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THE INVOLVEMENT OF TURKISH WOMEN IN THE PRE-
GENOCIDE TURKISH PROPAGANDA ABOUT SMYRNA AND THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENOCIDAL POLICY, 1919–1922

Elina Z. Mirzoyan and Tehmine R. Martoyan

ABSTRACT: After the Armistice of Mudros, rallies, gatherings and protests were organised across Turkey, with the active participation of Turkish women and men. The landing of Greek troops in Smyrna on 15 May 1919 became a reason, or, rather, a pretext, for Turkish women to initiate and participate in the outdoor rallies. These rallies, organised as a “struggle against the occupation” of Smyrna, started in the squares and districts of cities and gradually became large-scale throughout Turkey. To organise and control this process, Mustafa Kemal (as of 1934, Atatürk) initiated several organisations and associations, and issued the Havza Circular. Kemal legalised the persecution and abuse of Christians. Turkey attempted to liberate itself from international obligations and responsibility by breaching international laws and contracts. The annihilation of Smyrna’s Armenians and Greeks and the arson of their districts was the continuation of the genocidal policy of the Young Turks.

The Peculiarities of Preparatory Propaganda

When discussing the status and role of women in Turkey in the period before Mustafa Kemal, it is possible to limit the scope to family, education, culture and literature. However, starting with Kemal, the focus should shift to their involvement in the public, social, administrative and political spheres. Their role during the republican period should be examined in the context of legal, political and institutional reforms, ranging from Sharia law to civil rights, polygamy to monogamy, and issues related to divorce, property and more.

Furthermore, the transformation of Turkish women’s public roles within an Islamic context is linked to the broader movements of Westernisation and modernisation. Even while the Ottoman Empire was implementing legislative reforms, particularly those inspired by Western legal models, to involve Turkish women in the country’s institutional transformation, which was already being carried out by Kemal, it is important to note that contemporary newspaper

* This research was carried out within the framework of the grant programme of the Higher Education and Science Committee of the Ministry of Science, Education, Culture, and Sports of the Republic of Armenia (topic code: 22YR-6A042).

sources recorded that the ruling upper class granted certain state privileges to Turkish women to serve their interests:

Therefore, the ideological current created by Turkish reformers in favour of the liberation of Turkish women does not represent a genuine and popular value. Their concern is not the liberation of Turkish women from their entrenched status, but rather a partial and, to some extent, privileged granting of certain rights to the women of the capital's upper class, to serve their interests more effectively ... Under this guise of reform, the feudal class and the petty bourgeoisie have gathered. Sooner or later, they will separate from each other, because they have different paths. All Turkish publicists and intellectuals, whether women or men, and no matter how unconditionally and eloquently they speak in the name of the enlightenment and liberation of Turkish women, may all become fierce opponents of this very movement. This is because this movement, by including representatives of the mass upper class with class stratification, can never benefit them, but rather the opposite.¹

Furthermore, the newspaper explained that this hypocritical approach of the ruling elite serving the interests of upper-class women was also defended by Turkish authors.

Turkish women were being drawn into propaganda aimed at continuing the genocide in Smyrna, as a means for the Turkish upper class to serve their interests and to more easily gain trust. The Havza Circular was issued to coordinate the reactions to this propaganda.² It strategically planned the entire process, giving great importance to the venues, format, actors, public and propaganda discourse.

The "Motivations" for Propaganda and the Havza Circular

The landing of Greek troops in Smyrna on 15 May 1919 served as a pretext for bringing Turkish women to the forefront of the public arena: Turkish women emerged on platforms for the first time alongside men at rallies held in different districts of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul). Gradually, the organisation and expansion of these public rallies came to be led by a range of groups, including the Turkish Hearths (Türk Ocakları), National Congress Committee

¹ Editorial, *Kayts* (Constantinople), no. 9, 1914.

² Havza was circular, created for the specific purpose of coordinating and directing the movement. It was the first publication of the Turkish nationalist movement, "Havza Genelgesi Milli Mücadele Ruhunun Ete Kemiğe Bürünmüş Halidir," T.C. Samsun Valiliği, <http://samsun.gov.tr/gazi-mustafa-kemal-aturkun-havzaya-gelisinin-100-yili-buyuk-coskuyula-kutlandi>.

(Milli Kongre Cemiyeti), rights protection associations,³ darülfünun⁴/university professors, schoolteachers, high-achieving female students as well as other women's committees and organisations such as the Asri Women's Union (Asri Kadınlar Cemiyeti), Anatolian Women's Committee for the Defence of the Motherland (Anadolu Kadınları Müdafaa-ı Vatan Cemiyeti)⁵ and female-oriented schools.⁶ Our observations indicate they were intellectual women, representing the fields of medicine⁷ or jurisprudence, as well as being writers and public speakers. They can be described as the internal community of the state administration, that is, they were either the wives, sisters or relatives of those holding public positions, which positioned them in the intellectual elite. This is corroborated by the information about the women who participated in and organised the rallies. Furthermore, the above-mentioned female representatives actively promoted outstanding female students, envisioning future goals for them. To support this aim, leading organisations of the time established special branches, such as the Istanbul branch of the Women's Centre of the Ottoman Red Crescent,⁸ which formed a special committee "to assist the victims of the landing of Greek troops in Izmir".⁹

³ Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2011), 102.

⁴ In modern Turkish, this word, composed of the Arabic roots "science" and "house", denotes a university. Although this word was used in the Ottoman language, it is also used in modern Turkish to emphasise that the university was of the Ottoman period. It was originally created as a higher education institution during the Ottoman period to prevent the exodus of young people from the empire to Europe for higher education. In addition to medreses, the idea of opening a similar institution for higher education first emerged during the reign of Abdülmecid. The first darülfünun in resemblance of today's universities was opened on 25 July 1846, and it is known as the first university founded in the Ottoman Empire. In 1933, it became Istanbul University. See "Darülfünun Nedir? İlk Darülfünun Hangisidir, Ne Zaman Açılmıştır?," *Milliyet*, 4 June 2021, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/egitim/darulfunun-nedir-ilk-darulfunun-hangisidir-ne-zaman-acilmistir-6522714>.

⁵ Bekir Sıtkı Baykal, "Millî Mücadele'de Anadolu Kadınları Müdafaa-i Vatan Cemiyeti," *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (1984): 108–26.

⁶ Nuray Özdemir, "Millî Mücadele Dönemi Mitinglerinde Türk Kadını," *Belgi Dergisi* 21, no. 1 (2021): 4.

⁷ This research demonstrates that medical professionals, including Turkish doctors, played a crucial role not only in the execution of the Armenian Genocide but also in the dissemination of propaganda that justified and incited the atrocities. See Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Role of Turkish Physicians in the World War I Genocide of Ottoman Armenians," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1, no. 2 (1986): 169–92.

⁸ Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti Hanımlar Şubesi.

⁹ İzmir Mazlumun-i Eytam ve Eramiline Muavenet Heyeti.

Street demonstrations and rallies involving thousands of men and women were held not only in the main squares and districts of Istanbul but also almost in all cities of Asia Minor. While both women and men took part in the demonstrations initially, in Muğla, Ankara, Sivas, Edirne, Kastamonu and Konya only women took part and only they made the decisions.¹⁰ Most of the speakers at these rallies were female teachers, primarily students of the Inas Darülfünun,¹¹ members of some committees¹² and mainly female intellectuals. Through her speeches, Halide Edip Adivar¹³ emerged as one of the symbols of Turkish nationalism.¹⁴

Following Kemal's instruction, the logistics of the rallies were organised in accordance with the Havza Circular, issued on 28 May 1919 in Samsun.¹⁵ This serves as further evidence of the intended continuation of the genocidal policy. It is also important to note that the Havza was one of the central pillars of Kemal's campaign, playing a key role in shaping his meetings with the leading figures in the paramilitary forces. In Samsun, Kemal met people whom he could trust to create a regular army and who could conduct military affairs. These organised meetings would later reveal Kemal's real intentions: on 29 May 1919, Kemal met at Havza with militia leader Topal Osman, also known as Feridunoğlu Osman Ağa. Turks perceived this meeting as a "handshake for the sake of salvation of the homeland" in bleak times¹⁶ that actually laid the groundwork for genocidal actions (deportations of Christians, pogroms, mass killings, etc.). Kemal's

¹⁰ Hülya Yalçın, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Kadın İmajı İnşası (1928–1938)" (master's thesis, Hacettepe University, 2019), 43.

¹¹ Ottoman Turkey's first women-only university, founded in 1914. See Ali Arslan and Özlem Akpınar, "İnas Darülfünunu (1914–1921)," *Osmanlı Bilimi Araştırmaları* 6, no. 2 (2005): 225–34.

¹² Özdemir, "Millî Mücadele Dönemi Mitinglerinde Türk Kadını," 4.

¹³ Halide Edib Adivar (1884–1964), a prominent intellectual, prose writer, author and nationalist political figure, was deeply involved in the Armenian Genocide. She played a direct role in the Turkification of Armenian orphans who survived the genocide. Edita Gzoyan, Regina Galustyan, Shushan Khachatryan and Elina Mirzoyan, *Hay yerekaneri t'urk'ats'umë Hayots' ts'eghaspanut'yan zhamanak* [The Turkification of Armenian children during the Armenian Genocide] (Yerevan: AGMI, 2023); Y.G.Ch., "T'urq Zhan dë arkë" [The Turkish Joan of Arc], *The Gochnag*, 7 October 1922, 40.

¹⁴ İnci Enginün and Müjgân Cunbur, *Millî Mücadele'de Türk kadını* (Ankara: Türk Ticaret Bankası, 1983), 14.

¹⁵ Özdemir, "Millî Mücadele Dönemi Mitinglerinde Türk Kadını," 4.

¹⁶ Erden Menteşoğlu, *Yakın Tarihimizde Osman Ağa ve Giresunlular* (Giresun: Yeşilgiresun Gazetesi Yayınları, 1997), 80. Erdal Aydoğan, "Mustafa Kemal Paşa'nın Samsun'dan Erzurum'a Yolculuğu: Halkla İletişim Örneği," *Atatürk Dergisi* 9, no. 1 (2020).

biographer Andrew Mango describes Topal Osman as a sadistic ethnic cleanser of Armenians and Greeks.¹⁷ Another account of Osman reads:

He was the embodiment of immorality throughout his existence, a professional of slaughter. I have not met such realities in history or myths that I was destined to see ... the valleys of exile, the deserts of Deir-Zor, the waves of the Euphrates ... I would not be surprised to know that he lacked human conscience, or that he was not, in fact, a human.¹⁸

On Kemal's orders, Osman undertook the organisation of rallies across Turkey, particularly in Smyrna,¹⁹ where Turkish women came to the fore. The Havza Circular was also a broad platform for the emergence of public speeches, with a separate focus on non-Muslims (mainly Armenians and Greeks). It also shaped the course of the speeches at the rallies and the strategic steps taken. Turkish female writers and intellectuals who could draw large audiences worked on propaganda, publicity, rhetorical speeches, narratives, poster slogans and other forms of expression. As the result of targeted and systematic efforts, the number of rallies and protest telegrams initiated in response to the circular gradually increased, which is a topic that warrants a separate study. By bringing Turkish women to the forefront in forming and leading rallies, the Havza circular highlighted their deserving position, which garnered the attention of both Turkish society and the international community.²⁰ In addition, the women's speeches were published in other periodicals of the time, including *İkdam*, *Tanin*, *Tasvir-i Efkar* and *Vakit*.²¹ These newspapers promoted the dissemination of the women's speeches in all possible ways, ensuring a wide audience for their propaganda. As a result of the Havza Circular, rallies initially took place in

¹⁷ Andrew Mango, *Ataturk* (London: John Murray, 1999), 383. See also "Feridunoğlu Osman Ağa," Greek Genocide Resource Center, <https://www.greek-genocide.net/index.php/overview/perpetrators/feridunoglu-osman-aga>; *Black Book: The Tragedy of Pontus, 1914–1922* (Athens: Central Council of Pontus, 1922), <https://archive.org/details/blackbooktragedy00281prich>. Regarding the massacres perpetrated by Topal Osman, see Vahan Gartshean, "Mukhtar ibr kazmakerpich' u varich' jarderu ev taragrut'eants" [Mukhtar as organiser and leader of massacres and deportations], *Azatomart*, 30 December 1928, 2.

¹⁸ P. Haykuni, *T'op'al Ōsman ev deepk'ere Marzuani mej zinadadaren heto* [Topal Osman and the events in Marzvan after the armistice] (Athens: Nor Or, 1924), 33. Osman is also characterised as someone who hated Christians. See also Editorial, *Zvart'nots'*, 1 September 1960, 9.

¹⁹ Haykuni, *T'op'al Ōsman ev deepk'ere Marzuani mej zinadadaren heto*, 4–5.

²⁰ Mehmet Şahingöz, "Milli Mücadelede Protesto ve Mitingler," *Türkler Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 15 (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2002), 727.

²¹ Özdemir, "Milli Mücadele Dönemi Mitinglerinde Türk Kadını," 4.

Istanbul and were co-organised with men. However, women came to dominate similar events all over the country.

The First Responses and Reactions of Women in Istanbul: The “Strategic Map” of Propaganda

Propaganda rallies were held in central locations so as to attract large crowds as well as in sites of collective significance for Turkish society. The first open-air meeting involving Turkish women took place on 19 March 1919 near Fatih’s mausoleum.²² It was organised by the Inas Darülfünun and Asri Women’s Association²³ in protest at the Mudros armistice.²⁴

The Quran was recited at the meeting. After the prayer, one of the female students of the faculty of literature of the Inas Darülfünun read the poem “Visit to Fatih’s Tomb”²⁵ by poet, writer, playwright, and diplomat Abdülhak Hamit (Tarhan) Bey, followed by Mediha Muzafer Hanım, a darülfünun graduate, who delivered her speech with “patriotic demonstration”: “We will not leave Istanbul. We won’t go. We won’t go,” with all the ladies present repeating this call in unison.²⁶ Later, Najie Faham Hanım spoke on behalf of the Asri Women’s Association. “Why should the whole nation suffer from deporting [*tehcir*] a part of the Armenians during the years of war, without considering the opinion of the nation, for political and administrative reasons? And maybe it happened for a military reason, why should the whole nation be responsible for it?”²⁷ She went on to say that the whole nation cannot be punished for the policies of the Committee of Union and Progress during the war.²⁸

The group of protesting women formed in Istanbul began focusing its efforts on denouncing the landing of Greek troops in Smyrna. Beginning on 16 May, a day after the landing, Turkish women voiced their protest in almost all districts of Istanbul. As a symbolic act of mourning for Smyrna, they refrained from attending places of entertainment, such as cinemas and

²² That is the mausoleum of Mehmed II, commonly known as Mehmed the Conqueror or Fâtiḥ Sultan Mehmed.

²³ The Asri Women’s Association was founded by graduates and students of the Inas Darülfünun in Istanbul 1918. See “Asri Kadın Cemiyeti,” *İnci*, 1 February 1919; Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi*, 87–103.

²⁴ See also Özdemir, “Millî Mücadele Dönemi Mitinglerinde Türk Kadını,” 5.

²⁵ “İstanbul Türk Kalacaktır,” *İkdam*, 20 March 1919, 2.

²⁶ “Ulvi Bir Tezahür,” *Genç Kadın*, 27 March 1919, 108; “Fatih Cami-i Şerifinde,” *Hadisat*, 20 March 1919, 1.

²⁷ “İstanbul Türk Kalacaktır,” *İkdam*, 20 March 1919, 2.

²⁸ Özdemir, “Millî Mücadele Dönemi Mitinglerinde Türk Kadını,” 5.

theatres. Schools and workplaces closed temporarily as strikes were called throughout the city.²⁹

On 18 May, under the leadership of the renowned doctor Besim Ömer Pasha, darülfünun students joined the rallies opposing the landing of Greek troops in Smyrna. A school strike was declared and progressive representatives from each faculty – selected with the active participation of professors and students – delivered speeches. Participants from the faculties of law and medicine, along with some statesmen, played a prominent role. The series of speeches attracted a large audience, and excerpts, especially from both young and established women, were published in *Tasvir-i Efkyar*, such as the following:

We represent the Turkish youth. We also agree to raise our voices to fight for Smyrna in this way. The Turkish youth will always have women – enlightened women – next to them. There should be no doubt about it. If necessary, we will sacrifice ourselves alongside the youth and for the sake of our country.³⁰

At the conclusion of the meeting, the coordinating council decided to hold protests in the squares of various districts of Istanbul, where the leading figures of Turkish Hearths, such as Halide Edip Adıvar, Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, Mehmet Emin Yurdakul and Dr Sabit Bey,³¹ delivered speeches. Darülfünun students also played an important role in the holding of these rallies. Meliha Hanım,³² a student of the Inas Darülfünun, who is known for delivering influential speeches at the rallies, her powerful public addresses and frequent appearances alongside Halide Edip, took to the podium as a representative of the youth and called for “resistance”.³³ Following this strong public response, these rallies continued in other districts and squares of the city in a more organised manner.

Women at Fatih's First Open-air Rally: Religious-Political Discourse

The first open-air rally in Istanbul protesting the landing of Greek troops in

²⁹ “İzmir Hadisesinin İstanbul Vilayetindeki Tesirâtı,” *İkdam*, 19 May 1919, 1.

³⁰ “Darülfünun’da İçtima ve Tezahüratın Devamı,” *Tasvir-i Efkyar*, 19 May 1919, 1.

³¹ Mehmet Şahingöz, “Millî Mücadelede Yapılan Mitinglerde Türk Ocaklarının Rolü ve Hamdullah Suphi,” *Hamdullah Suphi ve Gagauzlar*, ed. Mehmet Şahingöz and Alper Alp (Ankara: Türk Yurdu Yayınları, 2016), 34.

³² Leyla Kaplan, *Cemiyetlerde ve Siyasî Teşkilatlarda Türk Kadını (1908–1960)* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1998), 72–73. See also Murat Alper Parlak, ed., *Kurtuluş ve kuruluşun sembol kenti İzmir, Sempozyumu bildirileri*, 26–28 Eylül 2012 (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2015).

³³ Mehmet Korkud Aydın, “Millî Mücadele Dönemi İstanbul Öğrenci Hareketleri (1918–1922)” (master’s thesis, Fırat University, 2011), 4–5.

Smyrna took place on 19 May in front of the Fatih municipality building.³⁴ On the day of the rally, Istanbul's traders and merchants closed their shops, while school and work strikes were called again. And a big rally was held in Fatih Park. Two of the five speakers were women – Halide Edip and the aforementioned student Meliha Hanım. For the former, who had previously spoken only in indoor halls, this marked her first public address in an open-air setting. In doing so, she violated Islamic conventions that restricted women's speech to enclosed spaces and established the tradition of women appearing in public places. The occupation of Smyrna forced Turkish women to take a significant step in changing their status.³⁵

It should be noted that, in addition to choosing strategically important locations, significant attention was paid to the rhetorical component, that is, the political use of language. In this propaganda campaign, particular emphasis was placed on employing religious discourse. Language is an inherent part of propaganda, and political discourse is a form of communication encountered daily by individuals across society and which has the struggle for power as its main theme and motivation. The more open and democratic a society is, the more attention is paid to the language of politics. Consequently, political experts, including journalists and political scientists, and the broad mass of citizens are interested in political discourse.

Political discourse constitutes a distinct form of communication, characterised by a high degree of manipulation. Therefore, uncovering the mechanisms of political communication is crucial to determining the characteristics of language as a means of influence. Linguistic manipulation has subtle techniques that target specific points.³⁶ Halide Edip was skilful in

³⁴ "Fatih'te İstanbul Ahalisinin Muazzam Mitingi," *Memleket*, 20 May 1919, 1; "Sevgili İzmir İçin İstanbul Müslümanlarının Dünkü Tezahüratı," *İkdam*, 20 May 1919, 1.

³⁵ Zeki Sarıhan, *Kurtuluş Savaşı Kadınları* (Ankara: Cem Web Ofset, 2006), 89.

³⁶ Emma Townsend, "Hate Speech or Genocidal Discourse? An Examination of Anti-Roma Sentiment in Contemporary Europe," *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 11, no. 1 2014; Douglas Irvin-Erickson, "Genocide Discourses: American and Russian Strategic Narratives of Conflict in Iraq and Ukraine," *Politics and Governance* 5, no. 3 (2017): 130–45; Doris A. Graber, "Political Languages," in *Handbook of Political Communication*, ed. Dan D. Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981), 195–224; Nicholas Allott, "The Role of Misused Concepts in Manufacturing Consent: A Cognitive Account," in *Manipulation and Ideologies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Louis de Saussure (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2005), 147–68; Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner, "Introduction: Themes and Principles in the Analysis of Political Discourse," in *Politics as Text and Talk: Analytic Approaches to Political Discourse*, ed. Paul Chilton and Christina Schaffner (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 1–29; Paul Chilton, "Political Terminology,"

manipulating religious discourse. She was the first speaker at the rally, and in her work *Türkün Ateşle İmtihanı* (The Turkish ordeal), she describes the feelings she experienced when stepping onto the stage:

People gathered in front of Fatih Municipality. I was expected to give a speech from the balcony. While I was wondering if it would be possible to make my voice reachable to a large audience, a dramatic event served to mitigate this worry. Above the building, the red flags with crescents and stars hoisted in the wind, while a black cloth was hanging from the balcony below. It looked as if people were standing on the black cover of an iron fence facing the sea. There were soldiers and officers in the centre of the crowd. Around them were mostly young women in black chadors. They were all waiting for my speech. But one didn't even realise what was happening. Their shining eyes inspired and dictated what had to be said.³⁷

Edip addressed them:

Muslims and Turks are living their darkest days today: It's night ... dark night ... But there is no night without morning in human life. Maybe a bright morning will rise tomorrow ... Guns and cannons fall, but Hak³⁸ and Allah remain. There is a feeling of love and nationhood in our hearts: children and mothers ... you shall not be afraid, ladies, Turks, Muslims. We have proven that we deserve to be considered a nation in the world.³⁹

Edip employed politically and religiously charged rhetoric in her speech, and, seeing how these deliberate strategies stirred the crowd, she continued:

We cannot force them [referring, in her words, to the "occupation forces"] to listen to our words. But we can make our Padishah⁴⁰ listen to our words. Now we want to fight with and alongside our men, not only on the battlefield but also in the rearguard, which will heartfully represent the strongest, most nation-centred, and bravest nation ... We convey the people's feelings to our Padishah and say that we are living through dark days: everyone is silent today, but the important

in *Handbook of Communication in the Public Sphere*, ed. Karlfried Knapp and Gerd Antos (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 226–42.

³⁷ Halide Edib Adivar, *Türkün Ateşle İmtihanı* (İstanbul: Atlas Kitabevi, 1992), 29.

³⁸ In Turkish, Hak is one of the names of God in Islam and it can also mean "justice". Aristakes Pohjalian, *T'urq-hayeren ardzern bararan* [Turkish-Armenian handbook dictionary] (İstanbul: İpomet Matbaası, 1996), 180.

³⁹ Adivar, *Türkün Ateşle İmtihanı*, 29.

⁴⁰ *Padishah* means "sultan, monarch, king". See Pohjalian, *Turkish-Armenian Handbook Dictionary*, 375.

thing is that today the Turks and Muslims are assembled around the Padishah.⁴¹

This speech largely reverberated among the crowd and Halide Edip became an anticipated speaker at the rallies. With this address, she inspired broad segments of the public with the call to resist the “occupation” of Smyrna. Her speech came to be regarded as “of the important milestones in the development of the consciousness of their national identity”.⁴² With her speeches before large crowds, Halide Edip, whose name became almost identical with the rallies of the Turkish nationalist movement, sought, in her own words, to revive the Turkish spirit, create a reawakening and form a national identity.

The rally culminated with Meliha Hanım’s speech: “We strongly believe that our lives should be dedicated to saving our homeland, that our violated rights should certainly be restored, relying on our great Allah.”⁴³

At the end of the rally, Halide and two young women were instructed to send a telegram to US President Woodrow Wilson, protesting the “seizure of Turkey”.⁴⁴

Rallies were successively held in other districts as well. The second Istanbul rally took place on May 20 in Üsküdar.⁴⁵ Residents there flocked to participate in this mass rally, where three out of the eight speakers were women. One of them, Sabahat Filmer, the representative of the Asri Women’s Association, recalled: “A big crowd spread before our eyes like a colourful carpet. Neither the sun nor the wind bothered the excited people. They constantly waved, growing bigger every second, multiplying, expanding.”⁴⁶

In her speech, Filmer declared: “The Greeks took Izmir, a city with a Turkish life and soul. Maybe tomorrow they will eye our Konya, Bursa, and, yes, our very beloved Istanbul, which attracts even the evil eye with all its beauty.” Following her, Najie Faham Hanım, a fellow member of Asri, referred to Smyrna, which could not “be erased from the history and geography of our country ... Long live the whole nation and the Islamic world.”⁴⁷ She declared that men were not alone in this fight, underlining that women should participate too in the struggle for Turkishness.

⁴¹ Adıvar, *Türkün Ateşle İmtihanı*, 30. “Sevgili İzmir İçin İstanbul Müslümanlarının Dünkü Tezahüratı,” *İkdam*, 20 May 1919, 1.

⁴² Beytullah Kaya and Burcu Başaran, “Milli Mücadele’de Halide Edip Adıvar’ın Rolü,” *Çekmece Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 11, no. 23 (2023): 124–38.

⁴³ Kemal Arıburnu, *Millî Mücadelede İstanbul Mitingleri* (Ankara: Yeni Desen Matbaası, 1975), 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ “Dün de Üsküdar’da Büyük Bir İçtima Akd Edildi,” *Hadisat*, 21 May 1919, 1.

⁴⁶ Sabahat Filmer, *Atatürk Yolunda Büyük Adımlar* (İstanbul: Gül Matbaası, 1983), 49.

⁴⁷ “İzmir Hadisesi Milletın Kalbine Kök Saldı,” *İkdam*, 21 May 1919, 1.

It is important to note that the propaganda process was shaped by a linguistic hierarchy. If in the Ottoman state⁴⁸ Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish were dominant, then in the transitional period of the republic, French became dominant.

Special attention was given to public speeches, with dedicated professionals assigned to this task. The final female speaker was Zeliha Hanım, a French teacher. In her address, she declared: "Izmir is ours and will remain ours. Izmir is the honour, blood, and soul of Turks. Turks cannot live without Izmir, Konya, and Istanbul."⁴⁹ These rallies usually concluded with clear resolutions, and next steps were defined. Participants were encouraged to repeat certain slogans and expressions several times, such as, for example, chanting *Izmir bizimdir* ("Izmir is ours") at the end of a rally. We have observed that in Turkish linguistic culture, political narratives are traditionally transmitted through such wordings. Slogans like "[name of city] is ours" were used at other rallies. This rhetorical pattern can be seen as a prototype of later propaganda slogans, such as *Qarabağ bizimdir* ("Karabakh is ours"), which emerged in the context of the so-called Azerbaijani struggle.⁵⁰

A subsequent rally was held in Makriköy (present-day Bakırköy), attended only by women participated, who resolved to form a delegation and submit a memorandum to the Allied forces, declaring their determination not to surrender Izmir.⁵¹

On May 22, a rally took place in Kadıköy Square, where, despite the heavy rain, around 20,000–30,000 people participated.⁵² Munevver Saime Hanım, a student of the Inas Darülfünun, addressed the rally: "The time has come to say less and do more. We only lament that there is no heart – who will hear our cries...?"⁵³ She later joined the army and continued her struggle at the frontline with the rank of captain.⁵⁴

During subsequent rallies, Halide Edip called on both the Turkish people and broader Islamic world to intensify their efforts in support of the Turkish

⁴⁸ Benjamin C. Fortna, *Multilingualism and the End of the Ottoman Empire: Language, Script, and the Quest for the "Modern"* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023).

⁴⁹ "Üsküdar'da İkinci Büyük Miting," *Vakit*, 21 May 1919, 1–2.

⁵⁰ Elina Z. Mirzoyan, "Türk kanants' nergavratsut'yuny Zmyurniayi hamar t'urqakan hanrahavaknerum" [Involvement of Turkish women in Turkish rallies for Smyrna], *Ts'eghaspanagitakan handes* 11, no. 1 (2023): 90–102.

⁵¹ "Makriköy'deki Miting," *Vakit*, 22 May 1919, 2; "Makriköy Hanımlarının Mitingi," *İkdam*, 21 May 1919, 1.

⁵² Zekeriya Türkmen, *Millî Mücadele Yıllarında İstanbul Mitingleri* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2016), 105.

⁵³ "Kadıköylülerin Dünkü Muazzam Mitingi," *Vakit*, 23 May 1919, 1.

⁵⁴ Kaplan, *Cemiyetlerde ve Siyasî Teşkilatlarda*, 76; Afet İnan, *Tarih Boyunca Türk Kadının Hak ve Görevleri* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1975), 106; "Kadıköylülerin Dünkü Muazzam Mitingi," *Vakit*, 23 May 1919, 1.

struggle.⁵⁵ At the end of one of her speeches, she repeatedly urged participants to take an oath, in the name of Allah, that they would not hesitate to die for the Turkish flag, for the rights and independence of the Turks, and would not bow down to any force. Her emphatic appeal provoked anger among many in the crowd and there were also negative reactions to her appeal for people to swear “in the name of Allah”. With this speech, Halide Edip openly called on the people to engage in a real struggle, mainly using nationalistic and religious rhetoric, “speaking in the name of Allah and the nation”.⁵⁶ Although her speeches were occasionally censored in Turkish sources, they are remembered as the most effective and memorable speeches of the armistice rallies.⁵⁷ In one speech, she criticised the European powers for their biased attitude,⁵⁸ which, under pressure from the Allied powers, led to an arrest warrant being issued against her on the grounds that she had a hidden agenda of targeting religious propaganda at non-religious attendees.⁵⁹ Deploying her rhetorical-cultural skills, she attempted not only to consolidate the potential of the Turks, but also the entire Islamic world, in her use of religious words and expressions to manipulate religious fears.

As the rallies gained momentum and expanded in scope, “the occupying forces” sought to suppress them by prohibiting public gatherings in open-air spaces. As a result, gatherings were held in the National Assembly, organised and mainly attended by men. However, in other cities (Ankara, Edirne, Sivas, Kastamonu, Konya) the demonstrations went ahead, following the content and direction set by the Istanbul rallies.⁶⁰

On 22 May, at the conclusion of the Silvan rally, a telegram in French was sent “on behalf of 30,000 women” to the representatives of the Allied forces in Istanbul and to the wife of President Wilson, stating that “the occupation of Izmir is an act that is completely against humanity and justice”.⁶¹ These rallies established a culture of appealing to the wives of foreign leaders. The Kastamonu rally, held

⁵⁵ Adivar, *Türkün Ateşle İmtihanı*, 31.

⁵⁶ Arıburnu, *Milli Mücadelede*, 38.

⁵⁷ “İstanbul’un Bütün Müslüman Halkı, Hakkını İstemek, Adaletsizliğe Bağırarak İçin Dün Sultan Ahmet’te Toplandı,” *Hadisat*, 24 May 1919, 1; “Yüz Bin Müslüman Sultan Ahmet Meydanında Muazzam Bir Miting Akd Eyledi,” *İkdam*, 24 April 1919, 1.

⁵⁸ “İzmir’in İşgalinin Kalb-i Millette Açtığı Yara...,” *İkdam*, 23 May 1919, 1; “Kadıköylülerin Dünkü Muazzam Mitingi,” *Vakit*, 23 May 1919, 1.

⁵⁹ “İstanbul’un Bütün Müslüman Halkı, Hakkını İstemek, Adaletsizliğe Bağırarak İçin Dün Sultan Ahmet’te Toplandı,” *Hadisat*, 24 May 1919, 1; “Yüz Bin Müslüman Sultan Ahmet Meydanında Muazzam Bir Miting Akd Eyledi,” *İkdam*, 24 April 1919, 1.

⁶⁰ *Enginün and Cunbur, Milli Mücadele’de*, 14; Yalçın, “Cumhuriyet Dönemi Kadın İmajı İnşası,” 43; Şahingöz, “Milli Mücadelede Protesto ve Mitingler.”

⁶¹ Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister’s Office (BOA), HR.SYS, 3552–5.

on December 10, is notable as the sole demonstration entirely organized and led by Turkish women. A rally organizing committee was formed on behalf of the Kastamonu Muslim Women for this purpose. This historic demonstration,⁶² led by Zekie Hanım, wife of police chief Halil Bey, drew more than 3,000 women. Following the established principles, the rally resolved to send telegrams to the wives of world leaders. Signed by the rally committee on behalf of the Muslim women of Kastamonu, these telegrams protested the occupation of Urfa (present-day Şanlıurfa), Marash (Kahramanmaraş) and Aintab (Gaziantep), with the women stating that they were determined not to allow their country be destroyed.⁶³

Another women's demonstration took place in Konya on 8 January 1920, which was convened in protest at the "atrocities of the Greeks" in Smyrna and its hinterland as well as the "occupation" and "injustices" committed by the French in cooperation with the Armenians of Adana.⁶⁴ Such demonstrations by women continued to spread across cities in Asia Minor.⁶⁵

These women, who emphasised their readiness to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the homeland, captured public attention and wielded great influence – they gained the trust of the public easily. This development was likely also influenced by the significant decrease in the male population as a result of the war.

Initially, the most developed cities were chosen for the staging of rallies but, over time, the movement gradually spread throughout the country. This propaganda process, which involved Turkish women but was led and initiated by Kemal, represented a planned step within the broader Kemalist nationalist movement and was a component of the genocidal programme.

The propaganda campaign was not merely a tool for its own sake. It had devastating consequences: the Armenians and Greeks of Smyrna became victims of a genocide, systematically planned and executed by the subsequent Kemalist government, some years after the end of World War I. The following sections will present evidence that demonstrates the continuation of the genocidal policy against Armenians and Greeks in Smyrna.⁶⁶

⁶² *Kastamonu'da İlk Kadın Mitingi'nin*, 75. *Yıldönümü Uluslararası Sempozyumu*, 10–11 Aralık 1994, *Kastamonu* (Ankara: ATAM Yayınları, 1996), 40.

⁶³ "Hanımlarımızın Mitingi," *Açık Söz*, 14 December 1919, 1–2; Mustafa Eski, "İlk Kadın Mitingi," in *Kastamonu'da İlk Kadın Mitingi'nin* 75, 40.

⁶⁴ BOA, DH. ŞFR, 643–101, R.25.08.1335; Afet İnan, *Tarih Boyunca Türk Kadınının Hak ve Görevleri* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1975), 108; Ahmet Avanas, *Millî Mücadelede Konya* (Ankara: ATAM Yayınları, 1998), 39–41.

⁶⁵ Özdemir, "Millî Mücadele Dönemi Mitinglerinde Türk Kadını," 17–18.

⁶⁶ Tehmine Martoyan, *Ts'eghaspanut'yan k'aghak'akanut'yan sharunakutyunë Zmyurniayum* (1922) [The continuation of the genocidal policy in Smyrna (1922)] (Yerevan: YSU, 2024).

From Pre-genocidal Propaganda to Genocide

On 15 May 1919, the Greek army liberated Smyrna. Kemal opposed the policy of dividing Turkey. The Erzurum Congress, held from 23 July to 7 August, adopted resolutions against Armenia, the Armenians and the Greeks. The assembly proclaimed Western Armenia and Trebizond as Turkish territories. Preserving the Armenian-populated districts within Turkish territory and banning “the creation of an Armenian state” were considered necessary and the solution to that problem a “sacred act”.⁶⁷

The second article of the resolution states that all foreign occupations and interference will be considered as attempts to establish Greek and Armenian states, thereby justifying the principle of united self-defence. The same article also describes Christians living in Ottoman territory as guests “in the land of the ancestors of the Turks”. As their property, life and honour had been guaranteed under the sultans, so it would be secured in the future.⁶⁸

At the same time, however, the declaration stated that the Greeks or Armenians would never be allowed to hold positions in the state that could endanger the existence of the Turks, the rights of Muslims or Ottoman sovereignty. On this basis, the declaration stated its commitment to use all possible measures to prevent “any attempt by the Armenians and Greeks aimed at harming the Turkish fatherland.” It also rejected “any form of intervention by the Entente powers,” asserting that such interference would be considered an attempt “to contribute to the realisation of such plans and projects that they deny”.⁶⁹

According to one sub-point of the seventh article of the resolution, which reflected an anti-Christian bias, only Muslim compatriots were considered “members of society”. Accordingly, Christians could not be compatriots or members of society and, therefore, could not have equal rights.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Tehmine Martoyan, “The Destruction of Smyrna in 1922: An Armenian and Greek Shared Tragedy,” *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, 1913–1923*, ed. George N. Shirinian (New York: Asia Minor and Pontos Hellenic Research Center, 2017), 233.

⁶⁸ Mustafa Kemal, *Puts novoy Turts’ii 1919–1927*, vol. 1, *Perviy shagi nats’ionalno osvoboditel’nogo dvizheniya* [The path of the new Turkey, 1919–1927, vol. 1, The first steps of the national liberation movement] (Moscow: Litizdat, 1929), 374; Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2, *Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808–1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 344–45.

⁶⁹ Kemal, *Puts novoy Turts’ii 1919–1927*, 374–75.

⁷⁰ A. Alaverdyan, “Azgayin p’ok’ramasnut’yunneri dem ughghvats k’emalakanut’yan druyt’neri mshakumë Erzurumi hamajoghovum” [The formulation of the main statements

Turkish official ideology regarded the peaceful coexistence with Armenians and Greeks as a threat to Turkish security. Motivated by that “concern”, an assembly was held in Sivas from 4–11 September 1919, where the resolutions of the Erzurum Congress were further developed and the beginning of the Turkish state creation was announced. On 31 December, Kemal announced: “No other nation has shown such respect towards people having other religions and traditions as ours. It can even be said that our nation is the only one that respects peoples who have other religions.”⁷¹

The National Oath, adopted on 28 January 1920 by the Ottoman parliament, declared that Turkey did not recognise any international legal agreements or treaties that could “hinder the development of political, legal, financial and other spheres”.⁷² In June 1920, the Greek army launched offensives and liberated Balıkesir and Bursa, while another army unit took Adrianople (Edirne). On 10 August, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed, assigning Smyrna to Greece. However, the Turkish government in Ankara rejected the treaty.⁷³

Following the signing of the treaty, Armenian–Greek military and political cooperation grew stronger. Armenian Prime Minister Alexander Khatisian visited Greece, where he met with Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and Foreign Minister Nikolaos Politis. During this ten-day visit, which also included Asia Minor, Khatisian also met with Armenian communities in Athens and Smyrna.⁷⁴ These developments are recalled by eyewitness and survivor Ohanes (Onnik) Ghazarian in his memoir:

During those days, Armenian Prime Minister A. Khatisian visited Izmir on a private Greek ship – what excitement that was! Mr.

of Kemalism against the national minorities at the Erzurum congress in 1919], *Middle East: History, Politics, Culture* 7 (2011): 29.

⁷¹ Mustafa Kemal, *Puts novoy Turts'ii 1919–1927*, vol. 2, *Podgotovka Angorskoj bazi, 1919–1920* [The path of the new Turkey, 1919–1927, vol. 2, Preparation of Ankara base, 1919–1920] (Moscow: State Socio-Economic Publishing House, 1932), 300.

⁷² Ruben Safrastyan et al., *T'urk'iyai hanrapetut'yan patmut'yun* [History of the Republic of Turkey] (Yerevan: VMV-Print, 2018), 41.

⁷³ Harry N. Howard, *The Partition of Turkey: A Diplomatic History, 1913–1923* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), 245; Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek–Turkish Relations, 1918–1974* (Athens: Center for Asia Minor Studies, 1983), 66.

⁷⁴ Samvel Ramazian, *Ιστορία των Αρμενο-Ελληνικών στρατιωτικών σχέσεων και συνεργασίας* (Athens: A. Stamtoulis, 2010), 173; See also A. Khatisian, *K'aghak'apeti mē hishatakarannerē* [Memories of a mayor] (Beirut: Vahe Metean of Hamaskayin, 1991); Hervé Georgelin, “Armenian Inter-Community Relations in Late Ottoman Smyrna,” in *Armenian Smyrna/Izmir: The Aegean Communities*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2012), 189.

Khatisian was hosted in the huge mansion of Mr. Martiros Sarian⁷⁵ on the seashore of Cordelio. Several hundred friends and acquaintances were present at this reception, a kind of “garden party”, where Mr. Khatisian thoroughly explained the current situation in Armenia, its immediate needs, and the plan to establish a gold fund [foundation] for the state treasury of Armenia. Private church services were held in Izmir and surrounding cities, where speakers explained the purpose of Mr. Khatisian’s visit. I was present at the speech given by Mr. Khatisian in front of thousands of people in the huge St. Stephen’s Cathedral of Izmir. The people, who cheered the existence of independent Armenia for the first time in 600 years, inspired by the enthusiastic speech of its first prime minister.⁷⁶

However, the geopolitical situation gradually began to turn increasingly unfavourable for the Republic of Armenia. Kemalist Turkey began cooperating with Soviet Russia against the West. “The cooperation with Turkey fed the Soviet powers with illusions of global revolution, in return for which Turkey received not illusions, but real material aid – weapons and ammunition – specifically for the war against Greeks.”⁷⁷

The Kemalists carried on military actions against Greeks in the west, against the Armenians in Cilicia and the Republic of Armenia in the east. The Treaty of Moscow, signed on 16 March 1921 between the Kemalist Turks and Bolshevik Russia, contributed to their success.

On 10 January and 31 March 1921, the Greek army suffered defeats near the village of İnönü. However, that summer they launched a new offensive, capturing Eskişehir, and Afyonkarahisar in July and advancing towards Ankara in August. Between 23 August and 13 September, the Greek army was defeated in the Battle of the Sangarios (Sakarya) River. The Turkish forces strengthened their forces and attacked, delivering another blow to the Greek army near Dumlupınar on 30 August 1922.

In his memoir, Mgrdich Avedian, an eyewitness and survivor from Smyrna, recalls how the Greek army landed in Smyrna:

At the end of the war, in 1918, I was in Izmir, where rumours spread about the future capture of Izmir. One day, an important person

⁷⁵ Martiros Sarian (1870–1940) was a famous merchant in Manisa.

⁷⁶ Mikayel Bartikyan, *Arnashaghakh Izmirë* [Bloody Izmir], Ohanes (Onnik) Ghazarian, *Kensagrakan not’er* [Biographical notes] (Yerevan: AGMI, 2022), editor, author of the prefaces and references Tehmine Martoyan, 294.

⁷⁷ Albert Kharatyan, “Zmyurniayi hay gaght’ojakhë Egherni tarinerin” [The Armenian community of Smyrna during the years of genocide], in *Hayots’ Mets Eghern-90* (Yerevan: Yerevan State University, 2005), 116.

secretly informed me that the War Assembly had made a decision on the liberation of Izmir by the Greek army and he advised me not to leave home for the market that day.⁷⁸

The 93-year-old memoirist related vivid details etched in his memory:

I used to live in the Cordelio, a suburb of İzmir that was a vacation spot across the city, with access by both sea and land. On the day of the invasion, I was in Cordelio, watching through binoculars from the seashore as the Greek army, with weapons lowered, marched from the seashore towards the famous Cordon pier. It was 6 o'clock in the morning. Despite a prior agreement with the government, the Turks arriving by sea and land met the Greek army with weapons. After encountering the Turks, they advanced to occupy official positions. Within 24 hours, peace was established and Izmir came under the rule of the Greek army.⁷⁹

Turkey sought to “liberate” itself from international obligations and responsibilities by rejecting unwanted international legal acts and agreements. The resolutions of the Erzurum and Sivas congresses, which included a series of warnings and explicit threats, served to justify these further actions.

The Mass Annihilation of Smyrna's Armenians and Greeks

The annihilation of Smyrna's Armenians and Greeks, along with the arson of their districts in September 1922, was a continuation of the genocidal policy pursued by the Turkish authorities.⁸⁰ Mechanisms to perpetuate this genocidal agenda were developed and implemented by a criminal regime within the Turkish state. Hatred towards Christian minorities was deliberately nurtured and exploited as a driving force within Turkish society. Successive Turkish authorities consistently maintained and openly implemented the state policy

⁷⁸ M. Avedian, *Husher: Ėntaniki hayapahpanman keank'i aylazan djndak paymannerē* [Memories: The preservation of a family's Armenian life despite many hardships], AGMI collection, Preliminary Fund, 231, 6.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Abraham H. Hartunian, *Neither to Laugh nor to Weep: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide*, trans. Vartan Hartunian (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 193; see also Hervé Georgelin, *La fin de Smyrne: Du cosmopolitisme aux nationalisms* (Paris: CNRS, 2005); René Puaux, *La mort de Smyrne: Les derniers jours de Smyrne* (Yerevan: Ėditions de l'Universitē d'Ėtat d'Erevan, 2012); Varoujean Poghosyan, *Le dēsastre de Smyrne de 1922* (Yerevan: Ėditions de l'Universitē d'Ėtat d'Erevan, 2011); T. Martoyan, “Zmyurniayi hayeri ev huyneri bnajnjume ev nrants' t'aghamaseri hrkizume” [The annihilation of the Armenians and Greeks and the arson of the Christian quarters of Smyrna], *Haigazian Armenological Review* 41 (2021), 199–220.

of genocide. The Kemalist regime, having adopted the Young Turks' genocidal agenda, openly enforced measures of extreme political and religious intolerance. Kemal's policy of deporting national Christian minorities facilitated the complete Turkification of the country.⁸¹

A publication by Dr Lysimachos Oeconomos, a lecturer in modern Greek and Byzantine history at King's College London in the 1920s, described how the irregular Turkish army invaded the Armenian neighbourhood and slaughtered the population with knives and bayonets.⁸² The massacre was conducted alongside military operations but often independently of them. George Horton, the US consul in Smyrna, reported:

Looting and pillaging and rape and massacre went on a large scale immediately after the entry of the Turks, their vengeance first breaking upon the Armenian population, who were accused of having thrown bombs ... Armenians were systematically hunted and killed throughout the entire city and their houses methodically broken into, street by street, pillaged, and the men taken out and killed.⁸³

The relentless plundering, violence and murder continued for several days. Edward Hale Bierstadt (1891–1970), executive secretary of the Emergency Committee for Near East Refugees, described it as a massacre marked by every form of cruelty. However, the Turks tried to conceal these events from the Europeans at all costs.⁸⁴

The records of the Armenian National Delegation Archives – compiled from the testimonies of Smyrna survivors – detail the events preceding the crime committed in Smyrna, the fall of the city, and its aftermath:

On Thursday, September 14, Mustafa Kemal Pasha, arriving from Cordelio to Izmir on horseback and with his officers, advanced to Bunta, in front of Diso's bathhouse, where a huge crowd of displaced Armenians, Greeks and soldiers were gathered. The pasha made a short speech, saying that he felt sorry for the Christians whose houses were burnt down and assured them by saying:

⁸¹ H. Hakobyan, *Hayrenik' veradarnalu gaghap'arë ev jamanakacic mijazgayin iravunqë* [The idea of return to the homeland and modern international law] (Yerevan: Asoghik, 2000), 114.

⁸² Lysimachos Oeconomos, *The Tragedy of the Christian Near East* (London: Anglo-Hellenic League, 1923), 4.

⁸³ George Horton, *Report on Turkey: USA Consular Documents* (Athens: Journalists' Union of the Athens Daily Newspapers, 1985), 20–21.

⁸⁴ Edward Hale Bierstadt, *The Great Betrayal: A Survey of the Near East Problem* (New York: R.M. McBride, 1924), 27–28.

“You are free now, don’t worry.”

On the same night, while Mustafa Kemal Pasha returned to Cordelio, where he stopped at Saryan’s house, the former residence of King Constantine, the mob started a new massacre, this time on the cliff that was echoing with screams of agony and pain for many hours.⁸⁵

Eighty years later, Turkish eyewitness Gülfem Iren could still vividly recall the events, despite being only six years old at the time: “There was an ammunition depot near an Armenian church. The fire broke out from that depot. Was it the Armenians or the Turks that set the depot on fire? If I am to be asked, I believe the Turks set the fire there so it would be greatly efficient and clean.”⁸⁶

The complexity of the situation is reflected in the observations of Henry Morgenthau, the US ambassador to Constantinople from 1913 to 1916:

The Smyrna disaster of 1922 needs be only briefly mentioned here. It was the cause of the great exodus of all the Greeks of Asia Minor, but it happened so recently that many of the details are still fresh in public memory. Let me itemise a few of these details: The systematic burning of the Greek quarter of Smyrna by the Turkish troops under the very eye of Kemal; the systematic slaughter of Greek men, women, and children; the organized looting of houses and churches; the unchecked, wholesale raping of women and young girls; the segregation of all able-bodied Greek males from sixteen years of age to fifty.⁸⁷

Horton described the annihilation of Smyrna’s Armenians and Greeks as a “Dantean tragedy” and, as an eyewitness, noted the rarity of such brutality in world history:

The destruction of Smyrna happened, however, in 1922, and no act ever perpetrated by the Turkish race in all its bloodstained history, has been characterized by more brutal and lustful features, nor more productive of the worst forms of human sufferings inflicted on the defenceless and unarmed. It was a fittingly lurid and Satanic finale to the whole dreadful tragedy.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ National Archives of Armenia, f. 430, list 1, doc. 744.

⁸⁶ Tessa Hofmann, Matthias Bjørnlund and Vasileios Meichanetsidis, eds., *The Genocide of the Ottoman Greeks: Studies on the State-Sponsored Campaign of Extermination of the Christians of Asia Minor (1912–1922) and its Aftermath: History, Law, Memory* (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 2011), 205.

⁸⁷ Henry Morgenthau, *I Was Sent to Athens* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1929), 47.

⁸⁸ George Horton, *The Blight of Asia: An Account of the Systematic Extermination of Christian Populations by Mohammedans and of the Culpability of Certain Great Powers, with the True Story of the Burning of Smyrna* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1926), 112.

The targeted annihilation of the Armenians and Greeks should be viewed as a continuation of genocidal policy, fully aligning with the definition set forth in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.⁸⁹

Recording the Genocide: Armenian and Greek Eyewitness Accounts

This section presents a collection of compelling first-hand accounts, primarily sourced from oral history interviews conducted with direct participants. These testimonies offer invaluable insights into the nuanced experiences and diverse perspectives of individuals during this pivotal period, often revealing details and emotional dimensions absent from official records. Their reproduction here serves to provide critical primary evidence, allowing the reader direct engagement with the human impact of these historical events and forming a foundational basis for the subsequent analysis.

Arpine Bartikian:

Izmir was consumed by flames. They burned down the Armenian quarter, Haynots, first and then set fire to the St. Stepanos Church where all the Armenians had taken shelter; we fled and ran to the seashore. There were many boats in the sea but the Turks had drilled holes in all the boats to prevent the Armenians from escaping. The poor Armenians sat in the boats and sailed to the open sea, but after some time the boats filled with water and sank. The swollen bodies of the drowned people floated on the sea surface.⁹⁰

Sargis Yeterian:

The disaster in Izmir took place in 1922. The Kemalists came from Anatolia to Izmir; the mob filled in the town. First, they surrounded Haynots – the Armenian quarter. We constructed barricades in front of the orphanage. Izmir was burning in flames when we, five orphans, escaped, threw ourselves into the sea and swam towards an Italian ship which took us to Piraeus. Thousands of orphans were brought out and joined us. They took us all to the Isle of Corfu near the Adriatic Sea.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted 9 December 1948, entered into force 12 January 1951, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 78, 277, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf.

⁹⁰ Verjine Svazlian, *The Armenian Genocide: Testimonies of the Eyewitness Survivors*, 2nd ed. (Yerevan: Gitoutyou, 2011), 382.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 383.

Ashot Ohanian:

In 1922, the Greek Government lost the Izmir War, Kemal's army entered Izmir, singing:

“On the mountains of Izmir
Flowers bloom,
The godless Greek soldiers
Run away like winds.”

While singing this song, they started to plunder Izmir. At the beginning, we were in the American orphanage ... But the Turks burned our orphanage with petroleum; we threw stones at the building to put out the fire.⁹²

Satenik Gouyoumdjian:

When Kemal came, he drove all the Armenians, Greeks, and all the other Christians to the sea. He forced them towards the sea and set Izmir on fire. The fire consumed the population. Babies in swaths were thrown on the ground and the Turks trampled on them, or they were thrown into the sea and floated on the waves.⁹³

Haykouhi Azarian:

We had hardly returned to our former selves when the millidjis arrived. The millidjis were nationalists; they were armed. We were astonished. They were not the poor Turks in the war. The millidjis, armed to the teeth, came and started doing their job. Kemal had organized them to drive out the Armenians, Greeks – all those who were not Mohammedans.⁹⁴

Byuzand Moroukian:

We were barely settled when the deportation from Izmir began in 1922 and the great fire broke out. I was eighteen then and I was taken prisoner (I have kept up to the present day the only moment from the period of my captivity, a metallic numbered tag, which was attached to my wrist, as well as the order of my liberation from captivity), and we set out on foot with a large group and moved forward in an unknown direction during 12 days. Elderly men fell exhausted on the road. Those who were not able to proceed were shot on the spot by the Turkish gendarmes.⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., 399.

⁹³ Ibid., 376–77.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 408.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 370.

Garabed Hatcherian:

It is morning. There is peace on the quay and we are happy that the Turkish occupation has taken place without bloodshed. But then, we see from the balcony people taking the body of a fifteen year old boy from the street and carrying it to the quay wall. He must have been shot for being outside at night after curfew ... On our way, we meet some Armenian young people with foreign citizenship from whom we hear that the Haynots have been looted, women and girls have been raped and that Saint Stepanos church and the Diocese were under Turkish siege.⁹⁶

Archbishop Ghevond Durian:

On the morning of 9 September, Turks, being aware of the presence of the Kemalist army very close to Izmir, headed, in large numbers and totally armed, to the market. On the same morning, several Christians passing through the market were stabbed and injured, and some died because of torture. On the same day, starting at 10 o'clock, the advance of the Kemalist squads from other parts of Izmir encouraged the Turkish mob to start rambling around the city with Turkish flags. The Turkish mob gathered on the boulevard opposite Basmane and started shooting in the direction of the Armenian quarter. This gunfight, which lasted for a quarter of an hour, made the Armenians find shelter at St Stepanos Church ... There were around 2,000 children among them.⁹⁷

Mikayel Bartikyan:

The fire and destruction were necessary for the Turks. This was the only way they could erase the traces of the killing and robbery, plunder and looting. The robbery took place before setting the fires. From 9 to 13 September, goods from the shops of Haynots, the Frankish district, Aya Yorgi, and other districts were transported in closed vehicles, and even the captive Christians imprisoned in Gshla (Smyrna's military quarter/district) were made to load and unload the goods.⁹⁸

Ohanes (Onik) Ghazeryan:

Armenian and Greek merchants came to my shop to receive news about the events and situation. I described to them what I had seen

⁹⁶ Dora Sakayan, *An Armenian Doctor in Turkey. Garabed Hatcherian: My Smyrna Ordeal of 1922* (Montreal: Arod Books, 1997), 10.

⁹⁷ National Archives of Armenia, f. 430, list 1, doc. 748.

⁹⁸ M. Bartikyan, *Arnashaghakh Izmirë* [Bloody Izmir], Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation (section 8, folder 376).

on the way, especially the bomb blast at the station. I informed them that the situation could be dangerous and instructed them to stay awake at night with guns under the pillows to protect themselves in case of a possible attack. Fortunately, we safely spent the night. The next morning, Sunday, 22 August, was bright, and there was peace everywhere. Through the half-open doors of the shops, the Turkish shopkeepers were smoking pipes with gloomy faces as if they knew what was about to happen.⁹⁹

Panayiotis Nikolaidis (granddaughter's testimony):

Panayiotis and his group waited along the shoreline for days in scenes of pestilence, fear and despair. As ships eventually began arriving to take them away, he was separated from his mother and siblings. As his turn came to leave the harbour and board a waiting ship, he turned to his mother and noticed that she wasn't feeling good, suffering from the effects of the ordeal. People in his group told him to keep moving: "Come on, Panayiotis. Your mother is unwell. She's sleeping. She'll come with the others." That was the last time he saw his mother and siblings.¹⁰⁰

Despina Kerassitis (granddaughter's testimony):

In 1922, they had to flee Turkey after the Turks began slaughtering people. She was around six at that time. Her mother Eleni, had to dress her like an old lady so that she wouldn't be raped or murdered. She and her three brothers ended up in Alexandria, Egypt. Their mother Eleni was unable to care for them. Eleni had a wealthy second cousin in Egypt who didn't have children of her own, but for some reason she didn't want four children and they were sent to orphanages. My grandmother was sent to the Benakio Orphanage and her brothers Michael, John and Dimitrios were sent to the Kaniskerio Orphanage.¹⁰¹

Eleni Savides (granddaughter's testimony):

During the events at Smyrna in September 1922, my great-grandfather was arrested. At this point, my great-grandmother Maria was pregnant with her second child and my grandmother Eleni was a year and a half old. Maria tried to buy her husband out of prison. She turned up with

⁹⁹ O. Ghazeryan, *Kensagrakan not'er* [Biographical notes], Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute foundation (section 8, folder 128).

¹⁰⁰ "Panayiotis Nikolaidis," Greek Genocide Resource Center, <https://www.greek-genocide.net/index.php/quotes/testimonies/panayiotis-nikolaidis>.

¹⁰¹ "Despina Kerassitis (née Koufoglou)," Greek Genocide Resource Center, <https://www.greek-genocide.net/index.php/quotes/questionnaire-testimonies/despina-kerassitis-nee-koufoglou-izmir>.

a purse filled with gold coins, but the Kemalists confiscated her gold. Then the Great Fire of Smyrna happened and my great-grandmother was forced to flee the city.¹⁰²

Nikolaos Daldavanis (daughter's testimony):

In September 1922, he and his family were forced to the burning waterfront of Smyrna and were forced to flee. The only way they could survive was to escape into the sea or die ... An Italian ship sailed them to Athens. My father was about 15. He lost his family at the time, only to be reunited much later in Samos.¹⁰³

Ourania Zografos (granddaughter's testimony):

My paternal grandmother was from Smyrna. My grandmother fled Smyrna in 1922 after seeing soldiers killing all the men. My grandmother was 9 years old. She saw her father being taken away as a prisoner. She never saw him again. Her mother, sisters, and brother onboarded a boat with her to safety. They arrived in Piraeus, Athens.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

The article has analysed the Turkish women who initiated rallies with the aim to form a pan-Turkish and pan-Islamic protest movement against the "occupation" of Smyrna by the Greeks. However, as the movement evolved, the participants also addressed other topics, such as raising awareness about the "foreign occupation" and broadening social involvement in the movement, while emphasising national self-awareness, Turkishness, Islam, motherhood, martyrdom and hatred.

By holding rallies throughout the territory of Turkey, the Turkish nationalist movement effectively shaped public opinion and consolidated support for the expansion of its agenda and propaganda efforts. The research reveals that this propaganda campaign, meticulously planned within a pre-genocidal framework and was ultimately designed to facilitate a single, premeditated international crime: genocide. This campaign was an integral part of the Kemalist nationalist movement, yet it was not isolated from global trends, hence its portrayal as a Westernisation initiative. The statement "Women whose husbands are dying in the war cannot remain silent about the internal national grief" was a key rhetorical

¹⁰² "Eleni Savides, née Stringos," Greek Genocide Resource Center, <https://www.greek-genocide.net/index.php/quotes/questionnaire-testimonies/eleni-savides>.

¹⁰³ "Nikolaos Daldavanis," Greek Genocide Resource Center, <https://www.greek-genocide.net/index.php/quotes/questionnaire-testimonies/nikolaos-daldavanis-izmir>.

¹⁰⁴ "Ourania Zografos," Greek Genocide Resource Center, <https://www.greek-genocide.net/index.php/quotes/questionnaire-testimonies/ourania-zografos-izmir>.

tool used for mobilisation. This argument heavily justified and rationalised women's participation in rallies. However, in reality, women whose husbands were in the war zone were also drawn into these propaganda meetings, with their emotional states simultaneously exploited for the propaganda process. However, the deliberate involvement of Turkish intellectual women in this propaganda effort served multiple aims, both overt and covert. It reflected both an attempt at Westernisation within a global context and a broader push for modernisation. At the same time, it sought to transition Turkey from an Islamic-based state to a secular republic. Another goal was to empower women, particularly intellectuals, to mobilise public opinion and provide emotional support for the war effort. With many men at the front, it also aimed to elevate women's role in society, positioning them as the softer face of the nationalist movement. Indeed, in the pre-genocidal phase, propaganda discourse functioned as a tool of genocide, with the involvement of women enhancing its effectiveness. This discourse was marked by the manipulation of religious sentiment, aiming to mobilise and emotionally manage the public. As the article's thematic trajectory illustrates, the ultimate outcome of this propaganda's role within the genocidal programme was genocide in its fullest, most substantive form.

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