowed Turkish threats, as conveyed by the President, to prevent the House of Representatives from voting on a measure which he himself supports, which has progressed through every stage of the legislative process, and which, by his own admission, enjoys the support of the majority of the House.<sup>11</sup>

“Turks and Armenians Corner Jews in Debate over Genocide,” was the title of an article relating to this issue in *Ha'aretz*, written by jour-



nalist Nitzan Horowitz (September 28, 2000).<sup>12</sup> According to the writer, this fierce struggle was difficult for the Jews. More than any other group of Americans, they felt caught between a rock and hard place. A major element in the close ties between Israel and Turkey is the Turkish aspiration to enjoy the assistance of Jewish organizations in the United States. The Jewish lobby, well aware of the importance of these relations, indeed generously extended Turkey its assistance. But Jewish activists found it difficult to accede to the Turkish demands to block the Armenian initiative, which are based on the Turkish denial of the Armenian Holocaust (the term Holocaust is used in the article—Y.A.) Jewish organizations informed Horowitz that they could not block initiatives that concern genocide. Israeli representatives chose not to take a public stand on this matter, “because it does not concern Israel.” “There is a limit to Jewish influence, and this is where our red line goes,” said a senior Jewish source to Horowitz. But Turks, he argued, “although they understand that it is difficult for us to take sides...they don’t quite accept it, and they are angry and frustrated and claim that we have disappointed them. The whole matter is very difficult for us and puts us in a very uncomfortable position. It is a grave moral issue.” Another Jewish representative maintained that there should be a clear separation between the excellent ties with Turkey and the historical question of the Armenian Genocide. Turkey should not make one conditional on the other.

Other American Jews and Israeli officials have been angered by the debate. They criticized the fact that the Jews are forced not to take sides publicly on the matter of the Armenian Holocaust because of Turkish dictates. “I am proud of Yossi Sarid and Yossi Beilin who, by recognizing the Armenian Genocide, stood up courageously to Turkey,” says an Israeli official to the writer.

After all, we, as Jews, should be the first to understand the Armenians. Jewish organizations wage struggles all over the world against attempts at Holocaust denial. So how can we stand back and remain “neutral” when the denial of another nation is at stake?<sup>13</sup>

Journalist Zvi Bar’el (*Ha’aretz*, October 25, 2000), who wrote: “Armenian History Will Have to Wait” (the original Hebrew title of his article was “Was there a Genocide?”), shows quite another side of the picture about the involvement of Israel in the issue.<sup>14</sup> According to him, based on Turkish sources, Turkey even appealed to Israel to exert its influence on members of Congress. Bar’el quotes Ilnur Cevik, the edi-

tor of the *Turkish Daily News*, who wrote in an editorial: "We have learned that the administration and Congress were under pressure from the Jewish lobby to remove the bill from the agenda."

Israel realized at that time that Turkey might even consider a new policy. "It was vital to maintain Turkey's positive neutrality toward the Palestinian problem and certainly not to create an erosion in Turkey's position," said an Israeli source to the writer. "To put it delicately, it would be wise to bear in mind that if we exhibit insensitivity to subjects that are important to Turkey, it will take a similar approach to issues that are important to us. The Turks know very well how to keep their own political and historical accounts."

According to Bar'el, Israel and the U.S. administration went into action, preparing background material to explain to about 140 members of Congress that supported the bill the serious security repercussions likely to follow its passage. An example of this background material can be found in *Policywatch* number 495 (October 16, 2000) published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, which is related to AIPAC (American Israeli Public Affairs Committee), which represented a clear opposition to the Armenian bill, on behalf of the interests of U.S.<sup>15</sup> According to Bar'el in *Ha'aretz*, President Clinton recruited General Henry Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Defense Secretary William Cohen, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and members of the Jewish lobby to warn them that if the bill were passed, not only would America's policy toward Iraq and the peace process be irreparably damaged, but American soldiers could end up paying with their lives.<sup>16</sup>

One last point has to be clarified: President Clinton did succeed in preventing the legislative initiative in the American House of Representatives, and this should be criticized. Nevertheless, it is correct to mention that several times during his presidency, he published supporting statements (like some other presidents) regarding the Armenian Memorial Day. For example, on April 24, 2000, he stated:

Today we remember a great tragedy of the twentieth century: the deportations and massacres of roughly one and a half million Armenians in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. I join Armenians around the world, including the Armenian-American community, in mourning the loss of those innocent lives. I also extend my sympathy to the survivors and their descendants for the hardships they suffered. I call upon all Americans to renew their commitment to build a world where such events are not allowed to happen

again. The lesson we must learn from the stark annals of history is that we must forge a more humane future for the peoples of all nations.

Our own society has benefited immeasurably from the contributions of Armenian-Americans. They have enriched every aspect of American life, from science, to commerce, to the arts. For the past eight and a half years, the Armenian people have been engaged in an historic undertaking to establish democracy and prosperity in the independent Republic of Armenia. Their courage, energy and resourcefulness inspire the admiration of all Americans, and we are proud to extend our assistance to help realize the dream of a vital and vibrant Armenia. The United States fully supports the efforts of Armenia and its neighbors to make lasting peace with one another and to begin an era of security and cooperation in the Caucasus region. We encourage any and all dialogue between citizens of the region that hastens reconciliation and understanding.

On behalf of the American people, I extend my best wishes to all Armenians on this solemn day of remembrance.

On April 24, 1994, President Clinton referred in his statement regarding the Armenian Memorial Day also to the atrocities in Kosovo: "Today, against the background of events in Kosovo, all Americans should recommit themselves to building a world where such events never occur again." Yet, Clinton avoided using the term "genocide" in his statements, submitting to Turkish pressure. Instead he used phrases like "a great tragedy of the twentieth century," or "one of the saddest chapters of this century."

Unfortunately we have to admit (as we will see in the details of the next section), that the leaders of the State of Israel—unlike the American president—even avoided, except for few exceptions, any expression of sympathy or identification with the Armenians in mourning the loss of so many innocent lives.

The decision to withdraw the resolution after the letter from the president was, no doubt, an American sovereign decision. Who can, after all, tell the president of the United States what to do? It is therefore especially interesting to examine the point of view of a Turkish journalist, Sedat Sertoglu, in this matter.<sup>17</sup> The Turkish columnist claimed to know who was the mastermind behind the plan for President Clinton to send a letter to the speaker of the House of Representatives. According to him, Jewish lobby groups such as AIPAC, B'nai B'rith, and ADL (Anti-Defamation League; the American Jewish Congress was a little distant), had intensive talks with the Turks that explained that the acceptance of the resolution would have a strong negative effect on Turk-

ish-American strategic relations, but also on Turkish-Israeli strategic relations. According to him, in addition to the Jewish lobby in Turkey that was active in the issue, the Jewish lobby in Washington threw all its weight into the job, and very openly at that. Speaker Hastert, he argued, was asked if he had stopped to consider how many Jewish votes he would lose in the case of acceptance of the resolution.

It is clear that the speaker of the House of Representatives was looking for an escape—and the letter from President Clinton was this escape. According to the Turkish journalist, a Jewish Turk called the Israeli minister of regional development, Shimon Peres, from Istanbul and clearly explained to him what the situation was. Peres contacted Clinton who then wrote the letter. The journalist applauded “the incredible support given to Turkey by Israel over the Armenian resolution.”<sup>18</sup> We do not know if the details in the article are partly or fully correct. They are, nonetheless, significant because they illustrate the power—alleged or real—that the Jewish lobby has in Washington, at least in the eyes of the Turks.

The Armenians as well as the Turks are impressed by the alleged or real impact of the Jewish lobby in Washington. Some of them accused Israel and the Jewish lobby of being a powerful element in the coalition that stopped the non-binding resolution at the last moment. I personally hope that they exaggerate, but it seems that the Armenians can easily find evidence for the Jewish lobby's representatives' claims that they would do everything in their power to help enact pro-Turkish and pro-Azeri initiatives in the U.S. Congress. Representatives of the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith were proud to tell the *Turkish Daily News* (July 28 and 29, 1999) that there are a number of Jewish-American groups that have “U.S.-Turkish and Turkish-Israeli relations high on their agenda.”

Be it based on hard fact or not, the article above lists the following organizations as playing “an increasingly active role in the advocacy of Turkish positions on many issues in the United States”: the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

The activities mentioned were not directly related to the memorial of the Armenian Genocide, but the representatives of the Jewish lobby admitted that this activity “has brought us into open conflict with Greek-

Americans and Armenian-Americans. It has been welcome by the Turkish government, but we have paid a price. The price has been that we have the Greek and Armenians very angry at us,” as they told the *Turkish Daily News*.

Indeed some Armenians were very angry: “Up until now, Armenians have treated these Jewish groups with kid gloves, hoping for an eventual reconciliation with them. After these strident remarks, it is clear that they have foreclosed any possibility of friendly relations with the Armenian community.”<sup>19</sup> In the mind of these Armenians these Jewish groups, having gotten their marching orders from Israel, “have made a firm and final decision to side with the tyrants of Turkey and the barbarians of Baku against the defenseless Armenians struggling for their survival.”<sup>20</sup> At least in the eyes of some Jews and some Armenians it is, unfortunately, a “competition of victims.”

It is quite clear that the Armenian Genocide Resolution, which was withdrawn at the last moment in October 2000, is not the last stage of the struggle. All over the world, and in the U.S. in particular, the struggle for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide and its memory continues. Armenians and Turks are preparing the next stages in the battle. The past—not only for the Jews, but also for the Armenians and the Turks, each in contradictory directions—is inseparable from the present, and the future.

### **Israel 1994: Semi-Official Recognition?**

In 1994, the Armenian issue was raised in the Israeli Parliament. This time the debate centered on a report on Israeli First Channel Television (FCT). The reportage was connected to the curriculum that was being prepared about the Armenian Genocide (see chapter 6) and to the Armenian Memorial Day. The Turkish Foreign Ministry and the Turkish Embassy in Tel Aviv exerted pressure, as in previous cases, not to air the program, although unsuccessfully. Finally, the report (twelve minutes) that included information about the Genocide, interviews with Armenians, including one survivor of the Genocide who lived in Jerusalem, and interviews with Israeli students was shown, followed by an interview with the Turkish ambassador in Tel Aviv, who repeated the official Turkish version about the events of 1915 and criticized the fact that Israel is interested in the Armenian issue, which was, according to him, against the common interests of the two countries.

Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin (in the Rabin government in which Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was also a member) answered (April 27, 1994) on the podium of the Knesset a question by member of the Knesset Emmanuel Zisman (from the Labor Party, which led the government) about what the Turkish Ambassador had said in the reportage some days before.<sup>21</sup> In his written answer, Beilin stated that “according to the Jewish historical experience, we cannot but express understanding of the suffering and the destiny of the Armenian people.” He said also that the attitude of Turkey is well known to us, but this issue should not become a source of tensions between the two countries, which have recently considerably improved their relationships.

In his second question, Emmanuel Zisman claimed that the Turkish ambassador's statement that “in war like in war” could support the deniers of the Holocaust and therefore we have to answer if they were killed as a result of war or as a result of genocide. Member of Knesset Avraham Hirshzon (Likud) supported Zisman's comments and raised the issue of morality and politics and claimed “this [the Armenian issue] is an issue that is above politics for us as Jews.” In his answer to this, Beilin replied that Israel had never yielded to Turkish pressures to obliterate the terrible massacre, and that “we will always reject any attempt to erase those events, even for some political advantages.” Later on he added, “we never accepted the very superficial analysis that it [the Armenian tragedy—Y.A.] was done in the war. It was not a war. It was certainly massacre, genocide. We will support remembering it because this is one of the events the world must remember.”<sup>22</sup> By this Beilin practically rejected the Turkish denial of the crime and the claim that what was involved was only “a civil war” or that the Armenians were victims of the war's acts.

However, the UPI and Associated Press reports, which claimed that “Israel issued its first official condemnation of the Turkish genocide of the Armenians, ending a tradition of silence, to appease its regional ally, Turkey,” are a great exaggeration, and in fact only a wish.<sup>23</sup>

### **Israel and the Recognition of the Armenian Genocide: The Actual Attitude**

The actual attitude of Israel toward the Armenian Genocide can be demonstrated by the following story described in a *Ha'aretz* article (April 25, 2000), titled “A Holocaust by Any Other Name.”<sup>24</sup>

Not so long ago a booklet was published by an information center under the auspices of the Foreign Ministry, part of the “Focus on Israel” series, dealing with ethnic Christian groups in Israel. The booklet, written in English, was intended to be resource material for Foreign Ministry personnel around the world. It is only natural, therefore, that it skirted issues that are bones of contention. The chapter on the Armenian community contains the following sentence: “...immediately after World War I the local Armenian community grew with the absorption of survivors of the massacre in Anatolia, especially that of 1915.” This sentence irked a Turkish diplomat serving in one of the African states, and he protested vehemently to the Israeli Foreign Ministry. He was promised that this “distortion of the truth” would be rectified. Future editions of the booklet would appear with a more neutral statement, such as, “After World War I, the local Armenian community grew.”

“We have a problem,” admits a senior official at the Foreign Ministry. “Like other countries that have a good relationship with Turkey, we are between a rock and a hard place. One slip of the tongue, and there’s a scandal. Not long ago the Turks refused to approve the appointment of Prof. Ehud Toledano as Israel’s ambassador to Turkey, because in an academic publication 10 years ago he had said something derogatory about the Turks regarding this matter [about this affair, see chapter 9]. As children of a Holocaust that the world recognizes, it is especially difficult for us. Every time the Armenian issue is discussed, we have to think twice what title to give it. The Turks complain against anyone who mentions ‘Armenian Genocide.’ So our stand is that we ‘recognize the suffering of the Armenians,’ and try to evade the historical circumstances and the guilty party.”<sup>25</sup>

But not everyone thinks the issue is so complicated. In 1995, as mentioned, when Yossi Beilin was deputy foreign minister, he used the phrase “Armenian Genocide” from the Knesset podium when answering questions about it. The Armenians have not forgotten that remark, but point out that since then, there has been a significant weakening of the Israeli stand, in direct relation to the deepening ties between Israel and Turkey.

Five years later, in April 2000, Beilin said with the same decisiveness:

It doesn’t have to be this way. I think that our attitude toward such a dreadful historical event cannot be dictated by our friendly relations with Turkey, even though this relationship is particularly important to me as one who worked so hard to develop it. I also see the contradiction between the

political track and the ethical one. Something happened that cannot be defined except as genocide. One-and-a-half million people disappeared. It was not negligence, it was deliberate. I do not think that the government has to take an official decision on the issue, but we must clarify to the Turks that we cannot accept their political demands to ignore a historical event. An ethical stand cannot be dictated by political needs—these are two separate tracks.<sup>26</sup>

The declarations made by Sarid on Armenian Memorial Day on April 24, 2000 (see chapter 7) and by Beilin caused, paradoxically, the lukewarm attitude of the Foreign Ministry to be even more explicitly cool. The attitude of Barak's government in late 2000 to the beginning of 2001 was clear—it accepted the Turkish argument. In an interview with the *Turkish Daily News* (October 26, 2000), Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry Undersecretary Dr. Alon Liel was reminded of certain Israeli ministers' comments on the so-called Armenian Genocide, to the effect that Turkey should recognize it.<sup>27</sup> Liel said that the Israeli authorities sympathized with Turkish anger over these statements of the two ministers (Sarid and Beilin) and that they had received the Turkish side's message on the matter loud and clear. "Our government policy is that we should refrain from making these kinds of statements. These topics should not be for politicians to comment on, but for academics," said Liel, adding that Yossi Sarid (who, as mentioned, made one of the statements), was no longer a cabinet minister. It would be interesting to find out how Dr. Liel, a high Israeli official, and the foreign minister at that time, Professor Ben-Ami, stand on this issue in their capacity as distinguished academics.

In January 2001 France officially recognized the Armenian Genocide. Unlike the U.S. Congress, the French Parliament did not yield to Turkish demands and was thus "punished" by Turkey. Turkey hoped to stop the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, which had gained momentum during the years 2000-2001, by other countries. It withdrew its ambassador to France, one of its main trading partners, and cancelled a spy satellite contract with a French firm, worth \$259M (according to Turkey's defense minister). The Turkish government was also considering excluding French companies from ten other projects. Among them was state-owned arms maker Giat, which lost the chance to tender for the joint production of 1,000 combat tanks, estimated to be worth \$2 billion.<sup>28</sup> Cynical as it is, it seems that Israel profits from these developments. When negotiations about the deal were taking place, an Israeli



firm had lost to a French company; when the relations between France and Turkey soured over the Armenian question, Ankara threatened to cancel projects assigned to the French firm.<sup>29</sup> Israel then had a good chance of winning a major contract to upgrade hundreds of Turkish tanks in a deal estimated at \$2 billion (indeed, a contract was agreed in March 2002 and came into force in October 2002; see later). The Israeli foreign minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, raised the possibility that Turkey might also reconsider buying an Israeli imaging satellite.

It seems that the discussion about the Armenian issue in Israel bore some similarities to discussions in other states. It would be worthwhile to compare it to another case, the Canadian one. Lorne Shirinian's comprehensive book, *Quest for Closure: The Armenian Genocide and the Search for Justice in Canada*, gives us a good opportunity to examine in depth the debates regarding the Canadian recognition of the Armenian Genocide. This case, though very different from the Israeli one, may shed more light on this complex issue.<sup>30</sup>

On April 23, 1996, the Canadian House of Commons passed a "historical" resolution:

That this House recognize, on the occasion of the 81<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Armenian *tragedy* (my emphasis—Y.A.) which claimed some 1.5 million lives that took place on April 24, 1915, and in recognition of other crimes against humanity, the week of April 20 to 27 of each year as the week of remembrance of the inhumanity of people toward one another.

Since the "G word" was absent, this was not considered a full recognition. The Liberal government changed the wording of the original statement proposed by a member of Parliament from the Bloc Québécois, the official opposition, which contained the phrase "Armenian Genocide," and watered it down to "Armenian tragedy." Although the notion itself was a step forward, the Canadian government missed an opportunity to use the more accurate and more appropriate term "genocide."

Nevertheless, certain Canadian municipal and provincial governments and leaders have found the Armenian issue clearer and easier to accept than the federal government and have used the term "genocide" in their resolutions or statements. Among them are the mayor of the City of Vancouver (in 1984) and the Municipal Council of the City of Montreal (in 1997).

The legislatures of the most populous provinces, Ontario and Québec, dealt with the Armenian Genocide in the 1980s. The Legislature of

Ontario even “asked the Government of Canada to officially recognize and condemn the genocide,” and urged the federal government “to make appropriate representations to the General Assembly of the United Nations to recognize and condemn the Armenian Genocide.” It also recommended to the Government of Canada “that it designate April 24 in every year hereafter and throughout Canada as a day of remembrance for the Armenian community.”<sup>31</sup>

In the mid-to late 1990s the mayors of Toronto and North York sent messages of support to the community in commemoration of Armenian Genocide Day.

At the federal level, all the parties throughout the 1980s and 1990s paid attention to the genocide issue. Jean Chrétien, on April 25, 1993, several months before becoming Canada's prime minister, sent a message to the Armenian community of Toronto in which he expressed his “sincere greetings to all the members of the Canadian Armenian community who will gather to commemorate the 78<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.” However, once in power, the Liberal party changed the vocabulary of its sympathies.

“Canadian Armenians, and not only they,” writes Shirinian, “are still waiting for the Canadian federal government to cease using the reasoning of the 1915 perpetrators and contemporary genocide deniers and to stop yielding to commercial and diplomatic factors and to embrace a moral imperative.”<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, the attitude of the Israeli government, being in a much more complicated and sensitive situation, is very far from even the ambivalent attitude of the federal Canadian government. Unlike Canada and other states involved in the matter, there is much more at stake where Israel is concerned. In some cases that involve its very existence, Israel has to make many difficult compromises, moral and otherwise. Unfortunately, Israel has made compromises even in cases where its very existence was not at stake.

### **Peres Statement of April 2001 and the Ambassador's Statement of February 2002**

The headlines of the *Turkish Daily News*, the influential English Turkish daily, on April 10, 2001 were clear: “Peres: Armenian Allegations are Meaningless...”<sup>33</sup> The newspaper described Shimon Peres, foreign minister in Ariel Sharon's government, as being a supporter of the Turkish position regarding the dispute over the meaning of the events that

had taken place during World War I. As already mentioned, Peres had been described before in the Turkish press as the personality who had influenced President Clinton in preventing a pro-Armenian resolution in the House of Representatives in the year 2000. This claim was also repeated in 2001 in the Turkish press.<sup>34</sup>

The interview with Peres was conducted on the eve of his official visit to Turkey. Peres claimed in it that it is for historians to deal with such historical issues. This claim may seem feasible, and is sometimes used by governments—including the American and the Israeli—who wish to avoid the dilemma. Nevertheless, it is very well known that this denial tactic is practiced manipulatively by the Turks and their supporters.

According to the Turkish newspaper, Peres said that Israel should not take a historical or philosophical position on the Armenian issue, but added: “If we have to determine a position, it should be done with great care as not to distort the historical realities.”

Furthermore, Peres was quoted as saying:

We reject attempts to create a similarity between the Holocaust and the Armenian allegations. Nothing similar to the Holocaust occurred. It is a tragedy what the Armenians went through, but not a genocide.

Israel, as we have shown, had been systematically avoiding the Armenian issue. Now the foreign minister joined the deniers on behalf of the Israeli government. This was not the Holocaust (with a capital H); this was not a holocaust or even a genocide, claimed the minister. What is it but an Israeli escalation from passive to active denial, from moderate denial to hard-line denial? Imagine the Israeli and Jewish reaction to a similar claim by another country’s foreign minister, regarding the Holocaust. What would be our reaction if the Holocaust had been called a “tragedy”?

And what was, in fact, the reaction in Israel to these controversial words of Peres? At first, the Israeli media ignored the subject completely, although Peres’ visit to Turkey had received much attention in Israel. Only after the outraged reaction of the Armenians all over the world, including those who live in Israel, and due to the reaction of some “Armenian supporters” was the issue raised at all in the Israeli newspapers.<sup>35</sup>

Why did Peres, the experienced, respected politician decide to make this statement? Surely not out of ignorance of the Armenian Genocide.

If I may quote from a personal letter he sent me on August 15, 1995— at that time he was also a foreign minister, in Rabin's government— regarding my book *The Banality of Indifference* (1995). He wrote: "Your book, no doubt, is pioneering research on the subject of the Armenian massacre. I am aware of the fact that the official attitude of Israel did not acknowledge that horrible massacre out of concern for the Holocaust's unique place in the chronicles of human history." Notice that Peres, in the letter, did not use the term genocide, but "massacre." He also expressed there his criticism regarding the very same attitude in which he is, no doubt, taking part—a very important one.

The question remains: why did Peres decide to make such an extreme statement? It is very difficult to point to any enlightened politician in a democratic state—surely not of the caliber of Peres—who has ever made such revealing remarks as these on that issue. Many politicians avoid using the term "genocide," but never, to the best of my knowledge, except perhaps as implied in the ambivalent attitude of Britain in 2001,\* have any official persons claimed that *it was not* a genocide. It seems that Israel wished to advance its relations with Turkey and completely push aside the subject of the Armenian Genocide, including all the moral and historical implications of such a position.

The Armenians were puzzled and shocked by Peres' statement:

We are all very sad and baffled by these statements. How can a man with a Nobel Prize, and who until recently had all our esteem, go so low on moral ground? Could he not come with a diplomatic answer to avoid the question if he so wished? (From a private letter by an Armenian Canadian.)<sup>36</sup>

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\* The attitude of Britain to the Armenian Genocide was raised regarding the first Holocaust Memorial Day held in Britain on January 27, 2001. The discussions were about which victims should or should not be included in the ceremony. The government invited survivors of the Holocaust, the genocides of Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda to attend the event in London's Westminster Hall. The government first had refused to invite Armenians to join the event but later, after Armenians protested their exclusion, relented and invited Armenian representatives, including a ninety-six-year-old survivor of the genocide. During discussions some British politicians said that the British government had decided that the incidents of 1915-1916 did not fit into the United Nation's description of genocide (see, among others, "Armenian Massacres not part of the Memorial Day," Agence France Presse, January 24, 2001).

Another, who noted that he is the son of two surviving orphans of the Armenian Genocide, wrote: “I hope this does not represent the conscience of this great nation of Israel. Sarid, Charney, Auron, Beilin, Bauer etc. Where are their voices? This is a true disappointment and emotionally unbearable! Of all the people of the world Jews should be most sensitive to our trauma. Alas!”<sup>37</sup>

The Armenians were shocked to learn that an act of genocide was to be presented as meaningless by a man whose people suffered the same fate, but, as was written to Peres himself, “We are sure that deep down you know that genocide was inflicted upon the Armenian people.”<sup>38</sup>

The deploring question of “how such declarations could come from a very highly placed official of the State of Israel whose people have suffered the same fate” was repeated by many.

Later on, some Israelis raised their voices. Yehuda Bauer wrote:

The statements of the Foreign Minister are denial of a very clear and unequivocal case of genocide by a representative of a people whose fate became a symbol of this notion. There are today people who argue exactly as he does: indeed, not a few Jews were murdered by Nazis, but it was not a genocide. There are significant differences between the Holocaust and the murder of the Armenians, but that the two cases are acts of genocide cannot be discussible.<sup>39</sup>

Former minister of education, Yossi Sarid, who at that time was the opposition leader, attended the eighty-sixth commemorative rally at the Armenian convent in Jaffa, and accused Peres comments as being “arbitrary and baseless” and he added: “Many Israelis are ashamed of Shimon Peres’ remarks.”<sup>40</sup> Expressing his astonishment Sarid said that it is incomprehensible that someone of Shimon Peres’ caliber can show understanding for denial by the Turks. He demanded that Peres retract his statement. “I hope that next year Israel will join those states who have already recognized the Armenian Genocide.” He emphasized that he himself stands behind what he had proposed the year before: “I am convinced more than ever that the Armenian Genocide should be taught in Israeli schools.”

Yet not one Jewish organization abroad condemned publicly what Peres said. To the best of my knowledge, only one isolated private Jewish voice publicly condemned Peres’ statement and one U.S. Congressman, Adam Schiff (D-CA), a member of the House International Relations Committee, of Jewish heritage, pledged to take appropriate steps

in response to Peres' statement.<sup>41</sup> The assembly of Turkish American Associations for its part sent letters, messages, and e-mails to the Israeli parliament, Prime Ministry, and Foreign Ministry and launched a thank you campaign for Peres' statements.<sup>42</sup>

After a lot of protests poured into Israeli embassies and consulates around the world by outraged Armenians and after some critics in Israel mentioned above denounced Peres for genocide denial, Peres claimed (through his officials) to have been partially misquoted. The Israeli Foreign Ministry then issued the following cable to its missions:

Israel's position regarding Armenian massacre: 1. A number of missions have received protests, partly by e-mail, over an inaccurate report of Foreign Minister Peres' words in the Turkish press during his visit to Ankara. 2. In case you need them, here are the exact comments made by Foreign Minister Peres (as reported by Ankara): A. The subject should be left to historians, not politicians. B. We do not support the comparison of the Armenian tragedy to the Holocaust. C. Israel will take no political or historical stand on this issue. D. The minister absolutely did not say, as the Turkish news agency alleged, "What the Armenians underwent was a tragedy, not a genocide."

According to Eitan Naeh, head of Foreign Ministry's Turkish desk, Israel's position—which views the matter as a debate for historians and refuses to take a stand on it—was formulated by Yossi Beilin in 1994, when he was deputy foreign minister. Naeh says this is an even more neutral position than that of Britain, which has adopted a legal standpoint and claims that, according to international law, the murder of the Armenians was not a genocide.

Did officials issue a denial to the Turkish news agency? Naeh claims the Foreign Ministry "is not in the habit of" issuing denials. Yet the Israeli missions in both Los Angeles and Canberra made use of the explanatory statement cabled from Jerusalem.<sup>43</sup> It has to be noted that according to Armenian news agencies, the statement that the Israeli Consulate in Los Angeles released did not contain the claim that Peres had not said that it was a tragedy, not a genocide.<sup>44</sup>

Peres himself did not retract his statement. He has made no serious attempt to correct the newspaper or to deny what was quoted in the Turkish media. This cynical use of the Armenian Genocide as part of a bargain by the Israeli government continues. In his visit to Ankara in August 2001, in the midst of the second Intifada by the Palestinians

that began in October 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon encountered some new difficulties, because of the explosive situation in the Middle East. After hearing blunt criticism from his Turkish hosts, Sharon finished his observations saying that “Turkey has some problems that we [Israelis] can help solve if we were asked to, but in return, we expect Ankara to help us reimpose security and calm in the region.” What Sharon meant, according to some comments, was for Turkey to pressure Arafat into stopping the Intifada as a condition for helping Turkey solve its political and economic problems via the Jewish lobby in the U.S. Congress. In other words, military and security cooperation between Ankara and Tel Aviv is no longer enough to guarantee Israel’s help in getting the U.S. Jewish lobby to help Turkey against Armenian and Greek pressures in America. Ankara must also provide cover for Sharon’s policies—something the Turks probably did not count on when they set out on their program of cooperation with Israel in 1996.<sup>45</sup>

Israel, a state under siege, has the right to seek military alliances with states such as Turkey. It has the right to not take an official position on the Armenian Genocide if it deeply and sincerely believes that an official act of recognition would cause it *irreparable harm*. Though not the most ethical of decisions, that may be tolerable and even understandable.<sup>46</sup> But this does not give justification for Peres, in the name of the State of Israel to have “entered into the range of actual denial of the Armenian Genocide, comparable to the denial of the Holocaust.”<sup>47</sup> After Sarid’s statement in 2000 (to be discussed in detail in chapter 7), Israeli officials claimed that it was his personal view; nobody claimed the same this time. It should be clear: Israel was ready, and is ready, to bargain with the memory of the Armenian Genocide. It used the Genocide as merchandise, and by doing so Israel is ready to go beyond a moral boundary that no Jew should allow himself to cross. Israel should never, under any circumstances, and for any reason, aid and abet those who deny a genocide, *any genocide*.

But lately, Israel has gone much further. The new Israeli ambassador in Georgia and Armenia, Rivka Cohen, repeated Peres’ statement in a press conference she held on February 8, 2002 in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia.<sup>48</sup> She made remarks in a press conference in Yerevan to the effect that, while the Jewish people are saddened by the deaths and tragedy that were suffered by the Armenians between 1915 and 1916, the Holocaust was a unique phenomenon, as it was a planned program for the annihilation of an entire nation and nothing should be compared

with it. This was not reported in Israel at the beginning, but Armenians in Armenia and all over the world were enraged. Government officials and politicians demanded that the Ambassador be declared *persona non grata*. The Armenian Council of America declared:

We categorically reject the Israeli government's policy as immoral and unprincipled. It is most abhorrent that the Israeli government would use the Armenian Genocide as a bargaining chip towards its interests. We call on the Jewish people, who are still reeling from the pain of the Holocaust, to condemn the Israeli government policy regarding this issue. We ask them to discourage the Israeli government from becoming one of those governments, which until recently were denying the Holocaust with lame excuses.<sup>49</sup>

In an unprecedented action, several hundred Armenians held a demonstration in front of the Israeli consulate in Los Angeles.<sup>50</sup> This also was not reported in Israel, to the best of my knowledge.

The Foreign Ministry of Armenia made (February 15, 2002) an official note of protest to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, saying that Armenia considers any attempt at rejecting or belittling the significance of the Armenian Genocide as inadmissible, regardless of the motivation. "Armenia never intended to draw parallels between the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust, believing as we do that any crime committed against humanity is 'unique' with its own political, legal, historical, and moral consequences."

The official answer of the Israeli Foreign Ministry (February 18, 2002) was:

Israel has never tried to deny or diminish the reality of the events that occurred during the years 1915-1916. As Jews and as Israelis, we are especially sensitive to the human tragedies that occurred during the years 1915 and 1916, the final years of the Ottoman Empire. We understand the powerful emotions this subject arouses in both parties, considering the enormous number of victims and the great suffering undergone by the Armenian people. Investigation of this sensitive subject must be approached through open public discussion and dialogue between historians, based of course, on documents and facts.

Israel also asserted that the Holocaust was a singular event in human history and was a premeditated crime against the Jewish people. Israel recognizes the tragedy of the Armenians and the plight of the Armenian people. However, the events cannot be compared to the Holocaust. This does not in any way diminish the magnitude of the tragedy.<sup>51</sup> (The Is-



raeli Foreign Ministry refuses to produce the exact text, claiming that documents between countries are not published. The Ministry provided different versions to journalists when it was asked to express the Israeli attitude to the Armenian issue. In one case it refused to give a written text. At another time an official from the Ministry admitted that the Ministry [practically in the name of the State!] has different versions. Some sources wrote that the events cannot be compared to the Holocaust and others that they cannot be compared to genocide. However, both Peres and the ambassador had said that the events that occurred during the years 1915-1916 cannot be compared to genocide—Y.A.)

The implication in the Israeli Foreign Ministry's statement is that while the Armenian deaths of up to 1.5 million may have been a tragedy, they do not constitute a case of genocide. Another implication is that there must be public discussion and dialogue between historians to determine the facts of what happened to the Armenians.

There is no way to minimize the historical significance of this painful statement. Not a Holocaust, not a genocide—only “victims,” “plight,” “tragedy,” “massacre,” without even mentioning who the perpetrators were. There is no mention of any responsibility for the murders as if they were some natural disaster. But there is mention of the emotional relevance to both sides—the Turks and the Armenians (imagine Jews and Germans being mentioned together in the case of the Holocaust!). And of course, mention is made of the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

There is a lot of cynicism, arrogance, self-contradiction and irresponsibility in this dangerous official statement. By it Israel took another big step from passive to active denial. And this declaration was made by a state whose people were victims of the Holocaust only a little over fifty years ago! It puts in question the whole significance and relevance of historical scholarship on genocide, not to say that it desecrates the memory of the Holocaust and its significance.

In Israel the “usual protests” were publicly made this time, to the best of my knowledge, only by Israel Charny and myself.<sup>52</sup> “As a Jew and an Israeli, I am deeply ashamed of the position taken by our Ambassador and Ministry to deny that the genocide of the Armenian people in 1915 was in fact genocide,” wrote Israel Charney in a letter sent to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the Israeli ambassador to Armenia and other top officials. Abroad, an article entitled “Playing with Memory” was published in a major Polish newspaper. It was written by Konstany Gebert, one of the most renowned journalists and political commenta-

tors in Poland and a leader of the small Polish-Jewish minority and editor-in-chief of the Jewish monthly *Midrash*.<sup>53</sup> Relating to Hitler's comments in August 1939 before the invasion of Poland (Hitler was quoted as saying: "It is a matter of indifference to me what a weak West European civilization will say about me... Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"<sup>54</sup>), the author emphasized that, "first of all, Jews should remember since they are all aware of the price which could be paid for memory shortfall." The chief rabbi of Armenia's tiny (several hundred) Jewish community, Gersh Meir Burshtein, said that: "No one in Armenia should get the impression that [the Israeli Foreign Ministry's comments] reflects Jewish or even Israeli public opinion."<sup>55</sup>

The fact that the politicians, the media, and the academia in Israel disregard such a significant event demonstrates the depth of moral crisis in Israel's society, and how banal and "easy" it sometimes is to deny a genocide. There is at least one cynical lesson from this: for a "good" price, a nation can purchase a revision of its own history, even the history of an act as terrible as genocide. And more than this: a state can purchase a revision of its history of genocide even from a government that ought to know better than any other states what the meaning of genocide is, its significance, the importance of its memory, and the awful pain of its denial. As disgusting as it sounds, the exigencies of politics today put aside the moral question for financial, economic, and military gains.

Quite interestingly, it was reported in March 2002 that Turkey had decided on the modernization of its 170 M-60 tanks by Israel. The total value of the contract is about US \$687 million (it came into force in October 2002 and is considered the biggest weapons export contract Israel has ever signed). Some cynics suggested that perhaps this was the price for which the State of Israel had sold its integrity.<sup>56</sup> And then, about a week later, on April 6, 2002—if it was not sad, it could have been funny—the Turkish prime minister, Bulent Ecevit, told the Democratic Left Party (DSP) deputies that Israel was committing an act of genocide against the Palestinians. It is quite surprising to hear such a statement coming from the prime minister of a country that is so sensitive to the word "genocide." Israel asked Ankara for an "explanation" of the comments. Ecevit said his words were misunderstood. They merely reflected his concerns over the Middle East, he added. American Jewish lobbies said that the comments were particularly unseemly in light of their attempts to defend Turkey from Armenian claims of

genocide (as mentioned before), and in light of the Jewish genocide suffered at the hands of the Nazis.<sup>57</sup>

On the Jewish Memorial Day of 2002, Israeli author Ariana Melamed published an article, “The Obligation to Remember” (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, April 9, 2002). She wrote about her mother, a Holocaust survivor, who had given her *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* to read when she was twelve years old. Since then Melamed has come back to the book at least once a year, usually very close to the Jewish Holocaust Memorial Day, and suggested that people read it. Criticizing the Foreign Ministry statement, she wrote, “We become [Armenian] Holocaust deniers by our own will. Maybe my mother and I are wrong, but nobody will deny us the right to remember and the obligation to remember another Holocaust.”<sup>58</sup>

After the first recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the French House of Representatives on May 29, 1998, I wrote an article entitled “Supporting Denial” (*Ha’aretz*, June 9, 1998), in which I analyzed the French decision and its moral and political importance. I ended the article by saying: “Israel’s recognition of the Armenian Genocide would have unique significance—because we are a state created by survivors of the Holocaust. Is there any chance that Israel would follow France? Is it an exaggeration to hope that there will be even one member of the Knesset who would raise a proposal in Parliament that Israel officially recognize the Armenian Genocide?”<sup>59</sup>

It seems now that the chances that Israel will, in the near future, recognize the Armenian Genocide are more remote than ever. In the new Israeli government that was created by Sharon in March 2001, the few ministers who had supported recognition in the past are not members, and the chances that in that government voices like these will be heard are close to zero.

### Notes

1. The *New York Times* and the *Jerusalem Post*, June 8, 2000. The petitioners also asked the Western democracies to urge the Government and the Parliament of Turkey to finally come to terms with a dark chapter of Ottoman-Turkish history and to recognize the Armenian Genocide.
2. Yoav Karni, “Battle of Politics over the Armenian Holocaust,” *Ha’aretz*, October 27, 1989.
3. “Armenians Hail Rabbi as a Hero,” *Los Angeles Jewish Heritage*, November 17, 1989.

4. Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli, *The Holocaust Museum in Washington* (New York: Rizzoli Publications, 1995), p. 164. The late Jeshajahu Weinberg, an Israeli citizen, was the founder and the first director of The Holocaust Museum in Washington.
5. For details, see Edward T. Linenthal, "The Boundaries of Inclusion: Armenians and Gypsies" in *Preserving Memory* (New York: Viking Press, 1995), pp.228-41, and also Amir Neuman, "The Armenian Pandora's Box," *Davar*, October 29, 1989 and *Maariv*, August 20, 1989.
6. Zadok Yehezkeli, "The Dead Armenian and the Live Jew," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 25, 1989.
7. *Protocols of the Knesset*, November 8, 1989.
8. *Armenian News Network*, September 29, 2000.
9. Letter from President Bill Clinton to Speaker of the House of Representatives Denis Hastert, October 19, 2000.
10. Press Release from Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, October 19, 2000.
11. Press Release from H. Res. 596 Committee, October 19, 2000.
12. Nitzan Horowitz, "Turks and Armenians Corner Jews in Debate over Genocide," *Ha'aretz*, September 28, 2000.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Zvi Bar'el, "Armenian History Will Have to Wait," *Ha'aretz*, October 25, 2000. The original Hebrew title was quite different: "Was There a Genocide?"
15. Alan Makovsky, "Turkey: The Armenian Genocide Resolution and Iraq Policy," *Policywatch* number 495, October 16, 2000 (published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy).
16. Zvi Bar'el, *op. cit.*
17. Sedat Sertoglu, "Behind the Scenes," *Istanbul Sabah* (Ankara Edition), October 23, 2000.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Harut Sassounian, "Jewish Lobby Pledges All-Out Support for Turkey and Azerbaijan in Congress—Commentary," *California Courier On-Line*, August 5, 1999.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Protocols of the Knesset*, April 27, 1994.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Dadrian, 1997, p. xix.
24. Lilly Galili, "A Holocaust by Any Other Name," *Ha'aretz*, April 25, 2000.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. Selcuk Gultasli, "Israeli Undersecretary Liel: We Are Disappointed in Turkey," *Turkish Daily News*, October 26, 2000. Dr. Alon Liel was nominated foreign ministry undersecretary a short time before the interview, by the Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami. Later he became the general director of the office, until March 2001—the beginning of the Sharon government.

28. "Turkey Punishes France," *BBC News*, January 23, 2001.
29. Aluf Been, "Turkey Hints That Israel May win \$2 B Deal to Upgrade Turks," *Ha'aretz*, January 21, 2001; "Israel Company to Complete M-60 Tank Project," *Turkish Daily News*, January 26, 2001; Metehan Demir, "Mofaz to Visit Turkey," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 4, 2001.
30. Lorne Shirinian, *Quest for Closure: The Armenian Genocide and the Search for Justice in Canada* (Kingston: Blue Heron Press, 1999).
31. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
33. "Peres: Armenians Allegations Are Meaningless," *Turkish Daily News*, April 10, 2001.
34. For example see Burcun Imir, "Sharon: Turkish Israeli Relationship Can Be Defined as an Alliance of Democracies," *Turkish Daily News*, August 6, 2001.
35. Israel W. Charny, a public letter to Shimon Peres, April 12, 2001 (it was reported in various press outlets, including an April 18, 2001 article by Robert Fisk in *The London Independent* and on April 19, 2001 in the *California Courier*); also Yair Auron, "As-Tu Peres?" *Maariv* April 16, 2001.
36. D. A., letter to the author, April 16, 2001 (Private Archive).
37. G. S., letter to the author, April 11, 2001 (Private Archive).
38. Georgette Avakian, letter to Shimon Peres, April 19, 2001 (Private Archive).
39. Yehuda Bauer, letter to the editor, *Ha'aretz*, May 17, 2001.
40. Tom Segev, "Peres as an Armenian Holocaust Denier," *Ha'aretz*, April 27, 2001; *Voice of Israel*, April 23, 2001; Press Release, The Armenian National Committee of Jerusalem, April 23, 2001.
41. Jonathan Eric Lewis, "An Open Letter to Armenian-Americans: April 18, 2001. Yom Hashoa (Day of Remembrance)," *The Armenian Reporter International*, April 28, 2001; "Congressman Schiff Pledges to Address Peres Genocide Denial during Assembly Led Meeting" (press release, Armenian Assembly of Armenia), January 24, 2002.
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43. Tom Segev, *op. cit.*
44. *Ibid.*; International Action Alert, Armenian National Committee of Jerusalem.
45. "New Strains in Israeli-Turkish Relations," *Middle East Mirror*, August 20, 2001.
46. Jonathan Eric Lewis, *op. cit.*
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48. "Israel Thinks it is Highly Important to Develop Links with Armenia," *Armenian News Network*, Groong, February 8, 2002.
49. "Declaration by the Armenian Council of America," *Armenian News Network*, Groong, February 21, 2002.

50. Harut Sassounian, "Israel's Ambassador should be Expelled from Armenia," *The California Courier*, March 14, 2002.
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52. Yair Auron, "It Was Genocide," *Ha'aretz*, March 3, 2002; Israel W. Charney, letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon Peres.
53. Konstanty Gerbert, "Playing with Memory", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 25, 2002.
54. For Hitler's comments on the Armenians, see K. B. Bardakjian, *Hitler and the Armenian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA: The Zoryan Institute, 1985).
55. "Jewish Leader Downplays Israeli Denial of Genocide," *Armenian News Network/Groong*, February 21, 2002. It is significant to note that Rabbi Burschtein also said that the Jewish community, for its part, is concerned about the recent publication in Armenia of an anti-Semitic book written by hitherto unknown Armenian authors. The book, entitled *National System*, identifies Jews and Turks as the leading enemies of the Armenian nation and calls the Holocaust a myth created by Zionists. Armenian analysts noted that Armenians should not make a blanket statement against all Jews that would unnecessarily antagonize many Jews who boldly criticize the position of the Israeli government.
56. Zvi Bar'el, "The Best Friend Also," *Ha'aretz*, April 7, 2002; Harut Sassounian, March 14, 2002 (op. cit.).
57. Ilnur Cevik, "Genocide Mistake," *Turkish Daily News*, April 6, 2002; Metehan Demir, "'Genocide' Comment Hits Turkish-Israel Ties," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 7, 2002.
58. Ariana Melamed, "The Obligation to Remember," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, April 9, 2002.
59. Yair Auron, "Supporting Denial," *Ha'aretz*, June 9, 1998.

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## 6

### Genocide Education in Israel

*The entire history of the brief “millennial Reich” can be reread as a war against memory, an Orwellian falsification of memory, falsification of reality, negation of reality.*  
—Primo Levi, *The Monkey’s Wrench*<sup>1</sup>

Education plays an extremely important role in keeping historical events in the collective memory of specific groups, as well as of the whole world. One of its most significant goals is the transmission of a nation’s collective memory to the next generation, and it has great influence on the crucial question of if and how a certain historical event will be remembered in the future.

It is clear, therefore, why education has a specific importance concerning the Armenian Genocide: Turkey denies it and is very active in the struggle against its inclusion in the collective memory of humanity. Of course, the young people of today—including Turkish youth—are not responsible for what happened then. But we are collectively responsible for what will become of the genocide in their historical memory and consciousness and in ours.

The struggle about knowing and remembering the Armenian Genocide has a unique significance in the case of the State of Israel—a country of people who were the victims of the Holocaust. Since the Holocaust has such an important role in Jewish identity, memory, and education in Israel, the discussion here will also involve that domain. The way in which the Holocaust and other genocides are taught in Israel is influenced, of course, by the concept of the uniqueness of the Holocaust in world history that is promoted in Israel. An overview of Holocaust and genocide education in other countries, where the con-



cept of the uniqueness of the Holocaust is not promoted to such a degree, can give us an interesting comparative perspective and a better understanding of our main issue here: teaching about genocide (especially the Armenian Genocide) in Israel.

This chapter is divided into four sections:

- a) Teaching about the Holocaust and genocide in the world;
- b) Holocaust education in Israel;
- c) Teaching about genocide in Israel; and
- d) Alternative Holocaust memorial ceremonies in Israel.

### **Teaching about the Holocaust and Genocide in the World**

It could have been simple. Part of the struggle against the occurrence of any future genocide is education, so that it would “never happen again,” although, surely, teaching is not enough. But the reality is, of course, much more complex, as we will see in this chapter. We will start with a brief overview of genocide and Holocaust education around the world, particularly in the United States.

The study of genocide and specific genocidal acts (with the exception of the Holocaust) in American schools is extremely limited in the secondary school grades (7-12), colleges, and universities.<sup>2</sup> Yet, courses about the Holocaust and genocide are more likely to be taught in colleges and universities in North America than anywhere else.

For over twenty years in the aftermath of World War II, the study of the Holocaust in countries around the world was minimal to almost nonexistent. There were many reasons for this, including but not limited to the following: a lack of knowledge and/or interest by teachers regarding the Holocaust; a lack of attention to the Holocaust in school textbooks; and a dearth of curricular resources. If the Holocaust was taught at all, it was initiated by individual teachers who perceived the need to do so and/or had an interest in doing so. Most of the initial pedagogical efforts were made by educators in Jewish day-schools. If students were introduced to the Holocaust in public schools, it was generally through *The Diary of Anne Frank* (a fourteen-year-old German-Jewish girl who was murdered by the Nazis after hiding in Amsterdam for two years), most often using a long excerpt from literature anthologies. The awareness of the Holocaust and its impact on the world has changed significantly since the mid-1970s. The wars in Israel in 1967 and 1973 were one of the main reasons for this process in Israel as well as in, at least, Western society.

Since then a wide range of curriculum units, teaching materials, professional publications, and conferences have been produced in the United States to assist educators in the development of instructional units on the Holocaust. Some of these materials have been created as part of self-contained curricula focused solely on the Holocaust, while others have focused on the relationship of the Holocaust to contemporary social problems, such as intolerance, prejudice, and hate crime.<sup>3</sup>

Two major Holocaust museums and research centers—the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, DC, and the Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance (established under the auspices of the Simon Wiesenthal Center) in Los Angeles—opened in the 1990s. More recently (late 1990s) another one, the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust—was established in New York. Smaller museums and centers have been opened in many other places. A major function of these centers is educating about the Holocaust.

The opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993 as a U.S. national museum marked a new stage in the growth of Holocaust education. As of December 1996, there were approximately fifty Holocaust resource centers, twelve memorials, and nineteen Holocaust museums in the United States. The expressed function of many of the centers and museums is to conduct public outreach programs on various aspects of the Holocaust and/or support the teaching of the Holocaust. Many centers assist schools in developing curricula, provide in-service programs to teachers in private and public schools, and assist teachers and students in locating speakers (including survivors and liberators), films, and adjunct materials. Many have also developed their own curricula.

The study of the Holocaust nowadays is interdisciplinary, drawing upon insights and research from disciplines as disparate as theology, history, the social and behavioral sciences, literature, the fine arts, medicine, law, and others. The extensive and rich scholarship on the Holocaust shows no signs of abating, and interest in both the history of the period 1933-1945 and its implications for contemporary society and government policies shows no signs of waning.

The bright side of the growing interest among educators in teaching about the Holocaust is not without its drawbacks. It is one thing to mandate that a topic be taught, and an altogether different situation to actually teach it effectively (i.e., accurately, comprehensively, thor-

oughly-provokingly, meaningfully). In fact, some critics reject any mandatory studies of the Holocaust, claiming that such mandates endanger the quality of these educative endeavors. These critics assert that many educators are not conversant with, let alone well versed in, the history of the Holocaust, and to “force” them to teach the Holocaust is counterproductive.

Little is known about the degree to which students learn about Holocaust history and related issues, either at higher levels of cognition or at the moral level, or how such instruction affects student attitudes and values regarding prejudice, intolerance, and stereotyping. Much more research on the impact of specific curricular and instructional programs, as well as standardized assessment instruments, are needed to ascertain the impact of Holocaust education on learners from the intermediate grades through higher education.

Generally speaking, the process we have seen in the United States can be observed, with slight variations, in many other countries, especially in Europe, for example, France, Sweden, and England, where the formative years of Holocaust education took place. The unique experience of each country during the Holocaust and its behavior toward the Jews during that time are, of course, significant factors in the way each country reacts to the Holocaust in general, and educates about it in particular.<sup>4</sup> In France, for instance, the Holocaust has been taught since the 1980s quite widely in the last years of high school, and there are discussions as to whether such teaching should be mandatory. It should be noted that the teaching of history in France has a very significant place in the educational system. Since the end of the nineteenth century, history teaching there has been considered an important tool in forming the citizen of the future, considering his or her social, political, and civil functions.

Nevertheless, the place of the Jewish Holocaust in France and elsewhere today came about only as a result of scholars, historians, intellectuals, and politicians struggling for it in the 1980s. The years 1940-1944 are a difficult period in the French collective memory. Many would like to erase these years from French history, if such a thing were possible. France, haunted by the memory of the Nazi occupation, which does not cease to raise questions, feelings of guilt, and great contention, is living the syndrome/nightmare of Vichy. After the liberation, French society (of which the Vichy regime had constituted a significant and inseparable part) developed two alternative “comforting” myths—

the Gaullist and the communist. These myths persisted for a quite a number of years. They were at their height from the end of the war in Algeria in 1962 until the students' rebellion in 1968. Both the Gaullist myth and the communist myth responded to the psychological and political needs of French society. They attempted to diminish the dimensions of the collaboration with the Germans and the significance of the Vichy phenomenon, while fostering the heroic myth of the resistance and the rebellion. This heroic vision of the communists and the Gaullists also attempted to ignore the uniqueness of sacrifice, and the scope, of the Jewish resistance.

Attitudes toward the Holocaust have gone through many changes and incarnations in France. Since the second half of the 1960s, these attitudes have been characterized by challenge, criticism, accusation, and a demand to see justice done for the collaboration of French society regarding the deportation of Jews to the extermination camps, and for the aid offered to the Germans in persecuting the resistance fighters during the period of the Vichy regime.

Similarly, in the French centralized educational system, the Holocaust was practically denied during the years 1945-1960. The period of banalization of the Holocaust's teaching continued until the 1980s. In that period, the Holocaust was taught but the system avoided dealing with the hard questions it raises, especially the role of the French State and its collaboration with the Nazis in the fate of French Jewry.<sup>5</sup>

There is no official history or official state schoolbook of history in France. Editors of textbooks have to respect the program made by "Éducation Nationale"—the Ministry of Education. It seems that the Armenian Genocide is rarely represented in France in high school books where this period is studied.<sup>6</sup> For most editors of school curricula, the Armenian Genocide either did not happen, or should not be considered as an event that has to be taught and remembered.

It should be asked why the study of genocide, in general, and of specific acts of genocide (with the exception of the Holocaust) is extremely limited all over the world, including the United States. There are numerous reasons for this: at the high-school level the subject matter is extremely complex, and many teachers and schools shy away from controversy; teachers have not been prepared to teach this difficult subject; there is scant coverage of the topic in most textbooks, and texts generally drive the curriculum; teachers already face an overcrowded mandated curriculum; there is a lack of well-defined support

to teach the subject, for example, there is a failure in providing well-planned and thorough in-service training for those who are interested in and/or expected to teach these issues; and in some cases there is also a lack of interest or care on the teachers' part.

A major concern all educators face when tackling a subject as complex, controversial, and horrific as genocide and genocidal acts is which cases should be taught. Other than the centrality of the Holocaust, there is little to no consensus on this significant issue. More often than not, the cases of genocide that are addressed at the high school level are the genocide of the Armenians and/or the Cambodian genocide. This is due, in part, to the attention given those genocides by certain state curricula (e.g., California, Connecticut, and New York), as well as the fact that resources for teaching about such genocides are more readily available than for others.

To provide a thorough understanding of such a topic, students need to wrestle with a tangle of complex historical, political, philosophical, sociological, and moral issues. At a minimum, the study needs not only to address what, how, where, and when genocide happened, but also the *why*. Too many current curricula, including those on the Holocaust, neglect to address the "why."

Numerous critical challenges and issues vis-à-vis educating about genocide exist, and among the most significant are: a) the need for the development of more sophisticated curricula (both content and methodology-wise), not only on the Armenian Genocide, the Ukrainian Famine (in 1932-33 between five and seven million peasants, most of them Ukrainians, starved to death because the government of the Soviet Union seized the 1932 crop and foodstuffs from the population), the Holocaust, and the Cambodian genocide, but also other genocidal acts; b) the development of textbooks that address the issue of genocide and genocidal acts in more depth; c) the need for school districts to provide in-depth in-service training for teachers who are expected to teach about genocide; and d) serious research in regard to what content is most appropriate for various grade levels and student abilities, as well as what teaching strategies are most effective in teaching this material.

In any case, the state of education regarding genocide in the new millennium is not different from the state of Holocaust education of the mid-1970s, and the reasons for this are similar—but not identical—to the reasons for not teaching the Holocaust until then. We can only hope that we will see an increase in genocide education in the coming years.

Nonetheless, the Holocaust will probably continue to be the focus of most genocide courses in North America and Europe because of the way it is embedded in Western civilization, its effects on modern history, the plethora of records from different sources documenting it, and the revival of neo-Nazi and racist movements that deny the mass murder of the Jews in order to legitimate anti-Semitism. Furthermore, many teachers prefer to concentrate on one historical case in depth and have not mastered the range of sources needed to teach a comparative course.

The place of the Jews in Western society, the significance of the Holocaust in Jewish identity in Israel and the Diaspora, and the central role of the Holocaust in the Israeli educational system are probably also part of the explanation for the central part played by the Holocaust in genocide courses.

### Teaching the Holocaust in Israel

As mentioned above, two forces have led to the current attitude of the State of Israel and its leading institutions toward the Armenian Genocide: a) the pressure of the Turkish government, and b) the opposition of several high-powered Jewish-Israeli groups which are afraid that dealing with other genocides could damage the concept of the uniqueness of the Shoah. We will elaborate a little on the subject of Holocaust education in Israel, because it seems indispensable in understanding the attitude of the Israeli educational system towards teaching other genocides in general and the Armenian one in particular.

The terrible tragedies that befell the Jews at the hands of Nazi Germany became, historically, an important element of Jewish and Zionist education. The history of the representation of the Holocaust in the formal educational institutions of Israel is to be seen within the context of such central ideals and myths as the *Halutz* (the farmer-warrior who struggled for the creation of the state, sometimes symbolized in the past by a member of a kibbutz) and the native-born *Sabra*—"the new Jew." The educational institutions of the secular Jewish community in Israel, both before and after the establishment of the State of Israel, undertook the mission of constructing "the new Jew" as a moral, conceptual, and political entity. Building the newly constructed Israeli collective was considered—and probably really was so in many respects—the continuation, after the Holocaust, of the struggle for survival. However, the roots of Zionist educational *ideologies* were so ethnocen-

tric and goal-orientated that they did not enter into the *moral* dilemmas of the very foundations of Zionist education. This nation-building project reflected and produced a special ideological philosophy in which there was no place, for example, for essential issues such as the rights of the Palestinians.

After the end of World War II, Zionist historiography used knowledge about the Holocaust as part of the building of a Zionist moral education.<sup>7</sup> The hegemonic version of Holocaust memories became the central educative apparatus. Historical memory was mobilized for constructing the new Jew as one whose ethnocentric collective identity would be ensured by a particular historical memory, in which the term “Auschwitz” was understood as an immanent and determinist characteristic of not realizing the essence of Judaism in its modern form—namely, strong, independent, and part of a Jewish sovereign national state. The obligation to remember the Holocaust, (*zachor*), that served for the justification of Zionist morality and practice was based on the biblical word *zachor*. One context of *zachor* is that of war, be it against Pharaoh or against the Amalekites, the implacable enemy who lived in Canaan, the Promised Land, before the exodus of Israel from Egypt. *Zachor et asher asah lecha Amalek* [remember what Amalek did unto thee] (Deuteronomy 25:17) refers to the remembering of God’s command to be devoted to His teaching in order to reach the Promised Land and to exterminate *Amalek*: men, women, children, and even their animals. Illan Gur-Ze’ev claims that:

This *zachor et asher asah lecha Amalek* is part of the formation of the secular halutz and sabra myth in the collective Israeli identity. The *zachor*, remembering of the Holocaust victims, had merged into the *zachor et asher asah lecha Amalek*: the victim of Nazi Germany merged into the concept of “eternal victim,” seeing every “other,” every goy (other people), as “Amalek.” Implicitly, it means that the Amalek’s just fate is to be the just fate of “the other” in days to come.<sup>8</sup>

The ever-growing centrality of the Holocaust in Israeli collective identity and the formal curriculum is accompanied by stressing the linkage between the Holocaust, the existence and the moral justification of Zionism, and the State of Israel.

Other scholars are less critical concerning Holocaust education in Israel. One of them, Dalia Ofer, claims: “the role of education was of utmost importance in the Zionist revolution. Zionism faced conflicts

between religious and non-religious Zionists, on the one hand, and between the negation of the Diaspora and the affirmation of its cultural heritage, on the other.”<sup>9</sup>

In this context, a complicated task in curriculum planning was to select those events from Diaspora history that would enhance Zionism without breaking altogether with past traditions. It was important to construct a heroic past based on all of Jewish history without alienating the youth from Diaspora Jewry, for it was hoped that its members would eventually immigrate and join the Yishuv in Palestine and, later, Israel. The success of the Yishuv and Israel in achieving both the continuation of Jewish tradition and the transformation of the Jewish self-image was limited, however. In practice, Israeli youth felt superior to Diaspora Jews and very far removed from their culture. In this context the role of Holocaust education was very significant.

Some Israeli scholars divide the history of dealing with the issue of the Holocaust in the formal educational institutions of Israel into periods according to their orientation. Ruth Firrer and Dalia Ofer make the distinction between the “Zionist Period” (1948-1977) and the “Humanistic Period,” characterized by its “Humanistic Approach” (1979 to the 2000s).<sup>10</sup> Firrer proposed also what might be called the “intermediate incubation years” between 1961 (the Eichmann trial) and 1977—including the wars of 1967 and 1973.<sup>11</sup>

#### *“The Zionist Period,” 1948-1977*

The incomprehensibility of the Holocaust and the possibility that the memory of the Holocaust would fade away and knowledge about European Jewry and its social and spiritual world would disappear were of great concern to the Israeli political elite of the 1950s. This, they feared, would fulfill Hitler’s wish to obliterate the Jews. Yet, a sense of unease was expressed in discussions about the teaching of the Holocaust and the ability to transmit an understanding of it to later generations. This concern derived not only from the innate incomprehensibility of the Holocaust, but also from anxiety that the terrible stories of the Holocaust might cause emotional distress to youngsters, as well as from the denigration with which Israeli youth treated Jewish history in the Diaspora in general, and the Holocaust in particular. Many young Israeli students had negative stereotypes of Diaspora Jewry that were supported by the Israeli Hebrew literature they studied. Much of modern



Israeli Hebrew literature stressed the poverty and humiliation of the Jews of Eastern Europe and contained many anti-Semitic stereotypes.

As a result of these factors, very little was actually taught about the Holocaust in Israeli schools until the late 1970s. Until then, most of the information students gained on the Holocaust was through various commemoration ceremonies, but even these did not become a mandatory part of the school curriculum until 1958. Thus, the knowledge that the students acquired was neither systematic nor coherent and was completely divorced from any historical context. Furthermore, it was laden with phrases suitable for commemoration ceremonies, aimed mostly at eliciting an emotional response. The students' difficulty in relating to the events of the Holocaust was intensified by the lack of information and any real intellectual challenge. Young people often related to the passivity of the Jews who were murdered in Europe, saying that they went "as lambs to the slaughter."

In the early 1960s, two new high school history textbooks incorporated substantial units on the Holocaust. However, an analysis of these books reveals a strong emotional and ideological bias. In 1963 the Ministry of Education offered a course entitled "The Ghetto during the Holocaust" as an elective in the matriculation examinations. However, because there was little satisfactory course material and teachers' knowledge of the subject was limited, very few students choose the course.

Sociological research on the attitudes of Israeli high school students conducted after the Eichmann trial revealed a change of attitudes. The students viewed the Holocaust as a meaningful event in Israel's life. They displayed a more positive attitude toward Diaspora Jewry and made an effort to understand its hopeless situation. Indeed, the vast majority of the young people stated they were proud of the behavior of European Jewry during the Holocaust. The non-religious youth related mostly to Jewish resistance, while the religious youth expressed their admiration for the efforts of Jews to keep the religious laws and their willingness to sanctify God in such times as the Holocaust.

In spite of this, the curricula did not change considerably during the Eichmann trial. Most of the teachers realized that they lacked the appropriate basic materials for teaching the subject in the classroom. In this period the emphasis was mainly on the Zionist and Israeli contexts. Practically nothing was mentioned about the non-Jewish victims of the Nazis or other genocides.

Even after the Eichmann trial and throughout the 1960s, the Ministry did not initiate any methodical program for the study of the Holocaust. It was suggested that a few lessons would be dedicated to the subject in conjunction with Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies, and that the issue of the Holocaust would be studied partly in each course in the humanities, particularly history and literature. A few collections of documents, abstracts, and segments of articles published by Yad Vashem were offered to the teachers, and exhibitions, mostly of photographs along with some documentation, were assembled and displayed in school lobbies and libraries during the week of Holocaust Remembrance Day.

*The Humanistic Approach, 1978 to the 2000s*

During the 1970s, the educational system's interest in teaching the Holocaust increased markedly. This was the outcome of various political and social developments after the wars of 1967 and 1973. The two experiences had caused deep anxiety and fear, and their frequent comparison to the Holocaust made by the media in and out of Israel brought educators and historians to realize how inadequate their knowledge of the Holocaust was. The increasing interest in the Holocaust can also be related to a deep problem of identity, as we elaborated in chapter 1.

Faced with increasing criticism of its curriculum planning, the Ministry of Education could no longer avoid creating a structured Holocaust curriculum. The ongoing expansion of scholarship on the Holocaust provided more suitable books for teachers and made more knowledge available. The university graduates who had studied the Holocaust in an academic framework became a new generation of teachers who were able to introduce changes into the teaching of the Holocaust.

In the early 1970s, a new trend in curriculum planning was introduced by the Ministry of Education. In the context of teaching about the Holocaust three major approaches emerged. The first emphasized the need to strengthen Zionist identity through the subject of the Holocaust. The main message was that the Jews had not seen the "writing on the wall" because of their false hopes concerning Jewish emancipation. The events of the Holocaust destroyed these illusions forever, and thus the existence of Israel embodied the "lesson" learned from the Holocaust. The establishment of the State of Israel was the miraculous manifestation of both the Holocaust and Zionism.

The second approach, promoted by historian and educator Arie Carmon, viewed the main goal of teaching the Holocaust as “Education toward Values.” In Carmon’s view, the purpose was “to focus on the student in his search for meaning and the importance of his life as a human being, as a Jew and as an Israeli. The principles, aims, content, and methods are all meant to derive from and serve the intellectual needs of the student as an individual who is both searching for his identity and reflecting on his role and function in society.”

The third approach regarded knowledge itself as the primary purpose for studying the Holocaust. Beginning in the late 1970s, Haim Schatzker, Yisrael Gutman, and other historians promoted this approach. They stated that in spite of the new trends in curriculum planning, the Holocaust should not be treated as just another subject. The Holocaust, as “an epoch-making event,” had to be studied in depth. It was inconceivable that young Israelis might not know the events of the Holocaust. The goal was knowledge for its own sake, and the methodology to be used was systematic historical analysis that would raise the major issues through the readings of primary documents and a comprehensive comparative study. Schatzker and Gutman’s textbook *The Holocaust and Its Meaning*, which followed these guidelines, became the most popular textbook on the Holocaust. However, despite the authors’ claim that the dissemination of knowledge about the Holocaust was their primary goal, and even though the textbook emphasized the meaning of the Holocaust from a broad Jewish and human perspective, the Zionist message was clearly presented as the best attitude for Jews.

In 1979 the Holocaust was introduced as an independent unit in the high school curriculum, and in 1981 it was introduced as a unit for the matriculation exams, thereby sanctioning its teaching to graduating classes.

The genuine participation of Israeli youth in the dialogue about the Holocaust became more meaningful in the 1980s and 1990s. The opportunities for young Israelis to engage in the shaping of this dialogue also increased as the Holocaust became a more frequent topic of reflection in Israeli cultural life and because of political changes in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1989, the Ministry of Education initiated a program for high school students, which included a visit to Poland and the extermination camps. The program has become common in the last few years, and a number of studies have demonstrated the strong impact these visits have had on students’ understanding of themselves and their Jewish identity.

A survey conducted for Yad Vashem in November 1999 about the significance of the Holocaust in Jewish Israeli society provides some meaningful indications of the attitude of the Israeli public.<sup>12</sup> Practically all the Jewish-Israeli population (98 percent) thinks that the Holocaust has to be taught in the Israeli educational system. The great majority (91 percent) agrees that every pupil in Israel should visit Yad Vashem at least once during his studies. Fifty-eight percent think that the visits of young Israelis to Poland have to be continued, and 28 percent think that these visits have to be continued but with deeper preparation. Nine percent are against the visits and 5 percent have no opinion. Another finding is that 44 percent think that not enough time is dedicated to the Holocaust in the curriculum, while 38 percent think that the curriculum gets adequate time, and 2 percent that it gets too much time.

The interviewed people were asked why, in their opinion, the Holocaust should be taught. The answers were as follows (the total is more than 100 percent since there was a possibility for more than one answer):

- to be familiar/to know Jewish history/heritage/roots 67%
- to remember/not to forget 35%
- so that it will not happen again to the Jewish people 17%
- it is a subject of great importance 10%
- to deepen the commitment of the pupils to the Jewish people 8%
- to make us sensitive in our relationship with minorities and to racist phenomena 3%
- so that it will not happen to any people in the future 0.8%
- so that we will not do what has been done to us 0.2%

The few who answered that the Holocaust should not be taught explained it by reasons such as: we have to be optimistic; not to frighten our children; and to teach more modern subjects. Nevertheless, the mention of “humanistic reasons” for teaching the Holocaust was very limited.

To sum up, even though I accept, in principal, the chronological distinction between the “Zionist period” and the “humanistic period,” I have reservations as to the definition of the second period as a “humanistic period” or a “humanistic approach.” Three facts should be mentioned regarding this period that reveal the ongoing Zionist-oriented face of this attitude. First, the State Educational Law of 1953, which established the goals of the educational system in Israel, was changed only once, in 1980, when the Knesset decided to add the following

statement: “The goal of the state educational system is to base education in the state on the consciousness and the memory of the Holocaust and heroism.” The spirit of the change in the State Education Law is clear: to base or to foster the consciousness and the memory of the Shoah and heroism—from a Jewish-Zionist perspective—as was the case in the law of Yad Vashem in 1953.

Second, even in the “humanistic period,” the Holocaust was taught (until 1999) in the framework of “Jewish history,” which was separated from “general history.” These aspects limit by definition the scope of the “humanistic approach.”

Third, the visits to Poland of high school students since the late 1980s do not foster the “humanistic approach,” but rather the particularistic one. They foster the Zionist perspective and sometimes—to a lesser degree—a Jewish perspective. The visits to Poland are perhaps the ultimate example of the goals of “teaching and mourning” in combination with each other.

Essentially, the major dilemmas facing the teaching of the Holocaust in Israel are similar to the dilemmas generally faced by all pedagogues in all subjects: why to teach, what to teach, and how to teach; what the student has to remember; how to help him to remember; when to teach; and when to remember. In all cases, the danger is in transforming the Holocaust into an instrument, a means, rather than an end in itself. Effectively, in my opinion, the Holocaust is not over-taught or over-commemorated in Israel. Rather it is being used for too many goals of Zionist ideology, i.e. renewing the sense of Zionism and Israeli pride among young Israelis. Therefore, other victims of the Nazis and other genocides are rarely mentioned in Israel.

Concerning teaching other occurrences of genocide in general, and the Armenian Genocide in particular, there has been practically no change over the years, at least in the official attitude. We will turn to analyze this topic now.

### **Teaching about Genocide in Israel**

In the following paragraphs we will describe and analyze two controversies regarding teaching and remembering other genocides in the Israeli educational system. The first concerns a study program, and the second deals with a Memorial Day ceremony for the Holocaust held in one school.

*“Awareness of world’s suffering—Genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century”*<sup>13</sup>

Genocide is a crime that we must struggle to prevent or to reduce as best as we can. It is my belief that the first, and essential, step that is needed is to learn about, and be aware of, its very existence.

It is the conviction of those who prepared this study program (a team that I directed—Y.A.) that Israel, the national home of the Jewish people, who were the victims of the most horrendous of all genocidal acts, has a special moral and political responsibility to place the issue of genocide on the world agenda; to take part in attempts to preclude it from happening; to limit its scope when it does occur and proffer aid to its casualties; to demand that the perpetrators be brought to justice and the victims be compensated for their sufferings; and to thwart the efforts of all those who attempt to deny its very occurrence. First and foremost, we hold that this is a topic that needs to be learned and discussed by young people in Israel, because the history of the Jewish people is replete with centuries of persecutions, culminating in the Holocaust. We also believe that it is essential to develop sensitivity among our youth to the suffering of others, and to strengthen universal, humanistic values, which are well grounded in Jewish tradition. In this sense, I personally perceive teaching the Armenian Genocide as a very important matter for Israelis as well as for the cause of the Armenians.

The specific genesis of this study program was an incident that took place in Israel in 1990. In April that year, the Administrative Committee of the Israel Broadcasting Authority canceled a planned screening of an American documentary dealing with the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Adding insult to injury, and probably by coincidence, the film was replaced without explanation by a documentary about insects. The action of the Administrative Committee was clearly at the instigation of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, which was being pressured by the Turkish government to prevent the screening. This was not—as we have seen and as we will see—a new situation in Israel. Still, it led to an uproar, and at the initiative of Member of Knesset Yair Zaban, dozens of Knesset members and intellectuals, crossing all party lines, signed a letter protesting the action (see details in chapter 8).

I was personally moved by the incident to research the attitude of the Yishuv towards the Armenian massacre that took place at that time almost before their eyes. The study was published as *The*

*Banality of Indifference.* This led me later, at the beginning of 1993, to propose to the Ministry of Education to include in the high school curriculum a study program on the Armenian Genocide.

My proposal was, at first, warmly received by the Ministry in Rabin's government (controlled then by a member of the Meretz Party), which proposed that the program be expanded to include the genocide of the Roma during the Second World War, and one of the more recent acts of genocide, such as Bosnia or Rwanda.

Presenting the program before a special committee, the highest pedagogic panel in the Ministry of Education, at its meeting on November 11, 1993, I stated that "research proves that young people are both ignorant of and indifferent to disasters and acts of genocide committed in the twentieth century, especially to the Roma and the Armenians. Such ignorance has marked and long-term effects on the understanding and conclusions of the young Israeli regarding the Holocaust that the Jewish people suffered."<sup>14</sup>

The panel requested that I create a special educational program, designed for high school, seminary, and college students, and plan a supplementary instructive program for teachers.<sup>15</sup> The program was to include the following issues:

1. Information on the issue of genocide, its characteristics, definitions, and the conditions that might lead to its occurrence, followed by information about the United Nations Convention on Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide adopted in December 1948, and a similar law passed by the Israeli parliament in 1950.
2. Information and rudimentary facts concerning the massacre of the Armenians and the Roma.
3. Presenting the various attitudes of Jews toward the massacre of the Armenians at the time of its occurrence and in the years following it, including the different aspects of the attitudes of the State of Israel concerning this issue.
4. Moral, theological, philosophical, and political questions that arise when we encounter tragedies of other people, and an attempt to establish a connection between the Jewish identity after the Holocaust and the ability of Jews to sympathize with victims of other genocidal crimes.

When teaching this program, a special emphasis should be put on the following topics:

1. Genocide as an obviously extreme case of the violation of one group of humans by another—suffering inflicted on people by people.

2. The phenomenon of “and the world remained silent” as a most significant element in the genocide mechanism. The bystander and the indifferent share some of the responsibility and the blame, at least morally, of those who actually committed the killing. This view leads to the question: what would we do in the case of genocidal crimes committed in our time?

Later it was decided that the program would be prepared first and foremost for use as an optional unit for matriculation in history within the framework of one semester for high school students. A team was set up to draft the program and the Ministry of Education funded the project. The team set a goal of formulating the program within one year, writing and publishing a textbook for the students and an accompanying teacher’s guide, and preparing a group of teachers who would be ready to teach the course on a trial basis in the following year. All this we were able to accomplish in a relatively short period of time. We also decided to develop the program on a modular basis, so that teachers would be able to use parts of the program in conjunction with other related topics. For example, devoting a few lessons to the Armenian Genocide while studying the history of the First World War; discussing events in Rwanda or Bosnia in Home Room periods; or introducing a lesson or two on the Roma within the framework of Holocaust studies. (While studying the Holocaust, students often raise the question: “and what about the Roma?” Few are the teachers who are able to answer the question in a serious manner, as we will see later on.)

During the summer of 1994, the team and outside lecturers taught a short course on the topic at Seminar Hakibbutzim College of Education, in which more than forty high school teachers participated. At the end of the course, seven of those teachers opted to teach the study program on an experimental basis during the second semester of the coming school year (1995), and at the initiative of the group it was decided to continue meeting during the fall semester, in order to widen their knowledge of the subject. The program was presented from the outset as part of a large history curriculum for high school students who specialized in history (a very small group), in which the school had the choice of whether or not to include the program. It was one of nineteen programs proposed to them that year.

Everything was set to begin implementing the program in mid-December 1994, with both the blessing and the support of the Ministry of Education. A few weeks before the program was to commence, the director of the Pedagogical Secretariat informed the special committee (the highest pedagogic panel) that the minister



of education would personally have to approve the program and that meanwhile, it would be put on hold. Later, it was said that his decision would depend upon the decision of the Academic Committee on History, which was scheduled to meet at the end of January 1995 and would have to approve the program. When the teachers were notified, they protested and claimed that, in effect, this meant the cancellation of a program they had prepared to teach, and that the pupils were to be tested on within the framework of their matriculation exams. It was then decided to have the chairman of the Committee make the decision, pro tem, until the entire Committee could convene and decide the issue. In December of 1994, the chairman decided to reject the proposed program, claiming it was flawed and failed to meet academic standards. The official statement was that “from a professional point of view the program was unsuitable and should be immediately abolished.”<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that all the textbooks in Israel are under the control of the Ministry of Education, which annually provides an official list of required and supplementary books.

This time the protest in the press exceeded the previous storm. The Ministry of Education was accused of succumbing to political pressure and using the thin “fig leaf” of pedagogical reasons to justify its action. It was argued that even if there were flaws in the program, as there generally are in all experimental programs, the course was aimed at a small test audience and should be implemented, evaluated, and then corrected for future use.

The lines were more clearly drawn when the protocol of the meeting of the Academic Committee became available to the press. At that meeting, held on January 19, 1995, one professor rejected the course claiming that “we do not foster sensitivity, we teach,” and that the place for education of values is in the youth movements and not in the schools. The main thrust of the criticism was leveled at the presentation of the Armenian Genocide.

The chairman of the Committee, Michel Abitbul, stated that there are two schools of researchers on the Armenian massacres: Those who claim that the perpetrators of the Armenian massacres acted through pure ideological motives; and scholars who claim that “the massacre was a reaction to the ‘provocation’ of the victims themselves.” He stated that these views should also be brought to the attention of students.<sup>17</sup> He went on to the question: “were the Young Turks the only bad guys in this drama that unfolded on the border with Russia?” In a bizarre twist, the chairman referred to the works of a leading Armenian historian,

Vahakn N. Dadrian, to supposedly prove that much of the Armenian documentation of the genocide was based upon forgeries. The Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide, headed by Israel Charny, considered suing the Ministry of Education.

It is precisely against this attempt to justify acts of genocide that we protest. Even if there were actions by individual groups of Armenians against the Turkish authorities, there is not, and cannot be, at any time, a justification for the malicious murder of unarmed and defenseless women, children, the elderly, or for that matter the unrestrained killing of Armenian soldiers serving in the Turkish army, who were disarmed and shot in wholesale massacres. It is also important for us, as Israelis, to remember that at the same time the massacre of the Armenians was happening in Turkey, the Ottoman Empire ruled with a heavy hand in Palestine. During the First World War a pro-British Jewish underground group, NILI, operated in Palestine, and leading Zionists—Trumpeldor, Jabotinsky, and Ben Gurion among others—organized the Jewish Legion at the end of the First World War to fight against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>18</sup> Had those actions led to a massacre of the Yishuv, would the Academic History Committee have also felt a need to speak of Jewish provocation?

It should be noted that in the proposed textbook we did in fact deal with claims that “the massacres were a reaction against ‘provocation’ of the victims.” Nevertheless, our conclusion was clear:

There is no doubt of the proof, based on different and various sources from the period, that the comprehensive mass extermination of the civilian population in various regions of Turkey (and certainly not just in the battle zone) was carried out at the indisputable order of Turkish authorities in Constantinople. While certain facts and details can be legitimately debated, and some of the Armenian claims about genocide can be questioned, the historical sources, only a small part of which have been mentioned in this survey, create an unequivocal and unshakable picture. (Unless there has been some fantastic conspiracy to invent thousands of documents and reports from various sources in differing countries, including the United States which was neutral, and Germany and Austria, who were allies of the Turks, and to fabricate hundreds of newspaper items in numerous countries...) The term “genocide” did not exist, we should remember, at the time the atrocities were committed against the Armenians, but what the Young Turks did to the Armenians was indeed genocide. Again, one can argue with some of the facts, details, or circumstances, but there can be no doubt about the fact of the genocide itself. In this sense, the denial of the Armenian Genocide is very similar to the denial of the Holocaust of the Jews.<sup>19</sup>

The reaction of the Armenian community in Israel to the rejection of the program was one of great disappointment:<sup>20</sup>

We regret that the protocols of the meeting of 1.19.1995, held in the Ministry of Education of Israel to review the merits of the book of Dr. Yair Auron, almost reflect in its tone the Turkish official line.

One has the painful impression that Prof. Abitbul [the chairman of the Committee] is sitting as an erudite judge in a tribunal passing a verdict on the genocide of another nation. It is not hard to detect a vicious attack on the textbook project of Dr. Auron, who spent more than six years in the state archives of Israel, France and U.S., exploring the roots and facts of the Armenian Genocide.

Prof. Abitbul in the same cynical tone permits himself to call the Armenian “massacres” controversial and concludes that “as long as Turkish archives are not opened there will be question marks about other sources.” He questions, like some Turkish scholars, the cold-blooded decision of the genocide. He goes on, “in the midst of this discussion an issue comes forth. Were the massacres of 1915 a result of a conscious and declared policy by the Turkish government or was it a result of conditions and of local initiatives without any intention from the top?” Then he authoritatively makes another discovery—“the research proves that there was no connection between the massacres of 1894-96 and the massacres of 1915.”

Abitbul claims that the Turks protected Armenians in Syria and Lebanon and Jerusalem (a total of 10,000 people at the time), and Protestants and Catholics.

We would recommend him not to rely on Turkish sources but rather to do his homework in European archives. Actually the genocide was indiscriminate and neither Armenian Catholics nor the Armenian Protestants were spared.

Prof. Abitbul recommends that Dr. Auron should have consulted Ziya Gökalp, the equivalent of consulting Goering. It is shocking that the board passed the decision to disqualify the textbook compiled by Dr. Auron unanimously.

Contrary to the opinion of the board, independent experts consider the contents of the textbook of Dr. Auron as meeting all decent academic criteria. Dr. Auron is a highly competent historian who enjoys the respect of academic circles the world over. His initiative deserved encouragement and appreciation.

We regret to state that this document called “The Protocols of the Meeting of 19/1/1995” is a disgrace to the Ministry of Education. It is scandalous that these protocols were distributed to the general public. A gift from Prof. Abitbul to the Armenian people on their 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

With few exceptions there is a sad situation prevailing in Israel on the issue of the Armenian Genocide. We deplore that an Institute like Yad Vashem, which is committed to uphold principles of integrity, has a public negative attitude towards the Armenian Genocide.

The Turkish Denial books outnumber books on Armenian Genocide on the shelves of Hebrew University.

It is high time that Israeli historians and intellectuals launch a public debate on the morality of such statements. We call upon the Israeli Foreign Ministry to cease to submit to Turkish pressures and to act in the spirit of Franz Werfel, and show respect to victims of the first Genocide of this century.

We demand that a public discussion is opened on the merits of the textbook by Dr. Auran.

We hope that the Minister of Education Prof. Amnon Rubinstein will abide by his public commitment to teach the Armenian Genocide in Israeli educational institutions.

We wish to thank all academics, writers and journalists in Israel who stood by their principles and honored the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide.

As a result of the criticism directed at the Ministry of Education, the minister was quick to state that though the proposed study program was rejected, a different and better one would be prepared and would be ready to be taught in the following school year.

As they had promised, the Ministry prepared a textbook and arranged to teach it in a few high schools. The program was eventually devoted to dealing with the subject of the Armenian people, as can be seen in its title: "Minorities in History—the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire."<sup>21</sup> The first, and the largest part of the program, is devoted to a study of the Ottoman Empire; the second part—to the Armenians and Armenian history, the third part—the Armenian Genocide: sources and attitudes. The last part attempts to define the term "genocide." The last section also contains an article by Giles Weinstein, a French-Jewish specialist on the history of the Ottoman Empire. In Weinstein's "Three Questions About the Armenian Massacre" he raises the issues of the numbers of Armenian and Muslim victims, and rejects Turkish governmental responsibility for the crime. Weinstein's views are included in order to give the program the "proper balance" (our terminology—Y.A.) that the Ministry sought.

The textbook published by the Ministry of Education does not take a stand on the question: "Should the murder of the Armenians in the years 1915-1916 be called 'genocide'?" In the preface, where the concept of the textbook is presented, we find:

Armenian, Turkish and western scholars who have researched this period and the relations between the Armenians and the Turks differ on the inter-

pretation of the events that occurred in the years 1915-1916. The main controversy is between the Armenians and the Turks regarding the figures of the murder, about the degree of accountability of the Turkish government for the murder, and about using the term “genocide” for describing the murder of the Armenians.... In the beginning of World War I, and especially following the defeat of the Turkish army, there existed a deep tension between the Turks and the Armenians.... The deportation and the murder of the years 1915-1916 are the result of this tension.<sup>22</sup>

The text notes another subject of deep controversy—the issue of the reliability of the sources: Each side claims that the sources of the other side are unreliable. Therefore, in the textbook there are sources that ought to support the contradicting claims of both sides.

Once again, this attempt to maintain a neutral stance on the subject and to give academic credence to deniers of the Armenian Genocide led to criticism in the press. In a letter to the editors of the daily *Ha'aretz*, Professor Yehuda Bauer, a worldwide authority on the Holocaust, accused the Ministry of having deluded him, after asking for his advice on the issue and promising him personally that the new program would contain a clear cut portrayal of what transpired to the Armenians as genocide.<sup>23</sup>

I feel cheated. The Minister of Education had called me in for a meeting with the woman who was responsible for preparing a book regarding this issue, after Yair Auron's book was disqualified. This meeting was held in the presence of high officials from the Ministry, in the summer of 1995. In the meeting I stated that the main point is to make the students aware that genocide had occurred, and signified the historical sources: the great body of literature by the Germans, Austrians and Americans, which are backed up by a great volume of official Austrian and American letters that were exchanged between diplomatic representatives who were stationed in the areas where the murders had occurred.

I also raised the issue of the Turkish reports during the trials of the perpetrators of the murders, which were held in Constantinopol at the end of the war.

At the end of the meeting there was a general agreement that the book will regard the Armenian Genocide as a fact. This pledge was not carried out, for reasons I will not discuss.

Bringing forth the reasoning of the deniers as well as the fact of the murder makes a mockery of Israel as a country among civilized countries. In the United States there are three academics, the Shaws and Prof. Heath Lowry, who deny the genocide. Prof. Bernard Lewis, also a denier, was fined by the court in France and silenced. Prof. Lowry was exposed as a spokesman for the Turkish government in an article published by three

senior scholars (among them Prof. Lifton, the author of a book about the Nazi doctors in Auschwitz) in an international review that I edited [*Holocaust and Genocide Studies*—YA]. My Israeli colleagues, who attach the same importance to the facts and their denial, are not worthy “experts” on this issue and undermine their own academic status.

Another person, Daniel Zohary, wrote to the editor of *Ha’artez*:

I am amazed at the way this issue is presented by the Ministry of Education and the statement that “the Armenians say the genocide happened—the Turks say it did not.” For example, how would we react if a textbook by the French Ministry of Education presented the genocide of the Jews in Europe in such a fashion: “the Jews claim that a genocide had occurred, many others explain that it was a reaction to the Jewish rebellion (in the Ghettos) against the German government.”<sup>24</sup>

Israel W. Charny, the executive director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem, also wrote a letter of condemnation to the editor of *Ha’artez*:

Amnon Rubinstein, the Minister of Education, should be ashamed for his tragic surrender to the forces of realpolitik and the joining of his Ministry with the deniers of genocide. The fact that this genocide happened to people different than us does not affect the severity of this moral distortion. The fact that the official educational leadership of our nation that has known persecution, racism and worst of all the Holocaust, takes part in the denial of the holocaust of other people is shameful.<sup>25</sup>

The Armenian community in Israel declared that they preferred the course not be taught at all rather than allow it to contain the views of a denier of their genocide. Pointedly they asked, how would Jewish people feel if, in some country, a course on the Holocaust was “balanced” with the views of a denier of the Holocaust?

The educational philosopher Gur-Ze’ev, who had publicly criticized the decision to reject the original program compared the two programs:

Two important differences clearly emerge from a reading of the newly approved textbook. First, there is an obvious adherence to a positivistic-neutral philosophy of science. In the history curriculum, this philosophy of science manifests itself in sticking to “facts” and refraining from presenting moral dilemmas and educational implications. With this understanding of history teaching and study, the new program restricted itself to a forgotten chapter in the history of the Ottoman Empire, which it termed the “Armenian Problem.” In the Auran program, the Holocaust of the Gypsies and

Armenians, which he constantly calls “genocide,” as distinct from the Jewish “Holocaust,” was presented as an historical fact that had to be learned and whose moral implications had to be elaborated and taught in light of universal humanist morality. In the new program, even in the “Introduction,” the fate of the Armenians at the beginning of this century is not presented as historical fact. The new program embraces the concept that there is no room for humanistic moral education in a history lesson. The anonymous author [as the name of the author was never indicated] writes as if the matter is a debate among neutral, objective experts from various schools of history.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time that this Ministry’s new course was being taught, an elective course on Genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, based upon the original study program, was being implemented at one high school—Ramat Hefer Regional High School in the Sharon Region—and has been taught since 1995. The private initiative to teach the program was taken by the school’s history teacher, and received the approval of the authorities of that school.

In February 1996, a reporter for the then daily, *Davar Sheni*, interviewed the teachers and students of both programs. His article conveyed strong criticism of the Ministry’s program both from teachers who taught the course and from the pupils who studied it. One pupil is quoted saying: “The textbook is boring,” and added “I don’t understand why the study program doesn’t present the subject as genocide.” This new program, which was supposed to correct the pedagogical failings and the supposed flaws of the original one, was described by one teacher as being “on a very low level, starting with printing errors and ending with factual errors,” adding that “it appears to me that neither thought nor effort were put into it.”<sup>27</sup>

In Ramat Hefer Regional High School, where the original program was taught, students were encouraged to analyze the Armenian Genocide in a contemporary context—i.e. to also deepen their understanding of the recent genocidal acts in Rwanda and Bosnia. The teacher of the program was very pleased with it and with the results achieved. The pupils, as well, expressed much satisfaction with the course. They stated that they felt that they now had a better understanding of events that were happening in the present; they felt that they had developed a greater sensitivity to the suffering of others; and they believed that in the future they will be more aware and involved in what is happening in the world. The teacher at Ramat Hefer Regional High School, who has taught the subject since 1995 in accordance with the original study, said from the

perspective of five years' experience, that interestingly, the students emerged with a much deeper awareness of the Holocaust: "They told me that learning about the Armenian Genocide has shown them how easy it is to simply forget and ultimately deny a genocide. They were shocked and shaken by this."<sup>28</sup> In her opinion, "the program is an attempt to acknowledge important values, an attempt to help the youngsters to reach a humanistic point of view. When I taught this program I had deep discussions with my students about human rights, freedom, occupation and its meaning, etc."<sup>29</sup>

The pupils of Ramat Hefer Regional High School sent a letter to the minister of education criticizing the rejection of the original program. They wrote: "An understanding that goes beyond bureaucracy and petty policies is essential, an understanding of what is right, just and human."<sup>30</sup> They informed the minister that they were astonished and disappointed that the program was rejected, and asked him to reexamine the approval of the original program. They expressed their wishes to meet him and discuss the issue. The minister's advisor answered them in a formal letter, proposing (one might say, in a cynical way) the option of studying the Ministry's new program.

Because of the critical reviews of the minister's new program, it was not implemented. In the meantime, the program "Genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" is being taught by myself in one student-teachers college, and was taught also for three years in another college while I was lecturing there. Several high schools have also decided to teach the program, entirely or partly. For example, the Denmark High School in Jerusalem decided in 1997 to include it in a framework of its six-year program for moral education: "A school in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel." "We have to be sensitive toward other persecuted peoples like the Armenians," said Aryeh Barnea, the high school director. "If we struggle against denying the Holocaust on the one hand, but on the other hand, silence those who struggle to gain recognition for the Armenian Genocide, we miss the goal which is the sanctity of human life," he said.<sup>31</sup>

Another initiative is being conducted by the experimental high school in Jerusalem. For the past few years the school set out to instill knowledge of the Armenian Genocide amongst the schools students and teachers, the history teachers explain:

This was done because of the importance of this genocide as a historical event and because of its humanistic and universal context. Nevertheless,



the high point of our activities was the contact we had made with the Armenian community in Jerusalem, and the cooperation between the school and the community to promote awareness of this issue. Our students visited the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem several times and Armenian students regularly attended our school lectures by Armenian as well as Israeli speakers. In 1998 a group of Armenian representatives attended the school's Holocaust memorial service and the following day representatives from the school attended the memorial service for the victims of the Armenian Genocide. Both of these services were shown on an Israeli television program.<sup>32</sup>

Some history teachers in high schools teach about the Armenian Genocide on their own initiative when they teach the period of WWI. There are others who teach "Genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century" as a special subject in one way or another. More than 100 students in two high schools in Kibbutzim have studied the subject in the school year 2000 in the framework of their enlarged history courses. We note that some high school teachers choose to use another section of the program—the section about the Roma. Practically nothing about the genocide of the Roma appears in the curricula in Israel, including the many textbooks and educational programs about the Holocaust.

We estimate that on the whole, hundreds of high school and college students have been learning annually since 1995 in one way or another about the Armenian Genocide. They and their teachers became aware of the subject, at least partly, because of the public discussion about the program and the Armenian Genocide in general.

In education, as in other domains and maybe even more so, personal attitudes, decisions, and actions are very significant. A lot depends upon the human beings who react differently in the same situation.

### *To Know or Not To Know?*

Through the controversy about the programs another issue was raised: some historians and educators said that the topic of the genocide should not be taught as a separate subject. They claimed that high school students have to learn about the Armenian Genocide (most of them do not use the term "genocide" but "massacre," "tragedy," and so on...) in the framework of their learning about World War I, and about the Roma in the framework of their studies regarding World War II. Some of the educators are hesitant even about teaching the genocide of the Roma in the framework of the Holocaust. It goes along with the fact that all the non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime are either not

mentioned at all, or mentioned only slightly in the Israeli curricula. They are sometimes defined the “other victims”—a problematic definition in some aspects: “others” for whom? Toward whom? While teaching about the Holocaust we should ask ourselves in what ways we should approach, and how much time we should dedicate to, the non-Jewish victims of the Nazi regime: Roma, homosexuals, political prisoners, Poles, Russian prisoners of war, the mentally ill, Jehovah’s Witnesses.

It is quite significant that even in such a comprehensive book as *Histories—Towards a Dialogue with the Israeli Past*, which deals with the history of teaching history in the State of Israel, and which analyzes in detail the debates over the teaching of the Holocaust, the debates over the inclusion of other genocides are almost completely absent. There is one sentence about the Armenians (the authors use the term “Armenian Holocaust”), and nothing at all about the Roma.<sup>33</sup> The presentation of any genocide in any textbook is very influential in forming attitudes and perceptions about it. It has a long-term impact on the population’s view of the subject. Textbooks in general are considered in Israel as being very influential. For example, in 2000 a public debate emerged after the decision of Education Minister Yossi Sarid to include a small number of poems by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish in the new high school literature curriculum.

What can an Israeli high school student learn about the Armenian Genocide through his regular textbooks? The answer is quite clear: practically nothing. For example, let us look at the new textbook, *Change and Progress in Israel and the Nations in the New Era*<sup>34</sup>—a history curriculum for a student in the junior and senior years of high school, which is written according to the new study program of the Ministry of Education and is used widely in Israel. In more than 300 pages there are about two-and-a-half sentences that mention the Armenian massacre—the term “genocide” is never used—therefore even as a term it is not known by many of young Israelis. The book states that the Sultan Abd Al-Hamid II was named the “Red Sultan” after his soldiers committed a horrible massacre against the Armenian population in the nineties [of the nineteenth century] (p. 123). Further on (page 126), the book refers to the Pan-Turanist policy of the Young Turks that led to the revival of Arab nationalism and to a flourishing of Turkish fanatics that caused the terrible Armenian massacres of 1909 and 1915.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising to find that Israeli students know little about other peoples' genocides. This is shown clearly in a survey that was conducted in 1996 about attitudes toward genocide (the first study that was conducted in Israel on this subject). The study sample consisted of 800 BA students from seven universities and colleges in Israel. The students were asked about their knowledge, feelings, and attitudes concerning genocide. Among other questions, students were asked to assess their knowledge about the Armenian Genocide. Forty-two percent answered that they did not have any knowledge, 44 percent that they had little knowledge, 13 percent that they had some knowledge, and 1 percent that they are well informed about it. Their answers about their degree of knowledge concerning the genocide of the Roma were almost the same (36 percent no knowledge, 49 percent very little knowledge, 14 percent some knowledge, and 1 percent quite a bit of knowledge).<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting to compare these answers to those of two other questions that the students were asked on whether they agree that the Armenian Genocide is irrelevant to learn about because it happened more than eighty years ago. Four percent strongly agreed, 4 percent mostly agreed, 34 percent mostly disagreed, 58 percent strongly disagreed. In another question, 56 percent thought that it is essential, and another 37 percent that it is very important that the people of the world should know and understand the Holocaust. It is of course interesting to understand why most of them do think it is important and relevant to know about the Armenian Genocide, and yet most of them do not know about it. At the same time, in another study when the students were asked about their knowledge of the Holocaust, 59 percent answered that they knew a lot, 34 percent that they knew quite a lot, 6 percent answered they knew very little, and less than 1 percent answered that they knew nothing at all. Is the Shoah the only genocide worthy of learning by the Israeli student?<sup>36</sup>

In the last six years (1996-2002) I have given this questionnaire during the first lesson of my course on genocide (an optional BA-level course), which was attended by approximately 450 students. The degree of knowledge expressed by the students over the years was practically the same: 85-90 percent said they know nothing or very little about the genocide of the Armenians. About the same figure, between 85 percent and 90 percent, said they know nothing or very little about the genocide of the Roma.

One of the achievements of the program, from my point of view, is the fact that students are shocked when they discover and internalize the fact that they actually did not know a single thing about the Armenian Genocide. Usually they are shocked and shaken more when they begin to understand, even partly, why they did not know about it. They are even more appalled when they learn about the attitude of the State of Israel towards it.

The following, from an article published in *Ha'aretz* in 1996 by Avi Antman, is a good illustration of the impact that learning about the Armenian genocide could have on young Israelis:<sup>37</sup>

Over fifteen years have passed before I had the courage to write these words. For my college graduation, my father [a Holocaust survivor] had given me a subscription to the "Sifria La'Am" (publications). The first books I received were the first and second volumes of Franz Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. This book taught me about the Armenian tragedy, made me understand the Holocaust in a meaning that went beyond the everyday clichés, and had caused an intellectual revolution within me. Later I learned that the book that had strengthened the hands of the ghetto fighters from Bialistok to Warsaw was not the Holy Bible, but this very same book.

I received my undergraduate degree in the study of the Middle East [in the modern age, at Tel Aviv University—Y.A.]. I had graduated without knowing a single thing about the holocaust of the Armenian people. Three courses I had taken during my studies dealt with the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, but all failed to mention the Armenian Genocide.

To those of you who find it difficult to understand the meaning of this "omission," it could be described in terms of omitting the Jewish Holocaust from modern European history. Above that, it could be described as omitting the Holocaust itself from modern German history.

Most high school and university students think that the Holocaust is a unique phenomenon—an attitude that is quite understandable. What is shocking is the fact that they know almost nothing about other cases of genocide. They say that the Holocaust is unique without even thinking about the fact that one can reach this conclusion only after comparing the Holocaust to other cases. Many in Israel reject even the idea of comparison.

The meaning of these findings is very clear: If an Israeli student does not learn a thing about the Armenian Genocide during his BA studies, he has no chance to learn about it in his advanced studies, be it MA or Ph.D.—no matter what subject or discipline he studies. Maybe somebody will mention it occasionally, but to the best of my knowl-

edge there is not a single course taught in the Israeli academy that deals systematically with the subject. From these students who practically know nothing or almost nothing emerge the future elite of Israeli society—the judges, the artists, the authors, the politicians, the intellectuals, the educators...

*“Awareness of World’s Suffering”: Different Attitudes*

“Our Holocaust and the Holocaust of Others” is how the Israeli writer Amos Elon titled his 1978 article concerning the controversy over the Israeli television film on the Armenian community in Old City of Jerusalem (see chapter 8). This title reflects the common attitude in Israel concerning “other” genocides, including, of course, the Armenian. This is one of the two main factors that influence Israeli attitudes toward the Armenian case. The second factor is, as mentioned, the relationship between Israel and Turkey.

These two factors influenced the different attitudes in Israel regarding teaching the Armenian Genocide. On January 15, 1995, Amnon Rubinstein, the minister of education, sent a letter to the editor of *Maariv*, titled by him or the editor “Not a Political Decision.”<sup>38</sup> This was done during the controversy around the program “Awareness of World’s Suffering.” In the letter he said, “The fact that Jews were persecuted and murdered, as no other people ever were, obliges us to be more sensitive to the suffering of others. The moral of the Holocaust is both Jewish and universal.” Rubinstein says that he is “against all the attempts to belittle the murder of European Jewry.” He admits that there are attempts to relate the Shoah with malice or in a superficial fashion. He does not say whether he includes the original program about the Armenian Genocide in the attempt to belittle the Holocaust but continues to say “that because of this and because of the initial harsh reaction of Yad Vashem against the program,” he asked to be informed before the final approval. According to *Ha’aretz* (December 23, 1994) in an article written by Rovik Rosenthal, Yad Vashem was against the program because it includes, so claimed by Yad Vashem, an attempt to compare or to connect the Holocaust to the Armenian Genocide.<sup>39</sup> Rubinstein is quoted in that article as saying: “I also think that the Shoah should not be compared to any other genocide and this distinction has to be clear.” Rovik Rosenthal in *Ha’aretz* adds: “In the program there is no comparison or connec-

tion to the Holocaust. The Holocaust is only mentioned in the list of cases of genocides, and even concerning this obvious reference, there was bafflement in the Ministry of Education and strange ideas came up like canceling the list or excluding the Holocaust from it in one way or another.” We should ask ourselves how we would feel if another country would strike the Holocaust from a general list of genocide cases in the twentieth century?

Yad Vashem took part in the discussion concerning the curriculum. The director of Yad Vashem rejected the idea of teaching the murder of the Armenians and the Roma in Holocaust studies. It has to be clarified that this point was not relevant to the issue, since the editor of the program emphasized in the preface of the program and in the supplementary instructive program for teachers that he never intended for it to be studied in such a framework. In the view of Avner Shalev, the chairman of the Directorate of Yad Vashem, “it is an example of conceptual confusion from the beginning.” He was afraid that the uniqueness of the Shoah could be compromised.<sup>40</sup> He opposed the program a priori, even before reading its educative rationale. Avner Shalev said that “...the Holocaust has its own uniqueness,” and “Holocaust deniers try to distort its meaning by claiming that it was just one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s outbursts of violence. Their purpose is to obliterate its unique significance.” The historian Moshe Zimmermann, in the same article in *Ha’aretz*, blamed Yad Vashem for cultivating fears against any attempt to interfere with “their monopoly” on the Holocaust.

Naturally, the Armenian community in Israel deplores the attitude of Yad Vashem:

With few exceptions there is a sad situation prevailing in Israel on the issue of the Armenian Genocide. We deplore that an institution like Yad Vashem, which is committed to uphold principles of integrity, has a negative attitude towards the Armenian Genocide.<sup>41</sup>

In another statement (“open letter to the Minister of Education Amnon Rubinstein,” April 22, 1996) the Armenian Case Committee wrote: “We regret that Yad Vashem, the national institute responsible for the memory of the Holocaust, took an indifferent attitude, not to say hostile, to the question of the Armenian Genocide.”

Yad Vashem was also involved in the discussions concerning the International Conference on Holocaust and Genocide in 1982 (see chapter 9). Another bitter discussion connected with the Armenian Geno-

cide that Yad Vashem was involved in dealt with the question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and the mention of the Armenian Genocide, in a film project about the Holocaust (see chapter 9).

Contrary to these references, Yad Vashem claimed that it did not interfere in past discussions and has officially approved the intention of the minister of education, Yossi Sarid, in April 2000, to include genocide in general, and the Armenian Genocide in particular, in the high school curriculum (Press Release of Yad Vashem, April 24, 2000).

Yet, one should not have the impression that the refusal to deal with other genocides based on the uniqueness of the Holocaust was limited only to Yad Vashem. After the first information about the new program became public, an editorial in the *Jerusalem Post* (“Teaching the Holocaust,” February 24, 1994) strongly attacked the program:

To make her [Anne Frank] just another victim of persecution is to desecrate the memory of six million. By planning to incorporate Armenian and Gypsy history [not genocide—Y.A.] into the study of the Holocaust, the Ministry of Education is committing a similar sacrilege.

And the editorial concluded:

Indeed, there is nothing in history like the Holocaust. It was not mass murder in the heat of war, nor “ethnic cleansing” nor even just genocide. It was a planned, calculated, cold-blooded attempt by one of the world’s most advanced nations to obliterate a whole people and its culture from the face of the earth. To deny its uniqueness is to deny the uniqueness of the victim—a strange undertaking indeed for Israel’s Ministry of Education.<sup>42</sup>

It is quite interesting to see, once again, how the very basic facts regarding the program were distorted, purposely or not, by its critics. There was never any intention, not to speak of a plan, to incorporate the genocides of the Armenians or the Roma into the study of the Holocaust.

This was not the only article on the issue in the *Jerusalem Post*. An interesting discussion appeared there in 1995 concerning the high school curriculum. Yitzhak Kerem, a historian of modern Greek and Ottoman history, as well as the Holocaust, published an article titled “The Armenian Catastrophe” and sub-titled “There was no Turkish plan to annihilate a people.”<sup>43</sup> Kerem supported the decision of the Education Ministry. He repeated the Turkish arguments and wrote: “Undoubtedly, there were deaths and atrocities on both sides, but calling the deaths of Armenians genocide is an exaggeration... When 700,000 Armenians were

relocated by the Turks in 1917, some 300,000 died. This was their tragedy.” After using such terms as “catastrophe,” “massacre,” and “tragedy,” Kerem concluded his article by declaring that: “One thing is clear: the Armenian massacre of 1915 cannot be equated with the Holocaust.”

In “The Armenian Holocaust,” an article published in *Ha’aretz*, Israel Charny claimed that you can not struggle against denying one genocide—the Holocaust—while supporting the denial of another.<sup>44</sup> He emphasized that in the controversy concerning the rejection of “Sensitivity to World Suffering,” there was “revisionist argumentation (questioning the reality of the event) that penetrated the Israeli academy and that has unfortunately similar lines to the revisionist argumentation regarding our Holocaust.” He mentioned, apart from Kerem’s article, what had been said (according to the official protocol) by none other than the head of the History Committee of the Ministry of Education, Michel Abitbul, who “denied the basic evidence related to the Armenian Genocide.” Charny also published an article for the *Jerusalem Post* protesting against the attitude of the newspaper concerning the curriculum, saying that you can not struggle against revisionist ideas regarding the Holocaust and have revisionist ideas concerning another genocide. The editor at first refused to publish the article and finally published only part of it as a letter to the editor.<sup>45</sup>

The *Jerusalem Post* also published an article by Yosef Goell, “Let Us Erase this Shame,” which attacked the decision of the Ministry of Education and Kerem’s article. Goell wrote that there was some merit to the Committee’s criticism of the curriculum, but not for “the outright killing of an entire pilot program.”<sup>46</sup> He pointed out that:

What worries me is that a committee of learned historians, so strict in their criteria, hasn’t managed to come up with their own “historically rigorous” treatment of one of the most important historical phenomena of this century.

Even more worrisome is the remark by one professor, a committee member, which explains that failure. “The aim of the program,” he said, “is to teach sensitivity to suffering in the world. I can not accept that as being a legitimate aim of teaching history. We are not in the business of fostering sensitivities, but of teaching. Educating youngsters towards values and toward taking stands is the province of youth movements and other informal social settings.”

Perhaps the most interesting reaction in the *Jerusalem Post* to the decision of the Ministry of Education and to Kerem’s article was an



article by Raymond Tanter, “The Moral High Ground.”<sup>47</sup> Tanter, a professor of political science from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, a former member of the staff of the Reagan Administration and a visiting professor at the Hebrew University and Tel-Aviv University, wrote: “The real issue is whether priority should be given to *raison d’État* in Jerusalem’s relations with Ankara, or whether the Jewish state should retain the moral high ground.” Then he continued:

It was not an easy decision to criticize the Israeli government on matters concerning genocide. But with a record of strong support for Israel for a quarter of a century, I consider myself friendly enough to differ with the government.... As a White House staffer with the Reagan Administration, I have a long record of support for Turkey, and no history of involvement in Armenian causes. I took part in the creation of the administration’s Southwest Asian security policy and advocated high levels of assistance for Turkey.

Also, as the Pentagon’s representative to NATO arms control talks in Vienna, I stood with the Turkish ambassador at the doors of his embassy after suspected Armenian terrorists machine-gunned the entrance, even though the ambassador had warned that this was dangerous. But I stood with my Turkish companion because, as an emissary of the U.S. government, I considered it an honor to stand with an ally at a time of trial.

Washington can stand with Ankara on NATO issues and acknowledge the Armenian Genocide. Similarly Jerusalem can maintain good relations with Ankara and recognize the Armenian Genocide. The decision about teaching it to high-school pupils should be reconsidered.

The editor, it should be mentioned, took out the last sentence of Tanter: “The moral ground is the only place to stand on this issue. If not the Jews, who?”<sup>48</sup>

Kerem did not give up. In a letter to the editor he attacked Tanter and Auran, saying that the five letters of Morgenthau’s (the American ambassador who struggled for the Armenians in Turkey during the genocide) published in the curriculum “are forged and the real letters appear in the book of the Princeton scholar Dr. Heath Lowry, entitled, *The Story Behind Ambassador Morgenthau*.”<sup>49</sup> Kerem, as well as some other Israeli academics (see chapter 9), repeat Turkish publications that claim Henry Morgenthau’s diaries and letters were forged.

Kerem repeated other denial arguments and raised another “argument” related to the Holocaust: “When Tanter and numerous other academics learn about the active role of Armenians from Germany, Greece and the Caucasus in Nazi war crimes involving the murders of

hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Shoah, they will look at the Armenian question differently and much more critically when their enthusiasm leads them to freely coining it as a genocide.” Kerem is not the only Israeli academic to raise this claim, as we will see in chapter 9.

A relatively moderate questioning of the Armenian Genocide was made by journalist Dan Margalit, of *Ha'aretz*, in his article “A Cultural War Over the Shoah.”<sup>50</sup> Margalit wrote:

The Holocaust is primarily Jewish. Any historiography or journalistic attempt to appropriate it for universalistic or humanistic purposes (correct as they may be) is meant to blur this fact. This attempt is not the result of innocent academic study. It holds a problematic national and political message in the present and in the future. Post-Zionist writers, who deal with politics no less than the reconstruction of the past, work to blur the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a trauma of the Jewish people by affiliating it with other wrong doings. They tend to mention it in affiliation with the Armenian massacre of 1915. [The authors of the program are not Post-Zionists—Y.A.] This is an illusion. For every Armenian that wanted to show loyalty to his country and join the Turkish army during the First World War was accepted with open arms. [This is a misrepresentation of the facts. Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army were disarmed at the beginning of the war and used only for heavy labor, not combat. Those who did not perish during this strenuous labor were usually shot by their fellow Ottoman soldiers.—Y.A.] No Jew was allowed to join the Third Reich Army during the Second World War, even not in the last battle over Berlin. The public pressure on Amnon Rubinstein, the Minister of Education, to expand the chapter regarding the Armenian massacre, is welcomed by them. This does not represent only an educational purpose. It is designed to implant an idea in the minds of students that will relate to the Holocaust monument undermining and blurring its exclusivity.

In a later article, “Recruiting holocaust Against the Holocaust” (April 27, 1995), Margalit expressed similar views, claiming that undermining the uniqueness of the Holocaust is not without contemporary meaning.<sup>51</sup> In both articles Margalit has made some basic historical mistakes using—consciously or not—Turkish argumentation. He also did not use the term “genocide,” but “massacre.”

On the other hand, some historians claimed that the program was too sensitive and too careful concerning the Shoah, and attacked the attitude that “no one has the right to touch our ‘baby’” [the Holocaust], which is manifested, according to them, in the program.

The question of the uniqueness of the Shoah, as mentioned many times before, is one factor in the complex issue of Israel's attitude towards the Armenian Genocide. If this factor could be defined as an ideological one, the other factor is purely a pragmatic one. Lurking not far from the surface of the debate about the new A.W.S. program were the relations with the Turkish government. The minister of education, Amnon Rubinstein, wrote in his letter to the editor of *Maariv* (January 1, 1995): "A high national personality [former President Ezer Weizman—Y.A.] asked me not to include the subject of the Armenian massacre because of the special framework of relations with Turkey." Rubinstein added that he did not accept this argument: "Turkey is a democratic state, important and friendly to Israel. Nevertheless, I do not see any reason why our close relations with Turkey would prevent historical discussion on the terrible massacre that was committed against the Armenian people by the Ottoman regime, which is completely different than the actual democratic regime."<sup>52</sup> Yet, even in such a letter we note that Rubinstein never used the term "Armenian Genocide" but "massacre," "murder," and "tragedy."

In an article published in *Ha'aretz*, "The Holocaust Is Only Ours," Rubinstein admitted that there were some inquiries regarding political sensitivities. According to journalist Rovik Rosenthal, relying on different sources, there were inquiries from the president (Ezer Weizmann) and the foreign minister (Shimon Peres) regarding this subject. Rubinstein said, "I rejected these inquiries." The president's office chose not to react, and the foreign minister's spokesman denied that there was an inquiry at all.<sup>53</sup>

On an official visit to Ankara in May 1995, the former deputy foreign minister, Yossi Beilin, was asked by the Turks about teaching the so-called Armenian Genocide, and if the subject is included in the Israeli curriculum. Yossi Beilin answered the Turkish Foreign Minister diplomatically. His reply was, according to the political writer of *Ha'aretz*, Aluf Ben (February 5, 1995): "We teach History in our schools. What happened is part of history, and it is impossible to avoid it. We do not teach propaganda of any side and we are definitely aware of the Turkish position." It is significant to recall that a year before, Yossi Beilin declared in the Knesset on April 24, 1994, "what happened to the Armenians was not 'civil war.' It was not war. It was most certainly massacre and genocide."<sup>54</sup>

We have to ask ourselves what are the implications of the involvement of the Turkish government in the matter of teaching the Armenian Genocide. As we can see, the new curriculum has be-

come an international and political issue. It turned into an even bigger issue especially after the declaration of Minister of Education Yossi Sarid on April 24, 2000 regarding his intention to include the Armenian Genocide in the high school curriculum (see chapter 7).

Let us sum up who were the other people or institutions that were involved in the debate over the curriculum, and who avoided it. The Israeli political elite was not involved in the discussion. The issue was not discussed in the Israeli Parliament or its committee of education. Probably, the fact that the minister of education was a left-wing party member and had a liberal record influenced this inaction one way or the other. Eventually some members of the Knesset tried to interfere, but not publicly. One exception was the activity of the minister of absorption, Yair Zaban, who publicly criticized the decision of his colleague (Zaban and Rubinstein belong to the same party—Meretz).

The media, on the other hand, dealt relatively frequently with the discussions about the program. As we will see, the first long item on national TV (IBA) concerning the Armenian Genocide was related to the debate, and was aired on the Friday evening news program on April 22, 1994. After this report the issue of Israel's attitude towards the Armenian Genocide was raised even in the Israeli Parliament—but not in its educational aspect. Many articles and reports appeared in newspapers and many radio stations also dealt with the subject—in general they criticized the decision of the Ministry of Education.

The academically independent Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem organized a conference regarding the question of teaching the Armenian Genocide in Israel. A previous conference, which was supposed to take place at the Van Leer Institute in 1990, commemorating seventy-five years since the Armenian Genocide, had been canceled, probably due to some degree of governmental pressure. As we have seen, some individual scholars from the academy took a public position against the decision of the Ministry of Education. Some sent letters to the minister and some sent letters to the editor of the program.

The small Armenian community in Israel (the great majority live in the Armenian quarter in the old city of Jerusalem) was very hesitant during the earlier debates concerning Israel's attitude towards the Armenian Genocide. This time, they publicly proclaimed their criticism. During the years 1994-1997, Israeli Armenians demonstrated four times against the Israeli attitude toward their genocide in the Israeli (western) part of Jerusalem,

and another time in Tel Aviv. Perhaps the significance of the educational sphere influenced their behavior. The fact that Jewish-Israeli citizens struggled for this issue encouraged them to express their attitudes and feelings and even to actually protest. But we have to keep in mind that the Armenian community in Israel is extremely small and has no political influence. The power of the Armenian lobby in comparison to the Turkish lobby (inside and outside Israel) is practically, as mentioned, non-existent. In the struggle between “sensitivity to the world’s suffering” versus “political sensitivities,” the “political sensitivities” certainly have the upper hand.

### **Alternative Holocaust Memorial Ceremonies in Israel**

The Holocaust is not only taught in the Israeli educational system; it is also memorialized there. The Holocaust ceremonies and the memorial ceremonies for the victims of Israel’s wars, as we have seen, have had a very great impact upon young Israelis over the years. The Israeli Holocaust memory and the Holocaust ceremonies are practically exclusive—only Jewish victims are memorialized and mentioned. It is, therefore, very relevant to mention some alternative Holocaust memorials, where efforts to remember non-Jewish victims were made.

#### *(a) An Alternative Holocaust Ceremony*

Another debate in the educational sphere concerned the Holocaust Memorial Day of 1995 at the Kedema School. This school was established in 1994 in the Hatikva working class neighborhood of southern Tel-Aviv, as a project led by a group of radical Mizrahim (oriental, or Sephardic Jews, originating from Arab countries). Its aim was to enable Mizrahi youth to complete academic high school while cultivating their cultural identity and their awareness of the oppression of the Mizrahim. The debate over the Holocaust Memorial Day at Kedema had components that were related to inter-ethnic relations in Israel. That is the tension between what is considered the hegemonic Ashkenazi Israeli elite (originating from European countries) and the challenge—others would say the threat—that Kedema represented to the educational and political establishment. (The Kedema School in Tel-Aviv was closed in 1999, but another Kedema School continues to function successfully in Jerusalem).<sup>55</sup>

On the eve of the Holocaust Memorial Day of 1995, it was decided at Kedema High School in Tel Aviv to move beyond the customary ceremony and to emphasize the issues of racism, human suffering, and the universal lesson of the Holocaust. To that end, a seventh ceremonial torch was added to the six ceremonial torches, symbolizing the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

A text written by the principal of Kedema, Sami S. Chetrith, was read out by a Holocaust survivor and a seventh ceremonial torch was lit, in memory of other groups and nations who had been murdered:

We, Jews of the third generation since the nation's liberation and independence, with great reverence, wish to share the fire of the torches in memory of the six million Jews, who perished in the Nazi Holocaust, with an additional torch, a seventh one, to be displayed for the entire world to see.

We have the tragic privilege of standing here to remember and to forewarn: no nation, no culture and no group of people is immune to hatred, racism, persecution or extermination. Xenophobia, persecuting and annihilating the other, is a social phenomenon, which could infect any society, at any time.

We do not intend, God forbid, to mitigate the pain of the memory of our people, nor do we wish to compare one Holocaust to another.

Our only wish is to remind all human beings that persecution and extermination of the other is a man-made monster, created by the hands and minds of human beings, as other nations, races and members of different religions and ethnic groups have learned throughout the history of mankind. We must remember that only Man can overcome this terrible monster. We, the offspring of the survivors of the most terrible catastrophe of all, today, standing here with heads held on high, pray for peace and fraternity between nations, religions, races and cultures.

The news report about the unusual format of the ceremony at Kedema School brought strong and contradictory reactions in its wake. The right-wing Beitar Youth Movement held a demonstration in front of the school on Holocaust Memorial Day, to protest against what they saw as the undermining of the unique Jewish character of the Holocaust.<sup>56</sup>

Member of Knesset (who later became a minister, and is currently minister of education in Sharon's government) Limor Livnat (Likud) criticized the school by claiming that, "We Jews have one day a year in which we can identify with the people who were victimized, just because they were Jews, and that day has to be unique." Livnat had emphasized the National-Zionist context of the Holocaust Memorial Day, and thus went on to claim that "the principal of Kedema wanted to

turn the Israeli Memorial Day into something universal. It is all an attempt to de-Zionize the state, an attempt to distort and falsify anything connected with Judaism or Zionism." In her opinion he is not worthy to be the head of an educational institution in Israel. The struggle is, according to Livnat, between attitude that sees Israel as a Jewish state and attitude that sees it as a state of all its citizens. "This is a Jewish state, not a Gypsy's nor an Indian state, nor a homosexual state and I am not ashamed to say it." Member of Knesset (later the speaker of the Knesset) and a survivor of the Holocaust, Dov Shilanski (Likud), also responded in similar manner, by saying: "Mentioning the calamities of others doesn't help anyone. It conveys the wrong message to the youth: 'It happened to us: it also happened to others,' whereas it happened to us because we had no land and no army of our own at that time...we are the only ones that want to be universal, to show how great our hearts are." Author Aharon Meged claimed that certain things have to be kept as a cultural asset, otherwise a nation loses its unique character.

There were others who saw in the ceremony a chance to take a fresh look at the national symbols, which, they thought, should be seen as a positive thing for itself. This attitude was characterized by the understanding of the importance of the readiness to challenge what they considered to be the ethnocentric nature of Holocaust Memorial Day and the need to introduce new contents that would imbue everybody with a feeling of belonging to an Israeli collective, a feeling that would exceed the bounds of the Jewish, National, Zionist ethos. An anonymous person who identified himself as a Holocaust survivor wrote to the principal of the school, "I congratulate you on breaking the code of silence concerning the Genocide of Armenians, Gypsies and others. The power of our outcry as Jews lies in our sensitivity about other human beings, even though they are not Jewish."<sup>57</sup> An editorial in the weekly *The Kibbutz* stated, "The principal of Kedema, Sami S. Chetrit, has done what we all never dared do. He has broken the sacred pattern that was created throughout decades of Holocaust Day ceremonies, and had the courage to give new contents to symbols that nobody dared touch."<sup>58</sup>

Due to the voices that criticized it, some parents and teachers of the school called for a meeting before Holocaust Day in 1996, to re-discuss the format of the ceremony. The principal opened the discussion by restating the intentions and educational principles behind the previous year's ceremony. He proposed continuing to regard the Ho-

locaust from a universal point of view while, at the same time, emphasizing the unique significance it had for the Jewish people. He claimed that on such a day, when all eyes were focused on the Jewish people, we, as Jews, had the rare opportunity to remind the entire world and ourselves that racism and xenophobia are man-made monsters, created by human beings.

The following discussion, however, did not focus on the significance of the Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony or its nature, but on the question of whether Kedema and its members—parents, teachers, and students—had the right to digress from the traditional State ceremony and decide for themselves on its nature. Some parents opposed any change whatsoever, among them parents who claimed that neither they nor the school had the authority to do so. These parents explained their reluctance, saying that since neither they nor their families had experienced the Holocaust, “they” should be asked, without specifying who were the “they” who had the authority to approve the change in the ceremony. Another claim was that the status of the school was, as yet, not well established and, therefore, any step that could arouse criticism or opposition should be avoided.

Holocaust Memorial Day was held two days later. In the ceremony six ceremonial torches were lit and the text that accompanied the lighting of the seventh torch in the previous year was read out. The participants were invited to light their own seventh torch, and so some of them did.

The ceremony at Kedema School in 1995 differed from the customary one only by the addition of a seventh torch. Nevertheless, it caused such strong reactions, since it dared to question the meaning of the national memory as a whole and, therefore, also challenged the essence of Israeli identity. Holocaust Commemoration Day, which comes in the midst of a sequence of national celebration and memorial days, touches the roots of the Zionist ethos and the manner in which it was institutionalized within the framework of the state.<sup>59</sup>

As has been mentioned, an important issue concerning the memory of the Holocaust is the relation and the tension between particularism versus universalism. From this point of view, Kedema’s “particularism” might in fact promote universalism.

It is significant to mention that a similar idea was supported by Rabbi Irving Greenberg. Greenberg was the director of the U.S. president’s commission created in 1979 that dealt with the characteristics of the Holocaust in American memory, including the United States Holocaust



Memorial Museum. Later he was the Council chairman of the museum. In 1979 he supported a proposal that an Armenian minister, Reverend Vartan Hartunian, deliver a prayer for the dead at the end of the ceremony of the Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust in the White House, and that an Armenian-American, Alex Manoogian, light a seventh candle to memorialize victims of all genocide around the world. “To the commission staff,” Greenberg wrote, “the seventh candle was an appropriately distinguished analogy, particularly since the end result was a seven-branched fully lit menorah (candelabrum, which is also the symbol of the State of Israel—Y.A.). However, the inclusion and associations were sharply criticized by a number of important figures in Holocaust commemoration in the State of Israel.”<sup>60</sup> The different, or rather the contradictory, attitudes towards the inclusion of the memory of other victims’ groups raise difficult questions. There are Jews—probably most Israelis—who refuse the inclusion of the memory of other victim groups, whereas others argue that this inclusion does not belittle the memory of the Jewish victims, but enlarges and gives deeper significance to it.

*(b) A Proposal for a Memorial to the Victims of Genocide*

Another unique idea in this context was proposed in Israel in 1995 by Zvika Dror, member of Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetatot (The Ghetto Fighters)—a kibbutz that was founded by Holocaust survivors, many of whom were in the underground against the Nazis—who conducted interviews and edited the volume *Dapei Eduth* [*Pages of Witness*].<sup>61</sup>

Dror proposed building in Israel a memorial to the victims of twentieth century genocides. He wrote that for us, the Jews, the Holocaust and the genocides that were committed against other peoples are not the same. Every people mourns its own victims, laments and commemorates its own relatives. The commemoration of the Jewish victims has become part of the Jewish cultural heritage. We, rightly, ask other peoples to recognize the depth of our tragedy. “But,” he wrote, “we are part of humanity. We can not be indifferent to any human suffering. When we avoid dealing—some intentionally, some because of misunderstanding, some because of simple indifference to death inflicted on other peoples—we impair the character of our own memory.” Dror suggested the creation of a memorial center and he even drew some architectural plans for it and proposed that the monument should be close to the Tel-Aviv

airport, where the specific genocides would be documented by photos, monuments, or any other means. Mentioning the dozens of acts of genocide in one place would cultivate the memory of crimes done by human beings against other innocent human beings, to protest against the evil of mankind. In this way this monument would join Jewishness and humanism. Dror mentioned the fact that Yitzhak Zuckerman (Antek), who was one of the top leaders of the Warsaw ghetto uprising and later one of the founders of Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot and the Holocaust Museum there, used to say that it is impossible to understand the Warsaw ghetto uprising without reading Franz Werfel's *The Forty Days of Mush Dagh* about the Armenians, and that the Armenian Genocide is mentioned also by the poet Yitzhak Katznelson, after whom the Museum of the Holocaust and the Uprising at the kibbutz is named.<sup>62</sup> He also mentioned the activity of a member of the Kibbutz, Holocaust survivor Miriam Novitz, on behalf of the memory of Roma victims of the Nazi regime.

In concluding, Dror writes: "For a long time I carried the idea in my heart. The debate about the curriculum's *Awareness of World's Suffering—Genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, and the fact that we are close to the end of the millennium pushed me to dare to share the idea with my friends. I hope I am not wrong in thinking that the journal of Kibbutz Lochamei Hagettaot is the best place to propose the idea."<sup>63</sup> The idea had no follow-up.

Certain significant changes have occurred over the years regarding Holocaust education in Israel. Practically no changes have occurred over the years in teaching the other genocides in general, and the Armenian one in particular, at least officially. Furthermore, the formal educational system has claimed in the past that this avoiding of other genocides is what could be defined as "innocent." Actually, after many years of struggle, which has not achieved any practical change, it is clear that the official attitude is a conscious one, which wants to insist on the uniqueness, perhaps also on the exclusivity, of the Holocaust.

The chances that there will be any changes in the official educational attitude are now more remote than ever. The fact that forces in the political system that support the humanistic approach (among others, recognition of the Armenian Genocide and teaching it) have lost their influence, and the dependency of the educational system on the political system is one of the reasons. The failure of the Israeli academy in dealing with these issues (which will be analyzed in chapter 9) is another one.

Nonetheless, private initiatives of teachers and school directors, who have decided to deal with other genocides in their schools, are encouraging. Their influence is limited, yet it is a long-term influence. Furthermore, a few achievements have been recently made. Currently, two university curricula are being written in the Open University of Israel. *The Pain of Knowledge: Teaching the Holocaust and Genocide in Israel and the World* has been taught since autumn 2001. The second, *Genocide*, is still in preparation and includes analysis and theories concerning the different aspects of the phenomenon of genocide, as well as an analysis of case studies such as the Holocaust, the genocide of the Roma, the Armenian Genocide, and the genocides in Rwanda, Tibet, and of the Native population of the Americas.

I believe that it is essential to develop a greater sensitivity among Israeli youth to the suffering of others and to strengthen universal, humanistic values, which are well grounded—I believe—in the best Jewish tradition. The Shoah constitutes an important and central component—as we have seen—in Jewish identity.

However, I argue that Israel must hope and work for finding a more suitable balance between the Zionist, Jewish, and universal lessons learned from the Holocaust. Even in teaching the Shoah and inculcating the coming generations with its memory, the basic approach has to be that the value of human life is the same for all humans, whether Jews, Roma, Armenians, or Palestinians. The way to work towards this goal is to combine basic principles that seem apparently contradictory: on one hand, emphasizing the unique historical characteristics of the Shoah and its uniqueness for us as Jews; on the other, even emphatically, relating to the catastrophes of others and to other genocides in history. There are no contradictions between these approaches; there is, in fact, an accord, a concurrence. This is the integration of the unique and the universal that we struggle to achieve.

### Notes

1. Primo Levi, *The Monkey's Wrench* (New York: Summit Books, 1986), p. 31.
2. This paragraph is based on the entry "Education about the Holocaust and Genocide," written by Samuel Totten and William R. Fernekes, *Encyclopedia of Genocide* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), edited by Israel W. Charny, pp. 194-208.

3. As of 1995, five states (California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York) have mandated the teaching of the Holocaust in their public schools. Ten other states (Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington) either recommended or encouraged their public school personnel to teach about the Holocaust. In 1995, the state of Nevada created a Council to develop resources and teacher training programs on the Holocaust. Among these states, some have either developed state guidelines (California), a curriculum on the Holocaust and/or genocide where usually the Holocaust is the major subject (Connecticut, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia), or a study guide (Georgia). Employing a different approach, Tennessee has established a Holocaust Commission, whose charge is to commemorate the Holocaust through education.
4. The book *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, edited by Wyman in 1996 (op. cit.) enables us to examine this subject in a comparative perspective.
5. Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy* (Paris: Seuil, 1990).
6. See H el ene Strap elias, "Quelle place pour le g enocide des Arm eniens dans les livres d'enseignement secondaire," *L'actualit e du G enocide des Arm eniens*, (Paris: Edipol, 1999), pp. 353-360.
7. Illan Gur-Ze'ev, "The Morality of Acknowledging/Not Acknowledging the Others' Holocaust/Genocide," *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1998, p. 164.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
9. Dalia Ofer, 1996, op. cit., pp. 889-890.
10. The following paragraph is based mainly on Ofer, 1996, pp. 890-894, and Firer, 1989, pp. 177-187.
11. Ruth Firer, 1989, op. cit., p. 190.
12. Yad Vashem's survey, 1999, op. cit.
13. Due to my deep personal involvement in this controversy, I will try to be exceptionally careful in presenting the events in this case (Y.A.). The following paragraph is based largely on a lecture given by Dr. Ariel Hurwitz, a member of the team that was set up to draft the program, which included also Orly Tzarfati and myself.
14. Official protocol of the meeting held on November 11, 1993, the Ministry of Education, December 20, 1993.
15. The Pedagogical Secretariat, Ministry of Education, December 28, 1993.
16. Shift supervisor for history curriculum, the Pedagogical Secretariat, Ministry of Education, a letter to the history teachers, December 7, 1994.
17. Official protocol of the meeting held on January 19, 1995, the Pedagogical Secretariat, Ministry of Education.
18. For details, see Yair Auron, *The Banality of Indifference*, 2000, op. cit.
19. Yair Auron, *Awareness of World's Suffering—Genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Experimental Edition) (Tel Aviv: Kibbutzim College of Education, 1994), pp. 43-44.
20. The Armenian Case Committee, "Our response to the protocols of the meeting of the Board of the Ministry of Education of Israel which de-

cided to cancel the textbook compiled by Dr. Yair Auron,” Jerusalem, February 19, 1995.

21. “Minorities in History—the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire,” Ministry of Education (the author’s name is not indicated), Jerusalem, 1996.
22. *Ibid.*, p.1.
23. Yehuda Bauer, letter to the editor, *Ha’aretz*, March 29, 1996.
24. Daniel Zohary, letter to the editor, *Ha’aretz*, March 1, 1996.
25. Israel W. Charny, letter to the editor, *Ha’aretz*, March 8, 1996.
26. Gur Ze’ev, op. cit., pp. 168-169. See also “Between ‘Our’ Holocaust and the Holocaust of ‘Others,’” *Davar*, January 10, 1995.
27. Ran Melamed, “Two Educational Programs,” *Davar Sheni*, February 29, 1996.
28. Liora Eren Frucht, “A Tragedy Offstage No More,” *Jerusalem Post*, May 12, 2000.
29. Orit Shimoni, letter to the author, May 29, 2000.
30. Ramat Hefer Regional High School, letter to the minister of education, December 25, 1995.
31. Roy Felechner, “A teaching program, which was rejected by the Ministry of Education, will be taught in Denmark High-School,” *Kol Ha’ir*, September 12, 1997.
32. Summary of the activities regarding the Armenian Genocide in the Experimental school in Jerusalem, Gideon Lipshitz, Hava Root, Jerusalem, June 1, 2000.
33. Eyal Naveh, Esther Yogev, *Histories—Towards a Dialogue with the Israeli Past* (Tel-Aviv: Babel, 2002), p. 137. They write that the minister of education rejected a program that proposed to also teach the Armenian Holocaust in the framework of genocide studies.
34. Moshe Bar-Hillel, *Change and Progress in Israel and the Nations in the New Era* (Tel Aviv: Laor, 1998).
35. Yair Auron, unpublished survey about the attitudes of Israeli students towards other people’s genocides.
36. Yair Auron, 1993, op. cit., pp. 113-117.
37. Avi Antman, “Who Remembers Today the Annihilation of the Armenians,” *Ha’aretz*, March 11, 1996.
38. Amnon Rubinstein, letter to the editor, *Maariv*, January 15, 1995. Maybe it was a reaction to his critics from some intellectuals. See for example, Adi Ophir, “As-tu Amnon Rubinstein,” *Globus*, December 30, 1994. Ophir initiated a letter, sent by him and three other academics, urging Rubinstein not to reject the study program.
39. Rovik Rosenthal, “The Holocaust Is Only Ours,” *Ha’aretz*, December 23, 1994.
40. Or Kasti, “The Director of Yad Vashem spoke against the intention to relate to the murderer of the Armenians and the Gypsies in the Holocaust studies,” *Ha’aretz*, February 23, 1994 and *Al Hamishmar*, February 24, 1994.
41. The Armenian Case Committee, “Our response to the protocols....” Jerusalem, February 19, 1995.

42. "Teaching the Holocaust," *Jerusalem Post*, February 24, 1994.
43. Yitzchak Kerem, "The Armenian Catastrophe," *Jerusalem Post*, February 22, 1995.
44. Israel Charny, "The Armenian Holocaust," *Ha'aretz*, March 23, 1995.
45. Israel Charny, letter to the editor, "Revisionist Articles," *Jerusalem Post*, March 30, 1995 and private archive.
46. Yosef Goel, "Let Us Erase This Shame," *Jerusalem Post*, March 10, 1995.
47. Raymond Tanter, "The Moral High Ground," *Jerusalem Post*, April 24, 1995.
48. Private archive.
49. Yitzchak Kerem, "The Armenian Question," letter to the editor, *Jerusalem Post*, May 18, 1995.
50. Dan Margalit, "A Cultural War Over the Shoah," *Ha'aretz*, April 16, 1995.
51. Dan Margalit, "Recruiting holocaust Against the Holocaust," *Ha'aretz*, April 27, 1995.
52. Amnon Rubinstein, letter to the editor, *Maariv*, January 15, 1995.
53. Rovik Rosenthal, "The Holocaust Is Only Ours," *Ha'aretz*, December 23, 1995.
54. The wire services of United Press International and the Associated Press announced that because of Beilin's declaration, "Israel issued its first official condemnation of the Turkish genocide of the Armenians, ending a tradition of silence to appease its regional ally, Turkey." This interpretation, as mentioned, is regretfully an exaggeration, although Beilin's declaration was an important one. Beilin was the second Israeli minister (the first was Yossi Sarid) who defined, in April 2000, what happened to the Armenians as a genocide.
55. This paragraph is based on the article by Tamar Barkay and Gal Levy, "The Kedema School," *The News from Within*, Vol. XV, No. 6, June 1999, pp. 26-32. Further reference material can be found at *Fifty to Forty-Eight: Critical Moments in the History of Israel* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1999), pp. 433-440 (Hebrew), and "Holocaust Memorial Day in Advanced Eyes," *Politica*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, No. 1 1998, pp. 27-46, (Hebrew), both written by the same authors. The aspects of the inter-ethnic relations in this debate are beyond the scope of our study here. Also see Ran Raznik, "Holocaust Memorial Day in 'Kedema'—not only for Jews," *Ha'ir*, April 20, 1995.
56. "Holocaust against Holocaust," *Ha'ir*, April 28, 1995. All quotations in this paragraph are taken from the last article.
57. The school's archive.
58. Orah Armoni, *The Kibbutz*, April 27, 1995.
59. Avner Ben Amos, Illana Bet-El (op. cit.), 1998, pp. 457-479.
60. See Edward T. Linenthal, op. cit., pp. 230 and 311, based on an interview with Greenberg, as well as Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays* (New York: Summit Books, 1998), p. 343. Greenberg supported the inclusion of representation of the Armenian Genocide in the Museum.

On March 8, 1979, he wrote to Dr. Dicran Berberian, the executive director of the Armenian Assembly, "I know that Jews and Armenians unfortunately share in common the experience of being the victims of genocide."

61. Zvika Dror, *Dapei Edut—Pages of Testimony: 96 Members of Kibbutz Lochamei Hageittaot Tell Their Story* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1984).
62. See in details, Yair Auron, 2000, op. cit., pp. 304-305.
63. Zvika Dror, "To the Memory of the victims of Genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *Dapim—Journal of Kibbutz Lochamei Hageittaot*, January 6, 1995. He raised the idea again in 2001.

## **A Moralistic-Humanistic Attitude: Sarid's Statement, 2000**

*I join you, members of the Armenian community, on your Memorial Day, as you mark the eighty-fifth anniversary of your genocide. I am here, with you, as a human being, as a Jew, as an Israeli, and as education minister of the State of Israel.*  
—Israeli Minister of Education, Yossi Sarid, April 24, 2000

During the debate in 1989 over the involvement of the State of Israel in the controversy regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide that was taking place in the American Congress, Yossi Sarid, then member of the Knesset, criticized Israeli support of the Turkish government. The Turks had set out to prevent a law that would set a day of commemoration in the United States for the victims of the Armenian Genocide. During a debate in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Knesset, Sarid stated that the Jewish people, who had endured a terrible Holocaust, were the last people who ought to sanction the denial of the Holocaust of another nation, no matter what the momentary considerations might be (*Ha'aretz*, October 19, 1989).

So it was natural, after the victory of Ehud Barak (Labor) in the 1999 election, and the nomination of Yossi Sarid as minister of education, to expect changes in the field of education, including the hope that a step would be taken with regard to recognizing the Armenian Genocide. And indeed, in September 1999, as minister of education, he told a journalist that “the curriculum prepared by Yair Auron will be reexamined.”<sup>1</sup>

On the same occasion, the inspector of history teaching in the Ministry of Education, Michael Yaron, told a journalist that Auron's curricu-



lum was not authorized due to its emphases (meaning that the curriculum was pro-Armenian—Y.A.). He stated that a new curriculum had been prepared by the Ministry of Education (the Department of Curriculum Planning) and was waiting for approval. (This was most likely a revised edition of “Minorities in History” that was being prepared, after the criticisms of the first draft of the curriculum; see details in the last chapter—Y.A.) He declared that he hoped that the book would reach schools in the near future. It was practically impossible then, and after the declaration made by Sarid in April 2000, to get more precise information regarding this new curriculum.

In February 2000, I wrote a letter to the minister of education and asked for a meeting regarding the issue. I remarked at the time, “If you do not make progress regarding the teaching of the Armenian genocide, who will?”<sup>2</sup> Sarid probably knew that reviving the curriculum would be a long process and that there might be obstacles laid down by officials in the Ministry who were already opposed to it being taught in Israeli schools. Yet he personally supported the idea of visiting the Armenian Quarter on Armenian Memorial Day, April 24, 2000, realizing that his visit and statement there would create a precedent. It should be said again that Sarid was not the first Israeli minister to visit the Armenian community on Memorial Day. Yair Zaban (Meretz), the minister of absorption in Rabin’s government, had previously done so on Armenian Memorial Day, April 24, 1994. However, visiting the Armenian Quarter was Sarid’s personal decision, taken without consulting anyone, and without asking the prime minister’s permission or even informing him. He probably estimated that such permission would not be granted. Sarid asked to be invited officially by the Armenian community and carefully planned his address to the Armenians, aware of every word and knowing the significance and consequences of his act. Although he did not represent the Israeli government on this occasion, his presence there was emphasized as being in his capacity as minister of education.

“I am aware of the special significance of my presence here today, along with other Israelis,” he said early in his speech. “Today, perhaps for the first time, you are less alone.” He went on to say, “I am here, with you, as a human being, as a Jew, as an Israeli, and as minister of education.” Sarid noted that it was the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau Sr., a Jew, who in 1915 was among the first to tell the world about the genocide of the Armenians. He also referred to the

novel of the Jewish writer Franz Werfel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, which had influenced him and his generation.<sup>3</sup> Sarid concluded his statement with a declaration of commitment to ensure that the Armenian Genocide would be included in the Israeli secondary school history curriculum. (His full statement appears in Appendix A.)

It is interesting that in an article published by *Ha'aretz* on April 25, 2000, "A Holocaust by Any Other Name," prepared *before* Sarid's statement, journalist Lili Gallili wrote:<sup>4</sup>

The official stance of the Foreign Ministry can be summed up in three sentences: "We recognize that many Armenians died during the wars that signaled the end of the Ottoman Empire. We empathize with the victims of these events. These events that caused great suffering to the Armenian people should not be forgotten."

Gallili continued in her article: "'We have a problem,' admitted a senior official at the Foreign Ministry. 'Like other countries that have a good relationship with Turkey, we are between a rock and a hard place. One slip of the tongue, and there's scandal. Not long ago the Turks refused to approve the appointment of Prof. Ehud Toledano as Israel's Ambassador to Turkey, because in an academic publication 10 years ago he had said something derogatory about the Turks regarding this matter. As children of a holocaust that the world recognizes, it is especially difficult for us. Every time the Armenian issue is discussed, we have to think twice what name to give it. The Turks complain against anyone who mentions "Armenian Genocide," so our stand is that we "recognize the suffering of the Armenians," and try to evade the historical circumstances and the guilty party.'"

Sarid's speech—which practically described the very attitude the journalist was criticizing—received much attention in the Israeli and world press and was quoted in many countries. At first there was no official protest by the government, which usually acted in support of Turkish opinion. Even the greatest opponents to the inclusion of the Armenian Genocide in the Israeli curriculum were silent this time, as if they wanted to be aligned with the new policy. A good example of this was the fact that Dr. Alon Liel, the former Israeli ambassador to Turkey (who had no official responsibility at the time of the statement), did not express any criticism regarding Sarid's statement when he was interviewed on the Israeli First TV channel on the day of the statement. However, some months later, as a high Israeli official this time, undersecretary of the

foreign affairs minister, later becoming secretary general of the Ministry, he was quoted in *The Turkish Daily News* (October 26, 2000) as saying, “Our government policy is that we should refrain from making these kinds of statements. These topics should not be for politicians to comment on, but for academics.” Liel added that Yossi Sarid, who made one of the statements, was no longer a Cabinet member after the Meretz Party left Barak’s government and supported it from the outside. It was obvious that Sarid’s attitudes were not in accord with the official policy of the State of Israel.

Very significant was the reaction of Yad Vashem. A press release published the same day Sarid’s statement was made stated that Yad Vashem would like to clarify that it has never expressed any objection to studying the Armenian Genocide in the Israeli educational system. “This is a false conception with no factual basis that serves the motives of the persons who instigated this rumor.” Moreover, Yad Vashem wanted to clarify that it “supports the studying of the subject of the Armenian Genocide in schools and does not believe that this may cause damage to the studying of the history of the Holocaust—on the contrary.”<sup>5</sup> It is significant to note that Professor Shevach Weiss, Yad Vashem’s new chairman of the Council, a survivor of the Holocaust and former chairman of the Knesset, a known supporter of the Armenian agenda, supported Sarid’s statement publicly on the Israeli First TV channel. It was he who also signed the appeal of members of the Knesset and intellectuals in 1989 demanding that the film *An Armenian Journey* be aired on Israeli television (see chapter 8). He also stated several times publicly that Jews, as victims of the Holocaust, have a special obligation towards the suffering of others and have to protest against evils committed by human beings.

Is the sudden change in the attitude of Yad Vashem related to the clearly positive attitude of the minister of education? Apart from the personal attitude of Professor Weiss, it should be noted that Yad Vashem works closely and is supported financially by the Ministry of Education. Moreover, the general director of the Ministry is a member of the Yad Vashem Directorate. In political and academic circles, many were indifferent to Sarid’s views, and others preferred not to speak against him, even though they in fact supported—directly or indirectly, implicitly or explicitly—another point of view. With cynicism and opportunism, they probably thought that it was better not to “step out of line.”

An analogous situation took place in France on May 29, 1998. Then, the French Chamber of Deputies (the lower but more important house)

decided that France would officially recognize the Armenian Genocide. This resolution, voted upon unanimously, and considered an historic one, was achieved after years of effort. When it became clear that the resolution was to be accepted, nobody wanted to be remembered as the one who had been against it. Nevertheless, Turkish pressures, which were followed by pressure from the leaders of the French political parties in power, contributed to a delay of more than two-and-a-half years in the formal procedures. The French Senate approved the resolution on November 7, 2000, and the French Chamber of Deputies approved it definitively one month later, on January 18, 2001.

Not all Israelis were indifferent to Sarid's statement or supported it. In the popular radio program "Talks with Listeners" that dealt with the issue, speakers criticized Sarid's statement, advancing arguments such as: Sarid was right but not clever, we have to protect our interests with Turkey, and there were other tragedies to peoples other than the Armenians. Other speakers repeated the need to emphasize the uniqueness and the totality of the Holocaust.

The religious newspaper *Ha'modia* criticized Sarid's statement for being populist and not representative of any official or unofficial stand (November 7, 2000).

The Jewish-Turkish Immigrants Organization in Israel and Turkish-Jews were deeply involved in these debates, as they had been in previous ones, protesting this time against the "one-sided statement," and warning of the danger for the well-being of thousands of Jews living in Turkey today. They claimed that the declaration could be used as a weapon by Turkish extreme fundamentalists against the Jewish community in Turkey. They also mentioned the humane and tolerant treatment of Turkey towards its Jewish minority for 500 years following the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century. They protested against the efforts of the international Armenian community to compare the Armenian massacre to the Jewish Holocaust. The spokesman of the Turkish-Jews in Israel was quoted as saying:

This tragic event does not resemble the Holocaust... As spokesman of 120,000 Turkish Jews, I think that the Minister of Education should not take a partisan attitude in a painful and tragic event, against the attitude of the Israeli government."<sup>6</sup>

Another claim was that "we can not, and probably never will know the real truth."<sup>7</sup> A further argument was raised by a history teacher,

Gabriel Knold, with forty years of experience in a respected high school, who claimed that before adding the Armenian Genocide to the curriculum, the Ministry of Education has to deal with our own history and to check whether our students know about restrictions, massacres, and pogroms in Jewish history, and how much they are being dealt with in the Israeli curriculum.<sup>8</sup>

It was two extreme right-wing activists, Aliakim Ha'etzni and Ze'ev Galili, related to the settler's faction in the occupied territories, who had the most hostile reaction. In both their articles there are references to political and ideological inter-Israeli conflicts, and a clear disagreement and even personal hostility towards Sarid. Aliakim Ha'etzni, a former member of Knesset for "Hatechia" ("Renaissance"), an extreme right-wing party, titled his article "Only the Holocaust."<sup>9</sup> The article by Ze'ev Galili is subtitled "Between Massacre and Holocaust."<sup>10</sup>

Both writers blamed Sarid for using the term "Armenian Holocaust," and used this term in quotation marks to emphasize that in their opinion it is an alleged holocaust. Galili wrote clearly that in his opinion Sarid's statement was at once infuriating and also foolish and irresponsible, because he labeled the terrible massacre that was committed against the Armenians in 1915 "Holocaust." Ha'etzni and Galili emphasized the uniqueness of the Holocaust. "Nothing in history resembles our Holocaust," wrote Galili. Ha'etzni also blamed Sarid, though indirectly, in the denial of the Holocaust, an act that is considered a crime in Israel, according to a 1986 law. Galili made a distinction between the terms "massacre" and "Holocaust" without mentioning at all the term "genocide." Ha'etzni did define the term but clearly stated that "the atrocities committed against the Armenians were not genocide—a crime that is defined as the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group because of its nature." Ha'etzni said that the Jews were murdered only because they were Jews, like the Roma, but remarked that the minister of education did not demand to include the story of their destruction in the curriculum, even though they were exterminated like the Jews, only because they were Roma.

Ha'etzni claimed that Sarid had to be relieved from his post by the prime minister because of his speech:

This will help to correct our relationship with Turkey, which was damaged severely, and also stop the negation of the Shoah by putting it in the same line with massacres that human history is full of. If the Holocaust does not

differ in its essence from the Armenian massacre, it will in the near future stand in the same line with the Nakeba. [This term, in Arabic, is used to define the tragedy of the Palestinians in 1948, meaning disaster, tragedy, catastrophe.—Y.A.]

By mentioning the Nakeba in this context Ha'etzni touched on an extremely sensitive, painful, and explosive issue regarding the self-image of the Jewish-Israelis and their relationship with the Palestinians. Both sides see themselves as victims. There are Palestinians who think of their tragedy of 1948, the Nakeba, as a genocide, or even Holocaust, terms that the absolute majority of Israelis—including myself—cannot accept in this regard. Both articles by Ha'etzni and Galili commented on the relationship between Israel and Turkey and their respective interests. Galili raised the question of why Israel does not deal with other genocides that have been and are being committed with the same eagerness as it deals with the Armenian one: "The relationship with Turkey is a strategic base for our existence...Turkey's enemies are our enemies, its friends—our friends." For Ha'etzni, there are several historical points that were missed in the public discourse following Sarid's speech: the alliance between the Armenians and the Russians, the enemy of Turkey; Armenians were evacuated from areas where they endangered the security of Turkey during the war; the trials in Malta against the perpetrators of the massacre. He concluded his article by saying: "The Turkish argument was not even heard in Israel. Nobody tried to contradict these claims, and the false allegations by the Israeli minister were accepted without any reservations, as if it were part of the official policy of Israel. The media practically behaved as Sarid's spokesman." Galili remarked that anyone can read *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, which was, in fact, read in the past by many youngsters. He claimed that there are many other books [indeed, but not in Hebrew—Y.A.], as well as research and information on the Internet regarding the Armenian genocide, but he also stated, "Before learning about the Armenian massacre it is better to learn something about our Holocaust, about the wars of Israel and the culture of Israel. Even learning an additional chapter from the Bible will not hurt."

### **Terminology—Some Clarifications**

- Sarid never used the term "Holocaust" but rather the term "genocide," both in Hebrew and in English, in connection with the Armenians. On the con-

trary, Sarid even drew out the difference between Holocaust (Shoah) and genocide, when speaking of those Jews, victims of the Shoah, who joined the members of the Armenians community, on their Memorial Day, as they marked the eighty-fifth anniversary of their genocide.

- It is correct though, that the term “Holocaust” or “Armenian Holocaust” was sometimes used in the Israeli media to define the Armenian tragedy. For example, in Tom Segev’s article in *Ha’arets*, entitled “The Armenians Enter the Curriculum—Historical Justice to Another Holocaust,”<sup>11</sup> Segev used the term “Holocaust” purposefully throughout the article. Other journalists also used this term. This is clear from the title of a report in *Maariv*, “Crisis with Turkey because of Sarid’s Decision to Teach the Armenian Holocaust,”<sup>12</sup> or the title of the news article in *Yediot Aharonot*, “Sarid: I Will Recommend Teaching About the Holocaust of the Armenian People.”<sup>13</sup> The same term, in “The Holocaust of the Armenian People,” was used in the news of the Army Radio Station (“Gali Tzahal”) on April 27, 2000. It is likely that some of the journalists were not aware of the significance of the terms, and probably did not know about the heated discussions, in Israel and around the world, concerning the use of the terms Holocaust and genocide and the differences between them.<sup>14</sup>
- The curriculum, “Sensitivity to the World’s Suffering,” dealt extensively with the genocide of the Roma. Sarid himself insisted that he wanted to see “a main chapter on genocide, this huge and inhumane atrocity” in the Israeli curriculum. He also stressed the value of human life, no matter whose—Jewish, Arab, Armenian, Roma, Bosnian, Albanian, or Rwandan—and said, “I want this lofty message to be imparted to all our students in our school history curriculum.” Therefore, the accusation that Sarid wanted to avoid dealing with the genocide of the Roma is incorrect.
- The historical points Ha’etzni raised are hotly contested. Others argue the following: The Armenians massacred in Turkey had nothing to do with those involved with the Russians. The Armenians were deported on death marches throughout Turkey, not only from the war zones. The trials in Malta never took place for political reasons, so they could not have exonerated those being held there for capital crimes.

### **The Public Effect of Sarid’s Statement**

The hostile views against Sarid’s statement were few but extreme. It should be noted, however, that the claims they raised were accepted—although in a less extreme way—by many, and particularly by the mainstream of Israeli society.

Yet, supporters of the Armenian point of view appreciated Sarid’s speech. One clear public expression of this support was published in *Ha’arets*. Tom Segev (*Ha’arets*, April 28, 2000) wrote there that Sarid had “made history.” For Segev, it was a clear political decision, like

Sarid's previous decision some months before to teach the works of the Palestinian poet Muhammad Darwish. Sarid had decided that some of Darwish's poems would be studied in high school classes, and many criticized his decision. Segev hoped that Sarid's decision would lead also to a more humanistic attitude in teaching the Holocaust. He noted that we usually do not mention mentally ill people, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, and Roma who were also murdered by the Nazis.<sup>15</sup>

A *Ha'aretz* editorial (April 27, 2000) carried a very clear title, "The Need to Learn and to Remember," and stated that:

Israel's stuttering official position about the genocide of the Armenian people rests upon the mistaken assumption that there is an irresolvable contradiction between political interests and a moral stance.

The editorial claimed that

the problem isn't the lobbying pressure exerted by Turkey: instead, the problem is that Israel submits to it. Israel's position appears particularly problematic when it is examined in light of the campaigns waged by the Jewish people to counter renewed trends of Holocaust denial, efforts which peaked recently in the libel trial involving David Irving.

It went on to say that

one doesn't need to ponder similarities and differences in the fates of the two peoples to understand that Israel's waffling about Armenian history weakens the moral cogency borne by campaigns against Holocaust denial, as well as efforts to educate about the lessons of the Holocaust.

Israel's fuzzily obscure official statements expressing "regret about the deaths of many Armenians in wars which accompanied the end of the Ottoman Empire," and declarations that overlook the circumstances of these deaths, erode its moral right to demand that the world make sure that the Jewish Holocaust is never forgotten. And cautious Israeli formulations about the "massacre" of Armenians do little to improve Israel's moral position. "Massacre" means what happened at Kafr Qasem [Israeli Arabs were killed by Israeli soldiers at the beginning of the 1956 war], or to the convoy en route to Mount Scopus [a Jewish convoy sent in the 1948 war to Mount Scopus, an isolated Jewish area that was attacked by Arabs]. In contrast, the death of one-and-a-half-million Armenians was genocide.

According to *Ha'aretz*,

Education Minister Yossi Sarid showed prudence and sensitivity when he attended a memorial service conducted by Armenians in Jerusalem, to mark



the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide. Even though he went to the commemoration without coordinating his step with the Foreign Ministry or the Prime Minister's Office, Sarid appeared as an official Israeli delegate.

The newspaper then stated that

more important than this move, Sarid has decided that the genocide perpetrated against the Armenians should be included in the school curriculum, in a unit dealing with "genocide." A preliminary draft of this unit was formulated three years ago, only to be held in abeyance due to the cautious atmosphere that has permeated this Armenian issue. Throughout the ensuing 36 months, the world witnessed more gruesome instances of genocide, a fact that confers added importance to a decision incorporating the subject for study here. Whoever turns a blind eye to historical occurrences of genocide is liable to do the same when genocide takes place in the present.

Israel missed its chance to become the first country to recognize the Armenian genocide officially. A growing cluster of nations has conferred such recognition; these include France, Belgium and Sweden. Study and remembrance of the murder of another nation must be a supreme normative priority for the people that endured the Holocaust, and no perceived diplomatic interest should be allowed to obstruct such earnest reckoning.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Armenian and Turkish Reaction*

On April 25, 2000, the day after Sarid's statement, *Ha'aretz* quoted the minister of justice, Yossi Beilin, who in 1994, as deputy foreign minister, used the phrase "Armenian Genocide" on the Knesset podium—claiming that the massacre of the Armenians was nothing short of genocide. The Armenians pointed out that since his 1994 remarks, there has been a significant weakening of the Israeli stand, in direct relation to the deepening ties between Israel and Turkey.

On April 27, 1994, Beilin was somewhat ambiguous (see chapter 4). Now, in 2000, as mentioned in chapter 5, he was absolutely clear:

Something happened that cannot be defined except as genocide. One-and-a-half million people disappeared. It was not negligence, it was deliberate.<sup>17</sup>

Beilin had expressed his attitude before Sarid's statement, and, quite certainly, without knowledge of Sarid's intention. Both statements created concerns on the Turkish side that an official policy shift by Israel was in the making.

The Armenians were moved by Sarid's statement and praised him. The Armenian National Institute in Washington translated the speech, which they called "a powerful statement," into English. The speech was given, or quoted largely, in the Armenian media all over the world. Armenian communities worldwide, including, of course, Israel, congratulated him for his "precious decision," and his "courageous role as a human rights defender," and expressed their gratitude.<sup>18</sup>

The Turkish reaction was wholly different. At the beginning, the Turkish government did not react publicly to the statement, even though Sarid's declaration received much attention in the Turkish media. Three days after Sarid's statement, it was reported that Turkey had summoned the Israeli chargé d'affaires in Ankara, Moshe Kamhi, and demanded that Israel clarify its position, and may have even demanded an official correction to Sarid's statement (*Galei Tzahal* [the Israeli Army Radio Station], April 27, 2000). According to the Anatolia News Agency in Ankara and *Turkish Daily News* (May 3, 2000), Turkey was reassured that no change in Israeli policy on the Armenian "so-called genocide" had occurred. The Israeli ambassador, Uri Bar-Ner, said that Sarid's statement reflected the democracy in Israel, but the attitude of the government is different and clear. Diplomatic sources said that in a meeting between Ahmet Uzumcu, Turkey's ambassador to Tel Aviv, and Israeli Foreign Ministry officials, they stressed again that the statements made by Yossi Sarid, Israeli minister of education, pertaining to the so-called genocide of the Armenians were his personal views, and noted that they did not reflect official policy of the government. These officials said to the *Turkish Daily News* that Israel desired to further improve bilateral relations between the two countries. They stressed that there was no policy change whatsoever on the part of Israel, and that they would stick to their position that historians, not politicians, should discuss the issue. Speaking to the *Turkish Daily News*, an unidentified Israeli diplomat said, "It is not a matter needing an official declaration. We do not want to take a side on this issue; we leave it to the historians. The two ministers' statements are their personal opinions and they do not reflect the government's policies." This was probably a compromise offered by Israeli Foreign Minister David Levi, who understood that, in this way, the government did not have to make a statement against Sarid.<sup>19</sup> Israeli officials also pointed out that there was no change in their policy or point of view.

Nevertheless, the Turkish government was not satisfied by this response. Ankara wanted a written statement from the Israeli government. A week later, Turkish representatives avoided participating in official receptions held to celebrate the fifty-second Israeli Independence Day, and also boycotted the receptions held in Israeli embassies around the world, including the one organized by the Israeli ambassador in Ankara. According to the *Turkish Daily News*, Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit did not agree with this strong reaction, even though he was perturbed by the declarations. The Israeli tourism minister, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak (who previously had visited Ankara officially as chief-of-staff), was asked to rethink his planned visit to Turkey or to postpone it, even though he had been invited by the Turks.

On May 14, 2000 *Maariv* reported a severe deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations and a cooling down of diplomatic ties between Israel and its most important strategic allies in the region.<sup>20</sup> According to the report, Jerusalem received messages from Turkey that it would reconsider its relationship with Israel because of Sarid's statement. The report related that high-echelon political sources in Jerusalem severely criticized Sarid's behavior and the fact that he had not consulted with the government before making the speech. It also stated that Israeli security sources expressed their fears that Israeli security interests would be damaged because of this development, and that the prime minister was considering intervening and talking with the Turkish president and prime minister.

Some days later (May 18, 2000), the Israeli tourism minister began a three-day visit to Turkey. Turkish sources reported that Turkey and Israel demonstrated their will not to let the so-called Armenian genocide further harm the bond between them. Israel stressed once more that its official policy vis-à-vis the alleged Armenian genocide had not changed, and that it adheres to its position that the issue should be discussed in the realm of academia (*Xinhual General News Services*, Ankara, May 18, 2000).

This was not the last time the issue was raised. At the end of August 2000, the Israeli prime minister and minister of defense, Ehud Barak, visited Turkey to support the Israeli security industries—at stake were contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars. The Turkish and the Israeli media reported that Sarid's statement was also discussed in the meeting, claiming that Barak promised the Turks that Sarid would not return to the government soon.<sup>21</sup>

*The Results of Sarid's Statement*

There is no doubt that Yossi Sarid's speech was a courageous act that had a moral and symbolic significance. The answer to the question of whether or not it had practical effect and influence is less clear.

The controversy did result, directly or indirectly, in the publication of half- and full-page declarations in the *Jerusalem Post*, the *Jerusalem Reporter* and the *New York Times* on June 8 and 9, 2001 respectively, in which 126 Holocaust scholars from around the world "affirm the incontestable fact of the Armenian Genocide and urge Western democracies to officially recognize it as such" (see Appendix C). The declaration went on to state that the scholars ask the Western democracies to urge the Government and Parliament of Turkey to finally come to terms with a dark chapter of Ottoman-Turkish history and to recognize the Armenian Genocide. Among the distinguished names that appear in this declaration are those of Professor Yehuda Bauer and Professor Israel Charny from Israel and the Nobel Laureate for Peace, Elie Wiesel from the United States. Although the initiative for this declaration was taken at the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches, convening at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia in March 2000, the publication of the statement, especially in the *Jerusalem Post* and the *Jerusalem Report*, was directly connected to the debate in Israel. There is no doubt that Sarid's statement raised the awareness of the Israeli public on this issue.

What is the current status of the Armenian Genocide in the Israeli school curriculum? In reply to a question by Georgette Avakian, the head of the Armenian Case Committee in Israel, to the director general of the Ministry of Education, Shlomit Amichai, the chairman of the Pedagogical Secretariat, Michel Abitbul, wrote (July 31, 2000), that a comprehensive book on the Armenian genocide would be published soon by the Ministry of Education.<sup>22</sup> According to the promise of former Minister of Education Yossi Sarid, the book was to be available for history teachers who intended to teach the subject in the school year 2000-2001. Up to the time of this writing, however (Winter 2002), the book has not materialized. To the best of our knowledge, it will not materialize in the near future. After the nomination of the new minister of education in Sharon's government, Limor Livnat, the possibility of the program's realization is, in fact, close to nil.

## Notes

1. Tomer Zharchin, "Who will censor the censorship," *Ha'ir*, September 19, 1999. As mentioned before, Israeli public opinion is very sensitive and attributes a great significance to the educational curricula. Several times this has aroused heated public debates. The article deals with some curricula that were not authorized in whole or in part by the Ministry of Education.
2. Yair Auron, letter to the minister of education, February 2, 2000. On March 29, 2000 I was invited to meet him.
3. See details in Yair Auron 2000, op. cit., "The Forty Days of Musa Dagh: Symbol and Parable," pp. 293-312.
4. Lili Galili, "A Holocaust By any Other Name," *Ha'aretz*, April 25, 2000.
5. Yad Vashem, Press Release, April 24, 2000.
6. Moreno Margonto, director of the Jewish-Turkish immigrant organization, letter to the editor, *Ha'aretz*, May 1, 2000.
7. Yitzhak Althon, Istanbul, Turkey, letter to the editor, *Ha'aretz*, May 1, 2000.
8. Gabriel Knold, letter to the editor, *Ha'aretz*, May 4, 2000.
9. Eliakim Ha'etzni, "Only Holocaust, All Holocaust," *Yediot Aharonot*, May 1, 2000.
10. Ze'ev Galili, "Between Massacre and Holocaust," *Macor Rishon*, May 12, 2000.
11. Tom Segev, "The Armenians Enter the Curriculum," *Ha'aretz*, April 28, 2000.
12. Ben Caspit and Eli Kimor, "Crises with Turkey—Because of Sarid's decision to teach the Armenian Holocaust," *Maariv*, May 14, 2000.
13. Tamar Travelsy-Hadad, "Sarid: I will recommend to teach about the Holocaust of the Armenian People," *Yediot Aharonot*, April 25, 2000.
14. See, among others, the short and incomplete overview in Auron 2000, pp.13-24.
15. Tom Segev, op. cit.
16. Editorial, "The need to learn and to remember," *Ha'aretz*, April 27, 2000.
17. Lili Galili, op. cit.
18. Letters to Yossi Sarid from, among others, the Union of Armenians in Italy, Milan, May 16, 2000; from Armenian Educational and Cultural Society, Athens, May 19, 2000; from "one who lost most of my family members in 1915," May 10, 2000.
19. Uria Savit, "Foreign Games," *Ha'aretz*, August 18, 2000.
20. Ben Caspit and Eli Kimor, op. cit.
21. Daniel Ben Simon, "The beginning seemed different," *Ha'aretz*, September 1, 2000. Sarid reacted cynically, saying that it is good that there is Turkey, so I can know my position.
22. Letter of Georgette Avakian to Shlomit Amichai, July 12, 2000; letter of Michel Abitbul, July 31, 2000 (private archive).

## 8

### The Sphere of the Media

*We refuse to accept any avoidance of the Armenian Genocide in the national media.*—Petition signed by sixty-one Israeli public personalities and intellectuals, 1990

The public debate in Israel regarding the attitude towards the Armenian Genocide has several times been the focus of the media—especially television. Although there are many common characteristics between print and electronic mass media, the policy towards them is very different. The basic attitude of the state towards print media in Israel is (with certain limits) that of allowing freedom of expression and freedom of information, whereas the attitude towards electronic mass media demands that they should be limited in nature and receive authorization by law. In Israel, as in all other countries, the lesser the degree of democracy, the more the state controls its media. Yet even open and democratic regimes tend to be involved in the control of the electronic mass media.<sup>1</sup>

Although public radio was under the control of the government—until the 1990s the right of broadcasting was limited to the state or its institutions—through the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA), it had a fair amount of freedom.<sup>2</sup> The IBA monopoly ceased to exist in Israel and after the partial privatization of the electronic mass media, its influence diminished. The private “second channel” began broadcasting commercially in 1993. However, for our issue this fact had no influence at all.

The commercial channels almost never produced or broadcast any significant program about the Armenian genocide. Yet, this was not intentional, and probably happened because no one thought it was an important public issue. The First Channel—sometimes called “Israeli TV” or “National TV,” controlled by the IBA—debated numerous times about

the broadcasting of controversial internal, social, political, and security issues. The Armenian issue is considered an “external issue”; still, it is the only one of this kind that has created such a big controversy in the IBA and in the public.

### **1978—*Armenians in Jerusalem: A Film about the Armenian Community in Jerusalem***

In 1978, the Israeli Broadcasting Authority decided to produce a documentary film for television about the Armenian community in the Old City of Jerusalem. The Authority signed a contract with a private company to co-produce the film. The film script was approved, and an English-language version was planned for distribution abroad. For the production of the English-language version, Michael Arlen, an American writer of Armenian descent, was invited to Israel.<sup>3</sup> The seemingly innocent film focused on the Armenians living in Jerusalem’s Old City and included several references to the Armenian massacre during the First World War, primarily the testimony of several survivors of the genocide of 1915 who resided in Jerusalem. The film reached the final stages of production, but its screening was blocked by the Israel Broadcasting Authority, and it was never shown.

Several groups were involved in preventing the screening of the film: Turkish officials, their diplomatic mission in Israel, Turkish Jews in Turkey, activists in the Turkish Immigrants’ Society in Israel, and the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

In this controversy—as well as in all the controversies to come on this issue—the Israeli attitude was evident. It may be summed up as “our Holocaust versus the Holocausts of others.” Amos Elon, a journalist and author, published a series of articles in *Ha’aretz*. He claims:

Demonstrations of hypocrisy, opportunism and the moral trepidation within the official bureaucracy of the nation, which ceaselessly reminds the world of our Holocaust while the Holocaust of others is a subject worthy only of political exploitation.”<sup>4</sup>

With regard to a demand, which was made to delete any mention of the events of 1915 from the film, he wrote,

They [the IBA] are like a person who suggests deleting from a movie about the suffering of the Jewish People in the modern era all reference to Ger-

many, the Holocaust or even the Kishinev pogrom [committed in that Russian city in 1903].

With a certain degree of cynicism, Elon apologized to his readers for returning to this unfortunate, seemingly marginal subject: “There are those who see this as a lack of proportion: Israel is a country of one-day scandals, but what can I do, the issue will not go away.” Sharply he criticized “the cheap opportunism of hypocrisy”:

The Holocaust is the central trauma of Israeli society. We remind the world, at every opportunity, of the Holocaust of European Jewry, and warn of the indifference to the slaughter of the Christians in Lebanon (where we have a political interest). We drag every important visitor to Yad Vashem, and while he is still in shock we hand him a list of demands and requests for political and economic assistance. We are sincere in our grief over our disaster, and at the very same time opportunist in our exploitation of it.

But where is the boundary between the natural chauvinism of exploitation and the cheap opportunism of hypocrisy? What happens when the survivors of one Holocaust make political deals over the bitter memory of the survivors of another Holocaust? This is the one and only question of importance. This is the question that ought to arouse public interest. This is the question, which ought to trouble all of the serious thinkers who fill our world with lamentation and endless pondering about the meaning of the Holocaust in this generation and the next, for us and for others.

All of the great people of conscience, the very image of sorrow, who give speeches at every opportunity and travel abroad to remind the world that they are forbidden to forget, have followed the Armenian affair as though it had taken place on another planet. They were not shocked; they did not open their mouths.<sup>5</sup>

The protest did not help; governmental and IBA sources were led to understand that Jewish interests were in danger. The film was never broadcast. Even from the television archives one needs special permission from the director of television in order to watch it.<sup>6</sup> The director of the film, Amnon Rubinstein, still does not understand the reasons for the total banning of the film, which was driven, in his words, by some “strange paranoia.” Others from National Television who have seen it also fail to understand the reasons.<sup>7</sup>

### 1990—*An Armenian Journey*

*An Armenian Journey* is a film that was written, produced, and directed in 1988 by Theodore Bogosian, an Armenian-American journalist, for the Public Broadcasting System in the United States.



The film tells the story of Miriam Davis, a survivor of the Genocide, whose family perished. She talks about the death of her mother and brother and later she goes with Bogosian to the village in Eastern Turkey where she lived as a child. The film presents, among other documents, the protocols of the proceedings against the leaders of the Young Turks just after the end of World War I.

The Turks made unsuccessful efforts to prevent the screening of the film in other countries as well. In 1988, after the screening of the film on the Public Broadcasting System in the United States, the Turkish Embassy in the U.S. and Turkish-American groups protested. Complaining of “inaccuracies and gross misrepresentations,” the Turkish ambassador called the film a biased attempt “to validate the claim that Armenians were the victims of Turkish-perpetrated ‘genocide’ early this century,” and not “casualties of war,” as the Turkish government still insists (“A Disputed ‘Journey,’” *New York Times*, June 2, 1988).

The film, which had already been screened in dozens of countries, was scheduled by the authorized person in the television network to appear in April 1990 on Israeli national television. At the time the film was scheduled to be aired, the television network, without explanation, screened instead a documentary film about the life cycle of bees. There was no announcement of the cancellation of the scheduled screening of *An Armenian Journey*. The debate that followed was sharp and intense.

The public outcry against the cancellation of the screening was initiated by then Member of Knesset Yair Zaban. On May 13, 1990, a day before the meeting of the board of directors of the IBA, who had to decide whether the film would be screened or not, a petition was published, signed by sixty-one public personalities and intellectuals from all across the political spectrum, including twenty-five members of the Knesset from eight political parties, right, center, and left, six jurists, nine writers and poets, eleven academics (among them historians of the Holocaust), and two rabbis, one Orthodox and one Liberal (see the Appendix at the end of this chapter). The petition called upon the prime minister, Yitzchak Shamir, and the management of the IBA to screen the film as early as possible. “It is not the first time that a film that deals with the terrible tragedy of the Armenian people was banned from broadcasting in our country.” The petition was noteworthy and exceptional. It presented a change in the position of some historians of the Holocaust, who at this time took sides and criticized the attitude of the government over what they had not done in the controversy over the inter-

national conference in 1982 (see next chapter). Nevertheless, some of them insisted that the uniqueness of the Holocaust (“unparalleled in human history”) be mentioned. The petition recalled the Holocaust, mentioning its uniqueness as a factor, which should demand from Israel a unique sensitivity to the suffering of other people. The following words of the petition are particularly important: “Especially as members of a people which has experienced a Holocaust unparalleled in human history and which battles today against its denial, we are obliged to display special sensitivity to the tragedy of another people.”

At last, the meeting of the board of directors decided to broadcast the film (nine members were pro, five against, and four abstained). It should be noted that the members of the board of directors of the IBA are nominated according to a political division. At that time, the managing director of IBA was a member of the Likud Party, whereas the chairman of the board of directors was a member of the Labor Party. Both were nominated by the government.

Members of the board who were against broadcasting the film decided to appeal the decision. They had the right to do so, according to a law that indicates that the minister of education (at that time Prime Minister Yitzchak Shamir, who was acting also as minister of education) had to decide what to do with the appeal. If he decided to accept the appeal, he had to bring the recommendation to the government for ratification.<sup>8</sup> On August 12, 1990, Member of Knesset Yair Zaban asked the new minister of education, Zevulun Hamer, not to delay his decision, and if he decided to accept the appeal, to bring his decision to the government. He asked him not to “support the continuation of unacceptable behavior, that has continued over 12 years, and avoided showing films about the Armenian tragedy on the television of the Jewish State.”<sup>9</sup> Zaban told the minister of education that if the government decided not to show the film, he would consider turning to the superior court of appeals. To the best of our knowledge, the government never decided officially not to broadcast the film. But contrary to what the law allows, the film was not shown.

However, on June 26, 1990, the film was shown in a theater in Jerusalem. The mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, M.K. Yair Zaban, and the Armenian patriarch spoke at the screening. The event was carried out under the joint auspices of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide, directed by Israel Charney and the Lapid organization for teaching lessons on the Holocaust directed by Aryeh Barnea.

The film has not been screened on TV to this day, despite numerous requests and several changes of governments and education ministers in Israel since then.<sup>10</sup> The formal explanation presented by the chairman of the board of directors and the managing director of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, was that they had received requests not to do it from the Chief Rabbinate of Turkish Jewry, from the Association of Turkish Immigrants in Israel, and from other Turkish-Israeli immigrant groups. They claimed that screening the documentary could cause damage to or even endanger the Jews of Turkey. An additional reason was probably a fear of harming relations with Turkey, which was at the time the only Muslim state that maintained diplomatic relations with Israel. One can not assume that there was no talk of pressure originating in Turkey and the Turkish Jewish business community. Furthermore, it was claimed that deterioration in relations with Turkey might hamper the exit of Jews from other Muslim countries, apparently Iran and Syria. Officially, every alleged instance of pressure on Israel by the Turkish Government was vigorously denied. An official denial was also made of the alleged intervention of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and Prime Minister's Office.

In the year 2000, Yosef (Tommy) Lapid, now Shinui (liberal, anti-clerical) party leader and member of Knesset, admitted that as IBA director-general he had cancelled the documentary film under pressure from the former Foreign Minister Director General David Kimchi, who warned him that angering Ankara could harm efforts to help Syrian Jews escape via Turkey.<sup>11</sup> A member of the IBA board of directors who had supported cancellation of the documentary film said, "The film contains propaganda and injury to part of the public, because a Holocaust happened only to the Jewish People" (*Kol Ha'ir*, June 22, 1990). The director of the Prime Minister's Office was quoted as saying: "It is a problem of the Turkish Jews. We are not interested in the Eskimos or the Armenians, only in the Jews" (*Kol Ha'ir*, June 19, 1990; *Ha'aretz*, June 22, 1990). Member of Knesset Yair Zaban demanded that the prime minister rebuke his director for the latter's comments about the Armenians, and described the comments as "sickening." He added:

The very refusal to screen the Armenian film, when accompanied by offensive declarations such as these, helps to create the impression that the present leaders of the State of Israel condemn genocide only when it concerns the Jewish People and results in the fact that many Jews and Israelis in Israel and around the world hide their faces for shame. (*Ha'aretz*, June 26, 1990)

To all those involved, overtly and covertly, in the controversy—Jews, Turks, and Armenians—it was clear that there was special significance to the issue, which went beyond the debate over the screening of a film about the Armenian massacre in any other country. The fact that the country in question was of a people that was the victim of the Holocaust and of the unique problems which resulted came to the fore. In the course of the debate, the history of the Jews in Turkey was also raised. The Turkish people have been outstanding in their humane and tolerant treatment of their Jewish minority for 500 years following the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, “and saved masses of Jews” said a letter (May 24, 1990) to the IBA signed by the heads of three organizations that represented 120,000 Israeli citizens of Turkish descent. There were those who claimed, in this context, that not only had Turkey refused to turn its Jews over to the Nazis, it had even served as a refuge for persecuted Jews from European countries during the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup>

The Jewish-Turkish immigrant organizations in Israel essentially repeated in their letter the positions of Turkish governments ever since the genocide: there is controversy over the facts and there are contradicting versions.

We do not negate the right of the Armenian People to remember its victims in its rebellion against Ottoman rule, but any attempt to compare the Jewish Holocaust and the Armenian case is misleading in our eyes and detracts from the importance and uniqueness of the Holocaust, which befell the Jewish People solely because of racist views.

It is worth noting: not victims of *genocide* but “victims of *rebellion* against Ottoman rule,” as well as rejecting any attempt to compare the Holocaust and its victims to the Armenian case.

In a previous letter (April 26, 1988), these organizations protested against a report in the news on April 24, 1988 “concerning the Armenian massacre during World War I.” The short reportage dealt with the Armenian Memorial Day in the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. They blamed the IBA for being one-sided in favor of the Armenians.

Without historical examined facts, any one-sided view of the subject hurts the main goal of IBA: objective and factual representation of news events. It can also damage the unique and sensitive relationships between Israel and Turkey. But, above any communal and national interests, we ask the IBA to be true to its role and not to screen the film that was produced by an Armenian director.

The subject of the Holocaust was raised primarily by those who attacked the decision of the Broadcasting Authority. Those writing in the press sometimes even used the general concept of “Holocaust” outside the context of the Holocaust of the Jews in headlines and statements like “The Holocaust of Others” (*Kol Ha’ir*, April 13, 1990), “The Armenians Also Had a Holocaust” (*Davar*, April 17, 1990), “The Armenian Holocaust Will Not Be Shown on Israeli Television” (*Yediot Aharonot*, April 13, 1990), or “The Movie About the Armenian Holocaust” (*Ha’aretz*, April 27, 1990). Some articles and editorials emphasized a point made by journalist (later diplomat) Alon Pankes: “There were only two cases of genocide worthy of being called a Holocaust in terms of their demographic effect and the cultural destruction they created, the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, the mass murder and the justification of the obscenity of the event, that of the Jewish People and that of the Armenian People” (Alon Pankes, “The Armenians Also Had a Holocaust, The Forty Days of Meckel,”<sup>13</sup> *Davar*, April 17, 1990). In another article a sharp and clear statement was made: “Only two peoples can term their days of mourning with the horrifying concept ‘Holocaust’: the Jews and the Armenians” (Ephraim Sidon, “What Is Hateful To You Etc.,” *Maariv*, April 27, 1990).

The decision not to show the film was interpreted by many as a “desire to preserve the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust and the lack of desire, or inability, to accept the possibility that another people had experienced a Holocaust” (*Kol Ha’ir*, June 22, 1990).

This argument was put forward in other controversies. Several articles point out the connection between our treatment of our own Holocaust and the disregard of the Armenian Genocide: “It is worth examining and remembering these things at least until the next Holocaust Day, when the leaders of the nation and its educators once again preach the importance of the lesson and the educational message for the entire world in remembering the Holocaust” (*Kol Ha’ir*, June 22, 1990). These themes are repeated in the attacks on the decision not to show the film: “How can Israel, which is so sensitive to the Holocaust, assist in denying the Holocaust of another people?” (*Ha’aretz*, April 20, 1990).

Representatives of the Armenian community in Israel also related to the fact that the people in question had suffered from a terrible Holocaust. The spokesman of the Armenian community in Jerusalem reacted:

We are aware of the Turkish pressure on every country in the world. It is astounding that England, France, Italy, Scandinavia, and other states are not affected by the Turkish pressure, whereas in Israel, which is so sensitive to genocide and the Holocaust, they surrender to it.

The Armenians in Israel claimed:

We, the Armenian community in Israel, strongly protest the decision of the Israel Broadcasting Authority, as regards the documentary film on the Armenia Genocide. We had hoped that it would rescind its biased decision and show the film on television to the Israeli public.

In light of the above, we firmly believe that our case is just, and will therefore continue to pursue every possible means to reverse the decision.<sup>14</sup>

The Armenian Case Committee in Jerusalem reacted even more harshly:

What would happen if the authorities in France or England, for example, were to decide at the last minute to remove from the screen a film about the Holocaust of the Jews and to show in its place a film about bees and bugs?

An Armenian student sent a letter to the editor: “It is precisely the Jewish People who should display special sensitivity to the subject of the Holocaust of the Armenians, to ensure that future generations will not forget, and that the Holocaust will not recur” (*Yediot Aharonot*, May 3, 1990).

It is meaningful to note that some writers in this debate pointed out an associative connection, an analogy, or even an identity between the specific memories from both the Jewish Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide:

An Armenian survivor of Holocaust appears and sounds exactly like a Jewish survivor of Holocaust—emotional, upset, wiping away a tear, broken and weeping, chain smoking. A Holocaust is a Holocaust, even when the number of its dead is one sixth of the dead in our Holocaust. A massacre is a massacre, even if the victims are not Jews... The film is moving. The scenes of horror are familiar to us from other places, as if they had been replicated and moved to Turkey. Miriam Davis, an Armenian survivor who lives today in the United States, reconstructs the death of her mother and baby brother. We have seen this in so many films, which were produced here about the Holocaust, and no one ever thought to say that they were badly made, unworthy of being shown. (*Kol Ha'ir*, June 29, 1990)

And the next scene, a long row of corpses lying in a wide, open trench. There is a system in this trench, the bodies are parallel to one another. The

Association is with Auschwitz, the area behind the crematoria. The film returns from time to time to this allusion, Auschwitz. But *An Armenian Journey* does not manage to create identity between the Jewish and Armenian Holocausts. That is to say, the film does not infringe on the singularity and uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust. (*Yediot Aharonot*, May 11, 1990)

The Armenian survivor who endured the events of those days is described thus: “She has white hair, eyeglasses; she is interviewed in the shade of a tree; there is a sound of birds, like the Jewish survivor in [Kibbutz] Yad Mordechai, after 50 years.” (Ibid.) Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, it has to be clarified, was created by survivors of the Holocaust and named after Mordechai Anilevitch, the commander of the Jewish uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. Tom Segev titled his article on the issue in *Ha’aretz* “From That Fire,” recalling that “Pages from the Fire” also marks an association with the Jewish Holocaust.<sup>15</sup>

Another “mini-scandal” surrounding an original television creation took place in 1991. The film director, Orna Ben-Dor Niv, prepared a television docudrama, *Sarah*, the life story of Sarah Aaronsohn of NILI (a pro-British Jewish spy group that helped the British during WWI in gathering information on the Turkish army). NILI expressed an empathic identification with the Armenian tragedy. The murder of the Armenians was a central component in understanding the motives of their activity. Sarah Aaronsohn herself was deeply shocked by scenes of the massacre that she witnessed first-hand and later described to her comrades.<sup>16</sup>

Forty seconds of still photographs of the Armenian massacre were deleted from the film by the order of the director general of television, Yossef Barel. The director of the film was accused by journalists of accepting the deletion of these photos. She replied to these allegations with promises to prepare a special film about the Armenian subject in the future.

### **A Significant Change: 1994**

A significant change, a breakthrough in this respect, was created by senior television correspondent Yaakov Achimeir’s reportage in 1994. As a result of an initiative to prepare a special curriculum dealing with genocide cases in the twentieth century (mentioned above), the IBA’s prestigious weekly news program, “Yoman Hashavua” (“Calendar of the Week”), broadcast on April 22, 1994 a feature story on the Armenian massacre. The date was chosen

purposefully because of the Memorial Day of the Armenian Genocide, April 24. Attempts by the Turkish Embassy in Israel to cancel the broadcast failed. At the end the feature story, “Yoman Hashavua” conducted an interview with the Turkish ambassador in Israel, Unur Gökçe, which restated the official Turkish denials of the massacre and of Turkish responsibility for its implementation. The ambassador said, *inter alia*, “In wartime, many innocent victims fall in battle, and in war like in war.” In a diplomatic way he inquired as to why the feature had not been censored.

Both the feature and the interview aroused considerable reaction and the subject was brought before the plenum of the Knesset. A few members of the Knesset attacked the ambassador’s comments. Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin said, as mentioned:

We have never accepted the very superficial analysis that this was done during wartime. That is not war. This is definitely massacre, genocide, and we will assist in its commemoration because this is the sort of thing that the world is obliged to remember.

There were those who were angered by the interview with the Turkish ambassador and compared it, wrongly in my opinion, with granting a public stage to Holocaust deniers. In fact, the interview did not lead to a denial of the Armenian Genocide but rather to its being publicized by the deputy foreign minister. Yaakov Achimeir, the television correspondent, claimed “the interview with the Turkish ambassador caused a dramatic and historic reversal in Israel’s attitude toward the genocide of the Armenian People.”<sup>17</sup>

Turkey’s Ambassador to Israel himself protested against the broadcasting of the feature story, which was, in his view, one-sided. He claimed that the only purpose of the story was to support the Armenians and to slander the Turkish people. Further, he argued that the feature presented only one version of what he called “The Armenian tragedy,” which he claims was considered by historians to be controversial and about which one could not draw clear conclusions.<sup>18</sup>

Some weeks later, Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin presented the television correspondent with a thick file, which contained protests from members of the Jewish community in Turkey against the broadcast. The Turkish Embassy had also lodged a formal protest.<sup>19</sup> The Turkish government was furious. The Turkish foreign minister threatened Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres with the cooling of diplomatic relations.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of this episode, the strong mutual



interests of Turkey and Israel won out and the relationships between Israel and Turkey became even closer over the years.

Practically every year since 1994, the Armenian Memorial Day has been mentioned by at least one Israeli channel. In April 1997, Yaakov Achimeir, as an editor at a new weekly program on Saturday night, "News Around the World," devoted much of the first program to the issue of genocide in the modern World. The program focused on the Armenian Genocide, whose formal memorial day was close. This time there was not a single voice of protest in response to this detailed discussion of the subject.<sup>21</sup>

What can we learn from this development? First and foremost: what we are showing in our media, including the history of modern human suffering as a result of genocide in general and the Armenian one in particular, is our own issue. If that is clear to us, it probably will be clear also to the Turks, who are indeed sensitive to any mention of this shameful history in their recent past.

Secondly, changes can sometimes be achieved even by individuals who have the intellectual honesty, the devotion, and also some sense of courage to struggle against mainstream conventional attitudes and the official approach. Yaacov Achimeir is an example of an individual who took a stand, even though he belongs to "the system." He took a stand on the issue, expressed his views publicly, and tried to change the situation at the IBA, and succeeded in many regards.

The political circumstances (Rabin's Labor-Meretz government) surrounding some of the changes in the attitudes of Israelis, and perhaps also of a growing awareness of the subject, are also explanations for the change. While the Armenian Genocide is practically nonexistent in the Israeli educational curriculum, exposing ourselves to the truth by the means of the media remains almost the only other way to teach—little though that may be—about the Armenian Genocide. This event reveals once again that Israel does not have to fear losing its relationship with Turkey, because it is in the interest of Turkey, equally, to keep and even enlarge its ties with Israel.

Our focus here has been with the electronic media, mostly television. As mentioned, the control over the radio stations, even the national ones, is much less intense than the control over television. The radio stations have dealt with the Armenian issue—if the journalists or the editors were aware of the significance of the subject and thought it was an issue to be dealt with.

Because of the state's control over television—until the early 1990s there was only one national channel—the Israeli political authorities succeeded until about the middle of the 1990s in almost completely avoiding any significant mention of the Armenian Genocide. Since then, the control of the state seems to be diminishing. In this case, dealing with the issue or avoiding it depends more on the level of awareness of the subject, the level of knowledge, and the significance related to it by the people involved.

On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the print media have been allowed much more freedom of expression and freedom of knowledge. As can be observed throughout the previous chapters, it is primarily the print media that have dealt with the Armenian issue.

One more observation has to be made: the Armenian issue was discussed and covered, usually with great sympathy for Armenian suffering and a critical attitude towards official Israeli behavior, rather than by the ideologically oriented newspapers (especially *Ha'aretz*, *Al Hamishmar*, *Davar*). Over the years the impact of these newspapers has diminished, and *Al Hamishmar* and *Davar* were closed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Actually, only *Ha'aretz* and in a certain regard, the weeklies *Ha'ir* and *Kol Ha'ir*, which are liberal, independent, and privately owned newspapers of this kind, continue to be published. The privately owned, popular newspapers *Yedioth Aharanot* and *Maariv*, by their nature, are not supposed to deal in depth with issues like the Armenian Genocide and its significance. When they do deal with the issue, it is generally only to provide factual information about events related to it. In any case, in private columns, when there is any reference in these newspapers to the Armenian issue, it is generally with sympathy for the suffering of the Armenians and a critical attitude towards the behavior of the State of Israel regarding the issue.

## Appendix

### **“For the Attention of Members of the Board of Directors of the IBA”\***

We refuse to accept the avoidance of the Armenian Genocide.

We read with sorrow that the Management of the IBA cancelled the screening of *An Armenia Journey* that had been produced in the U.S. and was screened there as well as in other countries.

The film was scheduled to appear in the beginning of April, before April 24, the Memorial Day of the massacre of the Armenian people that was committed 75 years ago. It is not the first time that a film dealing with the terrible tragedy of the Armenian people was banned from being broadcast in our country.

We call upon the Prime Minister, in his role as the Minister of Education and Culture, and upon the Management of the IBA, to screen the film *An Armenian Journey* as early as possible. Especially as members of a people which has experienced a Holocaust unparalleled in human history, and which battles today against its denial, we are obliged to display a special sensitivity to the tragedy of another people.

We refuse to accept any avoidance of the Armenian Genocide in the national media.

This petition is published in view of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the IBA tomorrow that will decide on the screening of the film *An Armenian Journey*.

*Ha'aretz*, May 13, 1990.

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\* Signed by sixty-one public figures and intellectuals from all over the political spectrum, including twenty-five members of the Knesset.

## Notes

1. Oren Tokatly, *Communication and Policy in Israel* (Tel Aviv: The Open University of Israel, 2000), pp. 77-78; Dan Caspi and Yechiel Limor, *The Mediators: The Mass Media in Israel 1948-1990* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992); *Communication and Democracy in Israel*, edited by Dan Caspi (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hammeuchad Publishing House, 1997).
2. I myself gave four hours of lectures about the Armenian Genocide on the national radio station (Channel One) in 1998. One of the programs was titled, "Who is Afraid of the Armenian Genocide?" These lectures were re-broadcast once again in 2001.
3. Michael J. Arlen, an internationally acclaimed writer, is the author of *Passage to Ararat*, which describes his search for his own family and cultural roots and his desire to understand what it means to be an Armenian. The book also appeared in Hebrew (Yediot Aharonot Publishers, 1978).
4. Amos Elon, "Armenian as a Parable: Our Holocaust and the Holocaust of Others," *Ha'aretz* 1978, also appeared in Elon's book, *Looking Back in Consternation* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1998), pp. 250-60.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.
6. In 1995, hoping to include some parts of the film in my educational program—after obtaining, of course, special permission and official agreement—I asked for permission to see it from the television archives. My request was denied by the director of National Television, Yair Stern.
7. Interview with the director of the film, Amnon Rubinstein, June 7, 2000.
8. Letter from Aaron Harel, chairman of the Board of Directors, to the advisor of the minister of education, October 8, 1990.
9. Letter from Yair Zaban to Minister of Education Zvulun Hamer, August 12, 1990. The chairman of the board of directors wrote in his letter (October, 8, 1990) that Zaban was right in his demand.
10. I myself wrote to the managing director of Israel Television, Mordechai Kirshenbaum, who was nominated after the creation of Rabin's government in 1991. I asked him to correct this moral injustice and to make it possible to broadcast the film, even late at night. I did not get a reply.
11. Leora Eren Frucht, "A Tragedy Off Stage No More," *Jerusalem Post*, May 12, 2000.
12. See the letter from heads of the Turkish immigrant community in Israel, and a letter to the editor of *Yediot Aharonot*, May 20, 1990. There are those who reject these arguments. Historian Bernard Wasserstein argues that the position of the Turkish government on the Jewish question during the Holocaust was not particularly generous, but not especially murderous. Its position was cynical and narrow like that of most of the neutral countries. In his opinion, Turkey has nothing to be proud of (*Ha'aretz*, January 14, 1994). On this issue see also Alar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London and New York: Verso, 1987), pp. 112-114.

13. Aryeh Meckel was the managing director of the IBA at the time, and Alon Pankes was nominated by Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami as bureau director in 2000.
14. Georgette Avakian (The Armenian Committee in Israel), "To Whom It May Concern," May 5, 1990; July 1, 1990.
15. The Minutes of the Meetings of "Kibbutz Tel Hai" (a group of young Jewish activists in the Bialystock Ghetto in World War II) were buried in Bialystock and recovered after the war. They recalled in their meetings *Musa Dagh* and they were published under the title *Pages from the Fire*. See Auron, 2000, pp. 301-303.
16. See in detail, Auron, 2000, pp. 176-180.
17. Yaakov Achimeir, "Am I Indifferent to the Armenians?" *Maariv*, May 1, 1994.
18. A letter by the former Turkish Ambassador to Israel, Unur Gökçe, to the managing director of Israel Television, Mordechai Kirschenbaum, April 27, 1994.
19. Yosef Goel, "The Armenian Genocide," *Jerusalem Post*, May 4, 1997.
20. Yaakov Achimeir, "The First Genocide," *Ha'aretz*, February 13, 1995.
21. Yosef Goel, "The Armenian Genocide," *Jerusalem Post*, May 4, 1997.

## 9

### The Israeli Academy and the Armenian Genocide

*Therefore at such a time the prudent\* person keeps silent,  
for it is an evil time.—Amos 5:13*

The Israeli academy plays a very important role in the debate over the Armenian Genocide. It has been said again and again by governments—including the Turkish one—that historians, not politicians, should deal with the issue. In many cases this argument, relevant as it is, is used as an excuse or pretext in their explanations for why they do not recognize the genocide. It is quite clear that there is not—and there could never be—any academic institution that could decide “scientifically” whether or not there was a genocide committed by the Ottomans against the Armenians.

In this specific context the distinction between academics and intellectuals has to be pointed out. The term “*les intellectuels*” first acquired widespread usage as a consequence of Emile Zola’s open letter to French President Felix Faure and the “*manifeste des intellectuels*” evoked by one of the most famous public discourses of modern history—the Dreyfus Case of 1898. Not every academic is an intellectual; far from it. So the term “intellectuals” is not equal to the term “community of scientists.”

According to the classical concept, intellectuals, by the very nature of their work and autonomous position, have a responsibility for truthfulness and towards truth. Lewis Coser insisted that

intellectuals consider themselves special custodians of abstract ideas like reason and justice and truth, jealous guardians of moral standards that are too often ignored in the market place and the houses of power.<sup>1</sup>

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\* The original Hebrew text uses the term “maskil,” “intelligent.”

Another concept refers to the conflict between an intellectual and the existing social order. This view leads to the predetermination of the essence of intellectual activity by its social context. As formulated by Lewis Feuer,

the intellectual is one who chooses to estrange himself from the cultural superstructure. To call a person an intellectual is to suggest that in some basic way he stands against or apart from the contemporary dominant culture.<sup>2</sup>

This definition claims opposition to the dominant culture as determined by corporative power elites to be an indispensable condition of an intellectual's consciousness.

The debate in the academic institutions of Europe and America over the Armenian Genocide has intensified during the last three decades. Since the 1980s, the Turkish government has supported the establishment of institutions whose apparent purpose is to further research on Turkish history and culture, but that also tend to act in ways to further denial of the Armenian Genocide. Six American universities (Princeton, Harvard, Indiana, Chicago, Portland State, and Georgetown) founded chairs in Turkish studies.

Another example of Turkish efforts to influence the domain of the academy was the advertisement that appeared in 1985 in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and several other prominent newspapers: In the advertisement, sixty-nine academics, a number of them well established and well known scholars in various fields pertaining to Middle East studies, called on members of the U.S. Congress, who were then considering a resolution to create a Day of Commemoration for the victims of the Armenian Genocide, to go slowly until all records of the era had been researched by way of the archives of the Ottoman government, which up until then had been inaccessible. A huge investment of money and energy was made as part of the Turkish strategy to suppress the issue, which claims that historians, not politicians, have to deal with the "so called the Armenian genocide" and the Armenian "allegations."

To this day, and repeatedly, the above advertisement is referred to by deniers of the Armenian Genocide as proof of the "academic controversy" about genocide. There are those who consider it "a new era of sophistication and camouflage in denial of genocide," and "a new era of co-optation of bona-fide members of the academic establishment."<sup>3</sup>

In the fall of 1997, scholars and writers in the United States signed a petition titled, "We Oppose Tainted Chairs Funded by the Turkish Government at American Universities," protesting the Turkish government's funding chairs in Turkish studies at American universities. In the same year, after a long debate, the proposal for a Turkish chair at UCLA was denied.

In these charged circumstances, the attitude of the Israeli academy is very significant. In addition to all the reasons previously discussed regarding the significance of Israel's attitude toward the Armenian Genocide, the good reputation of the Israeli academy in the world at large must also be mentioned.

This chapter will concentrate on three main events regarding the Israeli academy and the Armenian Genocide.

- (a) The international conference on the Holocaust and Genocide held in Israel in 1982;
- (b) The debate over honorary citizenship by the city of Tel Aviv to Professor Bernard Lewis in 1997 and its implications; and
- (c) The intended nomination of Professor Ehud Toledano as Israeli ambassador in Turkey in 1997.

Other issues concerning the attitude of Israeli scholars, and a brief section about Yad Vashem's attitude toward the Armenian Genocide, will also be mentioned.

### **The First International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide: 1982**

The First International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide was planned to take place in June 1982. The opening session of the conference was to take place in a torchlight setting on the evening of June 21, at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. The conference was to open with a visit to the museum at Yad Vashem and a memorial ceremony, and later a meeting chaired by Dr. Yitzhak Arad, director of Yad Vashem, at which Gideon Hausner, chairman of Yad Vashem's International Board (a former attorney general of Israel who had prosecuted Adolf Eichman), planned to speak about "The Message of the Holocaust for our Generation." Elie Wiesel, the president of the conference, planned to deliver the keynote address, "Remember the Holocaust." Two nights later in Tel Aviv, Wiesel was to give a follow-up speech entitled "Warning against Genocide," thus completing the unity of the conference theme. One



hundred and fifty lectures were scheduled to be held, six of them dealing with the Armenian genocide.

The preparations for the conference had begun three years before. It was to be the first of its kind from at least the viewpoint of three of its major goals, each in its own way intellectually daring:

- (a) To associate the continuing memorial and study of the Holocaust with the study of the genocides of other peoples;
- (b) To bring together a wide spectrum of intellectual disciplines and professions to study the Holocaust and genocide; and
- (c) To look not only at the past, but toward the future—the acknowledgment that genocide will be the certain fate awaiting millions upon millions of human beings in the future.

The main figures behind this initiative were Professor Israel W. Charny, a psychologist at Tel Aviv University who was then the executive director of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide, and would later become director of the Institute on Genocide and Holocaust in Jerusalem, Prof. Shamaï Davidson, a psychiatrist from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup>

The struggle over the conference on the Holocaust and Genocide that was held in Israel in 1982 is discussed in this chapter because of the many significant implications it has on the role of the academy and academic freedom. The conference was the focus of a drama surrounding moral choices in face of the Turkish threat to Israeli and Jewish interests, and perhaps even lives, if the Armenian Genocide was discussed at the conference. The Israeli government yielded to the Turkish demand, as it has in many other cases before and after. The attitude and behavior of academics in Israel and abroad—who should act according to the principles of academic freedom—are the main issues here.

Apparently, the Turks learned of the conference from the *Jerusalem Post* edition of April 20, 1982, dedicated to Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel. Turkish pressure upon the Israeli government began soon after. In turn, the Israeli Foreign Ministry applied heavy pressure on the organizers of the conference (and later on scholars and intellectuals who planned to participate in it), intended to prevent the participation of Armenian scholars. As mentioned, of 150 lectures on the subject of the Holocaust and different cases of genocide, only six were scheduled to deal with the Armenian Genocide.

Alternative proposals were presented to postpone the conference and to hold it at a later time in another country. A compromise was proposed, by which the Armenian Genocide would be discussed unofficially at the conference, while dropping the six papers from the official program.

But the organizers realized that the Armenian scholars who were scheduled to present these papers would most likely feel offended and refused to hold the conference under these circumstances. Would any Jew ever understand having his paper on the Holocaust removed from a formal program of a conference on genocide? Nevertheless, they were prepared to pay this price, so long as there was no question that the Armenian Genocide was not really dropped from the actual proceedings. Still, this proposal was rejected by the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

The conference was held in Tel Aviv on June 20-24, 1982, with the participation of 300 out of an originally expected 600 researchers from the United States, Europe, and Israel. The formal opening, scheduled to be held at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, was moved to Tel Aviv. Yad Vashem boycotted the conference. Some Jewish researchers and dignitaries from Israel and the U.S. canceled their participation in the conference due to pressure from the Foreign Ministry. Among those who cancelled their participation were Yitzchak Arad and Gideon Hausner from Yad Vashem; the rector of Tel Aviv University at the time, Yoram Dinstejn; the philosopher of the Holocaust, Emil Fackenheim; and the historian of the Holocaust, Yehuda Bauer. Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, director of the Inter-Religious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, who had arrived in Tel Aviv from the U.S., dropped out of the conference after he had been told by his home office not to participate. Tanenbaum stayed in his hotel room and entreated his New York office to agree to his participation as a private person, but this too was denied.

Arthur Hertzberg, former president of the American Jewish Congress, an independent and deeply thoughtful person, called the organizers two days before the conference to offer his services as opening evening keynoter instead of Elie Wiesel (initially the president of the Conference), who had resigned. However, on opening day Hertzberg also withdrew, later saying it was one of the most painful decisions of his career, and that the pressures on him for two days had been enormous. His explanation was read to the session: "As a public figure interwoven into the Jewish organizational establishment I must on some occasions be mindful of public constraints called for by my colleagues."

Major Jewish organizations around the world, such as the American Jewish Committee, and many intended participants had been personally visited by Turkish ambassadors and/or were pressured by Israel's Foreign Ministry to withdraw their participation. The Foreign Ministry tried to persuade not only official agencies to withdraw but individuals as well, enlisting such eminent scholars as Elie Wiesel, Robert Jay Lifton, and Alan Dershowitz. It was Wiesel's telegram of withdrawal, announcing the dangerous situation for Jews in Turkey if the meetings were held, that the Foreign Ministry sent to persuade participants not to attend the conference.

In an interview with the *New York Times* on June 3, Elie Wiesel broke the story: "Israelis Said to Oppose Parley after Threat to Turkish Jews."<sup>5</sup> According to Wiesel, he had been told by an Israeli official six weeks earlier that the Turks had let it be known there would be serious difficulties if Armenians took part in the conference. He then received another message from Israeli officials. This one said that a delegation of Turkish Jews had visited Israel to warn there would be reprisals against Jews in Turkey if the conference were allowed to proceed as planned. A third Israeli message followed, reporting a threat that Wiesel, without wishing to reveal it, said was even more serious. He said, at that point, he felt he had to act. He would not consider excluding the Armenians, he said.

Elie Wiesel argued that he would resign as president unless the conference was postponed. It was an action, he said, that he took with the greatest anguish, and only after deciding that he could not support an event, however worthy, that put lives at risk, however unjustly. "One life is more important than anything we can say about life," he said, while discussing the pressures that were put on him and other conference leaders by the Israelis. According to Wiesel, two institutions—Tel Aviv University and Yad Vashem—had indicated then (June 3) that they would not participate. He tried to persuade Professor Charny and his associates to postpone the conference and to reschedule it outside Israel. When Professor Charny refused, Wiesel sent out telegrams announcing his resignation. This, he thinks, may have caused enough people to reconsider to make postponement more likely.

In the meantime, spokesmen for the Israeli Foreign Ministry denied that any Turkish pressures or threats against Israel or Turkey's Jews had been applied, but admitted they sought to cancel the meeting "out of concern for the interests of Jews."<sup>6</sup> The *New York Times*

reported that the spokesmen said their request had been motivated by considerations “vital to the Jewish nation that could not be spelled out.”<sup>7</sup> The Israeli chargé d’affaires in Ankara, Alon Liel, admitted that since April “we had had a mutual exchange of information” with Turkish officials on the genocide conference, and informed the Turkish Foreign Ministry on June 4 that all Israeli official and semiofficial institutions had withdrawn from the conference and that other participants had been urged to do the same.<sup>8</sup> The Turkish government, and Jewish leaders in Turkey as well, categorically denied there had been any threats, and reported that Turkish threats of reprisal were officially described as “totally false.”<sup>9</sup> A Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman told the *New York Times*: “We are not against the conference in Tel Aviv but oppose any linkage of the Holocaust to the Armenian allegations of genocide.”<sup>10</sup>

The Turkish Ambassador in Washington, in a letter to the editors of the *New York Times*, wrote (June 10, 1982):

Hearsay reports that the Turkish government had conveyed to the Israeli government any message whatsoever that explicitly or implicitly suggests any potential for adverse action against Jewish Turks are totally unfounded.

The notion that Jewish Turks might be victimized because of a contemplated conference in Israel that may include reiteration of 70 years old misrepresentations regarding the treatment of Armenians during World War I is preposterous.<sup>11</sup>

In the same letter he mentions the fact that twenty-two Turkish diplomats or members of their families had been assassinated recently by Armenian terrorists.

It should be noted that the counselor for the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, Monroe H. Freedman, an American official, told the *New York Times* (June 22, 1982)<sup>12</sup> that a Turkish diplomat had, in 1981, threatened retaliation if the fate of Turkish Armenians was included in the proposed Washington Holocaust Museum. He said he had been warned then that, if the Armenian issue was to be part of the museum, the safety of Jews in Turkey would be threatened and Turkey might pull out of NATO. The Turkish diplomat, Mithat Balkan, an embassy counselor in Washington, denied the accusations. Turkish interference in the program of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is witnessed by other sources.<sup>13</sup>

Contrary to the expectations of Wiesel and the Israeli Foreign Ministry, and despite the Turkish threat of reprisal and pressure from Israeli

authorities to cancel it, the conference was held as planned. The lectures on the Armenian Genocide were delivered, and paradoxically, the conference became a rallying point for the battle to advance knowledge of the Armenian Genocide and for academic freedom.

The conference became an arena for playing out a series of moral dilemmas and moral choices, some of which are beyond the scope of this book, but are surely of great significance. The dilemmas include responding to the threat against Jewish lives versus safeguarding historical truth, choosing between pragmatic and idealistic policy, taking care of “one’s own” versus responsibility for other people, the relationship of the Jewish Diaspora with Israel versus obedience and conformity to authority, and finally, freedom of ideas versus the coercive use of academics as an arm of national policy.

### **The Implications of the Turkish Pressures**

The primary implication of the Turkish pressures to expunge the Armenian issue from the conference was the fact that Israel’s foreign relations with Turkey could have been jeopardized. It is important to remember that Turkey was at the time the only Muslim country with which Israel maintained some sort of diplomatic relations. Moreover, there was, as we described it, a very real sense that Jewish lives were at stake.

Another issue that was raised explicitly and implicitly was the question of whether the Holocaust can be discussed with other genocides, i.e. the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Mentioning the Holocaust in the same breath with the genocides of other peoples evoked profound feelings in many people. First of all, there were many Jews and non-Jews who whole-heartedly supported the initiative of building a living memorial to the Holocaust that was simultaneously a memorial of hope for the future. Nevertheless, there were also a great number of Jews and non-Jews who were deeply disturbed by the association of the specific and the universal.

To the organizers it seemed that beyond the truth of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, its greater meaning lay precisely in the fact that it represented an incredible intensification of acts of destruction. These have taken place throughout human history, but the Holocaust had brought them to a point that emerges now as a paradigm, as the archetypal expression of man’s limitless evil and destructiveness.

From the beginning the organizers made a point of emphasizing in the conference literature a statement Elie Wiesel had made upon his return from a trip of President Carter's Commission on the Holocaust to Auschwitz and other death camps:

As we evoke the Jewish martyrdom, we also recall the suffering and death of the non-Jewish victims. The universality of the Holocaust must be realized in its uniqueness.

The issue of presenting the Holocaust with other genocides came up repeatedly in the efforts made to discredit the conference. Israeli diplomats used this argument when they called scheduled conference participants and urged them not to attend.

The Israeli press that strongly supported the conference criticized the official Israeli attitude toward the suffering of others. On June 4, 1982, while the Associated Press and the *New York Times* announced the decision to hold the conference, Nahum Barnea, an award-winning Israeli journalist, wrote in *Davar*: "For years we spoke of the conspiracy of silence that the nations of the world maintained about the Holocaust for reasons of expediency or political exploitation, and now we know that this can also happen to us."<sup>14</sup>

Amos Elon, who had already written about Israel's attitude towards the Armenian Genocide, wrote a critical article named "Their Holocaust" (*Ha'aretz*, June 11, 1982), describing the long history of the Israeli government's deference to the Turkish demands to deny the Armenian Genocide. Elon strongly condemned the behavior of Yad Vashem.

Dr. Arad told Elon that Yad Vashem canceled its participation in the conference because of the objection of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and the relations between the Jewish Holocaust and its uniqueness to other genocides.

Elon wrote: "What would Hausner and Arad say if the Italian government (in order to avoid hurting its German creditors-claimants) decided that in an international scientific conference on genocide in Rome, the Jewish Holocaust of 1940-1945 would not be mentioned?"<sup>15</sup>

Arad replied, saying that his remarks were taken out of context. Amos Elon noted in "We and the Armenians" (in *Ha'aretz* the same day), that Arad had clearly told him that he did not agree with the attitude of the organizers regarding the relation between the Jewish Holocaust and other genocides in general, and the Armenian one in particular. Elon

concluded: "After Yad Vashem closed its gates before the conference and its members boycotted it, the conference was held in Tel Aviv. Participants returned to their home countries with a certain impression of Yad Vashem, its moral stature, and its political and intellectual independence."<sup>16</sup> (For more about the attitude of Yad Vashem towards the Armenian Genocide, see later in this chapter.)

### **Freedom of Ideas versus Use of Academics as an Arm of National Policy**

It was an affront to my dignity as a human being and as a Jew, that after the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, a Jew should be told he cannot go to an academic conference or there will be a pogrom.<sup>17</sup>

These were the words of Dr. Frances Gaezer Grossman of Scarsdale, N.Y., of the post-graduate Center for Mental Health in New York City, one of the lecturers in the conference, who was asked by an Israeli official from the consulate in New York a few hours before flying to Israel to follow Elie Wiesel, who resigned as conference president "in the interests of the Jewish people."

Israel Charny, who analyzed this moral dilemma, believes that academic freedom, like any freedom, is never an absolute and unlimited value. There clearly are times when a government may demand of academics suspension of certain proceedings, discussions, or publications, especially when existential national security is directly breached. In a democratic society such demands cannot be capricious and must be developed within a framework of legal controls against excessive government authority. In a healthy united society, there is no reason why there should not be a large measure of voluntary cooperation between government and academics that allows academics to contribute significantly to the public of national policy. However, in a democratic society where freedom of ideas is one of the cardinal values, under all but emergency circumstances a government may not intrude on academic proceedings that are not to its liking, or force scholars to say or not to say what the government wants. As a general rule, said Charny, a democratic government may legitimately request the assistance of academics and scientists, but not dictate scholarly ideas or activities.

When the Israeli Foreign Ministry demanded the removal of the Armenian topic, wrote Charny, it was demanding that the conference organizers serve as a tool of foreign policy. One may not agree with the

government policy, but up to a certain point the request that academic activity be shaped to fit government policy is not outrageous. It became outrageous when the government spurned the organizers' cooperation in keeping the Armenian subject at a low profile and demanded they sacrifice the central principle of all academic undertakings: responsibility for knowledge and truth. Similarly, the pressures on potential funding sources to abandon the project were bothersome, but up to a point may not have constituted an abuse of government power in the *realpolitik* of life. Even the direct appeals to scholars in the name of the government to boycott an academic activity, though unpalatable, were not necessarily an abuse of democratic government.

However, Charny believes there certainly is no excuse for the full-blown lies told by the government to prevent people from attending the conference, by telling them it had actually been canceled when it was not. There was a crucial period of eight days preceding the conference when the organizers could not get a news story into any paper to announce that the conference was taking place. It is clear that deliberately misleading hints that the Ministry might fund the transfer of the conference to another country were no more than a way of seducing cancellation of the entire proceedings. At no time, wrote Charny, was there any actual financial offer made to the conference's legal advisor.

Taken all together, the original demand by the government to cancel the lectures on the Armenian Genocide, the misleading hints of funding the transfer of the conference outside of Israel, strong-arming funding sources, calling academics around the world in the name of the government not to attend, telling the people that the conference was canceled, and controlling the press go beyond the legitimate exercise of government power in a realistic conflict of interests with a group of academics.

Moreover, added to the barely concealed contempt for an academic meeting, there was a stubborn refusal to understand the conception of the conference that honored the Holocaust that befell the Jewish people by extending the concern to the genocides of all other peoples. Ministry officials repeatedly suggested that if the organizers could not drop the Armenian issue, they should simply cancel *all* topics other than the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup>

Professor Yehuda Bauer, an Israeli Holocaust expert who had withdrawn from the conference, publicly admitted later that it was a grave



mistake. “I gave in to the pressures of the Foreign Ministry. Elie Wiesel phoned me from New York and asked me not to participate. Later I told Charny that he was right, not I.”<sup>19</sup> It should be mentioned that Bauer also said, that in 1989 there had been another case where a high level Israeli official from the Foreign Ministry tried to influence him not to participate in an academic conference about Holocaust and Genocide organized by Robert Maxwell in Oxford, where the Armenian Genocide was to be discussed. The main subject of the conference was the Holocaust, but genocides, including the Armenian one, were also discussed. He told Bauer that it could damage relations with Turkey and the Jews there. This time Bauer did not give up.<sup>20</sup> To the best of my knowledge, Bauer is the only Israeli academic who admitted publicly that he was wrong to withdraw his participation from the conference.

It is ironic that eighteen years later, in January 2000, an international conference on the Holocaust was held in Stockholm, Sweden, with the representatives of forty-six other countries. Amongst those nations invited was Turkey, the nation that still denies there was a genocide of the Armenians. The Armenians were not represented. I do not know how this came about. To the best of my knowledge, there was no public protest. I do know that there was an important and large Israeli delegation, including Yehuda Bauer with the participation of Elie Wiesel. The Armenians were deeply hurt one more time. Also very ironic is the fact that my participation in an international conference in Paris, “Pro Armenia: Armenia in the 21st Century,” on January 31, 2003 was canceled because of last minute pressure by some delegates because I’m an Israeli Jew. The conference was organized by the network of the Armenian National Committee, which is part of the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy, in conjunction with ANCA offices in Washington, Moscow, and the Middle-East. The fact that I am an Israeli Jew should by no means have been a reason for canceling my invitation. The incident sparked a wave of protest among the Armenians, and the organizing committee publicly apologized.

### **“The Bernard Lewis Affair:” 1997**

The rationalization of the Armenian Genocide began to take root in Western academic circles in the 1980s, and was further strengthened by the hiring of Bernard Lewis at Princeton University. Lewis is one of the most prominent specialists on the Middle East—some

would say the most distinguished historian of the Middle East. Lewis' stature provided a lofty cover for the Turkish national agenda of obfuscating academic research on the Armenian Genocide.

In his classic book, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, first published in 1962, Bernard Lewis referred to the Armenian issue as follows:

Most tragic was the case of the Armenians, who at the beginning of the nineteenth century were still known as the *Millet-i Sadika*, the "loyal community," and were described by a well-informed French visitor as the minority group most loyal to the Ottoman Empire and most trusted by the Turks. The change began with the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and the creation of a Russian Armenia on the eastern border of Turkey, where the Armenian Church was established and recognized and where Armenian governors and generals ruled provinces and commanded armies. The political and cultural impact of Russian Armenia on the one hand, and the new national and liberal ideas coming from Europe on the other, powerfully affected the Ottoman Armenians, especially the rising middle-class, and stimulated the growth of an ardent and active Armenian nationalist movement.

For the Turks, the Armenian movement was the deadliest of all threats. From the conquered lands of the Serbs, Bulgarians, Albanians, and Greeks, they could, however reluctantly, withdraw, abandoning distant provinces and bringing the Imperial frontier nearer home. But the Armenians, stretching across Turkey-in-Asia from the Caucasian frontier to the Mediterranean coast, lay in the very heart of the Turkish homeland—and to renounce these lands would have meant not the truncation, but the dissolution of the Turkish state. Turkish and Armenian villages, inextricably mixed, had for centuries lived in neighborly association. Now a desperate struggle between them began—a struggle between two nations for the possession of a single homeland, that ended with the *terrible holocaust of 1915, when a million and half Armenians perished* [my emphasis, Y.A].<sup>21</sup>

The book has gone through numerous editions, was translated into many languages, including Hebrew, and was an essential entry in the bibliographies of many university curriculums all over the world.

Later on Bernard Lewis reversed his position and changed the text. In 1985 he signed a petition to the U.S. Congress protesting the plan to make April 24, the day on which the Armenians commemorate the victims of the Genocide, a national American-Armenian memorial day, mentioning man's inhumanity to man. Lewis' signature was the most significant of sixty-nine signatures published. A two-page spread appeared simultaneously in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, financed by the Committee of the Turkish Associations.

The history of Lewis' affair in France is quite well studied.<sup>22</sup> This affair in Paris began with an interview of Professor Bernard Lewis in *Le Monde* on November 16, 1993:

**Le Monde:** Why do the Turks always refuse to recognize the Armenian genocide?

**Lewis:** You mean to say to recognize the Armenian version of this history.

The Armenians posed a problem for the Turks because of the advance of the Russians and an anti-Ottoman population in Turkey. This population which sought independence, sympathized overtly with the Russians who were coming from the Caucasus.

There were also Armenian bands...and the Turks had certain problems in maintaining order in a state that was at war. For the Turks it was necessary to take punitive and preventative measures against an unstable population in a region that was menaced by an alien invasion. For the Armenians it was necessary to liberate their country. But the two camps were agreed in recognizing that the repression was geographically limited. For example, the war did not affect the Armenians who were living in other regions of the Ottoman Empire.

There is no doubt that terrible things took place and that numerous Armenians—and also Turks—perished. But one cannot always describe without doubt the precise circumstances of the victims' fate.

During their deportation towards Syria hundreds of thousands of Armenians died of hunger, of cold...but if *one speaks of genocide*, that implies that there was a systematic decision to annihilate the Armenian nation. *That is strongly in doubt*. Turkish documents prove an intention of deportation not extermination.<sup>23</sup> [my emphasis—Y.A.]

### **Academic Issue in Court**

The first phase in the judicial process was in the criminal court. On November 18, 1994, the criminal action against Bernard Lewis and *Le Monde* for denial of the Armenian Genocide was rejected. Nevertheless, the court, indirectly, recognized the Armenian Genocide. The 17<sup>th</sup> Chamber of the Correctional Tribunal of Paris announced the unacceptability of the demand of the Committee for the Defense of the Armenian Cause and three survivors of the Armenian Genocide in the criminal suit charging Bernard Lewis with revisionism, and against the newspaper *Le Monde*, which published his opinions. The French court ruled that the French law

(the Gayssot Law that was adopted on 1990) making it a crime to deny the crimes against the Jews in World War II cannot apply to the Armenian tragedy. Following this decision, Armenian activists demanded that French political leaders revise the Gayssot Law, so that it would apply to the denials and negation (reversionism) of *all* genocides, even though a law recognizing the Armenian Genocide was passed in January 2001.

In a letter to the president of the 17<sup>th</sup> Court, Palace of Justice in Paris that studied the case, Lewis wrote (October 21, 1994):

I was uneasy (when asked to be interviewed by *Le Monde*) not because I approve of evasion or suppression of truth, but because I feel it is preferable to discuss delicate historical questions in books or articles or scientific reviews more than in interviews in a newspaper. Experience shows that responses to interviews are necessarily abbreviated, simplified and easily lend themselves to distortion and sensationalism.

My accusers raise triumphantly the fact that my position is different from what I wrote 35 years ago and therefore accuse me of inconsistency and bad intentions. For a professional historian, there is nothing strange about changing one's opinion; the opposite would be as strange and would constitute a proof of incompetence. I presume that the physicians among my accusers do not use the same methods of diagnosis or treatment that were available 35 years ago.

As regards the difference between me and my accusers, I do not claim the infallibility of my opinions, and like every historian I am prepared to modify them if I am persuaded that they are inexact.

I can understand the terrible suffering that still is felt by Armenians. I have said in my publications that I am particularly touched by the situation of various unfortunate Armenian survivors—older than I am—who are compelled to relive the agonies of their childhoods. I am equally sensitive to the suffering of the Armenian infant-children who were traumatized by their memory of what happened to their ancestors and especially to their family.

If the term genocide is still used in its original sense—systematic planned extermination of a people as it was undertaken and almost achieved in Nazi Europe—then the application of this term to the Armenian case has not been demonstrated. If, on the contrary, the term simply designates a great number of casualties and deaths, I cannot dispute its application.

On behalf of the French Republic, the prosecutor explicitly qualified the massacres of the Armenians by the Turks in 1915 as genocide, and the position taken by the historian Bernard Lewis as revisionist. For the first time in French legal history, the court confirmed that Armenians were victims of a crime against humanity and that the Turkish government was responsible.

Then the second judicial phase began: The Armenians decided to go to civil court accusing the historian of defamation by denying that the Armenians were systematically exterminated. It was a new effort to win recognition that the Armenians were victims of a genocide.

In June 1995, Bernard Lewis was found liable for denying the Armenian Genocide by a court in Paris on civil charges that had been brought against him, as per the headline in *Le Monde*, “for denying the reality of the Armenian Genocide.” This court, which was hearing a second *civil* case against Lewis following an earlier *criminal* case, held Lewis liable of a “fault” and inflicting emotional damage upon another party because of his dereliction of responsibility as a scholar. The court ruled that in his denials of the genocide, Lewis calculatedly ignored and did not relate to major evidence and judgments by serious institutions, such as the U.N. Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in 1985 and the European Parliament in 1987, which have attested to the Armenian Genocide. Lewis was therefore convicted for “hiding elements which go against his thesis...[that] the reality of the Armenian Genocide results from nothing more than the imagination of the Armenian people.” He was ordered to pay a fine of 10,000 francs, punitive damages of one franc, and all court costs. *Le Monde*, in which Lewis had denied the Armenian Genocide, was ordered by the court to report the sentence.

The title of the article in *Le Monde* that reported the sentence, as it was ordered to do by the court was “*Bernard Lewis condamné pour avoir nié la réalité du génocide Arménien (selon le tribunal l'historien a commis une 'faute')*.”<sup>24</sup> The exact translation of the title in English is: “Bernard Lewis was condemned for having denied the reality of the Armenian Genocide (according to the Tribunal the historian committed a ‘fault’).” The title of the French popular newspaper *Libération*, June 23, 1995, was almost the same: “Armenian Genocide: Bernard Lewis condemned.” Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that a civil court can hold somebody liable but cannot convict him of a crime. Only a criminal court can convict somebody.

### **Bernard Lewis and the Honorary Citizenship of Tel Aviv**

This was the background to a dispute regarding Bernard Lewis that occurred in Tel Aviv. In May 1996, at a conference held at Tel Aviv

University in honor of his birthday, Roni Milo, the mayor of Tel Aviv, declared his intention to bestow honorary citizenship of the city of Tel Aviv on Professor Lewis. Sixty-four dignitaries, among them Albert Einstein, Lord Balfour, and the national poet, Haim Nachman Bialik, had already been awarded honorary citizenship of the city of Tel Aviv—it is considered the highest title awarded by the municipality. On July 14, 1997, the Deputy-Mayor Forum discussed the issue regarding Lewis. At the meeting the mayor informed his colleagues that many respected individuals had demanded that Bernard Lewis be honored and also that both Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University also wished to see him receive the title. (The spokeswoman for Tel Aviv University officially said that “there was no official institutional demand from the University, but that there were in fact letters of recommendation from senior faculty members, that may have brought the Mayor to think that there was an official demand.”)<sup>25</sup>

The members of the Deputy-Mayor Forum, including the mayor, were not informed of Lewis’ involvement in the French affair. Despite the lack of information, the members of the Deputy-Mayor Forum decided to approve the awarding of an honorary citizenship to Bernard Lewis and brought the issue to the formal approval of the city council. Mordechai Virshuvsky, the Tel Aviv counselor (a former MP), who later led the debate against Bernard Lewis becoming an honorary citizen of the city, was told about it, casually, by his advisor. He requested more background information about Bernard Lewis, his publications, and views. At this time Virshuvsky had received the material concerning the litigation process in Paris and asked the mayor to rethink the subject (letter from Virshuvsky to Milo, July 23, 1997).

On August 21 the issue was debated one more time in the Deputy-Mayor Forum. It was approved and put to a final vote before the Tel Aviv City Council. On August 31, the City Council debated the issue in a special open meeting. The meeting was stormy. Dozens of Armenians from Jaffa and Jerusalem and their Jewish supporters demonstrated in Rabin Square, in front of the City Hall, and were present in the meeting.

In a very emotional speech, Mordechai Virshuvsky said that the decision should not be a municipal-administrative decision but a moral one, an educational-historical one. “This is the struggle with myself, it is the struggle with my conscience as a Jew living in the State of Israel. The University has the liberty to award him as it wishes, but the decision

of the Council is not only an academic decision,” he said. Virshovsky admitted that he had known nothing of the Paris affair before, and that he had only learned about it recently. “One of the lessons I have learned from the Holocaust (although I am not a survivor) is that we have to struggle against injustice done by one people to another,” said Virshovsky. “I stand here with a bleeding heart. I struggle against Lewis’ honorary citizenship because I cannot behave in any other way. We, who cry all over the world ‘Remember what Amalek has done to us’ (all the Amaleks during all generations), will help to deny the memory of the suffering of another people.” Virshovsky quoted the 1986 Knesset law against the denial of the Holocaust. This law provides that anyone who publishes written material or makes oral sayings denying the acts committed during the Nazi period and that are crimes against the Jewish people or crimes against humanity, or makes statements that lessen their measure in the attention to refine them or express sympathy or identification with them—would be sentenced to five years imprisonment. Virshovsky continued by saying that the law does not apply to Professor Lewis directly, but the Knesset emphasized forty years after the atrocities that denying the Holocaust is a criminal offense in Israel. In his opinion, the concept of lessening the measure of the Holocaust or the genocide committed by the Turks against the Armenians applies to Professor Lewis, according to the understanding of the Israeli lawmaker. “Should he be punished? No. Should he be rewarded? Certainly not.”

The mayor of Tel Aviv decided to postpone the Council’s decision for one month. He explained that during the coming month he and the Council would study the vast material available on this issue. He decided to postpone the decision because, contrary to his expectations and those of others, he would not have a majority on the Council. Among the twenty-two members of the Council that were presented in the meeting, eleven intended to vote against, ten to approve, and one to abstain.<sup>26</sup>

The subject was never again brought before the Council. Bernard Lewis did not receive any kind of honorary citizenship from the city of Tel Aviv. But, Tel Aviv University organized an evening in honor of his eighty-first birthday in January 1998, with the participation of, among many others, Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak (the former and future prime ministers). Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister at the time, apologized at the last minute that he could not come.

On the eighty-third Armenian Memorial Day, on April 24, 1998, apart from thousands Armenians who commemorated that tragedy in the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem, dozens of Armenians protested in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv also against this evening organized by Tel Aviv University in honor of Bernard Lewis.<sup>27</sup>

In the background of this affair there were two significant developments. One was the activity behind the scenes around granting honorary citizenship to Lewis, and the second was the public debate about the Armenian Genocide in *Ha'aretz*.

### Letters of Support

The mayor of Tel Aviv received many supportive letters and faxes in favor of Lewis' nomination as an honorary citizen, and also some opposing statements. As the debate over the decision began, it was the strong and influential circles at the Tel Aviv University Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies that, according to *Tel Aviv Magazine*, initiated the proposition granting Lewis an honorary citizenship, organized, and coordinated the support.<sup>28</sup>

Many influential persons from various circles supported Lewis, among them well-known intellectuals and politicians like author Amos Oz and Teddy Kolek (the former mayor of Jerusalem who tended to support the Armenian community in Jerusalem), academics like Itamar Rabinovitz and Anita Shapira, and high-ranking personalities from the security establishment like Meir Amit, Shabtai Shavit (former heads of the Mossad) and Uri Lubrani, and sent letters of support. Shimon Peres and Moshe Arens also phoned Milo to declare their support.

In a letter to the mayor and to the members of the Deputy-Mayor Forum (August 11, 1997) signed by Professors Itamar Rabinovich, Shimon Shamir, and Asher Susser, the three former heads of the Dayan Center, and Dr. Martin Kramer, the head of the Center, they praised—undoubtedly rightly so—the unique and significant contribution made by Professor Lewis to the study of Islam and his love for Israel.

Concerning the debate about the Armenian Genocide they wrote\*:

We were astonished to read an article in a local newspaper that Prof. Lewis was condemned for denying the Armenian Genocide by a French court.

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\* On August 22, 1997, prior to the Council meeting on August 31, the mayor of Tel Aviv sent a letter to the members of the Council to inform them that he received letters of support, which he attached to his own letter, as well as a letter from Mordechai Virshovsky, who opposed the proposal. The journalists who covered this story were also given these letters.



There isn't any truth in this claim. There are always discussions amongst historians, but one fact is indisputable: Prof. Lewis was not found guilty. In an interview with the French newspaper, he stated that there was no master plan of the Ottoman Empire to exterminate the Armenians. Prof. Lewis himself wrote in his books about the deportation of the Armenians in WWI and the terrible massacre that accompanied it in many places. He mentioned and continues to mention the suffering of the Armenians, and in the past—before the lessening of the meaning of the word “Holocaust”—he even used it in the Armenian context. But, on the basis of his knowledge on the content of the Ottoman archives, he found that there was no master-plan to exterminate the Armenians, like the example of the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jewish people. In Europe and in the USA, Armenian activists try by all means to prevent historical debate—their aim is to put the Armenian tragedy in the same line with the Jewish Holocaust. Prof. Lewis did not change his view that the Jewish Holocaust is unique. His sayings have made him a target for these activists. They tried to bring a criminal case against him for denying genocide—ironically using the same criminal statute that forbids the denying of the Jewish Holocaust. Their effort failed. The court refused to deal with the accusation (therefore, Prof. Lewis was not judged and certainly was not condemned for denying genocide). At the same time, Armenian organizations filed a series of civil suits against Prof. Lewis, charging him with inflicting emotional pain. Three charges were raised against him. Two failed and the Armenian organizations were asked to pay Prof. Lewis' expenses. On the third charge the court in Paris ruled that Prof. Lewis did not neglect his responsibility as an historian, but “made a mistake” by not presenting in his interview the attitudes which go against his thesis, and therefore hurt the feelings of the Armenian community. He was ordered to pay punitive damage of one franc and court costs.

It must be noted that French historians considered bringing Lewis before the court an aggressive involvement of the legal system in an academic matter. The upper echelon of the intellectual community in France reacted by protesting: during the trial, Lewis was chosen to be an honored member of the *Institut de France*. The result of the third civil case against him led to complaints. The British historian Francis Robinson wrote in the *Times Literary Supplement* that while he did not wish to deny the suffering of the Armenians, it was a scandalous judgment against an historian that is familiar with the content of the Ottoman archives more than any court in Paris, or even the Armenians themselves.

We share this view and we believe that many of our colleagues in the academic community in Israel share this view.

The letter ended with the statement: “We note in our calendars January 20, the day when we intend to celebrate with him and with you the awarding of honorary citizenship.”

The same kind of arguments were raised shortly thereafter by Martin Kramer, the head of the Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, in a letter to the editor of *Tel Aviv Magazine* (August 10, 1997) and in an article by Asher Susser in *Ha'aretz*, August 31, 1997, titled "Denial and Deceit."

These distinguished scholars chose certain ways to describe the Lewis Affair. As mentioned earlier, they were correct to claim that he was not convicted for denying genocide, because a civil court can only hold somebody liable. Lewis did have to pay 10,000 francs and court costs. We note, moreover, that thirty French intellectuals, most of them historians, not a few among them Jewish, published a statement in *Le Monde* accusing Lewis of distorting the truth and inflicting emotional pain upon the victims. Among the signatures it was easy to identify the names of well-known people who have struggled against the denial of the Holocaust, such as Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Alain Finkelkraut, Yves Ternon, and Albert Memmi. Yehoshua Porath, another orientalist from the Hebrew University and a supporter of Lewis, replied: "We should not be too impressed with these names. None of them deal with Ottoman history, none reads Turkish and knows the rich and original material that was published for many years by Turkish historians to prove that their people did not commit systematic genocide against the Armenians" (*Ha'aretz*, September 5, 1997).

As mentioned before there were other letters of support of Bernard Lewis from other distinguished intellectual and scholars in Israel. Amos Oz (August 12, 1997) wrote: "His intellectual contribution for the understanding of the Middle East is major and original, and his principal stands are worthy of honor." No reference was made to the Armenian issue.

Professor Anita Shapira (August 16, 1997), who was dean of the Faculty of Humanities, holding a chair for the study of Zionism in Tel Aviv University, praised Lewis' scientific contribution. "But he has other virtues: he is a proud Jew." Once again, no reference to the Armenian issue.

Professor Zvi Yabetz, a distinguished historian and founder of the School of History in Tel Aviv University, also praised him. Lewis' positive attitude and support for Israel was a repeated motive in the letters of support, as well as his close relationships with former prime ministers of Israel such as Golda Meir, Menachem Begin, and Yitzchak Rabin. Former high security officials also praised his support and close relations with the State of Israel.

Noted orientalists like Gabi Varburg, former rector of Haifa University, and Amnon Cohen, who holds the Eliahu Elath Chair of the History of the Muslim People, praised his academic works. Cohen believed that Lewis was attacked because of his clear and public pro-Zionist and pro-Israeli attitudes.

Aaron Dothan, who holds the chair for the History of the Hebrew Language at Tel Aviv University, described him as enlightened humanist, proud of his Jewish heritage which he promotes zealously, and praised his vivid public support for the State of Israel. After attacking the informative article in *Tel Aviv Magazine* (August 8, 1997) he wrote:

From reading the article we learned that Bernard Lewis did not deny the Armenian holocaust, but only set it apart from the Jewish Holocaust. In doing this he demonstrated his opinion as a proud Jew. This view is shared by the majority of the Jewish people. There is no and there was no Holocaust like the one experienced by the Jewish People. This does not lessen the genocide and terrible massacre of the Armenians by the Turks. It is absurd that of all places, in the State of Israel, a man will be dishonored because of presenting an accepted Jewish point of view.

Minna Rozen, professor of Jewish Ottoman history, then at Tel Aviv University (now at Haifa University), sent a ten-page letter/article to the mayor of Tel Aviv on the Armenian issue, entitled “The Armenian Massacre and the Profession of the Historian.” It is quite interesting and meaningful to compare Rozen’s letter with Ternon’s article “Freedom and Responsibility of the Historian (The ‘Lewis Affair’)” mentioned before (note 22) and the article “Professional Ethics and the Denial of the Armenian Genocide,” by Smith, Markusen, and Lifton (see note 30). Three articles treated the same or very similar subjects: the titles are similar, but the points of view extremely divergent.

I would like to finish this paragraph by fully quoting the paragraphs relating to the genocide (“a massacre” in her terminology—Y.A.) and its consequences, as presented by Rozen:

At the outbreak of WWI the Russians remembered the Armenians and encouraged them to revolt against the Ottoman Empire, in exchange for an Armenian state that would be created after the victory of the Allied Powers. With this, the Armenians were marked not only as enemies of the Empire but also as a realistic threat to its existence. The following is known.

At the end of the war Armenian guerrilla forces continued to fight against the Turks and simultaneously continued their efforts to achieve an independent state. The final agreements in Turkey and in the Balkans had not

yet been fixed—and when a nation struggles for its independence, the end justifies the means. At that time the so called evidence of planning the massacre of all the Armenians in the Empire came to light through a series of letters allegedly sent by the “Young Turk” government to different functionaries in East Anatolia. The telegrams, known as the “Andonian Telegrams” after Aram Andonian, the man who published them, and probably wrote them, were also known as “the telegrams of Talaat Pasha.” Even though Andonian wrote quite sincerely that he published the telegrams for propaganda purposes and to strengthen the Armenian case in the world, they have become a realistic and truthful cornerstone in the Armenian consciousness itself. In 1983 two Turkish scholars proved this falsification. The evidence was so strong, that even the Armenians stopped using these telegrams for substantiating their claims. But the consciousness did not change.

Approximately at the same time the diaries of Henry Morgenthau, who was the U.S. Ambassador in Constantinople during the period of the massacre, in 1915, were also published. These diaries were also used as evidence (although less strong than the telegrams of Andonian) of the existence of such a “plan.” Examining the diaries in his handwriting, his personal letters and his reports to the U.S. government during his post, prove, above any doubt, that the printed diaries were rewritten to justify the entrance of Woodrow Wilson (and the United States) into the war.

The voice of the canons stopped and an Armenian state in Anatolia was not created. Even the short-lived state that was created on the ruins of Czarist Russia was conquered by the Bolsheviks. The Armenian Nation, and especially the survivors of the massacre, and the revolutionary activists that succeeded in escaping to the West and to the USA, continued to exist only as islands in the midst of other countries and cultures (except for the Armenian Republic in the Soviet Union).

Two central motives activate those groups. One is the need to prove that the bloodshed was not in vain, meaning that all the innocents who were murdered, were starved to death, and sold for slavery in East Anatolia, were not victims of an illusion of national independence in a country in which they were a numerical minority—an illusion designed and cultivated by their urban elites and their organizations in exile. There was a need to prove that there was no other option. The Ottomans, and now, after the creation of the Turkish Republic, the Turks, intended to slaughter all of them. This image of victim without any control [over his destiny—Y.A.] was needed for the restoration of the spirit of the survivors and especially for the restoration of the unity of their group. Their dispersion made the memory of the massacre and the image of victim the bonding agent that united all those islands.

Until the second half of the 1960s the memory of the massacre and its significance bothered the Armenians in their communities. The majority of the literature written on the subject was in the Armenian language and was read only by Armenians.

The vision of an Armenian state in Anatolia was abandoned meanwhile. It was raised again during WWII. The declaration made by Alfred Rosenberg of the Armenians being an Indo-European people came simultaneously with the conscription of the Armenians [*the Armenians*—not Armenians—original text—Y.A.] in Turkey, the Soviet Union and Western Europe, to destroy the stability of Turkey and the Soviet Union.

The expected prize was an Armenian state, in an expected new order in a new world created by Nazi-Germany. Aid was given in propaganda and intelligence in which the Armenian organizations were active. Besides the veterans of the Armenian Guerrilla, who escaped after WWI to the USA, (Drastamat Kanayan known by his nickname “Dro” and Garegin Nzhdeh) came back to Europe, and created the Armenian Legion that counted 200,000 soldiers, was trained by SS officers and participated in the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and the Caucasus [200,000 in the text—not 20,000 as mentioned sometimes in Turkish sources regarding the 812 Armenian battalion—Y.A.].

Many Armenians also participated in the “Oriental Legion” that was involved in the occupation of southern France. This war ended, as we know, not as the Armenians expected. In the years after the war, exactly as in the years before it, the Armenians did not deal with the memory of the massacre committed against them in the international context. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the massacre in 1955 passed almost without any mention.

All the frustration, the anger and the bitterness of the Armenian diaspora reached a climax at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. The Eichmann trial raised the memory of the Jewish Holocaust and its significance, not only regarding the Jewish agenda, but also on the international agenda. The interest and the awareness the Holocaust has received influenced Armenian historical memory in very interesting ways. At this historical crossroads, the Armenians were absolutely convinced that they were a totally innocent victim. Before their eyes there was the example of another people, for whom that the fact that it was a victim people became an important factor in achieving independence. The victims and the misfortune of the Jewish people have meaning, and this is exactly what the Armenians wanted to achieve. The Armenian organizations understood that an Armenian state in Anatolia would not be created. At this stage, recognition of the Turkish Republic for its responsibility for the “Genocide,” exactly as Germany recognized its responsibility for the Jewish Holocaust, would have satisfied them; it would have healed the wounds of their historical memory.

Because the Turkish government did not rush to accept this claim, they began a series of attacks against Turkish diplomats, which achieved at least one goal—bringing attention to the subject. To achieve identification between the Jewish Holocaust and the massacre of their people, they were obliged to eliminate any evidence regarding their part in the emergence of the Turkish-Armenian conflict and to prove that the Ottomans planned, yet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to annihilate all of them. They sought to

prove it by two means: one, historical writing, this time in Western languages. They have made selective use of true documents and in serious studies, in the “copy and paste” method as well as using false documents like Andonian’s telegrams. The second means is professional discrediting, intimidation and threatening against any scholar who dared to examine their claims in the accepted historiological methodology.

The correlation between the Jewish Holocaust and the Armenian holocaust have become inseparable in the collective identity of the Armenians. Everybody who tried to examine it was regarded immediately as a denier, not only of certain elements or aspects of their claim, but a denier of the massacre itself.

Meanwhile, the Turkish government did not stay inactive. The study of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was abandoned in Turkey until the 1960s. The main study focused on the 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the years of glamour of the Empire, which could have been a positive inspiration for building the identity, the unity and the pride of the new republic. The awakening of the Armenians led, interestingly, to the study of this important period in Turkey. Turkey opened the Ottoman archives for study and published volumes of documents from their archives, and encouraged the studying of this period in general, and the Turkish-Armenian conflict in particular.

The atmosphere that was created and still exists in the community of historians is not positive. This reality interferes with an open discussion on the history of that conflict. This atmosphere has existed for quite a long time in Europe and the USA and was transferred in recent years to Israel.

In the review *Historia* (published in Jerusalem by the Historical Society of Israel), number 10, August 2002, Minna Rozen published a long article (fifty-five pages) titled “Armenia Armenia,” in which she deals, in her words in the English summary of the article, “with two books dedicated to aspects of the deportation and mass killing of the Armenians living in Eastern Anatolia in 1915-16 by the Young Turk regime.”<sup>29</sup> The books are my book *The Banality of Indifference: Zionism and the Armenian Genocide*, published in Hebrew in 1995, and Vahakn N. Dadrian’s *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, also published in 1995. Although the term *genocide* is included in the title or subtitle of both books, she refers to what happened to the Armenians as deportation and mass killing or massacre to differentiate it from the Jewish Holocaust. Rozen repeats in detail what she wrote about the issue before, and practically blames the Armenians for what happened to them.

We will refer later to the claims about the validity of sources and the evidence regarding the Armenian Genocide as well as to the attitude of the Armenians regarding Nazi Germany (see the sec-

tions “The Validity of Sources and the Evidence Regarding the Armenian Genocide” and “The Attitudes of Turks and Armenians to Nazi Germany”).

### **The Public Debate**

The Armenian community in Israel was involved, this time actively, in the debate on this issue, more than they had ever been involved in previous debates. Armenian and non-Armenian academics and scholars from abroad took part in the debate.

In a memorandum published by the Armenian Case Committee in Israel (September 1, 1997) they wrote:

The Armenian Community in Israel and the World strongly protest the awarding of Honorary Citizen by the Municipality of Tel-Aviv to Professor Bernard Lewis, whose outright position in denying the Armenian Genocide brings disgrace to the discipline of history as well as to World civilization.

Professor Lewis has been known as a historian who flagrantly and in a blatant manner distorts the Armenian Genocide by being totally biased toward the Turkish position. However, the International Community at all levels has recognized and acknowledged the atrocious crime committed against the Armenian people living peacefully in the Ottoman Empire in 1915. This heinous crime went unpunished, and it is so ironic that those who deny it are being rewarded and commended for their work. We, the Armenian people, plead with the International Community as well as the Israeli public to stop such awards given to people who don't deserve commendations and to put pressures on their government to rectify the wrong deeds committed against one of the oldest and peaceful peoples of the world—the Armenians.

In a letter to the mayor of Tel Aviv (September 1, 1997) the Armenian Case Community wrote:

It is with great dismay that we, the Armenian Community in Israel as well as the Armenians living around the world, received the news of granting Professor Bernard Lewis an esteemed prize, the Honorary Citizenship, by the Municipality of Tel-Aviv.

As you may know, Professor Lewis has been known for his outright position in the denial of the Armenian Genocide, a heinous crime that was acknowledged by the International Community. Prof. Lewis time and again, flagrantly and blatantly distorts the Armenian genocide and bolsters the Turkish position in every academic as well as political conference. He has been appointed by the Turkish Government to direct the Turkish Studies Center in the U.S., with the prime objective of producing anti-Armenian

genocidal literature in order to undermine the quest of a nation for a just and fair compensation for a crime that went unpunished in modern history.

The Armenians feel that this prestigious medal of honor should not be awarded to Prof. Lewis, a Jew himself, whose people had suffered from the Holocaust, another crime that is a disgrace to world civilization and Humanity. However, it is so ironic that such a scholar has a stand which is politically incorrect. We hope that you will rescind your decision and consider that unpunished crimes in history should not be commended or rewarded.

George Hintlian, an Armenian historian, in a letter to the editor of *Ha'aretz* (September 5, 1997), wrote:

Bernard Lewis has not only compromised his academic principle but gone as far as denying publicly the Armenian Genocide (despite his full knowledge of the facts). This is unacceptable on three levels. First on a Jewish dimension, second on a moral level and third the academic level. Still fresh in the consciousness of the international media is his public trial in Paris Court, where he was obliged to pay a fine and offer public apology to the Armenian people. It would be a grave mistake on the part of the Tel Aviv city council to grant an honorary citizenship to a person with such a scandalous past. He has made himself an embarrassment to the Jewish people.

It is a service to the Jewish people to alert the Israeli public to a dangerous proposal, which would have given the impression to the world that Israel has double standards on the crucial issue of genocide denial.

We call upon on Israeli intellectuals to condemn and struggle to stop any decision about the granting of honorary citizenship to Bernard Lewis and this for the best moral interests of the Jewish people and the sacred memory of the victims of all genocides.

Rouben Adalian, the director of the Armenian National Institute in Washington, wrote (August 11, 1997) to the mayor of Tel Aviv:

We were shocked and dismayed to hear that the city of Tel Aviv was considering to extend Mr. Bernard Lewis honorary citizenship. I regret to advise you that in too many instances in the past twenty years Bernard Lewis has found it convenient to deny the Armenian Genocide. Lewis' habit of dismissing the atrocities committed against the Armenians in 1915 has been cause for concern in the Armenian community worldwide. He has used his eminence in the field of Middle East Studies as a cover for disseminating the Turkish government's official denials.

We would like to think of Tel Aviv as a city where the spirit of freedom and the respect for human dignity are valued above all other considerations, a place where the determination of the survivors who set foot in their ances-



tral homeland is preserved in the high standards it maintains in awarding honorary citizenship.

As Director of the Armenian National Institute, which is dedicated to the study, research and affirmation of the Armenian Genocide, I urge you to send a message to Bernard Lewis that the value of a scholar is not to be found in the breadth of his learning or the quantity of his publishing, rather in the honesty of his practices.

Six academics from the United States sent a letter (August 29, 1997) to the Tel Aviv City Council hoping that, “Before conferring on Professor Bernard Lewis the honorary citizenship of Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality, you will consider his record as a denier of the Armenian Genocide.”

Although at one time a deservedly acclaimed historian, Prof. Lewis in recent decades has increasingly become a propagandist for Turkey. He has trained a cadre of mercenary academics whom some American universities have hired to fill tenured Chairs of modern Turkish history paid for by the Turkish government to cleanse its sordid record on human rights. The most notorious of these, Heath Lowry, appointed to Princeton University with scant academic credentials, after a career directing a Turkish propaganda mill disguised as “educational,” we have learned was appointed at Professor Lewis’ urging.

The court case against Professor Lewis in France, widely covered in the world press, was an international scandal drawing deservedly harsh criticism of Prof. Lewis from distinguished scholars in the U.S. and abroad.

Among the signatures was that of Professor Roger Smith, president of the Association of Genocide Scholars, and Robert Jay Lifton, a distinguished Jewish professor of psychology and psychiatry. The others were Marjorie H. Dobkin, Nigel Young, John S. Wheatcroft, and Peter Balakian.

It is worth mentioning again a paragraph from a letter to the editor written by Professor Yehuda Bauer regarding the debate over a curriculum over the Armenian Genocide (*Ha’aretz* March 29, 1996—see chapter 6), who did not take sides publicly this time:

Bringing forth the reasoning of the deniers as well as the fact of the murder, makes a mockery of Israel as a country among civilized countries. In the United States there are three academics, The Shaws and Prof. Heath Lowry, who deny the genocide. Prof. Bernard Lewis, also a denier, was fined by the court in France and silenced. Prof. Lowry was exposed as a spokesman for the Turkish government in an article published by three senior scholars (among them Prof. Lipton, the author of a book on the Nazi doctors in

Auschwitz) in an international review that I edited. My Israeli colleagues, who attach the same importance to the facts and their denial, are not worthy “experts” on this issue and undermine their own academic status.

The article Bauer referred to is closely related to our issue “Professional Ethics and the Denial of the Armenian Genocide.”<sup>30</sup>

### The Debate in *Ha'aretz*

Another component in the Lewis affair was the debate in the respected Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*. The articles were published in the cultural and literary supplement every Friday during four weeks of August-September 1997.<sup>31</sup> This was the first and only quasi-academic public debate in Israeli society over the content of the Armenian Genocide. After four weeks the editor of the supplement, Beni Ziffer, decided to stop the debate, even though he did in fact receive more reactions.

The debate had echoes abroad. In October 1997, the Belgian magazine *Espace Orient* published the full translation in French of seven articles that were published in the first three weeks. They were published under the title of “*La concurrence des victims*” [“The concurrence of victims”], making reference to the book by the philosopher Jean-Michel Chaumont (*La découverte*, 1997), which itself has generated a heated debate in Europe. The French weekly *Courrier International* also published part of the debate.<sup>32</sup>

Several topics were aired during the course of the debates. These included geopolitical considerations, the notion of genocide, and the controversy about the uniqueness of the Holocaust—if and what makes the Holocaust a uniquely unique genocide, “*l'unique unicité*.” The role of the legal system regarding historical debates was also raised, as well as questions such as: what is genocide, the reality of the Armenian Genocide, the evidence and the validity regarding the Armenian Genocide, the meaning of Professor Lewis’ views, and the legal meaning of the decision of the civil court.

We will now examine some of the more basic and principal issues in greater detail.

#### *Geopolitical Considerations*

Some participants in the debate (Porath, September 5; Goren,

September 19) claimed that there are actual geopolitical aspects that have influenced it. The fact that Turkey is a state whose population is mostly Muslim, which turned to the West, is a member in NATO, and has a close relationship with Israel is one such factor. The Turks claimed on their side that the debate about the genocide in this case is related to anti-Turkish attitudes of some of Bernard Lewis' opponents.

*Who Has the Right to Decide about the Reality of the Armenian Genocide?*

Some questioned whether the court is the right place to decide on questions of historical truth. The judges themselves were conscious of their limits and clearly expressed this in their verdict. On the other hand, the role of the academy was rightly questioned: is the academy the "watch-dog" of truth and ethics or the interested defender of the establishment?

Boaz Shoshan (September 19), an orientalist from Ben Gurion University, argued whether or not Israeli and Jewish scholars have an obligation to the issue of the Armenian holocaust. This obligation is unconditional, even more so, writes Shoshan, when in the balance is loyalty to a teacher, colleague, and friend, or when the issue is honorary citizenship.

Lewis' supporters, the orientalists Susser (August 31), Porath (September 5), and Kramer (September 12), protested against Lewis' trial in France, claiming it set out to replace historical debate. Martin Kramer wrote that every historian worthy of the name has expressed his contempt for Lewis' trial. It is unacceptable interference by the legal system in an academic issue.<sup>33</sup>

It has to be clarified that the French judges were very careful not to judge the history. They wrote, explaining their decision: "It is not to the judges to appreciate and to say if the massacres committed between 1915 to 1917, constitute, or not, the crime of genocide." Generally speaking, "The judges have not the mission, regarding the events of history, to arbitrate and to decide once and for all on the polemics." Furthermore, the judges stated, "the historian, in principle, has all the liberty to expose the facts according to his personal views." But this liberty has a limit: that of responsibility. According to article 1382 of the Civil Code, the one who committed '*faute*' and caused damage to another person has to repair it. Like the others, maybe even more than another, the historian has to state the truth, only the truth, and, we hope, all the truth."

Shoshan replied (September 19) that the French judge, contrary to what Susser, Porath, and Kramer claimed, did not wish to perform the role of the historians. The court claimed that Lewis ignored a historical decision that was adopted by a committee of the United Nations. The court has rejected Lewis' right to express his "baseless" statement that may inflict damage. It is similar to the legal intervention in the case of Holocaust denial. A civilized society surely has to defend faiths and feelings, if they are related to issues that are to be fixed, and are involved with pain and suffering.

For Shoshan the meaning of Lewis' statement in *Le Monde* ("the Armenian version of this history") is very clear: "We have to read this answer in a very special way, not to say biased for us, to overlook the denial of the concept of Armenian Genocide, evident from the text."

*Was Lewis Found Guilty in Paris?*

Following this issue is the question of whether or not Bernard Lewis was condemned by the court in Paris.

Orientalist Amnon Cohen from the Hebrew University (September 12) claims that Lewis was not found guilty, repeating the argument raised by the directors of the Dayan Center in their letter (previously mentioned) to the mayor and the Council of Tel Aviv. A similar claim was raised by Sagar's article (August 31). As mentioned, they are right legally because a civil court can find somebody liable, yet not convict him. Regardless, the Armenians in France and all over the world regarded the court decision as a great victory, as a new era in the legal pursuit of justice concerning the Armenian Genocide.

According to the press release of the Armenian Assembly of America in Washington, D.C., dated June 24, 1995, the significance of the court decision is that, "This marks the first instance that a public denier of the Armenian genocide was brought to trial. Moreover, the party was a major figure in U.S. and European academic circles and a very influential figure in the field of Turkish and Middle Eastern history. The decision of the court sets a very important precedent for combating denial. The decision of the court is an affirmation of the historical truth of the Armenian genocide and a significant triumph in the Armenian community's effort to combat denial and obtain recognition through legal means."

*Lewis Referred to the Armenian Tragedy*

Another argument raised by Bernard Lewis' supporters was that he referred to the Armenian tragedy, and even used the term "holocaust" in his book about the emergence of modern Turkey.

However, Cohen and Susser failed to mention that he altered the text of later editions, especially to remove the reference to the "holocaust" of the Armenians, and that he changed his views. Kramer noted that Lewis now believes it was a terrible massacre, but not an intended and planned genocide.

Furthermore, Professor Lewis was asked to make available the academic research published in recent years, which, in his professional opinion, constitute the basis for the change from his original position to his new position that there was no state-planned or administered genocide/mass murder of the Armenians. Lewis did not respond to this demand, even though he noted that the letters to him and his reply would be published.<sup>34</sup>

*Lewis Never Denied the Massacres*

Some of Lewis' supporters claimed that he never denied the fact of the massacres, but expressed the fact that he was uncomfortable with the methodological aspect of the presentation of the massacres (Yudovitch, September 12; Avrom Yudovitch is a Jewish orientalist from the United States who has close ties with Lewis and testified on Lewis' behalf in his trial in Paris in 1995—Y.A.). According to this group of Lewis' supporters, Lewis' main reservation regards the question of whether the massacres were perpetrated according to a previous decision and a premeditated plan. Up to now, writes Yudovitch, there is still no serious evidence regarding such a decision. Supporting this view, Amnon Cohen writes (September 12) that Lewis has never denied, and he does not deny today, the terrible tragedy of the Armenians. None of these academics, nor Lewis himself, uses the term "genocide" in Hebrew or in foreign languages to define this "tragedy"—for them, it is a "massacre" or "massacres."

Two historians from Tel Aviv University, Israel Gershoni and Shlomo Sand, wrote a joint article about the attitude of Lewis and his supporters to the case. Gershoni, an orientalist at Tel Aviv University, a specialist on Egypt, opposes the mainstream in the Middle Eastern and African Studies department in his university. Shlomo Sand is a

historian (who is part of the “New Historians” school in Israel) and political scientist in the Department of History at Tel Aviv University. In the article, entitled “From Bernard Lazare to Bernard Lewis—Genocide and History” (September 5, 1997), Gershoni and Sand analyze Bernard Lewis’ stand in the larger context of the historiography, including the debate about the revisionist German historians of the Holocaust. They argue:

It would be absurd and foolish to include Lewis in the category of deniers of the Holocaust, motivated by glowing hate toward the other. Lewis does not hate Armenians and the “denial” of their holocaust by him is not unequivocal. His new attitude toward the Armenian Genocide placed him in a more sophisticated and elusive place.

Here it is worth mentioning to the reader, that not only marginal and biased deniers dealt with destabilizing and attacking the traditional representations of the Holocaust. Professional German historians, and considered liberals, like Ernest Nolte or Andrew Hillgruber, never denied categorically the very fact of the occurrence of the murder of the Jews and the Gypsies. They used a strategy in which the main weapon was “historicisation” of the Holocaust, and its historical product was relativisation and trivialisation of the Holocaust.

... Bernard Lewis and his many Israeli supporters will relentlessly continue their efforts to deny, and if not so, to lessen [the importance and the magnitude of—Y.A.] the Armenian tragedy.

### *Was It a Genocide?*

Porath goes further into the logic of Lewis’ arguments, which is consistent with the meaning of his statements. Porath speaks of “alleged genocide committed by the Ottoman Turks.” According to him, we are speaking of a terrible tragedy, but there is by no means a comparison with the fate of the Jews during WWII. We have to speak not about genocide, but rather about harsh measures taken by the Ottoman Empire against a national minority that supported the enemy during wartime, and for thirty years had tried to achieve national independence at the expense of Ottoman territories. After praising the academic qualities of Lewis, who, we are told, has studied the “Armenian affair deeply,” Porath writes (September 5): “He [Lewis] honestly and courageously came to the conclusion that genocide against the Armenians has not been committed.”

He supports his arguments by claiming that there was no racial ideology directed against the Armenians. The Ottoman Turks did

not try to exterminate all the Armenians, but the Armenians of East Anatolia, who were a fifth column and supported the Russians. Therefore, he argues, they were exiled systematically from the border area. On the road many died of starvation, dehydration, and diseases, and others by the hand of the Kurdish tribes. Porath believes that later on, Armenian propagandists spread the notion that two million Armenians were murdered. Porath goes on further to quote Dr. Justin McCarthy's study: "A first class Armenian historian-demographer has proved recently in a deep astonishing study, that the number of the Armenians who died [he uses this word and not "murdered" or any equivalent—Y.A.] was half a million—a quarter to a third of the number of the Armenians before the war."

George Hintlian, an Armenian historian living in the Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem, responded in *Ha'aretz* (September 5, 1997) that Porath should have been better informed than to quote McCarthy, who, with Heath Lowry, Lewis' successor in Princeton, leads the list of deniers of the Armenian Genocide.

Why does Dr. Porath need the opinion of deceased colleagues? Hintlian warns that many Hebrew University students in the future may be misled by the denial literature from the Turkish Embassy in Tel Aviv, which is on the Hebrew University bookshelves. "It seems that Dr. Porath finds these books quite objective."

In his letter to the editor mentioned above (see note 27), the French historian and specialist on the Armenian Genocide, Yves Ternon, analyzed in detail the *degré zero de la négation* by Porath, which is very far below Lewis' academic denial.

Israel Charny (September 19, 1997), who was a witness for the prosecution in Lewis' court trial in France, repeated what he had said there: "As a Jew and as a scientist I am ashamed of Bernard Lewis." Charny finds it difficult to decide what is more shameful and shocking: the repeated denials by Lewis and his refusal to take back his words, or the false information and protection given to him by Israeli orientologists.

### *What is the Genocide of the Armenians?*

In a letter sent by Bernard Lewis to the president of the 17<sup>th</sup> Court (Palace of Justice, Paris, October 21, 1994) he wrote: "If the term genocide is still used in its original sense—systematic planned extermination of a people as it was undertaken and almost achieved in Nazi

Europe—then the application of this term to the Armenian case has not been demonstrated. If, on the contrary, the term simply designates a great number of casualties and deaths, I cannot dispute its application.”

And indeed, Yaacob Goren, historian of the labor Zionist movement, wrote (September 19, 1997) that if we limit the meaning of the term genocide to the complete extermination of a people—that means killing every member of the people that the killers can reach—we can define the acts of the Turks toward the Armenians as a massacre and not as genocide.

The issue of the definition of genocide seems to occupy a very central part in genocide studies and the lion's share of its literature. It seems also that the definitional and terminological dispute has been conducted under the giant shadow that the Shoah casts over most genocide thinking. Whether consciously or not, most scholars use the Shoah as a basic model, a paradigm, or as the “ideal type” of the phenomenon of genocide. This may be misleading as the Shoah has unique characteristics among genocides.

Both Lewis' and Goren's use of the term genocide is very different from the definition of the United Nations Genocide Convention and the meaning of the term used by most scholars of genocide. (According to Goren's definition, it can be argued that even the Holocaust was not a genocide.)

The United Nations Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of Genocide defines genocide as “acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.” In 1997, the Association of Genocide Scholars voted unanimously to confirm the validity of the Armenian Genocide, and to underscore that the Armenian Genocide conforms to all of the definitions of genocide stipulated in the United Nations Convention on Genocide (see Appendix B).

It seems that many Israeli scholars are not aware and are not familiar with the vast literature of genocide studies in general, and the Armenian Genocide in particular.

*The Jewish Aspect of the Lewis Trial in France as Seen by Israeli Scholars*

The Lewis trial in France had clear Jewish aspects. The Jewish origins of Bernard Lewis played a considerable role in the *non-dit*



of the trial—rivalry of suffering, concurrence of victims, opposition of Jewish memory regarding the Armenian suffering, and the question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust.

Bernard Lewis was defended in court by a highly respected French (Jewish) attorney, Thierry Lévy (Lewis was never present in the court). The names of Robert Faurisson, the Holocaust denier, and Jean-Marie Le Pen, the extreme right-wing political leader who said that the gas chambers were only a *point de détail* in the history of World War II, were raised in the court. They were condemned according to article 1382 of the French Civil Code, which calls for repairing the damage caused to the victims of extermination, the survivors, and their families. Of course there are great differences between Lewis' case and their cases: Lewis is not a vulgar denier; he contests not the massacres but their essence.

Attorney Thierry Lévy said: "Bernard Lewis raised the question of the Armenian genocide as a historian, not as a Jew. Nonetheless, I can imagine that certain Armenians will not be unhappy [*mécontents*] to achieve in this case the condemnation of a Jew for denial [*négationism*]."

Lévy went even further than Lewis in questioning the validity of the Armenian Genocide. Like the deniers and the Turks, he asked about the authenticity of Ambassador Morgenthau's diary and tried to discredit it.

On the other side, the French-Jewish philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, who struggled against Holocaust denial, argued that Lewis used his origins. He and other opponents of the Armenians instrumentalize the Shoah. According to Finkielkraut, the Holocaust, Auschwitz, and the mass extermination constitute a unique event. However, this is not a reason to forget the Armenians and turn our eyes from Rwanda and Bosnia. The fact that we say "never again" does not obligate us to raise barbed wires around our memory. On the contrary, it obligates us to remain vigilant, even more than others.<sup>35</sup>

The association between the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust was also raised several times in the Israeli debate. Porath claimed that the title of my first article, "Honorary citizenship to a denier of the Armenian holocaust" [the term "holocaust" was chosen by the editor and not by me; I used the term Armenian Genocide—Y.A.] (Auron, August 29, 1997), included the word holocaust purposely to demonstrate the commonality of the Armenian fate during WWI with the Jewish fate during WWII. "This idea has

no factual basis.” Surely, Porath says, we should not compare the two events. On the other hand, Auron (August 29) claimed that the fact that we, the Jews, suffered the Holocaust obliges us to fathom the feelings and suffering of the Armenian people.

Shoshan (September 19, 1997) asked whether the Jewish Holocaust is for Porath (or Susser, or Kramer), a subject of historiosophical discussion—was it or was it not? Does Kramer see his obligation to struggle freely for the right of historians to “comment” upon (i.e. to deny) the Jewish Genocide? How do we in the State of Israel—part of whose population consists of survivors of the Holocaust—react to the holocaust of others?

Uri Avneri (September 19, 1997), a left-wing activist, presented arguments regarding the Jewish Holocaust raised by Germans, not necessarily Neo-Nazis, but Holocaust deniers, Holocaust justifiers, and others who trivialized it: “It is saddening and heartbreaking to read the very same claims, with little modification, from Jews and Israelis regarding the Armenian Holocaust.”

Avneri turns to the use of the term “holocaust” regarding other genocides: Many Jews wish to reserve this term only for “our” genocide. “We can respect their wishes, but only in the linguistic domain. When the use of language contributes to the denial or justification of genocide, one can not remain silent.”

According to Avneri, Bernard Lewis, besides being an historian, is an Israeli Zionist propagandist and also an anti-Armenian lobbyist. He does everything to defend the Turks in this terrible affair, and not only in the “scientific” domain. In the past, he has tried to influence the directors of the Holocaust Museum in Washington not to include references to the Armenian Genocide. Avneri said that if Lewis does not categorically deny the Armenian Genocide, he finds definitions and excuses that are not far from those used by certain German historians.

Gershoni and Sand put the discussion in the context of the relationship between the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide (September 5, 1997):

Nolte and Lewis, serious and important historians, supply consumer goods to different markets of national conscience. These are in large measure identical moves, even though they are in fact opposite. Nolte wanted to normalize “a little” the Jewish Holocaust to bring Germany back to the family of nations. Lewis tries to normalize the Armenian holocaust by separating the Jewish fate from the fate of other exterminated peoples. And maybe Lewis,

unintentionally, tries to bring Turkey back to the family of enlightened nations, even though it does not officially recognize the historical evil that was committed.

Unfortunately, Lewis' move reaffirms a more general tendency that dominates the hegemonic Zionist historiography in the public culture in Israel.

The uniqueness of the Holocaust became the centerpiece of a deliberate policy: the complete isolation of the Holocaust from any similar (not identical) historical event, and keeping the Jew as the only victim of genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is an absurd and ahistorical attitude...

Without analogy, history cannot be written. In the Holocaust there was a list of acts and events that are, undoubtedly, unprecedented in the history of humanity. The uniqueness of the Holocaust comes from the uniqueness of the hangman and its planned and industrial act of murder. But, eventually, in the late Zionist consciousness and in actual Israeli political culture, not the Nazi hangman but the Jewish victim is the central character in defining the uniqueness. The Holocaust is the epitome of the *Historia Calamitatum*, this eternal history of persecutions that we learn about from the start of our scholarly endeavors.

Over and above the historical debate about the essence of genocide and its representation in memory, we stand before a shameful case of insensitivity and indifference toward the persecution and extermination of another and a flagrant tendency to keep, at any price, the monopoly on suffering. Those who insist that the world recognize the full roster of crimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will have difficulty accepting honorary citizenship for Bernard Lewis.

Many from the *crème de la crème* of the cultural, political and academic elite, were drafted for the promotion of Lewis' prestigious award. They forgot to ask themselves a little question, which is whether they do not add to the suffering of the Armenian people. In Israeli culture it seems too much to ask of an honorary citizen and his zealous disciples sensitivity to non-Jewish suffering.

Israeli scholars of the Holocaust did not take part in this unique quasi-academic public debate about the Armenian Genocide. Efforts to debate the subject in academic symposia or conferences failed.

### *The Validity of Sources and the Evidence Regarding the Armenian Genocide*

We have already considered opinions such as Minna Rozen's claim regarding forgery of the Andonian Telegrams and the diaries of Henry Morgenthau and questioning the validity of the historical sources. These arguments were also raised by Israeli academics in some articles in *Ha'aretz*.

Porath (September 5, 1997), as we mentioned, does not regard the French scholars and intellectuals who criticized Lewis as authorities, because they do not have a full knowledge of the rich and original material, published over the course of many years by Turkish historians to prove that their people did not commit a planned genocide.

Cohen (September 12, 1997) wrote in *Ha'aretz* that Lewis' only guilt was his intellectual integrity that led him to assert that it was never proven that the Turkish government planned to annihilate the Armenians, or instructed anyone to massacre them. Cohen continued to claim that the official Ottoman archives have been opened to scholars from all over the world, and until now have not resulted in concluding research on the issue. According to him, official Ottoman documents that were found indicate different aspects of the events of 1915. On the other hand, some documents that were considered in the past as part of the immediate historical background (like the Talaat Pasha telegrams) were revealed as worthless frauds, and they are rejected today by every serious historian, from every part of the political spectrum. Until we uncover further evidence, testimonies that are sufficiently validated about the official Ottoman involvement in the terrible crimes committed against the Armenians, the historical question about the plan, the intention and the involvement of the state and its leaders—remains unresolved. The events themselves cannot be refuted or questioned. Cohen concludes:

Every scholar of history, everyone who looks for justice must hope that the maturity and the responsibility shown by the Turkish authorities by opening the archives would result in studies that will enable us to stop using Armenian or Turkish versions.

Until then we have to be very careful about what we say, and to avoid  *clichés*  that do not honor those who use them.

Martin Kramer (September 12, 1997) explains Lewis' change of view. Why, at all, should this shift in opinion seem strange? Forty years have passed and the historiography has made progress. Since 1980, a revolution has occurred in the study of World War I in the Ottoman Empire. Archives were opened, documents began to be published. The sources show, for instance, that the Ottoman authorities conducted 1,400 military trials concerning the crimes against the Armenians—which serve as unequivocal evidence for the massacre.

According to Kramer, this is also evidence that denies the version that the Turks had a master plan for genocide. Furthermore,

the “Andonian Telegrams” that allegedly proved that the leaders of the “Young Turks” explicitly ordered the extermination of the Armenians were revealed in 1986 to be frauds.

We find the same claims in the official protocol of the meeting of the Academic Committee on History of the Ministry of Education held on January 19, 1995 regarding the curriculum about the Armenian Genocide (see chapter 6). What did the chairman say to the committee that was composed of very distinguished Israeli historians from Israeli universities (and a selected group of history teachers)?<sup>36</sup> The chairman, Professor Michel Abitbul, a specialist in Africa and North-African Jewry from the Hebrew University said, in criticizing the proposed experimental program “Sensitivity to World Suffering—Genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” “It avoids the heated historical debates that have accompanied for years the study about the Armenian massacre”:

In the middle of the discussion stands the question of whether the massacre [he did not use the term genocide—Y.A.] of 1915 was a result of a declared and conscious policy of the Turkish government, or a result of local initiatives and circumstances, without any high-level instructions.

The scholars are still debating this question. In the background is the problem of the reliability of four kinds of sources that have existed since 1915 and still today are the main sources of research. The telegrams of Talaat Pasha, the diaries of Henry Morgenthau, the documents of Naim-Andonian and the discussions of the Turkish court martial after WWI. And indeed, while the Turkish archives of WWI were not open, many question marks were raised regarding the reliability of the content of these sources.

As we have already mentioned, he also said that there are two sides to the drama that took place on the borders of Turkey and Russia. None of the committee members had any comments or reservations with what the chairman said. The protocol of the meeting was sent to the editors of the media in Israel.

It is interesting to note that Professor Vahakn Dadrian, whose academic work validating these sources was mentioned by Professor Abitbul as leading him to question the reliability of the sources, said in an interview to the French newspaper *Libération* (June 22, 1996) that the Turkish archives had been purged. The director of the Turkish archive has recently described the Genocide as “Armenian fantasy.” According to him, said Dadrian, there is not one document that verifies the occurrence of the Genocide. Another interesting point is that Minister of Education Amnon Rubinstein on several occasions publicly praised

the professional level of the members of the academic committee and its chairman. Furthermore, Abitbul was nominated in 1999 by Minister of Education Yossi Sarid as the director of the Pedagogical Secretariat—the highest pedagogic post in the Ministry of Education.

It is beyond the scope of our study to deal in detail with the claims raised by respected and noted Israeli academics regarding the reliability of (some) sources relating to the Armenian Genocide.

\* \* \*

I am not an orientalist or a specialist in the history of Turkey or the Ottoman Empire. Even more, I am not a scholar of the Armenian Genocide per se. I deal with one specific aspect of this genocide, that is, its memory and denial.

As I have stated, for me, as well as the majority of genocide scholars, there is no doubt of the proof, based on numerous and varied sources from the period, that the comprehensive mass extermination of the civilian population in various regions of Turkey (and certainly not just in the battle zones) was carried out on the order of Turkish authorities in Constantinople. While certain facts and details can be legitimately debated, and some of the Armenian claims about the genocide can be questioned, the historical sources create an unequivocal and unshakable picture of genocide.

Regardless, it is astonishing (or perhaps not...) to note the similarity between the claims, or the “questions,” of some Israeli scholars and the arguments raised by the government of Turkey in its struggle against the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and even against its systematic study.

Unfortunately, we can also find similarities between Turkish claims and the claims of some very respected Israeli scholars on one side, and the claims of Holocaust deniers and historical revisionists on the other. The deniers of the Holocaust use parts of quotations of Jewish historians for disproving the claims about the extermination of the Jews. They use the names of Yehuda Bauer, the Jewish-Israeli historian of the Holocaust, Pierre Vidal Naquet, the French-Jewish historian and intellectual, Shmuel Korkovesky from Yad Vashem, and many others as “witnesses” for refutation of the Holocaust.

Another claim of the revisionists of the Holocaust is that there are two sides, both worthy of consideration. The revisionists try to

present their views as equally legitimate, suitable to be discussed as an alternative to the view that the Holocaust did occur. They want to portray themselves as representing the opposite view to the “established history,” seeking to achieve self-empowerment and legitimacy.

One manifestation of the “Turkish denial syndrome” was triggered by an initiative of some sixty congressmen in the United States House of Representatives in April 1999. They tried to pass a resolution “to provide in a collection all United States records related to the Armenian Genocide.” Of course, the initiative had political significance and was part of the struggle for recognition of the Genocide. But significant also is the reaction of the Turkish government. The Turkish ambassador in Washington D.C., Baki Ilkin, wrote a letter to all 535 congressmen, dated May 27, 1999, to which was attached an eleven-page report titled “An Objective Look at H. Res. 155.” The intent of the letter was to block the passage of a resolution that proposed to utilize for purposes of research and scholarship the holdings of a strictly American institution.<sup>37</sup>

For decades now, the world, especially the academic world, has been told by successive Turkish governments that only solid and reliable research based on primary sources and official documents can resolve the ongoing dispute they themselves have generated about the Armenian Genocide. Regrettably, the quest for truth in this connection is, and remains, a hollow pretense. In this formal letter, the Turkish ambassador raised questions and allegations mentioned previously by Israeli scholars, as well as other issues, in order to demonstrate that the use of the term “genocide” (i.e., in the “Armenian Genocide”) was inappropriate and therefore this resolution was inappropriate.

The Turkish claims include the following: “Ottoman Armenians were relocated, not deported,” and “the Ottoman Armenians of Eastern Anatolia became subject to a relocation only after as many as 1.1 million Muslims and 100,000 Jews, the overwhelming proportion civilians, were killed in massacres conducted by disloyal Ottoman Armenians fighting alongside Russian forces in Eastern Ottoman Anatolia.”

Another Turkish claim is that “Henry Morgenthau, like some others, pursued only one side of a many-faceted story.”

The Turkish ambassador’s memorandum questioned the legitimacy of the post-World War I Turkish Military Tribunal prosecuting the authors of the Armenian Genocide, their conviction by the Tribunal, and their punishment. The value and importance of Turkish archives

regarding the events, the allegation of “inter-communal clashes,” the argument of Armenian rebellion and of Armenian treachery, and the number of Armenian victims were also questioned, as well as the applicability of Lemkin’s definition of genocide and international law in relation to the Armenian Genocide, and then the Hitler declaration of August 1939, the Holocaust, the Nuremberg Trials, and the Armenian Genocide.

It is not for us here to demonstrate the spurious character of the Turkish arguments and to analyze them. (Dadrian’s book does examine the objections and sets of allegations put forward in the memorandum of the Turkish ambassador.) What is really unacceptable is that some of the Israeli scholars represent the Turkish claims as “objective” ones.

We note that many of the Turkish claims are related in one way or another to Jews in general, and to issues related to the Holocaust in particular. Let us look briefly at the Turkish claims that “disloyal Ottoman Armenians killed 1.1 million Muslims and 100,000 Jews,” which has never been mentioned by Israeli scholars. (The accusations regarding the so-called support “the Armenians” gave to the Nazis were not mentioned this time by the Turkish ambassador.) It is an attempt to play on Jewish sensitivities already exacerbated by the impact of the Holocaust and thereby to co-opt the Jews in the ongoing game of denial. But it has to be clarified that even by official Ottoman statistics, in the areas in which, according to Turkish claims, the Armenians committed atrocities in the course of “inter-communal clashes,” the number of Jewish residents did not exceed 4,000.<sup>38</sup>

I must admit that in my studies about Jewish reactions to the Armenian Genocide I never came across any reference to these accusations. How these “facts” have not provoked reaction and intense inquiry a long time ago—indeed there is no reference to them in any credible source on this matter—makes them totally unbelievable. What I myself found in my research on Zionist and Jewish reactions to the Armenian Genocide is quite the opposite. Jews referred to and praised the sympathy manifested by Armenians to Jewish suffering during the pogroms they had suffered in Eastern Europe in the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately in one case, according to Jewish sources, Jews helped the Turks to massacre the Armenians: Jews of Constantinople took part in the slaughters of the Armenians in 1895 and 1896.<sup>40</sup>

Another claim concerns Henry Morgenthau, the (Jewish) American ambassador in Turkey in the first years of the war (up to June 1916).



He was one of the few people who tried to assist the Armenians, insofar as circumstances allowed, in order to contain the scope of their destruction.

Morgenthau's numerous reports to the State Department and his post-war memoirs unambiguously confirm the genocidal intentions of the leaders of the Young Turk regime and equally emphatically affirm the reality of the intended genocidal outcome. He summarized his wartime finding by incorporating in his book a chapter that bears the title: "The Murder of a Nation."<sup>41</sup>

Key elements in Morgenthau's testimony are confirmed and reinforced by those other American diplomats who succeeded in his post for the remainder of the war. For instance, Abram Elkus, the next U.S. Ambassador (he was also a Jew), on October 17, 1916, in a cipher telegram, reported to Washington "...deportations accompanied by studied cruelties continue...forced conversions to Islam perseveringly pushed, children and girls from deported families kidnapped... Turkish officials have now adopted and are executing the unchecked policy of extermination through starvation, exhaustion, and brutality of treatment hardly surpassed even in Turkish history."<sup>42</sup> One can ask what is the proper definition for this description—we can quote many like it—if not the term genocide.

The efforts of the Turks, including the Turkish government, to question the reliability of Morgenthau as a source aims to indirectly invalidate the Armenian Genocide story that is anchored on Morgenthau's account. It is significant to mention that Heath W. Lowry is recognized as a principal source in the attempts to discredit Morgenthau and thereby give impetus to the Turkish endeavor to deny the Armenian Genocide. His book, *The Story behind Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*,<sup>43</sup> is included in the Turkish ambassador's brief bibliography in the report to the American Congressmen ("Prior to voting on the resolution, you may wish to familiarize yourself with the following texts").<sup>44</sup>

One final point has to be mentioned in this regard: Lowry was caught ghosting for the Turkish ambassador in Washington regarding the denial of the Armenian Genocide, as was described by Smith, Markusen, and Lifton (see chapter 2).<sup>45</sup>

Even the opinions about the telegrams of Talaat Pasha are not so unanimous and "are not rejected today by every serious historian," as some Israeli scholars claim.<sup>46</sup> For example, the opinion of the French genocide scholar Yves Ternon, who wrote some books about the Armenian Genocide and studied closely the history of these documents,

is quite different. In his opinion, to be considered as evidence, a document has to be both valid and correctly interpreted. Talaat's telegrams, and other documents collected by Aram Andonian, although authentic, are not acceptable. His reflections, Ternon emphasizes, are not about the authenticity but about the receivability of what is named "Andonian's documents" (or sometimes Naim Bey documents or Talaat Pasha telegrams). To Ternon, the Armenian Genocide is today *une vérité établie*—established truth. In his opinion, although most of the historians are convinced that the telegrams of Talaat Pasha were sent to regulate and put in order the modalities of the Armenian Genocide, it is preferable to close the debate about their authenticity by avoiding the presentation of them as a proof of the criminal intention of the Ittihad. They are not necessary for proof, because scholars have much valid evidence from other sources.<sup>47</sup>

Last, but not least, is the question concerning the value of the Turkish state archives. The claim by Israeli scholars that as long as the Turkish archives were not open many question marks would have to be raised regarding the reliability of the content of the sources is, at the very least, cynical and hypocritical. Turkey uses a state system that, for more than eighty years, has withheld authentic material on this matter by selectively denying access to its own archives.<sup>48</sup> This issue was clearly manifested by Ara Sarafian, Hilmar Kaiser, and Vahakn N. Dadrian:<sup>49</sup>

It is maintained by Turkish authorities that the evidence contained in the Turkish state archives, civilian as well as military, does not in any way support the charge of genocide. Before accepting such a conclusion, however, one has to ask the cardinal question: how intact, complete, and reliable are these depositories that purportedly cover the entire evidence on the wartime treatment of Ottoman Armenians.

Some facts have to be mentioned:

- a. For more than six decades the Turkish authorities had made these depositories containing material on the Armenian question inaccessible to most researchers. In fact a regime of preferential treatment was instituted. Those well-known for their pro-Turkish proclivities or open partisanship were allowed access; others were denied it.
- b. After the archives, i.e., some parts of them, were finally opened up to the public with great fanfare in January 1989 (since then the Turkish government declared several times of "their opening," for example on April 2002—Y.A.), access to them remained, and still remains, restricted through the imposition of a host of conditions. Indeed, the government, i.e., the authorities administering the archives, reserve

the right to control and, when necessary, to deny access on three grounds: (1) risk to national defense, (2) risk to public order, and (3) danger to Turkey's relations with other states, or to the need for maintaining normal relations between two foreign countries.

- c. Beyond these restrictions, deliberately framed in general and vague terms to allow the indulgence in arbitrary interpretations, there is the practice of selectively withholding documents for a variety of excuses. This practice is applied to those researchers who are suspected of not being in line with Turkish national interests.
- d. Despite great impediments, the post-war Turkish Military Tribunal had been able to seek, locate, and secure an array of documents, including formal and informal orders for the elimination of the bulk of the empire's Armenian population. These documents implicated the Ottoman High Command, the Ministers of Interior and Justice, and the top Young Turk leadership. Yet, nowhere can one find a trace of these archives of the Military Tribunal, which seem to have simply vanished. Nor is there any credible account as to who made the vast documentary corpus attesting to the facts of the Armenian Genocide disappear, and how.

The conclusion becomes inescapable that what one may be able to glean from the Turkish archives is circumscribed and limited by what the authorities involved are arbitrarily and selectively willing to offer.

### **Attitudes of Turks and Armenians to Nazi Germany**

I have to confess that I knew very little about the claim Minna Rozen raised concerning the attitude and behavior of the Armenians regarding Nazi Germany. This subject—important as it is—is not related directly to the question whether or not the Turks committed genocide against the Armenians. Later I learned that it was the Turks and some of their supporters that had cultivated this claim during their struggle against the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. For example, there is a subchapter, "Cooperation between the Armenians and the Nazis," in the book *The Great War and the Tragedy of Anatolia* by Salahi Sonyel, published by the Turkish Historical Society Printing House in Ankara in 2000.<sup>50</sup> Turkish propaganda publications go so far as to even write about the "Role of the Armenians in the Exterminations of the European Jewry" (*Turkish Forum*, August 12, 2001).

But even in this Turkish publication it is noted that "the Armenian 812<sup>th</sup> Battalion" was made up of a small number of committed recruits and a larger number of Armenians from among the prison-

ers of war taken by the Nazis in their sweep eastwards. Early on, the total number of recruits was 8,000; this number later grew, according to the book, to 20,000.<sup>51</sup> The Turkish scholar continues writing: “The author of this book noted that this and other information he wrote ‘is confirmed by the champions of the Armenians, Christopher J. Walker, who admits that the Armenians collaborated with the Nazis.’”<sup>52</sup>

When one reads Walker’s book, *Armenia—The Survival of a Nation*, one learns that these details are mentioned with a lot of other information, including the number of Soviet Armenians serving as soldiers has been estimated at between 300,000 and 500,000, and 20,000 Armenians served in the United States Army during the war. Armenians outside their homeland also contributed to the establishment of the Soviet tank corps known as Sasuntzi Davit that fought against the Forces of the Axis. On the other hand, Walker analyzed the behavior of the Turks during the war, their behavior towards minorities, the affair of the Capital Levy Tax or *Varlik Vengist*, and the fascist trends in Turkey during the war. In his opinion, Turkey was much closer to Nazi Germany than to democratic Britain.

Although under the terms of the Anglo-Franco-Turkish treaty of October 19, 1939 Turkey had pledged to join in a European conflict in which Britain or France were engaged, it chose not to do so, and went on to sign an agreement with Germany on June 18, 1941 which, while not contradicting the earlier treaty, was directly opposed to it in spirit, and fulsomely landed German-Turkish friendship. Walker concludes: “When the tardy and unwilling Turkish participation in the war (it declared war on Germany and Japan on 23 February 1945, not with the intention of doing any fighting) was set against the massive sacrifice of the Soviet Armenia, there was a feeling, as the war drew to an end, that legitimate Armenian national claims deserved a measure of satisfaction, something that they had been denied after the First World War.”<sup>53</sup>

The French scholar Yves Ternon studied this issue, which is not known and not spoken of even in Armenian circles.<sup>54</sup> In his opinion, the only substantial accusation of fascism (“fascist deviation” he calls it) regarding the Armenians is the affair of “tzeghagrongs” (in which “Dro” and Nzhdeh [sometimes spelled Nejdeh] were involved).

Ternon estimates that among the Armenians who lived in Europe in countries occupied by the Germans, the collaborators and the active anti-Nazis were not more than in other nations, and that most Armenians in these countries did not take sides actively. The “Oriental units,”

also known as “national units,” or national legions of Turks, Muslims of the Caucasus, Georgians, and Armenians is, in his view, another and different issue.

The following statement was made by Joris Versteeg, a Dutch journalist working on a book about the lives of the men in the 812 Armenian battalion in Holland during 1943-1945 (this Armenian battalion was stationed in Holland during most of the war years). He sent it to me on September 11, 1997, with the permission to publish it:

The number of Armenians in German military service during the Second World War was about 18,000: 11,000 in field battalions and 7,000 in supply and other non-combat units, according to the former director of the West German military archives J. Hoffman in his book *Kaukasien 1942/43, Das deutsche Heer und die Orientvölker der Sowjetunion* (Freiburg 1991). More important than numbers was the way these men came into German military service. Like other Soviet nationalists, Armenian prisoners of war faced genocidal conditions in the P.O.W. camps, specially in the first nine months of the war against the Soviet Union. The first experiment with Zyklon B in Auschwitz was executed on 600 Soviet P.O.W.s. More than 3 million of the 5.7 million Soviet P.O.W.s died in German custody during the war. Between November 1941 and January 1942 alone 500,000 died in German hands in a racially motivated policy of murder, exhaustion and starvation. In spring 1942, after 2 million had perished, conditions improved slightly when German army commanders discovered that their P.O.W. treatment worked counterproductively and improved Soviet fighting moral, and as P.O.W.s were needed as workforce.

To save “precious German blood” the German army and Rosenberg’s Eastern Ministry began to draft Soviet P.O.W.s in German or in “national” units from the survivors of the mass starvation. Called “volunteers” by the Germans, being drafted was their way out of starvation or extermination. The result for the Germans was mixed at best. There have been cases of Armenians fighting the Red Army, but more numerous were examples of revolts, defections and arrests in the Soviet Union, Poland, France, Holland and other countries.

Several cases have been documented about Jewish Red Army soldiers taken prisoners who were saved by Armenians. I interviewed one of them in Israel recently, Josef Moisevich Kogan, who was saved by an Armenian doctor, went into hiding in an Armenian battalion and escaped with help of Armenians. Another Jew was one of the leaders of an underground movement in an Armenian battalion in Holland. Although Armenians officially were declared “Aryans,” the notion of them being “levantine traders,” not unlike the Jews, was deep-seated in Nazi circles, and racial “purists” along with Hitler himself were prone to look upon the Armenians as “non-Aryans,” according to the American historian Alexander Dallin.

Speaking about military units from Soviet peoples, Hitler said: "I don't know about these Georgians. They do not belong to the Turkic peoples (...) I consider only the Muslims to be reliable (...) All the others I deem unreliable. For the time being I consider the formation of these battalions of purely Caucasian peoples as very risky, while I don't see any danger in the establishment of purely Muslim units (...) In spite of all the declarations from Rosenberg and the military, I don't trust the Armenians either." (Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia, 1941-1945: A Study in Occupation Policies* [London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981, second edition], pp. 229, 251).

In the Armenian diaspora in occupied Europe and to a less extent among Soviet P.O.W.s a collaboration with the Germans existed, but it should be said that the mainstream of the Armenian nation convincingly sided with the allies. In 1942 the BBC commentator and correspondent of the *Sunday Times* in Moscow, Alexander Werth, noticed that "*the only fully pro-Soviet and pro-Russian nation in the Caucasus are—for obvious historical reasons—the Armenians.*" (*Russia at War 1941-1945*, New York, 1964). These reasons were, of course, the fear of a repetition of the genocide by neighboring Turkey, which conducted a wait-and-see policy during the main part of the war and would have invaded Armenia if it had taken the side of Germany. The tragedy for the Armenian P.O.W.s who were forced to enter the German army and in many cases had sabotaged or revolted didn't end in 1945. Back in the USSR, practically all of them were condemned to forced labor in the Gulag. Those who were released in 1955 had survived the camps of Hitler and Stalin.

It is clear that claims about association and even cooperation between the Armenians and the Nazis has a special significance for the Jews: How could they support the murderers' supporters? The subject, important as it is, has to be studied in its context carefully and honestly as much as is possible, and the fascism deviations, when and where they existed, have to be noticed. But the question remains: why does this issue have to be raised when we discuss an historical event that happened more than twenty years earlier?

The claim that Turkey saved many Jews from the Nazis had the unstated premise that a people who showed such humanity could not have committed a genocide. Turkish supporters claim that the Turkish people had been outstanding in their humane and tolerant treatment of the Jewish minority for 500 years following the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and saved masses of Jews. There were those who claimed that not only had Turkey refused to turn its Jews over to the Nazis, it had even served as a refuge for persecuted Jews from European countries during the Holocaust.

As mentioned before in the chapter about the media, there are those who reject these arguments, saying that the position of the Turkish government on the Jewish question during the Holocaust was not particularly generous, but not especially murderous and that some of the darker side of Turkish-Jewish relations is deliberately suppressed. Its position was cynical and narrow like that of most of the neutral countries and Turkey has nothing to be proud of.

It is not for me to evaluate the academic value of the Israeli scholars' claims. Unfortunately, when relating to the Armenian issue, they sometimes use or even abuse their academic credibility and authority in their fields of studies.

\*   \*   \*

In this *état d'esprit* in the Israeli academy, it is not at all surprising to find more examples of deniers' views, especially among the orientalist. One of them can be found in the academic publication of Bek Aziz's book, *Intelligence and Espionage in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine in World War 1913-1918*. This book was published in 1991 by Bar Ilan University and Maarachot Publishing, which is a publishing house related to the Israeli Ministry of Defense.<sup>55</sup> Translation, introduction, and notes were written by Eliezer Tauber, an orientalist from Bar Ilan University. In a note on page 314 one reads: "We have to note also that the term 'Armenian massacre' is not correct from the historical point of view and it does not stand up today to critical scientific standards. There was no plan for the annihilation of the Armenians. On the other hand, close to two million Muslims lost their lives in East Anatolia in this [WWI] war, part of them at the hands of the Armenians." Now the Armenian tragedy is not even a massacre, let alone a genocide. Tauber is not far from claiming, like some Turks, that the Armenians committed genocide against the Turks.

By quoting this statement in the newspaper *Globes* (July 7, 1995) in an article called "Did you know that Bernard Lewis was found guilty of denying the Armenian Genocide?"<sup>56</sup> [As mentioned—it should have been written "found liable" and not "found guilty"—Y.A.] I hoped to start a heated debate. I went as far as to hope that someone, at least the author of the note, would charge me with libel, but the Israeli academy remained silent. It was not until the debate about awarding honorary citizenship of the city of Tel Aviv to Bernard Lewis two years later that the members of the academy spoke.

Contrary to what some of the participants in the debate say (that we have to learn and discuss the Armenian tragedy in a serious way), Israeli academics avoid any scientific and in-depth discussion about the issue. For example, after the decision of the History Committee to reject the curriculum about genocide, Dr. Ariel Horowitz, who was a member of the team that prepared it, sent letters to the minister of education, the director of the Pedagogical Secretariat, and to all the members of the committee (in total about twenty people).<sup>57</sup> He raised arguments concerning the decision of the committee, made some fair comments, and asked them whether for them, as for the minister of education, what happened to the Armenians was a genocide or not. Nobody replied.

We have seen how noted Israeli academics seek to avoid using the “G” word (i.e., genocide) for whatever reason. Instead they use the words “tragedy,” “tragic events,” or “massacre,” replacing a legally defined term with a vague concept that avoids the real issue. Except for descriptive purposes, tragedy as a label for genocide should be avoided, especially in an academic context. It is a transparent escape hatch for those seeking to avoid the “denial” accusation. To use a word such as “massacre” serves the same political and diplomatic ends. Who can be condemned for categorizing mass killing on a genocidal scale as “massacre”? No court would indict one for falsifying history by substituting “genocide” with “massacre.” The Nazis did massacre Jews, obviously; there can be no genocide without massacre. At the same time, the word is a convenient camouflage behind which genocide deniers can and do hide. While courts and university seminars constantly use and play with words, academics should take special care in exposing these word games and not play them themselves as they grapple with genocide.<sup>58</sup>

### **1997: Ambassador to Turkey**

In 1997, Ehud Toledano, a professor of Ottoman history, was chosen by Foreign Minister David Levi, to be the next ambassador to Turkey. This was in the tradition of the previous two to three decades, in which Israel nominated distinguished academics as ambassadors to centrally strategic capitals. Ankara is considered one of the most important capitals for Israeli diplomacy. There was no objection in Netanyahu’s Cabinet when David Levi put forward the name of Ehud Toledano on June 8, 1997.



On August 1, 1997, the Israeli Foreign Ministry officially informed the Turkish Foreign Ministry that the Israeli government had decided to nominate Toledano as the next ambassador.<sup>59</sup> Turkish consent to the new appointment should have been automatic. During August it became clear that there was a problem regarding the nomination. No official announcement was made, but at the end of the month the state-owned Turkish News Agency, citing sources in the Turkish Foreign Ministry, said difficulties had arisen. It claimed that in 1981 Toledano accused Turkey of carrying out massacres during the First World War. An Israeli Foreign Ministry official, who went to Ankara to clarify the delay in the appointment, reported back that Turkish opposition was adamant.<sup>60</sup>

The facts were as follows: in 1981, Professor Toledano had participated in an Israeli Army radio program on the topic of the Armenian Genocide. Professor Yehuda Bauer and George Hintlian, a representative of the Armenian community in Jerusalem, also participated in this program. Toledano was called to participate in it in at the last minute because the Turkish embassy in Tel Aviv refused to send a representative to the debate on the radio. Toledano claims he gave the official Turkish version of what happened in 1915, without offering any opinion about it. In 1997 he claimed that his interview had been translated incorrectly. According to Toledano, the misunderstandings had already been clarified in 1984. In an article written by Arye Dayan in the Israeli weekly *Kol Ha'ir*, he raised the possibility that the Israeli official sent to clarify the issue found that Toledano's file in Turkey contained material claiming that Toledano has represented an "extreme pro-Armenian attitude."<sup>61</sup> The Turks claimed the source of this information was Tel Aviv University. Toledano accused "orientalist circles" at Tel Aviv University for sabotaging his appointment.<sup>62</sup>

The general director of the Foreign Ministry, Eitan Benzur, was quoted in *Maariv* (October 1, 1997) as saying: "Somebody tried to mislead the government in Ankara." Who were the "orientalist circles" that were involved in the affair? "'Who snitched'—there is no other expression," wrote Yaacov Achimeir,<sup>63</sup> a senior journalist at the Israel TV First Channel who had criticized the official Israeli attitude (see chapter 6). According to Achimeir, the attorney general had to request an investigation on this horrid affair in which Toledano and Benzur had to reveal all they knew regarding the development of the affair.

One of the names mentioned was Itamar Rabinovich, former rector of Tel Aviv University, former ambassador to the U.S., and later presi-

dent of Tel Aviv University. He categorically denied the accusations.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, somebody did spread these false charges. In this way the struggles among the academies in their “ivory towers” led to a diplomatic and moral displacement.<sup>65</sup>

It was a strange situation: an allegation that somebody is “pro Armenian”—which means that he recognizes the Armenian Genocide and does not deny it—can be used as a “weapon” against him in the Israeli academy. And more: for a distinguished Israeli scholar (he is not the only one; his opponents in the academy used the same logic) to recognize the Armenian Genocide means being anti-Turkish, which in turn means being pro-Armenian.

Furthermore, in an interview with the Turkish press, Toledano denied that he has ever expressed pro-Armenian views in international conferences, claimed that he is a specialist of Ottoman history from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, that he never explored the events of WWI, and stated that he never disapproved of the Turkish version of those events. That means that he never disapproved of Turkish denial of the genocide.

In an interview with *Ha'aretz* he repeated the same views, continuing his efforts to get the nomination: “Someone is trying to sabotage my nomination by using a false tale.”<sup>66</sup> He is quoted as saying the day before: “I never criticized the Turkish government on the Armenian issue... I have always supported Turkey, in every international academic forum that I have participated and in every subject on the agenda. I dedicated my academic career to studying the history of the Ottoman Empire, and in the frameworks of my studies I have contributed to the creation of a positive image of the Ottoman heritage.” Indeed, this is really a very strange way to look upon the role of a scholar in academic forum.

What was the attitude of the State of Israel in this case? Israel tried to understand and study the Turkish attitude. It was clear to the Israeli government that the “accusations” against Toledano were not correct, that he is not “anti-Turkish.”

The Israeli Foreign Ministry tried to explain to the Turks that Toledano’s words were taken out of context, and their translation into Turkish was far from accurate.<sup>67</sup> “The subject is treated in diplomatic pipelines, in the spirit of the good relationship between the two countries,” said the spokesman of the Foreign Ministry some weeks later.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, in February 1998 another Israeli, Uri Bar-Ner, was nominated to be the Israeli ambassador to Ankara.

The Israeli government continues to avoid dealing with the main issue and the core of the question—denial of the Armenian Genocide. It was impossible to find any single official statement about the content of the issue—denying or recognizing the Genocide. Yaacov Achimeir wrote: “There is reason to believe that on the Foreign Minister’s table there is a clear recommendation not to answer questions regarding the Armenian tragedy by referring to it as ‘genocide.’ And thus, relations between Israel and Turkey remain in the shadow cast by the spirits of hundreds of thousands of Armenians—some estimate even a million or two. A nation that has lost six million of its sons claims the right to ask the world never to forget. We will not let any man born of woman forget the Holocaust.”<sup>69</sup>

From this affair we learn that Israel has accepted “genocide” as a negotiable term—which is in itself an intolerable phenomenon. Let us imagine a European country, say a Scandinavian one, that nominated an ambassador to Germany that was disqualified by them because he had spoken (or allegedly spoken...) twenty years earlier about the Holocaust committed by Nazi Germany. Would somebody in Denmark or Sweden accept the disqualification of the ambassador? It is unthinkable, especially when we deal with the State of Israel, which pretends to represent the victims of the Holocaust. But the Israeli academy stayed silent in this affair.

### ***A Shade of Difference: Yad Vashem and the Armenian Genocide***

The scientific, academic, educational, and other public activities of Yad Vashem merit, no doubt, a different study. The attitude of this important institution to genocide and to the Armenian in particular was mentioned in this chapter and in previous ones as well. I would like to deal briefly with a film called *A Shade of Difference*, created for Yad Vashem, and eventually banned from screening.

The documentary film was prepared in the early 1990s, directed by Yarim Kimor (from the IBA), and was produced by the respected private company “Telad.” It was originally intended to be used in future educational activities in Israel and abroad and was to be screened on television networks as one in a series of documentary films on the Holocaust. The steering committee that accompanied the production of the film was composed by Dr. Yitzchak Arad, the former director of Yad Vashem, Professor Yehuda Bauer and Professor Israel Gutman, both eminent scholars of the Holocaust, who

also had ample responsibilities in Yad Vashem. Joining the committee were two other members of Yad Vashem. The steering committee authorized the script, and members of Yad Vashem worked very closely with the producers of the film. It was financed by a foundation related to the Bronfman family in Canada, which dedicated a very large budget to it.

The film emphasizes the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust—"a shade of difference." The beginning of the film deals with the question of what is the difference between the Holocaust and other genocides or massacres. Forty minutes of the film deal with the Jewish Holocaust. The information is based on Nazi archives, films taken by the Allies, still photographs, and specially filmed footage. Israeli scholars are interviewed at length explaining their points of view. The last ten minutes deal with euthanasia—the mass murder of the mentally ill, retarded, and physically disabled (project T4)—with the genocide of the Roma by the Nazis, and with the Armenian Genocide. One of the testimonies presented in the film was that of Otto Rosenberg, a Roma survivor of Auschwitz, who lost all his family there. Rosenberg says that in the extermination camps there was no difference between the behavior of the Nazis towards the Jews and towards the Roma and that "what happened to us happened to them." Referring to this statement, Professor Bauer and Professor Moshe Zimmerman of the Hebrew University compare the difference between the Jewish Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma. The last three minutes of the film deal with the genocide of the Armenians. George Hintilian, an Armenian historian, states that the crime, in its intensity and its totality, is identical, but Professor Bauer and the narrator point out the differences. In any case, the film represents clearly the idea that there is a principal basic difference between the Holocaust and any other destruction of human beings in history.

In 1993, after an internal screening of the film in Yad Vashem, objections to the future use of the film began. Some people wanted to take out some sections from the film, especially those dealing with the Armenians, and to make corrections. It seems that the comparison between the Holocaust and other genocides was too much for some of them. Professor Bauer tried to find a compromise, but refused to take out the section about the Armenians. In the end, the film was banned and the entire project was cancelled. It has been almost impossible to receive any accurate information regarding the chain of events that led to the

cancellation of the film, therefore the description presented here likely does not represent the whole story.

In April 1995, two years after the film was initially screened and then banned, Yad Vashem denied that it had been banned, and their spokeswoman stated that it needed to be edited a second time because of a conceptual flaw.<sup>70</sup>

In August 1996, three-and-a-half years after the film was nearly ready, Yad Vashem declared that there was a copyright problem with the BBC, and therefore the film could not be broadcast widely, but could be viewed in the pedagogical library of Yad Vashem. They also claimed that any rumor regarding the banning of the film was false. Contrary to clear evidence, the spokeswoman claimed that there were no controversies within Yad Vashem regarding the film.<sup>71</sup>

In 1993, the former director of Yad Vashem, Dr. Yitzchak Arad, denied, contrary to the evidence, the involvement of Yad Vashem in the cancellation of the conference in 1982 and said that “Yad Vashem never intended to take part in this conference in the first place even though programs for the conference opening at Yad Vashem were presented and widely distributed in the world.”<sup>72</sup> When he was asked by the journalist what Yad Vashem would do if it were invited to a similar conference today [1993—Y.A.] that would deal, beside the Jewish Holocaust, with the Armenian one, he replied, “This is not a domain that the law directs and authorizes us to deal with and to represent.”

When he was asked openly if the institute of which he is the head recognizes the occurrence of the Armenian Genocide, he replied: “Yad Vashem was created according to the Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Law (Yad Vashem Law). This law defines our sphere of responsibility very clearly—the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Not only is it out of our sphere to deal with the massacre of the Armenians that happened during World War I, but it is also not our responsibility to deal with other victims of WWII, such as the Gypsies.”

According to this point of view, the representation of the non-Jewish victims of Nazi racism should be minimal. In accordance with this, it is not surprising that only several written lines and two photos among thousands can be found in the Yad Vashem Museum concerning non-Jewish victims of the Nazis. The text is: “The Racial policy of the Nazis called for the persecution of groups among the Gypsies and the Slavs, who were considered dangerous, even though the acts committed against them were not consistent. The orders given in Germany

required that the pure blooded Gypsies should not be deported, whereas in the Soviet Union [in the territories that were occupied by the Nazis—Y.A.], the order was to kill them. Defined as ‘inferiors,’ the national and cultural identity of the Slavs was denied and forbidden, and many were imprisoned or killed. Soviet soldiers were murdered as well. But because of political considerations, Hitler supported the Slavic puppet states, Slovakia and Croatia.

“During the war the Nazis murdered more than a hundred thousand ‘Aryan’ Germans who suffered from mental or physical disabilities, in the framework of the Euthanasia project. Protests from the leaders of the church brought this to a halt in September 1941. Nevertheless, the killing continued secretly in limited quantities.” As mentioned before, there are only two pictures in the Museum that relate to the non-Jewish victims. One is the arrest of Polish citizens by the German forces that occupied Poland, and the other Roma in the Belzec camp.

We can only guess what a visitor in Yad Vashem Museum might understand—if he does indeed come across them—from this presentation of the non-Jewish victims of the Nazis. Genocide scholar R. J. Rummel wrote that the Nazis murdered between 15,000,000 to over 31,600,000 people, most likely closer to 21 million men, women, handicapped, aged, sick, prisoners of war, forced laborers, camp inmates, critics, homosexuals, Jews, Slavs, Serbs, Czechs, Italians, Poles, Frenchmen, Roma, Ukrainians, and so on.<sup>73</sup> We do not know how the non-Jewish victims will be represented in the new Museum that is being built at this very moment in Yad Vashem.

Indeed, the law adopted by the Knesset in August 19, 1953 had great influence on the memory of the Holocaust and its significance in Israeli society, and even has today. One of the functions and responsibilities of Yad Vashem, according to article 2, paragraph 1 of the law is: “To collect, examine and publish testimony of the Holocaust it called forth, and to bring home its lesson to the people.”

As mentioned earlier, the Law does not say what the lesson or the lessons of the Holocaust are, and this, apparently, is not an accidental omission. Nevertheless, the main lesson intended is the Zionist one.

It should be emphasized that Yad Vashem is an institute of the state, and has to function according to the spirit of the 1953 law. But there are, no doubt, other interpretations of the law and its spirit. One example comes from Shevach Weiss, the director of the Council of Yad Vashem. He publicly supported the views of former Edu-

cation Minister Yossi Sarid regarding the occurrence of the Armenian Genocide, as stated by him on April 24, 2000.

The attitude of Yad Vashem in regard to these issues is not only significantly different from the attitude of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, but also from, for example, the attitude of the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, in New York, which is an American-Jewish institute. Both are more open to the inclusion of the memory of the non-Jewish victims of the Nazis and also to the Armenian Genocide.<sup>74</sup>

### **Other Cases of Avoiding the Armenian Genocide in the Academy**

It is illustrative to look at the special issue of the respected journal *Zmanim*—an historical quarterly published by the School of History at Tel-Aviv University dedicated to World War I: “The Great War: 80 Years After.” This issue is aimed at examining the impact of the war from different perspectives. The Armenian Genocide is not one of them. The issue is mentioned in a single sentence in an article by Haggai Erlich, who was always sensitive to mentioning the Armenian Genocide: “Real atrocities were experienced by minorities, primarily Armenians; their horrible massacre committed by the Ottomans left WWI as a scar in this region.”<sup>75</sup>

Not mentioning the Genocide among the themes that are dealt with in the quarterly in this context is significant. Maybe the respected historians were not aware of this event when they looked at WWI from the perspective of eighty years. Can we compare it to a respected historical quarterly published by a respected school of history in a respected university in Europe or the United States that would deal with WWII without adequate reference—or even without any reference—to the Holocaust?

The avoidance of almost any reference to the Armenian Genocide can also be found in the Israeli-Turkish International Colloquy, titled “The First World War—Middle Eastern Perspectives,” held at Tel-Aviv University on April 3-6, 2000, with the second half held in Istanbul on April 9-12, 2000.

The sponsors of this academic colloquy were the following: National Information Center, the Israeli Security Ministry, the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv Municipality, Beer Sheva Municipality, IDA—Department of History, the Research Institute of Mili-

tary History, the Israeli Society for Military History by Tel Aviv University, and Turkish Army Central Command, the Branch of Military History and Strategic Studies.

The involvement of different organizations and institutions in the colloquy is a subject in itself. Among the different topics of dozens of lectures during the symposium, there were those that touched different political, strategic, and military aspects. The final session even was titled “Man in War,” and another lecture was about women, peace, and war in Turkey during the war. The Armenian issue was not on the agenda. Can we imagine the uproar if an academic colloquy was to be held in a distinguished German university about World War II dealing with European perspectives, and the Jewish Holocaust was not mentioned?

In this situation in which the absolute majority of Israeli academics stays silent in the debate over the Armenian Genocide, and part of them indirectly and directly deny it, it is not surprising that the Armenian United Committee of Jerusalem decided to publish on April 24, 2000 an open letter to Israeli intellectuals and academics, in which the following is written:

On the one hand, for the last two decades now, the majority of Israeli intellectuals have been hesitant to take clear-cut positions *vis-à-vis* the Armenian Genocide.

On the other hand, some have been articulate in favor of the Armenian Genocide, both in Israel and abroad, while another group, though marginal, confusing political interests with ethical principles, has been consciously ambivalent about it. This particular group (mainly professors) tends to use official Turkish arguments, which border on denial of the Armenian Genocide. Though their numbers are few, their impact has long-term consequences on the Israeli public.

In the past, within Israeli society, it was inconceivable to question the Armenian Genocide, as it was a society educated on the writings of Henry Morgenthau, Franz Werfel, Avshalom Feinberg and Sarah Aharonson [members of the Jewish Nili Group during World War I—Y.A.] (all witnesses of the Armenian Genocide).

Today, the unfortunate fact is that most Israeli intellectuals are indifferent to issues affecting the status of the Armenian Genocide in Israel.

Because of the apathy and silence of the majority of Israeli intellectuals,

1. The Armenian Genocide is not yet recognized by the Israeli parliament.
2. The Armenian Genocide is not being taught in Israeli universities and high schools (despite the fact that textbooks have been prepared).



3. Official Turkish denial literature is allowed to stay on the shelves of Israeli university libraries as accepted and legitimate historical material in the name of objectivity.

It is high time that the Israeli intellectual and academic community, as the heir of a nation who has gone through the most terrible holocaust, should realize that this long silence and apathy should be broken in favor of a more active and fair position towards the indisputable facts of the Armenian Genocide.

The Armenian United Committee of Jerusalem wishes to express its appreciation and thanks to the scores of Israeli intellectuals and academics who continue to stand by the fact that a historical injustice was done to the Armenians, and hopes that their example is followed by many others.

Both Jews and Armenians have the painful obligation to remind the world of the horrors of genocide so that such tragedies do not recur elsewhere.

But we have to mention again that some progress has recently been made. Currently two university curricula about genocide, with a clear reference to the Armenian Genocide, are being written at the Open University of Israel (see chapter 6). An evening commemorating the Armenian Genocide was held on April 24, 2002 at the Hebrew University faculty club. The event "Life after Death: Vitality and Creativity after the Armenian Genocide" was presented by the Hebrew University Armenian study program. This program was founded in 1967 and currently offers degrees at the Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral levels. To the best of my knowledge it is the first time that a commemorative event for the Armenian Genocide took place at an Israeli University.

It has also to be emphasized again that there are in Israeli academic circles scholars who have criticized the attitude of the State and the attitudes of some of their colleagues, as we can see in this chapter and in the chapter regarding education.

And finally, although I argue that historians have a great responsibility to the truth, I do not mean to claim that well-meaning scholars who remain unconvinced by either the Turkish or the Armenian explanations are "deniers." It is the nature of academic inquiry to remain skeptical in lieu of strong evidence. And, given the likelihood that the Turkish archives have been purged of any incriminating evidence, it is possible that scholars using that as a resource have seen no state "evidence" to eliminate Armenians. It is my view that the nature of historical debate must always strive at the Truth. In order to do so it must not be swayed either way by personal convictions. In my view,

Jewish scholars have the responsibility to struggle against the denial of the Armenian Genocide, or any other committed genocide, in the same way as they have to struggle against the denial of the Holocaust.

The American linguist and activist Noam Chomsky proposes a distinction between the commissar and the dissident. These distinctions go back to the origins of recorded history, as we can find in the Platonic Dialogues, or even more dramatically in the Bible. The intellectuals who gained respect and honor from the establishment at the time were those who were condemned centuries later as false prophets—the countries, the commissars. Those who came to be honored much later as the prophets received rather different treatment at the time. They told the truth about things that matter, ranging from geopolitical analysis to moral values, and suffered the punishment that is meted out to those who commit the sin of honesty and integrity.<sup>76</sup>

Chomsky's attitude towards the deniers of the Holocaust in the principle of liberty of expression is questionable and debatable.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, according to him, in his essay "Writers and Intellectual Responsibility," the more crucial aspects of the question are seeking and telling the truth about matters of human significance. The obligation to do so may seem transparent, but it is not, at least in certain cultures, including that of this writer. Within that society, the value system imposed by authority held that the responsibility of the intellectual is to serve power interests: to record with a show of horror the terrible deeds (real or alleged) of designated enemies, and to conceal or prettify the crimes of the state and its agents.<sup>78</sup>

Chomsky blames the patterns of behavior and the attitude of American intellectuals regarding the Vietnam War, the genocide in East Timor, and the genocide in Cambodia, as well as the American historiography regarding the extermination of Native Americans. According to him, the responsibility of the writer as a *moral agent* is to try to bring the truth about matters of human significance to an audience that can do something about them.

Another very significant point that Chomsky raises is the audience. He strongly disagrees with the slogan "Speak truth to power": It is a waste of time and a pointless pursuit to speak truth to those who exercise power in coercive institutions—truths that they already know well enough, for the most part.<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, Chomsky has a qualification: insofar as such people dissociate themselves from their institutional setting and become human beings, moral agents, then they join everyone else. But in their institutional roles, as people who wield power, they are hardly worth addressing, any more than the worst tyrants and criminals, who are also human beings, however terrible their actions.

It is for Israeli intellectuals to ask themselves if and how Chomsky's comments are applicable to the Israeli academy.

### Notes

1. Lewis Coser, *Men and Ideas: A Sociologist's View* (New York: Free Press, 1965), p. viii.
2. Lewis Feuer, "What Is an Intellectual?" in *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals: Theory, Method and Case Study*, edited by Alexander Gello (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976), p. 48.
3. Charny, 2001, op. cit. See also Israel W. Charny and Daphna Fromer, "A Follow-Up of the Sixty-Nine Scholars who Signed an Advertisement Questioning the Armenian Genocide," *Internet on the Holocaust and Genocide* 26/26, April 1990, pp. 6-7, and Israel W. Charny and Daphna Fromer, "Denying the Armenian Genocide: Patterns of Thinking as Defence Mechanisms," *Patterns of Prejudice*, 32 (1) 1998, pp. 39-49.
4. The following pages are based, partly, on the reports of the *New York Times* which covered the issue several times and on "The Book of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide, Book One: The Conference Program and Crisis," International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide, Tel Aviv, Israel. The book was edited by Israel Charny, who convened the conference—the subtitle of which was "Towards the Understanding, Intervention and Prevention of Genocide." Charny's view of the chain of events appears in the book and includes in detail the pressures that were applied against the organizers of the conference, and the subsequent cancellation of the participation of a number of central personalities, including Elie Wiesel, who was the president of the Organizing Committee, and the chairman of Yad Vashem. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-316. Charny continues his efforts in the spirit of the initiative for the conference in 1982 in the framework of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem.
5. "Israelis Said to Oppose Parley after Threat to Turkish Jews," *The New York Times*, June 3, 1982.
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11. Sukru Elekdogan, Turkish ambassador in Washington, "Turkey's Jews Are under No Threat," letter to the editor, *The New York Times*, June 10, 1982.
12. "Turkish Threats to U.S. Reported," *The New York Times*, June 22, 1982.
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14. Nahum Barnea, *Davar*, June 4, 1982.
15. Amos Eylon, "Their Holocaust," *Ha'aretz*, June 11, 1982.
16. Yitzhak Arad, Amos Elon, "We and the Armenians," *Ha'aretz*, June 29, 1982.
17. "Genocide Seminar, Opposed by Israel, Opens," *The New York Times*, June 22, 1982.
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23. *Le Monde*, (excerpts from an interview with Bernard Lewis), November 16, 1993.
24. Nathaniel Herzberg, "Bernard Lewis condamné pour avoir nié la réalité du génocide Arménien," *Le Monde*, June 23, 1995.
25. Motti Danos, "How Roni Milo (almost) awarded an honorary citizenship to a denier of the Armenian holocaust," *Tel Aviv Magazine*, August 8, 1997.
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27. Alexander Soumech, "Thousands of Armenians called on Israel to recognize the Armenian Genocide," *Ha'aretz*, April 26, 1998.
28. Motti Danos, op. cit., September 6, 1997.
29. Minna Rozen, "Armenia, Armenia," *Historia*, 10, August 2002, pp. 35-90. My answer, as well as Dadrian's, will be published in number 12.

30. Roger Smith, Eric Markusen, and Robert Jay Lifton, "Professional Ethics and the Denial of the Armenian Genocide," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9, Spring 1995, pp. 1-22.
31. Except the article of Asher Susser, "Denial and Deceit," which was published in *Ha'aretz* on Sunday, August 31, 1997, and included comments on the article of Yair Auron, "Honorary Citizenship to a Denier of the Armenian Holocaust?" It should to be noted that Auron's article was edited, taking into consideration the possibility of a libel suit.

Thanks to the insistence of the editor of the literary supplement, Beny Zifer, the first article in the series was published. Susser probably read the article before its publication and could publish his reaction about it the day after.

The articles were: Yair Auron, "Honorary Citizenship to a denier of the Armenian Holocaust?" August 29; Israel Gershoni and Shlomo Sand, "From Bernard Lazare to Bernard Lewis: Genocide and History," September 5; Yehoshua Porath, "Really a Genocide?" September 5; Amnon Cohen, "Bernard Lewis, Genocide and Defamation," September 12; Martin Kramer, "The Obligation of the Historian," September 12; Avrom Yudowitch, "Unpardonable fault," September 12; George Hintlian, "Seventy Members of My Family Lost Their Lives," September 12; Boaz Shoshan, "The Question Is Still Open," September 19; Uri Avneri, "Character Assassination? What Character?" September 19; Yaacob Goren, "Jamal Pasha and the Yishuv," September 12; Israel Charny, "I Am Ashamed of Bernard Lewis," September 19.

32. "La Concurrence des Victimes," *Espace Orient* No. 26, October 1997, pp. 10-21; "Controversy: must we speak about 'Genocide' of the Armenians?" *Courier International*, No. 375, January 8-14, 1998. The weekly published parts of the articles of Porath and Gershoni and Sand.

In an Open Letter to the editor of *Courrier International*, the French historian and specialist of the Armenian Genocide, Yves Ternon, criticized the title the editor gave to the controversy. Yves Ternon, "Open Letter to the Editor of *Courrier International*," *Haratch*, January 13, 1998.

33. It is interesting to note that at the end of the year 2000, an Israeli historian was sued for libel in the Tel Aviv District Court because he wrote in his Masters thesis that there was evidence that soldiers had massacred some 200 residents of the coastal village of Tantura during Israel's War of Independence in 1948. The affair evoked many reactions and the question of whether the legal system has the right to interfere in an academic issue was also raised. The court ordered the author of the thesis to apologize to the veterans of this unit, who charged him with libel, and to pay them indemnities, but he refused to obey and claimed he had new evidence regarding the killing of the civilian population. The affair was not yet closed as of March 2003.
34. Letters by Israel Charny to Bernard Lewis, December 27, 1994 and May 22, 1995; see *Internet on the Holocaust and Genocide*, Special Triple 10<sup>th</sup>

- Anniversary 1985-1995 Issue 54/55/56, April 1995. Excerpts from a letter by Professor Bernard Lewis to the president of the 17<sup>th</sup> Court, Palace of Justice, Paris, 21 October, 1994, C-9; Letter from Israel W. Charny to Bernard Lewis, December 27, 1994, C-10.
35. Claude Askolovitch and Laurent Neumann, "Mémoire Juive contre douleur Arménien" [Jewish Memory against Armenian Pain], *L'évènement du Jeudi*, May 18-24, 1995.
  36. Official protocol of the meeting of the Academic Committee on History, held on January 19, 1995, the Pedagogical Secretariat, Ministry of Education.
  37. Letter of the Turkish ambassador in Washington, Baki Ilkin, May 27, 1999, in Vahakn N. Dadrian, *Key Elements in the Turkish Denial of the Armenian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA and Toronto: The Zoryan Institute, 1999), Appendix 1, pp. 59-74.
  38. Op. cit., Appendix 2, pp. 75-76.
  39. Auron, 2000, pp. 121-149.
  40. Ibid, pp. 150-153.
  41. Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (New York: Doubleday, 1918), p. 301.
  42. U.S. National Archives, R.G. 59.867.4016/299.
  43. Heath W. Lowry, *The Story behind Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1990). This text was given in 2001 to an Israeli minister by the Turkish Ambassador in Tel Aviv.
  44. See Henry Morgenthau Sr. Collection, Library of Congress Manuscripts Division, Washington D.C. The diaries are on reels 5 and 6. A published version is *United States Diplomacy on the Bosphorus: The Diaries of Ambassador Morgenthau 1913-1916*, edited by Ara Sarafian (Ann Arbor: Gomidas Institute Books, 2002). I wish to thank Ara Sarafian for providing this material.
  45. Smith, Markusen, and Lifton, 1995 (op. cit. note 30).
  46. See, for example, Sinasi Orel and Sÿreyya Yuca, "Affaires arméniennes, les télégrammes de Talaat Pacha—Fait historique ou fiction?" Société turque d'histoire, Triangle, 1983; Vahakn N. Dadrian, "Documentation of the Armenian Genocide in Turkish Sources," in *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographic Review*, vol. 2, edited by Israel W. Charny (New York: Facts On File, 1991); Dadrian, "The Naim-Andonian Documents on the World War I Destruction of Ottoman Armenians: The Anatomy of a Genocide," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 18, No. 3, 1986. Dadrian rejected the conclusions of these Turkish historians but revealed many errors that Andonian had made in the transcription of the telegrams in the three versions (Armenian, French, and English), which pertained more to the form than the foundation of the documents.
  47. Yves Ternon, "La qualité de la prevue—A propos des documents Andonian et la petite phrase d'Hitler," *L'actualité du Génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Edipol, 1999), pp. 135-142. See also Yves Ternon, *Enquête sur la négation d'un génocide* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 1989), pp. 25-33.

48. Ara Sarafian, "The Issue of Access to the Ottoman Archives," *Zeitschrift für Türkeistudien* 6, no. 1, 1993.
49. Dadrian, 1999, op. cit., pp. 28-29. He provides detailed bibliographic references for his comments.
50. Salhi Sonyel, *The Great War and the Tragedy of Anatolia: Turks and Armenians in the Maelstrom of Major Powers* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Printing House, 2000). This so-called academic publication was given to an Israeli minister by the Turkish ambassador of Turkey in Israel.
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53. Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London: Routledge, 1990, revised second edition), pp. 355-360.
54. Yves Ternon, *La Cause Arménienne* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1983) pp. 125-134.
55. Bek Aziz, *Intelligence and espionage in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine in World War 1913-1918* (Tel Aviv: Bar Ilan University and Maarachot, 1991), translated, introduced, and noted by Eliezer Tauber.
56. Yair Auron, "Did You Know that Bernard Lewis Was Found Guilty of Denial of the Armenian Genocide?" *Globes—Cultural and Communication Supplement*, July 7, 1995.
57. Ariel Horowitz, "Letter to the Members of the History Committee," February 8, 1995.
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59. Arye Dayan, "Killing Ambassador and then Rest," *Kol Ha'ir*, October 10, 1997.
60. Patrick Cockburn, "Holocaust that Israel would rather ignore," *Independent*, October 18, 1997.
61. Arye Dayan (op. cit.).
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63. Yaacov Achimeir, "Extremely Ugly Affair," *Maariv*, October 13, 1997.
64. Arye Dayan (op. cit.).
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67. Oded Granot, "The Turks refuse to approve the nomination of the Israeli Ambassador in Ankara," *Maariv*, September 9, 1997.
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69. Yaacov Achimeir, *Maariv*, October 13, 1997.
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71. Michael Sepharad, "The Six Million (This time not including the retarded, the handicapped and the Gypsies)," *Kol Ha'ir*, August 16, 1996.
72. Michal Peleg, "Shrine of National Remembrance," *Ha'aretz Supplement*, June 25, 1993.
73. See among others R. J. Rummel, "The Nazi Genocide State," in *Encyclopedia of Genocide* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO 1999), pp. 437-440.
74. Regarding the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum see Edward T. Linenthal, 1995, op. cit.
75. Haggai Erlich, "The 1919 Generation, the War and the Shaping of the Middle East," *Zmanim*, Vol. 17, No. 65, Winter 1988/9, p. 86.
76. Noam Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), p. 62.
77. It should be mentioned that Chomsky wrote a preface to a book of the French denier of the Holocaust, Robert Faurisson, *Treatise in Defense Against Those Who Accuse Me of Falsifying History*. Chomsky defended Faurisson's right to free speech. Even though I respect Chomsky's struggle for human rights and his openness of mind in defense of free speech, I can not accept his refusal to perceive any danger in denial discourse.
78. Chomsky, p. 61.
79. Ibid.



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# 10

## Conclusions

*Have you murdered and also taken possession?*  
—Kings I 21:19

In chapter 21 of Kings I there is the story of Naboth, who had a vineyard located in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab. Ahab spoke to Naboth saying, "Give me your vineyard garden because it is close beside my house, and I will give you a better vineyard than it in its place; if you like, I will give you the price of it in money." But Naboth said to Ahab, "God forbid me that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers and I will not give it to you." Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed, but Jezebel, his wife, told him that she would get him Naboth's vineyard. She then wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent them to the elders and nobles who were living with Naboth in his city. She told them in the letters to proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people, and seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against Naboth saying that he cursed God and the king. Then, she told them, take him out and stone him to death. The men of the city did as Jezebel had told them, and then they sent word to Jezebel saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead." When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth, to take possession of it. But then God told the prophet Elijah the Tishbite to meet Ahab in the vineyard and to speak to him saying, "Have you murdered and also taken possession?" Elijah told Ahab that he would be punished severely because of his sin against Naboth.

It seems to me that this story is quite applicable to our subject in many regards. The Turkish state—of the past—murdered the Arme-

nians, while subsequent Turkish governments have taken their possessions. And more than this, there is no Elijah who promises to confront Turkey, not even for denying it.

What the case of the Armenian Genocide demonstrates is—contrary to the biblical story—that justice is not done, the evildoer is not punished. Furthermore, the perpetrators can succeed in their constant denial of the crimes they committed. At the beginning perhaps the denial is accepted, not because people or states believe the perpetrators, but because of their pragmatic interests. Later, the murderers or their successors try to confuse future generations so that they will not know anything about the crime, hoping that it will then be forgotten.

Many observers estimate, in the case of the Armenians, that one act could radically change the long-standing denial of their Genocide: recognition of the Genocide by the United States or Israel. These are the pivotal countries that could bring about a Turkish recognition of the Genocide. There is a connection or even interdependence between the decision of the two states. If one of them recognized the Genocide, sooner or later the second would do the same.

There is no doubt that morally speaking, Israel should be the first. Sadly, however, taking a realistic view of Israeli society and policy, this is not likely to happen in the near future. The political establishment of Israel, from the left wing as well as from the right wing, with a few exceptions, has decided to develop relations between Turkey and Israel. It was a geopolitical decision and a strategy influenced by political and military interests that were sometimes represented as “vital Jewish” interests and later on as “vital Israeli” interests.

The political arena has its own “logic” and its own “morality.” One can understand the political, military, and economic interests of a state and the simple, banal, political considerations and calculations that are common in politics—“business as usual” we used to say... Regarding its complicated situation and sometimes the struggle for its very existence, Israel has the right to behave “politically”—according to its political interests—even more than most countries. In my opinion, this was truer in the past than it is today. Israel is strong and can assure its own security. And indeed, not all Israeli politicians have behaved like “business as usual.” Some of them in the 1990s and in 2000 criticized the attitude of the state and recognized the Armenian Genocide publicly, even when they were members of the government.

The question is raised as to whether Israel has crossed a moral boundary by using the memory of the Armenian Genocide—by its non-recognition and by contributing to the process of denial—as merchandise with which to bargain in its relations with Turkey.

Everyone would agree that Israel has no right to bargain with the memory of the Holocaust. But, even more, it has no right—by no means, in any circumstances, and much less so than any other country—to bargain with the memory of another victim group. And yet Israel did just that with the Armenian Genocide. The injustice on the side of Israel is even greater than that of other countries. Other states are passive or indifferent to the process of denial; some are even active in the struggle against denial and were ready “to pay the price” for their decision, which was based mostly on moral grounds. Over the years, Israel has turned from being a passive denier to being an active denier. Israel is contributing to the process of genocide denial and by doing so, it also betrays the memory and the legacy of the Holocaust, at least from my point of view.

Israel committed the “original sin” when it surrendered to Turkish pressure at the start of their relations. Israel should have explained to Turkey that the memory of a genocide would not be negotiable merchandise in the relations between the two countries. Because Israel is a country born out of the Holocaust, Turkey does not have the right to ask or force Israel to speak out about genocide.

In my view, Turkey would have accepted this stand by Israel because it was in its interest to develop its relations with Israel. After Israel surrendered on this point the first time, that surrender became a “precedent.”

When the political establishment crosses the “moral boundary,” other spheres in society have to raise their voices. The legacy and the moral of the Holocaust could have been a significant “voice” in this regard, but it has not come to pass. Israel has chosen the particular rather than the universal moral of the Holocaust. The legacy of the Holocaust, as represented by Holocaust institutions in Israel are, no doubt, the Zionist-Jewish lessons.

The mandate of Yad Vashem is to deal only with the Jewish Holocaust. The concept of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, which is a legitimate historical concept, was banalized in the political arena and by the general public, and sometimes used inappropriately. In the same manner, the Holocaust was used inappropriately by Israelis, and by Arabs, in the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

As a secular Israeli-Jew, I sometimes venture to ask my colleagues if we should not add another commandment to our Ten Commandments: “You shall not take the name of the Holocaust in vain,” as an addendum to the biblical commandment, “You shall not take the name of God in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

The universal lessons of the Holocaust, which could have been a check on the behavior of the political sphere, are not prominent in Israel and are not cultivated by the Holocaust institutions. Furthermore, it was and is the political establishment that dominates, generally speaking, the “Holocaust establishment.” (For instance, the head and members of the board of directors of Yad Vashem are nominated by the minister of education, who is a political figure.) Some of the Holocaust institutions are state institutions. Similarly, the “educational establishment” is largely influenced and even dominated by the political establishment. Only on the fringes of the educational sphere and the Holocaust institutions is there alternative discourse and efforts not to accept the policy of ignoring the Genocide, the indifferent and the passive denial that we can find in the educational system of Israel (as well as of almost all countries).

The media, based on the principals of the right to free speech, the right of the public to know, and so on, should have been a significant factor in the struggle against the denial. The general and theoretical ideas about the role of the media in modern societies, as well as the relation between the media, the power of the state and its institutions and society, influence the degree of ignorance and awareness of genocide all over the world.

As we have tried to demonstrate here, the print media in Israel have played an important role in raising general public consciousness on the subject, but as the issue has rarely been perceived as “really important” and crucial to the editors, their influence and impact has, therefore, been limited. As most of the people involved in the sphere of the media ignore the issue, why should the general public deal with it?

The public electronic media in Israel are controlled largely by the political establishment, and the commercial channels have their commercial considerations and calculations. Therefore, the chances that they will deal with such a complicated and sensitive issue are very small. Individuals from the media have to be concerned about the subject, personally involved, and ready to struggle for it. In this way they can contribute to the awareness of the general public and influence the po-

litical establishment. And in fact, in some specific cases, they succeeded in doing that.

So far, we have been talking about the state and its perceived interests (in the political and educational spheres), the media with its interests, and how the public that is exposed to the issue is very much dependent on how these institutions wish it to be presented. Now we turn to the academy. Some claim that the intellectuals are, or have to be, modern prophets. We should expect that in Israel these modern prophets would raise acute moral questions and struggle to ensure that their state behaves according to moral values.

It seems quite clear that the great failure of the Israeli State and society regarding the Armenian Genocide (and maybe regarding some other issues as well) is the failure of the intellectuals. With only some exceptions, they have not been willing to struggle morally against the arbitrary and coercive power of the state and its institutions, to combat the immediate, short-term considerations of *raison d'État*.

It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze the role of the intellectual in society in general and that of Israeli intellectuals in particular. Quite a lot of theoretical and empirical studies have been written regarding these issues.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars who study the subject claim that there are, or at least there were, differences between the European tradition, in which the intellectual kept his freedom, and American academia which, in general, is more connected and related to political power. In the pre-state period, the Israeli academy was constituted mainly of academics and intellectuals who had come from Europe and had European notions regarding the academy and the role of the intellectual. But Israeli academics and intellectuals wanted, at the time of the establishment of the state, to take an active and significant role in the creation of the new society and the new nation-state. They participated in nation building and state building. Therefore, they cooperated frequently with the political establishment and moderated—intentionally or not—their criticism of it. They remained in the domain of “criticism,” criticizing some aspects of the reality, but usually avoided the “critique”—raising question marks about the very definitions of the discourse, and proposing an alternative. In any case, over the years, the Israeli academy became more and more oriented and influenced by the American pattern of the academy.

The theory of Julian Benda about the betrayal of the intellectuals (Benda used the term *la trahison des clercs*—“the betrayal of the

clergymen”) is illustrative and thought-provoking.<sup>2</sup> In most aspects, the behavior of the majority of Israeli academics is similar to many of their colleagues in Western universities. In this regard most comply with the general expectations of the establishments of Western societies. Nonetheless, I argue that this model cannot be applied to Israeli pre-state intellectuals. Yet, we can use a modified version of Benda’s model to illustrate the behavior of quite many Israeli academics and intellectuals towards the Armenian Genocide—they behaved like *les chiens de garde*—guard dogs—of the state, to use the terminology of another French intellectual, Paul Nizan.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to note that several statements and resolutions have been published in recent years by genocide scholars, Holocaust scholars, concerned scholars, and writers calling on governments to recognize the Armenian Genocide (see appendices B, C, D). This is a response to the Turkish argument, which is accepted by the Israeli and some other governments, that academics, not politicians, should deal with this issue. It is very easy to identify many Jewish scholars among the supporters and signatories of these statements and resolutions, but, unfortunately, only two Israelis: Professor Yehuda Bauer and Professor Israel Charny.

The intellectual has to seek out and speak truth to an audience that matters, although it should not be seen as an audience, but as a community of common concern in which one hopes to participate constructively. We should not be speaking *to* but *with*. This is second nature to any good teacher, and should be to any writer and intellectual as well. I truly believe that we have to participate constructively in a community of common concern, and we—like teachers, even more so like educators and intellectuals—should speak with the young generation and our students as a community of common concern.

I think that the best way to do so is by education and dialogue. Nonetheless, I am completely aware as to how complicated and Sisyphean this process is. I am aware also that the people who exercise power try to consciously and/or unconsciously avoid this process. Education is the field in which the struggle for the transmission of the collective memory to the next generation is very central. We are collectively responsible for what will become of the Holocaust as well as the Armenian Genocide and other genocides in the historical memory and the historical consciousness of young people. As I mentioned ear-

lier, it could have been simple: to struggle against any occurrence of genocide in the future so that it would not happen—"Never again"—is to teach it, although, surely, teaching is not enough.

But the reality is, of course, much more complicated and different, as was shown here. Israeli students do not know a thing about the Armenian Genocide or about the genocide of the Roma. From these students, who know practically nothing, or almost nothing, will emerge the future elite of the Israeli society—the judges, the artists, the authors, the politicians, the intellectuals, the educators... In these circumstances we wonder if and how the next generation of educators and intellectuals will deal with the issue of genocide in general, and the Armenian Genocide in particular.

A fundamental change is needed in Israeli society's treatment of these issues. Today, we lack the teaching force, not only in quantity but also quality, to deal with them. No shortcuts can be taken in this regard. Thus, if we seek a change, the starting point should be with those "institutions" directly shaping the young generation, and particularly the educational system. These are the *moral agents*, the *agents of change*, initiating a debate and study penetrating all sectors of society, and especially the educational system at all levels, including higher education.

Experience in the educational field has taught me that teaching this subject greatly improves knowledge and beyond that, it brings about a change in the level of involvement, awareness, and attitude toward the issue. Students are shocked when they discover and internalize the meaning of the fact that they did not know a single thing about the Armenian Genocide. Usually they are shocked even more when they begin to understand why they did not know about it, and they are even more appalled when they learn about the attitude of the State of Israel towards it.

\* \* \*

One of the formative influences on historical memory, and ultimately the historical consciousness of a society, is the question of what society *can* and *wishes* to know about historical occurrences, what society wants to remember, and what it *chooses* to remember. In Israeli society, there are many people who would protest against some genocides, but prefer not to know anything about the genocides of the Armenians or the Roma.

In the Israeli establishment there are people who do not want the young Israeli to deal with any genocide apart from the Jewish Ho-



locaust, even though many will not readily admit to it. They give many explanations, reasons, and alleged reasons to it. The establishment wants to avoid questions; sometimes they even want to avoid real thinking and reflection about “difficult and complicated” issues.

In 1993, at the end of *The Banality of Indifference*, I wrote:

Israeli society may be at the beginning of a new stage in defining its identity and shaping its historical consciousness and relationship to the Holocaust. The Holocaust has been an important, meaningful, and central component in the creation of a Jewish-Israeli identity in the formative stages of Israel’s society, which were also years of struggle and war. In Israel’s formative stages and during the period when its existence was not officially recognized by many nations, the Holocaust and the state’s wars were central components in Israeli identity. Nurturing consciousness and remembrance of the Holocaust played an important function at the time. We witness today two simultaneous processes: the march on the path of peace, which we have, one hopes, initiated, and the entry of Israeli society into a stage of collective maturity. While these are separate processes, they are delicately intertwined. They may bring about deep and far reaching changes in our private and public identity.<sup>4</sup>

Even though I then added some reservations regarding this analysis, I realize that I was not sufficiently aware of the deep internal difficulties faced by Israeli society recovering, as far as possible, from the trauma of the Holocaust. The behavior of the “other side,” the Arabs, and especially the Palestinians, does not help in the achievement of this recovery and healing.

On March 2, 1988 Yehuda Elkana, Israeli philosopher and a survivor of the Holocaust, published a controversial article “In Praise of Forgetting” (see chapter 1) in the Hebrew daily newspaper *Ha’aretz*. This was at the start of the first Intifada (the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation), which were very difficult days for Israeli society. Elkana wrote:

Lately, I have become convinced that it is not personal frustration which serves as a socio-political factor in the attitude of Israeli Society towards the Palestinians, but rather a deep existential anxiety, fed by certain interpretations of the Holocaust and its lessons, as well as the willingness to believe that we are eternal victims persecuted by the rest of the world. In this ancient belief, shared by so many even today, I see the paradoxical and tragic victory of Hitler.

From Auschwitz came, in symbolic terms, two peoples: a minority, which claims, “it will never happen again,” and a frightened and anxious majority, which claims, “it will never happen to us again.”<sup>5</sup>

After the first Intifada, we witnessed the Oslo Accords in 1993, which, it was thought, would resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, with the hope that we were marching on the road to peace. This chapter of conclusions is being written in the terrible days of the second Intifada—more than two years after it began in September 2000, when the “siege mentality” of many Israelis is even stronger.

Israel’s War of Independence in 1948 was the “Nakeba”—the catastrophe of the Palestinians. This complex and painful issue has not been sufficiently studied and discussed. Its influence is perhaps more subconscious than conscious, and affects Israeli attitudes toward other genocides, including the Armenian Genocide. Contrary to my expectations of a decade ago, it appears that Israeli society, for both internal and external reasons, is not yet “ready” to deal with subjects like the Nakeba (which was not a genocide), and the genocide of other people.

Zionist ideology was founded on moral grounds and with a moral perspective. After the Six Day War, Israel distanced itself from the original principles and values of Zionism. Israeli government policy has failed to end that six-day war which has continued to the present day—thirty-five years later. We are still unable to reach the seventh day—that of peace.

Because of similar ways of thinking and ideology, we use and utilize the concept of the uniqueness of the Holocaust and we do not recognize the Armenian Genocide. By doing so, we harm the image of our Jewish and Zionist tradition and, in many regards, betray them.

In a similar process, the genocide of the Roma is also quite ignored. This genocide, which was committed as part of the very same process as the Holocaust in the same places and by the same perpetrators, receives in the world in general and in Israel in particular, far less acknowledgement than it deserves in comparison to the Holocaust. (Even if there were differences in the racial ideology employed against the Jews and the Roma, and its implications in the two cases [unlike the war against the Roma, the war against the Jews was very significant in the Nazi ideology]—the fate of the Roma is accepted by most scholars as being nearest to that of the Nazi vision of a future world.) One would expect that it would be especially the Jews who would struggle against the tendency to forget this genocide, *the Porrajmos*, “the great devouring,” because the Roma have no state, no literary tradition, and no powerful sponsor or lobby—but quite the opposite has happened.

The American-Jewish Holocaust and genocide scholar Sybil Milton criticized the fact that the fate of the Roma is almost never mentioned in the historiography of the Holocaust: “The emphasis on anti-Semitism and the exclusivity of the Jewish fate has obvious political reasons, also being the official Israeli interpretation, and as such has profoundly influenced the historiography of the Holocaust.”<sup>6</sup> No doubt the Jewish establishment in Israel and the Jewish Diaspora bears a special responsibility for this deplorable situation.

Since its creation Israel has based its claim to foreign support on moral grounds: as a refuge of the persecuted, as a democracy, as a country that maintains an ethical standard even when forced into battle. To reject charges of unethical behavior with the argument that the charges are politically motivated is to debase the arguments.

I believe that an Israel that recognizes the Armenian Genocide is a better state, and probably a stronger one. Likewise, I believe that an Israel that recognizes its moral, political, and economic responsibility as to the future of the Palestinian refugees is a better state, and even a stronger one.

Without minimizing the meaning of the Holocaust, I argue that Israelis must hope and work today to find a more suitable balance between the Zionist, Jewish, and universal “lessons” of the Holocaust. The basic approach to the Holocaust, as well as to the genocides of other people, should be that *the value of human life is the same for all humans*, whether Jews, Roma, Armenians, or Palestinians. The way to work toward achieving this goal is to combine two basic principles that are seemingly contradictory: on one hand, emphasizing the special Jewish tragedy, including its unique characteristics, and dealing with this Jewish tragedy as a general human tragedy, as a universal problem of the first magnitude; and on the other, relating, even emphatically, to the catastrophes of others and to other genocides in history.

There are no contradictions between these approaches; there is, in fact an accord, a concurrence. This is the integration and synthesis of the unique and the generalized. This integration will add universal, moral, and spiritual significance and power to the remembrance of the Holocaust, and to the just demand by the Jews from around the world to “never forget.” We should not fear that such an integration could create a relativism with regard to the Holocaust, leading to its diminution and to the weakening of its Jewish aspect.

The world has largely recognized the Jewish Holocaust as a Jewish tragedy, as well as a general human tragedy that should influence the

whole of humanity. It is probably the greatest moral failure mankind has ever known. Nevertheless, we still have to continue to struggle against the denial of the Holocaust. The State of Israel continues to struggle against Holocaust denial on one hand, but participates in the denial of another genocide on the other. This most likely will damage the struggle against Holocaust denial in the future. One might view this attitude as a moral failure. We have to remember that moral claims can have influence only if they are consistent.

As I said earlier, in my view Israelis are held to a higher standard than other nations on moral issues because we are, generally speaking, survivors of the Holocaust and because of the Jewish legacy and heritage. Not all Israelis agree with this point of view. However, we Israeli-Jews have failed to keep higher moral standards (also regarding our attitude towards acts of genocide like those in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia that are dealt with in this book) and this failure can be, in the long term, fatal for Israel. Unfortunately, people in Europe and elsewhere want to be rid of their feelings of guilt toward the Jewish people because of the Holocaust (and the long history of Christian anti-Semitism). They want to change the image of the Jew from being a victim and martyr to a victimizer and perpetrator. Without doubt, Israelis share responsibility for this phenomenon, but maybe the world's recognition of the Holocaust and its late "discovery" does not mean that the real meaning and significance of the Holocaust was really absorbed and internalized by all the elements of Western societies.

Because no previous study has dealt with these or similar issues, an original methodology was employed to analyze the subject with regard to four domains: the political, the educational, the media, and the academic. This methodology has to be developed and can be applied to other states and to other genocides as well. Every society and state has to analyze its attitudes to past and present acts of genocide, and to the phenomenon of denial. In criticizing Israel we have to remember that most countries behave in the same or similar ways. As mentioned, the attitudes and the behavior of the third party are crucial within the occurrence of acts of genocide on the one hand, and on the other in their denial, and in the struggle to prevent them in the future. Perhaps, a new field in genocide studies has to be created.

More has been written about the Holocaust than any other event in the history of humanity. George Santayana is quoted as saying that those who forget the lessons of the past are condemned to repeat their mistakes. Nevertheless, there are those who claim that the books by Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, which have had so great an impact, did not save the life of a single human being in the many terrible genocides committed after the Holocaust.

Both claims contain a certain truth. I believe it is our responsibility to know, and let others know, what people and nations can do to one another and, unfortunately, what they have done to each other in the past. The struggle for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide relates to events that occurred almost ninety years ago, but deals with our present and future.

In 1947 Albert Camus published *The Plague (La Peste)*, a novel that is in many regards an allegory of our inhumanity during World War II—the Nazis, fascism, and their evil.

The hero of the novel wrote the chronicle of the epidemic of the plague in the city of Oran in Algeria in 194...[in the original]:

Dr. Rieux resolved to compile this chronicle, so that he should not be one of those who hold their peace but should bear witness in favor of those plague-stricken people; so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done them might endure...

Nonetheless, he knew that the tale he had to tell could not be one of a final victory. It could be only the record of what had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never-ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts...

And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperiled. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city.<sup>7</sup>

We have to remember, as Camus tells us, that the fight against evil, terror, and genocide is a “never-ending fight,” and that we have to be consistent in this ongoing struggle, because “plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good.”

About fifty years later, in 1995, José Saramago published his powerful book—also a metaphor of our civilization in the twentieth century—*Blindness*. This is the story of a society whose members have been

blinded mysteriously. Among them a single woman retains her eyesight and chooses to join her blind husband in an isolation camp created for the blind by the government. The following is a conversation between the seeing woman and a blind woman who finally realizes that the other woman is not blind. Sometimes, purposely, it is difficult to realize whether the seeing or the blind woman is speaking:<sup>8</sup>

Today it is my responsibility, not tomorrow if I should turn blind. What do you mean by responsibility? The responsibility of having my eyesight when others have lost theirs. You cannot hope to guide or provide food for all the blind people in the world, I ought to, but you cannot, I shall do whatever I can to help.

### Notes

1. About Israeli intellectuals, see, among others, Anita Shapira, "The Zionist Labor Movement and the Hebrew University," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, 45, 2 (1996), pp. 183-198; Michael Keren, "Israel's Intellectuals and Political Independence," *Studies in Zionism* 9, 2 (1998), pp. 197-208; Baruch Kimmerling, "Sociology, Ideology and Nation-Building: The Palestinians and Their Meaning in Israeli Sociology," *American Sociological Review* 57, 4 (1992), pp. 446-460; Baruch Kimmerman, "Academic History Caught in Cross-Fire: The Case of Israeli-Jewish Historiography," *History and Memory* 7, 1 (1995), pp. 41-66; Yaron Ezrahi, "Changing Political Functions of Science in the Modern Liberal-Democratic State," in *Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* (1988); Nissan Oren (ed.), *Intellectuals in Politics* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984); George L. Mosse, "Central European Intellectuals in Palestine," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 45, 2 (1996), pp. 134-142; Alek D. Epstein, "Defending Democracy and Civil Rights in the Era of State-Building: The Jerusalem Academic Community from the Declaration of Independence to the Lebanon Campaign," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 13,1-2 (2001), pp. 63-87. See also Shlomo Sand, *Intellectuals: Truth and Power from the Dreyfus Affair to the Gulf War* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000). Sand especially analyzes the role of intellectuals in French society in comparison to their role in Israeli society.
2. Julian Benda, *La trahison des clercs* (Paris: Grasset, 1927).
3. Paul Nizan, *Le chiens de garde* (Paris: Maspero, 1960).
4. Auron, 2001, pp. 365-366.
5. Yehuda Elkana, "In Praise of Forgetting," *Ha'aretz*, March 2, 1988.
6. Sybil Milton, "Gypsies and the Holocaust," *The History Teacher* Vol. 24, No. 4, August 1991, p. 377.
7. Albert Camus, *The Plague* (Middlesex: Penguin Book, 1960), pp. 251-252.

8. José Saramago, *Blindness* (London: The Harvill Press, 1997), p. 238. In March 2002, after visiting the territories occupied by Israel, José Saramago, a Nobel Prize Laureate for Literature, declared that Israel's actions in the territories are comparable to the crimes that were perpetrated at Auschwitz and Buchenwald. People in Israel proposed boycotting him. I myself severely criticize the actions my country is carrying out in the territories, but by no means do I accept this comparison. I also think that what he said was harmful to the cause it was supposed to serve.

## Appendix A

### **The Speech Made by Yossi Sarid, Minister of Education of Israel, at the Armenian Memorial Gathering, the Morning of April 24, 2000**

I join you, members of the Armenian community, on your Memorial Day, as you mark the eighty-fifth anniversary of your genocide. I am here, with you, as a human being, as a Jew, as an Israeli, and as education minister of the State of Israel.

Every year, Armenians gather in Israel and all over the world to remember and to remind the world of the terrible disaster that befell your people at the beginning of the last century.

For many years, too many years, you were alone on your Memorial Day. I am aware of the special significance of my presence here today along with other Israelis. Today perhaps for the first time you are less alone.

The Armenian Memorial Day should be a day of reflection and introspection for all of us, a day of soul-searching. On this day, we as Jews, victims of the Shoah, should examine our relationship to the pain of others.

The massacre, which was carried out by the Turks against the Armenians in 1915 and 1916, was one of the most horrible acts to occur in modern times.

The Jewish ambassador of America to Turkey in those days, Henry Morgenthau, described the massacre as the greatest crime in modern history. Morgenthau did not predict what was in store later in the twentieth century for the Jews, the Shoah, the most terrible [crime] of all [which] is still in front of our eyes.

The person who was most shocked and shocked many people was the Prague-born Jewish author, Franz Werfel, with his masterpiece, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. The idea for writing the book was born in



March 1929, when Werfel visited Damascus on his way to Palestine. He wrote: The pitiful scene of the starved and mutilated children of the Armenian refugees gave me the last push to redeem the cruel fate of the Armenian people from the abyss of oblivion.

The book that appeared in German in 1933 shocked millions of people. Adolph Hitler was then in power. *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* was thrown into the flames along with other forbidden books. The book was translated into Hebrew in 1934, and influenced many young people in Eretz Israel, including me.

For me and for many youngsters of my generation in Israel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* had a formative effect on our personality and our world outlook.

Today in Israel very few youngsters have heard about Musa Dagh, very few know about the Armenian Genocide. I know how important the position of the Jews, and especially the attitude of the State of Israel to your genocide, are for Armenians in the world. As minister of education of the State of Israel, I will do whatever is in my capacity in order that this monumental work, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* is once more well known to our children. I will do everything in order that Israeli children learn and know about the Armenian Genocide. Genocide is a crime against humanity, and there is nothing more horrible and odious than genocide. One of the objectives of our education—our main objective—is to instill sensitivity to the harm to the innocent based on nationality alone. We Jews, as principal victims of murderous hatred, are doubly obligated to be sensitive, to identify with other victims.

We have to evoke among the young generation natural and deep indignation against manifestations of genocide in the past, in the present, and in the future. Genocide is the root of all evil and we have to make supreme political and educational efforts to uproot and extirpate it.

Whoever stands indifferent in front of it, or ignores it, whoever makes calculations, whoever is silent, always helps the perpetrator of the crime and not the murdered.

In 1918, Shmuel Tolkowsky, the secretary of Chaim Weizmann, wrote with the approval of Weizmann an important article entitled “The Armenian Question from a Zionist Point of View.”

Among other things, he said:

We Zionists look upon the fate of the Armenian people with a deep and sincere sympathy; we do so as men, as Jews, and as Zionists. As men our

motto is *Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto*. As Jews our exile from our ancestral home and our centuries of suffering in all parts of the globe have made us, I would fain say, specialists in martyrdom; our humanitarian feelings have been refined to an incomparable degree, so much so that the sufferings of other people—even alien to us in blood and remote from us in distance—cannot but strike the deeper chords of our soul and weave between us and our fellow-sufferers that deep bond of sympathy which one might call the solidarity of sorrow. And among all those who suffer around us, is there is people whose record of martyrdom is more akin to ours than that of the Armenians? As Zionists we have a peculiar question of principle. Zionism being in its essence nothing else than the Jewish expression of the demand for national justice, it is natural and logical for us to be deeply interested in the struggle for emancipation of any other living nation... We are convinced that the future peace and happiness of that part of the world—the Middle East—of which our own national homeland, Palestine, is only a section, will be best assured when “all well-defined national aspirations shall be accorded the utmost satisfaction that can be accorded them without introducing new or perpetuating old elements of discord and antagonism that would be likely in time to break the peace.” In our opinion a free and happy Armenia, a free and happy Arabia, and a free and happy Jewish Palestine, are the three pillars on which will rest the future peace and welfare of the Middle East.

This is what the secretary of Chaim Weizmann wrote more than eighty years ago; things that are important and just, that stress the value of human life, no matter for whom—Jew, Arab, Armenian, Gypsy, Bosnian Albanian, or Rwandan—and I want this lofty message to be imparted to all our students in our school history curriculum; a new program that is now in the process of being written.

I would like to see a central chapter on genocide, on this huge and inhuman atrocity. The Armenian Genocide should occupy a prominent place in this program, which does justice to the national and personal memory of every one of you, to the memory of all the members of your nation. This is our obligation to you; this is our obligation to ourselves.

Now we are on the eve of our Feast. It is the Feast of our freedom and we emerge from slavery to redemption. From slavery to freedom.

This is what we wish to every nation and also to the Armenian people: Freedom and Redemption—Redemption and Freedom.

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## Appendix B

### **The Armenian Genocide Resolution Unanimously Passed by the Association of Genocide Scholars (AGS) of North America\***

The Armenian Genocide Resolution was unanimously passed at the Association of Genocide Scholars' conference in Montreal on June 13, 1997.

#### **Resolution**

That this assembly of the Association of Genocide Scholars in its conference held in Montreal, June 11-13, 1997, reaffirms that the mass murder of over a million Armenians in Turkey in 1915 is a case of genocide which conforms to the statutes of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. It further condemns the denial of the Armenian Genocide by the Turkish government and its official and unofficial agents and supporters.

Among the prominent scholars who supported the resolution were: Roger W. Smith (College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA; president of AGS); Israel Charny (Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel); Helen Fein (past president of AGS); Frank Chalk (Concordia University, Montreal, Canada); Ben Kiernan (Yale University, New Haven, CT); Anthony Oberschall (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC); Mark Levene (University of Warwick, Coventry, UK); Rhoda Howard (McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada); Michael Freeman (University of Essex, Colchester, UK); and Gunnar Heinsohn (University of Bremen, Bremen, Germany).

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\* The Association of Genocide Scholars is an international interdisciplinary, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the understanding and prevention of genocide. The Association is now titled "The International Association of Genocide Scholars."

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## Appendix C

**Statement by Concerned Scholars and Writers, April 24, 1998**

**To Honor the 50th Anniversary of the U.N. Genocide Convention**

We Commemorate the  
Armenian Genocide of 1915  
and Condemn the Turkish Government's  
Denial of this Crime Against Humanity

On April 24, 1915, the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire began a systematic, premeditated genocide of the Armenian people—an unarmed Christian minority living under Turkish rule. More than a million Armenians were exterminated through direct killing, starvation, torture, and forced death marches. Another million fled into permanent exile. Thus an ancient civilization was expunged from its homeland of 2,500 years.

The Armenian Genocide was the most dramatic human rights issue of the time and was reported regularly in newspapers across the U.S. The Armenian Genocide is abundantly documented by Ottoman court-martial records, by hundreds of thousands of documents in the archives of the United States and nations around the world, by eyewitness reports of missionaries and diplomats, by the testimony of survivors, and by eight decades of historical scholarship.

After 83 years the Turkish government continues to deny the genocide of the Armenians by blaming the victims and undermining historical fact with false rhetoric. Books about the genocide are banned in Turkey. The words “Armenian” and “Greek” are nonexistent in Turkish descriptions of ancient or Christian artifacts and monuments in Turkey. Turkey’s efforts to sanitize its history now include the funding of chairs in Turkish studies—with strings attached—at American universities.

It is essential to remember that...

- When Raphael Lemkin coined the word *genocide* in 1944 he cited the 1915 annihilation of the Armenians as a seminal example of genocide.
- The European Parliament, the Association of Genocide Scholars, the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide (Jerusalem), and the Institute for the Study of Genocide (NYC) have reaffirmed the extermination of the Armenians by the Turkish government as *genocide* by the definition of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention.

Denial of genocide strives to reshape history in order to demonize the victims and rehabilitate the perpetrators. Denial of genocide is the final stage of genocide. It is what Elie Wiesel has called a “double killing.” Denial murders the dignity of the survivors and seeks to destroy remembrance of the crime. In a century plagued by genocide, we affirm the moral necessity of remembering.

We denounce as morally and intellectually corrupt the Turkish government’s denial of the Armenian genocide. We condemn Turkey’s manipulation of the American government and American institutions for the purpose of denying the Armenian genocide. We urge our government officials, scholars, and the media to refrain from using evasive or euphemistic terminology to appease the Turkish government; we ask them to refer to the 1915 annihilation of the Armenians as genocide.

This statement has been signed by more than 150 distinguished scholars and writers, including:

**K. Anthony Appiah**

Professor of Afro-American Studies & Philosophy, Harvard University

**Michael Arlen**

Writer

**James Axtell**

Professor History, College of William & Mary

**Ben Bagdikian**

Former Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley

**Houston Baker**

Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

**Peter Balakian**

Writer; Professor of English, Colgate University

**Mary Catherine Bateson**

Clarence J. Robinson Professor in English & Anthropology, George Mason University

**Yehuda Bauer**

Professor of Holocaust Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

**Robert N. Bellah**

Elliott Professor of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley

**Norman Birnbaum**

University Professor, Georgetown University

**Peter Brooks**

Professor of Comparative Literature, Yale University

**Robert McAfee Brown**

Professor of Theology and Ethics Emeritus, Pacific School of Religion

**Christopher Browning**

Professor of History, Pacific Lutheran University

**Frank Chalk**

Professor of History, Concordia University

**Israel W. Charny**

Director, Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide, Jerusalem

**Ward Churchill**

Associate Professor of American Indian Studies, University of Colorado

**Rev. William Sloane Coffin**

Pastor Emeritus, Riverside Church, NYC

**Vahakn Dadrian**

Director, Genocide Study Project, H.F. Guggenheim Foundation

**David Brion Davis**

Sterline Professor of History, Yale University



**James Der Derian**

Professor of Political Science, University of Massachusetts

**Marjorie Housepian Dobkin**

Writer

**Jean Bethke Elshtain**

Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics,  
University of Chicago Divinity School

**Kai Erikson**

Professor of Sociology, Yale University

**Craig Etcheson**

Acting Director, Cambodian Genocide Program, Yale University

**Helen Fein**

Executive Director, Institute for the Study of Genocide, John Jay  
College of Criminal Justice

**Lawrence J. Friedman**

Professor of History, Indiana University

**William Gass**

David May Distinguished Professor of Humanities, Washington  
University

**Henry Louis Gates, Jr.**

Professor of Afro-American Studies, Harvard University

**Carol Gilligan**

Patricia Albjerg Graham Professor of Gender Studies, Harvard  
University

**Langdon Gilkey**

Kennedy Distinguished Visiting Professor of Theology, Georgetown  
University

**Daniel Goldhagen**

Associate Professor of Government & Social Studies, Harvard  
University

**Sandor Goodhart**

Director of Jewish Studies, Purdue University

**Vigen Guroian**

Professor of Theology and Ethics, Loyola College

**Geoffrey Hartman**

Sterling Professor of Comparative Literature, Yale University

**Seamus Hearney**

Harvard University; Nobel Laureate for Literature

**Judith Herman**

Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

**Raul Hilberg**

Professor of Political Science Emeritus, University of Vermont

**Richard G. Hovannisian**

Professor of Armenian and Near Eastern History, UCLA

**Kurt Jonahsson**

Professor of Sociology, Concordia University

**Alfred Kazin**

Writer, Distinguished Professor of English Emeritus, CUNY Graduate Center

**Steven Kepnes**

Director of Jewish Studies, Professor of Religion, Colgate University

**Ben Kiernan**

Professor of History, Yale University

**Robert Jay Lifton**

Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice and The Graduate School of the City University of New York

**Deborah E. Lipstadt**

Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies, Emory University

**Norman Mailer**

Writer

**Eric Markusen**

Professor of Sociology, Southwest State University, Minnesota

**Robert Melson**

Professor of Political Science, Purdue University

**Saul Medlovitz**

Dag Hammarskjöld Professor of Law, Rutgers University

**W.S. Merwin**

Writer

**Arthur Miller**

Writer

**Henry Morgenthau III**

Writer

**George L. Mosse**

Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin, Madison; Hebrew University, Jerusalem

**Joyce Carol Oates**

Writer

**Grace Paley**

Writer

**Harold Pinter**

Writer

**Robert A. Pois**

Professor of History, University of Colorado

**Francis B. Randall**

Professor of History, Sarah Lawrence College

**Nicholas V. Riasanovsky**

Sidney Hellman Professor of European History, University of California, Berkeley

**Leo P. Ribuffo**

Professor of History, George Washington University

**David Riesman**

Henry Ford II Professor of Social Science, Harvard University

**Nathan A. Scott**

William R. Kenan Professor of Religious Studies Emeritus, University of Virginia

**Christopher Simpson**

Professor of Communications, American University

**Roger Smith**

Professor of Government, College of William & Mary

**Susan Sontag**

Writer

**Wloe Soyinka**

Nobel Laureate, Woodruff Professor of the Arts, Emory University

**Max L. Stackhouse**

Stephen Colwell Professor of Christian Ethics, Princeton Theological Seminary

**Charles B. Strozier**

Professor of History, John Jay College of Criminal Justice and The Graduate Center, City University of New York

**Rose Styron**

Writer; former Chair, Freedom to Write Committee, PEN American Center

**William Styron**

Writer

**Ronald Suny**

Professor of Political Science, University of Chicago

**Raymond Tanter**

Professor of Political Science, University of Michigan

**D.M. Thomas**

Writer

**John Updike**

Writer

**Kurt Vonnegut**

Writer

**Derek Walcott**

Professor of English, Boston University; Nobel Laureate for Literature

**Cornel West**

Professor of Philosophy & Religion, and Afro-American Studies, Harvard University

**Howard Zinn**

Professor Emeritus of History, Boston University

This statement was published again in April 1999 to honor the 51st Anniversary of the United Nations Genocide Convention.

## Appendix D

### **126 Holocaust Scholars Affirm the Incontestable Fact of the Armenian Genocide and Urge Western Democracies to Officially Recognize It**

At the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches, convening at St. Joseph University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 3-7, 2000, one hundred twenty-six Holocaust scholars, holders of Academic Chairs and Directors of Holocaust Research and Studies Centers, participants in the conference, signed a statement affirming that the World War I Armenian Genocide is an incontestable historical fact and accordingly urge the governments of Western Democracies to recognize it as such. The petitioners, among whom is Nobel Laureate for Peace Elie Wiesel, who was the keynote speaker at the conference, also asked the Western Democracies to urge the Government and Parliament of Turkey to finally come to terms with a dark chapter of Ottoman-Turkish history and to recognize the Armenian Genocide. This would provide an invaluable impetus to the process of the democratization of Turkey.

Below is a partial list of the signatories:

Prof. Yehuda Bauer

Distinguished Professor, Hebrew University, Director, The International Institute of Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem

Prof. Israel Charny

Director, Institute of the Holocaust and Genocide, Jerusalem, Professor of Hebrew University, Editor-in-Chief of *The Encyclopedia of Genocide*

Prof. Ward Churchill

Ethnic Studies, The University of Colorado, Boulder

Prof. Stephen Feinstein

Director, Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Minnesota

Prof. Saul Friedman

Director, Holocaust and Jewish Studies, Youngstown State University, Ohio

Prof. Edward Gaffney

Valparaiso University Law School

Prof. Zev Garber

Los Angeles Valley College

Prof. Dorota Glowacka

University of King's College, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dr. Irving Greenberg

President, Jewish Life Network

Prof. Herbert Hirsch

Virginia Commonwealth University

Prof. Irving L. Horowitz

Hannah Arendt Distinguished Professor, Rutgers University, NJ

Dr. Steven Jacobs

Rabbi, Temple Sinai Shalom, Huntsville, Alabama, Associate Editor of *The Encyclopedia of Genocide*

Prof. Steven Katz

Distinguished Professor, Director, Center for Judaic Studies, Boston University

Prof. Richard Libowitz

Temple University

Dr. Marcia Littell

Stockton College, Exec. Director, Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches

Franklin H. Littell

Distinguished Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Stockton College, Co-founder, Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches

Prof. Hubert G. Locke

Washington University, Co-founder, Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches

Dr. Elizabeth Maxwell

Executive Director of the International Scholarly Conference on the Holocaust, London, England

Prof. Erik Markusen

Southwest State University, MN

Prof. Saul Mendlowitz

Dag Hammarskjold Distinguished Professor of International Law, Rutgers University

Prof. Jack Needle

Director, Center for Holocaust Studies, Brookdale Community College, Lincroft, NJ

Dr. Philip Rosen

Director, Holocaust Education Center of the Delaware Valley

Prof. Alan S. Rosenbaum

Dept. of Philosophy, Cleveland State University

Prof. Richard Rubinstein

President Emeritus, and Distinguished Professor of Religion, University of Bridgeport, CT



William L. Shulman

President, Association of Holocaust Organizations, City University  
of New York

Prof. Samuel Totten

The University of Arkansas, Assoc. Editor of *The Encyclopedia of  
Genocide*

Prof. Elie Wiesel

Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities, Boston University,  
Founding Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council,  
Nobel Laureate for Peace

I hereby declare that the originals of these

126 signatures are on file in my office.

All affiliations supplied are for identification purposes only.

Dr. Stephen Feinstein, Director  
Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies,  
University of Minnesota

**Paid for by Descendants of Survivors of the  
Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust**

## Appendix E

### Statement of Scholars, Rabbis, Teachers, Community Leaders, and Students of Jewish Heritage

In August 2001, a group of highly distinguished Jewish scholars, both American and Israeli, released a statement affirming the Armenian Genocide and demonstrating their friendship with the Armenian people:

“We, the undersigned, are scholars, rabbis, teachers, community leaders, and students of Jewish heritage. As Jews, we share many similarities with the Armenian people. We were both victims of genocide during the twentieth-century and have survived despite those who would deny us our right to exist. On this year, 2001, which marks the 1700th anniversary of Armenia’s adoption of Christianity, we as Jews salute our Armenian friends and their contributions to Western society and culture.”

(Please Note: Affiliations are for Identification Purposes Only)

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