



Book Review by Constantine G. Hatzidimitriou

A Review of *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory*. Edited by Alexander Laban Hinton, Thomas La Pointe, and Douglas Irvin-Erickson. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013. 230 pages. 8 graphics.

This collection of studies illustrates that the field of Genocide Studies has become well-established and diversified, so much so, that it is able to turn a critical eye into its own assumptions and paradigms. The volume's purpose is to shed light on what are termed "hidden genocides" and discuss aspects of what scholars and governments have considered genocidal actions in relation to those that have been excluded from the category and why. An additional and very important focus of the collection is that many of the authors explore the effect that the recognition and study of one act of genocide has sometimes had on "hiding" or minimizing others. These comparisons and relationships range from the prototype of the Jewish Holocaust to state terror in Argentina, and nineteenth century Russian actions in Circassia. Some idea of the contents can be gained by noting the book's division of essays into Part One: Genocide and Ways of Knowing; Part Two: Power, Resistance, and Edges of the State, and Part Three: Forgetting, Remembering, and Hidden Genocides. The contents are wide-ranging and international, and will appeal to scholars and the general public interested in many fields of study touched upon.

Two of the studies in this collection however, held particular meaning for me in very personal ways. In the early 1980s I had the privilege of serving as the Educational Counselor for the U.S. Educational Foundation (Fulbright) in Thessaloniki, Greece. At the same time, I was both an administrator and professor of American history at Anatolia College (SBLA). In both positions, I was constantly challenged by my Greek students to interpret American history and culture in ways I had never before

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considered. My assumptions had to be re-examined and looked at through sometimes hostile European perspectives instead of traditional American norms. For example, I was surprised to learn that many of my students considered the treatment of Native Americans by the United States government to be an act of mass murder and genocide that continued what began during the so-called age of discovery into the nineteenth century. This perspective when related to the celebration of Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, or the steady Western expansion in American history led to spirited debate and discussion. Since these educational programs were taking place under the auspices of public and private American institutions in Greece designed to promote our values and cultural diversity, the context made the exchange of ideas particularly meaningful.

Looking backwards from the early twenty-first century, I continue to be impressed with how progressive and far-seeing those young Greek students were. Thus, it was with particular interest that I read the study of Chris Mato Nunpa, in the book under review titled: “Historical Amnesia: The ‘Hidden Genocide’ and Destruction of the Indigenous Peoples of the United States.” In it, the author systematically applies the criteria of the 1948 U.N. Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide to the historical and legal record of the U.S. government’s treatment of Native Americans. His survey proves that all of the criteria of what constitutes genocide clearly apply to the American context and that in fact reveals a major example of a hidden genocide. The author also quotes from *American Holocaust* a study by David E. Stannard¹ that documents a little known fact, that Hitler himself expressed admiration for the efficiency of the American genocide campaign against the Indians, viewing it as a forerunner for his own plans.² Nunpa also points out that most often, in an international context, the United States government is silent when the genocide of the native peoples of the Americas is brought up, and he compares this silence to that of Germany, Turkey and Japan with regard to their genocide pasts. In fact, the extermination rate of native Americans was much higher than that of those other two countries and represents a rate of approximately 98.5%. I wish I had had this article available to me in the 1980s to share with my Anatolia College students—so much of the documentation it contains would have supported their passionate perspectives and would have enriched our discussions.

The second article in this book that holds personal meaning for me—and which is the real focus of this review—is “Constructing the Armenian Genocide: How Scholars Unremembered the Assyrian and Greek Genocides in the Ottoman Empire,” by the well-known legal scholar, Hannibal Travis.³ It reminded me of the long struggle by my friend Thea Halo, to gain recognition of the Greek and Assyrian genocides by Armenian genocide scholars and the opposition she faced. I met Thea many years ago in

connection with her research for her now famous book *Not Even My Name*⁴ based on her mother's horrific recollections of the hardships and genocidal massacres in the Pontus. I had previously worked on *Slaughterhouse Province*⁵ which focused on Armenian massacres and published the eyewitness account of American U.S. Consul Leslie Davis. This led me to develop close connections to Armenian scholars working on that genocide's history, including my colleague at Columbia University, Marjorie Housepian-Dobkin. In fact, my mentor and dissertation advisor in Byzantine history, Professor Nina Garsoian, held an endowed chair in Armenian studies at Columbia, and through her, I came to know many prominent Armenian scholars.

All of my interactions reinforced the idea that Greeks and Armenians shared a common experience acknowledged by both groups and for this reason collaborated on opposing official and non-official Turkish efforts to distort and minimize what had happened. Thus, years later, I was surprised and initially skeptical when Thea contacted me and indicated that she had encountered opposition rather than cooperation from various academic and non-academic sectors of the Armenian community to her efforts to gain equal recognition status by the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) of the genocide of Assyrians and Greeks with that of Armenians under the rubric of a general genocide of Anatolian Christians. Apparently, Marjorie Housepian-Dobkin's inclusive perspective was not one generally held by many others. Ultimately, Halo's efforts were rewarded when in 2007 the International Association passed a resolution granting equal status to the Greek and Assyrian genocides as has recently been documented in a fine article published by its former president, Israel W. Carney, in the *The Genocide of the Ottoman Greeks*.⁶ The Travis article in the *Hidden Genocides* collection provides the theoretical context and a comparative perspective for Halo's political struggle for this recognition. I also think that it shows that the opposition she faced was tactical and misguided, and not unlike that faced by other genocide suffering ethnicities—whose interests ultimately have more in common than not.

Travis begins his study by placing the “active suppression of the existing historical knowledge about Assyrian and Greece experiences” into a chronological and political context which states begins in the 1960s in contrast to previous perspectives. He writes that, “From the standpoint of critical genocide studies, the Armenian genocide, like the Holocaust, is the culmination of a long-term campaign to establish a binary racial conflict and the exclusivity of one group's fate, a gross simplification of the broader understanding of the crime of genocide as mass murder that prevailed in the 1940's.”⁷ He also points out that part of the reason for this is that this suppression also sought to create the impression that the crime of genocide is a discontinuous event within Western history, and that the civilized European nations were not complicit in

enabling ultranationalist genocides like that of Turkey. In this connection, a more “limited” view of Turkish actions also helps support modern Turkey’s current position within NATO as an important moderate and secular state and its perceived international role as positive force in helping the West deal with recent ethnic conflicts in places such as Syria and Iraq. Travis points out that modern Turkish apologists can thus maintain a “view of the Armenian genocide as a discontinuous episode in an otherwise tolerant and progressive society.”⁸ Until recently, most genocide and area studies scholars considered the Armenian genocide as the only one that occurred in the early twentieth century, and in fact the European Parliament reaffirmed in 2004, its 1987 resolution recognizing only this genocide. He also shows that most scholars of the Armenian genocide were complicit in an ongoing concealment of the Assyrian and Greek genocides. The pattern only began to change in 2010, when the long neglected evidence of the broader aspects of Turkish actions was recognized as was the statistical evidence concerning the numbers of Greeks and Assyrians killed in comparison to Armenians. The scholarship concerning both of these aspects is ably surveyed by Travis in this study.

As part of his survey the author “reviews categories of evidence of genocide that are regarded as relevant by Armenian and Armenian American scholars, and subjects the traditional narrative of the “Armenian genocide,” drawn from thirty years of those scholars’ works, to the test of that evidence.”⁹ Furthermore he, “assesses whether the Assyrian and Greek genocides have been passively forgotten or purposefully hidden, and explores some promising signs that politicians and scholars are returning to the original source material.”¹⁰ Non-Armenian scholarship which has contributed to this “hidden genocide” is also examined and placed into its political context. For example, the misguided view that nearly every member of a group has to have been killed before concluding genocide has taken place is examined. Travis points out that this criterion is not applied to the Jewish Holocaust, often looked at as the template for genocide, since large numbers of European Jews in varying countries survived Nazi occupation. Finally, he surfaces the role of pragmatism, which is the idea that “it would be easier for Armenian lobbyists and sympathetic scholars to secure political recognition of one genocide than it would be to win recognition of three genocides.”¹¹ Additionally, Armenian scholars also sought to draw as close an analogy as possible to the extermination of European Jewry between 1941 and 1945. The article concludes on a positive note indicating that collaborative efforts are now making the difficult to find primary sources concerning the Ottoman Christian suffering in the late Ottoman empire increasingly available in translation. This is revealing and useful in correcting the historical record. Thus, the close collaboration and mutual support among Armenians and Greeks on subjects of common interest, which has always been part of my personal experience, appears to be the norm.

I have not described the many other fine specialized studies that are contained in this important publication. Suffice it to say, that the *Hidden Genocides* collection is an essential guide to the latest scholarship on genocide studies from an international and comparative perspective.

¹ David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

² Cited in *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory* edited by Alexander Laban Hinton, Thomas La Pointe, and Douglas Irvin-Erickson. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013), p. 105.

³ *Hidden Genocides*, pp. 170-192.

⁴ Thea Halo, *Not Even My Name* (NY: Picador, 2000).

⁵ Leslie Davis, *The Slaughterhouse Province: An American Diplomat 's Report on the Armenian Genocide* (NY: Caratzas, 1989).

⁶ Tessa Hoffman, Mathias Bjumlund, Vasileios Meichanetsidids, "The Genocide of the Ottoman Greeks: Studies on the State-Sponsored Campaign of Extermination of thee Christians of Asia Minor and its Aftermath: History, Law, Memory (NY; Caratzas, 2011), pp. 334-38.

⁷ *Hidden Genocides*, p.. 170.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 171.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 172.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 173.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 182.

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