

YETVART FICICIYAN, ED., *DER VÖLKERMORDAN DEN ARMENIERNIM SPIEGEL DERDEUTSCHSPRACHIGEN TAGESPRESSE, 1912–1922*, BREMEN: DONATVERLAG, 2015, 447 PAGES.

ISBN 978-3-943425-51-2

Reviewed by Stefan Ihrig

*University of Haifa*

---

The German dimension of the Armenian Genocide has seen important contributions over the last decade. One could mention for example Rolf Hosfeld's *Operation Nemesis*.<sup>1</sup> But of course, one must also mention the activities related to the publication of source materials, first and foremost the endeavors of Wolfgang Gust in editing materials available in the German Foreign Office. The documents collected in Gust's volume are invaluable to the study and understanding of the Armenian Genocide, and now are available in English and Turkish (and online) as well.<sup>2</sup> These materials are still very actively ignored by denialists as they are not easy to discard. The question remains and remains unanswered by denialists: why would Germany, an ally of the Ottomans and much worried by all the moral and political implications of the genocide in progress, falsify documents attesting to something that the German diplomats themselves (largely) wanted to stop or at the very least saw as damaging and misguided?

But the German connection still has much more to offer, also by way of new source materials still waiting to be fully explored. One such source material are newspapers and other forms of public and printed discourse. There have been similar publications in and on other countries already; now with Yetvart Ficiyan's book we have something comparable for Germany as well.<sup>3</sup> In his 447-page book Ficiyan brings together many dozens of

---

1. Besides my own contribution, see also: Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik J. Schaller, eds., *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah* (Zurich: Chronos, 2002); Jürgen Gottschlich, *Beihilfe zum Völkermord: Deutschlands Rolle bei der Vernichtung der Armenier* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2015); Margaret Lavinia Anderson, "Who Still Talked about the Extermination of the Armenians? German Talk and German Silences," in Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göcek, and Norman M. Naimark, eds., *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 199–217; Rolf Hosfeld, *Operation Nemesis: Die Türkei, Deutschland und der Völkermord an den Armeniern* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 2005); Stefan Ihrig, *Justifying Genocide – Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

2. Wolfgang Gust, ed., *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/1916: Dokumente aus dem Politischen Archiv des deutschen Auswärtigen Amtes* (Springe, Germany: Zu Klampen, 2005); Wolfgang Gust, ed., *The Armenian Genocide – Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915–1916* (New York: Berghahn, 2014); Wolfgang Gust (ed.), *Alman Belgeleri Ermeni Soykırımı 1915-16* (Istanbul: Belge, 2012) as well as online at [www.armenocide.de](http://www.armenocide.de).

3. Cf. for example: Richard D. Kloian, ed., *The Armenian Genocide – News Accounts from the American*

newspaper articles from the period immediately before the genocide, beginning in 1912, up to the post-war years, ending with 1922. Having worked myself on the German printed discourse and often the very same newspapers and articles for many years, it is hard not to greatly appreciate the work that has flown into this publication as well as the incredible service it provides for future researchers.

The volume combines newspapers from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. This makes the volume more diverse, but not necessarily more representative of the trends of the time. For example the Swiss *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* had been at the avant-garde of reporting on the Armenians and had regularly featured extensive articles for some time already before World War I. During the Armenian Genocide itself the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* was arguably the best source in the German language of what was actually going on. The German and Austrian papers, on the other hand, were acting under official censorship as well as self-imposed self-censorship; they viciously attacked the Armenians for the course of the war and were, in any way, not able to offer balanced views. Interestingly enough, Swiss papers were available at newspaper stands in Germany's larger cities throughout the war. Thus German newspaper readers could have informed themselves on the ongoing genocide at the time through papers such as the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

The main contribution of this volume is perhaps something this reviewer has also attempted to do recently – to contradict two prevalent academic myths relating to the Armenian Genocide and the German dimension. The first, also grounded on previous, too narrowly focused analyses of the wartime press, was the idea that during the First World War censorship had prevented Germany's newspapers from discussing the Armenians.<sup>1</sup> The second dealt with the interwar period and the claim that Germany did not discuss the Armenian Genocide, even more that it did not come to terms with it and that this also contributed to the possibility of the Holocaust years later.<sup>2</sup> Ficiciyan's volume forcefully contradicts such legends by laying bare a series of articles from the war years and the early interwar period. It is true that censorship prohibited a balanced treatment of the Armenian Genocide and that de facto only anti-Armenian voices in the press were able to express themselves. But in the end and however skewed, there was a discussion of the Armenians. Often Ottoman propaganda was merely reproduced, sometimes German newspapers ventured farther and developed their own anti-Armenian discourse and logic. But it was an important topic in some phases of the war and any intelligent reader could have understood that the Germans and the Ottomans protested too much against allegations of wrongdoing for there not to have been something larger going on than atrocities and resettlement. Similarly Ficiciyan's collection shows that in the period after the war there was quite some debate on the Ar-

---

*Press, 1915-1922* (Berkeley: Antio Printing, 1985).

1. Elizabeth Khorikian, "Die Behandlung des Völkermordes an den Armeniern in der deutschen Presse und Literatur um 1915-1925," in Armenuhi Drost-Abgarjan, ed., *Armenologie in Deutschland* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 159-172.

2. Wolfgang Gust, "Die Verdrängung des Völkermordes an den Armeniern – Ein Signal für die Shoah," in Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominik Schaller, *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah*, 463-480.

menian genocide – I go as far as to claim that there was a great German genocide debate in the years from 1919 until 1923. Ficiciyan republished here a selection of important articles from these years. The idea that Germany failed to come to terms with the Armenian Genocide is true, but only in so far as we would expect coming to terms to involve strong condemnations and some sort of moral learning. This was not the case. By the end of 1921, after a markedly pro-Armenian period directly following the trial of Talât Pasha's assassin, many German nationalist papers went on to even justify genocide outright.

Another fascinating contribution of this volume is the spotlight it throws on the period immediately before the genocide. In the first part of the book the years from 1912-1914 are covered for which the editor has found a wealth of articles and longer essays in the German-language press. The almost 150-pages of materials on this period convey a sense of heightened urgency of the Armenian Question before the First World War that contrasts sharply with how the years before are often portrayed in the main narratives of the Armenian Genocide. Perhaps this first chapter alone should serve as a call to further investigate these crucial years.

One could criticize Ficiciyan for missing some major articles and debates of the years that are covered in the volume. Especially blatant is the absence of Theodor Wolff's highly important editorial in the summer of 1919 when the so-called Lepsius documents were published – the documents from the German Foreign Office on the genocide.<sup>3</sup> Similarly the volume missed some of the larger debates during World War I itself.<sup>4</sup> However, given the absolute dearth of studies on the German newspapers and the Armenian Genocide, this would be an unfair criticism. But it should stand as a warning to the reader who might think that the volume is comprehensive and the last word on the German-language newspapers and the Armenian Genocide. Germany was highly attuned to the Armenian topic and highly entangled with Ottoman affairs in these years; it is an even broader and richer field than this book might suggest. But this should not deflect from the fact that this a highly important and welcome book. It should be but the beginning of more exploration, of more activities towards understanding how, in the era of the telegraph and modern mass (media) societies, a genocide could unfold, be discussed in the daily press, even to great extents, and yet lead to nothing more than often phony condemnations, or as I have shown and is documented also in this volume, to justifications for genocide.

---

3. Theodor Wolff, untitled daily commentary, *Berliner Tageblatt*, 28 July 1919.

4. Stefan Ihrig: "Lord Bryce and the Armenian Genocide in German wartime propaganda," in Stefan Ihrig, ed., *The Armenian Genocide and the World*, special issue of the *Journal of Levantine Studies* 2 (2015): 51-70.