Right to Arrive

Topographies of Genocide, Flight, and Hospitality – Then and Now

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One hundred years ago, Syria was a destination for Armenians driven out of Ottoman Turkey during the genocide that claimed between 600,000 and more than one million lives. Those who survived headed for Aleppo and places further east, where they sought sanctuary. Today, the mass movement of people is occurring in the reverse direction, as refugees flee conflict and oppression in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

The conditions that gave rise to the genocide in the early twentieth century differ from those motivating conflict in the Middle East now. Unchanged, however, are the large numbers of people driven from their homes by war and persecution. Many of the displaced are eking out an existence in Turkey; others attempt to cross the Aegean and the Mediterranean to reach Western Europe. Yet others die along the way.

The movement of refugees across this broad topography – from the Middle East to Western Europe – reminds us of the historically unstable identities of hosts and strangers, persecutors and persecuted. Those who were once hosts may now be estranged; those who were once strangers may now have the opportunity to be hosts.

Right to Arrive takes inspiration from Immanuel Kant's late-eighteenth-century ideas in order to think through host/stranger relations, arrival and hospitality practices, notions of cosmopolitanism, and the mediating role of art – then and now. Kant argued that strangers are not automatically entitled to stay in a place. They are, however, entitled to be temporarily taken in, particularly if returning them to their homes would endanger their lives. This principle is encoded in international humanitarian law as the principle of non-refoulement. Shifting the emphasis from the obligations of the host to the rights of the stranger, Kant stressed that hospitality is not a philanthropic act, nor is the stranger's condition one of indebtedness. The right to arrive must be upheld because, regardless of his or her identity, the stranger enjoys a basic human entitlement to seek out others and cultivate cos-

mopolitan bonds. Only by upholding and enacting this right to arrive will perpetual world peace, *ewiger Frieden*, be achieved (Kant, 1977, p. 214).

Refugee Movement through Turkey

We are experiencing a global displacement crisis of unprecedented scale. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, there are 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. Forty million of these people are displaced internally within their own countries, while 25.4 million are officially classified as refugees, and 3.1 million as asylum seekers. More than 50% of the refugees are children. It is often assumed that high-income countries bear the brunt of the refugee crisis, yet 85% of the world's displaced people are hosted by developing countries. Turkey is currently the leading host of refugees in the world, followed by Uganda, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Iran (UNHCR, 2018a).

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the Anatolian peninsula – roughly current-day Turkey – has seen waves of refugees and migrants (Blumi, 2013). Situated in close proximity to conflict-ridden and war-torn countries, and lying along trade routes connecting Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, its topography has long been criss-crossed by displaced people seeking refuge.

Turkey has been much impacted by the contemporary exodus from Syria. Since the beginning of the civil war, 5.6 million people have fled and 6.5 million are internally displaced (UNHCR, 2018c). Like the Ottoman Armenians internally displaced in the early twentieth century, present-day Syrians who relocate within Syria are not officially considered refugees. Those formally registered as refugees are hosted in neighbouring Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. At present, Turkey hosts 3.5 million refugees.

The lack of long-term prospects in host countries where refugees have found only temporary protection – combined with the desire for a better life – has prompted many displaced people to take to the Mediterranean, a major route for those trying to reach Europe. In 2015, the numbers of irregular migrants and asylum seekers attempting to reach Europe by sea peaked. Since then, approximately 1.6 million people have arrived by boat, with Greece, Italy, Spain, and Cyprus the main landing countries. Around 15,000 people are reported to have died or gone missing while attempting to reach safety (UNHCR, 2018b). The image of Alan Kurdi's body lying on a beach in western Turkey is still seared in public consciousness.

Although only a small proportion of the world's displaced head for Europe (Beauchamp, 2017), the EU is intensifying efforts to stem the flow. In March 2016, the EU reached a financial deal with the Turkish government to stop irregular migrants to Europe (Corrao, 2018). In consequence, Turkey has also been required to

tighten its borders and minimize the number of refugees trying to reach the EU via the Mediterranean. Like Lebanon and Jordan, Turkey now restricts border crossings, so that thousands are trapped at border gates. Other Western countries have adopted a similar approach. Australia, for example, deters the arrival of refugees through mandatory detention and the offshore processing of asylum claims.

Attempting to prevent migration does not solve the issue for any party. Instead, it infringes upon people's legal right to seek asylum and prolongs the refugee's plight. In consequence, 'Protracted refugee situations have become the norm rather than the exception' (İçduygu and Şimşek, 2016, p. 60). As is also the case in some other European countries, Turkey has been hosting a substantial number of refugees for an extended period of time. There is increasing pressure on transit infrastructures and host countries' legal and operational frameworks, while public opinion is not always in favour of admitting and integrating refugees. These strains have long-term implications for democratic processes in Europe and elsewhere and contribute to policies that violate refugees' legal and moral right to arrive.

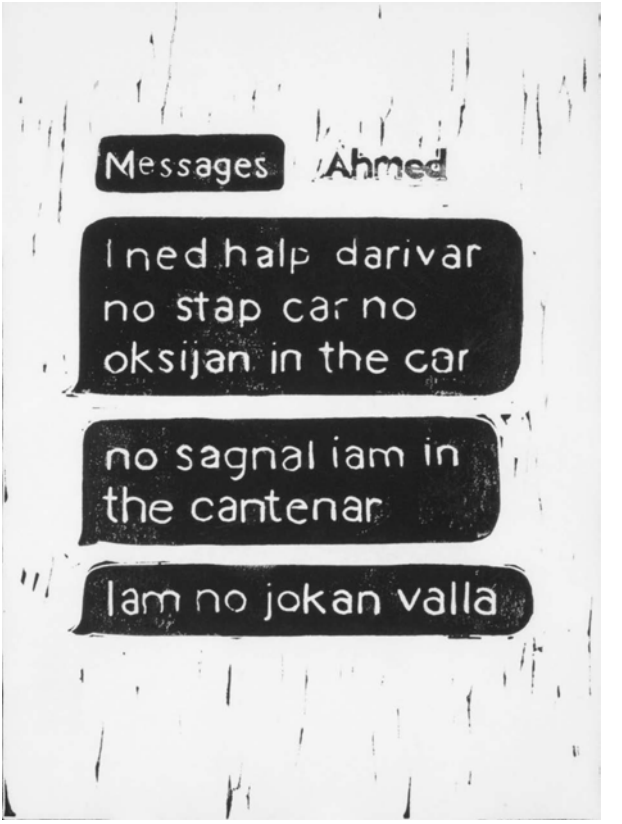
Worldly Possessions

'Worldly Possessions' explores the implications of reneging on the stranger's right to refuge and hospitality. These implications are epistemological, since failed encounters contribute to prejudicial forms of knowledge-making. They are also political, contributing to a Kantian state of 'perpetual war'. The installations make use of everyday objects such as children's board games, toy figures, and glassware to highlight the plight of civilians fleeing conflict. In the Brechtian sense, everyday objects constitute an alienated *mise-en-scène* for depicting refugee experiences. Plenitude is contrasted with scarcity, visibility with invisibility, and action with inaction. Conserved objects on display become metonyms for the preservation of life and the memorialization of loss.

'Kindertransport' uses the text message sent by Ahmed, a seven-year-old Afghan boy smuggled in a refrigerated lorry travelling from Calais to the UK in 2016: 'I need help, driver isn't stopping the car, no oxygen in the car. No signal. I am in the container. I am not joking. I swear by God.'

Linoleum printing – a handcraft medium with a restricted viewership – highlights disjunctions between, on the one hand, the ephemerality and limited impact of the refugee's plea for help and the urgency and exponential circulation of the message conveyed to a global audience, on the other. Historically specific modes of communication are hereby revealed to be central to the definition of who may belong and who may not. If war, sectarian conflict, poverty, and environmental degradation are the impetus for the global refugee crisis, media are one of its drivers.

Figure 3.1. Vanessa Agnew, Kindertransport, 2018, linoleum, mulberry paper.



Source: Jobst von Kunowski.

Plaques set among cobblestones are inscribed with details of the refugee's search for a new home: *Habibullah A. wanted to live here DOB 1983 Fled Afghanistan 10.2015 Denied housing in Berlin on 20.7.2016*. The plaques speak to fantasies of a place where the streets are paved in gold. At the same time, the plaques recall Gunter Demnig's Stolperstein ('stumbling stone') Project, which upholds the memory of those expelled and murdered under National Socialism. 'Refugee Plaque' invokes the Nazi past to draw attention to the situation refugees face in Europe today. Refused rental contracts, refugees from predominantly Muslim countries are often consigned to inadequate emergency accommodation for long periods of time.

Figure 3.2. Vanessa Agnew, Refugee Plaque, 2016, granite, brass flashing.

Source: Jobst von Kunowski.

Second World War refugees are shown carrying their possessions and pulling a handcart – miniature figures arranged in spiral formation around the inside of a glass teapot. Their exilic journey occurs in full transparency, a plight visible within the context of ritualized daily life, represented by the accoutrements of tea consumption. As a result of this disjunction, the refugees' spiral course acquires an inevitability – it is a journey that lacks a *telos*. Without the possibility of arrival or hospitality, the refugees remain perpetual strangers.

Figure 3.3. Vanessa Agnew, Fleeing, 1945, 2015, glass teapot, model figures.

Source: Jobst von Kunowski.

Figure 3.4. Vanessa Agnew, Refugee Ludo, 2017, game set, modelling clay.

Source: Jobst von Kunowski.

Similar to the game Ludo, Mensch ärgere Dich nicht (Man, don't get annoyed!) is a popular German board game dating from the First World War. A player advances game pieces around the board through the roll of a die, winning when all

his or her pieces reach 'home', but losing ground when an opponent's piece lands on his or her own. The installation transforms game pieces into refugee figures, whose abjection is reinforced by the arbitrariness of their enforced translocation. The frustration implied in 'Mensch ärgere Dich nicht!' raises questions about spectatorship and agency. While refugees are evaluated for inclusion or exclusion on the grounds of politically expedient criteria, the installation reinforces the substitutability of the individual within a system of refugee quotas. Further, it raises questions about current global refugee crises and the invisible hand of national and transnational bureaucracies.

Figure 3.5. Vanessa Agnew, Then and Now, 2017, acrylic box, backgammon set, brass plaque, prayer beads, coin, paper, mobile phone.

Source: Jobst von Kunowski.

A backgammon set and *tasbih* (a set of prayer beads) are overlaid with a 'night letter' (a death threat issued by the Taliban), invalid travel documents, a mobile phone, assorted currency from countries along the refugee route, and a worn photograph. The installation creates a palimpsest of everyday objects that reflects the changing reality of a refugee's life. Leisure and an orderly existence within a community have given way to a sense of insecurity, transience, statelessness, and fractured identity.

'Wanderlust Life Jacket' uses a found object – a life jacket abandoned by a refugee on a beach in Lesbos in 2016. Covered in souvenir travel patches from countries along the Balkan route, together with patches bearing aspirational slogans ('It's not the destination, it's the journey'), the installation highlights the difference in meaning of travel between people fleeing war and poverty and middle-

Figure 3.6. Vanessa Agnew, Wanderlust Life Jacket, 2017, life jacket, souvenir travel patches.

Source: Jobst von Kunowski.

class Westerners. The installation also highlights the discrepancy in opportunities for the young: self-realisation, adventure, and a self-congratulatory tone contrast with the struggle for mere survival. Moreover, the sheer volume of patches covering the jacket reinforces the length and arduousness of the journey undertaken by refugees, belying common assumptions about the ease with which people leave their homes.

The Concept of the Refugee against the Backdrop of the Armenian Genocide

The legal concept of the refugee dates to refugee flight and a genocide perpetrated one hundred years ago. There is a close relationship between ethno-religious separation, displacement, and genocide, since genocide may arise from what begins as 'a scheme to "remove" a group *en masse* from a particular locale' (Levene, 2011, p. 56). Around the turn of the century, the Ottoman government turned against a group of its own citizens, Armenians, perceiving them as a security threat and as an obstacle to the ethnic homogenization and Turkification of the country (Kévorkian, 2011, p. 244). The government ordered the deportation of Ottoman Armenians to a distant and hostile part of the empire, knowing full well that they would not survive at their destination (Suny, 2015, pp. 269-270; Dündar, 2011, pp. 276-277). The deportation was part of a genocidal calculus that sought to annihilate Ottoman Armenians through massacres, death marches, exposure to the elements, disease, and sexualized violence (Akçam, 2012, p. 193).

Survivors of the genocide became refugees within their own land and beyond. Yet their plight did not end with the conclusion of the First World War. 'The collapse of the repatriation provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres [which ultimately dissolved the Ottoman Empire], the multiple failures to establish an independent Armenian state, and the rise of Kemalist policies denying Armenians the right of return to their homeland and denaturalizing those living outside the borders of the newly constituted state' all deprived Armenians of state protection and made their refugeehood permanent (Watenpaugh, 2014, p. 168).[1] Surviving Armenians became stateless people in an emerging international refugee regime based on a nation-state system that consisted of entities which sought, above all, to protect their own sovereignty and to minimize refugee numbers. Under this new order, states erected barriers to asylum and created highly restrictive criteria that dictated who could receive refugee status (Gatrell, 2013, p. 53; Kushner and Knox, 1999, pp. 64-73).

By 1926, the number of refugees in Europe was estimated at 9.5 million, with another 20 million people internally displaced (Haddad, 2008, p. 99). In that decade, of all national communities, Armenians had the highest proportion of

1 Article 144 of the Treaty of Sèvres stipulated that 'the Turkish Government solemnly undertakes to facilitate to the greatest possible extent the return to their homes and re-establishment in their businesses of the Turkish subjects of non-Turkish race who have been forcibly driven from their homes by fear of massacre or any other form of pressure since January 1, 1914' (Martin, 2007, pp. 829-830). The same article annulled transactions undertaken since 1915 regarding 'abandoned properties' (*Emval-i Metruke*) and required the Turkish government to restore these movable and immovable properties to their owners, who were predominantly Ottoman Armenians (Onaran, 2013; Akçam and Kurt, 2012; Üngör and Polatel, 2011).

members of the community living as refugees (Haddad, 2008, p. 102). In the absence of reliable Ottoman population data, estimates of the number of Armenians who perished between 1915 and 1923 range from 600,000 to more than one million (Bijak and Lubman, 2016, p. 39). The League of Nations determined the number of stateless Armenians to be around 340,000 during the 1920s, a figure that does not include those who moved to the United States or resided in the Soviet Republic of Armenia (Watenpaugh, 2014, pp. 168-169). Hovanissian estimates that, as of 1925, some 275,000 Armenian refugees lived in the region that is now controlled by the current states of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran (quoted in Migliorino, 2008, pp. 31-32). Refugees also ended up in the Soviet Republic of Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, the Balkans, Western Europe, the Americas, and Australia. Nonetheless, the League of Nations' comprehensive settlement plan for the Armenians was not very successful (Holborn, 1939, pp. 127-128). As late as 1937, Michael Hasson, President of the Nansen International Office for Refugees of the League of Nations, reported that thousands of Armenian families were still not permanently settled (Hansson, 1937).

The genocide and subsequent conflicts between Turkish-Muslim and Armenian groups were thoroughly gendered. Armenian adult males were perceived as threats to security and massacred immediately. Women and children were thought lesser threats and forced to participate in death marches from Anatolia to the Syrian desert (Rowe, 2011, pp. 152-153). Many died on these journeys or in massacres. Some survived the marches to become refugees at the margins of the empire; others survived as a result of forced assimilation. Between 100,000 and 200,000 women and children were incorporated into Muslim households (Bjørnlund, 2009, p. 34). For a long time, there was a profound silence about these women and children, since their experiences did not fit into clear-cut narratives of survival (Altınay and Türkyılmaz, 2011).

Ottoman Armenian women and children were taken from their homes and transferred to other locations within their own country. This was not merely a spatial relocation, but part and parcel of the genocidal policy (Sarafian, 2010). Armenian women and children had to convert, change their names and, in effect, relinquish their 'Armenianness' in order to survive. The forced assimilation of Armenian women and children complicates the concept of the refugee, since internally displaced people are not formally considered refugees. Those who remained in Ottoman-controlled territory could not draw on legal protections accorded to refugees, since they had not crossed an international border. They were deprived of the protection of the state to which they belonged and were at the mercy of those who captured or adopted them.

By the end of the First World War, Syria and Lebanon, now under French mandate, had become an important centre for Armenian refugees (Migliorino, 2008). Not only did this region have the highest concentration of refugees, but many hu-

manitarian aid organizations worked there. The League of Nations and the French government ran settlement programmes for Armenian refugees in the territory (Gzoyan, 2014, pp. 92-101). In Syria and elsewhere, a large-scale campaign was established to support Armenian survivors (Rowe, 2011, p. 154). Armenian religious and secular organizations, such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union, led the campaign supported by the League of Nations through its multiple bodies, including the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and the American group Near East Relief (Watenpaugh, 2010; Watenpaugh, 2014). As news of the persecution spread, other countries like Australia also took part in relief efforts. Organizations such as the Armenian Relief Fund and Friends of Armenia collected donations, sent funds and goods, and supported orphanages in Syria and Lebanon (Babkenian and Crispin, 2017). These efforts, which mark the emergence of modern humanitarianism, sought to help as many refugees as possible to survive, to rescue Armenian women and children who had been absorbed into Muslim households, and to return them to their families and communities (Maksudyan, 2015; Ekmekçioğlu, 2013; Watenpaugh, 2010).

The Armenian refugee situation also helped to set legal precedent. Throughout the interwar period, Armenian and other refugees fleeing the Ottoman Empire were at the centre of international legal thinking about refugeehood (Lochak, 2013). Together with the plight of Russians fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution and the ensuing civil war, the predicament of Armenian refugees was crucial in establishing refugee status as an internationally recognized legal category in the 1920s. Between 1920 and 1935, various measures were undertaken that aimed to provide refuge to those deprived of state protection. During this period, 'refugee' was defined in terms of membership of a specific group that had, for one reason or another, lost the protection of its own state. As Hathaway argues (1984, p. 358), this corresponded to the initial phase in a tripartite evolution in social and legal thinking about refugee status. First, Russian and then Armenian refugees were defined in this juridical and *ad hoc* way (Hathaway, 1984, p. 358). Then, between 1935 and 1939, a *social* approach to defining refugeehood dominated (Hathaway, 1984, p. 361). In this approach, refugees were defined as 'the victims of broad-based social and political upheaval, whether or not there were problems of international legal status' (Hathaway, 1984, p. 361). Membership in a targeted group continued to be a criterion of refugeehood (Hathaway, 1984, p. 370). And, according to Hathaway, from 1938 to 1950 refugee rights were further codified in international law, primarily in an individualized fashion through 'consideration of the relationship between a particular individual and his [sic!] State' (Hathaway, 1984, p. 370). The Holocaust and, subsequently, the Cold War were crucial contexts for defining the refugee against a backdrop of increasing geopolitical polarization (Goodwin-Gill, 2014, pp. 52-53; Moorehead, 2006, pp. 25-28).

Amidst the current unprecedented crisis of global human displacement, almost one hundred years after the emergence of the refugee as a legal concept, the international community still fails to adequately protect refugee rights. Refugee law is constantly flouted as states deny people the right to cross international borders – a legal requirement when applying for asylum (Haddad, 2008, p. 26). Moreover, the label of refugee has, since its inception, embodied numerous contradictions: it simultaneously undermines refugees' agency while according them individual rights (Haddad, 2008, pp. 34-39).[2] State and non-state actors rely on temporary responses rather than permanent solutions and insist on the possibility of refugees' 'safe return'. Increasing numbers of refugees are relegated, for ever-longer periods of time, to liminal spaces. There, they languish at the margins – if not completely outside – of our moral universe.

Armin T. Wegner (1886–1978)

Born in Wuppertal, Germany, Armin T. Wegner was a writer, poet, and human rights defender. At the beginning of the First World War, Wegner volunteered for military service and, in the spring of 1915, was assigned to the German medical mission to the Ottoman Empire under Trützschler von Falkenstein. Between April and August of 1915, Wegner was stationed in Istanbul, Rodosto, and Gallipoli, but that summer he fell ill with typhoid and was sent to Pera (Istanbul) to be treated at the German military hospital. During his stay there, Pastor Hans Bauernfeind informed him that Armenians were being deported. Later a Swiss merchant gave Wegner similar information. While on leave Wegner travelled as far as Konia to determine whether the rumours were true, before returning to Berlin (September–October 1915) to convalesce. With the disbandment of Trützschler von Falkenstein's mission in November of that year, Wegner joined the Sixth Ottoman Army under the command of Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz. Von der Goltz was in Baghdad to organize troops at the front against the British forces. Here Wegner again fell ill and witnessed the death of von der Goltz from typhus. In the autumn of 1916, Wegner was recalled to Germany and travelled from Baghdad back to Berlin (Meier, 2011, pp. 155-158).

Wegner first learned of the deportation and killing of Ottoman Armenians during the summer of 1915 and travelled to Konia to witness this for himself (Meier, 2011, p. 156). Konia, which lay on the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, was the site of a concentration camp that had been established for Armenian deportees awaiting onward displacement by train (Kaiser, 1998, pp. 72-75). During wartime it was difficult to receive and distribute information about events in Asia Minor, since Ar-

2 For a discussion of terminology, see Maksudyan (2019) and Levin (2016).

menians and foreign missionaries were expressly prohibited from using the postal services. Soon missionaries' access to the telephone and telegraph was cut off as well, and the diplomatic missions of neutral states were banned from encrypting telegrams (Anderson, 2011, p. 204). When Wegner returned to Germany in September–October 1915, he contacted people who might have been able to help him to distribute information to the German public. This group included the editor-in-chief of the *Berliner Tageblatt* (Meier, 2011, p. 157). Wegner's efforts, however, were to little avail and he found it difficult to raise sufficient public awareness of the Armenians' predicament. Others whom he approached, including Johannes Lepsius, Paul Rohrbach, and Martin Rade, were already engaged in efforts to support Armenians. The theologian Lepsius had recently returned from an eye-opening visit to the Ottoman capital, where he met the Committee of Union and Progress leadership and registered its desire to solve the 'Armenian question' by any means. One of the first outcomes of Lepsius' efforts to draw attention to the genocide after his return was the publication of an anonymous article entitled 'The Extermination of a People' (*Die Ausrottung eines Volkes*) in the *Basler Nachrichten* in September 1915 (Hayruni and Hosfeld, 2017, pp. 233-34). Lepsius also informed his compatriots about the violence against Armenians in a piece published in the September-October issue of *Der Christliche Orient* (Kieser, 2011, p. 18). However, neither Wegner, nor Lepsius, nor anyone else was able to generate an effective platform for sharing news about the Armenian massacres.

Nevertheless, Wegner's findings contributed to a growing body of knowledge about the Ottoman exterminatory policies. Soon after the first deportations and massacres began, German consuls in the Ottoman territories sent detailed accounts about the annihilation of Armenians to the ambassador and to his superiors at the Foreign Office (Ihrig, 2016, pp. 105-138; Anderson, 2011, p. 205). As early as July 1915, the ambassador reported to the German chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, that the Ottoman government was pursuing a policy of destroying the Armenian community (Anderson, 2011, p. 205; Hosfeld, 2005, p. 251). Later that year Johannes Lepsius, addressing the German Press Association, reported on the state of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and relayed the conversation he had had the prior summer with Enver Pasha about the Armenians (Anderson, 2011, pp. 211-212).

There were other sources of information as well. The Ottoman government introduced the use of the railway to the history of modern genocide by deporting Armenians via sections of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway (Kaiser, 1998, p. 75). This meant that Franz J. Günther, the deputy general director of the Anatolian Railway Company, which operated the railway network in Asia Minor and Syria, had first-hand information about the massacres. In addition to protecting the company's Armenian skilled personnel and construction workers by resisting the Ottoman government's deportation orders, Günther sent many reports detailing the depor-

tation and murder of Armenians to his superiors at the Deutsche Bank in Berlin, who then relayed this information to the Foreign Office. Other company employees also collected evidence. Although Cemal Pasha, commander of the Fourth Ottoman Army, had strictly prohibited photographing Armenians, the company's employees took pictures that attested to the genocidal policies of the government (Kaiser, 1998, p. 77).

Informing the public was seen as contravening German national interests since the German government did not want to risk breaking with its Ottoman allies over the fate of the Armenians (Hosfeld, 2005, p. 254). In response to the ambassador's demand that the Ottoman government be sanctioned for its anti-Armenian policies, Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg clearly articulated the German position: 'Regardless of whether or not Armenians perish, our only goal is keeping Turkey on our side until the end of the war. In the event of a prolonged war, we will still very much need the Turks' (quoted in Hosfeld, 2005, p. 255, our translation). In keeping with this view, authorities at the Foreign Office suppressed news of the Ottoman crimes (Meier, 2011, p. 157). To make matters worse, those who tried to inform the German public about the genocide were denied a platform. As late as May 1916, the *Berliner Tageblatt* quoted the architect of the genocide: Talat Pasha claimed, in line with the official Ottoman position, that the Armenians were destroying the empire and that their deportation was thus a military necessity (Schaller, 2002, p. 529). In keeping with the instructions from Berlin, the German press proved willing to self-censor and largely avoided taking a critical stance against the Ottoman policies towards Armenians. The journalist Hellmut von Gerlach said that he learned about the Armenian massacres in a meeting with Wegner in October 1915 and had no difficulty confirming Wegner's reports among his colleagues. But, he added, this knowledge did not bring about change. On the contrary, 'Germany remained silent. Official censorship sealed our lips… So the best thing was to keep silent' (*Armin T. Wegner e gli Armeni in Anatolia,* 1996, pp. 49-50). Notwithstanding von Gerlach's claims, censorship was not watertight and, indeed, the German public had access to information in Dutch, French, English, Russian, and Swiss newspapers, which remained available. This has led historians to conclude that German elites did know about the Armenian genocide during the war (Anderson, 2011, p. 217). Even so, feeble talk about the genocide translated into neither an official condemnation nor a change of policy with regards to the extermination of Armenians.

Travelling to Baghdad in mid-November 1915 with von der Goltz's convoy, Wegner came into direct contact with deportees. They were there in the mountains that separate coastal Cilicia from the Anatolian plateau and the Arabian Peninsula, all along the Berlin-Baghdad Railway, and in the desert. Wegner knew what the marches signified. In a letter to Marga von Bonin dated 26 November 1915, Wegner concluded, 'Where? Where to? This is a route from which there is no coming back home' (1920, p. 20). While other members of the military convoy looked away,

he deliberately sought out Armenian deportees in their camps. 'The Turks avoided these camps and denied their very existence. The Germans did not go to see them and acted as if they did not exist at all' (*Armin T. Wegner e gli Armeni in Anatolia*, 1996, p. 112). The following autumn, on his way back to Germany, Wegner visited deportation camps in Maden, Tibini, Abu Herera, and Rakka (Meier, 2011, p. 158). As part of a larger network of concentration camps in Syria and Mesopotamia, the camps constituted an important instrument of the genocidal campaign (Kévorkian, 2011, pp. 631-637). Wegner came to know two women, Beatrice Rohner and Anna Jensen, at the Aleppo orphanage.[3] Drawing on their assistance as interpreters, he was able to talk to orphans, access camps around Meskeneh and Aleppo, and record deportee testimonies (Meier, 2011, p. 158; Wegner, 1920, pp. 168-169). The camp at Meskeneh, like others, was a major way station on the deportation route, especially between spring 1915 and spring 1916, which constituted the height of the deportations. Thousands of Armenians tried to survive in the camps under conditions of terrible deprivation, disease, and fear (Mouradian, 2015, p. 44). Defying the ban on gathering information about the genocide, Wegner took photographs and collected eyewitness accounts (Balakian, 2015, pp. 95-96). He recorded eyewitness testimony in his diary, with some of these notes ending up in a chapter in his *Der Weg ohne Heimkehr, ein Martyrium in Briefen* (The Road of No Return Home, A Martyrdom in Letters), published in 1919. He also smuggled out petitions, documents, and letters, which he delivered to the US embassy in Istanbul (Meier, 2011, pp. 158-159).

In 1917, Wegner joined the editorial board of *Der Neue Orient* (The New Orient), which was controlled by the German Foreign Office. In the same year, he prepared a literary account of his time in Mesopotamia under von der Goltz. On 9 February 1918, he delivered a presentation to the Silesian branch of the *Deutsch-Türkische Vereinigung* (German-Turkish Society), illustrating the lecture with 108 lantern slides. Some of the images relating to the Armenian genocide were later used in a lecture titled *Die Austreibung des armenischen Volkes in die Wüste* (The Expulsion of the Armenian People to the Desert). Literary scholar Andreas Meier notes that even though Wegner used pictures depicting Armenian deportees in his lecture 'In Mesopotamia with von der Goltz', he stated that they were deportees of war, but he did not explicitly call them victims of genocide. Meier argues that Wegner came close to aligning himself with the official Turkish position justifying the expulsion, which blamed Armenians for betraying the empire. After the war, however, Wegner seems to have

3 Beatrice Rohner led an international rescue effort to support Armenians who survived the death marches and reached Aleppo. She was able to save more than a thousand children at an orphanage in the city (Kieser, 2014). In her study, Hilmar Kaiser showed that Rohner's work relied on an Armenian underground network led by the Reverend Hovhannes Eskijian, a network that attempted to establish safe havens and implement what Kaiser refers to as a 'program for Armenian national survival' (2002, 52).

revised this view, and in the 1919 *Austreibung* lecture he adopts an avowedly pro-Armenian stance (Meier, 2011, pp. 159-162).

Meier adds that it was only after the First World War that Wegner made a systematic study of the genocide and acquired a significant amount of factual information about the extermination of Armenians (2011, p. 163). A number of published accounts were available to him, including Johannes Lepsius's *Bericht über die Lage des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei* (Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey), published in 1916, Martin Niepage's *Ein Wort an die berufenen Vertreter des deutschen Volkes. Eindrücke eines deutschen Oberlehrers aus der Türkei* (The Horrors of Aleppo, as seen by a German Eyewitness), also published in 1916, and J. W. Ernst Sommer's *Das armenische Volk in Sage und Geschichte* (The Armenian People in Legends and History), published in 1917. The first product of Wegner's investigations – one that made his pro-Armenian stance public – was an open letter to US President Woodrow Wilson published on 23 February 1919 in the *Berliner Tageblatt*. In the letter, Wegner positioned himself as one of the few Europeans to have directly witnessed the annihilation of the Armenians and demanded justice for them (Payne, 2013, p. 28; Meier, 2011, p. 164).

Wegner continued his pro-Armenian advocacy in his public lecture *Die Austreibung des armenischen Volkes in die Wüste* (The Expulsion of the Armenian People to the Desert), which he delivered on 19 March 1919 at the Urania Society in Berlin. In addition to relying on his own field notes (albeit a small portion thereof), he drew on sources by Lepsius, Niepage, Sommer, and Paul Rohrbach, who published an edited volume titled *Armenien: Beiträge zur armenischen Landes- und Volkskunde* (Armenia: Contributions to Armenian Regional and Folklore Studies), in which he documented the persecution of Armenians. The result was a powerful narrative augmented by images (Meier, 2011, pp. 165-67). Meier emphasizes that Wegner's aim in this lecture, as well as in its subsequent versions, was less to provide an historically accurate eyewitness account than to influence German public opinion and to make a case for the Armenian cause (2011, pp. 167-68; Agnew and Konuk, 2020).

In adopting this approach, Wegner assumed the task of challenging German public opinion, which was ambivalent, if not hostile, towards Armenians. As historian Stefan Ihrig reminds us, post-war public attitudes were characterized by 'the interplay between information and whitewashing, accepting the charges of genocide and denying or justifying what had happened' (2016, p. 193). Such views remained strong during and after the trial of Solomon Tehlirian for the assassination of the exiled Talat Pasha in Berlin. There were many who blamed Armenians for engaging in fifth column activities and betraying the Ottoman government. In the preface written for the publication of the trial proceedings, Wegner challenged such views head-on, stating, '[A]nd all these fierce accusations which are being leveled against the Armenian people in order to find the guilty reason [*schuldige Ursache*]

for these horrors in their own behavior cannot excuse what has been committed against them' (quoted in Ihrig, 2016, p. 280). Around this time, Wegner's position also shifted vis-à-vis German complicity in the genocide. Earlier iterations of the 'Expulsion' lecture exonerated Germany, but in the version he delivered in 1924 in Vienna, he assigned responsibility for the 'Armenian question', which had paved the way for genocide, to Germany and other signatories to the 1878 Berlin Treaty (Meier, 2011, p. 167).

Wegner's political advocacy was not limited to the Armenians and he continued to speak truth to power after the rise of National Socialism. On 11 April 1933, he published an open letter to Hitler protesting the persecution of Jews and requesting that Germany should be protected 'by protecting the Jews'. In other words, protecting the Jews was to protect Germany. 'Because', he added, 'even if Germany might be able to do without the Jews, she cannot do without her virtue. "There is only one true faith", wisely warns Immanuel Kant from the crypt of his hundred-year-old tomb, "even if there may be many different creeds." Keeping this doctrine in mind will allow you to understand also those you are now fighting. What would Germany be without truth, beauty, and justice?' (Wegner, 2015, pp. 157-158; English translation in *Armin T. Wegner e gli Armeni in Anatolia,* 1996, pp. 164-165). For this outspokenness Wegner was arrested, tortured, and incarcerated in several concentration camps (Hofmann, 1996, p. 1). Upon his release he fled Germany and went into exile. International recognition came in the 1960s, when Wegner received the title of 'Righteous Among the Nations' from Yad Vashem and the Order of Saint Gregory the Illuminator from Armenia (Yad Vashem, 2018; Khatchaturian, 2018). He died in Italy in 1978.

Armin T. Wegner's Images in *Right to Arrive*

Wegner's work is crucial, for it continues to counter the official and popular disavowal of and justification for the Armenian genocide by Turkey. Additional evidence for the genocide is to be found in the memoirs, diaries, letters, and other documents of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) leaders (Göçek, 2015; Adak, 2007). As critical biographies of the architects of the genocide come to be published, new light is shed on the genocidal calculus and on political continuities between the late imperial and republican periods (Kieser, 2018). Visual documentation of the Armenian genocide is limited because of Cemal Pasha's prohibition against photographing Armenian deportees and because of the technical challenges associated with photography at that time (Hofmann and Koutcharian, 1992, p. 54). As a result, there is no equivalent of the Holocaust's visual record or, to borrow Susan Sontag's phrase, a 'photographic inventory of ultimate horror' (1977, p. 19). Indeed, the Armenian genocide is characterized by the very paucity of images (Ba-

ronian, 2010, p. 207). The two most significant bodies of work are the collection of Near East Relief and that of Armin Wegner (Hofmann and Koutcharian, 1992, p. 54). The historical photographs in *Right to Arrive* are drawn from Wegner's collection, now held in the German Literature Archive in Marbach. He himself used the images in lantern slide lectures dealing with the plight of Ottoman Armenians, including in the lecture 'The Expulsion of the Armenian People to the Desert' in March 1919 in Berlin. Only a few images in Wegner's collection relate to the genocide per se; others are ethnographic images depicting Armenians and their ways of life. Some of the images included in *Right to Arrive* belong to the latter category.

Wegner did not leave detailed information about many of the images, and there is ongoing debate about provenance, dates, locations, and authorship. The captions used in *Right to Arrive* are drawn from Andreas Meier's edition of Wegner's slide lecture 'The Expulsion of the Armenian People to the Desert' (Meier, 2011, p. 93). It is known that Wegner took dozens of photographs during his deployment. Whether he photographed deportees on the way from Aleppo to Baghdad in 1915 is unclear. His diary, however, refers to pictures taken on the return trip from Baghdad to Constantinople the following year (Hofmann, 1996, pp. 10-11). Meier indicates that of the hundred-odd images used in the lecture, approximately one third can be attributed with some certainty to Wegner himself (2011, p. 108). Many of the photographs were taken at camps near Aleppo in 1916 and others *en route* (Hofmann, 1996, p. 11). Wegner smuggled slides back to Germany, but many did not withstand the heat and ravages of the journey (Wegner, 1920, p. 169). The surviving material seems to have been insufficient in creating the kind of impact he had had in mind. He thus looked to the existing photographic record in order to fill in the gaps, incorporating into his lecture images from other sources, including commercially available lantern slides from Theodor Benzinger's studio in Stuttgart and from Paul Rohrbach's work. Wegner also frankly conceded that some of the images depicted events that had occurred earlier (Meier, 2011, pp. 169-170). One such image appears in this exhibition under the caption 'Camp at the Anatolian Railway' (more on this image below). Favouring publicistic and literary approaches over strictly documentary ones, Wegner intended to illustrate rather than minutely record the Armenian experience (Meier, 2011, p. 170). At the time, this sparked controversy, with members of the public questioning the authenticity of some of the images used in the slide lecture. Later, Wegner's approach was seen to have jeopardized the credibility of his undertaking (Meier, 2011, p. 171). This does not mean that Wegner's work does not serve a vital historiographic function (Tamcke, 2011, p. 75). As an eyewitness to the atrocities, collector of survivor testimonies, and visual recorder of Armenian experiences, his work captures the horrors of the genocide and the predicament of the Armenians within the broader context of Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire (Agnew and Konuk, 2020). Though the record is incomplete, Wegner's collection

provides some of the most powerful evidence of the genocide and flight that we have today.

Figure 3.7. Map of Turkey, ca. 1915; source: Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Unattributed map depicting the Ottoman Empire and surrounding empires. Wegner appears to have marked Greater Syria, including locations such as the Syrian desert and cities, as the sites for which deported Ottoman Armenians were destined. Thousands ended up in camps that were visited and photographed by Wegner in 1915-1916.

Figure 3.8. Armenian Women; source: Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Date, location, and authorship unknown. Wegner used the picture in an ethnographic fashion as a glimpse into the lives of Armenian women and to comment on familial relations. He also indicated that Armenians, like Jews, are 'the most scattered people on earth'.

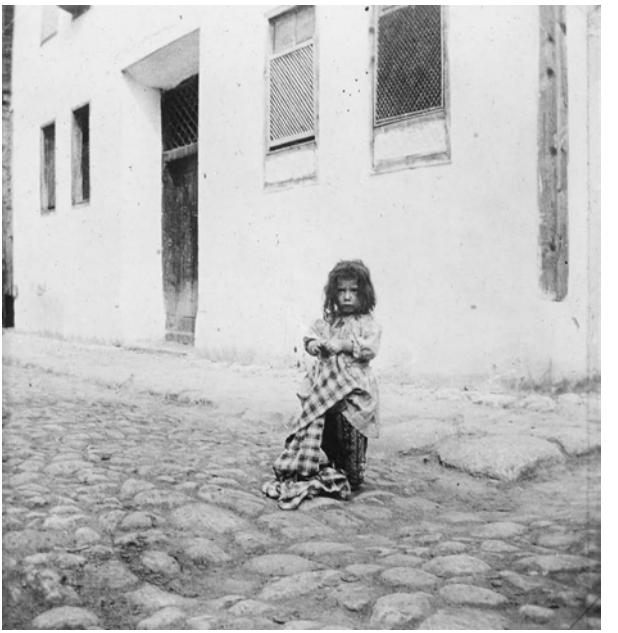
Figure 3.9. Armenian Family Portrait; source: Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Date, location, and authorship unknown. Wegner made use of an established tradition of family portraits, popular among Armenian and other communities in the empire, to emphasize the absence of Ottoman Armenians due to the deportations and genocide. These family portraits remain as shadowy reminders.

Figure 3.10. Burning Street; source: Armin T. Wegner, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Possibly Zeitoun (present-day Süleymanlı, a town in Kahramanmaraş Province, south-eastern Turkey). Wegner reports that the Armenian quarters in many cities were put to the torch and that there was widespread looting by Turks.

Figure 3.11. Abandoned Child, 1915–1916; source: Armin T. Wegner, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.



Location unspecified. During the deportations, children were often separated from their parents. Wegner notes that the children were sometimes taken into harems by Turks in order to convert them to Islam, while desperate parents searched in vain for their children.

Figure 3.12. After a Massacre, 1915–1916; source: Armin T. Wegner, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Unidentified town. Wegner reports that all that remained after the massacres were piles of half-clothed, unburied bodies abandoned behind a wall or in a deserted trench.

Figure 3.13. Corpses in the Desert, 1915–1916; source: Armin T. Wegner, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Possibly an Armenian deportation camp in Ottoman Syria. Wegner states that naked corpses lay all about, left in the open to be eaten by jackals. The horror of seeing starving, dying people could hardly be described, he adds. He witnessed children retrieving swallowed gold from the innards of their dead mothers and starving women forced to consume their own excrement or feed on their own dead new-born babies.

Figure 3.14. Refugees on the Coast, 1915–1916; source: Armin T. Wegner, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Refugees were driven to the Aegean coast, beyond the Sea of Marmara, where they often waited days for deportation. They were packed into small, unseaworthy fishing boats and sailed into the Gulf of İzmit. When a boat capsized, Wegner adds, the Turkish government considered it a welcome accident.

Figure 3.15. Armenian Mother Fleeing, 1915–1916; source: Armin T. Wegner, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Carrying a tent and poles, sleeping bag, and cooking pot, with her infant loaded atop the heavy bundle, this Armenian mother had been fleeing for two months, her husband slaughtered somewhere en route. In this manner, says Wegner, the mother and child laboured to cross the Amanus mountain pass towards the Syrian desert.

Figure 3.16. Camp at the Anatolian Railway; source: Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Contested date – possibly after the 1909 massacres in Cilicia, courtyard of the German-Levant Cotton Company in Adana (Krikorian and Taylor, 2015).[4] Wegner reports that streams of people carried bundles and pushed their belongings in handcarts while others were deported on the Anatolian rail system. By the time he travelled to Baghdad via Aleppo in 1915, refugee numbers at the railway station had swelled to 50,000.

4 This image predates the genocide, as reported by Abraham D. Krikorian and Eugene L. Taylor on the Armenian News Network/Groong. A photograph of the same scene, but cropped differently, is included in Ernst Jäckh's *Der aufsteigende Halbmond: Beiträge zur türkischen Renaissance,* Berlin, Buchverlag der 'Hilfe', facing p. 110, published in 1911.

Figure 3.17. Delousing, 1915–1916; source: Armin T. Wegner, Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen.

Camp for Armenian deportees in Ottoman Syria. Never would he forget, Wegner says, the images of desperation and suffering that confronted him in the camp. 'You are German', someone called out to him, 'and you Germans are allied with the Turks. How is it possible that your chancellor allows such a crime to occur? So, it's true that you yourselves wanted it to happen?' He could give no reply. 'But imagine', he adds, 'if tens of thousands of our own people were suddenly crammed together on a bare patch of earth; what efforts we wouldn't go to, to alleviate their slightest need.' The shadow cast on the subjects is possibly that of the photographer and witness himself.

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