



Angel Of Aleppo Is A Story For Today...

My novel Angel of Aleppo is a story for today, despite it being set over a hundred years ago. While it is ultimately about how the power of love allows survival against well-nigh impossible circumstance, it is also about the perennial suffering of the small and relatively helpless against the juggernaut of persecution and exploitation.

There is little material gain to be had as a return on providing help for Armenia, an uncomfortable truth that concerns small, unimportant nations and their human rights. Every living Armenian is affected to this day by the unaccounted-for mass killings of 1.5 million Armenians from 1915-22 by Ottoman Empire Turks and their hired Kurdish thugs, their surviving community ignored in the wash-up by the Versailles powerbrokers and border-bargainers.

Modern-day Turks deny their crimes against Armenians of a century ago and the leaders of the civilised world do little to call them and their lapdogs in Azerbaijan out over continued neo-genocidal behaviours against Armenia. And because of the accident of oil around Baku that enriches the Azeris, they can get away with it.

For many centuries the Armenian homeland sat at the crossroads of East and West on the Silk Road between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, invaded and conquered time and time again to the point that Armenians no longer owned their own sovereign land, but found themselves by the nineteenth century spread diaspora-style throughout the Ottoman Empire, and in locations ranging from Venice to Paris.

Interior Talaat Pasha ordered the long-planned, systematic killings of Armenians to begin on April 24, 1915, murders that would continue throughout Anatolia for the duration of World War One and beyond it. Talaat's twisted motives included a desire for ethnic cleansing and removal of the non-Islamic element of Ottoman society. It echoed on a much broader scale the massacres in Armenian village quarters throughout the latter stages of the nineteenth century ordered by the increasingly demented Sultan Abdul Hamid II, before the political rise of the 'Young Turks' consigned the aged ruler to figurehead status only.

After the Ottoman surrender to the Allies in 1918, the sole undefeated Ottoman General Mustafa Kemal rallied the surviving troops in Anatolia and single-mindedly called on them to resist the Versailles-ordained break-up of the Ottoman Empire. Significant in Kemal's actions from 1919-22 was the continued murdering of Armenians, while resisting British, French, Italian and Greek occupation and stealing untold amounts of ancestral Armenian family property and gold.

When opening his inaugural Turkish Republic parliament as its founding president, Kemal drilled into his Cabinet of fellow war criminals the maxim that in the coming years there would be accusations about mass killings of Armenians, but the official position would be: bad things happen in war. This became the official Turkish position, and it has remained the same since then.

International indifference to Armenia became set in stone after the collapse of the Treaty of Sevres in 1920. Instead of Armenia being guaranteed fair borders, independent nation status and their own homeland in what was once an ancient empire to rival that of Rome, Armenia's under-sized, short-lived, land-locked republic of 1920 was incorporated into the new USSR.

In addition, Joseph Stalin, oblivious to the truths of Armenian history, bribed stateless Tartar tribes around the Caspian Sea with the ancestral Armenian lands of Artsakh immediately east of modern Armenia, from then on to be part of new Soviet member republic Azerbaijan.

The pan-Turkic people of Baku and surrounds took the bone that Stalin threw them. They began increasingly methodical acts of cultural genocide over the century that followed, erasing the truth, obliterating evidence of Armenian culture from the map by vandalising

ancient Armenian Christian relics and monasteries of Artsakh. Azeri persecution of Armenians in this territory has continued until the present.

Nowadays, the very word 'genocide' is banned from verbal discourse in Türkiye. In January 2007 Turkish-Armenian journalist and reconciliation advocate Hrant Dink was murdered for daring to suggest genocide recognition. His killer walked free.

By the genocide's 2015 centenary some 28 European and South American nations had acknowledged the Turkish atrocities as genocide, each provoking anger in Ankara. On the 106th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide commemoration, under intense American-Armenian diasporan lobbying, US President Biden proclaimed: 'each year on this day, we remember the lives of all those who died in the Ottoman-era Armenian Genocide.' But American recognition is foiled by the NATO alliance and its geopolitically driven military presence in the Republic of Türkiye.

Continued anti-Armenian aggression from Türkiye and its puppet-ally Azerbaijan and absence of interest from neoliberal agenda-driven global mainstream media come as no surprise, but Azerbaijan's 2020 September 27 to November 10 war, a military action backed by Türkiye, was a modern-day outrage of genocidal intent of which only a minimal percentage of the greater world population was even aware. With Syrian mercenaries allegedly on a pro rata bounty based on Armenians killed, the Azeris succeeded in taking back lands between Artsakh and Armenia lost in the 1991-94 territorial war following the breakup of the Soviet Union.

The sole road through Azerbaijan in and out of Armenia, known as the Lachin Corridor, was blocked in mid-December 2022 by Azeri troops, cynically characterising themselves as 'concerned environmentalists'. It denied Armenians in Artsakh food, medical supplies and even running water, ultimately driving most of them from their homes.

On February 22, 2023, the International Court of Justice ruled that Azerbaijan should guarantee free movement along the Lachin Corridor, but - unlike the Ukrainian struggle against Russian invasion - no practical international assistance was forthcoming. The United States and France criticised Azerbaijan's establishment of a checkpoint on the Lachin Corridor and called for free movement of people and commerce along the route. Both nations confined themselves to mild diplomatic rebukes over these flagrant abuses of human rights.

Azerbaijan succeeded by late 2023 in ousting the majority of Arsakh's 120,000 population, which forced neighbouring Armenia to accommodate somehow an immediate and sudden refugee population explosion.

Armenia is under mounting pressure in the east from Azerbaijan's dictator Ilham Aliyev, who wants to create a checkpoint-free east-west corridor through Armenia's southern-most Syunik province to its exclave Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Aliyev is adept at rewriting history in his pronouncements, brazenly insisting that centuries-old ancestral Armenian lands were always those of Azerbaijan, despite the latter only being an actual independent nation since the 1990 Soviet breakup. And Türkiye sits on the other side of Armenia, behind a border closed for than a hundred years, cynically monitoring the small, impoverished republic's increasingly desperate struggles to remain independent.

My novel tells a story of one woman against a backdrop of genocide. But every Armenian family has a story. My desire is for readers who love a compelling story to embrace mine and become advocates for some justice for Armenia.

About Jon Cocks: Jon Cocks taught secondary Drama and English for many years. Angel of Aleppo, a Story of the Armenian Genocide is his first full-length novel. He has unpublished cartoon strips, a long list of credits in community theatre, a long-running TV ad, several one-act plays written for students and a novella about being a teacher called Duty of Care. Other than an enduring love affair with his Armenian-born wife Lilit, Jon loves books, theatre, movies, the Adelaide Crows, cricket, and wine.

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