

The Benefits and Challenges of Genocide Education: A Case Study of the Armenian Genocide

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Genocide education has been evolving for the past several decades. It was once commonly referred to as Holocaust education, as it primarily concentrated on the Jewish Holocaust. However, with the Armenian genocide entering our collective consciousness and the shock of contemporary genocides such as those in Cambodia, Serbia, Rwanda, and Darfur, educators have acknowledged the importance of a comparative approach to teaching about genocide. The importance of teaching from a variety of case studies, all of which carry unique qualities, has become an important component of genocide education. Thus, genocide education has now become an umbrella term that refers to the use of historical and contemporary cases of genocide to teach about social justice and human rights. The potential and urgency of genocide education has long been underestimated, as it has faced many challenges to date—for instance, the resistance displayed by some communities who deny a particular genocide and prefer the issue remain silent. For example, it was not until the 1970s that Holocaust curricula started to develop in North America, and today we see educational institutions at all levels adopting courses fully dedicated to the topic of genocide.¹

The goal of genocide education is not solely to educate students about historical accounts of genocide, but also, I argue, to help pave the way for one of the most effective avenues to anti-racist education. Genocide is a

consequence of deeply rooted societal discrimination, and it results from a series of human rights violations that render a people vulnerable to further exploitation. Racism and its dangers are therefore seen in their most visible and terrible form in genocide, making it a unique opportunity to teach and learn about these complex events. A combination of geopolitical circumstances and the manipulation of human behaviour often lead to active or indirect participation in genocide and similar crimes associated with human rights violations. Thus, genocide and human rights education creates an invaluable opportunity to explore the various choices available to all those affected by genocide, and the decisions that could have a positive impact on society even in the most difficult of times. The deep connections between individuals, the decisions we make, and the social conditions in which we live are embodied in genocide education. Genocide education also opens possibilities for empathetic forms of education to shift the barriers between societies where the concept of the Other is frequently raised and reinforced in harmful and destructive ways.

Genocide education remains a strong medium for educating students in the importance of safeguarding and understanding not just their individual human rights but also those that we share universally. According to research conducted by genocide scholar Samuel Totten, teachers strongly believe that genocide education provides opportunities for teaching about identity, moral theories, and character education.²

In “Holocaust Education in Ontario Schools: An Antidote to Racism?” Geoffrey Short showed that in many instances genocide education does not lead to anti-racist education unless teachers truly grasp the purpose and goals of the former. Thus, in order for genocide education to be delivered effectively, teachers require adequate professional development and continuous support. Without these conditions, it is easy for genocide education to become a survey course on genocides in history. Short goes on to cite the denial of genocide as an important concern requiring attention in the classroom: “Clearly, if the Holocaust is to function as an effective antidote to racism it is essential to counteract Holocaust denial.”³

In *The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools*, Thomas Fallace discusses the “*New York Times* debate” of the 1970s in light of the emergence of Holocaust education curricula and the New York City Board of Education’s recommendation that its study be made mandatory in all its schools. Among the letters published in this debate were some denying

the Holocaust and thus challenging Holocaust education. For instance, George Pape, president of the German-American Committee of Greater New York, claimed that there was no proof the Holocaust had really taken place; he also wrote that the curriculum would target innocent German Americans. Dr. M. T. Mehdi, president of an Arab-American organization, claimed the curriculum was Zionist propaganda that was going to be promulgated at the city's expense. While many non-partisan spectators also believe that teaching this curricula would disrupt the peace amongst ethnic groups and incite hatred, this view is misleading. The goals of genocide education are quite the opposite of this, and in fact are intended to dispel feelings of resentment, hatred, and discrimination that may exist between ethnic groups. This kind of false and misleading reasoning resurfaced over three decades later in the case of the Turkish government's denial of the Armenian genocide during the Toronto District School Board's implementation of genocide education.

On 13 July 2005, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) put forward a motion that eventually led to the development of the grade eleven Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course and, on 14 December 2005, it decided to integrate the Armenian genocide into the high school-level history curriculum. Once the inclusion of the curriculum was settled upon, and after the course had been written in 2007, the government of Turkey began an offensive to prevent proper acknowledgement and education on the issue of the Armenian genocide.

On 27 August 2008, Ottawa's *Embassy Magazine* reported on the issue in an article titled "Turkey Decries Toronto School Board Genocide Course." The author, Michelle Collins, reported that the Turkish embassy, together with the Council of Turkish Canadians (CTC), had begun lobbying against the course. Both argued, as George Pape had of the Holocaust in the 1970s, that no such thing as an Armenian genocide had ever taken place and that the TDSB's new course would expose students to racism and discrimination.

Despite the fact that a growing number of Turkish intellectuals, both in and out of Turkey, have questioned the Turkish government's position on the Armenian genocide—albeit amidst protest and death threats—the CTC aggressively denies and actively works against any effort to acknowledge, commemorate, recognize, or teach the Armenian genocide in Canada. Their website houses material denying the genocide, ranging

from archived petitions to position papers in line with the Turkish government's views.⁴

One such petition is titled "Content Change for TDSB's Grade 11 Course Genocide: Historical and Contemporary Implications," published by Lale Eskicioglu on 23 November 2007. The petition claims that the course would expose Turkish-Canadian students to more racism and discrimination without presenting any documented incidents or facts to support the claim of genocide. It used multiculturalism as a pretext to exclude the Armenian genocide from the course, since it is claimed that it is unfair and unjust to impose perpetrator status on an entire nationality. The petition also includes a mention of two instances of terrorist acts against Turkish government officials in Canada, claiming these are examples of racism that could be supported by the course. It concludes by stating that many "respected historians" dispute the Armenian genocide, and it cites the supposed lack of consensus amongst historians as grounds for disqualifying the Armenian genocide from being included in the course.⁵

The TDSB provided an opportunity for individuals to present deputations to the Program and School Services Committee on 16 January 2008. Individuals were given the opportunity to either raise concerns for or express their support of the course. Deputations were made in support of the course by Leo Adler, a Toronto Criminal Lawyer, Professor Frank Chalk, Director of the Montreal Institute of Genocide Studies at Concordia University, Jim Karygiannis, MP for Scarborough-Agincourt, and David Warner, former speaker of the Ontario Assembly. Two individuals presented deputations against the course—Lale Eskicioglu, representing the CTC, and Professor Ozay Mehmet, a Turkish-Canadian academic from Carleton University. A review of the deputations provides insight into the barriers posed by genocide denial.

Lale Eskicioglu's oral deputation was a replica of the contents of the aforementioned petition, of which she was the author. She started off by targeting Barbara Coloroso's 2007 book *Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide*, which was included in the curriculum. Eskicioglu claimed the book was used as a basis for the genocide curriculum and discredited Coloroso's work since she is not a historian. She claimed the history of the Armenian genocide is "disputed" and that the works of certain historians who held the view supported by the Turkish government were not consulted, in particular that of Justin McCarthy and Guenter Lewy. Books by

McCarthy and Lewy, known genocide deniers, were handed out to those present. She concluded by claiming that the decision for the course was one-sided and that “the claims of an Armenian Genocide are being used to justify [the] racism, hatred and prejudice our children are experiencing.”⁶

The second speaker, Professor Ozay Mehmet, demanded that the TDSB re-examine the curriculum “and remove all Armenian references in this course” for the following reasons: “The Armenian component, text references and bibliographic sources are one-sided, ethnically biased, and reflecting only Armenian input and promotes ethnic hate”; the use of the term “Armenian genocide” in the course amounts to accepting forged documents as valid; the Armenian part of the course will expose Turkish children to harassment and bullying in our schools; and finally, the Canadian government’s position on this matter is unclear.⁷

While the speakers opposing the course were of Turkish origin, the deputations supporting the course came from a variety of backgrounds and displayed the diverse support the inclusion of the Armenian genocide module had received. These refuted many of the concerns raised by the CTC. For example, they stressed that the course in no way equates present-day Turkish citizens with the perpetrators of genocide (i.e., the Committee of Union and Progress). Professor Frank Chalk stressed that the international scholarly consensus supports the fact that the Armenian case is rightfully classified as genocide according to the UN’s genocide convention. He also suggested that the CTC would be applauded as honest and courageous if they finally confronted the history of the Armenian genocide rather than supporting the Turkish government’s policy of denial. He also stressed that the Canadian government is clear on the issue of the Armenian genocide and has officially recognized it as fact.

It was apparent from the beginning that those opposed to the inclusion of the Armenian genocide had used concerns of discrimination, bullying, and terrorism, as stated in the CTC petition, merely as a guise.⁸ Their position was first and foremost a defence rooted in the Turkish government’s denial of the Armenian genocide.

A close look at the contents of the course would immediately dispel the CTC’s fears of discrimination and racism. The course provides a thorough exploration of morals, values, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and similar themes that lay the groundwork for the case studies that follow. The curriculum does not allow for any form of discriminatory sentiment

or animosity between ethnic groups. It is clear in the course that *genocidaires* from Nazi Germany and the Ottoman Empire in no way represent the German or Turkish citizens of today—rather, the curriculum supports a movement to collectively acknowledge the wrongs of the past and build a positive future. The TDSB also addressed the concept of multiculturalism, stating that the very notion of multiculturalism supports the need for such a course:

Given the specific multi-cultural and multi-ethnic diversity within Toronto, we feel it is essential that students born within and outside Canada have the opportunity to explore in depth the causes and consequences of genocide and the lived realities of the aggressors, targets, bystanders, and resisters to these horrific acts of violence. A study of these experiences will help foster a sense of empathy for the targets of these violent acts and hopefully encourage students to understand the connections they have to their fellow human beings.⁹

In the *New York Times* debate described above, German interest groups had presented many concerns about Holocaust education that were similar to Turkish concerns over the TDSB course. If we as a society had not disregarded these concerns as attempts at denying genocide, we might never have achieved the successes in genocide education of the past few decades. As Germany worked to come to terms with the Holocaust and use its lessons to promote positive change, this led to an inspirational and exemplary social transformation from a nation that perpetrated genocide to a pluralist society. Unfortunately, this acknowledgement of guilt, and the resulting social transformation, did not occur in Turkey, where political leaders have insisted on denying the truth and forcing a fabricated history onto its people. The CTC's defense is ultimately the product of the systematic denial of the Armenian genocide. Organizations such as the CTC and the "respected" historians mentioned in their petition ultimately perpetuate the cycle of genocide rather than one of positive social transformation. Their insistence that any mention of the Armenian genocide is a universal attack on Turks has kept generations in the dark, thus leading to the outrageous behaviour experienced by the TDSB when trying to implement curricula that is beneficial and healthy for society.

The International Association of Genocide Scholars, in a 24 January 2008 letter of support to the TDSB, addresses this claim of a “universal attack” on Turks by stating that the

assertion that teaching the truth about the Armenian past will be demeaning to Turkish students or Turkish people in general denigrates the intelligence of Canadians of Turkish descent and strikes us as disingenuous. Education in a democracy is built on historical critique and critical evaluation. When the history of US slavery, British colonialism, German genocide of Jews and Roma, Mussolini’s fascism, Stalin’s purges, or Mao’s human rights crimes, is taught, the descendants of the perpetrators’ nationalities (Americans, British, Germans, Italians, Russians, or Chinese) are not demeaned or persecuted by anyone. On the contrary, they emerge from learning those histories better educated, with a stronger sense of how important critical analysis of the past is; and they achieve an ethical capacity crucial to good education. In dealing with the truth about their nations’ histories, they develop the moral honesty crucial to the progress of human rights in a democracy. The study of genocide is not designed to impose collective guilt. It is meant to seek to understand a common human problem. Turks as a people did not commit the Armenian genocide, any more than Canadians or Americans in general committed genocide against native American populations. But some of our ancestors did commit these crimes, and it is our present responsibility to study and acknowledge them in order to prevent genocides in the future.¹⁰

Although German-American organizations have realized the importance and benefits of understanding and acknowledging the past as a means of creating a peaceful society, the government of Turkey has yet to do so; in the meantime, it encourages Turkish communities abroad to parrot its position.

The TDSB was not the first or only target of genocide denial on the part of the Turkish government and its affiliates. What we saw in the TDSB case study has been a common occurrence throughout North America. An earlier episode is discussed by Roger Smith, who shows how, amongst many other means of denial, the Turkish government targeted secondary schools in the United States as it grew fearful that the Armenian genocide

would be discussed in classrooms. Smith notes how “a letter from the Turkish embassy in Washington was sent to secondary schools throughout the United States to dissuade them from using histories that mention the Armenian Genocide. Stronger efforts still have been made to prevent any discussion of the 1915 genocide being formally included in the social studies curriculum as part of Holocaust/genocide studies.”¹¹

Mark Fleming also discusses difficulties faced by the state of Massachusetts in implementing genocide education. In 1999, a guide for teaching genocide and human rights, including the Armenian genocide, was issued by the Massachusetts Board of Education. In October 2005, a group of Turkish Americans, led by the Assembly of Turkish-American Associations (ATAA), filed a lawsuit against the Board of Education claiming that the guide violated the First Amendment because it cited the Armenian case as genocide. This was a failed attempt to jeopardize the teaching of the Armenian genocide.¹²

In *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*, scholar Richard Hovanissian describes the significance of genocide denial:

It has been said that denial is the final phase of genocide. Following the physical destruction of a people and their material culture, memory is all that is left and is targeted as the last victim. Complete annihilation of a people requires the banishment of recollection and the suffocation of remembrance. Falsification, deception and half-truths reduce what was to what may have been or perhaps what was not at all. ... By altering or erasing the past, a present is produced and a future is projected without concern about historical integrity. The process of annihilation is thus advanced and completed by denial.¹³

This effectively characterizes the CTC’s intentions, which is part of a larger denial apparatus belonging to the Turkish government. The policies set forth by the Turkish government have had a tremendous effect on how the Armenians are viewed by those raised and educated in Turkey. The establishment of a legal framework restricting certain thoughts and encouraging others, the vilifying of the Armenian population, and genocide denial have all led to viewing Armenians as the Other, and behaviour toward them has been fashioned accordingly. Article 301 of the Turkish

penal code, which criminalizes defending the existence of the Armenian genocide, has already vilified many intellectuals for their views. The assassination of the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, in January 2007, by an ultra-nationalist Turkish citizen in Istanbul, was a by-product of such a law. The law made Dink a criminal in the eyes of the public and thus a target for hatred and death.

Denial is an attack on the memories of survivors and their descendants. According to genocide scholar Gregory Stanton, “It is a continuing attempt to destroy the victim group psychologically and culturally, to deny its members even the memory of the murders of their relatives. That is what the Turkish government today is doing to Armenians around the world.”¹⁴ In other words, it is an attack on the collective memory of a people and their right to commemorate. Those who deny history, such as the Armenian genocide or the Holocaust, are attempting to conceal the truth. Genocide scholar Israel Charney describes deniers as individuals who “are attempting to write a final chapter to the original genocide—now by ‘mass murder’ of the recorded memories of human history. If being alive as human beings means some basic sense of knowing the record of history, the ‘killing’ of objective history is also the killing of human consciousness and evolution.”¹⁵ Denialists’ motives for destroying memory are exactly the reason why we value the stories told by those who survive such mass atrocities as the Holocaust, given that a great deal of education is centred on the sharing of testimonies. If that very memory were to be denied, and the suffering trivialized, this would leave society with lessons unlearned.

While teaching about denial in the grade eleven Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course at the ARS Armenian Private School, I shared with the class a poem written by Canadian-Armenian author and academic Alan Whitehorn. This poem, titled “How Do We Remember the Dead?” deals with the denial of the Armenian genocide. I asked the students to reflect and record their thoughts on the poem. The responses I received were expressive of the extent to which the crime of genocide had affected their lives through its denial. I saw the student responses as calls to the government of Turkey to break the cycle of genocide and, by doing so, end its assault on the conscience of the Turkish people and the memory of the Armenians who were victimized in 1915. It was a call to also set subsequent generations free from being victims in the present.

There is a parallel between the wounds caused by physical violence during the Armenian genocide, as discussed in survivor testimony, and the wounds students have on occasion described, and which are caused by denial. These are wounds inflicted in different ways, leaving different marks but caused by the same crime. Therefore, the Armenian genocide is an event, the physical and mental consequences of which are felt across generations. Moreover, its denial has had a profound effect on the identities of Armenian communities in the diaspora.

The experience of three generations of victims and survivors is commonly shared by many members of the Armenian community and is a concept worth examining. There is an absence of research on the effects of the denial of the Armenian genocide on subsequent generations. Such research would bring to light the harmful consequences of denial that are often sanctioned under the guise of freedom of speech.

2013–2014 marked the sixth academic year the TDSB’s Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course was offered. Since its implementation, the school board has also declared April Genocide Awareness Month. Over the years, the course has become popular among students, teachers, and administrators alike. Registration numbers alone show this, as they demonstrate a consistent increase in enrolment from year to year. Facing History and Ourselves, an organization involved in developing the course, provides ongoing professional development and teacher support, ensuring teachers are confident and effective, and are meeting the goals and purpose of genocide education.

In 2014, the Federation of Turkish Canadian Associations (FTCA)—an organization similar to the CTC—released a petition to request the removal of the Armenian genocide module. It also asked that a section reading “genocide of Armenians, Assyrians and Pontian Greeks” in the school board’s 2013 Genocide Awareness Month statement be removed.¹⁶ At the start of 2014, the ATAA pursued genocide denial as the California State Assembly passed a resolution on teaching the Armenian genocide.

In light of such denial campaigns, a TDSB course proposal released in 2008 rings true:

Given the specific multi-cultural and multi-ethnic diversity within Toronto, we feel it is essential that students born within and outside Canada have the opportunity to explore in depth the

causes and consequences of genocide and the lived realities of the aggressors, targets, bystanders, and resisters to these horrific acts of violence. A study of these experiences will help foster a sense of empathy for the targets of these violent acts and hopefully encourage students to understand the connections they have to their fellow human beings.¹⁷

Here, the TDSB provides a unique opportunity for promoting multiculturalism and diversity through genocide education; conversely, the legal and educational structure of the Turkish government—the very same government attempting to negatively influence the domestic affairs of another country—has suppressed free discussion of and research into the Armenian genocide.

The inclusion of the Armenian genocide in Canadian curricula is imperative. Canada has been engaged with Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire since 1878. Canadian fieldworkers and missionaries were present in the empire and witnessed the destruction of the Armenian population. They often communicated their experiences and concerns through letters and news reports, thus allowing Canadians to become well aware of the plight of the Armenians. A significant increase in Canadian media coverage triggered large scale and popular support for fundraising and relief efforts as early as the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1896, during which time three hundred thousand Armenians were murdered.¹⁸ The Armenian Relief Fund Association of Canada was formed in 1916, to better coordinate such fundraising.

Over 15 years, it collected an impressive \$1,000,000 in donations and had among its patrons Toronto's Roman Catholic archbishop and Anglican archdeacon, an Ontario Supreme Court justice, and two governors general. Its officers were mostly businessmen and clergymen. It had more than 25 chapters and worked in conjunction with the British Lord Mayor's Fund and the American Near East Relief.¹⁹

The teaching of the Armenian genocide, especially in the context of Canadian history, creates opportunities to learn about the positive outcome of humanitarianism, collective action, and global citizenship. It also sheds

light on the positive role government officials, religious institutions, civil society, and the media can play in effecting change.

In its revised 2013 Canada and World Studies curriculum, the Ontario Ministry of Education included the topic of the Armenian genocide as a specific expectation in the mandatory grade ten Canadian History Since World War I course. Teachers can address the Armenian genocide when studying the importance of public commemoration and the acknowledgement of past human rights violations and genocide. The students are also asked to address the importance of these actions for identity and heritage in Canada. This is an important step towards incorporating this important page in Canadian history into mandatory curricula.²⁰

Genocide denial is one of the biggest challenges to the implementation of genocide education. Stanton identifies denial as the last stage of the genocide process. It is a by-product of impunity and, if left unaddressed, can fuel future instances of mass violence. For this reason, genocide denial at the state level—as it is being practised by the government of Turkey today—can be dangerous. Since the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923, successive governments have created an atmosphere of amnesia concerning Armenia and Armenians through the manipulation of geography, culture, and official history. These exercises in memory politics have then been pursued in all possible political, legal, and socio-cultural arenas and by a variety of government ministries, from education to culture. The infamous Article 301 of the Turkish penal code stands as just one example that is often cited as problematic.

Although organizations such as the CTC and the ATAA publicly deny the Armenian genocide abroad, a growing number of Turkish intellectuals in Turkey and the diaspora have called for Turkish recognition of the Armenian genocide. These include Taner Akcam, Fatma Muge Gocek, Halil Berktaç, Cengiz Aktar, and Baskin Oran. In December 2008, thousands of Turks signed a petition apologizing for the Armenian genocide and calling on the Turkish government to acknowledge this history. The authors of the petition were threatened with trial under Article 301. In April 2010, on the ninety-fifth anniversary of the Armenian genocide, an unprecedented number of Turkish intellectuals signed a petition, which in part read “We call upon all peoples of Turkey who share this heartfelt pain to commemorate and pay tribute to the victims of 1915. In black, in silence. With candles and flowers.”²¹ A group of intellectuals also held a vigil at the prison where

hundreds of Armenian intellectuals were detained prior to being executed on 24 April 1915. The following year, the number of intellectuals reached five hundred, and it has been growing ever since, despite government intimidation and the imposing fear of imprisonment and threats. Indeed, these actions were met with thousands of protesters chanting death threats and such discriminatory slogans as “Death to the Armenian Diaspora.”²²

The Turkish government’s unwillingness to acknowledge the Armenian genocide and its disallowing of any mention of it under laws restricting freedom of speech have prevented Turkish society from having an opportunity to take responsibility. By maintaining the taboo on the Armenian genocide, the Turkish government has glorified the lives of the perpetrators of genocide while maintaining silence on the history of those who should have become the heroes of Turkish society, those who saved Armenian lives in 1915. Imagine a Germany where Schindler’s story was silenced by the state and Hitler’s was praised. Raffi Bedrosyan gives us an idea of how the glorifying of genocide perpetrators plays out in Turkey in his article “The Real Turkish Heroes of 1915”:

And yet, it is true in Turkey, where it is acceptable to name several neighborhoods, streets, and schools after Talat Pasha and other *Ittihat ve Terakki* (Committee of Union and Progress) “heroes” who not only planned and carried out the Armenian Genocide, but were responsible for the loss of the Ottoman Empire itself.

At last count, there were officially 8 “Talat Pasha” neighborhoods or districts, 38 “Talat Pasha” streets or boulevards, 7 “Talat Pasha” public schools, 6 “Talat Pasha” buildings, and 2 “Talat Pasha” mosques scattered around Istanbul, Ankara, and other cities. After his assassination in 1922, Talat was originally interred in Berlin, Germany, but his remains were transferred to Istanbul in 1943 by the Nazis in an attempt to appease the Turks. He was re-buried with full military honors at the Infinite Freedom Hill Cemetery in Istanbul. The remains of the other notorious *Ittihat ve Terakki* leader, Enver Pasha, were also transferred in 1996 from Tajikistan and re-buried beside Talat, with full military honors; the ceremony was attended by Turkish President Suleyman Demirel and other dignitaries.²³

The power of education, and genocide education specifically, resonates clearly here. Genocide denial presents itself as a great obstacle to this important form of education, a roadblock above and beyond the borders of perpetrator governments as we have seen in the case of the Turkish government.

In the absence of justice, reconciliation, and social reform, denial fuels the cycle of genocide by leading the perpetrator state from a post-genocidal society back to a pre-genocidal stage outlined in Stanton's "Ten Stages of Genocide" (i.e., classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, persecution, extermination, and denial).²⁴ Denial allows genocide to transcend time and space, following victims and their offspring. Thus, genocide does not begin and end with physical destruction, nor do its effects remain constrained to particular borders. As mentioned above, people in California, Massachusetts, and Ontario have found themselves affected by campaigns being pursued far from the time and place of the physical violence.

The transgenerational effects of genocide fuelled by denial were common themes among the Canadian-Armenian youth interviewed by the Sara Corning Centre for Genocide Education throughout the course of the Armenian genocide's one hundredth anniversary commemorative period. Titled "100 Voices: Survival, Memory and Justice," this set of interviews was conducted with secondary-level students from grade nine to twelve at the ARS Armenian Private School in Toronto. A common concern shared by the interviewees is the fact that the Turkish republic continues to deny the Armenian genocide and this continues to cause trauma for generations subsequent to those who survived.²⁵

Denial is a common issue that continues to affect victim groups of all genocides, and the need to educate about the effects of genocide denial is therefore a necessity. A letter supporting the TDSB course written by Rwandan genocide survivor Leo Kabalisa on 22 January 2008 identifies how denial continues to affect all victims of genocide, irrespective of time and place, and becomes a barrier to education and prevention. A part of his letter reads:

Your program [the TDSB course] is being implemented at the right time because we are facing the phase of denial of the genocides. Ninety-two years after the Armenian genocide, instead of learning from the past, the current leadership of Turkey is spending

time and energy to deny the sad history of their past. In the case of the genocide of Tutsis, conferences and forums of discussion have been organized throughout Europe by Hutu extremists and their supporters to revise and deny the history of the genocide of the Tutsis. For the Holocaust, we all remember last year's conference in Teheran in which the reality of the Holocaust was questioned by scholars invited by the president of Iran. ... Those who complain about the teaching of genocide too often are simply genocide deniers. Do not yield to their attempts to influence valid curriculum.²⁶

By responding to and overcoming such challenges, societies demonstrate their dedication to creating safe spaces where new generations can learn and become the change. The TDSB expressed this well in its proposal to the Ontario Ministry of Education: "Democracy, justice, and the rule of law must be understood, claimed, and defended by each generation of citizens if we are to confront this demonstration of human evil. We believe that a full-credit course will engage students and allow them to study genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in a systematic and thoughtful way."²⁷ The Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity course remains true to this rationale.

Moral philosopher Annette Baier states: "The reasons for recognizing obligations to future persons are closely connected with reasons for recognizing the rights of past persons."²⁸ If we cannot address the past and draw lessons from it, starting with respecting the rights of past persons, then we cannot ensure the rights of persons in the future.

NOTES

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- 6 Hratch Aynedjian, Program Committee Deputations (16 January 2008), DVD.

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- 12 Mark Fleming, "Government Speech, Free Speech, and Education: The Constitutional Challenge to the Massachusetts Genocide Education Guide," *University of St. Thomas Journal of Law and Public Policy* 4, no. 2 (2010): 18–30.
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