

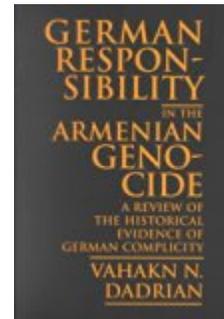
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Vahakn N. Dadrian. *German Responsibility in the Armenian Genocide: A Review of the Historical Evidence of German Complicity*. Watertown: Blue Crane Books, 1996. XVI + 304 S. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-886434-02-8.

Reviewed by Meredith Hindley (American University)

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The long and arduous battle to document the Armenian genocide and its implementation by the Young Turk Ittihadist government has limited the exploration of the role of other nations in the genocide. Questions about Germany's role in the massacre of nearly one million Armenians from 1915-1916 linger because of Germany's close association with Turkey before and during the First World War. Two lines of thought persist about the nature of Germany's involvement: either Germany had nothing to do with the genocide or Germany instigated it. In *German Responsibility in the Armenian Genocide: A Review of the Historical Evidence of German Complicity*, Vahakn N. Dadrian, the author of the landmark *History of the Armenian Genocide*, takes the middle road. Dadrian does not accuse Germany of instigating the Armenian genocide; he argues instead that Germany contributed to the genocide through policies that condoned it and that the German government sanctioned German and Turkish officials who participated in the genocide's implementation.

At the high policy level, Dadrian finds a willingness by Germany to embrace Turkey's genocidal tactics toward the Armenians. Kaiser Wilhelm II's tolerance for the Turkish government's anti-Armenian policies filtered down to his advisers and directly influenced German relations with Turkey. Germany responded "nonchalantly" to empire-wide Turkish attacks from 1894 to 1896 against the Armenians, which resulted in approximately 300,000 Armenian deaths. Dadrian argues that Wilhelm II's lack of response to the first massacre signaled to the Turks "that Germany did not object to the emergence of a new Turkey that is purged of its native Armenian population" (p. 13). German nonchalance toward Turkey's anti-Armenian violence continued in the wake of the 1915-1916 massacre.

Germany's pro-Turkish stance led to an official policy of "non-intervention" toward the Armenian genocide, a policy publicly justified on the grounds that Germany needed to maintain the trust of its wartime ally. While positing a policy of nonintervention, Germany actively worked to cover up the genocide and to minimize any suspicion of German involvement. Germany sent two diplomatic notes, both mild in tone, to the Turkish government which protested the genocide. Dadrian argues that the purpose of the notes lay in the dismissal of any suggestion of German participation. In addition to censoring the press and distributing anti-Armenian propaganda, Germany also created a diplomatic White Book designed to blame the Armenians for Turkish reprisals against them and to document German efforts to alleviate the situation through diplomatic pressure.

As Germany worked to disassociate itself from the appearance of complicity in the genocide, a number of German officials were involved in its implementation to varying degrees. Dadrian acknowledges that "there is no explicit evidence to suggest that such massacres were in fact intended by the Germans involved," but he maintains that German officials became "indirect accessories to crimes perpetuated by the [Turkish] Special Organization functionaries whose overall goal they endorsed, financed to some extent, and shepherded" (pp. 54-55). Germany sanctioned their involvement, both officially and through silent approval.

While most German participation in the genocide occurred through studied passivity or casual suggestion, some individuals participated more directly. High-ranking military and diplomatic officials ordered and assisted in the Armenian deportations while fully cog-

nizant of the fate that awaited the Armenians. For example, General Bronsart von Schellendorf, the senior member of the German Military Mission to Turkey, issued deportation orders demanding that “severe measures” be used against a disarmed Armenian labor battalion. “Severe measures” was a euphemism for the killing actions carried out by the Turkish-government-sponsored Special Organization bands. Others, such as German artillery officer Major Eberhard Wolffskeel, participated more directly. Wolffskeel single-handedly laid waste to the Armenian section of Ufra, home to 25,000 Armenians, after the Turks were unable to overwhelm barricades erected by Armenians attempting to stave off deportation.

Dadrian does note, however, that a number of German officials in Turkey objected to the Armenian genocide and German involvement in it. Consular field representatives sent frantic reports detailing the ongoing slaughter of the Armenians to the German main office in Istanbul. The information, upon which the field representatives pleaded for action, was either suppressed or ignored. Those German officials who attempted to intervene actively on behalf of the Armenians encountered reprimands from their superiors.

Sanction of the Armenian genocide by Germany extended to include rewards and aid to Turkish officials closely involved in the killings. A number of Turks received the Prussian Orders of the Black and Red Eagle and the Iron Cross from the German government. Furthermore, seven of the Young Turk leaders who masterminded the genocide found sanctuary in Germany after the war. They escaped Turkey with help from three high-ranking German military officers who provided assistance with the official knowledge of Berlin. Dadrian regards the decoration of the Turks and the extension of sanctuary to them as further demonstration of official German approval of the Armenian genocide and as a sign of moral bankruptcy.

Using Turkish and German state archives, Dadrian has constructed a case for German complicity in the Armenian genocide—and it is precisely his intent to build a case. The volume consists of two long legal briefs, each of which is approximately eighty pages, with supporting appendices. Dadrian chose to construct the volume in this manner because he wanted to identify by a prepon-

derance of evidence those Germans engaged in criminal acts and those who abetted the crimes. This format is more than a rhetorical strategy: Dadrian explicitly challenges German authorities on a legal and historical basis to assume moral responsibility for Germany’s role in the Armenian genocide.

This format has two distinct consequences for the reception of Dadrian’s work. First, the lack of a narrative structure or a basic explanation of the events surrounding the Armenian genocide severely hampers the advancement of Dadrian’s argument. The reader works too hard to understand the events being discussed and their implications. Consequently, the book lacks the power of works on the Holocaust that also document perpetrators, collaborators, and criminal acts, but which do so in a compelling, readable manner. Second, the legal-brief format and overt moral agenda raise questions about Dadrian’s use of evidence. By its very nature, a brief utilizes only those facts that support a case and reduces opaque relationships to black-and-white terms. Dadrian’s work is very black and white—where appropriate, he identifies individuals as either perpetrators or co-conspirators and details the natures of their crimes. There are no gray areas. Dadrian also makes a weak attempt to connect the Armenian genocide to the Holocaust by using an appendix to list prominent Nazis who served in Turkey at the time of the former. While avoiding a blanket indictment of all Germans, Dadrian’s linkage of the Armenian genocide to the Holocaust in this manner implies an argument of continuity which he neither supports nor adequately explores. Moral indictments of participants in historical events should be accompanied by judicious handling of evidence.

Yet despite the volume’s flaws, the reader cannot help but be troubled by Germany’s actions regarding the Armenian genocide. In a position of superior power, Germany made a conscious decision to support the genocidal program of its weaker ally. Germany was not a perpetrator, but it remains far removed from the position of bystander.

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