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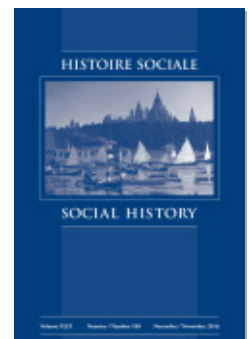
*La France face au génocide des Arméniens du milieu du XIXe siècle à nos jours: Une nation impériale et le*  
by Vincent Duclert (review)

Geoffrey Grandjean

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analyzing international media coverage of the Armenian Genocide over the last century. In her review of the book *The Spirit of the Laws. The Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide* (by researchers Taner Akçam and Ümit Kurt), Arpi Hamalian underlines its significant contribution to the analysis of the implementation and development, by successive Turkish governments, of the complex legal framework that enabled the planning and destruction of the Armenian people, in addition to the confiscation of their property, by manipulating the “spirit of the law” in denying their crime. On a different note, the book titled *La Turquie et le fantôme arménien* [Turkey and the Armenian ghost], by journalists Laure Marchand and Guillaume Perrier, is based on field investigations carried out in Turkey, whose objective, clarifies Sylvia Kasparian, is to apprise the world of the indelible scars left by the crimes committed against Armenians. The authors keep this story alive by calling on the memory and history of the genocide, still present in Turkey despite a century of denial. The book by Hamit Bozarslan, Vincent Duclert, and Raymond H. Kévorkian titled *Comprendre le génocide des Arméniens. 1915 à nos jours* [Understanding the Armenian Genocide: From 1915 until today] is divided in three parts and paints a picture of the historiographical field linked to this event. Accessible to a wide audience, this synthesis has the advantage, according to Aurélia Kalisky, of including the Armenian Genocide as one of world history’s major events of the 20th century. Historian Mikaël Nïchianian’s book *Détruire les Arméniens. Histoire d’un génocide* [Destroying Armenians. A genocide] met the difficult challenge of providing a useful and invaluable summary of the most recent studies pertaining to the Armenian Genocide in fewer than 300 pages. More particularly, the author seeks to understand the historical factors that made this genocide possible. In my own review, I emphasize the fact that this book describes in a plain and intelligible language the conditions that led to the destruction of Armenians and the consequences of this crime for the Turkish society.

Joceline Chabot  
*Université de Moncton*

[Traduction : Alicia Cleaver]

DUCLERT, Vincent – *La France face au génocide des Arméniens du milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle à nos jours: Une nation impériale et le devoir d’humanité*. Paris: Fayard, 2015. Pp. 435.

In *La France face au génocide des Arméniens*, French historian Vincent Duclert traces France’s positions—political as well as social—towards the Armenian Genocide. The book has the great merit of analysing France’s official positions, on the one hand, and the various pro-Armenian sentiments, on the other. Most of all, it discerns the reasons behind the latent debates surrounding the recognition of the genocide of the Armenians and the prosecution of its denial in France.

Firstly, concerning France's official positions towards the genocide: Duclert argues that France abandoned the Armenians at the time of the "Great Massacres" of 1894-1896. Even as information from Armenia was being communicated to the European embassies in Constantinople, Gabriel Hanotaux, France's Minister of Foreign affairs, decided against intervention. According to Duclert, France decided to align itself with Russia because, firstly, it feared the uncontrollable development of an Armenian question in the international sphere and, second, because of its anglophobia, which systematically led it to counteract British diplomacy. This French inaction appalled Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador in Constantinople, who took personal initiative by directly communicating information to the French MPs that incited them to attack the policies of Gabriel Hanotaux' Government. His initiative was to no avail. In the parliamentary session of 3 November, 1896, Parliament rejected the protest against abandoning the Armenians: "It was agreed that France shall do nothing," (p. 108), even though the European powers had succeeded in putting an end to the first massacres.

The appointment of Théophile Delcassé as Minister of Foreign Affairs on 28 June, 1898, changed the situation. The Entente Cordiale ushered in a political friendship with the United Kingdom and the Government of Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau adopted a firmer policy towards the Ottoman Empire. In the end, political realism, however, prevailed over humanitarian duty.

The rise to power of the Young Turks movement in 1908 resulted in a rise in ultranationalism and the development of a powerful current of Social Darwinism. The regime rushed into a crusade against the Armenians. Massacres resumed. Again, the French Government waited, despite its new president, Georges Clemenceau, who was engaged against the Great Massacres fifteen years earlier. Faced with the reaction of public opinion and parliamentarians, Clemenceau decided to send French vessels to pick up survivors from the small coastal town of Kessab. This was followed, on 12 September 1915, by other French and English vessels that evacuated the fighters of Musa Dagh.

During the First World War, the rescue of the Armenians was not an objective of the Triple Entente. Even so, the Entente addressed a declaration to the Young Turk Government on 24 May, 1915, that warned it of its full responsibility for the "crime against humanity and civilisation" (p. 205). The declaration did not dissuade the Young Turk Government from continuing the Genocide. On the contrary, it encouraged it "above all to hide the acts and the evidence." (p. 208)

The end of the First World War saw France emerge victorious from the conflict, but it also confirmed its abandonment of Armenia. Indeed, the Treaty of Sèvres on 10 August 1920, which raised hope for international justice, was a "stillborn agreement" according to Duclert (p. 267). Turkey took its revenge with the Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July, 1923, which ended the war in the East but enabled the Kemalists to deport the Armenians from Anatolia. In the words of Duclert, "Armenian existence was sacrificed to the interests of *Realpolitik*." (p. 309)

Throughout these events, the victims and witnesses of the Genocide gradually drafted a demand for international justice which never materialised, forcing the Armenian diasporas to resort to the "terrorist alternative" (p. 341) beginning in the

1970s. These victims and witnesses did, however, eventually find support in the form of pro-Armenian commitment in France.

On to the book's second point. Duclert analyses the way in which France's abandonment of the Armenians gave rise to a French tradition of pro-Armenian sentiment. With the Great Massacres of 1894-1896, publications, conferences, and meetings affected public opinion. At the same time, numerous intellectuals and politicians—such as Denys Cochin and Jean Jaurès—made their voices heard in the name of Republican ideals. The value of Duclert's analysis lies in understanding the close links between commitment to the Armenian cause, on the one hand, and the defence of Alfred Dreyfus, on the other. It was, in fact, the same men and women who acted in both cases, opposing themselves to the same *raison d'état* of the Government of Jules Méline and Gabriel Hanotaux. Duclert thus asserts that “if the Armenian affair made the Dreyfus affair possible, it was because it had steered the international public opinion towards an awareness of its responsibilities for the injustice in the world. (p. 153)

The Armenophile movement did not succeed in changing the course of events, however. It changed tack in 1900 with the creation of a periodical dedicated to the recognition of the Armenians, *Pro Armenia*. It was via this magazine that the Dreyfus supporters and the Armenian community in France met.

The pro-Armenian mobilisation regained strength during the First World War, thanks in particular to the works of Francophone lawyer André Mandelstam on the philosophy of human rights. On this subject, Vincent Duclert considers that “the position of France on the Armenian Genocide reveals the difficulty of understanding such a phenomenon identified with war, and which at the same time belongs to a distinct war paradigm.” (p. 229)

In the aftermath of the War, pro-Armenian commitment was reactivated again in order to “establish the historical, cultural, and philological knowledge of a people that was in danger of disappearing after the 1915 Genocide.” (p. 245) It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that a Permanent Peoples' Tribunal was established from 13 to 16 April 1984. It found the Young Turk Government guilty. France officially recognised the Armenian Genocide only in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the Law of 29 January 2001. However, in spite of several attempts, the prosecution of its denial did not succeed. Scholarly work, on the other hand, has been developing anew and is beginning to create “a public knowledge which is essentially formed through universal recognition.” (p. 366) After having diverged for a century, pro-Armenian commitment has at last acquired an official position in France. Vincent Duclert brilliantly shows in this book how, for more than a century, France failed in its duty towards humanity.

Geoffrey Grandjean  
*University of Liège*