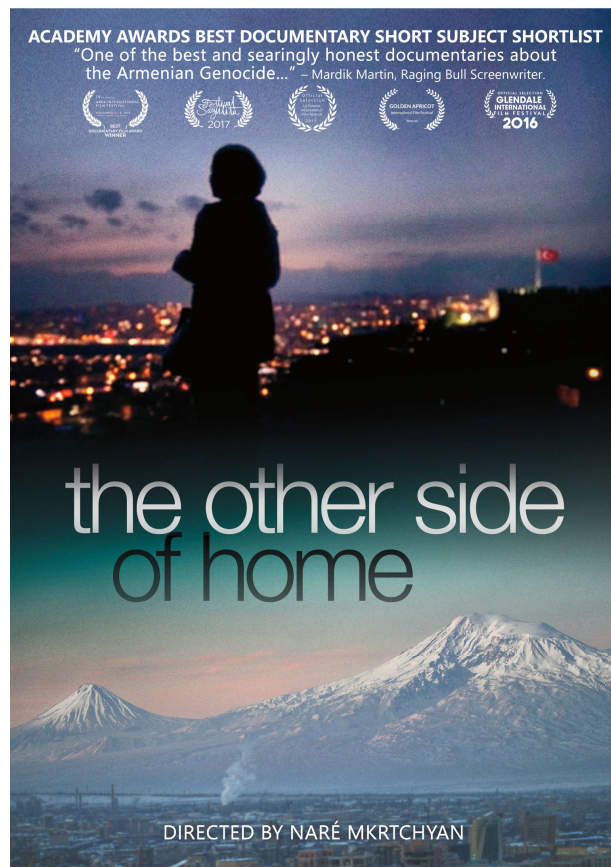




## THE OTHER SIDE OF HOME



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## **THE SIDE OF HOME**

### **Synopsis**

In 1915 an estimated 1.5 million Armenians were killed by the Ottoman Turks. A Turkish woman, Maya, discovers that her great grandmother was a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. She decides to go to Armenia to take part in the 100 year commencement of the Genocide in an effort to come to terms with her conflicted identity. *The Other Side of Home* is a universal story of identity, denial and how the experience of genocide creates a ripple effect for generations on both sides.

### **About Armenia**

The Republic of Armenia is a mountainous, landlocked country located between southwestern Europe and southeastern Asia, an area also referred to as Anatolia. It is bordered by Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkey. Its capital city is Yerevan. Armenia declared itself an independent nation in 1991.

The Armenian people have lived in Anatolia for thousands of years. Over that time, they have sometimes been an independent nation as they are today, and at other times they have been under the control of various other cultures including the Arabs, Greeks, and Byzantines.

Over their thousands of years of existence, the Armenian people have amassed a rich culture, including a distinctive language, literature, art, and architecture. The majority of Armenians are Christians. In 301 A.D., the country became the first in the world to adopt Christianity as its national religion. Armenia's coat of arms features Mount Ararat, which is believed by many people to be the resting place of the biblical Noah's ark. In the past, Mount Ararat was located in Armenia, however as a result of changing borders, while Mount Ararat is visible from Armenia, today this national symbol of Armenia is actually located in present-day Turkey.

### **The Armenian People in the Ottoman Empire**

Armenia was part of the Ottoman Empire for many years, and it was under this regime that the Armenian genocide occurred. The Ottoman Empire was founded in approximately 1300 by Muslim Turks, and eventually become one of the largest and most powerful empires in the world. At the height of its power—during the 15th and 16th centuries—it extended into the Balkan region, southeastern Europe, Greece, and parts of the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula. The Armenian people—like many other ethnic groups—were absorbed by the powerful Ottoman Empire as it expanded. Armenians made many important contributions to Ottoman culture, including noted works of architecture that still exist in present-day Turkey.

The Ottomans were primarily Muslim, and while the Armenians that became part of the Ottoman Empire were allowed to practice their Christian religion, they were often viewed as infidels and treated as second-class citizens, without the same rights as the Muslim majority among which

they lived. For example, they did not have the same legal and political rights as their Muslim neighbors, and they often had to pay higher taxes.

In addition to being treated as inferior, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were sometimes treated with resentment. One reason for this was that some Armenians merchants and industrialists were relatively wealthy, and were thus resented by neighbors who were less well-off. Attempts by some Armenians to gain civil rights also caused resentment. As a result of the resentment and mistrust that many Ottomans felt towards the Armenians, there were a series of massacres between 1894 and 1896, in which historians estimate that tens of thousands of Armenians were killed. These were not the only Armenian massacres. For instance, an estimated 20,000 were killed in 1909 after attempts to win autonomy.

### **The Young Turks and World War I**

In 1908, the Ottoman Empire was beginning to decline, and its government was overthrown by a political group known as the Young Turks, also called the Committee of Union and Progress. Under the Young Turks, resentment and mistreatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire increased further. In order to prevent further disintegration of the empire, the group promoted something called Turkification, which meant the elimination of minorities and the creation of a homogenous Turkish state. The Armenians were seen by many as an obstacle to Turkification.

In 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered World War I, allied with Germany and the Central Powers. One of its enemies was Russia, with which it shared a border. Some Ottomans were afraid that the Armenians would be more loyal to Russia, which had a Christian government. The Ottoman government used the threat of Armenian disloyalty in order to increase fear and distrust of the Armenian population. Historians point out that this cultivation of mistrust is one of the warning signs of genocide, and is often purposefully done, in order to instill fear against a particular group of people. In reality, while there is evidence that a small number of Armenians did help Russia during the war, the majority did not.

### **The Armenian Genocide**

Distrust, resentment, and hatred finally culminated in the Armenian genocide, which began in 1915. Most people see the genocide as officially beginning on April 24, 1915, when the government arrested and later killed several hundred Armenian doctors, writers, scientists, and other intellectuals. After these leaders were eliminated, the government went on to kill hundreds of thousands of Armenians throughout the empire, through massacres and mistreatment that was carried out by both the military and civilians.

Thousands of Armenians were rounded up and sent on death marches into the desert without food or water, and many died from hunger, thirst, and exhaustion. Thousands more were murdered by killing squads and buried in mass graves. In addition, Armenians throughout the Ottoman Empire were attacked and beaten, raped, tortured, and killed in numerous other ways. Their property was confiscated. Many Armenian children were kidnapped, converted them to

Islam, and put into Turkish homes. There is extensive evidence of these atrocities including eyewitness accounts, the testimony of survivors, reports from foreign diplomats, and even photographs.

The total death toll was high. Most researchers believe that there were approximately 2 million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire before the genocide started in 1915. They estimate that approximately 1.5 million were killed, leaving less than half a million behind. Many people call this the world's first genocide. Armenians also call the genocide the Medz Yeghern, which means "great catastrophe." The mass killings of Armenians greatly influenced Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term "genocide" in 1943, to describe what had happened to the Armenians, and later to the Jews during World War II.

In addition to all the Armenians who were murdered, many more lost their identities when they were saved and hidden by Turkish, Arab, and Kurdish families. Known today as, "hidden Armenians," these people were able to survive the genocide, but were forced to conceal their identities, often converting to Islam. As a result, a significant number of Turkish people today; unknowingly have Armenian ancestors.

### **Refusal to Acknowledge the Genocide**

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In 1918 the Ottoman Empire surrendered to the Allied powers and signed an armistice treaty, which ended its participation in World War I. When the war ended, there were some attempts at bringing the perpetrators of the genocide to justice. For instance, between 1919 and 1920, some senior officials from the Ottoman government were tried and executed for mass killings of Armenians. However, other leaders escaped the country before they could be tried.

While most historians agree that the Armenian genocide occurred, Turkey's government has always denied it. Instead, it has argued that while Armenians did die during the war, the number of dead has been greatly exaggerated. Turkey also insists that there was never a master plan to eliminate the Armenians and that this means that the deaths that did occur cannot be called genocide. Under Article 301 of the Turkish penal code, it is actually against the law to talk about an Armenian genocide. Article 301 prohibits anyone from criticizing Turkey or its government. Numerous Turkish writers, intellectuals, and others have been prosecuted under this law. In 2007, Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink was murdered after publicly speaking about hidden Armenians and the Armenian genocide.

As a result of their history of conflict, and the refusal of Turkey to acknowledge the genocide, relations between Armenia and Turkey are poor. The border between Armenia and Turkey was closed in 1993, and has remained closed since then.

Around the world, there has also been widespread reluctance by other countries to publicly acknowledge the genocide, because of fears of damaging political relations with Turkey. Some nations that have publicly acknowledged the genocide have been subject to threats from Turkey. For example, when Austria did so in 2015, Turkey responded by warning that Austria's

declaration would permanently damage relations between the two countries. Overall, the Armenian National Institute reports that only 28 countries have officially recognized the Armenian genocide.

The United States has not done so. In 2008, presidential candidate Barack Obama pledged to recognize the genocide if he became president, yet he failed to do so after being elected to office. However, despite a lack of official acknowledgment, the genocide is widely discussed and acknowledged in the United States. For example, in one New York Times editorial, two scholars point out that in 1915—the year of the genocide—there were 145 Times articles talking about it, which reveals that even then, many people were aware of what was happening. In 1915, the Near East Relief charity was created in the United States, in response to reports of the genocide. It helped provide food, clothing, shelter, and other aid for survivors.

### **Armenia Today**

Armenia declared itself an independent nation in 1918, but in 1922 it was incorporated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In 1991, it once again declared independence, and has remained an independent nation since then.

The country is estimated to have a population of about 3 million, with the vast majority being ethnic Armenians. There are an even greater number of Armenians living in other countries around the world, though, largely the result of the fact that so many were forced to flee as a result of the genocide. It is estimated that approximately 8 million Armenians live in other countries around the world, with some of the largest Armenian communities in Russia, France, the United States, Iran, Canada, Syria, and Lebanon.



## Glossary

- Anatolia: Also called Asia Minor, this peninsula of land is the westernmost part of Asia, and is the point where the continents of Europe and Asia meet.
- Ankara: Ankara is the capital of Turkey, and the country's second largest city.
- Armenia: Armenia declared itself an independent nation in 1991. It has a population of about 3 million people.
- Armenian Genocide Museum: Located in Yerevan, the museum is dedicated to honoring the memorial of the genocide victims, and raising international awareness about the Armenian genocide.
- Article 301: Part of the Turkish penal code, Article 301 makes it against the law to criticize Turkey or its government. Numerous writers, intellectuals, and others have been prosecuted under this law.
- Christianity: Christianity is a religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. In 301 A.D., Armenia became the first in the world to adopt Christianity as its national religion. Today its population is primarily Christian.
- conversion: To give up one set of religious beliefs and adopt another.
- Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (1954-present): Erdoğan is the president of Turkey.
- genocide: The United Nations defines genocide as, "Acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." In 1946 genocide was recognized as a crime by the United Nations General Assembly.
- Istanbul: Formerly known as Constantinople, Istanbul is the largest city and the largest port in Turkey. It is located in the northwestern part of the country, and it straddles the Bosphorus Strait, which separates Europe and Asia.
- Mount Ararat: This symbol of Armenia is featured on the country's coat of arms, and is believed to be the resting place of the biblical Noah's ark. While Mount Ararat is visible from Armenia, it is located in Turkey.
- Muslim: A person who follows the religion of Islam. The majority of Turkey's population is Muslim.
- Barack Obama (1961-present): Obama served as president of the United States from 2009 to 2017. He made a campaign promise to recognize the Armenian genocide, but failed to do so after being elected to the presidency.
- Ottoman Empire: The Ottoman Empire was founded in Anatolia in the late thirteenth century by Muslim Turks. It was one of the largest and most powerful empires in the world during the 15th and 16th centuries. It lasted until 1923, when it was replaced by the Turkish republic.
- Pope Francis (1936-present): Pope Francis is the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. He has urged the international community to recognize the Armenian genocide.
- Turkey: Turkey was founded in 1923, from the Ottoman Empire. It is located in Southeastern Europe and Southwestern Asia. Turkey shares a border with Armenia. It has a population of almost 80 million people.
- Turkification: The process through which existing local cultures were transformed into part of the Turkish empire and its culture.

- Yerevan: Yerevan is the capital city of Armenia. It is believed to be one of the world's oldest continually-inhabited cities. About a third of Armenia's population live in Yerevan.
- Young Turks: The Young Turks, also known as the Committee of Union and Progress, were a political group that seized power of the Ottoman government in 1908.

## Timeline

- 301 A.D.: Armenia becomes the first country in the world to make Christianity its official state religion.
- 1894-1896: The Ottoman government sanctions the murder of thousands of Armenians.
- 1908: A political group known as the Young Turks, or the Committee of Union and Progress, seize power in the Ottoman capital of Constantinople.
- 1909: Thousands of Armenians are massacred by the Ottoman government.
- 1914: World War I begins; The Ottoman Empire enters the war on the side of Germany and the Central Powers; Russia declares war against the Ottoman Empire; Some Armenians are accused of siding with Russia.
- 1915: There are an estimated 2 million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire; The Armenian genocide begins with the arrest of several hundred Armenian intellectuals, clergymen, and political leaders, quickly followed by mass deportations and killings of Armenians all over the Ottoman Empire.
- 1916-1917: Hundreds of thousands of Armenians are massacred in mass killings and forced marches.
- 1918: The Ottoman Empire surrenders to the Allied powers. The leaders of the Young Turks flee to Germany. Armenia declares itself an independent republic.
- 1920: The independence of Armenia is formally recognized by the Allied powers.
- 1922: Armenia is incorporated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).
- 1923: Turkey becomes a republic under Kemal Atatürk.
- 1987: The Armenian genocide is recognized by the United Nations and the European Union.
- 1991: Armenia declares itself an independent nation.
- 2008: U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama makes a campaign promise to recognize the genocide if elected to office, however he later fails to do so.
- 2012: France makes it a crime to deny that the Ottomans committed genocide against the Armenians. Turkey warns that it will retaliate.
- 2015: Armenians commemorate the 100th anniversary of the genocide. The killing of Armenians by the Ottomans is described as genocide by Pope Francis. Turkey recalls its envoy to the Vatican.
- 2016: The German parliament adopts a resolution to officially recognize the Armenian genocide.

## Additional Resources

### Books:

- Ronald Grigor Suny (2015). "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else:" A History of the Armenian Genocide. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Margaret Ajemian Ahnert (2007). The Knock at the Door: A Journey Through the Darkness of the Armenian Genocide. New York: Beaufort Books.
- Taner Akcam (2006). A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Thomas De Waal (2015). Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Raymond H. Kévorkian (2011). The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Vahakn N. Dadrian (2003). The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus. New York: Berghahn Books.

### Online Sources

- Armenian Genocide Museum of America. <http://www.armeniangenocidemuseum.org>
- Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. <http://www.genocide-museum.am>
- Armenian National Institute. [www.armenian-genocide.org](http://www.armenian-genocide.org)
- Genocide1915.org. <http://www.genocide1915.org>
- The Genocide Education Project. <https://genocideeducation.org>
- History.com, "Armenian Genocide." <http://www.history.com/topics/armenian-genocide>
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The Armenian Genocide (1915-16): In Depth." <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10008189>

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