

# “Kill the Armenian/Indian; Save the Turk/Man: Carceral Humanitarianism, the Transfer of Children and a Comparative History of Indigenous Genocide”

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## Abstract

This article draws the genocide of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire into the comparative study of indigenous genocide. Using a Human Rights Studies approach, I focus on the transfer of indigenous children by state authorities through carceral institutions to argue that the ideology and practice of modern humanitarianism is a definitive shared element of indigenous genocides across the late-19th and early-20th Centuries. Common experiences of denial by powerful states and cultural erasure invite added comparison and intersectional solidarity. The article is written to address Native American and Armenian Studies scholars together, elaborate a working vocabulary for future collaborative research in Human Rights Studies and serve as a point of departure for public scholarship and policy engagement.

## Keywords

genocide – human rights – indigenous rights – indigeneity – indigenous genocide – cultural genocide – Native Americans – Armenians – *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* – the *Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* – humanitarianism – Indian Boarding Schools – Residential Schools – orphanages – child transfer – Syria – Lebanon – Ottoman Empire – Turkey – history of children and childhood – history of the Middle East – history of the United States

Indigenous genocide is a consequence of settler-colonialism and state centralization; it unfolds over a long period of time with shifts in locations, polices and actors, and turns not just on extermination, but also on environmental degradation, strategies of starvation, exposure to disease, mass rape, child transfer, and geographical concentration. Indigenous genocide encompasses attacks on language, cultural heritage, religion, and non-European forms of political organization. Its inherently complex nature means that indigenous genocide has not fit easily into academic definitions or the popular collective imagination of genocide, both of which have been shaped primarily by the history and memory of the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> European and American politicians, historians, and jurists, tend to exclude this mass atrocity from the broader corpus of the history and legal theory of human rights and genocide for similar reasons. Thus excluded, indigenous peoples are ineligible for the legal and restorative justice elements anticipated by the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide* (1948) which states with vast colonial empires or unwanted minoritized indigenous communities played an overarching role in the drafting. Consequently, indigenous genocide is an unimagined and purposefully unimaginable form of mass violence the very nature of which relieves humanity of its obligation to prevent and the moral burden to punish that acknowledgement demands.

This exclusion is also a lingering effect of colonialism and an incomplete process of global decolonization; it evidences a persisting failure to recognize the human rights of indigenous peoples and their experience of genocide. As Elazar Barkan observed two decades ago:

In the case of naming the destruction of indigenous people as genocidal, the historical perspectives and rhetorical stands are profoundly in conflict, partly because the debate is still held captive by the world view that informed European expansionism. The rejection of the use of the term genocide is about exclusion, about segregating the suffering of indigenous peoples as somewhat different than other “more terrible” genocides. Instead, once we acknowledge the equality of indigenous people, we can recognize that atrocities committed against them also constitute genocide.<sup>2</sup>

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1 See Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider. “Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory.” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5:1 (2002): 87–106.

2 Elazar Barkan. “Genocides of Indigenous peoples: Rhetoric of Human Rights,” in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 117–140, 135.

Similarly, generations-long campaigns of violent resistance to colonialism by indigenous people in ways that have few parallels in the Holocaust or other acknowledged genocides has justified warfare against indigenous civilians, making indigenous genocide seem less like genocide and more like a state protecting its own frontier civilian populations. Social and institutional elements of indigenous genocide – as each revolves around questions of state modernization and centralization, culture and religion, land and settlement, and integration with city life and capitalist economies – seem at odds with what constitutes genocide as both a historical phenomenon and legal construct, reinforcing the probability of exclusion. By the same token colonizers and dominant groups have arrogated to themselves the right to define out of existence and “in-authenticate” the indigeneity of indigenous groups, denying the basic human right to identity and group belonging – be it through the mechanisms of settler-colonialism, Apartheid, language and cultural policies of assimilation, pseudo-science, and of course, genocide, itself.<sup>3</sup>

To confront this history of exclusion, build a framework for historical and theoretical inclusion, and imagine restorative possibilities through intersectional solidarity, this article draws the genocide of ethnic Armenians into the comparative study of late-19th and early 20th-century indigenous genocide. Using a Human Rights Studies approach, it focuses on a core element of genocide, the transfer of children by state authorities through their incarceration in institutions of humanitarian “care” – boarding schools, orphanages and similar carceral forms – to argue that the ideology and practices of modern humanitarianism are a shared element of indigenous genocide and can serve as a vital analytical tool of comparative study. Common experiences of genocide denial and cultural erasure invite added comparison and intersectional solidarity.

Beyond imagining ways to bring this elemental feature of genocide into a comparative frame, I have written this article to engage Native American and Armenian Studies scholars together and to elaborate a working vocabulary for future collaborative research and action to address lacunae in the theory and practice of genocide prevention, justice, and reparation. At the outset, filling that lacuna requires the recognition that the genocide *Convention* excluded from the category of genocide the practices of empires and states towards indigenous communities and peoples, placing indigenous (and other

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3 See James V. Fenelon, and Clifford E. Trafzer. “From Colonialism to Denial of California Genocide to Misrepresentations” in special issue on indigenous struggles in the Americas, *American Behavioral Scientist* 58:1 (2014): 3–29; and Dirk Moses. “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust.” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36:4 (2002): 7–36.

colonized) peoples in a state of exception from the growing corpus of post-World War II humanitarian legal doctrine.

Linked to the processes of exclusion and exception is that *indigenous*, and *indigeneity* as concepts in the study of genocide and mass violence against civilians can be made by state actors and proponents of settler-colonialism contested terms. Referring to Native Americans, Australian Aborigines, Indios, or Maori as indigenous peoples, has become commonplace – certainly these communities fit the popular and international human rights law understanding of the category. When Palestinians, Kurds, Sámi, or Armenians are labeled indigenous, such an attribution drives speculation that the term is being used polemically. In part this is because it indicates that countries within which these communities exist(ed) are colonial-settler states wherein citizenship, full access to rights, and civic belonging are affected negatively by systemic racism or similar violations of human rights.

Non-acknowledgement of indigenous genocide tends to be policy in settler-colonial states, especially as calls for reparations and restoration have become louder. With the overwhelming role of the Holocaust in the popular imagination of genocide in mind, acknowledgment of responsibility for genocide by those states is an issue in the conceptualization of dominant national identities, with the potential to align a state and its citizens with the architects of genocide rather than with wilderness-taming pioneers or death camp liberators. Self-acknowledgement of responsibility for genocide can transform the heroic national origin story the dominant group has told itself for generations to one in which they and the core ideologies of the state are instead responsible for genocide and generations of displaced and refugee peoples.

In Ottoman and Middle Eastern Studies, unspooling this argument further invites recasting the Ottoman State and the successor Republic of Turkey as a settler-colonial polity in fields beyond the genocide of the Armenians. It has implications for the historical treatment of other indigenous, nomadic and immigrant communities like: Kurds, Arabs, Balkan Muslims and Turkic peoples – in ways that challenge not only older Turkish nationalist historiographies that posit the Ottoman State as somehow a benign empire without colonialism to those that assert the primordial Turkishness of Anatolia. From a historian's perspective thinking about the Ottoman State as a colonial-settler state is a tool that can help make better sense of the politics, atrocity, and social change witnessed over the last two centuries and as a point of origin for better characterizing state violence in contemporary Turkey. Chris Gratien's 2022 book, *The Unsettled Plain: An Environmental History of the Late Ottoman Frontier*, is among the most important works to conceptualize the empire in

a colonial-settler framework and doing so permits the author to paint a complex picture of the long-term transformation of Anatolia's Cilicia/Çukurova region through the standard repertoire of action and ideology available to such states.<sup>4</sup> That repertoire, including the destruction of indigenous communities through genocide, the forced settlement of nomadic peoples, and the degradation of the environment to make way for settlers and unsustainable agricultural practices would be familiar to those studying contemporaneous North America's Columbia Basin Project, its dams and impact on the Salish; or the brutal transformation of South America's Gran Chaco region and the elimination of indigenous communities and their rights alongside deforestation and extractive industrialization.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, when states fail to recognize their colonial-settler past, it fosters a permissive environment for genocide denial and cultures of impunity in the present. The same holds for denying the historical and contemporary existence of indigenous peoples.

### **The Armenian and North American Genocides in a Comparative Frame**

A valuable and consensus-driven definition of indigenous has emerged in the research and deliberative processes leading to the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007):

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their

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4 Chris Gratien, *The Unsettled Plain: An Environmental History of the Late Ottoman Frontier* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2022).

5 Penelope Anthias, "The Pluri-Extractivist State: Regional Autonomy and the Limits of Indigenous Representation in Bolivia's Gran Chaco Province." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 54:1 (2022): 125–154; see Alice Cohen and Emma S. Norman, "Renegotiating the Columbia River Treaty: Transboundary governance and indigenous rights," *Global Environmental Politics* 18:4 (2018): 4–24.

continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.<sup>6</sup>

This definition – which shapes evolving international human rights law and norms – emphasizes that indigeneity is more than just prior occupation. Being indigenous is a modern identity with the right to a political subjectivity that has been formed in part by a continuing process of resistance to assimilation or racial citizenship; indigenous people perceive themselves as distinct from the dominant or preferred ethnicity and practice the transmission of recognizable culture and knowledge to subsequent generations. With this definition in mind, the Ottoman Armenians of Anatolia have many of the key characteristics of indigeneity – certainly when placed in the ambit of the 1915–1922 genocide and the century since. Conversely, in the context of Ottoman Studies, referring to Armenians as only a minority group among many, a *millet*, or ethno-religious community adopts the restrictive and reductive vocabulary that accompanies genocide itself. This reductionist approach fails to capture how the genocide falls within the repertoire of 19th and 20th-century centralization and genocidal projects of settler-colonial states. Further, it elides the unique lingering effects of the ideology and practice of genocide – from the racialization of Turkish citizenship to state-sponsored genocide denial – on Armenian communities within Turkey and in the diaspora.

Likewise, thinking about the genocide of the Armenians in the frame of indigenous genocide can recast the period of 1915–1922 as an intensification of genocide rather than as a *de novo* act. It permits thinking about episodes of mass violence against Armenians and other indigenous communities as genocide, including Assyrians, across a longer and larger field of space and time and fosters a reconsideration of the overarching role of nationalisms alone in ideologies of extermination and dislocation. In this possible revision, seemingly aberrant episodes of violence or discontinuities become part of a whole.<sup>7</sup>

Only recently has the Armenian Genocide achieved inclusion in the larger field of the history and theory of genocide. This consideration happened after four generations of struggle by survivors, academics, artists, and grassroots political organizers in the face of the Republic of Turkey's efforts to deny the genocide. The shared history of confronting denial by modern states with the

6 “The Concept of Indigenous Peoples,” in *Workshop on Data Collection and Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, 2004) 1–4, 2.

7 See for example Talin Suciyan's lecture “Unearthing, Discovering, Unlearning: Armenian Indigeneity in Turkey” (Promise Institute, University of California Los Angeles, May 6, 2022).

power and vast resources to control public narratives and coopt academics, politicians, and professors to support that denial, I argue, is one among several reasons demanding a reconceptualization of the Armenian historical experience of genocide as indigenous genocide, in addition to the historical warrant for that designation. The re-framing can serve as an act of solidarity with other indigenous communities struggling against campaigns of state-based denial and for recognition, restoration, and reparations, themselves.

Likewise, contemporary Armenian and Armenian diaspora-based human rights advocacy to address the destruction of cultural heritage and annihilation of histories and knowledges during violent conflict, including Azerbaijan's continuing war against Artsakh, and in state-supported education and public spaces like museums and school curriculum, resonates deeply with similar indigenous movements and legal efforts. This resonance has broad implications for interdisciplinary collaboration and the application of domestic and international human rights law and jurisprudence across a spectrum of fields and fora. Placing the history of Armenians as indigenous people and the generations of mass violence against them into an indigenous genocide frame, opens the possibilities of reengagement with the many critical lacunae in the theory of genocide. This is especially the case in the field of the destruction and erasure of culture and language, and the transfer of children – two of the salient cultural elements of the crime of genocide. Intersectional solidarity of this nature is critical when looking forward into a future with continuing and renewed threats to indigenous Armenians and other indigenous and minoritized communities of the Middle East and Caucasus: Palestinians, Kurds, Yazidis, Shabak, Assyrians, and Copts.

As if to lay aside any ambiguity in the applicability of the genocide statute to indigenous people, UNDRIP's Article 7:2, establishes:

Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and shall not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, including forcibly removing children of the group to another group.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike the *Genocide Convention*, UNDRIP has yet to achieve the force of law or recognized as a norm. This ambiguity is not an issue for many indigenous scholars (in and out of the academy), cultural workers, and politicians in the Western Hemisphere. For example, Yale University Historian Ned Blackhawk (Shoshone) has written extensively on genocide in the American West, and is

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8 United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, New York, 2007, Art. 7:2.

editing with Ben Kiernan, Benjamin Madley, and Rebe Taylor a book entitled: *The Cambridge World History of Genocide Vol. 11: Genocide in the Early Modern, Indigenous, and Imperial Worlds, from c. 1535 to World War One* (forthcoming). As poet and historian Margo Tamez (Lipan Apache) explains in her poem “Chertoff” (named for the Obama-era Secretary of Homeland Security):

4.

Most Americans deny the Indigenous-American genocide.

This denial is not illegal in the United States, nor anywhere else on our planet.

5. In your future, I am offering testimony in  
tribunals about your role  
in the wall.

I am forcing a national conversation about the relationality between  
American genocide  
Texas, what can we learn from Jewish Holocaust  
survivorship experiences in the US,  
on-going denial of Indigenous  
genocide and Indigenous historical genocide  
erasure in the US.<sup>9</sup>

Tamez’s poem is one of many works that demonstrate the power of Holocaust memory in shaping the understanding of genocide and the structuring of claims-making.

The Halluci Nation – a Canada-based First Nations electronic music band formerly known as A Tribe Called Red – a group whose body of work recalls that of Armenian-American rock group System of a Down, especially the song, “P.L.U.C.K.” (1998), blends history, contemporary violence, the forced disappearance of indigenous women, residential schools, and genocide in its lyrics. In their 2014 anti-Thanksgiving anthem, “Burn your village to the ground,” they sing, “Everything’s been ruined/ They don’t care about people living on that land/*It’s a religious disaster*, it’s like genocide ... Hundreds of indigenous women, murdered or missing in Canada/A haunting national disgrace with

<sup>9</sup> Margo Tamez, “Chertoff,” *Father | Genocide* (New York: Turtle Point Press, 2021) 102.



no solution in sight.”<sup>10</sup> That same year, the group boycotted the opening of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, saying:

Human rights are great for society. We appreciate the work the museum has been doing to bring attention to global issues. Unfortunately, we feel it was necessary to cancel our performance because of the museum’s misrepresentation and downplay of the genocide that was experienced by Indigenous people in Canada by refusing to name it genocide. Until this is rectified, we’ll support the museum from a distance.<sup>11</sup>

When US Secretary of the Interior (2021–) Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) – the agency which oversees the US Bureau of Indian Affairs – toured the former site of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School during a ceremony honoring six Sioux children who had died there and whose remains were being repatriated, she noted: “We have distinct cultures and languages and communities to this day, and so clearly, the cultural genocide part didn’t work, because we’re still here” Haaland told *Native News Online* “I’m very grateful for that.”<sup>12</sup>

By way of a corrective, there remains a reluctance to employ the word genocide in her agency too, even as it identifies a key element of genocide – forced assimilation – in generations-long US government Indian policy. In a letter prefacing the May 2022 US Bureau of Indian Affairs’ “Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report,” Bryan Newland (Bay Mills Indian Community, Ojibwe), Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs, writes:

This report confirms that the United States directly targeted American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children in the pursuit of a policy of cultural assimilation that coincided with Indian territorial dispossession. It identifies the Federal Indian boarding schools that were used as a means for these ends, along with at least 53 burial sites

10 Halluci Nation, “Burn your villages to the ground,” (2014).

11 CBC News, “A Tribe Called Red cancels performance at human rights museum,” September 18, 2014, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/a-tribe-called-red-cancels-performance-at-human-rights-museum-1.2771222>.

12 Jenna Kunze, “In the Wake of Carlisle Exhumation, Deb Haaland Says ‘Clearly, the Cultural Genocide Part Didn’t Work,’” *Native News Online*, July 20, 2021, <https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/in-the-wake-of-carlisle-exhumation-deb-haaland-says-clearly-the-cultural-genocide-part-didn-t-work>.

for children across this system – with more site discoveries and data expected as we continue our research.<sup>13</sup>

The report's candor and recommendations constitute an unambiguous acknowledgement of forced assimilation alongside forced migration. Forced assimilation sat at the center of Raphael Lemkin's thought on genocide though again it is excluded from the 1948 *Genocide Convention*. It figures as a violation of human rights and indigenous rights as established in the UNDRIP and *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Article 30), as well as in the body of human rights treaties, including the 1973 *Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid* (Article 2), that emerged in the process of decolonization. While still recognizing the report and its recommendations as a step-forward, failing to place it into the ambit of genocide cuts off opportunities to connect the US-based experience with the global civil society movements and international legal norms that best foster justice, accountability, and where reasonable, reconciliation. Introducing genocide into the hyperpolarized politics of the US at this moment could just be a bridge too far.

The successful prosecution and conviction of Guatemala's US-backed Ríos Montt and his military staff for the crime of genocide against the indigenous Maya during that country's 30-year civil war in 2013 stands as one of the few examples of accountability in the Western Hemisphere and only took place through international cooperation and support – and with his death in 2018 and the acquittal of his co-conspirators, a cruel reminder of how fleeting that accountability can be.<sup>14</sup>

The elliptical use of the term *forced assimilation* suggests why in research and advocacy distinguishing between cultural genocide and genocide should be rethought altogether and the term itself ultimately abandoned. It is reminiscent of the Orwellian use of the term ethnic cleansing to avoid indicating that genocide in the Balkans was taking place to avoid action.<sup>15</sup> Limiting the scope of indigenous genocide to culture, rather than recognizing the destruction of culture as an element of genocide, fails to recognize the political and social rights of indigenous peoples by reducing them to artifacts that merely need to be restored.

13 United States Department of the Interior, "Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report," Bryan Newland, (Washington, DC, 2022), iii.

14 Amy Ross, "The Ríos Montt Case and Universal Jurisdiction" *Journal of Genocide Research* 18: 2–3 (2016): 361–376.

15 Rony Blum, Gregory H. Stanton, Shira Sagi, and Elihu D. Richter, "Ethnic Cleansing' Bleaches the Atrocities of Genocide," *European Journal of Public Health* 18:2 (2008): 204–209, 205.

Elaborating a comparative global history of indigenous genocide in the period of the 1860s–1940s that incorporates the 1915–1922 genocide of the ethnic Armenian citizens of the Ottoman Empire, attacks on Armenian civilians and institutions in the previous generation, the treatment of Armenian survivors who remained in Turkey, or those who created new lives in diaspora – must be more than just an effort to identify the unique and the shared in the mechanics of annihilation. Rather, it should embrace what I term “genocidal knowledge” in that history: meaning that we should think about how, to borrow a phrase from the late Eric Weitz, globalized utopias of nation and race structured the ideology of these genocides. Those engaged in organizing and committing genocide often read the same the books, followed the same ideologies and social reformers, and drew lessons from successful techniques and technologies.<sup>16</sup> More so, this approach helps scholars to identify and follow through lines or perhaps lineages of common professional networks and practices and even entertain the possibility of shared personnel across indigenous genocides especially in the context of colonialism and foreign occupations.

In the study of genocides, and also enormous crimes against humanity like Apartheid, the legal foundation of which drew heavily on Canada’s late-19th indigenous reservation policies, historians working in fields as distinct as Human Rights Studies, comparative international law or environmental history have found precedents, common threads and influences.<sup>17</sup> These are what Dirk Moses calls the “patterns and logics” cutting across genocides.<sup>18</sup> The essays in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation and Subaltern Resistance in Global History* (2008) edited by Moses, and Stephan Ihrig’s *Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler* (2016) are perhaps the most relevant examples.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Margaret Jacob’s essay, “Indian Boarding Schools in Comparative Perspective: The Removal of Indigenous Children in the United States and Australia, 1880–1940” in *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting*

16 Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.)

17 See Pierre Bélanger and Kate Yoon. “Canada’s Apartheid: The Sanctioned Diffusion of Canadian Strategies of Indigenous Segregation, Assimilation, and Extermination.” *Extraction Empire Undermining the Systems, States, and Scales of Canada’s Global Resource Empire 2017–1217* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017) 684–94.

18 Dirk A. Moses, “Empire, Colony, Genocide: Keywords and the Philosophy of History” in Dirk Ad. Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008.) 7.

19 Dirk A. Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008.); Stefan Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

*American Indian Educational Experiences* (2006) stands as a critical methodological model from which to build other examinations of the cultural element of the crime of genocide across settler-colonial states.<sup>20</sup> Cumulatively this scholarship demonstrates how the act of genocide builds from the experiences and practices of previous moments of genocide and mass violence against civilians, establishing the epistemological foundations of genocidal knowledge. Simply put, those committing genocide learn from other genocides and genocidaires, especially when those genocides are met with a culture of impunity.

The historical experience of indigenous Armenian children in the Ottoman State and indigenous Native American and First Nations children in the US and Canada with carceral humanitarian is not just a common element of both genocides; it is also helps us understand how the ideology and practices of modern humanitarianism can be elemental and distinguishing features of genocide as a phenomenon.

Modern humanitarianism was defined by its participants and protagonists as a permanent, transnational, institutional, often neutral, and secular regime for understanding and addressing the root causes of human suffering. It relied on social scientific approaches to the management of humanitarian problems – expanding late nineteenth-century notions of “scientific philanthropy” to a massive scale. Further defining it was the emergence of a new and, to some extent, gendered practice – professional relief work and the female relief worker. Modern humanitarianism also emerged around the same time states and empires acquired the technological and organizational capacity to commit the kinds of industrial, highly bureaucratic, and lethal genocides of the 19th and 20th centuries; both phenomena draw on a vision of society perfectible by modern human beings.

This may appear to contradict my previous work on the subject. In 2015 I published the book *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism*, which argues in part that the US-based non-governmental modern humanitarian organization, American Near East Relief played a significant role in rebuilding the post-genocide Armenian community, and had been an advocate for the political and cultural rights of Armenian refugees following the collapse of international efforts to establish an independent Armenian

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20 Margaret Jacobs, “Indian Boarding Schools in Comparative Perspective: The Removal of Indigenous Children in the United States and Australia, 1880–1940” in Clifford F. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc (eds.) *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2006).

state and the repatriation of survivors to their homeland.<sup>21</sup> This is not a revision of that argument.

In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Zygmunt Bauman's observes that it is an "engineering mindset" that enjoins a seemingly objective capacity in modernity to separate the vital and useful from the moribund and harmful in the betterment of societies. Under certain circumstances and ideologies, that engineering mindset might determine that it is Jews or Armenians, nomads or Communists, homosexuals or the intellectually disabled that are harmful to society.<sup>22</sup> There is nothing about the tools and practices of modern humanitarianism which makes them immune from being employed as an adjunct to genocide under those circumstances. The *plasticity* and *asserted* neutrality of modern humanitarianism opens its practices and forms to this role. It is in this way that modern humanitarian educational efforts and social work can align with genocide. The experiences of indigenous people discussed in this article show how effective the tools of humanitarianism can be for conducting the kind of sorting, removing and "making harmless" that Bauman sees at the center of the genocidal knowledge of the Holocaust.

I have written this article with the possibility of conversations across very different communities of scholars in mind by seeking to recast core narratives and vocabularies as an example of the way these can be made more accessible to different fields. It works to bring to the discussion indigenous knowledge and memory as the core evidentiary base, eschewing – though not entirely – a traditional recourse to the archives of genocidal states and the memoirs of perpetrators. Part of that effort, too, is building a non-essentialist or common historical and theoretical vocabulary.

This effort is critical: there has been a traditional resistance in the Armenian public sphere and among Armenian Studies scholars to imagining the Armenian genocide within any other comparative frame than that of the Holocaust, and certainly not indigenous genocide. My own sense is that this has been informed in part by anxieties around Armenian "whiteness," race, and miscegenation – and how Jews, Armenians and other Middle Eastern peoples have struggled with that category in diaspora. Generations of discrimination in the US and elsewhere – in the form of everything from Ellis Island-era racial categorization and quotas to anti-Armenian redlining in Fresno, California – have raised

21 Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); see also: "The League of Nations' Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1927" in *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 5 (2010): 1315–1339.

22 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 70.

questions about where Armenians stand in racist legal and social categories.<sup>23</sup> Examining this history from within indigeneity could call the stability of Armenian “whiteness” and its access to elements of privilege into question; and not doing so would put the field on the wrong side of our present moment of ethical and historical reckoning. By the same token, Native American history is not immune from corrosive American Exceptionalism; and again, by drawing that history into a broader conversation about genocide across the globe, it can disrupt US resistance to following international norms in human and indigenous rights and serve as a basis for solidarity.

### Pipestone and Antoura – Listening to Indigenous Voices

Listening to two old men recall their experiences as little boys – one from Minnesota, one from Central Anatolia – who survived genocide and their encounters with humanitarians and humanitarianism, begins this part of the article.

On a Spring morning in 1935 following the death of his white father, five-year-old Adam Fortunate Eagle (Chippewa) and several of his brothers and sisters were taken by car from their Native American mother’s home on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in northern Minnesota to the Pipestone Indian Training School, some 160 kilometers south. Established in 1893, it was one of the hundreds of US government and private facilities of the kind created in the period following the American Civil war as an elemental feature of the 19th and early 20th-century genocide of indigenous peoples in Western North American.<sup>24</sup> Fortunate Eagle (1930–) arrived at the facility in the era of the

23 As Bedros Torosian has argued in the case of California, “Fresno-based Armenian migrants also became invested in promoting said (racialized) preconceptions. In doing so, the heads of the expatriate community longed to establish the ‘whiteness’ of the Armenian people with the intention of engaging their new racialized white identity in the home country. With little hesitation, the custodians of *Asparēz* publicized pseudo-scientific racialist, temporal, and gender-based categories and value systems which were accepted as self-evident, natural, and universal truths.” See Bedros Torosian, “Ottoman Armenian Racialization in an American Space (1908–1914),” *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies* 8:2 (2021): 31–59, 51.

24 The literature on the history and legacies of Native American Boarding Schools in the US and Canada has grown tremendously over the last quarter century. Among these include: Andrew Woolford, *This Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc, eds. *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006);

“Indian New Deal” – an economic, legal, and social reform project administered by the sociologist John Collier (1884–1968,) that mirrored the larger Great Depression-era “New Deal.” Collier, who had been appointed by US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, abandoned many of the most brutal practices of the preceding decades, which had sought to strip Native American children of their cultural identity and forcibly assimilate them to the dominant Euro-American culture. Collier’s goal was still full assimilation through primarily detribalization and urbanization. The new policies did allow individual indigenous children some measure of native cultural identity and connection with their families as they were prepared for jobs as skilled laborers in the case of boys, and domestic servants in the case of the girls, away from the reservations. The separation of Fortunate Eagle from his mother by the state echoes key assimilationist practice that persisted into the 1970s in the US, Canada, and Australia – removing indigenous children from immediate families and placing them in the care of white foster or adoptive parents by social workers. In the US, that practice would only end with the recognition that Native American children were being removed at a rate far higher than the general population and with the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978).<sup>25</sup>

Fortunate Eagle spent the next decade of his life at the institution and in 2010 wrote a memoir of the time, *Pipestone: My Life in an Indian Boarding School* which casts his experience in a somewhat different light than accounts of life at these schools from just a decade earlier.<sup>26</sup> He writes of caring adult teachers and staff – many of whom were Native Americans from other Northern Plains and Oklahoma-based nations – and white administrators who embraced key progressive education and public health principles. These administrators were, at the same time, often frank in explaining the continuing mission of assimilation and their belief in the superiority of Western Civilization:

Us Indians were here first, and the white men claim it for themselves. And now, I’m in an Indian boarding school run by the American government. It’s the same government some of my friends’ families have fought against. When I ask [Superintendent] Balmer about it, he says, “The

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David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

25 See Marc Mannes, “Factors and events leading to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act.” *Child Welfare* 74:1 (1995), 264–282, 265–266.

26 Adam Fortunate Eagle, *Pipestone: My Life in an Indian Boarding School* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012).

government has a policy to assimilate young Indians into society.” I don’t understand what he says, but it doesn’t sound good.<sup>27</sup>

He did know of the efforts to strip indigenous peoples of their culture and language. A few years into his stay, a group of boys were removed from a nearby Catholic missionary-run school and placed at Pipestone. They spoke of abuse at the hands of alcoholic priests and being beaten when they spoke Chippewa or Sioux. Listening to the stories, Fortunate Eagle and the “rest of the boys did not know what to say, because it [was] so awful.”<sup>28</sup>

What to Fortunate Eagle had seemed alien were practices that had been commonplace in Dawes Act-era America (1887–1934). During this time, the US government sought to solve with finality the “Indian Problem” – indigenous sovereignty and autonomy in the Great Plains and Western US – through genocide. Much of that “problem” had already been solved by a series of post-US Civil War military campaigns of extermination that decimated or concentrated on reservations much of America’s indigenous population. The Dawes Act regulated (or eliminated altogether) communal land tenure, self-government, self-identification, non-Christian religious practices, and cultural education in a final push by the US government to extinguish the political and cultural category of “Indian,” itself. The end goal was to eliminate the whole concept of the “Indian” through radical assimilation, and then integrate the human beings who once had that identity into an American society. This would finally open the entire continent to Euro-American settler colonization, political centralization, unfettered natural resource extraction, and commercial agriculture on an industrial scale.

Indian Boarding Schools had been founded on – what their advocates considered – a humanitarian response to policy that sought the physical elimination of the indigenous. This impulse is best reflected in what Capt. Richard H. Pratt, founder of the US Training and Industrial School (1879) at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania told the 1892 Denver meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Correction – the leading American organization of state welfare agencies, prison oversight boards, and what we might call now humanitarian NGOs:

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27 Fortunate Eagle, *Pipestone*, 69. On boarding school memoir and testimony see Arnold Krupat, *Changed Forever: American Indian Boarding-School Literature*, 2 vols. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020).

28 Fortunate Eagle, *Pipestone*, 47.



A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indians there are in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.<sup>29</sup>

As that policy unfolded at nearly 150 US government administered schools and even more private, Protestant or Catholic missionary-run schools, it meant indigenous young people, like the boys Fortunate Eagle had met from Red Lake, were systematically forced to abandon cultural practices, religion, and language, and to adopt those of the dominant culture. The goal was still to destroy indigenous communities. The technique would be less lethal to the individual – and with the audience for whom Pratt defended the policy in mind – based on a solid foundation of modern social scientific knowledge and education theory.

It was genocide.

In his own words, Pratt's plan fits a modern reading of the 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide's* definition of genocide, primarily in the element of the crime relating to the transfer of children of one ethnic, racial, or religious group to the dominant group. Problematically, the standard international legal interpretation of the child transfer clause suggests that the concern in 1948 was about children and biology, not children and culture. In deliberations at the time, the example provided was one in which “racially valuable” Polish children – meaning ones with the kinds of physical characteristics that fit the Nazi's eugenics plan – were taken from their families and assigned to German ones.<sup>30</sup> Native children were certainly not “racially valuable” in the opinion of the US government.

Still, the very conditions under which Fortunate Eagle had been placed at Pipestone were discussed during the drafting process of the *Genocide Convention*, though only at the margins. Venezuela's representative, the international lawyer and author Victor M. Pérez Peroza (1898–1969), was unique in explicitly connecting alleged humanitarian treatment of children with the possibility:

29 R.H. Pratt, “The Advantage of Mingling Indians with Whites,” in *Official Proceedings of the Annual Meeting Conference on Social Welfare*, 1892, ed. Isabel C. Barrows (Boston: George H. Ellis Press, 1892) 45–58, 46.

30 Isabel Heinemann, “‘Until the Last Drop of Good Blood’ The Kidnapping of ‘Racially Valuable’ Children and Nazi Racial Policy in Occupied Eastern Europe,” in Moses, *Empire*, 246–265.



IMAGE 1 Dawes Act-Era (1893) photograph of Native American children and white administrators at the Pipestone Industrial Training School  
SOURCE: MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

[A] group could be destroyed although the individual members of it continued to live normally without having suffered physical harm ... [T]he forced transfer of children to a group where they would be given an education different from that of their own group, and would have new customs, a new religion and probably a new language, was in practice tantamount to the destruction of their group, whose future depended on that generation of children. Such transfer might be made from a group with a low standard of civilization and living in conditions both unhealthy and primitive, to a highly civilized group as members of which the children would suffer no physical harm, and would indeed enjoy an existence which was materially much better; in such cases there would be no question of mass murder, mutilation, torture, or malnutrition; yet if the intent of the transfer were the destruction of the group, a crime of genocide would undoubtedly have been committed.<sup>31</sup>

31 Hiram Abtahi and Philippa Webb (eds.). *Travaux Préparatoires of Multilateral Treaties: The Genocide Convention*, 2 (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008), 1504.

Pérez Peroza was thinking about the Yanomami and other Amazonia indigenous peoples who had begun to assimilate under pressure from both the Venezuelan and Brazilian governments and American-based Evangelical missionaries.

Nonetheless para-lethal elements of genocide – like child transfer or rape as genocide – tend to be at odds with popular conceptions of genocide when genocide is only understood as mass killing. As noted above, it presents a confounding legal and policy hurdle to indigenous communities globally seeking redress, as international law tends to dismiss these claims as “cultural genocide” – the exclusion of which from the Genocide *Convention* was purposeful and driven by the interests of major settler-colonial states, including the US and Great Britain.<sup>32</sup> Just like in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide trials at Arusha, Tanzania where rape has been integrated into the crime of genocide, political and social pressure to broaden the scope of genocide to include cultural genocide is certainly possible and even more probable following the acceptance of UNDRIP and its highlighting of indigenous genocide and its relationship to culture.<sup>33</sup> The destruction of culture as a crime against humanity or war crime is better established now after the 2016 conviction of the former-Islamist militant Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi at the International Criminal Court for his part in attacks on libraries, mosques, and saints’ tombs in Timbuktu.<sup>34</sup> Recent legal rulings in Canada on behalf of compensation for discrimination against First Nations children, likewise indicates the outlines of what could be a major shift in the scope of international and domestic approaches to cultural rights, the rights of the child, and human rights during genocide or the commission of crimes against humanity.

Colliers’s progressive approach, relative to the brutality witnessed at Carlisle, had been important in the life of Fortunate Eagle, as well as to the changes in national policy, including the extension of citizenship to Native Americans (1924). These were perhaps only tolerable to American society in the fact that the late 19th-century genocide had been successful. Indigenous peoples and their political and cultural identity no longer posed an existential threat (imaginary or otherwise) to the project of American modernity.

32 See Johannes Morsink, “Cultural Genocide, the *Universal Declaration*, and Minority Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 21:4 (1999): 1009–1060.

33 See Alexandra A. Miller, “From the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to the International Criminal Court: Expanding the Definition of Genocide to Include Rape,” *Penn St. L. Rev.* 108 (2003): 349–375.

34 Daniel M Cole, “From the Hague to Timbuktu: *The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi*, a Consequential Case of Firsts for Cultural Heritage and for the International Criminal Court,” *Temple International and Comparative Law Journal* 31 (2017): 397–464.



IMAGE 2 “Boy Scout Troop No. 81: US Indian Training School, Pipestone” (ca. 1930)  
 SOURCE: CHESTER E. SOGN. “PIPESTONE INDIAN TRAINING SCHOOL BOY SCOUT TROOP.” PIPESTONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The “Indian” that had once been such an imagined threat, could be recast in a final act of genocide as an absent reminder of a romanticized untamed past now pacified, and whose names could be used for Scout camps and whose likenesses could adorn the uniforms of baseball and football teams. The decades prior to Fortunate Eagle’s birth were, according to US Census Bureau data, when the indigenous population (as defined by the federal agency) reached its lowest ebb at fewer than 300,000 survivors.<sup>35</sup>

Twenty years before Fortunate Eagle left his mother’s home on Red Lake, the German pastor directing a Protestant missionary orphanage in Hama, lifted a five-year-old Armenian boy, Karnig Panian (1910–1989), onto a train headed to Beirut, 200 kilometers away. From there he was taken to a small village called Antoura, where a state facility for Armenian and Kurdish children had been established in a converted French boarding school that had been seized by the Ottoman State at the outset of the war.<sup>36</sup> At Antoura, he would be subjected

35 Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492* (Lincoln: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 30.

36 The orphanage at Antoura has attracted scholarly attention over the last 10 years in part because of the Panian translation and as discussed below, a broad reassessment of the activities of Turkish feminist nationalist Halide Edip before and during World War One. See Selim Deringil, “‘Your Religion is Worn and Outdated’: Orphans, Orphanages and Halide Edib During the Armenian Genocide: The Case of Antoura,” *Études arméniennes*

to efforts – many quite brutal – calculated to forcibly assimilate him into the cultural and social practices of the state’s preferred new Turkish identity.<sup>37</sup>

Armenians were among the several indigenous communities of Central Anatolia. They share a unique written language and practice a distinctive version of Christianity that dates from the 4th Century. Equally, Armenians converted to Islam, with concentrations of Armenian-speaking Muslims communities in the Black Sea region. Conversion – coerced or voluntary – to Islam was, more generally, a path to integration with the dominate group and loss with time of identification as an Armenian. Until the 20th-century “Armenian” was not the hardened racialized category that “Indian” was in the contemporaneous North American context; and individuals did move across the categories of Muslim and Armenian, especially in times of extremis – it was a form of passing that was only possible because of the generations of mixing Anatolian populations that is usually denied by nationalists of all stripes.

That said, at the time of the Armenian Genocide, members of the Ottoman elite began to engage in thinking about Armenian as a racial identity – in apposition to a racialized Turkish identity.<sup>38</sup> Evidence from the period indicates that conversion to Islam would not prevent deportation or extermination in many cases.<sup>39</sup>

Just prior to the outbreak of WWI, Armenians constituted the majority ethnicity or plurality of the population of several Ottoman provinces of Eastern Anatolia and were a significant minority in all the cities of the empire, including

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*contemporaines* 12 (2019): 33–65; Nazan Maksudyan, “Agents or Pawns?: Nationalism and Ottoman Children During the Great War.” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 3:1 (2016): 139–164, and her recent book *Orphans and Destitute Children in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014); Hülya Adak, *Halide Edib ve siyasal şiddet: Ermeni kurumu, diktatörlük ve şiddetsizlik* (Halie Edip and Political Violence: The Armenian Genocide, Dictatorship, and Non-Violence) (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2016).

37 Among the many critical texts on the genocide of the Ottoman Armenians, the most recent include, Ronald Grigor Suny, “*They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else:*” *A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Richard G. Hovannisian, ed. *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide* (London: Routledge, 2017); Raymond H. Kévorkian, *Le génocide des Arméniens*, (Paris: Odile, 2006).

38 See Bora Isyar, “The Origins of Turkish Republican Citizenship: the Birth of Race,” *Nations and Nationalism* 11:3 (2005): 343–360. “What is important for us here is that conversion (in both its institutionalized form and as a strategy to avoid being forced to migrate) could not serve as a way to re-enact the citizenship rights of Armenians in the empire. The secular/racial construction of the Turkish citizen was dominant in 1915 and it materializes into practices that [genocide] would have been impossible earlier,” 353.

39 Selim Deringil, ‘Geç Dönem Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Ermeni Sorununu Çalışmak ya da Belgenin Girtlagini Sıkmağ’, *Toplum ve Bilim* 91: 122–41, 135–136.

the capital, Istanbul. Armenians were professionals, traders, bureaucrats, journalists, and artists. Armenian women engaged in forms of advocacy, and participated in the professions, though still contended with a multi-layered form of patriarchy within their own community – and, outside it, from Ottoman society. With their own cultural and educational facilities, and political organizations that adopted ideologies, primarily on the political Left, Armenians of the late-Ottoman Empire had created a community that was distinctive enough that the boundary between it, the state, and its preferred dominant political and social caste was easy to discern. While at the same time and under circumscribed conditions, Armenians could engage in politics and participate in the empire’s social, educational, economic, and cultural life.

The Armenian political leadership had supported a bold constitutional revolution in the Ottoman State in 1908 that brought the possibility of equal citizenship. The promises of that revolution were fleeting. The violence and social mobilization against minorities in the empire over the preceding generation, the loss of territory at the empire’s edges, flooding its center with Muslim refugees – themselves fleeing war and violence in the Balkans and Caucasus – meant that equality for Armenians and other ethnic and religious minorities tended to be viewed as form of status theft by the majority population.<sup>40</sup>

Further military losses and counter revolution radicalized the Ottoman elite who grew determined to answer the “Armenian Question” – how European diplomats characterized international efforts to protect the interests of the Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire and often justified their policies of “humanitarian intervention.” The Great War provided the catalyst (and cover) for the answer: a sophisticated campaign of extermination, mass rape, property theft, deportation, and concentration that would take place across the period 1915–1922.

“Aboard that train were the last remaining sons of an annihilated nation, racing toward unknown shores, tossed about by the waves of fate. All that was left of our families and hometowns was our memories” Panian recalls of that journey in his 1992 Armenian-language memoir, «Յուշեր Մանկութեան և Որբութեան» (*Memories of Childhood and Orphanhood*). Panian’s incarceration in the orphanage secured his survival at the very moment most of the indigenous Armenians of Anatolia had been murdered or forcibly displaced.<sup>41</sup>

40 For recent scholarship on the impact of the Adana massacres on Armenian post-revolutionary thought see: Bedross Der Matossian, *The Horrors of Adana: Revolution and Violence in the Early Twentieth Century* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2022).

41 Garnik Banean [Karnik Panian], *Goodbye, Antoura: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Aram Goudsouzian, trans. Simon Beugekian, forward and afterword, Keith David Watenpaugh (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). The original Armenian text is:

Panian came from a family of artisans and agriculturalists in the Anatolian town of Gurin, Gürün on contemporary Turkish maps. Surrounded by cherry orchards and wheat fields, Panian remembers his life there, and his mother's face, in heartbreaking detail. In a scene repeated hundreds of times throughout the areas with the densest population of Armenians in the Spring of 1915, Ottoman authorities, following the passage of emergency legislation, separated men and older boys, including Panian's father, from the elderly, women, and children. The men were summarily executed or enslaved to work for the Ottoman war effort digging trenches or building railroads, before being murdered.

Organized into caravans, the remainder were forced south into the Syrian high desert, sometimes on train, sometimes on foot. Women and girls were systematically raped and sold along the way as household slaves or wives without their consent. Once beyond the pale of Anatolia, authorities moved survivors through a series of death camps along the Euphrates River where no provision had been made for their survival and most perished. I witnessed their bleached white bones on the outskirts of towns like Dayr al-Zur and Maskana the last time I was able to visit those killing fields before they were engulfed again in the violence of the Syrian Civil War (2012–) and the brief, but brutal rule of the Islamic State, which, too, engaged in genocide of the indigenous Yazidi and Shabak a hundred kilometers to the East.<sup>42</sup>

A small portion of the deported – generally those identified as having possible utility to the Ottoman state as artisans – were dumped in camps nearer urban centers in Syria (including Panian's family) as state authorities, primarily the Governor of the Province of Greater Syria, Cemal (1872–1922) debated with his colleagues in Istanbul what to do about the tens of thousands of mostly female and child survivors. Cemal argued against liquidation of the IDPs, preferring forced Islamization and enslavement in the face of labor shortages.<sup>43</sup>

The facility at Antoura was an initiative of Cemal and his political ally, the American-educated Turkish ultra-nationalist feminist intellectual, Halide Edip

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Garņik Banean, «Յուշեր Սասնկութեան և Որբութեան» [*Memories of Childhood and Orphanhood*] (Antelias: Kat'oghikosut'iwn Hayots' Metsi Tann Kilikiyoy, 1992).

42 For a detailed discuss of this process and critical discussion of indigenous humanitarianism, see: Khatchig Mouradian, *The Resistance Network: The Armenian Genocide and Humanitarianism in Ottoman Syria, 1915–1918* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2021).

43 For a military archival discussion of Cemal's Armenian and other minorities policies in Syria, see, M. Talha Çiçek, *War and State Formation in Syria: Cemal Pasha's Governorate During World War I, 1914–1917* (London: Routledge, 2014.) Çiçek sees Cemal's non-liquidation approach, forced assimilation and coerced conversion efforts as evidence of a more humane and approach to Ottoman wartime efforts – and not genocide.

(1884–1964) whom he had appointed to head Greater Syria's education system. Cemal had instituted a policy of rounding up surviving Armenian orphans under the pretext of addressing public health and safety concerns. Once in state orphanages, and in a practice predating the genocide, Armenian children were routinely converted to Islam and given Muslim names; the boys were also circumcised. Little is known of the girls: in all likelihood, most were placed as soon as possible into Muslim households as domestic servants or married to Turkish soldiers. They would not be reconnected with the Armenian community as Panian and the other boys would and no memoir of a female survivor is extant. Cemal had also ordered the military and civilian bureaucracy to deny humanitarian relief services to Armenians unless they converted to Islam – a seeming break with other members of the military junta at the center who advocated against any provision of aid. He trumpeted the policy, nonetheless, in his exchanges with the central government. Simultaneously, he ordered the closure of American, European, and Armenian Church orphanages and relief centers.<sup>44</sup> In doing so, he asserted the Ottoman state's complete political and biological sovereignty over the survivors, forestalling any possibility that domestic Armenian or international institutions could be employed to prevent the further loss of cultural and religious identity.

Antoura was part of end-stage genocidal efforts and an educational institution. It employed a full primary and early-secondary modern curriculum and was not the kind of warehouse that other orphanages in the empire were.<sup>45</sup> It was unique as well in that, as in the case of Pipestone, it represented a shift in policy – and one consistent with a social-scientific approach to modern humanitarianism. It was likely an experiment, proof of concept, or pilot project, for the adaptation of techniques, including Montessori and foreign language instruction, to a full-scale national assimilation project. At Antoura, young Armenians were not just to be converted to Islam and learn Turkish by default. The under-studied presence of Kurdish youth, who arrived already as Muslims, helps explain what Halide Edip and her collaborators hoped to accomplish. The plan was to make Turks in the sense of a modern nationalist identity of both groups – rather than just safe Muslim subjects of the empire – by employing the full range of social work and leading-edge educational techniques. This meant that young Kurds and Armenians, who were considered “harmful” to the homogeneity of the emerging Turkish nationalist polity, were subject to the same forms of radical deracination indigenous young people had endured at Carlisle and other carceral institutions and for similar reasons.

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44 Çicek, *War and State*, 126–127.

45 See Maksudyan, *Orphans*.





IMAGE 3 “The orphans lined up in the courtyard with the music band in the center”  
(Ca. 1916)

SOURCE: AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT ARCHIVES, “ANTOURA ORPHANAGE PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM, 1915–1918”

Halide Edip, who had been educated at the American Robert College in Istanbul, cultivated a relationship with the leadership of the nearby Syrian Protestant College, which would become the American University of Beirut in the interwar era. She shared with them periodic reports of her “progress” and even a photographic album of set-pieces demonstrating the implementation of Montessori techniques and adherence to American standards of care.<sup>46</sup> So concerned was she about showing the humanity of the enterprise, she lied about the nature of religious and nationalist indoctrination at the school to

46 American University of Beirut Archives, “Antoura Orphanage Photograph Album, 1915–1918.” The collection includes 29 photographs of the residents of Antoura engaged in educational and vocational training activities, posing with staff and administrators, including Halide Edip and Cemal. The final page includes an inscription in Ottoman Turkish that reads “To the Honorable Dr. Bliss the President of the American College. Presented as a memento of Antoura.”

See the AUB archive finding aid: <https://www.aub.edu.lb/libraries/asc/Documents/CommonDocuments/AntouraOrphanageFAfinal.pdf>.

the American leadership of college; in her post-war English-language memoirs she further revises and justifies her role, claiming she had only humanitarian motives during the war, and rather it was Armenians who were intent on the stealing and converting of Muslim Turkish youth.<sup>47</sup>

Panian, and the three other boys whose memoirs are available remember it differently.<sup>48</sup> He recalled that speaking Armenian brought about extraordinary moments of violence.

I didn't know Turkish, nor did I know any Turkish names or numbers. All I knew was my true name, and I didn't see the point of changing it. The boy before me was asked his name, and he replied with his Armenian name. Without warning, [schoolmaster] Fevzi Bey smacked him right across the face. The boy fell to the ground and began crying. His nose was bleeding. Furious the headmaster screamed at him: "Forget your old name! Forget it! From now on your name will be Ahmet, and your number will be 549 ... It was my turn next. I said my name was Karnig. Now it was my turn to be slapped across the face and fall to the floor crying. The schoolmaster then kicked my sides as I lay prostrate on the floor. I eventually passed out from the pain."<sup>49</sup>

He woke up two days later with broken ribs. Panian remembered the rigorous religious education and forced conversion, the use of brutal beatings with the *falakha* – a whip used on the feet for infractions – for engaging in Christian religious practices or speaking Armenia. Hunger was a constant. He writes of a moment when some boys would bring bones from the nearby cemetery in which dead orphans were buried, that they would then boil and eat. In an

47 Halide Edip, *The Turkish Ordeal: Being the Further Memoirs of Edip* (New York: The Century Co., 1928), 15–18.

48 See Shushan Khachatryan, “Հալիդէ Էդիփը և հայ երեխաների թրքացումն Անթուրայի որբանոցում. պրոբլեմային դաշտի նշագծում” [Halide Edip and the Turkification of the Armenian Children at Antoura Orphanage: Identification of the Problem Field] Յեղասպանագիտական հանդես [Journal of Genocide Studies] 8 (2), 2020 9–41. The author uses the memoirs of other Antoura residents, Melkon Bedrossian (b. 1905) who fled Antoura in 1918 to Damascus where he found surviving members of his family, Harutyun Albojajian (b. 1904,) whose oral history testimony was collected by Verjine Svazlian, for her 2011 collection, in addition to Panian, to provide a counter-narrative to Edip's self-exculpatory account in her post-war writing. See Harutyun Albojajian, Խաչել թյան ճամփաներով [On the road to crucifixion] (Yerevan: VMV-Print Publishing House, 2005); Մելգոն Պետրոսեանի յուշերը Եղեռնի օրերէն, ամփոփուած Վարդիվառ Յով- հաննէսեանի կողմէ [արևմտահայերեն թարգմանք թԻ և ֆրանսերենից] [The Memoirs of Melgon Petrossian from the Days of Disaster, Vardivar Hovhannissian, ed.]: AGMI Collection, Box 8, folder 148, no. 231.

49 Panian, *Goodbye*, 80–81.



IMAGE 4 “Group of orphan boys wearing their uniforms with a male teacher”  
SOURCE: AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT ARCHIVES, “ANTOURA ORPHANAGE PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM, 1915–1918”

ellipsis that encapsulates the painful memories and unwarranted shame of his time in the orphanage, Panian does not say he drank that broth. Throughout this early period, Halide Edip was either present at the orphanage or overseeing it from Damascus in her role as provincial Inspector of Education.

In late 1918, Ottoman forces retreated from Lebanon and the Ottoman personnel at Antoura fled. When the American Red Cross and a cadre of Armenian nurses arrived in the days following, they found no adults and instead the children in charge. They also noted the quick reassertion of Armenian identity. As Bayard Dodge, a member of the faculty of the Syrian Protestant College and later president of the American University of Beirut, explained in a report at the end of the war, as soon as the management of the institution was placed in the hands of the American Red Cross in Beirut: “Immediately the Armenian children asserted their rights. They refused to use their Turkish names and they brought out Armenian books, which they had hidden away in secret places during the Turkish régime.”<sup>50</sup> When Panian left Antoura, he was placed in

50 Archives, American University of Beirut (1919), “Report from Bayard Dodge (Beirut) to C.H. Dodge (New York City) concerning the relief work in Syria during the period of the war,” Folder AA: 2.3.2.28.3 Howard Bliss Collection 1902–1920, 13.

the care of the American humanitarian organization, Near East Relief, that would seek to repatriate him and other orphans to Anatolia, though not to his town of Gurin which had been thoroughly cleansed of its Armenian inhabitants. Rather the American humanitarian project existed in symbiosis with a doomed post-WWI French effort to create a colonial client state in Southern Anatolia; within a few months of his "return," Panian was evacuated back to Lebanon, again the ward of a humanitarian organization albeit American and housed in an orphanage.

Panian's and Fortunate Eagle's stories bring into relief a humanitarian position in the history and theory of genocide. Critically they experienced humanitarianism not as the humane alternative to genocide, but rather the para-lethal and institutional element of it after the bulk of the annihilation had occurred. Panian and Fortunate Eagle survived the physical destruction of their communities; they were victims, however, of the same genocidal knowledge while in the custody of humanitarian institutions of care and education. A figure like Halide Edip as an American-educated social worker and nationalist humanitarian subject is at the end of a through line connecting Antoura and Pipestone. On one level her motives paralleled those of Pratt: there was no essential objection to the elimination of the Armenian or Indian, rather education, training, and social work provided a less brutal and more useful, more deliberate, more modern alternative to killing children. Even before World War One Halide Edip had been involved in leading the Turkish Hearth organization, the *Türk Ocakları* (1912–) that was at once a nationalist movement dedicated to Turkish arts and culture, and a center for the assimilation of non-Turkish and Turkic Muslim refugees and migrants as Turks into Turkish society through language instruction, political indoctrination, sports, scouting, and vocational training. The efforts at Antoura were similar in practice, and likely a proving ground for Halide Edip's post-war nation-building agenda which she hoped to impose throughout the state. Fortunate Eagle notes of his education at Pipestone, too, that the curriculum was the same and no less rigorous than what was offered to non-Native students in Minnesota public schools, although he remembers how hard it was to stomach the American history curriculum.

The Turkish Hearth calls to mind the work of the US-based humanitarian NGO Settlement House movement, most notably Chicago's Hull House that linked assimilation (primarily of Southern European immigrants) with women's education, American democratic idealism (forestalling the attraction of radical European ideologies of the Left), participation in the arts and

humanities and vocational training.<sup>51</sup> As Halide Edip notes in her memoir, *The Turkish Ordeal*, writing of her efforts on behalf of the Turkish Hearth, “the idea behind it was a composite one. The ideals of Tolstoy, the social work in America as expressed in ‘Hull House,’ by Miss Jane Addams ... The creation of a new Turkey demanded the individual change of the Turkish masses.”<sup>52</sup> Halide Edip’s deep familiarity with American history and American education makes it difficult to believe that she was unaware of the role of boarding schools in the culmination of American Manifest Destiny. Recall that it is only in retrospect that the boarding schools have been recognized in professional circles as places of horrible abuse and sites of gross human rights violations. In the era during which her ideas about Armenians, Kurds and Caucasian and Balkan Muslim immigrants had formed, she would have seen the treatment of indigenous children by American humanitarians and state officials as a standard of care, and if not a model, at least quite normal and humane.

To close the circle, in 1909, Jane Addams served as the first woman president of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, the organization where 17 years earlier, Pratt stood on the plenary stage and exhorted his audience of humanitarians to support him as he sought to destroy the last vestiges of Native American language, culture and political belonging as a humanitarian act.

### Survivance, Solidarity, and the Responsibilities of Refuge

The stories also tell of different forms of survivance. Survivance is a portmanteau of “survival” and “resistance” coined by the long-time former Director of Native American Studies at UC Berkeley, Gerald Robert Vizenor (White Earth Band of Ojibwe) – and as a word and inclination should have a role in contemporary Armenian Studies. Vizenor writes that it is:

an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of

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51 On the Settlement House movement, see Rivkah Shpak-Lisak, *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890–1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

52 Edip, *Ordeal*, 1, n.1.

succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy.<sup>53</sup>

To paraphrase the work of Helen Makhdomian, while there are clear differences in the forms of survival between Native Americans and Armenians, it is the collective experience of the refusal to disappear that sits at the center of the shared experience of survivance.<sup>54</sup> Brought together, the two stories show how their experiences in the custody of humanitarians shaped their post-genocide work and activism as adults and points to a way to think about the post-genocide and post-boarding school/orphanage life as history and phenomenon. In the case of Fortunate Eagle the boarding school experience helped shape a Pan-Indian political consciousness that was manifest in his later Red Power movement activism in the 1960s and 1970s and may have only been possible because of the mixing of national groups at the school.

After Pipestone, he attended college at the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas, which in the 1930s had evolved from a boarding school into an advanced vocational training institute by the time he had arrived. Now it is the Haskell Indian Nations University, a comprehensive land grant institution. He did not return to Minnesota – and rather migrated away from reservation life – which was part of the intent of his incarceration, and established himself in California’s San Francisco Bay Area. In the 1960s he emerged as a leader of local urban Indians, primarily in the communities of Oakland and Berkeley, founding in 1965 the Inter-Tribal Council of California. With Richard Oakes (Mohawk) and others, he co-organized the 19-month occupation of Alcatraz under the auspices of the Indians of All Tribes movement. The occupation helped galvanize American Indian activism and had a significant impact on US federal tribal policy. As of 2022, he lives in Oregon, and continues to write and to make art.

Panian spent ten years as a ward of American Near East Relief, a decade he remembers with a kind of fondness Fortunate Eagle recalls in a few passages in his memoir. He originally trained as an electrician – NER had built its educational policies around US-Reform era “Negro Education” and did not anticipate that Armenians would pursue higher education.<sup>55</sup> He showed a

53 Gerald Vizenor, ed., *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 2008) vi.

54 Helen Makhdomian, “Connected Memoryscapes of Silence in Micheline Aharonian Marcom’s *Draining the Sea*.” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 66, no. 2 (2020): 301–324, 302.

55 Watenpugh, *Bread*, 188.

flair for reading and teaching and returned as a young adult to the Armenian community-run high school (Jemeran) in Beirut to complete his secondary education. Becoming an important figure in the cultural and political life of Beirut's Armenian diaspora, married, founded a family, and lived out his life as a writer and beloved teacher until his death in 1989.

Refusing to disappear, still meant growing old in exile. A broader and unanswered question in the study of indigenous genocide is: how does survivance help us understand diaspora? This is an ambiguity in UNDRIP and indigenous rights advocacy, as well, where the uninterrupted connection to the land is among the paramount elements of indigeneity. Concentration, rape, and forced migration and dispossession are constants in the indigenous experience, fostering the loss of language, religious practices, and culture in ways that burden the practice of indigeneity. It is those multiple forms of loss that can lead states to deny the authenticity or legitimacy of claims of indigeneity or even social or political existence that feature in everything from state-sponsored genocide denial, and government policies built on blood quanta or genetic testing, to restricted access to sacred sites and historical records.

The kinds of exile Panian and Fortunate Eagle experienced were quite different. Still, for both men, that exile evidenced another element of humanitarianism's genocidal potential. Fortunate Eagle's time at Pipestone was not about preparing him for a leadership role within his tribal community. Rather at the school and later at the Haskell Institute, the expectation was that he would become a skilled worker in a city and grow distant from reservation life. Return, likewise, was impossible for Panian; and his education and training by NER was undertaken to prepare him for integration into Lebanese society or immigration – where the fact that Lebanon was under French Mandate meant he would have citizenship as part of colonial effort to increase the non-Muslim population of the country: something a post-colonial Lebanon would deny to most Palestinian refugees arriving a generation later. In the consociational politics of Beirut, he could still be part of a diasporan community with some access to community and language. While Fortunate Eagle's activist trajectory is unique, neither men could be considered an existential problem to the polities they inhabited as adults that had been when they were subjected to genocide as boys.

For many other Armenians, the post-genocide meant exile much further West raising a further question of survivance. In one of the final scenes of Fatih Akın's 2014 film *The Cut*, the protagonist Nazareth Manoogian (played by Tahar Rahim) has found work as a section hand in 1920s Dakota while searching for the twin daughters he had lost in the opening days of the Armenian

Genocide.<sup>56</sup> He prevents the Irish immigrant crew he is working with from raping an indigenous girl (played by the Secwépec First Nation actor, Grace Dove). The scene recalls Manoogian's failure to stop the rape and murder of an Armenian mother during the mass deportation of Armenians years earlier. Though he suffers a terrible beating at the hands of the crew and is forced to flee, the event is the catalyst that allows him to locate his surviving daughter. The scene is a powerful reminder that many Armenian survivors of genocide arrived in the United States as genocide against indigenous people was ongoing; and their ability to settle as agriculturalists or city dwellers across the Western United States was only possible because of genocide – the worst violence of which, was for example, the Wounded Knee Massacre (mischaracterized by the logic of indigenous genocide as a battle) a generation prior.

Among the many reasons to bring these genocides into a shared framework of indigeneity is to pose the question: what are the responsibilities survivors of genocide have to others facing genocide in the places where they have found safety and refuge? The greatest burden of responsibility, of course, should be assumed by the states that commit genocide. Survivance, though, suggests a strategy for solidarity: where the experience and memory of genocide and the sharing of stories creates a way of seeing the world that brings better acknowledgement of trauma and more coherent political strategies for justice and reparation. This is a question that will not be answered in this journal article, but instead should be part of the conversations I hope it begins.

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<sup>56</sup> Fatih Akin, *The Cut* (Film: 2014).



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