

# Ambiguous Indifference? An Investigation of Irish Perceptions of the Armenian Question, 1895-1924.

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## Abstract

*This thesis was inspired by the Irish government's peculiarly ambiguous position regarding the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. It is an historical research into the contemporary Irish reactions to the events that were unfolding in the Near East from 1895 to 1924. The First World War brought a new radicalism to Irish nationalist politics and saw the retrenchment of unionist loyalties to the British Empire. Nationalists in Ireland regarded themselves and their independence aspirations as the most legitimate and exceptional in the world, and therefore regarded the Armenian cause and the international sympathy it garnered with hostile competitiveness. Unionists openly expressed sympathy of the Armenian cause as a way to demonstrate their continued belief in the war aims of the British government and their commitment to remaining part of the Empire. The ways in which Irish opinion on the Armenian cause was influenced by domestic and international factors will be closely examined in this research with the aid of previously unexplored primary sources from 1895 to 1924.*

## Introduction

*'On 29 October 2019, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a resolution to recognise the 1915-17 Armenian genocide. It has also been recognised by the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, 16 EU member states and 32 countries worldwide. Is it not time for the Tánaiste and the Government to bring forward a motion or resolution to recognise the awful genocide in Armenia more than 100 years ago?'*<sup>1</sup>

-Thomas P. Broughan TD

The Irish Government has consistently refused to officially recognise the Armenian genocide of 1915-1917, despite frequent calls from opposition TDs (members of parliament) and the press to do so. Despite the increase in public interest in this matter in the context of 2015, the year that marked the centenary of the genocide, the Irish government has decided to maintain an ambiguous attitude towards these historical events, simultaneously offering sympathy to the 'enormous suffering' of the Armenians while also fundamentally denying that what happened to them.<sup>2</sup> This position of non-recognition stands in contrast to Ireland's traditional reactions to similar events. Ireland has been a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance since 2011 and every year celebrates the National Holocaust Memorial Day in association with the Department of Justice and Equality. Additionally, Ireland has recently become the first European Union member state to officially recognise the state of Palestine and condemn Israel's 'unlawful de facto annexation' of Palestinian land in the occupied territories. Ireland, in its self-conception as a 'post-colonial state' has often publicly expressed its solidarity with oppressed peoples around the world. Ireland's stance on the recognition of injustice around the world has generally fallen in line with that of its EU neighbours, except for the case of Armenia.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas P. Broughan TD, Dáil Éireann debate, Tuesday 12 November 2019, Vol. 989, No. 1, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2019-11-12/18/>.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Government expressed its deepest sympathy for the enormous suffering of the Armenian people during the terrible events of 1915, which resulted in the appalling deaths of large numbers of the Armenian population in the Ottoman empire. No Government has taken a position on the recognition of the events of 1915 as genocide, believing that it is not in a position to adjudicate on this contentious matter involving the consideration of a number of legal issues and an assessment of the actions and intentions of many parties during that time.' - Deputy Simon Coveney's reply Broughan, Dáil Éireann debate, Tuesday 12 November 2019, Vol. 989, No. 1, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2019-11-12/18/>.

This is the phenomenon on which this thesis is based. It has been more than 100 years since the Armenian genocide occurred. In order to fully understand the source of Ireland's ambiguous silence regarding these events, it is crucial to uncover the historical relationship between Ireland and Armenia in the context of the First World War and its immediate aftermath, a subject that has been completely neglected thus far. The purpose of this thesis is not to come to a definitive answer as to why Ireland has not officially recognised the Armenian genocide. To try to do so would entail an analysis of over 100 years of Irish foreign policy, public opinion and international legal history. It is doubtful that the results of such an endeavour would lead the researcher to a definitive or satisfactory answer. Rather, this thesis intends to lay out the historical foundations for Ireland's perception of the Armenian Question, which have hitherto been unexplored within academic literature. The research question for this thesis is therefore:

*What were the main factors, domestic and international, that shaped Irish perceptions of the Armenian Question, 1895-1924?*

The examination of Irish primary sources from 1895 to 1924, situated within the context laid out in a growing body of literature that focuses on Ireland's international relations during this period, has uncovered a rich and fascinating story of how both domestic and external factors essentially coloured Ireland's reaction to the situation in the Near East.

The 'Armenian Question' is defined here as the major events relating to Armenian history between 1895 and 1924. Starting in 1895, the world's attention was captured by the Hamidian massacres of the Armenian peoples of the Ottoman Empire. These incidents, together with the Armenian genocide of 1915-1917, were taken by the Allied powers as a moral justification for war with Turkey. The idea that the First World War was being fought for the self-determination of small nations was supported by the news that Christians in the Near East were being heavily persecuted. When the Allied countries emerged victorious from the war, promises were made to the Armenians that they would be granted their own independent nation. However, as the realities of the post-war world came to light during successive peace negotiations, the Armenian question culminated in disappointment. The Turkish nationalist movement, led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha, were successful in their bid to creating the new Turkish Republic. With the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, the Allied Powers

conceded any last remaining hopes that an Armenian national home would be created. Concurrent to these events in the Near East, Ireland was undergoing radical change in this period. The First World War was a major catalyst for the radicalisation and fictionalisation of Irish politics. The tumultuous years of revolution, war with Britain and civil war left a lasting mark on Ireland's international outlook and fundamentally shaped Irish perceptions on the Armenian Question.

## Historiography

The intersection of Irish and Armenian history has remained virtually untouched within academic literature. One of the only references to Ireland's reaction to the Armenian Question during this period can be found in Daniel Steel's article: 'Genocide and the 'clean-fighting Turk' in First World War Britain and Ireland'<sup>3</sup>. Steel's main argument is that in Britain and Ireland, the reputation of the chivalrous and 'clean-fighting' Turk was preserved during the First World War, as the press preferred to portray the German 'Hun' as the main antagonist. While Steel accurately describes the clashing images of the 'clean-fighting' and 'unspeakable' Turk and rightly points to the 'mental gymnastics' performed within British propaganda outlets to accommodate both images, he treats 'British' and 'Irish' opinion as a single entity. He in no way acknowledges the fact that during these years Ireland was undergoing a revolution, with nationalist forces determined to be a free and independent nation. Irish and British perceptions of the First World War were vastly different, especially when taking into account the increasing popularity of radical nationalist and separatist ideals. Furthermore, Steel only makes reference to one Irish newspaper, the *Irish Times*. The *Irish Times* was heavily influenced by the British press and had a predominantly Protestant moderate-unionist outlook<sup>4</sup>, hardly representative of the vast array of political opinion in Ireland during this time. This thesis will address these shortcomings by analysing a wider range of publications across the political spectrum.

Patrick Walsh is an Irish historian who has directly addressed Ireland's involvement in the Eastern Question in the context of the First World War. He draws attention to the 'forgotten

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel Steel, 'Genocide and the 'clean-fighting Turk' in First World War Britain and Ireland', *Historical Research*, Volume 94, Issue 264, May 2021, Pages 419–439

<sup>4</sup> Ian d'Alton, 'A Protestant Paper for A Protestant People: The Irish Times and the southern Irish minority', *Irish Communication Review*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, (2010), pp. 65-73.

aspects' of 'Ireland's Great War on Turkey' and places Ireland's reactions to the events unfolding in the Near East within the anti-imperial and nationalist outlook.<sup>5</sup> However, Walsh's work is flawed, sensationalised and unashamedly biased. His arguments are tangibly coloured by his own anti-British sentiment and persistently belittles the veracity of the reports of Armenian killings throughout his work by alleging that they were made up by British propagandists. What little value his work provides by shedding light on primary sources and newspapers, is completely overshadowed by the alarmingly subjective tone in which he carries out his analysis. Furthermore, Walsh's public statements regarding the Armenian genocide have been extremely provocative and controversial. In October 2021, Walsh gave an interview with the 'Eurasia Today' news platform in which he stated that he regretted how the Western World were fooled by 'Armenian lies and nonsense narratives'.<sup>6</sup> Armenian scholars have regarded his understanding of Armenian history as a 'school-boy rendition of Turkish denialist paradigms from the 1980s'.<sup>7</sup> Such a source can hardly suffice as the sole word on the realities of the historical links between Ireland and Armenia during the era of the First World War. The fact that the most extensive work on this subject has been carried out by someone who openly denies the Armenian genocide demonstrates how vitally important it is to present a more balanced and academically-grounded research. This is the aim of this thesis.

## Conceptual Framework

In order to fully understand the diversity of Irish reactions to the Armenian Question, the conceptual underpinnings of Ireland's historical relationship with British Empire must be clarified. The complexities of this relationship have been expounded upon by prominent Irish scholars such as Alvin Jackson, who has demonstrated how 'Ireland was simultaneously a bulwark of the Empire and a mine within its walls.'<sup>8</sup> For centuries, Irish people both profited from and were subjugated by the Imperial system. This accounts for the diversity of opinion which Irish people held towards the Empire. Unionists, a predominantly Protestant political

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<sup>5</sup> Patrick Walsh, *Forgotten Aspects of Ireland's Great War on Turkey*, (Belfast: Athol Books, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Eurasia Today, 'Armenian narratives are much heard in the Western World- Interview with Dr Patrick Walsh' 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2021, <https://ednews.net/en/news/interview/485535-armenian-narratives-are-much-heard>. [accessed 4 June 2022]

<sup>7</sup> Gomidas Institute, 'Besmirching Armenians', 21 March 2013, <https://www.gomidas.org/press/show/30>. [accessed 4 June 2022].

<sup>8</sup> Alvin Jackson, 'Ireland, the Union, and the Empire, 1800-1960', in Kevin Kenny (ed.) *Ireland and the British Empire*, (Oxford, New York; Oxford University Press, 2004), p.123

faction based in the Northern Ulster counties of Ireland, were determined that Ireland should remain within the Union and be a contributor and benefactor of the British Empire. Unionists in Ireland believed in the British Empire as a humanitarian and benevolent project. The most popular expression of nationalism in the late nineteenth century, the Home Rule Movement, epitomises the tensions binding Ireland to the Empire. Home Rulers, (otherwise known as Constitutional Nationalists), were determined to break the Union, the link with the imperial motherland, but were content that Ireland should still participate in and benefit from the structures of Empire. Home Rulers and Unionists clashed over the impending prospect of Home Rule being granted in Ireland. However, with the coming of the First World War, the Home Rule movement suffered successive defeats as the British government sought to postpone finding a resolution to the Irish Question until after the war. This in turn led to a rise in popularity of Advanced Nationalism which espoused a complete separation from Britain and the Empire. Irish attitudes towards Empire and their considerations on Irish sovereignty reflected an insecurity of 'Irish' identity during this period. Such was the context within which Irish people observed the fate of another small colonial state on the outer edge of Europe, Armenia.

## Methodology and sources

An invaluable tool that has facilitated this research is the online Irish Newspaper Archives. Using this database, I collected and consulted over 1,000 newspaper articles dated between 1895 and 1924 that mentioned the words 'Armenia' and/or 'Turkey'. The newspaper articles came from a vast array of different newspapers that cover a broad political and social spectrum in terms of their reach and audience. The newspapers used in this thesis can be divided into three broad categories that encapsulate the unionist, moderate/constitutional nationalist and advanced/radical nationalist perspectives. Firstly, the main source that was used to capture the unionist perspective was the *Belfast Newsletter*. Owing to the fact that unionists were a minority population, largely based in Ulster, there were fewer available newspapers to be consulted in comparison to the nationalist publications. However, the *Belfast Newsletter* was a prolific daily news outlet that had a high circulation amongst Ulster unionists and therefore excellently captures that unique point of view. Secondly, the moderate nationalist outlook was represented by the *Freemans Journal*, the *Nationalist and Leinster Times* and the *Irish Examiner*. Lastly, the radical nationalist perspective was revealed through an examination of publications such as *Sinn Féin Weekly*, *An Claidheamh Soluis*, and *New*



*Ireland*, amongst others. The rhetoric and information collected from the Newspaper Archives was supplemented by other primary sources which were obtained from official government archives such as the website Documents on Irish Foreign Policy (DIFP) and the Houses of the Oireachtas digital archive.

## Structure

The following three chapters are arranged in chronological order. Chapter 1 covers the period of 1895 to 1918. It explores the initial reactions within Ireland to the news of the Armenian killings in the context of the First World War and the beginning of Ireland's revolutionary period. Chapter 2 analyses Irish reactions to the Armenian Question in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, a period when Irish nationalists were themselves seeking international recognition for the Irish Republic. The final chapter focuses on the period between 1922 and 1924 in which the Irish people observed the culmination of the Armenia Question at Lausanne and Irish nationalists found common cause with the anti-British rhetoric of the Turkish nationalist movement.

## Chapter 1

# Revolutionary Ireland, the First World War and the Armenian Genocide.

### Introduction

This chapter will focus on the Irish perceptions regarding the persecution and killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in the lead up to and in the immediate aftermath of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1917. The coming of the First World War transformed Ireland's political landscape and in many ways set in motion the movement for Irish independence. Unionists saw their participation in the war as a way to display their loyalty to the British Crown and ideological alignment with the perceived humanitarian mission of the British Empire. The war caused a split between Irish nationalists who believed that participation in the war was right and necessary, believing that it would eventually result in the self-determination of small nations, and those who considered Irishmen fighting in British uniform to be the ultimate betrayal of the Irish independence movement. As the Armenian killings were instrumentalised by the English and Allied governments as a justification for war with Germany and Turkey, the perceptions of these violent incidents amongst Irish people were essentially coloured by their own feelings and ideas of whom exactly the Great War was being fought for, what it represented in a global sense and what its outcome would mean in terms of the future of Irish sovereignty.

### Ireland and the Armenian killings of 1895

The Irish public were aware of the suffering endured by the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire as early as 1895. Explicit, graphic and sometimes sensationalised accounts of the killings were published in a wide range of Irish newspapers across the political spectrum and in a few small regional publications too. The tone of the majority of these articles was sympathetic towards the Armenians and accusatory of the Turks and the Germans. The *Irish*

*Times* published numerous eye-witness accounts taken from British newspaper sources such as the *Daily Mail*, detailing how:

*‘The Turkish soldiers took little children by the feet and dashed them against the stones... The Armenians were marched with their hands tied and then bayoneted and flung into the pit. They put some to death with scissors, cutting them and opening their veins in the neck. Others were sawn, others had the tongues cut out and the eyes gouged out.’*<sup>9</sup>

The fact that mainstream newspapers such as the *Irish Times* parried much of the anti-Turkish propaganda of the English press, this does not equate to the sum of Irish opinion on this matter.

#### I. Unionist Sympathies as Ideological Alignment.

Leading up to the beginning of the Armenian genocide, the reporting of the situation in Irish newspapers became more focused and accurate, and in turn, more varied in accordance with political divisions festering in Ireland during this time. Unionist publications such as the *Belfast Newsletter* called for its readers to support Protestant church-sponsored initiatives such as the ‘Friends of Armenia’ and reported extensively on the meetings these organisations held and how much money they raised.<sup>10</sup> The unionist movement was ‘essentially an amalgamation of Irish Toryism, Orangeism and the Church of Ireland’, thoroughly influenced by conservatism and loyalty to the British crown and most prevalent in Ulster.<sup>11</sup> Unionists feared that Home Rule in Ireland would put them at the mercy of a Catholic-led government in Dublin. In the context of heightening tensions over Home Rule during the Ulster Crisis of 1912, with the militarisation and mobilisation of the militia forces on the nationalist (the Irish Volunteers) and unionist (the Ulster Volunteer Force) sides, it is perhaps unsurprising that the unionist reaction to the news of the Armenian killings mirrored much of the rhetoric of the British newspapers. By highlighting their sympathy for the Armenians and their support for the British government’s actions through the rhetoric of Christian solidarity and humanitarian concern, unionist publications sought to demonstrate a distinctive British alignment in the face of an increasing threat of separation.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Irish Times*, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1895.

<sup>10</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 28 April, 1899.

<sup>11</sup> Alvin Jackson, ‘Modification of the Union’ in D. George Boyce and Alan O’Day (eds.) *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism Since 1801*, (London, New York; Routledge, 2001), p. 116.

## II. The Ambiguity of Moderate Nationalism.

The nationalist movement was dominated in these early years by the influence of moderate, constitutionalists and Home Rule advocates such as John Redmond and his Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP). At the beginning of the First World War, moderate nationalists were also outwardly sympathetic to the plight of the Armenians. Some observers were hopeful that British activism on the behalf of the Armenian cause would bode well for the Irish question. These optimists praised Gladstone's speech given to the British Parliament in 1895 about the Armenian issue, saying that he showed 'mental vigour and interest in public affairs' and hoping that 'his voice may again be heard championing the Irish cause, which his prestige and power did so much to advance.'<sup>12</sup> Such sentiments express a continued belief in the 19<sup>th</sup> century humanitarian values of the British Empire and Ireland's place within it.

However, these were the minority, as in most of the mainstream and moderate nationalist publications, the sentiments of outrage and sympathy for the Armenians were often accompanied by a critique of Britain's handling of the situation in the Ottoman Empire. The reforms that the Allied Powers proposed to improve the conditions of the Armenians (the appointment of a High Commissioner to be responsible for the government of Armenia and the nomination of Christian governors in majority-Christian districts)<sup>13</sup>, were flagged by the *Freemans Journal* as 'mild'. The article describes the Treaty of Berlin of 1878 (which ended the Russo-Turkish War and made Britain the primary protector of the Christian minorities of the Ottoman Empire), as a 'dead letter as far as the Armenians are concerned' and insisted that if such was that fate of these most recent reforms, 'the Powers will be guilty of a gross betrayal of the Christians in the East.'<sup>14</sup> Criticisms of British Imperial politics in the East were evident even in mainstream and moderate-nationalist Irish press from as early as 1895. Before the war had begun, there was a sense of ambiguity in the mainstream nationalist thought as to whom the real antagonists were in the Near East.

## III. The Rise of Advanced Nationalism.

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<sup>12</sup> *The Nationalist and Leinster Times*, 5 January 1895, *Westmeath Examiner*, 5 January 1895.

<sup>13</sup> For a full account of the reforms which the Allied Powers attempted to impose on the Ottoman Empire during this period see Davide Rodogno, 'Chapter Eight: Non-intervention on Behalf of the Ottoman Armenians 1886-1909', in Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press; 2011), pp. 185-212.

<sup>14</sup> *Freemans Journal*, 16 May 1895.

When the First World War began, there was a split amongst Irish nationalists. The majority still backed Redmond, who told the Irish Volunteers that they had a ‘two fold duty’ to defend Irish shores and to ‘fight wherever the firing line extends in defence of the right of freedom and religion in this war’.<sup>15</sup> The more radicalised and militant minority of the Irish Volunteers rallied behind the figure of Eoin MacNeill, who expelled Redmond and his supporters and renamed the force the Irish National Volunteers. This group was infiltrated heavily influenced by radical nationalist groups such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). McGarry explains that, despite the marginalisation of radical groups such as the IRB and lack of public support before the Ulster Crisis, separatist ideals were ‘deeply embedded in the texture of Irish identity’ and achieved ‘an emotional response with Irish people which Home Rule had failed to inspire’.<sup>16</sup> The nationalist movement generated a cultural revival in the years leading up to 1914.<sup>17</sup> The advanced nationalist movement also underwent a process of political organisation in these years. In 1905, Sinn Féin was founded and proceeded to absorb other small nationalist groups before emerging as a tangible opposition party to the IPP in 1908.

In the years prior to the Armenian genocide, the advanced nationalists had already formed opinions and interpretations of the significance of the situation. Some prominent nationalists such as Ethna Carbery took the opportunity to call out the cowardice and apathy of the British government in their policy towards Armenia, appealing to her fellow Irish to ‘strive no longer to influence the councils of England, but to join with us to give our own Ireland freedom and a nation’s right to lift her banner and draw her sword for the succour of the oppressed’.<sup>18</sup> The official publication of the Sinn Féin party, the *United Irishman* (later renamed the *Sinn Féin Weekly*), expressed similar sentiments regarding the Armenian issue. In an article from 1904, it was conveyed that the situation in the Ottoman Empire had arisen due to England’s ‘selfish

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<sup>15</sup> Richard S. Grayson ‘The Place of the First World War in Contemporary Irish Republicanism in Northern Ireland’, *Irish Political Studies*, Vol.25, issue 3, (2010), p. 327.

<sup>16</sup>M. J. Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism, 1882-1916*, (Boydell and Brewer, 2006), p, 239.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Hennessey describes in detail how cultural nationalists such as Arthur Griffith considered the dying out of the Irish language and Gaelic traditions to be the result of Britain’s deliberate campaign to erase the ‘soul’ of the Irish nation. Thomas Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War One and Partition*, (London; New York, Routledge, 1998), pp. 26-39. This point will become significant later on when Irish nationalists perceived the ‘cultural destruction’ that had been wreaked upon Ireland as incomparable to any other case, including that of Armenia.

<sup>18</sup> *Shan Van Vocht*, 2 October, 1896.

policies’ and announced in no uncertain terms that ‘England is responsible for all Turkish massacres in Armenia and elsewhere’.<sup>19</sup>

Such criticisms of British foreign policy by Irish advanced nationalist was not reserved only for the Armenian issue in this period. Townend has demonstrated how anti-imperialism had a growing influence on Irish nationalism throughout the Home Rule movement and shows the core relevance of wider imperial events on the development of the Irish political consciousness. Townend traces how Irish anti-imperialism shaped in the context of the Afghan and Zulu wars, the Boer War, and the Egyptian Crisis.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, an article in *Sinn Féin Weekly* published in 1908 in the aftermath of the Young Turk revolution, expressed admiration and solidarity with the Young Turks:

*‘It is our feeling that the Young Turks who have produced so profound a revolution and done it without loss of blood, without violent dynastic or other change- it is the feeling that they have not got fair play and that their efforts to produce good, and above all equal, government in all the Turkish Empire are liable to be frustrated by readiness of Europe to take advantage of Turkish difficulties’.*

This article concludes by stating that ‘For years the English Press has invented “Armenian massacres” and so forth in the Balkans for its own purposes of defaming Turkey’.<sup>21</sup> Such was the suspicion and mistrust harboured by advanced nationalists about the motives and morality of the British imperial government that they came to doubt the veracity all reports of foreign affairs that came from British sources.

This was the context within which the news of the Armenian genocide of 1915 was received in Ireland. Perceptions and interpretations of what was happening in Armenia were essentially coloured by the divisions within Ireland over the future of Irish sovereignty. The next section will analyse how the rise in popularity of advanced nationalism and republicanism effected the way in which the Armenian cause was interpreted in Ireland from 1915 to 1917.

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<sup>19</sup> *United Irishman*, 19 November, 1904.

<sup>20</sup> Paul A. Townend, *The Road to Home Rule: Anti-imperialism and the Irish National Movement*, (Chicago, University of Wisconsin Press, 2016), p. 10

<sup>21</sup> *Sinn Féin Weekly*, October 24, 1908.

## 1915-1917: Reactions to the Armenian genocide in an increasingly divided Ireland.

The mainstream press in Ireland covered the events unfolding in Armenia in extensive detail throughout 1915 to 1917. Daniel Steel has pointed to the fact that in Britain and Ireland, newspapers purposely portrayed the image of the ‘clean-fighting’ Turk in order to place the primary blame for the killings of Armenians on Germany’s shoulders.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the Irish Times published several articles bearing titles such as ‘Armenian Atrocities – What Germany Could Do’, and ‘The Horrors Which Germany Can Stop’. However, from an examination of a wider range of Irish publications, this chapter demonstrates that the reaction within Ireland to the Armenian genocide was varied, divided, contentious, and very different from the response of the English press.

### I. Unionist re-entrenchment.

On the 24 May, 1915, the *Belfast Newsletter* published the statement made by ‘His Majesty’s Government in association with the Governments of France and Russia’, which labelled the Armenian killings as a ‘crime against humanity’ and promised to ‘hold all members of the Ottoman Government as well as such of their agents as are implicated, personally responsible for such massacres.’<sup>23</sup> Unionist discourse concerning the plight of the Armenians was firmly based in the call for Christian solidarity. One letter to the editor of the *Belfast Newsletter* read: ‘it is the high and Christian privilege of any nation to crush to utter extinction the spirit of the beast and false prophet whose trail of blood in Belgium and Armenia cries out for vengeance’<sup>24</sup>. The unionist press also redoubled its call for fundraising on behalf of Protestant Church organisations such as the Friends of Armenia. Unionist rhetoric also made a point of celebrating the British and Russian advances in Mesopotamia and Anatolia, predicting the imminent rescuing of Armenians by the allies. In the eyes of Irish unionists, a British victory in the Great War would undoubtedly bring salvation and independence to the suffering Armenians.

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel Steel, ‘Genocide and the ‘clean-fighting Turk’ in First World War Britain and Ireland’, *Historical Research*, Volume 94, Issue 264, May 2021, p. 419

<sup>23</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, May 24, 1915

<sup>24</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, October 8, 1915.

## II. Redmondite support for an increasingly unpopular cause.

Unionist discourse about the Armenian genocide carried on the same tone and sentiments that had been expressed in the 1890s. On the nationalists side however, there was a tangible shift in the way in which the Armenian cause was interpreted in the context of the First World War and the increasing radicalisation of the Irish nationalist cause. Even in the moderate nationalist newspapers, the fate of the Armenians was highly politicised. The *Freemans Journal*, the press organ of the Irish Parliamentary Party, published frequent updates on the situation in Armenia alongside a condemnation of alleged conspiracy planned by Sir Roger Casement, an former Consul of the British Imperial government turned radical Irish nationalist.<sup>25</sup> The article accused Casement of collaborating with the German army in trying to convert Irish prisoners of war to join the German side. In a tone of outrage, the article describes how these ‘disgraceful transactions’ were made in order to try to convince Irish soldiers to fight ‘for and with those who are now torturing to death with every fiendish device of cruelty the Christians of Armenia’. The *Freeman’s Journal* also reviled the accusations allegedly made by Casement that England was responsible for the situation in Armenia. The article concludes by determinedly declaring Ireland’s continued allegiance to the Allied side, but notably excludes any mention of Britain: ‘The Irish Brigade in the service of France is a glorious memory. There will be no Irish Brigade in the service of the Hun or the Turk’.<sup>26</sup> It seems that in the context of the increasing popularity of separatist ideals within Irish nationalism, the moderate nationalist purposefully avoided the sensitive issue of Ireland fighting ‘Britain’s War’ and instead chose to highlight Ireland’s allegiance to the France and its condemnation of the Turkish and German enemies.

The brief reprieve afforded to Redmond and his supporters at the beginning of the First World War did not last very long. Messages of faith in Westminster, conciliation with unionism and compromise with the British Empire rubbed against the grain of nationalist public opinion during this period. Wheatly explains how, throughout 1915 and the beginning of 1916, the war was generally considered in Ireland to be going badly, and many predicted that would last much longer and that its cost was enormous. Recruitment in provincial Ireland

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<sup>25</sup> The details of Roger Casement’s journey from British Consul to radical Nationalism and the evolution of his opinions about the Armenian massacres has explained in Patrick Walsh, ‘Sir Roger Casement on the Ottomans and Armenians in Britain’s Great War’, *Studi Irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol. 8, issue 8 ,(2018) pp. 135-151.

<sup>26</sup> *Freemans Journal*, October 26, 1915.



remained slow and reluctant. Home Rule was stalled indefinitely, taxes were raised, public services were compromised and unionist enemies were admitted to Westminster. The fear of conscription was also mounting throughout this period.<sup>27</sup> These negative attitudes towards the war and the Redmondites were compounded by the growing popularity of Sinn Féin and the aftermath of the Easter Rising rebellion of 1916. Radical separatist propaganda strove to portray the Irishmen who went to fight in British uniform as ‘degenerates’, reserving the status of ‘martyr’ for those whom they regarded as ‘real Irishmen’, willing to die for their country.<sup>28</sup> Although the Easter Rising ended in failure and was regarded initially by most Irish people as a ‘reckless fiasco’, the resulting imprisonment and execution of the rebels by the British authorities had the effect of raising their status to that of martyrs in the public nationalist imagination.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the surviving rebels of 1916, such as Michael Collins, went on to become the leading figures of the nationalist movement. Throughout this period, Sinn Féin solidified its position as a tangible opposition party, not only to the war and the British government, also to Redmond and the IPP. Although still in the minority, support for Sinn Féin was mounting and the advanced nationalist rhetoric of Catholicity, sense of victimhood, glorification of the struggle and antipathy towards England<sup>30</sup> had widespread appeal. From December 1917 to December 1918, Sinn Féin membership across Ireland rose from 66,270 to 112,080 and the outcome of the June 1918 election was a landslide win for Sinn Féin.<sup>31</sup>

### III. The Advance Nationalism, Competitive Victimhood and the Imperial War.

The reaction of the radical nationalist press to the news of the renewed killings in Armenia in 1915 was essentially coloured by the growing disaffection for the Great War and the mounting sense that the ‘real enemy’ of Ireland was, in fact, England. Curiously, while some of the advanced nationalist rhetoric recognised Armenia as a fellow small Catholic nation, victim to the insatiable appetites of Empire, much of the sentiments expressed a strong sense of hostility and derision towards the Armenian cause. One example of this can be seen in an

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<sup>27</sup>Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910–1916*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 264.

<sup>28</sup> John Ellis, ‘The Degenerate and the Martyr: Nationalist Propaganda and the Contestation of Irishness, 1914–1918’, *Éire-Ireland*, Vol. 25, no. 3, (Fall/Winter, 2000) p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising Ireland: Easter 1916*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910–1916*, (Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 266.

<sup>31</sup> Paucic Travers ‘The Irish Conscription Crisis 1918’ (M.A. thesis, University College Dublin, 1977) p.136.

article published in January 1916. The article, entitled ‘Satan Rebuking Sin’, is extremely critical of England’s vacillating policies towards Turkey in the past:

*‘For seventy years, England was the strenuous defender of Turkey, fighting one war and then threatening others avowedly for Turkey’s protection. She resisted the liberation of the Christian provinces in Europe, and succeeded in temporarily preventing it for some. Yet now, [...] England has suddenly awoken to the sufferings of Christians.’*

The author of this article clearly considered England’s concern for the Armenians as a superficial and hypocritical ploy to justify war with Turkey. Not only is this article scoffing at English attitudes, but it also belittles the significance of the Armenian cause: ‘[England’s] heart is rent because the government of Armenia is not given over to the “Armenians”, a peculiar Christian sect who do not constitute over 15 percent of the old kingdom of Armenia now included in Turkey’. The article casts doubts on the veracity of the reports coming from English sources about the situation in Armenia, implying that there could not have been 15,000 Christians killed or driven from the city of Marsivan, as according to ‘the great English authority, “Encyclopaedia Britannica” gives the population of Marsivan as “about 20,000, two-thirds of whom are Mussulmans’. Not only did the author question the number of Armenians killed, but also denies them ‘victim’ status by asserting that ‘Catholics who do not act as the agents of Russia, have never suffered heretofore in Turkey’s political broils’.<sup>32</sup> There is a clear implication here that the Armenians were targeted by the Turkish government because they were enemies of the Turkish state as they conspired with Russia, not because they were victim to religious or ethnic persecution.

Nationalists expressed their disappointment and frustrations in the outcomes of a war that had been supposedly fought for the good of small nations. The hope and inspiration that had been instilled in Irish nationalists at the beginning of the war was rapidly fading as they felt

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<sup>32</sup> *The Hibernian*, January 15, 1916. The article referenced above was published by the Dublin-based *Hibernian* newspaper which was closely associated an Irish-American alliance called the Ancient Order of Hibernians. This was a strongly nationalist and Catholic group but the *Hibernian* newspaper was not regarded as an anti-Redmond publication. It is difficult to ascertain how widely publications such as this were read outside of advanced nationalist circles. But in the context of the time, when separatist and anti-English attitudes were becoming more commonplace, it is clear to see how articles such as these would have suited the popular grain of nationalist thought. Furthermore, similar sentiments can be found in more popular and far-reaching nationalist publications. *New Ireland*, a weekly paper edited by the prolific nationalist writer Patrick Little who later became a Fianna Fail TD, and *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the official paper of the Gaelic League and successively under the editorship of Eoin MacNeill and Padraig Pearse (prominent figure of the Easter Rising), both published articles that made specific and pointed references to the Armenian cause.

betrayed by the realities of the war. One article cynically proclaimed that small nations were nothing more than the ‘new pets’ of imperial powers, ‘whether it be Serbia, Montenegro, Belgium, Armenia or Albania’. In the same breath however, this article observed that these nations were still better off than Ireland as they received sympathy, charity and recognition of their suffering, whereas Irish people who yearned for sovereignty and independence were being portrayed as ‘cowards or traitors’.<sup>33</sup> Irish nationalists felt aggrieved that, even after sending their soldiers all over the world to fight in the Great War, their independence was still being withheld and the issue of Irish sovereignty was still widely regarded in Europe as a British domestic issue. Irish nationalist were convinced that their suffering had been overlooked due to England’s reputation as the ‘country of the liberal constitution and the free parliament’.<sup>34</sup> Irish nationalists lamented that:

*‘The Penal Laws in Ireland Europe in general knows naught of. The exclusion of Catholics from national and governmental equality it never heard of. The Coercion Acts, Crime Acts and such contrivances civilised nations do not understand... They knew of Poland, Finland and Armenia; they knew something even about Egypt and India, but they know nothing of the struggle of Ireland’.*<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, Irish nationalists imagined a hierarchy of recognised victims, in which, to their outrage, they found themselves at the bottom.

In this period and beyond, victimhood was an important component of Irish nationalist thought, as it lent legitimacy and emotional fervour to the cause. The sense of collective historical victimhood and lack of recognition of that status resulted in Irish nationalists being unable or unwilling to extend sympathy or recognition to the Armenian cause. Social psychological research has elaborated on how, particularly in Western society, there is a tendency minority groups to profile themselves as victims in order to obtain more societal recognition. Furthermore, these minorities who classify themselves as victims can often publicly express negative attitudes towards other minorities, although the latter were not responsible for their past victimisation.<sup>36</sup> One example can be seen from Polish survivors of Nazi persecution in the Second World War who felt that they had been victimised to the same

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<sup>33</sup> *New Ireland*, March 18, 1916.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *New Ireland*, October 27, 1917.

<sup>36</sup> Laura De Guissmé and Laurent Licata, ‘Competition over collective victimhood recognition: When perceived lack of recognition for past victimization is associated with negative attitudes towards other victimized groups’, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 47, issue 2, (2017), p. 148.

extent or even more than the Jews, and so displayed negative attitudes towards Jewish suffering.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Irish separatists classified themselves as a victimised minority within the British Empire, just as Armenians were recognised in England and Europe as a victimised minority within the Ottoman Empire. The wave of sympathy for the Armenians that swept across Europe was therefore received by Irish nationalists with hostility and envy. Advanced nationalists expressed their frustrations with the lack of recognition for Irish suffering at home as well:

*'What is amazing and deplorable is when Irish people's sympathies are extended to every race but their own; when charity, instead of beginning at home, begins abroad – and stops there, when refugees from Armenia and Servia, Romania and Belgium, are looked after while our Irish refugees, driven from the rich lands by the invader, and huddled our rocky western coast are neglected'*<sup>38</sup>.

Such sentiments deliberately placed the suffering of the Irish people whose land had been colonised by the British, at least on par with, if not more catastrophic than what had happened to the Armenians.

Throughout 1917, Irish observers kept a keen eye upon the potential terms for peace which were rumoured to have already been in negotiation. Nationalists in Ireland were increasingly anxious about the outcome of these negotiations. Advanced nationalists were not as confident in the belief that the end of the war would bring self-determination for all small nations as they might have been in 1914. An article published in *New Ireland* in May 1917 proclaimed that 'the truth about the war is gradually leaking out. From rumours, which appear to be backed by substantial degrees of truth, it was not the safe guarding of small nations but the spoilation of Turkey that was the root of the war'<sup>39</sup>. In March 1917 the Tsarist regime in Russia collapsed and Lenin declared that the Bolsheviks would work to free all colonised peoples. When the Bolsheviks seized power, they published a raft of secret treaties that had been made between the Tsarist regime and the European allies, prematurely dividing the spoils of the war. The Bolshevik revelations were reprinted in news outlets around the world, including Ireland. This incident was taken by many nationalists as further confirmation that

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<sup>37</sup> Bilewicz, M., Winiewski, M., Kofta, M., & Wojcik, A., 'Harmful ideas. The structure and consequences of anti-Semitic beliefs in Poland'. *Political Psychology*, Vol. 34, issue 6, (2013) , p. 821.

<sup>38</sup> *An Claidheamh Soluis*, February 10, 1917.

<sup>39</sup> *New Ireland*, May 26, 1917.

the British war aim could not be trusted.<sup>40</sup> The nationalist press in Ireland began to make gloomy predictions:

*'There have been made bargains between the Allied Powers, for Russia to have Constantinople and the Straits and possibly Armenia. Syria is to become a French Colony. Mesopotamia will be another patch of red on the maps of the British Empire, [...] the beauty of this whole business is that most of the territory is yet unconquered; but such is the mentality of aggressive imperialism!'*<sup>41</sup>

Irish nationalists were losing faith that the end of the war would bring salvation and freedom to small nations, including, and most importantly, their own. The anxiety over Ireland's future in the post-war world was the primary concern of Irish nationalists, who saw their claim to sovereign independence as more legitimate and urgent than any other. Thus, with the end of the war and the prospect of the creation of a new world order, Irish nationalist watched with trepidation self-interest as the great powers decided the fate of small nations such as Armenia.

## Conclusion

The period from 1915 to 1917 saw the radicalisation of Irish nationalism in the context of the First World War. The reaction of the unionist press to the news of the Armenian genocide was to commit further to British war project and to mirror British liberal political figures in their expressions of sympathy and outrage. While the moderate nationalist press was inclined to take the Armenian genocide as an example of why Ireland's commitment to the war was about more than allegiance to Britain, these sentiments of faith in Westminster and compromise with Empire, rubbed against the grain of popular nationalism. The rise in popularity of separatist ideals and cultural nationalism had a direct effect on how the news of the Armenian genocide was received within nationalist circles. Instead of finding solidarity with the Armenian's plight, the advanced nationalists instead regarded the sympathy and recognition received by the Armenians with hostility and envy. These feelings provoked Irish nationalist publications to scoff at English sentiments of sympathy, to lose faith in the war, to cry out for their own recognition and, in the process, belittle and ignore the suffering of the Armenians. There was not one unified response from the Irish people to the news of the

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<sup>40</sup> Gerard Keown, *First of the Small Nations: The Beginnings of Irish Foreign Policy in the Interwar Years, 1919-1932*, (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> *New Ireland*, May 26, 1917.

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Armenian genocide as the issue was deeply politicised within the context of the Irish question.

## Chapter 2

# Internationalisation, Exceptionalism and Denial

### Introduction

This chapter will analyse how Irish perceptions of the situation in Armenia were essentially coloured by the events that took place both within Ireland and internationally following the Allied victory of the First World War. This period saw an intensification and increased diversification of Irish nationalism with the Irish War of Independence. Determined internationalisation of the Irish question at the Paris Peace Conference and beyond indicated how Irish nationalists yearned for recognition as the only way they saw to legitimise and solidify their claims to an independent Irish Republic. As seen in the previous chapter, the nationalist outlook on the world situation could easily stir feelings of competitiveness, hostility and jealousy. On the other hand, in the post-war world, some Irish nationalists, believing whole-heartedly in a Wilsonian future, saw a golden opportunity for Ireland's claims to be recognised along with the other small nations of the world. However, once the realities of the new post-war world order became apparent and the fate of the Armenians unfolded, the Irish nationalists looked on with anxiety and self-interest. The developments that occurred in the aftermath of the First World War in relation to Turkey and Armenia were closely observed by Irish spectators across the political spectrum with trepidation, as if it resembled a prophecy for the fate of the Irish question.

#### I. Sinn Féin's rise and the War of Independence

In March 1918, a German offensive on the Western front resulted in a devastating setback for the British forces. In one day, they had suffered 38,500 casualties, 7,000 fatalities and 21,000 taken prisoner. The War Cabinet was determined to raise at least 150,000 troops from Ireland through mandatory conscription, while in the same breath issuing a renewed bill for Irish Home Rule.<sup>42</sup> This course of action alienated Irish unionists and nationalists and intensified anti-war feeling in Ireland. Irish nationalists, republicans, trade union leaders and prominent members of the Catholic Church gathered in the Mansion House in Dublin in April and, in a

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland: World War I and Partition*, (London; New York, Routledge, 1998), p. 214.

display of solidarity, produced a pledge to deny Britain's right to conscript Irishmen, declaring that they would 'solemnly resist conscription by the most effective means at our disposal'.<sup>43</sup> The British government retaliated by arresting many of the Sinn Féin leaders under the guise of a 'German plot' conspiracy which alleged Irish nationalist collusion with Germany during the 1916 Rising. Among those arrested were Eamon deValera and Arthur Griffith. The news of these arrests encouraged the nationalist communities throughout Ireland to prepare themselves for active resistance. Irish nationalists were determined that no more Irish blood would be spilled in what they considered to be Britain's imperial war. The Near East, where so many Irishmen had died in battle, became an important symbol for Irish nationalists in the anti-conscription campaign, a sentiment expressed in the traditional Irish ballad, *The Foggy Dew*: " 'twas better to die 'neath an Irish sky than at Sulva or Sud-el-Bar."<sup>44</sup> In the end, the Allied powers won the war without having to enforce conscription in Ireland, but the crisis had done considerable damage to Anglo-Irish relations and effectively ended any support for Home Rule. This culminated in a huge display of support for Sinn Fin in the 1918 general elections. Despite a significant number of party leaders being in prison, Sinn Féin won 73 of the 105 Irish seats at Westminster.<sup>45</sup> Sticking to the tradition of abstentionism, the Sinn Féin MPs who were not in prison or on the run from the British authorities gathered in Dublin on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1919 to establish the Irish Parliament, Dáil Eireann, and to declare an independent Irish Republic. On the same day, the opening shots of the Anglo-Irish war were fired, and so began a protracted and violent conflict that would last until the summer of 1921.

## II. Internationalisation of the Irish Cause and Irish Exceptionalism

With the country embroiled in war with the British forces, Irish nationalists out of necessity were increasingly focussed on domestic developments. However, the Dáil was determined to garner as much international support for the Irish cause as possible. In this vein, the Dáil published a 'Message to the Free Nations of the World', calling for international support for

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>44</sup> Pauline Murphy, 'Celebrating 100 years of the beloved song 'Foggy Dew' and its history', *Irish Central Newsletter*, (February, 2019), <https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/100-anniversary-song-foggy-dew-history-charles-oneill>.

<sup>45</sup> Gerard Keown, *The First of Small Nations: The Beginnings of Irish Foreign Policy in the Interwar Years (1919-1932)*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 36.



Irish separatist aspirations ‘at the dawn of the promised era of self-determination and liberty’.<sup>46</sup> The Dáil also appointed Count Plunkett as Foreign Minister and sent representatives abroad to set up information offices in the newly independent states of Eastern Europe, as well as special envoys to Moscow in the hopes of establishing cooperation with Russians, Turks and Persians.<sup>47</sup> The Republican press was initially optimistic that Ireland’s case would be heard at the Paris Peace Conference. However, for all the support the Republicans received from Irish-American communities, President Wilson backed away from the Irish question, largely due to pressure from Lloyd George. Wilson was not prepared to jeopardise the cooperation of the British delegation in Paris for the sake of the Irish republicans and he agreed that the Irish question would be regarded as a British domestic issue and would not be discussed at the conference.<sup>48</sup> This would be the beginning of a series of disappointments for the Irish Republicans as the post-war settlements unfolded.

While the Irish government was determined to seek support in all corners of the world, there was a strong notion within the Republican leadership that Ireland’s bid for independence should not be cast in the same mould as other subject peoples of Empire. Prominent Republicans such as Erskine Childers and Arthur Griffith were keen to place themselves and their aspirations within a ‘white and European framework’.<sup>49</sup> In June 1919, Childers characterised Ireland as a ‘lonely, symbolic figure’, that was ‘tragically isolated’ from her sister nations of Europe and lamented the fact that ‘White peoples in the rest of the world ... have already made good their right to self-determination, so that Ireland survives as the only white community on the face of the globe where government by consent is not established’.<sup>50</sup> The continued international sympathy and support for an independent Armenian state filled Irish nationalists with a mixture of cynicism and disbelief. On the 17<sup>th</sup> May, 1919, the Irishman published the speech given by Arthur Griffith in the Dáil the previous day to welcome an American delegation:

*‘At the beginning of the war, we heard from the English press about the extermination of the Armenians by the Turks. Recruits were asked to avenge them. The war was*

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<sup>46</sup> Dáil Éireann, ‘Message to the Free Nations of the World’, 21 January 1919, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1919-01-21/13/>.

<sup>47</sup> Keown, *The First of Small Nations*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 36.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Hopkinson, ‘President Woodrow Wilson and the Irish Question’, *Studia Hibernica*, No. 27 (1993), p.95.

<sup>49</sup> Bruce Nelson, *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race*, (Princeton and Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 510.

<sup>50</sup> Erskine Childers, ‘Might and Right in Ireland’, *English Review*, Vol. 28, (June 1919), quoted in Nelson, *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race*, (Princeton and Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 512.

*over, some Armenian representatives went a week or two ago to the British foreign office, and asked for an accession of territory for Armenia, and the English government explained that the Armenians wanted no territory, since the Armenians had been exterminated (laughter), but the Armenians explained that the extermination of the Armenians was only in the English press (renewed laughter).<sup>51</sup>*

In the same breath, Griffith highlighted the duplicitous and treacherous nature of the British Imperial government and belittled the legitimacy of the Armenian cause, implying with tangible derision that the whole thing had been conjured by the British imagination for the purpose of justifying the war. Griffith continued on his speech by stating that there was a country where people had exterminated, and that the methods employed in that extermination had never before been used by any other Empire against its people. He was referring, of course, to the Great Irish Famine of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and the remainder of that Dáil meeting was spent listening to representatives from different counties in Ireland who presented pre and post- famine population statistics for their respective regions.<sup>52</sup> During this period, the Famine loomed large in the minds of committed Irish separatists. From 1845 to 1852, over a million Irish people died and an even greater number emigrated. The population of Ireland was cut by 25% in a six year period.<sup>53</sup> Irish nationalists blamed this catastrophe squarely on the British government. More recent historiography on the Famine has acknowledged that there were several factors which contributed to the suffering of the Irish peasantry, including the fact that Irish merchants, both Catholic and Protestants, were in the practise of hoarding grain. However, there is a strong consensus that the actions and inaction of the British government caused undue and prolonged suffering.<sup>54</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Irish nationalists were determined to frame the Famine as a result of hundreds of years of British misrule in Ireland which deliberately affected Irish Catholic peasantry more than anyone else. The Famine represented the pinnacle of Britain's misrule in Ireland which resulted, not only in demographic destruction, but also a devastation of Gaelic language and culture. The fact that there was another white and Christian nation, Armenia, whose claims for independence from an imperial abuser so closely mirrored the Irish appeal, or were

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<sup>51</sup> *The Irishman*, May 17, 1919.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan; 2002), p.3.

<sup>54</sup> Mark G. McGowan, 'The Famine Plot Revisited: A Reassessment of the Great Irish Famine', *Genocide Studies International*, Vol. 11, no. 1, (2017), p. 88.

potentially even perceived as more urgent or legitimate, did not fit in well with the narrative of Irish exceptionalism.

### III. Paris to Sevres from an Irish perspective

Much to the chagrin of the Irish nationalists, the Armenian's claims to an independent republic were discussed at the Paris Peace Conference. In March 1919, *Young Ireland* commented dryly:

*“President Wilson did not see Sean T O’Ceallaigh. No doubt the President was writing to M. Boghas Nabur Pasha ‘The head of the Armenian National Delegation in Paris’, when the Irish Republican called on him. Before he finishes off his fourteen points, however, we fancy he might have time to see Ireland’s representatives.”*<sup>55</sup>

The evident sarcasm and strategically placed quotation marks clearly demonstrate the disdain of the author towards the attention being afforded to the Armenian question. However, the Armenian question was far from settled. British troops had occupied the area since the end of the war and the British government was eager to withdraw its resources. They wanted no part in an Armenian mandate but were also reluctant to allow French domination. They were determined that the mandate of Armenia was to fall to the US. By the summer of 1919, the situation on the ground was becoming increasingly volatile as Armenian forces fought with Kurds and Tartars and there was a growth in the popularity of Turkish nationalism in the interior of Anatolia. As winter approached there was also a severe relief crisis as hundreds of repatriated Armenians had nowhere to go.<sup>56</sup> These aspects of the Armenian situation aroused very little attention or sympathy in nationalist circles in Ireland, especially as the Anglo-Irish war raged on. Indeed, in May 1920, the *Irish Independent*, (hardly a radical publication), stated that ‘over 200 hundred Irishmen lying in British jails have been sentenced to death, without even a semblance of a trial...Those who were so lately engaged in denouncing the Turks in Armenia, now stand charged with the torturing of political prisoners.’<sup>57</sup> The Dáil created a publicity campaign designed to draw the world’s attention to the misconduct and

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<sup>55</sup> *Young Ireland*, March 1, 1919.

<sup>56</sup> Paul C. Helmreich, *From Paris to Sévres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920*, (Ohio; Ohio State University Press, 1974), p. 130

<sup>57</sup> *Irish Independent*, May 7, 1920

cruelty of the Black and Tans.<sup>58</sup> Only in the Belfast Newsletter were there any appeals for funds to help the Armenians.<sup>59</sup>

The US was also hesitant to shoulder the responsibility of Armenia and, in the end, the British troops were withdrawn without finding a replacement. The apparently imminent victory of the Bolshevik forces in the Caucasus drew more urgency to the Armenian question by early 1920. It was decided that independent Armenia, with a much smaller amount of territory than originally promised, would be placed under a League of Nations mandate, despite protests from the League Council.<sup>60</sup> While the *Belfast Newsletter* mirrored the British press's interpretation of this as an 'insoluble problem'<sup>61</sup>, other newspapers such as the Irish Examiner held a more cynical view of the situation:

*'France has a mandate over Syria, and even Italy has a look in at Adana, while Great Britain naturally has the lion's share with a mandate in Palestine and Mesopotamia, where the oil comes from. There is no oil in Armenia, and so no one wants a mandate in that hapless country.'*<sup>62</sup>

With increasingly serious Turkish attacks on Armenia, the Allies backed away from the situation, arguing that the formation of a greater Armenia was not possible without the participation of the US. In early 1920, the projected state was cut almost in half by planning the union of the Russian Armenian Republic with parts of the provinces of Van, Bitlis and Erzerum. To soften the blow, the Allies extended a de facto recognition to the existing republic. Two years after the end of the war, the Treaty of Sevres was imposed on the Ottoman Empire. Turkey was forced to recognise the independence of the Armenian republic and to renounce all rights over the portions of land being handed to the new state.<sup>63</sup>

#### IV. Nationalist Propaganda: Belittlement and denial of the Armenia killings

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<sup>58</sup> The Dáil publicity was run by Desmond Fitzgerald and Erskine Childers and were in charge of publishing the Irish Bulletin, which contained detailed accounts of British atrocities in Ireland during the Anglo-Irish War and was aimed at securing international attention and sympathy for the Irish cause, Keiko Inoue, 'Propaganda of Dáil Éireann: From Truce to Treaty', *Éire-Ireland*, Volume 32, Number 2-3, (Summer/ Fall 1997), p. 155.

<sup>59</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, January 14, 1918.

<sup>60</sup> Helmreich, *From Paris to Sévres*, (Ohio; Ohio State University Press, 1974), p. 293.

<sup>61</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, April 30, 1920.

<sup>62</sup> *Irish Examiner*, April 30, 1920.

<sup>63</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, 'The Historical Dimensions of the Armenian Question, 1878-1923', in Richard G. Hovannisian (ed.), *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, (New Brunswick U.S.A and Oxford U.K.); Transaction Books, 1987), p. 35.

Irish nationalists watched with trepidation as the US backed away from the Armenian question due to domestic pressure for a return to isolationism. This was not out of concern for the Armenians; but rather for themselves. Many Irish nationalists had pinned their hopes of being recognised as an independent republic on the US and were eager to engage in campaigning opportunities. Indeed, DeValera, then President of the Irish Republic, toured the US from the summer of 1919 to December 1920 doing exactly that. Irish nationalists at home and in the US worked together to disseminate propaganda that emphasised the Irish-American link, and to portray Irish claims for independence as the most ancient and legitimate case to be supported in the US. In November 1920, the *Sinn Féiner* reprinted an article written by an Irish-American nationalist. The piece was a review of a 1919 film named ‘Auction of Souls’ which told the story of the Armenian genocide from the account of survivor Aurora Mardiganian. The article dismissed the whole film as British propaganda made to ‘tone up American opinion upon the division of Turkey’. Linking to the Irish question, the author related that:

*‘It is impossible for a thoughtful spectator this myth with aught but horror as he recalled that that on the very same morning it was produced, he had read a news dispatch on the front page of a metropolitan newspaper that John O’Brien, an American citizen, was murdered in a raid made at Nenagh in Ireland by British soldiers, who reproduced in all its blood-curdling actuality the very scene the mind of the scenario-writer had created in Britain’s interest.’<sup>64</sup>*

Irish nationalists interpreted the international attention drawn to the Armenian cause the result of a successful British propaganda campaign, one that justified the Allied dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and at the same time diverted focus from the Irish question. This was especially true in terms of the American public’s sympathies.<sup>65</sup>

This kind of activity can also be observed at an official governmental level. In May 1920, Sean T. O’Ceallaigh, the Dáil’s representative in Paris and future President of Ireland, wrote a memorandum to Pope Benedict XV. Amidst the flattery and expressions of appreciation for His Holiness’s ‘unswerving neutrality’ during the war, O’Ceallaigh complained that ‘the continental press continues to reproduce the calamities fabricated in England, painting our

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<sup>64</sup> *The Sinn Féiner*, November 27, 1920.

<sup>65</sup> *The Sinn Féiner*, March 21, 1921. ‘Yet there is an American that can tell what the capital city of Armenia is or where her boundaries are located. Under such circumstances, how debasing it is to feel that you were of Irish blood! [...] How much better would it have been for Ireland at this moment had she lived under the sovereignty of the Turk than under the benign rule of the Black and Tans!’.

struggle for bare liberty as a movement of anarchists'.<sup>66</sup> Although he does not explicitly say it, it is most likely that O'Ceallaigh was referring to the Armenian killings here. In the post-war years, the Vatican saw re-emerged as an important diplomatic player, as it was one of the only powerful transnational institutions and represented a third pathway for new states between Marxist Socialism and Anglo-Saxon liberal capitalism.<sup>67</sup> This was especially significant for the Irish, and we can see here that there was a concerted effort to influence the Pope in favour of the Irish cause. In his letter to the Pope, O'Ceallaigh frequently mentioned how the Irish nationalist aspirations were to be on par with the freedoms afforded 'all white nations'. He assured him that 'more than ninety per cent of our Parliament and its electors are Catholic' and that the movement has never been 'contaminated anti-religious or other dangerous movements'. Without explicitly referring to the Armenian cause, O'Ceallaigh tried to demonstrate how Ireland's desire for independence was the most legitimate in terms of its whiteness, its catholicity and its separation from socialism. In doing so, he necessarily belittles the legitimacy of the Armenian cause on all three counts, while also casting doubt on the veracity of the reports of the Armenian killings, which were according to O'Ceallaigh simply 'fabricated' by the English press.

#### V. The Unionist Reaction

This kind of nationalist propaganda was met with outrage and indignation in unionist circles. The memory of Armenia's suffering at the hands of the Turks remained a powerful symbol within unionist thinking about the Great War. At a war memorial service in Belfast in 1918, the Lord Bishop reminded his audience that the self-sacrifice of Ulstermen had not been in vain, it was 'to defend the homes of the people of the Empire, to save their dear ones from a cruel foe, and to save the oppressed nations – Belgium, Northern France, Armenia, Serbia and Poland.'<sup>68</sup> Irish unionists, clearly influenced by British Turcophobic sentiments, continued to frame the war as a battle for the survival and sanctity of Christendom. An article in the Belfast Newsletter from July 1920, in smug overtones relayed how the Sinn Féin representatives to the Platform Committee of the Democratic National Convention in San

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<sup>66</sup> Memorandum by Sean T. O'Ceallaigh to Pope Benedict XV, Rome, May 18, 1920, in DIFP, No. 35 NAI DFA ES Paris 1920, <https://www.difp.ie/volume-1/1920/memorandum-by-sean-t-ocellaigh-to-pope-benedict-xv/35/#section-documentpage>, Last accessed July 27, 2022.

<sup>67</sup> Agnes de Dreuzy, *The Vatican and the Emergence of the Modern Middle East: Benedict XV's Diplomacy in Greater Syria (1914-1922)*, (Catholic University of America Press; Washington D.C., 2016), P. 172.

<sup>68</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, July 1, 1918.

Francisco had been ‘snubbed’, while the Armenian issue had been discussed at length.<sup>69</sup> Unionists were aware that the Irish nationalists were working hard to influence American opinion, and were outraged at the claims that their suffering surpassed that of the Armenians. They were particularly indignant at the work of nationalist organisations such as American Committee for the Relief of Ireland, arguing that ‘the raising of funds for distress that does not exist is part of rebel propoganda and the main object is to create that Ireland under the Imperial government is in as bad a condition as Armenia was under the Turks.’<sup>70</sup> The author of this article was shocked that nationalist publications had made this ‘monstrous comparison’ in so many words and vehemently denied that they had any foundation. Unionists were appalled at the idea that nationalist propoganda was painting the British government as worse than that of Turkey, whom they still considered to be a cruel and dangerous foe. In this context, they regarded the comparison of Ireland and Armenia to be nothing short of blasphemous. Republicans, however, were becoming less inclined to view the Turks as an enemy.

## Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how the perceptions of the Armenian cause in Ireland were essentially influenced by international factors (the reshaping of Europe in the aftermath of the First World War) and domestic factors (the Irish War of Independence). This result of this was that various political factions within Ireland had vastly different ideas about what the Armenia cause symbolised. Irish nationalists saw their independence aspirations as both exceptional and in direct competition with the Armenian cause. The propoganda that emanated from nationalist newspapers during this period strove to highlight the hypocrisy of the British government, and through this process, the Armenian question was belittled and dismissed as English propoganda. Irish unionists on the other hand, continued to espouse the Armenian cause as a way to demonstrate their loyalty to the British government and to display their sustained belief that the war had been fought on the grounds of moral (and Christian) salvation. The internationalisation of the Irish question and the subsequent series of disappointments the Irish nationalists in their quest to gain recognition, was the main catalyst that shaped Irish discourse on the Armenian cause.

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<sup>69</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, July 3, 1920.

<sup>70</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, April 15, 1921.

## Chapter 3

# The Enemy of an Enemy – A Friend? Ireland and the Culmination of the Armenian Question.

### Introduction

This final chapter will focus on Irish perspectives on the last phase of the post-war peace settlements between the Allies and Turkey at the Lausanne conference (1922-3). Firstly, within the context of the Irish Civil war, it will be highlighted how the Anti-Treatyite Republicans tended to view the Kemalist movement as a shining example of what could have been. The knowledge that Mustafa Kemal had successfully reconquered the territories which had been stripped from Turkey at Sevres and, through diplomatic skill, had managed to negotiate favourable terms for the new Turkish Republic at Lausanne, served to solidify the Irish Republican's disappointment and dissatisfaction with the terms of the Treaty which had created the Irish Free State. The anti-British rhetoric of the Kemalist movement inspired the idea of a potential friendship between Turkish and Irish nationalist based on their mutual enmity for Britain. In contrast, the unionist press continued express sympathy for the Armenians but ultimately considered the failure to establish an Armenian national home as unfortunate but inevitable. In this chapter, we shall see how Anti-Treatyites, working outside of the official government apparatus, tried to use the Lausanne conference as an opportunity to decry the illegitimacy of the Free State and call for an international recognition of the Irish Republic. For the government of the Irish Free State, the Lausanne episode illustrated the new state's lack of sovereignty and autonomy in foreign affairs. The Irish Free State was asked to ratify the Lausanne Treaty, and the debates in the Dáil over this issue display a high level of apathy and disinterest amongst Free State politicians for anything happening outside of the island of Ireland during this period. Ultimately, Irish on both sides of the treaty-split viewed the Lausanne episode in terms of self-interest and propaganda opportunities, and were not concerned that this final phase of the peace settlement wiped away any remaining hopes that an independent Armenian state would be established on their homeland. The fact that the Irish and Armenian cases were compared to each other as 'fellow victim nations' sat uncomfortably with Irish exceptionalism, and belittled the achievements of the Irish independence movement. Irish Republicans, at this point in time, saw themselves and their



claims as more akin to those of the new Turkish state, and no longer found it useful or advantageous to draw analogies between themselves and the non-existent Armenian state.

### I. Irish Civil War and Turkish Success

The Irish War of Independence came to an end in July 1921 with a truce. In terms of fatalities, it had been a small war. There were approximately 1,400 dead, 363 of whom were police personnel, 261 British Army, 550 IRA volunteers and 200 civilians.<sup>71</sup> The IRA, led by Michael Collins, had developed guerrilla war tactics to fight the British forces in Ireland, who were prone to brutal retaliation acts. Vivid accounts of the violent reprisals executed by the Auxiliary ‘Black and Tans’ were widely publicised in the Republican press, with the result of ‘countless’ moderate nationalists being converted to the separatist cause.<sup>72</sup> The Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed by Collins and Griffith, heads of the Irish negotiating team, in December 1921. The Treaty established the Irish Free State, a self-governing dominion within the British Empire, while the six northern provinces remained part of the United Kingdom. The terms of the Treaty were deemed inadequate and even a betrayal to the Republican cause by many, including influential leaders such as DeValera. The IRA in particular was demoralised and angered by the prospect of having to swear fealty to the British crown in order to be a part of the new Free State apparatus. Though the Treaty was narrowly approved in the Dáil, the split between pro-Treatyites and anti-Treatyites was acrimonious and led to the Civil War which would last until May 1923.

Concurrent to these tumultuous events in Irish politics, the Eastern question was rapidly evolving during these years. The British-backed Greek invasion of Turkey and occupation of Istanbul was interpreted by Turkish nationalists as a betrayal of the Armistice by the Allies. The Turkish nationalists, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha fought and won their own war of independence and successfully rolled back the terms of the Treaty of Sevres. The provinces of Kars and Ardahan were reconquered in a short war against the Republic of

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<sup>71</sup> Richard Bourke and Ian McBride, *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, (Princeton & Oxford; Princeton University Press; 2016), 684.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence*, (London; Penguin Books, 2013), p. 372.

Armenia in 1920-1 and Anatolia was also taken back from the Greek Army in 1922.<sup>73</sup> By 1923, the Turkish Republic had been secured by the Treaty of Lausanne. The larger Christian communities that had existed in Anatolia prior to the Great War were practically gone. Of the 13 million people who lived in Anatolia in 1923, 98% were Muslim, as opposed to 80% before the war.<sup>74</sup>

## II. The Greco-Turkish War in the Irish Republican Press

As Kader and Smyth have recently demonstrated, the animosity of both the Irish and Turkish national movements towards their common foe found expressions in their public pronouncements during this period. In February 1921, *Hakimiyet-I Milliye*, the semi-official organ of the Kemalist movement published an editorial addressed to the ‘heroes of Ireland’:

*‘In the east those who suffer under oppression see the sacred struggle of the Irish as a natural ally in the struggle for revenge against injustice. However, the Turks in particular—Sinn Féin’s real comrade in arms—see ourselves as the brothers of Ireland’s heroic manhood. We wish their success as if they were one of our own armies going into battle.’<sup>75</sup>*

There is no evidence of direct collaboration between the Kemalists and Irish Republicans, but the Irish Republican press expressed their admiration for and solidarity with the Kemalists’ fight against the British. An article published in the *Sinn Féiner* in February 1921 bearing the triumphant title ‘Turkish Leader Thwarts England’, drew distinct parallels between the Turkish and Irish struggles. The author of the article expresses great admiration for Mustafa Kemal Pasha and ‘his dogged determination to defeat the Treaty of Sevres by which Turkey was partitioned by the Allied saviours of democracy’ and delighted in the fact that England’s ‘schemes of plunder and exploitation in Turkey’ had been seriously jeopardised. Coming off the back of the Anglo-Irish Treaty which had solidified the legal partitioning of Ireland, the process by which the Kemalist movement was apparently succeeding to dictate the future boundaries of the Turkish Republic was followed with great interest by those in Ireland who were not willing to accept the terms of the Treaty. The story of the occurrences in the Near East in the aftermath of the Great War, as relayed in the Irish Republican press, tended to

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<sup>73</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk’s Turkey*, (London & New York, I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 138.

<sup>74</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building* (2010), p. 141

<sup>75</sup> Merve Dogan Kader and Séan Patrick Smyth, ‘Neither Sulva nor Sedd-Ul-Bahr – When the Harp and Crescent Intertwined’, *History Ireland*, Vol. 28, issue 2, (March/April 2020), p. 43.

portray the Turks as the victims, rather than the Armenians or other minority communities of the old Ottoman Empire. One such article published in *Young Ireland* in September 1921 argued that:

*'After the armistice the Turks, relying on the Wilsonian doctrines, abandoned that arms and looked forward to an era of peace and prosperity. They did not anticipate the duplicity of England [...] Mustapha Kemal Pasha saw the danger before it was too late. He raised a national army, which owing to an alliance with Soviet Russia, he was soon able to put on a war footing. Attacked by England's Greek allies on the one side and by Armenians on the other, he was able to hold up the former whilst his armies annihilated the latter.'*<sup>76</sup>

The republican press celebrated the victory of the Kemalists and had little sympathy for their victims, whether they be Armenian or Greek. Even publications such as the *Catholic Bulletin*, that had been founded in 1911 as a pro-Home Rule paper and later adopted a line in opposition to the Treaty, expressed deep interest in how the Turks were working to undermine the imposition of the Treaty of Sevres. The *Catholic Bulletin* argued that the 'unrest, anarchy and misery' in Turkey was created solely as a result of British policy.<sup>77</sup>

The notion that the peoples of the near east, Armenians, Greeks and Turks, were all victims of British imperial lust was not restricted to Republican papers. Mainstream broadsheets such as the *Irish Examiner* considered the 'Turkish point of view', arguing that 'common justice demands that it should be stated that British troops continue to remain in Constantinople four years after the war has ended, and two years after the Turks had been informed they were to receive that city back'.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the *Nationalist and Leinster Times* blamed the Near East crisis on the Allied policy, commenting: 'When France made a separate treaty with Angora, the Greek game was up. Had the British Foreign Office only told Athens so thousands of Greek, Armenian and Turkish peasants who are now falling, need not have died'.<sup>79</sup> The *Freeman's Journal*, another moderate pro-Treaty publication, reported on the sentiments expressed by Selah Eddin Bey, commander of the Turkish forces at Smyrna, who announced that 'the nationalists would abstain from excesses and reprisals and show that they can make war in a civilised manner, unlike the Greeks, whose devastation [...] had been comprehensive

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<sup>76</sup> *Young Ireland*, March 12, 1921

<sup>77</sup> *Catholic Bulletin* quoted in Kader and Smyth, 'Neither Sulva nor Sedd-Ul-Bahr – When the Harp and Crescent Intertwined', *History Ireland*, Vol. 28, issue 2, (March/April 2020), p. 44.

<sup>78</sup> *Irish Examiner*, November 13, 1922.

<sup>79</sup> *Nationalist and Leinster Times*, September 9, 1922.

and entirely unjustified'. The Freeman's Journal commented that 'there is good reason to believe that statement is true'.<sup>80</sup>

The *Irish Independent*, which was in the process of transforming itself into the official organ of the Free State, was one of the only papers which consistently expressed anti-Turkish sentiments. But this by no means reflected a consensus within the pro-Treaty camp. Indeed, Grattan Esmonde, prominent Cumann na nGaedheal Senator<sup>81</sup>, wrote to the *Irish Independent* expressing his astonishment at the 'prominence you are giving to virulent English propaganda directed against the Turkish army, who are on the point of freeing their native land from the invader.'<sup>82</sup> Even the *Belfast Newsletter*, a staunchly unionist publication which normally championed the imperial policies of the British government, said that 'Smyrna is no longer a bone of contention by the victory of Kemal Pasha; it returns to Turkey from whom in all justice it ought never to have been taken away'.<sup>83</sup> With the Civil War raging throughout Ireland, the one thing on which most people could agree was that the British government's policies had been the source of a lot of their troubles. Similarly, regardless of their own political affiliations, most of the Irish press outlets apportioned at least some of the blame for the crisis that was unfolding in the Near East on the British government.

This attitude was solidified by the response to the Chanak Crisis and London's subsequent call for the dominions to send troops to the Near East. Free State TD's openly called on the government to refuse this call. Cathal O' Shannon TD asked the Dáil, if war between Britain and Turkey, whether there would be a 'single Irish citizen who would want to send a single young Irishman out to fight the war of oil owners against Kemal Pasha or anybody else.'<sup>84</sup> Through the eyes of Irish observers, Britain's war with Nationalist Turkey could no longer be viewed through the same lens as it had been during the Great War. The hypocrisy of the British government had been exposed, highlighted by their abandonment of the Greek forces in Turkey. The rhetorical defence of British actions as being motivated to save the Armenians

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<sup>80</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, September 12, 1922.

<sup>81</sup> The Cumann na nGaedheal Party was formed in 1923 as the pro-Treaty opposition to Sinn Féin, for more details see Jason Knirck, *Afterimage of the Revolution: Cumann na nGaedheal and Irish Politics 1922-1932*, (Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Patrick Walsh, *Britain's great war on Turkey: An Irish Perspective*, (Athol Books, 2009), pp. 465-66.

<sup>83</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, September 6, 1922.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Kader and Smyth, *Neither Sulva nor Sedd-Ul-Bahr – When the Harp and Crescent Intertwined*, *History Ireland*, Vol. 28, issue 2, (March/April 2020), p. 44.

and other Christians in the Near East against the ‘terrible Turks’ lay dead in the water. In the end, the issue came to nothing as foreign forces evacuated Turkey shortly after this incident.

The international representation of Ireland abroad after the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty reflected the situation of the government at home, it was fragmented and confused. George Gavan Duffy, one of the signatories of the Treaty was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Dáil Cabinet and the network of Sinn Féin envoys that had been established at the end of the First World War continued to represent Ireland abroad. Duffy was aware of the trouble that this may cause, as in his opinion, most of these envoys were ‘die-hard Republicans’.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, as the split within the nationalist movement deepened, Republicans within the embryotic diplomatic service began to openly preach against the Treaty. Prominent and established Irish representatives such as Sean T. O’Ceallaigh and Leopold Kerney diverted to the Anti-Treaty side. Meanwhile, the attention of the Free State government was absorbed in domestic affairs. The deaths of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins in August of 1922 removed two key figures who had taken interest in international affairs. The new president of the Irish Free State, William Thomas Cosgrave, declared to the Dáil that the war of independence had not been won by foreign affairs.<sup>86</sup> This set the tone for the new government’s attitude towards international affairs, which McKweon had succinctly described as a ‘synthesis of disinterest and self-interest’.<sup>87</sup>

### III. The Lausanne Episode

It was within this context that the Anti-Treatyites attempted to use the Lausanne conference as an internationalised opportunity to decry the illegitimacy of the Irish Free State and to campaign once again for the international recognition of the Irish Republic. Bryony Harris has described how anti-Treaty leaders took the opportunity to appeal to British antagonists (the Soviets and Turks) in defence of their Republican cause, whereas the Pro-Treaty elites harnessed the Lausanne episode as an opportunity place constitutional pressure on the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Keown, *The First of Small Nations*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 96.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* p. 110.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p.104

<sup>88</sup> Bryony Eve Cecilia Harris, ‘Securing the Saorstát: The emergence of the Irish Free State and the culmination of the Eastern Question, (1921-1924)’, *MA Thesis International Relations in Historical Perspective*, Utrecht University, (August 2021).

The Anti-Treatyites did achieve a publicity breakthrough at Lausanne, but not in a way that they would have wished. The Turkish plenipotentiary, Riza Nur, when pressed to concede an Armenian national home during a sub-committee meeting on minorities, accused the Allies of using the Armenian issue as a way to encroach on Turkish sovereignty. He argued that there was not only ‘one victim nation in the world’ and pointed to the European colonial subjects who also wanted their freedom: ‘even the Irish- how much blood have they spilt for how long for their homeland and independence?! [...] You give them their independence, their homeland, and we’ll give the Armenians theirs immediately’.<sup>89</sup> The way in which Nur raised the Irish question at Lausanne was as ‘a rhetorical battering ram’<sup>90</sup> against the British delegation, who were pressing for the Armenian issue to be resolved by creating an autonomous region inside the new Turkish state where Armenian refugees could return and preserve their ethnic and cultural identity. The Turkish delegates were vehemently opposed to the plan, convinced as they were that such a concession would mean the continuation of Allied influence and intelligence in their country.<sup>91</sup> The comparison made between the Irish and Armenian causes not only undermined the pro-Treaty assertions that the Free State was a sovereign and functioning nation-state, but it also fell short of an expression of support for the Irish Republic. It was also a blow to the Republicans who had perceived their claims and status to be more akin to those of the victorious new Turkish state than the Armenian’s last ditch effort to secure a ‘national home’ against all the odds. Additionally, being categorised among a host of other ‘victim nations’ around the world, did not sit comfortably with Irish nationalists’ self-conception as an ‘exceptional’ case.

Unsurprisingly, the story of Nur’s invocation of the Irish case at Lausanne was not widely publicised in the Free State. The only trace of this incident was a short piece that appeared in the Irish Independent and two regional newspapers, the *Donegal News* and the *Fermanagh Herald*, which reported a story from the *Chicago Tribune*: ‘The Irish nationalist organisation which calls itself the ‘Irish Republic’ has written to Mustafa Kemal urging that Turkey

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<sup>89</sup> Dr. Riza Nur, *Lozan Hatıraları* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1992), 119-22. trans. by Adham Smart in quoted Bryony Harris, ‘Securing the Saorstát: The emergence of the Irish Free State and the culmination of the Eastern Question, (1921-1924)’, *MA Thesis International Relations in Historical Perspective*, Utrecht University, (August 2021), p. 50.

<sup>90</sup> Bryony Harris, ‘Securing the Saorstát: The emergence of the Irish Free State and the culmination of the Eastern Question, (1921-1924)’, *MA Thesis International Relations in Historical Perspective*, Utrecht University, (August 2021), p. 50

<sup>91</sup> Lerna Ekmekçiöglü, ‘The Epitome of Loss’, The Lausanne Project Podcast, June 2022, <https://thelausanneproject.com/2022/06/03/podcast-16-ekmekcioglu/>.

should support the independence of Ireland in its negotiations with the Powers at Lausanne.<sup>92</sup> However, the extent to which the Lausanne episode was to prove an embarrassing affair to the Irish Free State government became apparent in early 1924, when the Irish government was asked to ratify the Treaty of Lausanne. In the Dáil and the Seanad, the relevance of the whole Lausanne affair to Ireland was disputed. Foreign Affairs Minister FitzGerald began by stating: ‘The Treaty is an extremely long document, going into many details, practically all of which are of no interest country, and do not affect this country in any way.’<sup>93</sup> The question of whether or not the Irish Free State government would ratify the Treaty of Lausanne highlighted ongoing issues pertaining to the legitimacy of the new Irish constitution and Ireland’s agency in foreign affairs.<sup>94</sup> Not once was the Armenian issue raised during the ratification debates. The fact that this treaty delivered the final blow to the independence aspirations of the Armenian people was neither considered nor commented upon by the leaders of the Irish Free State.

#### IV. The Unionist Perspective.

Only in Northern Ireland was the Armenian cause discussed in relation to Lausanne. In contrast to the new Free State, the memory of Irish soldiers in British uniform dying on the battlefields of the Somme and Gallipoli in the unionist North of Ireland was a source of pride. In Ulster, the memory of World War I contributed to the foundation myth of the state of Northern Ireland and played an important role in defining the British identity of the unionist majority. This point has been discussed at length in the literature relating to the erection of war memorials in the North of Ireland.<sup>95</sup> The lives of Ulstermen lost in the Great War undoubtedly had an important symbolic meaning, but the memory of the sufferings of the Armenians and other Christian minorities as the moral justification for war also carried a significance for those in the North that believed that they had been on the ‘right’ side. This aspect of unionist memorialisation of the Great War has been completely overlooked. The fate of the Armenians in the aftermath of the Great War received considerably more attention in the North than in the Irish Free State, where the memory of the war for painful, contentious

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<sup>92</sup> *Irish Independent*, 16 January, 1923, *Donegal News* and the *Fermanagh Herald*, January 20, 1923.

<sup>93</sup> Dáil Éireann debate, vol. 8 no. 2, 1 Jul, 1924

<sup>94</sup> Bryony Harris ‘Securing the Saorstát: The emergence of the Irish Free State and the culmination of the Eastern Question, (1921-1924)’, *MA Thesis International Relations in Historical Perspective*, Utrecht University, (August 2021), p.

<sup>95</sup> John Turpin, ‘Monumental Commemoration of the Fallen in Ireland, North and South, 1920-60’, *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 11, issue 4, (Winter, 2007), p. 107.

and conflicting with the dominant nationalist outlook. The Protestant Churches of the North became very active supporters of British-founded organisations such as the Friends of Armenia and the *Belfast Newsletter* frequently published public appeals for funding on their behalf. There was even an effort to create an annual public awareness day called ‘Golden Rule Sunday’, when it was encouraged that the public would ‘deny themselves a little’ of food and comforts while thinking of the ‘piteous’ conditions of Armenian orphans and refugees. However, it should be pointed out that this Golden Rule Sunday campaign was short-lived and was only advertised until 1925.<sup>96</sup>

The *Belfast Newsletter* made a concerted effort to draw attention to the Armenian cause during and after the Lausanne Conference, but was careful not to indict the British government for their unfulfilled promises of an Armenian National Home. In an editorial piece from April 1923, the *Belfast Newsletter* explained that the US was to blame for the unfavourable outcome of the peace negotiations: ‘The United States declined the mandate in the region of Armenia. That was the first breach in the scheme of dismemberment [of the Ottoman Empire]’.<sup>97</sup> As has been shown in the previous chapters, the notions of ‘Unspeakable Turk’ gained more traction in the North of Ireland, as opposed to the nationalist South where the feeling that the British Empire was the chief antagonist of the Great War was pervasive. Steel has pointed out the ‘mental gymnastics’ employed in post-War British media while trying to accommodate both the image of the ‘clean-fighting’ brave Turkish soldiers and that of the ‘terrible Turk’, responsible for the killings of the Armenians.<sup>98</sup> This is also evident in the North of Ireland. Lectures given by war veterans such as Lieutenant-Colonel Gibbon, organised by the Presbyterian Church and attended by the general public as well as important political figures such as Sir James Craig are indicative of this. In his speech, Gibbon presented ‘two distinct sides of the Turkish character.’ The Turk was at once a ‘brave soldier’ and brutal in his treatment of the Armenians. Gibbon said that, regarding the fate of the Armenians in the aftermath of the war, ‘It was no good to say to the Turks that they must not do these things- the Turks only understood force. That would mean renewed war and there was no sane man in Europe but shrank from that.’<sup>99</sup> While there

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<sup>96</sup> ‘Golden Rule Sunday’ was advertised in the *Belfast Newsletter* on November 23 and 28, 1923, December 5 and 6, 1924 and once in 1925, on November 24.

<sup>97</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, April 10, 1923.

<sup>98</sup> Daniel Steel, ‘Genocide and the ‘clean-fighting Turk’ in First World War Britain and Ireland’, *Historical Research*, Volume 94, Issue 264, May 2021,

<sup>99</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, February 7, 1923.



was public expressions of sympathy and support for the Armenians in Northern Ireland, the overarching discourse revolved around the notion that failure to secure an Armenian homeland was an unfortunate inevitability in the way that the peace negotiations unfolded, mainly due to the lack of unity amongst the Allied powers and the obstinacy of the Turks.

#### V. Republican Courting of the New Turkish State

In contrast, the Republicans persisted to espouse the new Turkish State as a symbol of the defeat of British imperialism and spared little thought for the fate of the Armenians. Leopold H. Kerney, while serving as the Republican representative in Paris, sent the following message to Ismet Pasha in the wake of the Lausanne conference:

*'The most dangerous things according to the old Irish proverb, are the horn of a bull, the hoof of a horse and the smile of an Englishman. The Irish people rejoice to know that you have escaped the last danger; you have profited from the example of the so-called 'treaty' between Ireland and England, you have known how to resist the threats, the bluff, the lies of England, her effort to divide the Turkish people and diminish Turkish territory. The Irish Republic sends its respectful greetings to independent Turkey, the first civilised nation to recognise the Irish Republic, will inspire Ireland in the task not yet accomplished in vanquishing English power, direct or indirect, in Ireland, thereby following the glorious examples Joan of Arc, George Washington and Kemal Pasha. In 1847, Turkey wished to send corn to Ireland, suffering then from an artificial famine, but was prevented from doing so by criminal England. Ireland remains grateful to Turkey and hopes that the independence she has reconquered will at all times enable her to overcome English intrigue'.<sup>100</sup>*

The references made to 'direct' and 'indirect' English power and Turkey successful 'reconquering' of her independence, despite English intrigue, reveal how Irish republicans drew lines of comparison between Turkey's retention of Anatolia, and Ireland's loss of the six northern counties. Just as Republicans tended to view those six counties as rightfully belonging to Ireland not Britain, they also considered that the lands that Turkey had been stripped of after the First World War as rightfully part of the Turkish state. The message also tries to establish a historical link between the Turkish and Irish nations, invoking the Ottoman assistance to Ireland during the famine.

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<sup>100</sup> *Éire The Irish Nation*, August 4, 1923.

Aside from the courting of Turkish diplomats, the Irish Republican press expressed a deep admiration for the person of Kemal Pasha and praised his modernisation of the Turkish State. Even when the Republican press in Ireland made a rare reference to the Armenian massacres, it was maintained that these violent incidents were not to be linked to or associated with the current Turkish Republic: ‘The old Turkey of sultans, harems and Armenian massacres has completely disappeared and has been replaced with a people of hard-working national realists.’<sup>101</sup> The Irish Republican press disregarded the validity of the Armenian cause and instead focused on Turkey’s apparent

*‘unparalleled sufferings, having been at war for over a dozen years with almost every European state; sometimes singly and sometimes all together, their national territory reduced by three quarters; their population by one half; their capital occupied by the English for four years, embarrassed by hundreds of thousands of refugees...’*<sup>102</sup>

Such was the enmity harboured by Irish Republicans for the British government that they were willing to believe that the vilification of Turkey was solely the work of British propagandists. Irish Republicans found common cause with Turkish nationalists, and just as they regarded themselves as blameless victims of imperial oppression, they portrayed the Turks in a similar light. Due to the fact that the details of the Armenian killings were widely publicised in Ireland, it can only be concluded that the Republicans regarded the situation in the Near East with selective memory, creating a narrative which best suited their own rhetorical intentions.

## VI. Ambiguity and Disinterest

The unionist and republican press in Ireland no doubt represent the two opposite extremes of Irish opinion on the Turkish-Armenian issue. The stance of the moderate nationalist and mainstream press, as well as that of the government of the Free State can be described as a mixture of ambiguity and disinterest. The *Freeman’s Journal* congratulated Kemal Pasha and his colleagues on their ‘energy and resourcefulness’ in winning favourable terms at Lausanne, but also expressed doubts as to the character of the new Turkish state, regarding it as an ‘experiment’.<sup>103</sup> Other news outlets such as the *Irish Examiner* showed enthusiasm for

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<sup>101</sup> *The Nation*, November 13, 1924.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Freemans Journal*, August 28, 1923.

the new Turkish state and published articles in which Kemal Pasha was regarded with something akin to celebrity status. One such article, published in February 1923, excitably proclaimed that Kemal Pasha had been spotted wearing Irish tweed and expressed the hope that ‘perhaps new markets are being opened up for the Irish Free State.’<sup>104</sup> The Free State government itself did not proclaim open support for either the Turkish State or the Armenian cause. Neither the Irish government nor the Catholic Church in Ireland offered any support or assistance to organisations such as the Friends of Armenia and there were no campaigns for fundraising evident in the Free State press. The Free State government moved to ratify the treaty of Lausanne under the impression that this would confirm the ‘definite establishment of peace between Ireland and Turkey.’<sup>105</sup> Ultimately, the fledgling Free State had more pressing issues to deal with and was in no position to make pronouncements in support of the Armenians or declarations that may jeopardise future potential relations or trade with the Turkish Republic. In simple terms, support for the Armenian cause and sympathy for their sufferings offered no ideological or practical reward for the Irish Free State during this period.

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<sup>104</sup> *Irish Examiner*, February 27, 1923

<sup>105</sup> Desmond Fitzgerald, Dáil Debate, Treaty of Lausanne – Motion to Acquiesce in its ratification, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1924, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1924-07-01/50/>.

## Conclusion

The histories of Ireland and Armenia have seldom intersected within academic literature. It may therefore, have been easy to assume that the events taking place in the Near East in the context of the First World War would have borne little relevance in Ireland. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, the Armenian Question garnered considerable interest amongst different political factions in Ireland throughout the period of 1895 to 1924. Irish perceptions of the Armenian Question were divided according to each political groupings' perspectives on both domestic and international developments. For Irish unionists, fighting on the British side in the First World War was a source of pride, a chance to highlight their loyalty to the British Crown and their determination to remain part of the Empire. Similarly, their sustained sympathy for the sufferings of the Armenians and vilification of the Turks was a rhetorical tool used to show their ideological alignment and belief in the benevolent and humanitarian nature of the British imperial project. For the optimistic constitutional nationalists in Ireland, the British government's concern for the fate of the Armenians was taken as a good omen. They hoped that the ideal of self-determination for small nations would be applied to both Ireland and Armenia after the Allied victory. However, the British handling of the situation in the Near East did not go uncriticised, even within the moderate nationalist discourse.

Before the First World War had even ended, there were radical Irish nationalists who believed that Irishmen fighting in British uniform was a disgraceful betrayal of the Irish nation. They reviled the war and regarded it as a war driven by imperial greed. Such was their suspicion and distrust of the British that they began to question the veracity of the reports coming from the mainstream press of the killings of Armenians. As radical separatist rhetoric gained popularity in Ireland and the Anglo-Irish war broke out, Irish nationalist activists were determined to present their case for independence at the post-war peace conferences. Time after time their efforts were frustrated as none of the major powers were willing to offend Britain by discussing the Irish Question. Irish nationalists, regarding their own aspirations for independence as the most legitimate, urgent and exceptional, looked on in jealousy and contempt as the Powers made promises to grant an independent nation to the Armenians. The Anglo-Irish War came to an end with the signing of the Treaty in 1921. The contents of the treaty caused a split within the nationalist movement. Anti-Treatyites saw the Treaty as a complete betrayal of everything they had been fighting for. This feeling of disappointment

was compounded by the fact that, in the same year, the Turkish nationalists were succeeding in thwarting the British-back Greek forces and were reclaiming the territories that had been stripped from them after the First World War. The Treaty of Lausanne saw the creation of the new Turkish Republic and the last hope for the foundation of an Armenian national home was dashed. Irish republicans looked on in awe of what the Kemalists had achieved. They saw themselves and their aspirations as more akin to that of the triumphant Kemalists rather than the defeated, stateless Armenians. While rogue Republican envoys worked outside of the government to court Turkish diplomats and agitate for international recognition, the leaders of the new Irish Free State were focused on domestic issues. The Civil War was still raging across Ireland and the new government was intent on establishing legitimacy and authority at home rather than paying attention to foreign affairs. Supporting the Armenian cause held no practical or ideological benefits for the new state. While unionists in Ireland continued to show sympathy for the Armenians, they were not outraged by the fact that the Allies had failed to keep their promises and slowly, unionist interest in the Armenian cause abated.

The inspiration for this research was sparked by the peculiarly ambiguous stance the Irish government has taken in response to calls to recognise the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1917. While this thesis does not seek to provide an explanation for this current position, the historical groundwork has been laid out here to demonstrate that contemporary reactions in Ireland were varied, deeply politicised and sometimes ambiguous. This thesis could be considered as the first step in unveiling the story of Ireland's interaction with the memory of the Armenian genocide. Future studies may consider to what extent the Irish policy neutrality played a role in preventing successive governments from taking a firm stance on this issue. What this thesis has shown is that from the very beginning, Irish opinion on the Armenian genocide was divided, deeply influenced by Irish perceptions of the British Empire, the future of Irish sovereignty and the First World War. Ireland is no longer a reluctant part of the British Empire, no longer in the throes of a revolution, no longer engulfed in civil war. As such, the main factors identified in this thesis that influenced Irish perceptions of the Armenian genocide should hold no bearing on current Irish attitudes towards this issue. The Irish government's decision whether or not to recognise the Armenian genocide should be dictated by their commitment to international justice norms and human rights over all else.

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## Appendix I.



Faculty of Humanities  
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### PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

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Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

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Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

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- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
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