

# Ilhan Omar and the Armenian Genocide

by Hugh Fitzgerald



When Congress recently voted on a resolution recognizing the Armenian genocide, the vote was lopsided in favor, 405 in favor, 11 against, with 3 voting “present.” One of those voting “present” was Ilhan Omar, the Muslim Congresswoman from Minnesota. Just a few days before, there had been a different vote involving Turkey, calling for sanctions on that country for its attacks on the Syrian Kurds. Omar had been one of a handful, and the only Democrat, to vote against that sanctions bill. The Turkish-American basketball player, Enes Kanter, an opponent of Erdogan’s despotism, tweeted about Ilhan Omar after that vote: “What an absolute disappointment and shame that the only democrat who did NOT support the Turkish bill aiming to stop the killing of innocent people is @IlhanMN who seems like on #DictatorErdogan ‘s payroll working for his interests, but not for the American people and democracy!” One

would like to know if Omar has received any money or other gifts from Erdogan; it might help explain her latest votes.

That would be a scandal, but Ilhan Omar has been no stranger to scandal. Many believe that Omar's second husband, a British citizen named Ahmed Nur Said Elmi, was actually her brother, and that she married him to help him fraudulently gain a US green card. Omar filed joint tax returns with her current husband, Ahmed Hirsi, while still legally married to Elmi. Hirsi and Omar also listed the same home address in public court records and temporarily relocated to North Dakota together while she was married to Elmi. When Omar filed those joint tax returns with Hirsi in 2014 and 2015 while she was still legally married to Elmi, she was fined by Minnesota's campaign-finance watchdog for paying a lawyer with campaign funds to fix the mistake, since federal law prohibits people from filing joint returns with a person who is not their spouse.

Ilhan Omar's explanation of why she did not vote for the Armenian Genocide resolution was that there are so many other genocides that have not been the object of Congressional resolutions that it seemed wrong to single out this one:

"A true acknowledgement of historical crimes against humanity must include both the heinous genocides of the 20th century, along with earlier mass slaughters like the transatlantic slave trade and Native American genocide, which took the lives of hundreds of millions of indigenous people in this country."

This is illogical. She is arguing that no "historical crimes against humanity" should be recognized as long as many other such crimes have not yet been recognized. Unless those others are recognized, Ilhan Omar insists that it would be unfair to single out any particular genocide. For her, it's all or nothing at all. But if that reasoning were to be adopted, then no recognition or condemnation of genocide could ever be adopted by Congress, unless all other genocides were similarly

included. She doesn't think that the Armenian Genocide should be recognized, so she claims, unless other genocides, going back several centuries, are recognized at the same time. Since that cannot possibly happen, she is justifying her permanent opposition to such a resolution.

She mentions, as worthy of being recognized by Congress, two examples of "mass slaughters" in which, she claims, America was implicated. The first was the transatlantic slave trade. But that was not a genocide; there were no "mass slaughters" of the slaves. Both the European slave-traders, and the American slave-owners, made every effort to keep their slaves both alive and healthy; after all, the slaves were valuable property, and that property had to be protected. The best estimate is that of the 12-14 million slaves taken from Africa across the Atlantic to the Americas, 1.8 million slaves died in the Middle Passage, not from "genocide," but from overcrowding, disease, and lack of medical care. The death rates for the crews on those slave ships were even higher than for the slaves. That is a far lower figure than that of the tens of millions of black African slaves who are believed to have died in the Arab Slave Trade, which began in the late seventh century, and only ended in the 20th, where it did end, because of Western pressure. Slavery was not abolished, for example, in Saudi Arabia and Yemen until 1962; in Oman, it was not until 1970.

Why was the death rate so much higher among African blacks seized by the Arabs than for those taken by the Europeans? The explanation lies in the particular nature of the Arab slave trade. Most of those seized were young black boys, intended to serve as eunuchs in harems in the Muslim lands. They were castrated in the bush, in primitive operations, without anesthesia or sterile instruments; these operations often lead to death from infections or other complications. Those who survived the operation were then taken by the slavers on long journeys, marched hundreds of miles, either all the way

up to the Muslim slave markets of Cairo and North Africa, or to the coast, where they were taken by dhow across the Red Sea, and then marched again for hundreds of miles to the other slave markets of Islam – Muscat, Riyadh, Baghdad, Damascus, Istanbul. Many of the boys who survived their castration did not survive the long treks.

The scholar Jan Hogedoorn, in his study "The Hideous Trade," estimates that only 10%-30% of those castrated slaves survived. Despite this mortality rate, the trade was profitable, because eunuchs fetched higher prices than ordinary slaves. The best estimate now is that 14-17 million black Africans survived the trip from Africa's interior to reach the Islamic slave markets. Many of them were those castrated boys, to be used as eunuchs; the others taken – men, women, girls – had much higher rates of survival than the boys. It is hard, then, to estimate the actual numbers of black Africans seized by Arab slavers, but given the data supplied by Hogedoorn and others, it was at least several times the number who survived. At least 40 million seems a reasonable estimate – a number that far exceeds the 12 million taken in the Atlantic slave trade, the trade about which we hear so much and the only slave trade that Ilhan Omar thinks deserves to be recognized, for she has never said a word about the much more catastrophic Arab Slave Trade. This trade wreaked havoc all over East and Central Africa, disrupting tribal societies. In his monograph on "The Wanderings of Peoples," the British historian A. C. Haddon notes that in Africa "the slave trade, as carried on under Arab influence...contributed powerfully to the dislocation of tribes." Damage was done to the African social order because of this slave trade, which went deep into Africa, as deep as the Congo, unlike the Atlantic Slave Trade, which confined itself to the coast of West Africa where Europeans did not seize, but bought their African slaves from other Africans, many of them Muslims.

Even now, black Africans are enslaved by Muslim Arabs in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. One wonders if Ilhan Omar would be willing to support a resolution recognizing, and deploring, in equal measure, both the Atlantic Slave Trade and the Arab Slave Trade. I suspect not; she's too intent on protecting the reputation of her fellow Muslims, the Arabs. She would be even less likely to support a Congressional resolution recognizing, and calling for an end to, the current enslavement of black Africans in Mali, Mauritania, and Niger – a resolution that, if passed, could well do some immediate good by pressuring those states to end the practice.

Omar also plays past and loose with numbers. She refers to the "genocide" of the indigenous Native Americans in the U.S. territories as claiming "hundreds of millions of victims." That's an impossible figure; the total number of Native Americans in what became the United States when the Europeans arrived in 1492 was only 7-10 million (there were 40-50 million South America), of whom about 10%, or 1 million, died, not from being killed by the Europeans, but almost entirely from disease. The Europeans brought with them measles, chicken pox, smallpox, influenza, and the bubonic plague across the Atlantic, with devastating consequences for the Indigenous populations.

The Europeans were not engaged in deliberate "genocide" of the indigenous peoples in North America. They wanted land, and were intent not on wiping out the indigenous populations, but on pushing them ever further west; in South America, the Europeans wanted the indigenous peoples to stay alive to work the fields and mines. The Europeans in both North and South America could not foresee that the indigenous peoples would not have the same resistance to diseases that the Europeans had acquired over time. Furthermore, little was known about the transmission of these diseases; there was no understanding of how to protect the indigenous peoples. Yet Ilhan Omar wants to label these deaths from disease a deliberate "genocide"

that “killed hundreds of millions” in the territory of the U.S. There was no deliberate genocide, though there was certainly warfare over land. Those “indigenous peoples” who died numbered at most a few million, almost all from disease. There could not have been “hundreds of millions” of victims within the territory of the U.S., given that the total indigenous population in that territory was never more than 10 million, the estimated population in 1492; in fact, the Indian population in America steadily decreased from its 1492 level, rising again only in the 20th century.

Would Ilhan Omar want the true “genocide” conducted against Hindus by Muslims in India, which claimed 70-80 million lives, over several centuries, to be recognized by Congress? Or would she oppose it, as unfairly singling out Muslims? The Hindus of India have never made those centuries of mass murder an international issue, the way Armenians did with their own genocide. Perhaps India should do so now, presenting the facts to a largely ignorant and startled world. Muslims were (there’s no getting around it, Ilhan Omar) responsible for those mass killings of Hindus, as they were responsible for the Arab Slave Trade, with more tens of millions – black Africans – dying as a result, and of course it was Muslim Turks who were responsible for the Armenian genocide, with 1.5 million victims. What member of Congress, possibly an Indian-American, will introduce a resolution about the murders of 70-80 million Hindus by Muslims? And what intrepid member of the Black Caucus will introduce a similar resolution recognizing the extent and effect of the Arab Slave Trade on black Africans? Or what member of Congress, black or white, will introduce another resolution, about not the past but the present, calling on the American government to end all aid to, and cooperation with, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, until they free all of their black slaves? Such suggestions must fill Ilhan Omar with dread.

Ilhan Omar has shocked even her supporters with her vote of

“Present” on the Armenian Genocide bill. They do not buy her argument that until all those other “genocides” (which she has either mischaracterized, or greatly exaggerated by orders of magnitude) committed by Americans are recognized by Congress, it’s not right to recognize the genocide by the Turks against the Armenians.

We all know that she voted “Present” on the resolution because the parties charged with the genocide were the Ottoman Turks, her fellow Muslims. Omar is not about to vote for any resolution that makes any group of Muslims sound bad. She’s not interested in the truth; she’s a Defender of the Faith. It’s good to have this so obviously out in the open, and her cynicism made crystal clear to her disappointed former supporters. Why, even Rashida Tlaib not only voted for the Resolution on the Armenian genocide, but was a co-sponsor of the bill. What does Tlaib now think of Omar? Perhaps some journalist can ask her about that. What do all those left-wing groups that supported the Armenian Genocide bill, from Human Rights Watch to the Southern Poverty Law Center, now think of their once-beloved Ilhan Omar? A little doubt at first, thence to more, as they learn about her killing store? Let’s hope she keeps it up, alienating former enthusiasts, so that at the next election, she can be sent back to Minneapolis with whatever husband/brother/father/boytoy she happens to have with her at the time.

First published in