

**Pamela Steiner, *Collective Trauma and the Armenian Genocide: Armenian, Turkish and Azerbaijani Relations since 1839.***

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Dr. Pamela Steiner, a Senior Fellow at the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health, is a practitioner whose research is dedicated to promoting reconciliation between opposing sides in conflict situations. At the invitation of Professor Taner Akçam, she discussed her timely new book, released in the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as President Biden's April 2021 statement acknowledging the Armenian Genocide. Steiner argues that a major obstacle to building a stable future in the region is the collective historical trauma that remains unresolved among Armenians, Turks, and Azerbaijanis. A peaceful outcome to the entrenched ethno-political tensions requires cooperation by people of conflicting sides, despite ongoing sensitivities and difficulties. Drawing on practices from her work in psychotherapy, she promotes conflict resolution based on historical analysis and psychological research.

Traumatic events elicit a range of responses that include fight, flee, or freeze that are geared toward individual self-preservation. These are instantaneous responses of the human brain to the fear of death, which is experienced in body, emotion, and thought. On the collective level, the last phase of trauma is a frozen conflict and a situation of mutual destruction. Traumatized groups experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress and certain triggers remind them of

painful historical events, but in a post-traumatic situation, as people acquire more power, they do not flee or freeze, but instead choose to *fight*.

The psychological dimensions of the Armenian Genocide continue to resonate in the South Caucasus region, where an intractable conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan persists. Armenians experience this territorial dispute as an existential threat and a continuing consequence of Turkish impunity for the 1915 Genocide. Unsurprisingly, Turkey has allied itself with Azerbaijan and provides material and geo-political support against Armenia, which views these actions in the context of Turkey's ongoing policy of genocide denial. For the Turkish people, on the other hand, a major symptom of their collective trauma is an ongoing sense of humiliation and moral injury. The modern Turkish Republic, established in 1923 in the aftermath of the Genocide, constructed a foundational narrative that claims the civilian Armenian population posed a security threat to that Ottoman Empire. Thus, genocide denial is a pillar of Turkish foreign policy as well as an essential element of the national origin story. Steiner sees the centennial anniversary of the Turkish Republic as a potential opportunity for Turks to come to terms with this version of history.

If people on all sides can enter into a dialogue that is geared toward building mutual trust, the region can avoid repeating the murderous ethnic cleansing that contributes toward generating mutual hatred. Steiner remains optimistic that a peaceful future may be brought about through the mobilization of a large number of people who demand accountability for the violent past and insist upon the values and principles of human rights.

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