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TITLE: “Kill the Armenian/Indian; Save the Turk/Man: Thoughts at the Intersections of Humanitarianism, the Transfer of Children and the Possibilities of a Comparative History of Indigenous Genocide”

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TRIGGER WARNINGS: genocide, rape, violence against children

ABSTRACT:
This article proposes drawing the genocide of ethnic Armenians into the comparative study of indigenous genocide. Using a Human Rights Studies approach, it focuses on a core element of genocide—the transfer of children—to explore this possibility, and argues that the genocide of Armenians and Native Americans by state authorities through institutions of humanitarian care is a common element to both; it seeks, as well, to understand how the ideology and practices of modern humanitarianism are elemental to indigenous genocide. Shared experiences of denial and cultural erasure invite added comparison and intersectional solidarity, too. The article is written to engage Native American and Armenian Studies scholars and to elaborate a common vocabulary.

KEYWORDS: Genocide, human rights, indigeneity, indigenous genocide, cultural genocide, Native Americans, Armenians, humanitarianism, Indian Boarding Schools, child transfer

English historian Arnold J. Toynbee’s juxtaposition of three indigenous peoples who faced genocide during the 19th and 20th centuries in his *Armenian Atrocities: The Murder of a Nation*
(1915) is jarring in both its inaccuracy and cruel indifference. He wrote the book at the height of World War One in an effort to gain popular support for Britain’s war against the Ottoman Empire by repacking it as a humanitarian crusade on behalf of the Armenians of Anatolia. He assures his readers that Armenians are worth saving because they are:

Not savages like the Red Indians who retired before the White Man across the American continent. They were not nomadic shepherds like their barbarous neighbours the Kurds. They were people living the same like as ourselves, townspeople established in the towns for generations and the chief authors of its local prosperity. They were sedentary people, doctors and lawyers and teachers, businessmen and artisans and shopkeepers, and they raised solid monuments to their intelligence and industry, costly churches and well-appointed school. In fact, they were in the closest personal touch with Western civilization.¹

Toynbee’s book was among the first to construct a historically accurate narrative of the Armenian Genocide, and is important in the way it portrays what had happened to the Armenian people as systematic, and part of a purposeful, legal, state-initiated effort to eliminate them. However, his contrast between the Armenians as “civilized” victims of mass violence and annihilation, and the Kurds and Native Americans as not, is not a simple turn of phrase. It is a precis of the way different kinds of people and communities are made eligible to have their histories of extermination, cultural destruction and mass violence understood as genocide. By Toynbee’s criteria: Kurds are barbarians and nomadic, and Native Americans are savage and strangers to civilization who merely disappeared, seemingly as a consequence of their inherent inferiority. Neither community was entitled to the empathy and support that the Armenians should have in the form of civilian protection, international justice and national sovereignty —
things all three communities have still not fully achieved. The failure to meet those conditions of eligibility relieves humanity of the burden of action to prevent and the moral obligation to punish that genocide imposes.

Those conditions, especially as they revolved around questions about culture and religion, land and settlement, and integration with city life and capitalist economies are mapped onto the idea of what constitutes genocide as both a historical phenomenon and legal construct; and more concretely, have dogged the legal and restorative justice processes anticipated by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948,) which was adopted in the wake of the Holocaust. In particular, the genocide convention tends to exclude from the category of genocide the genocidal practices of empires and states towards indigenous communities. In part this is because of the powerful role that the history and memory of the Holocaust plays in defining what global publics, historians and international lawyers imagine what is, and is not, genocide. In that collective legal and historical imagination, indigenous genocide is often at odds with that definition.

That exclusion is also a lingering effect of colonialism and the persisting failure to recognize fully the human rights of indigenous peoples: as Elazar Barkan observers:

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.²

The debate is not just academic: That fear of acknowledgment shapes national policies in settler-colonial states as calls for reparations and restoration 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 of national identity with the potential to align a state and its citizens with the architects of genocide rather than as concentration camp liberators or the creators of places of refuge for survivors.

Indigenous genocide is a consequence of colonialism, settlement and state centralization; it unfolds over a long period of time with shifts in locations, polices and actors, and turns on not just extermination, but also on environmental degradation, long-term strategies employing starvation, disease and concentration, and attacks on language, cultural heritage and non-European forms of political organization. Generations-long campaigns of violent resistance by indigenous people in ways that have few parallels in the Holocaust confuses the matter further in that that kind of resistance provides a seeming justification by the state to engage in warfare against indigenous civilians — making indigenous genocide seem less like genocide and more like a defensive strategy by a state protecting its own frontier civilian populations. Since the Convention’s establishment, and certainly since the beginnings of the global indigenous rights movements in the 1970s that culminated in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) this exclusion has been challenged with little success, securing neither redress under international law,³ nor, until recently (and only unevenly) support from university-based academics and professional societies.⁴
This is not the case for indigenous scholars (in and out of the academy,) cultural workers and politicians in the Western Hemisphere, for example: Yale’s Ned Blackhawk (Shoshone,) poet Margo Tamez (Lipan Apache,) The Halluci Nation, a Canada-based First Nations electronic musical group that used to be known as A Tribe Called Red are among the many native people who have used the term “genocide” to describe the historical experience of indigenous communities in the Americas in their human rights activism, scholarship, art, and policy advocacy. When US Secretary of the Interior (2021-) Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo), who 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.” Indeed, the successful prosecution and conviction of Guatemala’s Rios 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 — and with his death in 2018 and the acquittal of his co-conspirators, a cruel reminder of how fleeting that accountability can be.

It has only been recently, too, that the Armenian Genocide has achieved unambiguous inclusion in the larger field of the history and theory of genocide. This 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 relative success of confronting denial by a modern state with the power and resources to control narratives, coopt academics and buy politicians, 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
accuracy of that designation, in an act of solidarity with other native communities struggling against campaigns of state-based denial.

Likewise, contemporary Armenian and Armenian diaspora-based human rights advocacy to address the destruction of cultural heritage and destruction of histories and knowledges during violent conflict and in state-supported education and public spaces like museums, resonates deeply with similar indigenous movements and legal efforts — with broad implications for interdisciplinary collaboration and the application of domestic and international human rights law and jurisprudence across a spectrum of fields and forums. Finally, placing the history of mass violence against Armenian civilians and its sequelae into an indigenous genocide frame opens the possibilities of reengagement with the many critical exclusions in the theory of genocide, most especially 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 communities of the Middle East and Caucasus: Palestinians, Kurds, Yazidis, Assyrians, and Egypt’s Copts.

Elaborating a comparative global history of indigenous genocide in the period of the 1880s — 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, and the treatment of Armenian survivors who remained in Turkey or 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 “through lines” 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 and indeed how those engaged in
organizing and committing genocide often read the same the books and followed the same ideologues. More so, it is possible to identify and follow through lines of common professional networks and practices and even entertain the possibility of shared personnel across indigenous genocides 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 Borderlands Studies, Human Rights Studies, comparative international law or environmental history have found precedents, common threads and influences, what Dirk Moses calls the “patterns and logics” of genocide. 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. 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 American Indian Educational Experiences (2006) stands as a critical methodological model from which to build other examinations of cultural genocide across settler-colonial states. 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. Those committing genocide learn from other genocides and genocidaires, especially when those genocides are met with a culture of impunity.

This essay explores one of those through lines as a way to begin to imagine how the genocide of an “Old World” indigenous community can be brought into productive comparison and dialog with a “New World” genocide. I argue that the historical experience of Armenian and
Native American children in the US at the hands of humanitarian efforts by state authorities is not just a common element of both genocides; it is also helps us understand how the ideology and practices of modern humanitarianism is an elemental and distinguishing feature of indigenous genocide as a whole. Modern humanitarianism was envisioned 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 20th century; both phenomena draw on visions only possible in modernity of the perfectibility of societies.

This is seemingly counter intuitive. I wrote the 2015 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 indeed had been an advocate for the political and cultural rights of Armenian refugees following the collapse of international efforts to establish an independent Armenian state and repatriate survivors. 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 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. There is nothing about the tools and practices of modern humanitarianism which makes them immune to being employed as an adjunct to genocide under those circumstances. The plasticity and possible moral 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 sorting, removing and “making harmless” Bauman sees at the center of the ideological beginnings of the Holocaust.

Written with the possibility of conversations across very different communities of scholars in mind, this essay recasts core narratives and vocabularies as an example of the way these can be made more accessible to different fields. Likewise, 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: Among Armenians and Armenian studies scholars there has been a traditional resistance to imagining the Armenian genocide within any other comparative frame than that of the Holocaust. My own sense is that this been informed in part by anxieties about 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 everything from Ellis Island-era racial categorization and quotas to anti-Armenian redlining in Fresno have raised questions about where Armenians stand
in racist legal and social categories. Examining this history from within indigeneity could call the stability of Armenian “whiteness” and its inherent privilege into question; but not doing so would put the field on the wrong side of our present moment of racial reckoning. By the same token, Native American history is not immune from 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 two little boys, one from Minnesota, one from Central Anatolia, who survived genocide and their encounters with humanitarians and humanitarianism, begins this part of the essay.*

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, 100 miles 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.¹³
Fortunate Eagle (1930-) arrived at the facility in the era of the “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 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 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 as well a 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 finally with the recognition that native children were being removed at a rate far higher than the general population and the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978).

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 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010) which casts his experience in a somewhat different light than accounts of life at these schools from just a decade earlier. He writes of caring adult teachers and staff, many of whom were Native Americans from other Northern Plains and Oklahoman nations, and white administrators who embraced key humanitarian progressive education and public health
principles and at the same time were often quite 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 government has a policy to assimilate young Indians into society.” I don’t understand what he says, but it doesn’t sound good.14

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.15”

What to Fortunate Eagle had seemed alien, were practices that had been common place in Dawes Act-era America (1887-1934) during which the US government sought to solve with finality the “Indian Problem” — indigenous sovereignty and autonomy in the Great Plains and Western U.S. — 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 the majority 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. Only with the “Indian” disappeared through radical assimilation, and in a subordinated sense, into an American identity and a capitalist
economy, would the continent be opened to Euro-American settler colonization, political centralization, unfettered natural resource extraction, and commercial agriculture on an industrial scale.

Indian Boarding Schools had been founded in what their advocates considered a humanitarian response to polices that sought the physical elimination of the indigenous; an impulse reflected best in what Capt. Richard H. Pratt, founder of the U.S. 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:

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 Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.16

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 or perish. 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.

Insert Image 1: “Boy Scout Troop No. 81: US Indian Training School, Pipestone (ca. 1930)

(rights not acquired at time of submission)
It was still genocide.

As described it fits a plain reading of the 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*’s defining as an element of the crime of genocide the transfer of children of one ethnic, racial or religious group to the dominant group. More 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, 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. 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 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

[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.18

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. Equally 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 Convention was purposeful and done at the behest of major settler-colonial states, including the US and Great Britain. Just as since the 1994 Rwandan Genocide trials at Arusha 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. 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. 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 ambit of international and domestic approaches to cultural and human rights during genocide and the commission of crimes against humanity.

Colliers’ progressive approach relative to the brutality witness at Carlisle, which had been so important in the life of Fortunate Eagle, and the changes in national policy, including the extension of citizenship to Native Americans (1925) were perhaps only tolerable to American society in the face of the fact that the late 19th-century genocide had been largely successful. Indigenous peoples and their political and cultural identity no longer posed an existential threat to the project of American nationalism and state centralization. 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 likenesses adorn the uniforms of baseball and football teams. Indeed, the decades prior to Fortunate Eagle’s birth were, according to census data, when the indigenous population of the
United States reached its lowest ebb at fewer than 300,000 survivors.\textsuperscript{22}

Twenty years before Fortunate Eagle left his mother’s home on Red Lake, the German pastor directing a Protestant missionary orphanage in Hama, Syria lifted a five-year-old Armenian boy, Karnig Panian (1910-1989,) onto a train headed to Beirut, Lebanon 150 miles to south. Once there he would be held in a state facility for Armenian and Kurdish children at Antoura\textsuperscript{23} and be subjected to brutal efforts calculated to forcibly assimilate him into the cultural and social practices of the state’s preferred Turkish ethnicity.\textsuperscript{24}

Armenians were among the several indigenous communities of Central Anatolia and share a unique written language and practice a distinctive version of Christianity that dates from the 4\textsuperscript{th} Century, though by the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, Catholic and Protestant missionaries had converted a significant portion of the population. 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.

“Armenian” was not the hardened racialized category that “Indian” was/is in the 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. Though not a racial category, being Armenian was a recognized legal category with implications for taxation, the ability to own property and firearms, and limitations on access to jobs in the military and state bureaucracy.
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 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 as a whole. 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 Turkish ethnicity 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.

Politicized Armenians had supported a bold constitutional revolution in the Ottoman Empire 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. The adoption by a powerful cadre of Ottoman politicians of a racially-informed nationalist ideology overwhelmed the efforts at comity.

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 minority 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.

That train ride and Panian’s incarceration in the orphanage secured his survival at the very moment the majority of the indigenous Armenians of Anatolia, which before 1915 numbered over 1.5 million, had been reduced to just a little over 250,000. Remembering his journey from a distance of 55 years in his 1992 Armenian-language memoir, *Husher mankut’ean yev vorbut’ean* (Memories of Childhood and Orphanhood) which has been edited and translated into English as *Goodbye Antoura: A Memoir of the Armenian Genocide* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015.) writes of that moment. “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 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 in particular 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, following the passage of emergency legislation, authorities 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, their bleached white bones still visible 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 and the brief, but brutal rule of the Islamic State, that engaged in genocide of the indigenous Yazidi.

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, including the Governor of the Province of Greater Syria, Cemal (1872-1922) and those in Istanbul debated what to do about the tens of thousands of mostly female and child survivors. Cemal argued against liquidation of the IDPs, preferring forced Islamization in the face of labor shortages. By the time Panian was transferred to the Beirut, most of his family was dead and, in all likelihood, only he survived to that point because his grandparents had surrendered him to the German orphanage in Hama.

The facility at Antoura, then a small village north of Beirut and now an upscale suburb of the city, was an initiative of Cemal and his political ally, the American-educated Turkish feminist intellectual, Halide Edip (1884-1964) whom he had appointed to head the province’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, boys circumcised. Little is known of the girls, most were placed as soon as possible into Muslim households as domestic servants or married to Turkish soldiers and would not be reconnected with the Armenian community as Panian and the other boys would. Cemal
had also ordered the military and civilian bureaucracy to deny humanitarian relief services to Armenians unless they converted to Islam, and trumpeted that policy in his exchanges with the central government. Simultaneously, he ordered the closure of American, European and Armenian Church orphanages and relief centers. By doing so, he asserted the Ottoman state’s complete political and biological sovereignty over the of 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 these end-stage genocidal efforts, but also more. It employed a full primary and secondary modern curriculum and was not the kind of warehouse that other orphanages in the empire were. It is 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 — was likely an experiment, or pilot project, for the adaptation of techniques, including Montessori and foreign language instruction, to full-scale national assimilation. At Antoura, young Armenians were not just to be converted to Islam and learn Turkish by default. This is why the under-studied presence of Kurdish youth, who arrived already as Muslims, helps explain what Halide Edip and her collaborators hope to accomplish. The plan was to make “Turks” in the sense of a modern nationalist identity of both groups, rather than just new and 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 in the generations previous to Fortunate Eagle had endured at Carlisle and other institutions for similar reasons.
It was also an effort to make the inhumanity of the ongoing genocide more palatable to nearby American observers. Its nearness to Beirut, a major center of Euro-American missionary and educational activity, primarily in the form of the Syrian Protestant College, which became the American University of Beirut in the 1920s, put Halide Edip and Antoura under additional scrutiny from American educators and the body of American humanitarian aid workers who had established a Beirut chapter of the American Red Cross at the time of the Great Syrian Famine. Later many these same people would be part of the much larger, post-genocide humanitarian efforts of Near East Relief.

Halide Edip, who had been educated at the American Roberts College in Istanbul, in particular, cultivated a relationship with the SPC leadership, sharing 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. 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 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.

INSERT: Image 2 – Classroom at the Antoura Facility ca. 1916.

Panian, and the three other boys whose memoirs are available remember it differently. Speaking Armenian, in particular, brought about extraordinary moments of violence.

I didn’t know Turkish, nor did I know any Turkish names of 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 head master screamed at him: ‘Forget your old name! Forget it! From now own your name will be Ahmet, and your number will be 549…It was my turn next. I said my names was Karnig. Now it was my turn to be slapped across the face and fall to
floor crying. The schoolmaster then kicked my sides as I lay prostrate on the floor. I eventually passed out from the pain.\textsuperscript{31}

He woke up two days later with broken ribs. Panian remembered as well the rigorous religious education and forced conversion, the use of brutal beatings with the \textit{falakha}, a whip used on the feet for infractions, including 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, which they would then boil and eat. In an 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 present at the orphanage.

In late 1918 Ottoman forces retreated from Lebanon and the Turkish 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.”\textsuperscript{32} As Panian left Antoura, he was placed in 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 Gürün 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 an humanitarian organization albeit American and housed in an orphanage.

Conclusion Panian’s and Fortunate Eagle’s stories brings into relief the humanitarian through line 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 logics of genocide while in the custody of humanitarian institutions of care and education. A figure like Halide Edip as an American-educated social worker and feminist/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 elimination of the Armenian or Indian, rather education, training, and social work provided a less brutal and more useful, more modern alternative to killing children. Even before the war Halide had been involved in leading the Turkish Hearth organization (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 and vocational training. The efforts at Antoura were similar in practice, and in all likelihood a proving ground for Halide Edip’s post-war nation-building agenda which she hoped to impose throughout the state. The context and purpose were different. 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. 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.” 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 understood 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 indeed 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 had asked his audience to destroy the last vestiges of indigenous language and culture as a humanitarian act. 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 succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy.”

Brought together, the two stories show how their experiences in the custody of humanitarianis shaped their post-genocide work and activism as adults and points to a way to think about the “patterns and logics” of post-genocide, post-boarding school/orphanage life as history and phenomenon. More so in the case of Fortunate Eagle than Panian, the experience of the boarding school helped shape a Pan-Indian political consciousness that was manifest in his later activism, 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 1930s had evolved from a boarding school into an advanced vocational training institute by the time he had arrived and is now, 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 the boarding schools, and established himself in California’s Bay Area. In the 1960s he emerged as leader of 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 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. He lives in Oregon, continues to write and make art.

Panian spent ten years as a ward of the American Near East Relief, a decade he remembers with a kind of fondness Fortunate Eagle recalls in 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. He showed a flair for reading and teaching and returned as a young adult to the Armenian Jemaran high school in Beirut to complete his secondary education. Becoming an important figure in the cultural life of Beirut’s Armenian diaspora, he founded a family, and lived out his life as a writer and beloved teacher until his death in 1989.


3 See for example failed efforts to declare attacks on Aboriginal cultural heritage and the removal of children as genocide in Australia. *Nulyarimma v Thompson* (1999) is on point. The case turned on the destruction of a lake holy to a local Aboriginal community, the court found that even though Australia is a signatory to the *Genocide Convention*, genocide as a crime was never integrated into Australian law for use within the state. Mitchell, Andrew D. “Genocide, human rights implementation and the relationship between international and domestic law: Nulyarimma v Thompson.” *Melbourne University Law Review* 24:1 (2000): 15-49.


5 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,


Ibid, 47.


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.


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.


The orphanage at Antoura has attracted scholarly attention over the last five years in part because of the Panian translation and, as discussed below, a broad reassessment of the activites 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 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, no. 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 krımı, diktatörlük ve şiddetlisizlik* (Halie Edip and Political Violence: The Armenian Genocide, Dictatorship, and Non-Violence) (İstanbul: İstanbu Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2016.)

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,

26 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.

27 See Maksudyan, Orphans.

28 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:


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 Alboyajian (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, Harutyun Alboyajyan, Հայերի դժվարություններով On the road to crucifixion (at the crossroads?) (Yerevan: VMV-Print Publishing House, 2005); Մելգոն Պետրոսյանի առաջին տարիքից մինչև համարիչ Յովհաննիս Վարդիվառ Xաղաքացիական կողմէ [The Memoirs of Melgon Petrossian from the Days of Disaster, Vardivar Hoyhannissian, ed.]. AGMI Collection, box 8, folder 148, no. 231.


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, p. 13.

Edip, *Ordeal*, 1, n.1
