

Shall We Come to Terms with Our Past?

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It is fair to remind the listeners that no speaker can deal, in a matter of an hour, with all aspects of any question, including those of Armeno-Turkish relations. Considering that I published no less than 80 books/booklets and 48 articles in foreign journals and papers on this subject, this naked truth also applies to my talks in the United States. My stress in this or that facet of the topic necessarily depends on the particular focus of the day or on the specific drive of our adversaries. Hence, a topic such as “Shall We Come to Terms with Our Past?” seems to be appropriate and highly all-inclusive, right now.

Coming to terms with one’s past needs to conform to a number of conditions, however. Otherwise, it may be misleading in several ways. The methodology of such a probe into history should be the kind utilized in any scientific endeavour. As an exercise in good faith, and consequently resisting the disproportionate, unfair and often illegal weight of well-organized and wealthy pressure groups, it has to be free from domestic and international politics, and eventually bring out all pertinent facts. It also follows that to venture to utter the last note on a controversial issue via political organs may eventually usher Orwellian “truth ministries”. Historical accuracy cannot be sacrificed on the pedestal of highly influential pressure groups and political interests.

Coming to terms with the past demands comprehensive, meticulous and factual research, based on unbiased documentation and solid evidence beyond reasonable doubt. If one searches for “guilt” in history, *a priori* designation of the blame on one party may well be a prejudicial approach. Moreover, the fault cannot be put on the shoulders of a whole people or on its future generations. One cannot reactivate the out-dated theologian concept of “original sin” and charge that the new generation is born with guilt for all. One cannot classify nations into two categories of “good” or “bad”.

Justice abhors double standards. Probing into the past cannot be restricted only to a nation, region, date, or to an ethnic/religious group. No nation can demand from another to examine solely the past of the latter. No nation can be singled out by others and made a scapegoat. No nation may be forced to serve the interests of another under the label of “coming to terms with the past”. If need be, the records of all of them, without any exception, and veto privilege operating in favour of any one of them, should be open for close scrutiny. Can the histories of all continents be fully written without appropriate references to what happened to the original inhabitants of the colonized countries and the New World?

The condition of “without exceptions” includes the Armenians as well. Omission is the most virulent form of censorship. Many Armenian arguments omit a mass of crucial facts. They cast aside the dimensions of their armed belligerency (“more than 200,000” soldiers, according to their own accounts), the deaths that they caused (even initially 120,000 murdered Muslims when the Turks were preoccupied with mobilization at the beginning of the war, as recorded in a prominent British source), their frequent wars (no less than a dozen between 1914-22, as admitted by their own commanders), and the effects of contagious diseases (that took away the lives of all participants, as documented by all states). The Armenians are industrious, innovative, artistically-inclined and forceful, but (during and before the First World War) they were not pacifistic, unprotected, and unarmed bunch of civilians. As guerrillas or regular fighters aiding the invading Tsarist Russian, British and French forces but killing Turks in the process, they received messages of thanks and congratulations by some foreign leaders. This is something that the Japanese-Americans had *not* done before or after 1941.

Let all nations, *including the Armenians*, Turks and the rest come to terms with their own pasts. If all agree to do so, the Turks will be among those with the whitest records.