

Turkey's violence in the Kurdish region

The Turkish state recently declared curfew in Kurdish regions which are Cizre, Silopi and in Nusaybin. 52 curfews have been imposed since mid-August across this region. Even though Tens of Kurdish citizens have been killed, the Turkish media chooses to remain silent about the government terror. Why are the Turkish people closing their eyes when it comes to Kurdish people's basic human rights that are being abused, while Kurdish civilians are being killed by the Turkish state?

The armenian genocide question

In an address to a group of Nazi leaders and Wehrmacht Generals in 1939, the German Führer, Adolf Hitler was reported to have said:

"Who, after all, speaks today about the annihilation of the Armenians.....?"

The *Armenian question* was one of the infamous civilian butcher hallmarks of the First World War. Ever since that inglorious incident, an adequate description begs the question for that incident, as the Turkish government insists it was never genocide; whilst the Armenian government thinks otherwise. In any case, grammatical historical credence *might be* lent to the Turkish government claims, as the word '*genocide*' never existed in grammatical parlance during the First World War.

The word '*Genocide*' was coined by Raphael Lemkin (a Polish-Jew criminal and international law specialist), in 1944. He being a survivor of the Nazi instigated *Jewish Holocaust*, Lemkin coined the word to describe the Nazi policy of systematic murder and targeted annihilation committed by the German government during the Second World War.

The word '*Genocide*' is a conglomeration of the Greek word '*geno,*' meaning

race or tribe and the Latin word '*cide*,' meaning killing.

On December 9, 1948 the United Nations adopted the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of *Genocide*, thus defining *Genocide* as an international crime. Signatory states were obliged to prevent and punish the perpetrators

According to the Convention, genocide is can be insinuated when

- There are mass murders of a target group(s) of people
- There is serious bodily or mental harm to the members of a group
- There is deliberate creation of such living conditions for a group that brings about its complete or partial physical extermination
- There are implementation of measures aimed at preventing birth rates within the group
- There are forcible transfers of children from one group to another

Though long subjugated under Ottoman rule since the Middle Ages, Armenians made up the chunk of the Christian population of Ottoman administered Anatolia and the Caucasus alongside the Greeks. Ever since the Ottoman conquest of Anatolia from the Byzantines and consequent fall of Constantinople (modern day Istanbul) to the Ottomans in 1453, the Ottomans who then assumed the torch bearers of the Islamic Caliphate or Sultanate sought a mutual cohesive governance of its subjugated populations who where majorly distinctively Christian and Muslim by religion. This nevertheless came with some restrictions to the once dominant Christian population as some Churches (e.g Hagia Sophia) were converted to Mosques and the *dhimmi contract* (taxable restrictive protection) was imposed on non-Muslim subjects (Jews and Christians) living within the Ottoman domain.

Following the Crimean war (1853-1856) in which Western European powers (Great Britain and France) sought to contain Russian expansionist aims in the Danube, Caucasus and around the Black Sea, the European powers advocated for the abolition of the *dhimmi contract* on Christians and called for equality of all religious groups in the Ottoman empire in return for their support for the Ottomans against the Russians. The Russian war effort in itself had a

religious clout under the auspices of its expansionist aims. Seen as the protector and custodian of the Christian Orthodox religion (a successor and relic of the Byzantine Empire), the Russians had intent to liberate Christian minorities (most of whom were of the Orthodox faith) from Ottoman rule. This intent seen as *fiat compli* by the Ottomans and Russians fuelled mutual mistrust and ultimately war between both sides during the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878) and World War One (1914-1918). Following initial gains by the Russians against the Ottomans in the Caucasus from Russo-Turkish War and Ottoman loss of territory in the Balkans which forced series of population exchanges of Muslims and Greeks (most of the Muslim population Thrace and the Balkans were forced to migrate into Anatolia whilst Greeks and other Christian minorities in Anatolia moved in the opposite direction); there was a growing simmering mistrust of the Christian population of Anatolia (who at this time were majorly Armenians). It was alluded by the Ottomans that though the Armenians (who lacked a homeland) but granted equality status (though being Christians) under the 'Tanzimat' programme will still be sympathetic to the cause of the Russian enemy who were their religious brethren.

The Armenian question within the Ottoman empire was first lime lighted in a speech by Ottoman Sultan, Abul Hamid II in 1890 where he was referred to have talked about resolving the '*Armenian question*' once and for all:

"I will soon settle those Armenians...."

"I will give them a box on the ear which will make them...relinquish their revolutionary ambitions."

Upon the freedom of the Slavs and Greeks from Ottoman rule in the late 19th century, the Armenians agitated for greater freedom (or possible independence) from Ottoman rule. This resulted in killings targeting the Armenians within the Ottoman Empire during that period. Following the start of the First World War, the Ottomans who allied with the Central powers (Germany and Austro-Hungary) sought to reclaim lost territory especially in the Caucasus from the Russians who were fighting on the side of the Allies (Great Britain, France and later the United States). Clicking on the hint of

the failure of the 1915 Gallipoli campaign of the allies and heavy Russian losses and subsequent capitulation in the hand of the Germans, the Ottomans moved in a sweep to settle old scores with the Russians and other dissident groups within their already crumbling empire in a bid to bring about a *volte face* to the dwindling fortunes of the waning empire.

On April 24, 1915 several hundred Armenian intellectuals and representatives of national elite (mainly in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople) were arrested and later killed. As such, Armenians regard this act as the beginning of the '*Armenian Genocide*'; hereinafter, Armenians worldwide commemorate the '*Armenian Genocide*' on April 24 of every year. In a military onslaught against Russian territory in Caucasus (which also is the Armenian homeland), hundreds of thousands of Armenians and other non-Turkish minorities in East Anatolia (the Caucasus) were deported to '*safe zones*' in the Syrian desert and Mesopotamia in series of forced marches. As a result of this several deaths occurred in wilful murders by the Ottoman army, heat stroke, disease and other resultant deaths. It is estimated that about 1.5million people were deported in this exercise; a chunk of them being Armenian. As such, this forms the basis of the '*Armenian Genocide*' question claims by both parties alongside targeted killings of Armenian Soldiers serving with the Ottoman army at that period (60000 were reported killed). The Turkish government (successor of the Ottoman Empire) claim that not only Armenians were deported in this military exercise though it took place in the Armenian heartland which substantiates the Armenian claims of *genocide*.

After the First World War in 1918, new national borders were drawn by the Allies, and the Ottoman Empire (which was now powered by a group of army officers by the mantra of the 'Young Turks') scavenged for territory to salvage the glories of the Ottoman Empire. Midwifed by Ataturk Kemal, a new nation known as Turkey was born in 1922 from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. With borders redrawn, Anatolia (modern day Turkey) was emptied of its Christian population (Greeks had already moved out in population exchanges in the late 19th century and now Armenians most of whom were deported to their deaths had its survival residue racing across the borders to Russia and other Countries). Not until 1991 after the collapse of the USSR did Armenia attain

sovereignty once again after millennia of subjugation.

A hundred years on from that incident we can still ask:

was the Ottoman-Armenian question genocide?

Every man with knowledge can be a judge in this matter.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights in Turkey

This paper will examine and address a fundamental human rights issue: the discrimination and violence lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexuals (LGBT) citizens face in Turkey. The central aim of this paper is to respond to two basic questions:

Why does the LGBT community face discrimination in Turkish society?

How can we decrease discrimination and harassment towards LGBT people in Turkey?

That being said, even though LGBT people are becoming stronger and more visible in Turkey, they are still facing violence, attacks, abuse and discrimination on a daily basis. Honor crimes against LGBT are believed to be a way of keeping the 'honor' of the family intact. Kaos GL, a Turkish LGBT rights organization, tracked 16 "hate crime" murders of gay men and transsexual people in Turkey in 2010 alone.

(www.lgbtnewsturkey.com/2013/09/11/2012-report-of-human-rights-violations-based-on-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity/)

Homofin, is a herbal treatment, which claims to influence hormones. The manufacturer states: 'It is now up to you to be or not to be a homosexual'. Homofin's site even encourages mothers, who suspect their sons are gay, to buy these capsules and secretly dissolve the drug in their food. The government has yet to take any legal action to get this unethical,

unscientific drug off the

market. (<http://www.mambaonline.com/2014/01/03/gay-cure-pills-condemned/>)

In addition, police officers regularly arrest LGBT people on the accusation of prostitution. Sexual orientation or gender identity is often used as a basis for criminal penalties, in particular executions, arrests or detention. Critics say these actions are a way of putting pressure on the LGBT community. Most LGBT people that have experienced such incidents do not report this misconduct; they know that those responsible will never be punished.

To this day, there are many obstacles LGBT activists face on social networking sites and the internet in general. One example is that websites of LGBT associations are regularly hacked by religious groups.

While the government plays dumb, the fundamental rights of LGBT people are being violated, especially their right to private life. Homosexuals are increasingly targeted, also in hate speeches made by government officials. In 2010, Selma Aliye Kavaf, the Minister for Women and Family, classified homosexuality as a biological disorder and a disease which needed to be cured. Further, in response to the question 'when Turkey is going to have openly gay ministers' the mayor of Ankara, Ibrahim Melih Gokcek stated 'if god willing (insallah) in our country there are no gay and will never be' when he was asked 'when Turkey is going to have openly gay ministers'. Even more so, the fact that Prime minister Erdogan has never mentioned homosexuality or LGBT people during his service is a clear sign that the government should be blamed for the violence and harassment against LGBT people; by being passive, the government clearly shows their toleration of homophobic and transphobic attitudes.

Moving forward, The Universal Declaration which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10th 1948 passed with a vote of 48 in favor (Turkey being one of them), zero against and eight abstentions. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration states that 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should

act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood'. However, the rights of LGBT people are ignored and not mentioned in the Turkish constitution's prohibition of discrimination or the social and civil rights.

(<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>)

Meanwhile, LGBT groups are pushing their agenda forward in order to include protection against gender/sexual orientation discrimination in the Turkish Constitution and have some support from outside the LGBT community. The LGBT activists campaign for equality before law.

On the 30th of June 2013, the gay pride parade attracted almost 100.000 people. This was seen as a positive development by LGBT activists.

(http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/01/world/europe/protests-squelched-gay-rights-march-brings-many-in-turkey-back-to-the-streets.html?_r=2&)

On the other hand, Gezi resistance which started on 27th May 2013, was an anti-government struggle against injustice and cruel and inhuman intervention of the Turkish police. The protesters demanded freedom of the press and freedom of expression, the removal of all barriers between the citizens and their right to education and health service, as well as protesting against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.. During the Gezi struggle, LGBT people got a chance to show that they are normal and harmless human beings, and do not warrant that people are afraid of them. Gezi remains an event that has sent a clear message to everyone : 'the struggle of the people in Gezi Park was a battle for democracy and rights for all'. (<http://roarmag.org/2014/01/gezi-ottoman-turkish-nationalism/>)

A momentous decision was taken when People's Democratic Party (HDP) freshly nominated five LGBT activists. Furthermore, the Republican People's Party member and also LGBT activist Öykü Evren Sözen has announced her candidacy once again from Bursa Osmangazi district city. Another big step was made when Can Cavusoglu, an openly gay independent candidate, publicly announced that he is running to become a mayor in Giresun's district of Bulancak in the March 2014 local election. He declares himself gay, activist, writer, thinker, painter humanist and women's rights activist.

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/hdp-pledges-diversity-with-its-party-assembly.aspx?pageID=238&nid=57005>)

Being Gay, bisexual or transsexual is seen as an “illness” by religious groups. Hate crime is a daily reality throughout Turkey. Islam being the dominant religion in Turkey is one of the reasons why there are anti-gay actions. Religious clerics state that homosexuality is a test. If you are not able to stand the temptation, you will go to hell. If you resist, you will be pardoned and go to heaven. In Turkey, there are many religious people who believe that Islam’s position regarding LGBT people would be to apply the death penalty (<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/321419/pinoyabroad/worldfeatures/gay-muslims-in-turkey-torn-between-religion-and-sexuality>)

To conclude, the government in Turkey has to introduce a new constitution containing greater human rights protection. An anti-discrimination law to protect LGBT is a necessity. In this way, the discrimination in society will not only decrease but will also reduce the long-established judicial practice of giving penalty reductions based on unjust provocation in hate-motivated killing of LGBT people. Currently, the perpetrators continue to be rewarded by the judiciary. LGBT people will continue to be targets if the LGBT are not seen to be equal before the law. The demands of LGBT people for equality and protection under the law, full justice and freedom for LGBT people should be accomplished. This year was utterly a difficult one, marked by several hardships the LGBT had to endure, such as killing attempts, ill treatment, rape and cyber attacks. Thus, I reckon a proper end of my article would be a very inspiring line from Nazim Hikmet’s invitation poem: “To live like a tree single and at liberty and brotherly like the trees of a forest.

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