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AUSTRALIAN PRESS COVERAGE OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

1915-1923

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Masters of Arts

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

VAHE GEORGES KATEB

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

2003

Thesis Certification

I, Vahe G. Kateb, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts, in the Graduate School of Journalism, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institutions.

Vahe G. Kateb

9 May 2003

Abstract

Under the cover of WWI, the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire deported and exterminated the Armenian population from historical Armenia (Eastern provinces of modern day Turkey) and surrounding regions. However, since then, successive Turkish governments have denied any wrongdoing and blamed Armenians for their fate. The Australian press, as the only mass medium of the period, covered extensively the extermination of the Armenians. However today's press often refers to the same events ambiguously, using the word "alleged" and giving equal coverage to the Turkish denial of the events. In addition, "young turk" has become a complimentary phrase.

This thesis examines the coverage of the Armenian Genocide in the Australian press of 1915-1923. The newspapers examined are: *Age* and *Argus* (Victoria), *Brisbane Courier* (Queensland), *Mercury* (Tasmania), *Register Adelaide* (South Australia) and *Sydney Morning Herald* (New South Wales).

The aim of the thesis is to determine if Australian journalists of the period had appropriately covered the Armenian Genocide and if the coverage corresponded with the modern definition of genocide as stated in the United Nation's Genocide Convention (UNCG). The study compares news reports published on the Armenian Genocide with the acts of UNCG and finds that they had indeed communicated to the Australian public that Armenians were subjected to genocide. In the absence of the word "genocide" Australian journalists of early 20th century described the meaning of the word as "destroying a nation", "race extermination", "policy of extermination", "wiping out the Armenian nation" and other similar expressions.

The study also looks at censorship in Britain and Australia during WWI. From the wide coverage of the press it concludes that there were no restrictions imposed on the reporting of the Armenian Genocide. Another aspect covered was the religious factor. Armenians were often identified as “Christians”. The word defined a common denominator between the Australian reader and Armenians. Australia and Armenia were almost entirely Christian nations while Turks were Muslims who were physically and spiritually destroying (churches, monasteries, manuscripts, desecrating religious sites) the Armenian people. Thus, Christian churches were heavily involved in the relief effort of Armenian survivors and orphans.

The thesis also examines where Australians were getting the reports on the Armenian Genocide; how the reports appeared in the papers, the headlines of the reports and comparison between headlines and articles on atrocities attributed to Germans, and the extermination of the Armenians at the hands of the Turks. In addition, in the context of war propaganda the study finds that overall the newspapers had given wider coverage to atrocities attributed to Germans, while Turkish atrocities against Armenians had received adequate coverage but less prominence.

The thesis reveals the previously unknown fact that Australians had responded passionately to the plight of the survivors by founding a friendship society (Friends of Armenia) and relief society (Armenian Relief Fund).

This pilot study focuses only on the Armenian case. Future research should be expanded to include the Australian press reports of ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Christian elements, Assyrian and Greek in Turkey. Hopefully this will raise Australian journalists’ awareness to the level of their predecessors of early 20th century so that they will be able to

counteract the increasing pressure and denial campaign actively pursued by the Turkish Embassy and members of the Australian Turkish community.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge the resilience and sacrifices of my grandparents, who somehow survived the genocide and found the inner courage, despite their ordeal and heavy losses, to continue life and form a family. Their silent existence was an inspiration to me.

I like to thank my mother, Mary; and wife, Manush, who were patient, understanding and supportive while I was spending all my time studying and researching in the library neglecting them.

Special acknowledgement and appreciation to my supervisor, Dr Eric Loo, who has guided me through the maze of writing my first thesis.

Finally thanks to my friend Stavros Stavridis with whom I shared the passion of the events of WWI.

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Abbreviations

<i>AAP</i>	<i>Australian Associated Press</i>
<i>AFP</i>	<i>Agence France Press</i>
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
Anzac	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
<i>ARG</i>	<i>The Argus</i>
<i>BC</i>	<i>The Brisbane Courier</i>
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
<i>HER</i>	<i>The Herald</i>
HQ	Headquarters
<i>MCY</i>	<i>The Mercury</i>
NAA	National Archives of Australia
POW	Prisoner of War
<i>REG</i>	<i>The Register-Adelaide</i>
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
<i>SMH</i>	<i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i>
<i>TDN</i>	<i>Turkish Daily News</i>
UNCG	United Nations Convention on Genocide
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

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