

T.E. Lawrence's Idea on How to Solve the Armenian Question

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Abstract

T.E. Lawrence's specific perception of the Turks and of the Armenians is analyzed within the frames of this particular research article. T.E. Lawrence's biographical-documentary novel *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and his famous interview given to the American journalist and editor Lincoln Steffens have been the material of our cultural and linguostylistic study. An attempt is made to establish the true image of the Young Turks and the Armenians who were killed by the Turks because of their national identity. Lawrence depicts Turkish atrocities with some highlighted negative emotion.

Key words: cultural perceptions, linguostylistic analysis, Young Turks, Armenians, perfect massacre.

Introduction

T.E. Lawrence's (Lawrence of Arabia) perception of various oriental cultures is very specific. What we are interested in is his interpretation of the Turks, the Arabs and the Armenians and their cultural values. For this purpose we have focused on Lawrence's biographical-documentary novel *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and the famous interview given to the American journalist and editor Lincoln Steffens.

To understand Lawrence's attitude towards other nations we need to be aware of the political-military situation Lawrence found himself in. The situation was really complex and its roots ran into the past and involved the intertwined histories of the Ottoman and the British Empires, Islam and the Arab Speaking World. Lawrence, who managed to succeed because of his very specific ability – awareness of the vast cultural, political and military-technical differences of the nations and states involved in the war, was a British Army Liaison officer and a military advisor to the Arab Army.

Particularly, through a minute cultural and linguostylistic analysis, we have made an attempt to establish Lawrence's perception of Young Turks, and the Armenians who were slaughtered by the Turks because of their ethnicity.

Analysis: Turks

Lawrence, being a military man, depicts Turkish atrocities with some highlighted negative emotion:

(1) *The Turks cut the throats of their prisoners with knives, as though they were butchering sheep.*

The author introduces the climax in the second part of the sentence. The emotional-expressive-evaluative overtones are introduced by the clause where the image of prison-

ers being *butchered* like *sheep* is horrible. *Butchering sheep* is shocking even in the direct meaning. The author simply creates a very vivid image which characterizes Young Revolutionary Turks who kill, yet never shudder. The author uses no epithets or attributes, like *inhumane*, or *savage*. However, the image speaks for itself. To understand it wholly the reader is expected to be aware of the existing cultural-national characteristics of the Turks and the social environment. Lawrence's keen observations reveal that during the period of 1916-1918 the Turks had one aim:

(2) *Turkey made Turkish for the Turks – Yeni-Turan – became the cry.*

In the above example the adduced informative and evocative functions of speech are so delicately interwoven that they present a unity, moreover, the unity is highlighted with this *T* alliteration, which seems to be warning – The Turks were getting ready for some undesirable secret activity. (<<http://www.trismegistos.com/magicalletterpage>>)

The last part of the utterance, *became the cry*, used metaphorically, is the climax, which emphasizes the Turkish truth – everything connected with the Turks, Turkey should belong to the Turks which on the surface level is not bad, but reading between the lines it becomes evident that the Turks have been striving for *Yeni-Turan*: this simple idea sounds like a bunch of threats, it contains some very severe hint about negative forces in store – about ruining, slaughtering, annihilating everything and everybody – everything and everybody that appeared to be non-Turkish by origin and nature. It was a signal about capturing others' lands, enslaving others' language, annihilating others' religion, owing others' culture and, finally, about the ethnic cleansing of other nations living on the lands of the Turkish desire.

That was the culture, strategy and attitude adopted by the Young Turks – a feature inherited from Sultan Hamid II – Lawrence is sure.

When others' historical and cultural monuments and values are abolished or owned Young Turks may seem to be even more revolutionary.

(3) *...they must purge their empire of such irritating subject races as resisted the ruling stamp.*

The ruling stamp, a periphrasis, is used to stress the Turks' unrestricted negative power, while still another periphrasis, *such irritating subject races*, comes as a negative evaluation of the nations, Armenians among them, who appeared to be viewed by the Turks as enemy because of their culture and riches. The modal verb *must* combined with *purge* is used to indicate how urgent it was for the Turkish government to get rid of those "unimportant" nations.

Let us adduce another very informative passage for the analysis.

(4) *Later there had been nationalist movements in Egypt, in India, in Persia, and finally in Constantinople, where they were fortified and made pointed by the new American ideas in education: ideas which, when*

released in the old high Oriental atmosphere, made an explosive mixture. The American schools, teaching by the method of inquiry, encouraged scientific detachment and free exchange of views. Quite without intention they taught revolution, since it was impossible for an individual to be modern in Turkey and at the same time loyal, if he had been born of one of the subject races – Greeks, Arabs, Kurds, Armenians or Albanians – over whom the Turks were so long helped to keep dominion.

As can be seen from the passage the nominal syntagms, *the old high Oriental atmosphere, explosive mixture, scientific detachment, free exchange of views, quite without intention*, obtain significantly highlighted value when they appear in the same context together with *the American schools, they taught revolution, it was impossible for an individual to be modern in Turkey and at the same time loyal, born of one of the subject races (Greeks, Arabs, Kurds, Armenians or Albanians)*. These syntagmatic word-combinations add considerable flavour to the whole passage, building on to the main idea. The climax comes to the close, and here the key unit is *so long helped to keep dominion*. It actually gives a hint of a certain steady and destructive policy – the Turks, otherwise, could not have been so powerful and potent in achieving or bringing about a particular effective result concerning *Turks were keeping their dominion...* The verbs *to encourage, to teach, to help* become of major importance in this particular context. Progressive and modern American education turns out to be rather dangerous in an Oriental atmosphere, specifically in the Turkish context, where it obtains the status of an *explosive mixture*.

The victims of the Young Turks had only one fault – their national identity. Just for that very reason the Armenians, the Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, were slaughtered.

(5) The Young Turks had killed the Armenians, not because they were Christians, but because they were Armenians; and for the same reason they herded Arab Moslems and Arab Christians into the same prison, and hanged them together on the same scaffold.

Through repetition and parallelism (*not because...but because; the same reason, the same prison, the same scaffold*) the author manages to emphasize and transmit the most important piece of information. In the second case, the hopelessness of the situation is intensified and the evocative function is successfully realized, due to change of the nominal component in the parallel syntagmatic word-combinations presented. Instead of using the term *ethnic cleansing*, Lawrence uses a longer and more powerful explanation, thus making certain impact on the readers' feelings. The conjunctions *but* and *and* in this particular context display new textual meanings: they emphasize the Turks' inhuman and monstrous policy towards other nations. The prepositions *for, into, on* act as a kind of intensifiers whose aim is to stress how dangerous and hopeless the situation was. Lawrence does not use any evaluative adjectives to present the Turks' atrocities, he abstains from expressing his personal opinion and attitude, he simply lays down the facts which speak for themselves.

Analysis: Armenians

During his activity of a liaison officer Lawrence managed to closely study the Armenians, their lifestyle, preferences, national characteristics, national wisdom, national demeanor. Lawrence's negative attitude towards the Armenians is not quite obvious in the book, it is rather highlighted in his interview given to Lincoln Steffens, in 1919, entitled *Armenians Are Impossible*. As the author of the interview puts it:

(6)...*why we Americans should go halfway around the world to take charge of the Armenians and not only save them from the Turks, Greeks, French, Italians, British and themselves, but, somehow, to save ourselves from ourselves and them. He said, for example, that the Armenians were "the last word in human impossibility"*.

The pronouns *themselves* and *ourselves* being in syntagmatic relation with the verb *to save* express the author's intent clearly. Armenians expect others to save them, the most impressive key word-combination which can be viewed as a cognitive one is *to save them from themselves*. It gives a hint that his perception of the Armenians is very unique. The passage ends with an unexpected phrase *the last word in human impossibility*.

(7)*he had some inexpressible sympathy or – let me rather say – some knowledge or experience of the Armenians that gave him a human understanding for the Turks (and all the other near neighbors of the Armenians), who are forever trying to kill off this orphan race.*

Lawrence uses an epithet *orphan race* to define the Armenians. Most probably he meant that no other nation wanted to take care of them, because they themselves were somehow indifferent towards their own needs. The reporter adds:

(8) *So he did not say that the Armenians should be killed off. He only gave me the impression, at the time, that that was the sole solution of the Armenian problem; and that that was his reason for desiring us Americans to take on the job.*

The attributive word-combination *orphan race* in the above sentence (7) and the attributive syntagm *sole solution* in the sentence below (8) seem to carry a certain message, but unfortunately the message, which at first sight seemed implied, reveals the hidden intent. It sounds like a resolution, a deadlock, a destiny for a whole nation.

Killing and wiping this *orphan race* off the world seems to be the only solution. But the worst is yet to come. *All the other old rival races* never finished the job, because their *aesthetic pleasure in the killing of Armenians* was fully satisfied *before all the Armenians were dead*.

(9) *He made me feel, that the Turks shouldn't do it; they were too rough and ready – and not Christians. Nor the Greeks; they enjoyed it too much and were inefficient; they never finish anything, and when their **aesthetic pleasure in the killing of Armenians** was sated they quit. And so with **all the other old rival races**. They stopped work **before all the Armenians were dead**.*

Yet another very interesting feature of the Armenians is established by Lawrence – they are blessed by God, they cannot be abolished, cannot be wiped off the surface of the Earth. His dissatisfaction, that they produce offsprings in a *controlled and organized way*, is expressed through the stylistic repetition of *to breed* in the Past Indefinite Tense – *bred and bred and bred*, then Participle I of *to spread* – *spreading and spreading* which means they spread incessantly. There are *millions of them, all meek, gentle, obedient, unprotesting, and lovely*, attractive in a graceful way. In the last part of the sentence the consonants *s, p, b*, through alliteration, create an atmosphere of secrecy beneficial for breeding and spreading. The adverb *slyly* points out that The Armenians are self-contained in private matters, they are clever and tend to keep thoughts and feelings private.

(10) *Even when they all went at the task together they invariably left a couple here and a couple there: Adams and Eves who, the moment one's back was turned, **bred and bred and bred** so that the next time one visited Armenia there were the Armenians as before, **millions of them, all meek and lovely**, but busy by day at business and at night secretly breeding and *slyly spreading and spreading*....*

From the next paragraphs we learn that being *practical the English* think about *solid things – oil, ore, air, the sea* and they are not fit for a *perfect massacre* of the Armenians, they still have a dream – *a world government must be founded*.

Lawrence has one truth for the Armenians – they *have no lack of thrift*, and they, the British and the Americans, should teach them to work hard to succeed. Armenians will practise medicine, law. The trouble really is that all those old races that have been civilized, and once dominated the world and worked it, have lost control. They have *gone forward logically, psychologically, physiologically*. Here the stem *logically* is repeated for three times for some stylistic effect. Lawrence thinks they, Armenians, *do not care for hard labor, the Armenians should work for Armenia and not Armenia for the Armenians*. Ex-civilized nations like the Armenians are not lazy. They are *too intelligent to work for others. They are exploiters themselves*. The Armenians, Lawrence is sure, are *the most intelligent, the most perfectly selected, the most highly developed race* in the world – *from the civilized point of view*. Here the superlatives are used to highlight certain national features that seem important to foreigners.

Lawrence continues: *The Jews themselves feel about Armenians the way the anti-Semitic Europeans feel about the Jews; and so do the Greeks, Turks – all the other races that have **ever had them on them**. They feel that the Armenians would put them all to*

work. And they would. The Armenians are all that the Jews are, plus all that all the other races are – and they are Christians besides!

A more perfect evaluation of a nation cannot be found. Lawrence is sure that the Armenians must not have Armenia, because they want to live on the coast, in cities, on rent, interest, dividends and the profits of trading in the shares and the actual money earned by capital and labor. *They are harmless.* They are willing to do nothing but spend. Even Jews are spenders, great spenders, but Armenians *will do nothing and they won't spend. They get and they save;* they sell but only to buy again and so get more and more. *It takes evolution to develop such perfection of the true commercial spirit,* and it is a matter of degree. *And the Armenians are the nth degree.* If ever the Armenians are given a fair start in the world, if they get a free hold of any corner of the earth, they will own the whole planet and work all the rest of mankind. *That's what the Turks know and dread and the Greeks and – all of us who know them.*

The most striking part of Lawrence's attitude towards the Armenians is that this almost perfect nation needs a *perfect massacre*. This adj + noun syntagm is actually the carrier of the author's intent – this is the case when a nation should be abolished, massacred because of their positive features, because “these positive features turn out to be very dangerous for the whole mankind”.

The problem with the Armenians remains obscure and controversial – they are creative, harmless, thrifty, graceful, intelligent, gone forward... and just for these reasons *they should be killed off*. This is T.E. Lawrence's verdict.

Conclusion

To sum up, we want to highlight the following: Lawrence was not only a successful liaison officer and a British spy, who also happened to make Mustafa Cemal Pasha, Atatürk, work on the British as a spy, but also a keen expert in Oriental cultures whose observations are of great value, whose work principles can be studied and applied in culture-study and in the military. And as he had perfectly understood *the Armenians will never be abolished because they know how to breed and spread*. After all why should they?

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Հայկական հարցը և նրա լուծման լոուրենսյան տարբերակը

Մույն գիտական հետազոտության սահմաններում փորձ է արվում մշակութային և լեզվատնական վերլուծությունների միջոցով պատկերել ստեղծարար ու ամեն հարցում ելքը գտնող հային, որը սակայն, ըստ լոուրենսյան պատկերացումների, իր ողջ դրական հատկանիշներով հանդերձ պետք է վերջնականապես ենթարկվի բնաջնջման: Լոուրենսը հարմար չի տեսնում թուրքին այդ գործը կատարելու համար, քանի որ թուրքը չափազանց վայրագ է և քրիստոնյա չէ: Լոուրենսը դժգոհ է, որ ամենակատարյալ ու ամենաքաղաքակիրթ հայ ազգին ոչ մի այլ ազգ չի կարողանում բնաջնջել, որովհետև հային միշտ հաջողվում է կենդանի մնալ և բազմանալ:

Армянский вопрос и лоуренсовская версия его решения

В пределах данного исследования лингвистическими методами делается попытка передать образ созидательного и находчивого армянина, который вопреки своему сугубо положительному образу, по лоуренсовским соображениям, должен быть уничтожен. Но турки не самые подходящие для этого дела, так как они слишком грубы и суровы, и к тому же мусульмане. Лоуренс не доволен тем, что самые совершенные и самые цивилизованные армяне никак не уничтожаются, после каждого геноцида всегда остается пара, которая владеет искусством размножения.