

HALİDE EDİB (ADIVAR)'S APPEAL TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC FOR JUSTICE FOR THE TURKS

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On August 7, 1919, just as the Erzurum Congress of Turkish delegates from the eastern provinces of Anatolia was ending and preparations were underway to assemble representatives from all over the country for a national Turkish Congress at Sivas, the well-known Turkish author, Halide Edib (Adivar), while arranging for Louis Edgar Browne (1891-1951), then correspondent for the Chicago Daily News covering the revolutions in both Turkey and Russia, to travel to Anatolia to cover the congresses, entrusted him with a 'Letter to the American Public,' in the desperate but forlorn hope that the United States, which she still vainly expected would push aside the racist and bigoted efforts of the victorious Allies to deny to the Muslim Turks the self-determination and liberty which they were promising to the Ottomans' Christian minorities, would assume a mandate over those portions of the Ottoman Empire inhabited by Turkish majorities so that it would help them achieve self-determination and independence. Lost in the midst of the Turkish Revolution that followed, her fervent appeal for justice to the American Public has only just come to light in Browne's papers, held in collections of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University in California.

Attending both the Erzurum and Sivas Congresses, and carrying on personal interviews with Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and other leading figures of the Turkish War of National Liberation, Browne's reports, like those written in Britain's *Manchester Guardian* at the same time by then young British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, exposed to the American and British public alike the crass dissimulation and bigotry with which Christian Europe and its protégées among the Ottoman Christian minorities had pushed the victorious Allies into invading the Muslim portions of the Ottoman Empire in order to subject the Muslims to domination by these minorities. Halide

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Edib, who had been publicly stirring the Turkish population of İstanbul to rise up against the Allied occupation of the Ottoman capital as well as the unjust peace settlement being forced on the Turks by the Western Allies, subsequently evaded the Allied occupation of İstanbul and traveled to Anatolia with her husband, Adnan Adıvar. Joining Mustafa Kemal and the Turkish nationalists in their new capital at Ankara, Halide Edib worked to convince them that their best hope was to convince the United States to accept a mandate over the Turkish areas of Anatolia because of her (largely false) belief that the Americans would treat the Turks fairly and teach them to develop the kind of democratic institutions which would enable them to govern themselves. Her efforts were ignored by Mustafa Kemal, who had a better understanding of how American public opinion had been twisted against Muslims and Turks by Christian propaganda during the previous two decades. The universal truths which she espoused, however, remain as valid today in Turkey's relations with the western world as they were seventy - five years ago. While having little influence on Turkish policies, her appeal did ultimately make a significant contribution to the changes in public opinion which convinced the United States Congress to defeat Woodrow Wilson's efforts to assume a mandate which was intended mainly to establish Armenian and Greek rule in the Turkish areas of Anatolia¹.

LETTER TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC by Halide Edib

I. The Turkish Question.

The Turkish Question is now on the political table of the old and the new world to study and to pass the sentence. It is a case with a thousand and one faces and phases, and it has been presented to you by many different sources, but never by a Turk or the Turks although the Turks are mostly concerned in the matter.

I am going to present the case from the Turkish side as a whole. I believe that this question concerns the American public more than their Allies, for they alone preserve the confidence of the East as impartial and as territorially disinterested also as the only power which went into this terrible war with the sincere desire of straightening the world.

¹ These events, as well as Halide Edib's role in the Turkish War of National Liberation are discussed in detail in my study, *From Empire to Republic: The Turkish War of National Liberation, 1918 - 1923* (5 volumes, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000).

The Ottoman Empire as a whole, with all its different mass of races and communities, constitutes the Eastern Question. All the powers in Europe singly or in concert have approached the question, made more or less temporary changes on it according to the dominant political current of the time, but they entangled and obscured it more and more instead of enlightening or straightening the question.

I will state the case in three points:

- I. The Near East question in itself.
- II. How Europeans have approached it.
- III. How it ought to be approached.

- I -

The Eastern Question for us is contained within two circles:

1. The circle within is Turkey Proper with nearly 12 million Turks and several millions of different other communities and minorities.
2. The larger circle of Ottoman Empire with Turkey proper plus all the Arabs of Syria and Arabia, a people nearly fifteen millions.

The intellectuals in Turkey believe that the Syrian and Arabic question interests us economically and politically only in a particular way. Turkey as an Empire is a past ideal. Syria as a whole cannot be under the Turkish rule any way, but Turkey and Syria must be considered tied to each other economically that a good or a bad system of future government in either will affect the other in its essential features. On the borders they live in such a mixed proportion that in the solution of the old Ottoman Empire question, both must be considered put somewhat in a uniform system, and if a foreign power undertakes a mandate in one, she is bound to take a mandate in the other in order to be free from intrigue and political complications.

What concerns the Turk most essentially is Turkey Proper and I will state the Turkish case as clearly as possible.

Turkey has been very badly governed after the good old Sultans with their administrative and strong qualities had passed away.

The Turks have felt this during the last century with increasing keenness and clearness. It is owing to the strength of this feeling that the revolution of 1908 ended Absolutism and gave a share to the nation in government.

But good government in Turkey requires something more than efficiency or good will. Turkey has different minorities of different races and religions. The old Turks had given them all almost autonomous political privileges, and they had developed their own language, culture and life as almost a separate people and power. They went on alright with their Turkish rulers as long as the Turks were strong enough not to tolerate disturbance and the foreign appetite was not working thro' the minorities to create a necessity of interference in the Turkish affairs as a pretext for occupying the Turkish lands.

The Romanoffs in the East, through the Armenians and Habsburgs, and in the western borders, through the Macedonian races, worked hard to get Turkey in a state ripe for European partition.

The Armenian massacres which have caused this worhy indignation in Europe and in America are facts, but they are facts of a larger and more vital whole. Those who have come out to Turkey to pity, to save, to look after the massacred Armenians have seen an equal number of massacred, deported, starving and suffering Turkish humanity. While relief is being given out to the Armenians, thousands of Turks men, women and children are starving and dying in misery in the very same regions.

Those who consider that the Turkish baby or the Turkish women suffer as much as Christian under starvation and atrocities could tell America that there is a Turkish tragedy as much as there is an Armenian tragedy. Nay, there is more, there is a human tragedy, Kurd, Turk, Armenian and all have suffered and will suffer still as long as Turkey is not looked upon as a whole and with the conditions that lead to this almost infernal suffering of races.

I do not dispute the number of poor Armenians massacred, but I state that nearly a million of Mohammedans, Turks and Kurds were massacred by the Armenians as well. We neither have money nor men who could go out to America and give the necessary information. But the sense of justice of the average American is beyond religious prejudice.

If an American mission comes out to Eastern Anatolia with the purpose of studying the Turkish side of the Armenian atrocities, if they wish to see

how many Turkish villages were burnt, how many innocent Turkish people were massacred, if they do not surround themselves with Armenian dragomans or counselors, they could get the necessary documents not from the Turks only but from the Russian eye witnesses who wished to have the Turks exterminated on Russian frontiers as much as possible and unscrupulously used the Armenians for this purpose and got utterly disgusted in the proceedings themselves.

But I repeat again that the Turkish question does not consist of the Armenian or of the Turkish atrocities, they are auxiliary phases and only a part of the picture.

- II -

I gave the first picture. The second picture is how Europe approaches the Turkish question. She approaches it only with one idea. As the leading French papers gave the title 'The Great Inheritance' and how it ought to be divided between the Allies and who should get the largest share. As all the means that lead to it are fair, they use all the means.

The first obstacle to this grand scheme of partition is the Turk, so at first he must be provoked and put in a position which will lead him to extreme behaviour or misbehaviour. He has already lost all the credit he had in Europe and America by the one sided exposition of the Armenian massacres. Further action is necessary to confirm his already bad reputation that he may have no human voice rising in his behalf. First comes the scheme of great Armenia.

I am one of the Turks who welcomes the Armenian Republic in Erivan and believe in giving more satisfaction if it is thought necessary by an impartial American commission studying the Turko Armenian frontier question in place. But to disperse one million Armenians on vast lands which could keep over fifteen millions does not seem a friendly solution even to Armenians. It will arouse four million almost-armed Kurds who have children and wives massacred by the Armenians. The same is true of the Turks. The Armenians tell the same story. So to favour especially the Armenian and ask him to rule over a vast majority who have considered the position of the Armenian inferior means a second great tragedy. It will of course call European interference. Kurds could be made into a small mandate and added to Mesopotamia. In the meantime France could protect

great Armenia by some sort of mandatory position in Adana, Konya. Turks may ask Italy when they see themselves butchered on all sides. And on a whole region already in ruins, a new and more terrible fire will be kindled. The difficulty of the task has kept Europe from immediate action, and it is due to the patriotic chiefs in Anatolia region that revolution, Bolshevism waiting at the borders are kept out.

But in Smyrna immediate action could be taken, for after the Armistice the Turkish people on the coast were disarmed and the arms depots were passed to the English such as in Aidin and other centers.

In Smyrna 80 percent of the population is Turkish. Trade and the land is mostly Turkish, the whole place is Turkish. Except the Smyrna town itself and places such as Ayvalık, there is no Greek density.

One day Admiral Calthorpe tells the Turkish governor that Greeks are to occupy Smyrna. If the Turks make opposition, there are the warships ready to ensure quiet landing. So the Greeks land one morning. They act the first official Turkish extermination tragedy before the very eyes of those civilized troops in their typically Greek way. A wholesale massacre begins. Turkish officers are dragged, bayoneted, torn and spat upon. Little boys and men are killed with stones and tortures. The Turkish women violated and torn to pieces and the whole town robbed in the meanest way.

What the Greeks could do before the very eyes of their Allies they could do with infinitely more artistic ability in the interior. As the Greek occupation widens, the tragedy becomes more realistic and the heart of the Turk, men and women, rise in disgust and despair. In the place of the most prosperous Turkish towns such as Aidin and Menemen there is nothing but a handful of ashes. Not in a poetic sense but in the bare sense of a bare fact, 120,000 Turks have emigrated towards Broussa. And a handful of Turkish men and women are fighting on the ashes of their homes. Ships of girls hardly twenty years old, men who have just laid their arms are fighting. The Turkish government in its abject fear declares them rebels, but no sublimer little band of people have taken arms. The Greeks amuse themselves by lighting the old men's beard and burning them, by torturing the young men alive and by cutting them slowly to pieces and by dividing the Turkish girls among their civilized troops.

This time we have names, facts, photographs. The Turkish women and girls are fighting for their honour and for their country so we, the rest of the Turkish women, have prepared the documents and all in English. Whatever happens, we wish our American sisters to see and take note that in the history of women, Turkish women deserve a page.

The same story is being prepared in Thrace. An occupation of western Thrace by the Greeks with its 83 percent of Turkish population, with Smyrna tragedy fresh in their very eyes, will be the repetition of the same story .

So the more all the elements of Turkey exterminate each other, the more there are new ruins, disasters the better for the partition idea. Turks exterminated and the Christians tearing each other's throat is the place for the Allies to come in with their higher civilization and methods. It is enough said I think, for if I go further and give another picture of Greeks and Bulgarians, Bulgarians and Turks, it will be only another repetition with change of names and races.

So Turkey is like the bull in that wonderful story of Jack London, 'The madness of John Harned.' When he is in the trenches and arms in hand he fights in gentlemanly fashion, and such great armies and navies as the British and the French have seen him in Dardanelles and know that one cannot laugh at or insult the Turks or crush and provoke him by the methods used since the Armistice. But Smyrna and its little band of fighters of young girls dying bravely and honorably at least must arouse something in the hearts of European peoples, whatever politics or European statesmen may do.

III- HOW IT OUGHT TO BE APPROACHED

The European method of approach has openly failed. But the case is not at all hopeless. Only it must be approached not as a possible Colony but as a country which needs and demands help. If certain conditions are removed and certain new conditions created, Turkey would be as peaceful and prosperous as any country :

1. Equality and uniform political and judicial rights.

Each community belongs to a church government in Turkey plus the rights of a simple citizenship. Each church government or the Patriarchate is the agent of two outer Powers. For example, the Greek Patriarchate is the agent of Greece and the Great Power which happens to be furthering the

tingo Imperialism of Greece. It is so much of a government that Mr. Venizelos gives his orders and they work openly for Greece. They gather and offer formal prayers for the annexation of Constantinople (Istanbul) to Greece. They arm the Greeks to kill the Turks when they can get them single and protect the assassin in the name of Greece, saying that he is only a brave national hero. Hrisantos who is a simple robber has shot four Turkish policemen, and his elegies fill the Greek papers of Constantinople. That the Greek churches and the Patriarchate were arm depots is a fact which the Allied forces have actually seen and taken note of. When it is to the interest of Greeks in Turkey to enjoy the rights of Turkish citizenship, they hold to it, but when it comes to answer to the law for wrong doing, then they are the special protégés of Greece and its Allies. The dose of this attitude increases or decreases according to the political situation which dominates. And the Turkish reprisal begins when they are in a dominating position. Actually the Patriarchs give themselves the airs of separate Sultans so we have quite a number of political governments in Turkey. This is one of the fundamental evils out here, which prevents the forming of a proper government. The religious communities or organizations must cease to interfere in politics.

A reform and unification of the civil codes which could satisfy all the elements; a complete secularization of the government where all the races are proportionally represented are the first necessary steps to be taken.

2 - A uniform system of Universal education.

The Christian communities have had their schools apart, and any step to create a uniform system by the Turks aroused a perfect din of protestation and revolt from the Christians. The fundamental things taught in those community schools are the different sort of hatreds to be nourished for the Turks. When a wave of nationalism came to Turkey, the Turks followed the example of the other communities. Now the Turkish children can hardly pass Greek or Armenians streets. A stoning process begins by the Christian children. The same happens to the Christian children in Turkish streets.

Every person, either Greek or Armenian or Turkish, must be given equal opportunities to develop and harmonize and get ready for future self government. For, however large an Armenia is formed, Armenians of Turkey will not go. They are mostly engaged in trade and commercial pursuits, and nowhere in the world they can have the same opportunity for gain. The same is true of the Greeks.

The country must be opened to non political, commercial, industrial and agricultural undertakings. The country is rich enough to pay any undertaking of that sort. But :

I- The political rivalry and the partition policy must end.

II- Internal inequalities and abnormal political privileges must be removed.

III- A perfectly new and modern government for the benefit of all the peoples of all the land must be formed.

This new attitude, this changing of the physionomy of the East could be undertaken by a power with the following attributes:

I- She must be out of the European family of colonizing powers.

II- She must be strong enough to impose non interference to her Allies in Europe.

III- She must take the question into her hands with due knowledge of the conditions in Turkey.

IV- She must be religiously and racially impartial and to all the elements in Turkey.

V- She must be effecient in methods of teaching the people self-government.

America seems the power with these attributes. America is gone into the war not to gain extra land for Europe and Greece, but for a new ideal of peoples interest and happiness. Opposite to the destructive ideal of Lenine stands the constructive ideal of America.

At the bottom both wish to change the rotten, the hypocritical, the despotic and the selfish methods of the old world. No nation could voluntarily take to destruction before this sublime ideal of constructive policy for the benefit of the peoples fails and becomes only a dream.

(signed) Halide Edib
İstanbul, 7 August 1919

