

Jahn Otto Johansen, *Folkemordet på armenerne (The Armenian Genocide)*, Minoritetsbiblioteket V Kultur og Utenriks, Oslo, 2015, 143 pages.

In light of the 100th year commemoration of the Armenian Genocide on April 24, 2015, the prominent Norwegian journalist, newspaper editor, author and Professor of Media at Oslo University, Jahn Otto Johansen (born 1934), has written the book *Folkemordet på armenerne* ("The Armenian Genocide").

Presumably because of fear of irritating the international diplomatic community, not a single major book publisher in Norway would publish Johansen's new book, but the Pen Club, supported by Fritt Ord, financed the project.

Johansen contributed to financing the book himself by selling his own house in Drobak, Norway, and using the Prisoner's Testament Peace Award given by Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and Aktive Fredsreiser/Travel for Peace AS, which he had earned for his tireless work against suppression and discrimination.

There have been many books about the genocide, the second-most-studied case of genocide in history. This book will give Norwegian society an opportunity to be acquainted with the documentary data and analytical comments on the Armenian Genocide.

The book is not just another book for researchers and people with a special interest, but is meant to be a book anyone can read. It is a thin book, less than 150 pages, that is easy for anyone to read, which has also been one of the goals.

In addition, it is a contextually rich book about Armenia and the Armenian Genocide. It seeks to explain the reasons behind the genocide, how it happened and what it led to. But it is also about the political situation in Turkey and the rest of the region today, and how Turkey tries to deny that the genocide ever happened.

Johansen touches on many topics, and gives many different examples when it comes to Armenian history, art and culture, as well as the genocide, definitions and juristic matters.

In the book Johansen mentions the unwillingness of the Republic of Turkey, the successor to the Ottoman Empire, to recognize the Armenian Genocide, which, according to Johansen, was genocide in its most severe expression and must not be denied. What the Armenians underwent is unambiguously genocide, which is legal a category with legal consequences. In fact Turkey also pressures and bribes other countries not to recognize the genocide.

As Johansen writes: "*There has never been any doubt in my soul that we must not forget the Armenian genocide. The horrible fate of the Armenians was not an isolated phenomenon. It is linked to a long tradition of persecution and genocide. People from all around the globe must gain insight into this crime, or we will not be able to break away from the circle of evil*" (p. 136).

The Turkish government acknowledges that during World War I many Armenians died, but does not accept that the deaths were the result of a systematic plan to destroy the Armenians. They counter that Muslim Turks died as well,

claim that the number of Armenian victims has been inflated, and state that massacres were committed by both sides as a result of inter-ethnic violence and the wider conflict of World War I.

However, the overwhelming majority of historians as well as academic institutions on Holocaust and Genocide Studies recognize the Armenian Genocide.

As of 2014, the governments of twenty-two countries, including Russia, France, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as forty-three states of the United States of America have recognized the events as 'genocide'. International organizations officially recognizing the Armenian Genocide include the European Parliament, Council of Europe, World Council of Churches, Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, and Mercosur.

One of the people Johansen mentions in the book is Raphael Lemkin (1900–1959), a Polish lawyer best known for his work against genocide, who migrated to the United States in 1941. Lemkin coined the word genocide from the root words *genos* (Greek for family, tribe, or race) and *-cide* (Latin for killing) in 1943. However, the concept of the crime, which later evolved into the idea of genocide, was based on the Armenian Genocide and prompted by the experience of Assyrians massacred in Iraq during the 1933 Simele massacre.

However, Johansen emphasizes that the book is not directed against the Turks or the Turkish people, although President Erdoğan aggressively denies the genocide. The Turkish people, according to Johansen, suffer today under Erdoğan's suppression, which not only affects writers and journalists, such as Hrant Dink and Orhan Pamuk, both mentioned in the book, but also everyday citizens, not least the youth.

According to Johansen, Erdoğan follows a Neo-Ottoman political line and *“works hard to make Turkey more Islamic and less secular. He has turned his back to the West and is trying to establish Turkish leadership in a radicalized Muslim world”* (p. 8).

The opposition, who liken Erdoğan to the sultan and the Prime Minister Davutoğlu to his grand vizir, see this as an *“attempt to make the country into a regional superpower with the Sunni-Islamic Ottoman Empire as a paradigm”* (p. 8).

One of the most important targets of the Erdoğan government is the independent media. Very large numbers of newspaper journalist and TV commentators have been arrested for criticizing the government, and these journalists have been kept in prison without any charges filed.

In a supplement describing the situation 100 years ago, the book also makes connections to the situation in the region today. According to Johansen, there is a red line from the Armenian Genocide, which resulted in one to one and a half million deaths, to the Jewish Holocaust and the extermination of Gypsies as well as to massacres by ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), which Turkey partly supports today.

Johansen not only criticizes Turkey, but also the Western powers, like the United Kingdom, Germany and France, and their war crimes. These have been too busy playing their own power games, and have been reluctant to do anything.

He quotes an Armenian saying about the situation for the minorities in Syria and Iraq today that *"History repeats itself. The US did not intervene in time, because these minorities did not mean as much to them as oil, gas, and other strategic interests. During the First World War it was not in the interests of Great Britain, France or Russia to sacrifice anything for the Armenians. They would not do anything at all to help us"* (p. 63).

Johansen also mentions the Armenian resistance, a name given to the military and political activities of the Armenians against the Ottoman Empire during World War I, considered a struggle for freedom and resistance to the Armenian Genocide by the Armenian combatants but high treason by the Ottoman Empire. However, there is no doubt that the goal of the Genocide was to finally solve the so-called "Armenian Question", which meant the extinction of the Armenian people.

There were previous instances of Armenian resistance within the Ottoman Empire, like the Zeitun Resistance, the Defense of Van, the Urfa Resistance, and the Shabin-Karahisar uprising in 1915. Johansen mentions the heroic defense of Musa Dagħ at the beginning of the Armenian Genocide. The story is featured in the well known book *The Forty Days of Musa Dagħ* written in 1933 by the Austrian-Bohemian writer Franz Werfel.

Johansen writes that *"I have often praised the Germans for the fact that they, more than any other European people, have made a break with their past. Not in any other capital was one of the most central plots of land been used to raise a gigantic monument to the country's own crimes – Holocaust Mahmmal by The Brandenburg Gate in Berlin"* (p. 136).

In Turkey the situation is quite different. The concept of a cultural genocide, the acts and measures undertaken to destroy any nations or ethnic groups, has not yet been accepted into the 1948 UN Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of Genocide. However, the word 'Genocide' coined by Raphael Lemkin not only refers to the physical extermination of a national or religious group, but also its national, spiritual and cultural destruction.

That is exactly what Turkey has done to the Armenian nation. Turkey's politics of culture genocide is simple. After dispersing the Armenian people, the Turkish intentions are to completely bury their presence, thus erasing any future claims to the land. Cultural genocide against the Armenian heritage on the territory of Turkey continues, and the rest of the world does nothing, or too little, to prevent it. It is happening, and the whole world is watching.

One can conclude from the book that the whole world has to be united against attempts at genocide, and not be led by strategic considerations about natural resources, control and power. Rather, the world should be united in the battle for justice, freedom and peace.

We have to recognize and condemn the Armenian Genocide, and make sure that Turkey does not continue its politics of denial. In the long run such a thing will not only honor the victims of the genocide, but make it possible for Turkey and Armenia to build bridges and together create a future of prosperity.

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