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## ALL THE HEROES DESERVE REMEMBRANCE

By Robert Fisk

'Many survivors of the Armenian genocide have told me of  
courageous Turks who saved the lives of their families'

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**O**n Turkish television a few days ago, an extraordinary event took place. A Turkish writer and historian lectured his people on the facts, the reality of the Armenian Holocaust of 1915. In front of a nationwide audience, Dr Taner Akcam advised penitence. "If you can't bring yourself to describe it as genocide, call it a massacre," he said. "But it was a crime against humanity... Ask forgiveness from the Armenian people and... make a commitment that in Turkey, political dissent and disagreement should no longer be treated as an offence."

These were not easy things for a Turkish audience to hear. From their schooldays, Turks are taught that the Armenian community of Ottoman Turkey betrayed the empire by siding with the Russians in the First World War, that Armenian deaths on the great deportations from Turkey were a by-product of civil unrest. The truth that one and a half million Armenians were deliberately destroyed by the Ottoman Turks in 1915, their men folk bayoneted, shot and drowned, their womenfolk raped and starved in government-organised deportations to the Syrian desert on the orders of Talaat Pasha is hidden from them. Any Turk who suggests otherwise is a traitor to the Turkish nation which gave him birth and to Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder of the Turkish state.

So of course, Dr Akcam was interrupted during the bitter six-hour Turkish television programme. "How dare you let this man speak? Shut him up!" came an imperious voice over a phone link-up. It was Semra Ozal, widow of former President Turgot Ozal of Turkey. But Dr Akcan did not give up. "Unless we distance ourselves from the perpetrators of this crime, which was a genocide [*soykirim* in Turkish], we will never be able to relieve ourselves of this terrible burden," he said. A brave man, Dr Akcam. So too, Yavuz Baydar, who in the same day's Turkish *Milliyet* newspaper wrote that he "was always convinced of the necessity to show courage and to take to task Talaat and company for their misdeeds... These men are our Pol Pots, Berias and Stalins, and the sooner we call these crimes to account, the better our chances of redeeming ourselves from this scourge of being accused of genocide."

These words are an indictment of the cowardice of the Blair Government, which tried to exclude the Armenian Holocaust from Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day in January and which eventually invited just 20 Armenians to attend. Mr. Blair, presumably mindful of Britain's strong economic link with Turkey as well as Turkey's role in NATO and its alliance with Israel ` wanted to stick to the political safety of post-1940 genocides. A letter from BBC producer Daniel Brittain-Catlin to an Armenian group in France, admitting that the Home Office would have "overall editorial control" of its coverage, in itself an astonishing statement from a BBC official, said that the outside broadcast "is likely to include some reference to, albeit briefly, the Armenian genocide."

"Albeit briefly". That was the best we could do for one and a half million Armenians. Messrs Akcal and Baydar were certainly braver than Mr Brittain-Catlin. But how should the Armenians respond? They have long demanded recognition of their suffering at the hands of the Turks. They have insisted that modern-day Turkey should admit what the Ottoman Turks did: they committed an Armenian Holocaust that was the precursor of the Jewish Holocaust less than a quarter of a century later.

But many of the survivors of the Armenian genocide have told me of individual courageous, honourable Turks who saved, or tried to save, the lives of their families. Not long before he died in Beirut, Zakar Berberian who was 12 at the time recalled the massacres at Marash in 1915, how he saw Turkish gendarmes drop babies on the stone flags of the streets; how, if the babies survived, the gendarmes picked the infants up by their feet and dashed their brains out on the stones, watched by their hysterical mothers. During the deportations, both his parents died of cholera. "I should have died," he said. "But a Turk gave me food to survive."

The ghosts of this tiny band of saviours pass through the pages of the massive Bryce report on the Armenian genocide, published by the British Foreign Office in 1916. Here we read of Arab villagers trying to feed the Armenians bundled towards Aleppo on railway freight wagons, shades of the European freight cars that would take another people to their annihilation less than three decades later, and of **Tahsin Bey**, governor of Erzerum in 1915. "About this time," two American witnesses recorded, "orders arrived by which Tahsin Bey was instructed that all Armenians should be killed. Tahsin refused to carry this out and, indeed, all through the time he was reluctant to maltreat the Armenians, but was overruled by 'force majeure'." Elsewhere, Tahsin Bey does not appear in this humanitarian light. But then, wasn't Oskar Schindler also a member of the Nazi Party?

Armenians themselves are taught at school of the brave governor of Aleppo, **Jelal Pasha**, who said he was a governor, "not an executioner," who said "it is the natural right of a human being to live." He saved thousands of lives. But it is the small man 'the good Turk' who occasionally shines out of the Bryce report. On the deportation to Ras al-Ain in 1915, Maritza Kedjedjian was a witness to the rape of young women by Kurds. "When they were going to carry off another girl," she wrote later, "I asked **Euomer Tchaoush**, a Mardin man, to help us." "Tchaoush" means he was a Turkish army corporal. Maritza goes on: "He stopped them at once and did not let them take [the girl] away... The Kurds from the surrounding villages attacked us that night. **Euomer**, who was in charge of us, immediately went up to the heights and harangued them in Kurdish, telling them not to attack us. We were hungry and thirsty and had no water to drink. **Euomer** took some of our [drinking] vessels and brought us water from a long way off... The wife of my brother-in-law... had a baby born that night. The next morning we started again. **Corporal Euomer** left some women with her and kept an eye on her from a distance. Then he put the mother and the new-born child on a beast, and brought her to us in safety."

Could there be a more moving story from the killing-fields of the Armenian Holocaust? And should the Armenians not commemorate it indeed, remember all those brave Turks who acted out of compassion and refused to obey orders? The Israelis long ago developed the fine principle of honouring the "righteous gentile," those men and women who at risk of their lives tried to save the victims of the 20th century's second Jewish Holocaust. Is it not time that the Armenians did the same? Though those Turks were painfully few in number, Armenians would be acknowledging the humanity of some of Ottoman Turkey's citizens. And how would the Turks react? By refusing to honour these brave fellow Turks? Or by remembering their courage and thus by the same token accepting the fact of the Armenian genocide?

Dr. Akcam deserves such a gesture. So does the Turk who gave food to 12-year-old Zakar Berberian. And so does Corporal Euomer.

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