

Guest Editorial

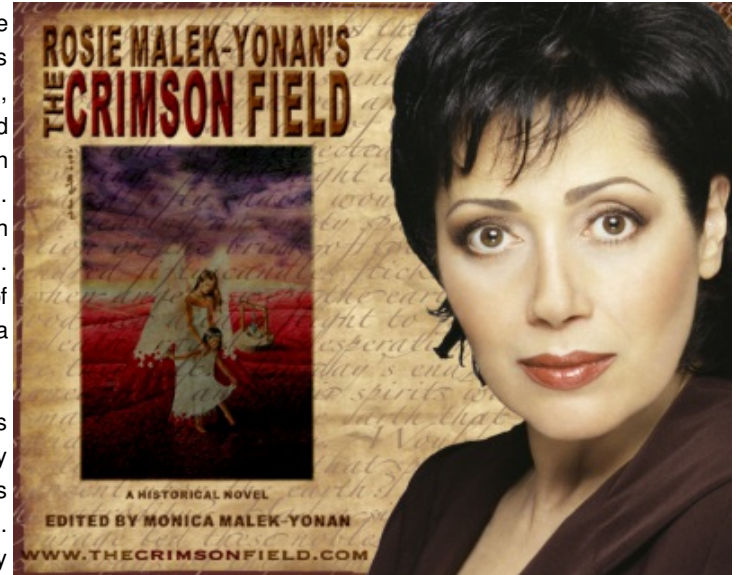
Turkish Hackers Facilitate Assyrian Book Sales

Rosie Malek-Yonan

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Los Angeles (AINA) -- In the early part of the 20th century, the Ottoman government carried out a deliberate and systematic mass ethnic cleansing of its Christian inhabitants, namely the Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks. The proclamation of a fatwa for jihad against the Christians in Turkey quickly spread to northwestern Persia, in the densely Assyrian populated region of Urmia (Urmi). From 1914 to 1918, two-thirds of the Assyrian population perished in a genocide that has remained cloaked under a shroud of secrecy. However, the anonymous Assyrian Genocide's staggering losses of 750,000 souls remains ever present in the remembrances of a nation that has vowed to never forget.

My maternal grandmother and paternal grandparents were survivors of the Assyrian Genocide. As I was growing up, the oral history describing the events of 1914 through 1918 by my grandparents were constant to me, just as they were to most Assyrian families. There seemed to be a need for a steadfast vigilance by these family elders who spoke of the mass murders of our nation in great detail.



Touched by a single event that unified the Assyrian nation, for survivors such as my grandparents, the constant retelling of these events was indicative of the personal conflict the elders were sorting through and a reflection of the frame of mind of much of the nation.

In time I began collecting corroborating letters, photos, family journals, family war diaries, newspaper articles and clippings and the quest for documenting and preserving this unwritten chapter of Assyrian history.

The extraordinary events my grandparents described formed images that hung in my mind haunting me my entire life. To this day, I am astounded at the valor of all the survivors and how they faced their demons and lived to tell their tales as eyewitness to their own tragedy. Their bravery and dauntless spirit and ability to endure in times of adversity were nothing short of remarkable.

I am in awe of the fallen Assyrians who called on their own courage to face the heinous crimes committed upon them. They are the silent heroes of my nation.

Those who know no compassion and mercy astonish me. Those who live daily lives weighted down by hatred resulting from ignorance. The very ones who continue to condemn Assyrians for their nationality and religion.

But mostly, I am still lost in admiration of my grandparents' sense of dignity, honor and grace that was the code by which they lived. They were among the more than 70,000 Assyrians forced to flee Urmia in the final mass exodus of the winter of 1918 that split off in two opposing directions. My 18 year-old maternal grandmother, Maghdleta, whose husband had just been murdered, fled north towards the Russian frontier, while my paternal grandparents bundled their newborn infant and followed other Assyrians south towards Mesopotamia. Not everyone was as lucky as they were to reach safety.

Though the perpetrators of these crimes against the Assyrians were Ottoman Turks, Kurds and local Turks in Persia, I was never taught to hate an entire race of people. Everyone must be judged on his or her own deeds. "Don't condemn one man for the sins of another even if they share the same blood or name," my grandmother would say.

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In 2005, I published my book, [The Crimson Field](#), chronicling the life of Maghdleta, my grandmother's hellish reality of the Assyrian Genocide. At the time, I wasn't aware of the extraordinary journey I was about to embark upon. I was simply making a record of one Assyrian family's life.

Against everyone's advise, I sent a copy of The Crimson Field to a Turkish journalist from Istanbul. She wrote back saying: "It will be a privilege for me to read your book and to have a deeper insight about one of the oldest cultures of the world and their great tragedy. How I wished my heartfelt apology could alleviate the sufferings the Assyrian people have gone through! Your considering me as an elder sister would be a great consolation for my feeling of shame for being a member of a nation which is responsible for those sufferings."

The book I had written to document my family's history was rapidly leading to bonds across the seas with strangers whom I have come to know as friends.

The withholding of historical facts and the manipulation of evidential findings and lack of global public education on the subject of the Assyrian Genocide has not only lead to the persistence of denial by governments around the globe including the United States, but it has also perpetuated the continuation of a century-old raced-based hatred and hostility.

However, the Turkish journalist's statement to me reinforced my belief that there are courageous people who will stand with the Assyrians in their quest for the recognition of the past atrocities committed against my nation. Truth shines its own light and will emerge through darkness.

While Assyrian sympathizers are bountiful, Turkish laws prohibit journalist or anyone for that matter from publicly acknowledging and supporting the Assyrian Genocide. For this reason, I will not reveal the identity of this journalist who will surely be condemned for her perspective on a subject still taboo in her country.

The pledge of friendship with this remarkable Turkish journalist as well as scores of other Turkish readers of my book, are the bonds of humanity and understanding that I had hoped my book would bring about. Atrocities committed by a nation cannot reflect every member of that nation. Every person shall stand alone on judgment day regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion and color of skin.

In her final review of The Crimson Field she writes: "It's a deeply moving, impressive, inspiring book, full of emotions and vivid depictions of life. I admire it."

But it is naive to presume that one journalist's viewpoint is representative of all Turks. Clearly there still exists a deep racial hatred and intolerance that is passed on from generation to generation. Since 2005, my book's website has been hacked into by Turks several times (AINA [1-21-2008](#), [11-20-2007](#)). The latest and sixth such incident occurred just last week. The Turk behind this malicious act was most probably a young hacker who knows nothing of the circumstances of the Assyrians who seek justice and not revenge.

This Turkish hacker has no idea who my grandmother, Maghdleta, was and what sacrifices she made to ensure the safety of future generations of her family and nation. All he sees is a book that represents a nation that he must hate not because of anything done to him or even his family but because he blindly follows in the footsteps of his father.

Ironically, as savvy as they are, the only thing these Turkish hackers have managed to accomplish thus far is to drive the sales of my book through the roof! Perhaps a nod of gratitude is in order for this economic boost.

The Turkish government's shroud of secrecy to suffocate the Assyrian Genocide is slowly slipping as more and more hackers continue to bring focus on this issue through Internet vandalism. Though I cannot condone such dreadful behavior, I can't help but chuckle at the end result.

The acceptance of the Assyrian, Armenian and Greek Genocides will ultimately result in the downgrading of many Turkish notables who have been revered as historical heroes of the Ottoman Empire.

I am an optimist and will hold out to the idea that perhaps one day, civilization will advance to a level when we can begin to have open dialogue about all genocides and holocausts without contributing to more hatred even if we have to downgrade a few heroes.

Rosie Malek-Yonan is an Assyrian actor, director and author of [The Crimson Field](#). She is an outspoken advocate of issues concerning Assyrians, in particular bringing attention to the Assyrian Genocide and the plight of today's Assyrians in Iraq since the U.S. lead invasion of Iraq in 2003. On June 30, 2006, she was invited to [testify](#) on Capitol Hill regarding the genocide and persecution of Assyrians in Iraq. She is on the Board of Advisors at Seyfo Center in Europe that exclusively deals with the Assyrian Genocide and is an Ambassador for the Swedish based Assyrians Without Borders. She has worked with many of Hollywood's leading actors and directors. She played the role of Nuru Il-Ebrahimi, opposite Reese Witherspoon in New Line Cinema's "Rendition." To schedule an interview with Rosie Malek-Yonan, please send your request to contact@thecrimsonfield.com.

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