Justice After Demise

One of humanity’s greatest weakness is its arrogance. History is passed down to the children of its survivors. It serves the purpose of reminding future generations of the greatest feats of mankind, and its greatest flaws. Our elders hope that they enlighten their youth in an attempt to teach ethics and morality. From our ethics and morals, we develop justice. Following the events of the Holocaust, Allied Nations knew it was their moral responsibility to take action against one of the greatest offenses in human history. Could there truly be justice after genocide? I feel that it is impossible to have justice after genocide because of its capacity of human destruction.

As the son of Turkish immigrants, I grew up in a household filled with culture. From an early age, my parents pushed my country’s culture onto me by making me participate in folk dancing, instrument playing, and, for a brief period, re-learning the language I had forgotten. I recall my lessons on the history of Turkey being very brief, mostly touching on the aspects of the formation of the Republic of Turkey. My parents and many of my elders placed great emphasis on the “Founding Father” of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. They noted his works as a renowned revolutionary and politician. They mentioned the various social, economic, and political reforms that he created. He was recognized by almost all Turks as the most flawless man in existence. My parents used him as a model for the person I should aspire to be; someone that is accepting of others, someone that could unite people, someone that could overcome adversity. His ethics and ideologies were remembered for many generations, but the Armenian Genocide, which occurred in Turkey, was forcibly forgotten among the Turks.

Sometime afterwards, when I entered my adolescence, I was always fascinated by European history. What interested me most about European history was the wars. Many Europeans, although physically similar, would be split apart from each other culturally just because they were raised on opposite sides of rivers, mountains, and plains. They would ravage war against each other to preserve and enforce their own sense of beliefs and ideologies. Although it may seem barbaric hundreds or thousands of years ago for people to selflessly kill
their own brothers and sisters because of their beliefs, many forget the genocides that have occurred over the last century. Genocides are fairly recent in our history. Many survivors of the Holocaust are the grandparents or great-grandparents to the youth of today. After 70 years, we are still able to listen to oral stories about a survivor’s experience in camps. It has become a large part of our culture. We have learned about the atrocities of faced by many minorities during the holocaust, as well as the moral disregard by the Nazi party. In 1948, the newly formed United Nations set out to define the definition of their newly discovered atrocity, genocide: “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” [1]. The thousands of culprits responsible for causing the genocide fled, but, during the Nuremburg Trials, significant figures in the Nazi party faced prosecution. Great action was taken to make this event well known. When I had later discovered the Armenian Genocide by my country, I had questioned why own country rejected to acknowledge their genocide like the Germans had.

The Armenian Genocide served as a dark period for Turkey's history. To briefly give a background, during the First World War, the Ottoman Empire had terrible stability and, like a house of cards, was vulnerable to any force. Like the Holocaust, a new nationalistic, “progressive” movement, The Young Turks, easily took over the nation, hoping to create new political policies. The Armenians, who had faced threats and mass murder before, were hopeful, thinking that this new party would consider supporting minorities such as themselves. Unfortunately, The Young Turks forced the elimination of 2 million Armenians. 1.5 million Armenians were killed in the conflict [2]. After the war, with the end of the Young Turks and the formation of the Republic of Turkey, the Armenians remained a forgotten people. Their lands were never regained, the lives lost were never mourned for, and memorials were not built. Post-WWII, the United States formed an alliance with Turkey to prevent the spread of Communism. After entering NATO in 1952, Turkey had become strong enough to hold its own opinions without being questioned. Since the formation of its Republic, Turkey has not formally recognized the Armenian Genocide [3].

On the contrary, Germany has made great strides to accomplish justice. But what defines justice? The definition of justice is “the quality of being just; righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness” [4]. Powerful allied nations, who had assisted with the re-establishment of a "New Germany", tried nearly 200 people for conspiracy, crimes against peace, war crimes, and
crimes against humanity. They were given trials to show to the public that these trials were created not to establish a just punishment for the culprits, but to impose the idea that people must realize the true loss of morals behind these genocides, so that future generations would not follow the same order. Several generations later, most western nations follow this idea by incorporating the memories of genocide into our culture through education, memorials, and organizations. Whenever genocide occurs, western nations and relief groups do not hesitate to assist the injured. While this info shows that justice can be achieved after genocide, I have to disagree with this statement.

In contrast, I feel that it is not possible to have justice after genocide. When I had previously discussed the Armenian Genocide in this essay, I mentioned their loss of homes during the genocide and lack of reparations. If Turkey had recognized the genocide and paid for reparations towards the ancestors of Armenians who died in the genocide, could Turkey claim that justice has been achieved? No. Before this event, most Armenians had lived comfortably in areas that they called home. They lived their lives, often following daily orders. They were human. Humans have a primitive mindset for their survival. When someone appears out of the ordinary or interferes with their way of living, they will feel threatened. When Armenians were transported away from their homes and killed, they encountered strong forms of stress. Armenian survivors carried this “stress” throughout their entire lives in an illness that would later be referred to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Many would never be able to properly integrate into society again. They would find many difficulties when looking for jobs or establishing relationships. They would spend the rest of their lives in a melancholic state. This stress is paired with the loss of people. Spouses, parents, children, other relatives, and friends are forever lost in the Genocide. Countries could make reparations to victims, but victims will never be able to see their loved ones, nor will they recover from their trauma. This trauma is not limited to the victims of the Armenian Genocide. Among all the genocides in the 20th century, victims have suffered the trauma of human slaughter.

Justice after genocide is impossible. Survivors of genocides face psychological effects, causing them to behavior much differently than they had before their genocide. Although justice cannot be completely established, I feel that most countries should still recognize their atrocities against the human race in order to improve morality and ethics. The Nuremberg Trials showed
the recognition of the moral rights that humans must follow. It would prove successful many generations later as we still remember to respect other humans in their time of need.

MLA Cited Works


