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Erik Sjöberg, *The Making of the Greek Genocide: Contested Memories of the Ottoman Greek Catastrophe*. Berghahn Studies on War and Genocide 2017, 258 pp., ISBN 978-1-78920-063-8.

Inevitably, Genocide Studies straddles the fine line between history and politics. Following a 2003 state-initiated program to teach young people about the Holocaust, the Swedish government funded a *Forum för levande historia* ("Forum of living history"). Subsequently, the question of whether schools should also teach children about atrocities committed in the name of Communism led to a drawn-out debate in 2006 on the right or responsibility of politicians to engage with history. In the same vein, a similar controversy arose in 2010 over an issue that had been brooding for many years: should the Swedish parliament officially acknowledge the fate of the Ottoman Armenians in 1915 as a genocide? In the end, the Swedish Parliament not only acknowledged the Armenian genocide, but also included Ottoman Assyrians and Pontic Greeks in their endorsement, a fact that drew harsh criticism from some observers who cited the uncertainty of the numbers surrounding especially the Pontic Greek case and the controversy that the same claim had recently aroused among genocide scholars in the United States.

It is the decades-long discussion that had preceded the Swedish parliamentary decision – mainly in Greece, but also internationally – that is the subject of Erik Sjöberg's recent book *The Making of the Greek Genocide*. Even through a cursory analysis of its title, which contains the words "making" and "genocide," one can sense the potentially problematic nature of the topic and how easily it might offend a reader irrespective of their perspective. Fortunately, the book quickly dispels whatever misgivings the reader might have: despite his thorough engagement with a vast and complex material, the author skillfully avoids getting caught in the crossfire of different interpretations. The chain of events from the Balkan Wars and First World War to the Greek-Turkish war and final disappearance of the Ottoman Empire are all related in the first chapter, but the book is not devoted to them. The wars, deportations, ethnic cleansings and population exchanges that led to the annihilation of the Greeks in Asia Minor are merely the prologue to the debate over

a national trauma that was initially forgotten under the burden of all the other tragedies and challenges that the young Greek state faced in the mid-twentieth century which included foreign occupation, civil war, and military dictatorship.

The case for a Greek genocide began in the Pontic community in 1980s Greece, and its initial overtones were leftist if not anti-nationalistic. The Pontic Greeks had always been markedly distinct from other Greek groups in the Eastern Mediterranean, and as survivors and refugees they had repeatedly felt neglected and excluded from the national identity promoted by the Greek state. By rediscovering their own trauma, they not only gave a voice to their own dead, disappeared or dispersed ancestors and relatives, but also to their own community within Greece and abroad. Sjöberg follows the many turns, twists, and transformations which, over the course of the ensuing two decades, pushed the Pontic claims for recognition politically rightwards, getting adopted first by nationalist Greeks who saw the Pontic trauma as that of the Greeks as a whole, then by the Greek community in the United States. Living in a country that had, by and large, come to equate the term genocide with the Jewish Holocaust – and where calls to recognize the Armenian claims regularly clashed with political interests to maintain good relations with Turkey – American Greeks began to uncover their own forgotten family traumas, and soon joined demands for a joint recognition of the Greek, Armenian and Assyrian/Syriac genocides as a “Christian Holocaust”. This highly contested designation led to a falling-out within the International Association of Genocide Scholars, who both feared a gradual watering down of the concept and deplored the lack of systematic scholarship on the subject. In fact, the recognition turned out to be dissatisfying to many others as well: whereas the Pontic Greeks had effectively lost their special status and become genocide victims along with other Greeks and Christians, the Armenians found it problematic to share their own much more uncontested claim with the Greeks, whose expulsion from Asia Minor took place under significantly different conditions, with a much less obvious claim to victimhood.

For a book that is, to a great extent, based on newspaper columns, debate articles, and political proclamations in one direction or the other,

it is impressive how it still manages to create a fluid and captivating narrative. Some might claim that giving too much precedence to the surrounding debate and political discourse rather than to the tragedy itself, may somehow diminish and relativize the fate of the Pontic Greeks. Conversely, others might claim that more attention ought to have been given to how the debate diverted the attention from significant failures of the modern Greek state, as well as the United States, to acknowledge the diverse voices and memories of their own subjects and communities. In the end, however, neither of these are Sjöberg's objective. The book he has written is as history ideally should but rarely manages to be: a thorough but very clearly delineated investigation, where the various pieces of the source material form a fully readable whole.

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