

Tuzla Camp: the symbol of injustice

One of these lost properties is the Children's Camp that belongs to the Foundation of Gedikpasa Armenian Protestant Church. I have, as someone who has lived in this camp, talked and written about its saga countless times.

The Tuzla Camp became almost a symbol of the whole phenomenon of the seizure of Minority Foundation properties. There have been exhibits organized and books written about it by the Human (Rights) Organizations.



Main building Camp Armen: with visiting Armenian Evangelical summer camp leadership

Trust me, one could not get tired of hearing the saga of the Tuzla Camp...

It is worth narrating, yet another time.

It was flat land

One morning they took us 13 children...

From Gedikpasa on foot to Sirkeci... Then to Haydarpasa by boat... From Haydarpasa to Tuzla station by train.. An hour away from the station on foot, they took us to a wide, limitless, flat land surrounding a lake and the sea.

Tuzla then was not like the Tuzla of today, filled with the villas of the rich and the bureaucrats.. It was then an untouched shore with fine sand and a piece of lake formed from the sea... a couple of houses on the vast land, a sprinkling of fig and olive trees, and thorny raspberry bushes along the sides of the ditches...

Plus, the Red Crescent tents that we had set up...

Our labor as children

For us 13 puny kids, between the ages of 8 and 12, the summer imprisonment at the cement covered garden of the Gedikpasa Orphanage had come to an end...

We remembered our families and relatives only at night, while watching the flickering city lights in the distance. The city lights reminded us of old fallen stars piled up on each other. We completed the construction of the camp building in three years by getting up at dawn and working until midnight. "Stumpy" (our nickname for Zakar), who was one of the shortest among us, could grab by himself a bag of cement and carry it all the way up to the roof. We used to bed wet at night, out of exhaustion, yet each time would save face by putting the blame on others, saying "I did not do it, he did."

We were confronted by the state
I went to Tuzla when I was eight.

Hrant Dink

The Man, the Mission , the Martyrdom

By Zaven Khanjian

Part II

Audio-Visual Lecture presented on September 25th , 2007 at the United Armenian Congregational Church

I labored there for exactly 20 years...

I met my wife Rakel there. We grew up together. We got married there. Our children were born there.. After September 12, they placed our

And a rebel with a cause.

The short study of the life of Hrant Dink has revealed to me that the story of the Tuzla Camp, its creation and seizure by the Turkish authorities, the childhood labor and the earthly heaven created there, has left such a deep scar on the psyche of Hrant that went on to be the driving force in his struggle for justice, for fairness, freedom of expression, minority rights and true democracy for all Turkish citizens under Turkish law.

I said Turkish citizens. Hrant was a Turkish citizen. He defended his right of being one. A Turkish citizen. He struggled for it. He fought to have been one. Here is Robert Fisk again writing on January 20, 2007.

"Dink told news agency reporters in 2005 that his case (this is the case in Malatya) had arisen from a question on what he felt when , at primary school, he had to take up a traditional Turkish oath.

"I am a Turk, I am honest, I am hard working".

In his defense, Dink said, "I said that I was a TURKISH CITIZEN, but Armenian, and even though I was honest and hard working, I was not a Turk, I was an Armenian".

And Armenian he was. With roots so deep to the land, not very many Turkish citizen living in Turkey can claim today. Let's listen to Rakel Dink as she addresses the Turkish court and judges at the opening session of the trial of Ogun Samast, Hrant Dink's assassin.

"Your honor, my husband was tried for whatever he wrote, for what he thought and spoke. Even though an innocent man he was found guilty because of this unjust understanding

camp director (Hrant Guzelian) under arrest with the accusation that he was "raising Armenian militants."

It was an unfair accusation. None of us had been raised as Armenian militants.

In order for the orphanage and the camp, now without a director, not to be closed down, my friends and I, who had all been raised there, assumed this duty.

But one day they served us a paper from the court...

"It turns out that you minority institutions did not have the right to acquire property! It turns out that we had made a mistake when we had once given you permission. This place will, from now on, belong to its former owner."

In spite of our resistance for five years, we were defeated.. Yet , what could we have done; we were confronted by the state.

We were no longer helpless

They threw us out of the civilization we had created there.

They usurped what had been put together with the sweat of the one thousand five hundred children raised there.

They appropriated our labor, the labor we had put in as children.

And the "Tuzla Poor Children's Camp" that we had created, our "Atlantis" civilization, is now in ruins...

After the children's chirpy voices disappeared, the water in the well has also dried up...

The building has sagged..

The soil is barren...

Trees are offended...

The diving flights of my rebellion are as sharp as those of a swallow whose meticulously crafted nest is destroyed with a single blow...

Yet no longer helpless"

There you go...

You want a cause? The Tuzla camp - symbol of lost minority properties.

You want a rebel? Hrant Dink.

ask you, can you trust him or her? If we do not deny our origin, does that mean we are enemies?

And here is Hosrof Dink, Hrant's brother at the same trial.

"My brother knew that our ancestors were born on these lands and harvested this land, that they had turned grape into pectin, grape juice to wine, wheat to bread, earth to jug, copper to ewer, iron to plow, and that they had dearly loved this land, had caressed it with their hands and had smelled it with their noses. I also know he thought that all the people who lived and currently live (here) share the same pain, and that all their happiness, sadness and hopes are linked to each other."

And so the Armenian Turkish citizen was prosecuted for denigrating and insulting Turkishness and on October 7, 2005 was given a 6 month suspended sentence under the provisions of the infamous Article 301 of the Turkish penal code for an article he had written in AGOS entitled "On Armenian identity".

Many in Turkey; intellectuals, writers , journalists, educators have also been prosecuted under similar circumstances and for violating the vague provisions of Article 301. Taner Akcam, Orhan Pamuk, Elif Shafak, Ragip Zarakolu are among them. But non have been convicted like Hrant Dink was. This was really hard for Hrant to accept and digest. The verdict was harsh on him and he could not take it lightly. It alienated him from the country he called his and home. He repeatedly said if he was truly guilty of the charges he could not live any more within the society he was convicted to have insulted. He decided to appeal both to the higher courts and the European Court of Human Rights. He made up his mind. He decided to stay and fight. In his own soul and conscience he was so fair in his struggle for individual freedom of expression. He vehemently opposed the French law criminalizing the denial of the Armenian genocide. This certainly placed him at odds with some outspoken



The campers at the Tuzla "Camp Armen" beach front

of the state.

I, as a member of the people who have lived on these soils since NOAH, want to feel, to see both my children and myself as Armenian Turkish citizens, as equal.

Our proverb says "One who denies his origin is a sinner:.. What would you expect from someone who denies or hides his or her origin? How can you establish a strong building, a good character over a faulty foundation ? I

Diaspora Armenian nationalists who have the luxury of living under conditions incomparable to the restrictions, pressures and discrimination experienced by Turkish Armenian citizens. A few of them, just months before Hrant's murder accused him of trying to exploit "cheap heroism". (Ajan herosutyun). Unfortunately Hrant paid very dearly for that heroism. His life.

Continued on page 4