



News services
Your news when you want it

News Front Page

World



Africa

Americas

Asia-Pacific

Europe

Middle East

South Asia

UK

England

Northern Ireland

Scotland

Wales

Business

Politics

Health

Education

Science/Nature

Technology

Entertainment

Also in the news

Video and Audio

Have Your Say

Magazine

In Pictures

Country Profiles

Special Reports

RELATED BBC SITES

• SPORT

• WEATHER

• CBBC

NEWSROUND

• ON THIS DAY

• EDITORS' BLOG

LANGUAGES

• Russian **РУССКИЙ**

ТҮРКЧЕ

Last Updated: Monday, 1 August 2005, 16:00 GMT 17:00 UK

E-mail this to a friend

Printable version

Armenian quest for lost orphans

By Dorian Jones

Producer, Masterpiece, BBC World Service

Ninety years ago, hundreds of thousands of Armenians died in mass killings that still resonate through Turkey's social and political life.



Nahide Kaptan (front row, second from left) was taken in aged nine

Armenians say that up to 1.5m of their people were deported and died at the hands of the then Ottoman rulers of Turkey.

But it is believed that thousands of orphaned Armenian children were saved secretly by Turkish families.

Until now, the very existence of the children has remained largely an untold story, buried along with those who died between 1915 and 1916.

But the stories of those Armenian orphans are slowly being uncovered by their descendants. Turkish documentary maker Berke Bas is one of those people.

Family member Nahide Kaptan was saved in 1915 when she was nine years old. But uncovering the truth still remains a difficult and contentious issue.

What happened in 1915 still remains a hotly disputed subject. Armenia, along with the Armenian Diaspora, accuses the then Ottoman rulers of carrying out a "genocide". But Turkey disputes the charge, saying that a few hundred thousand died and that the deaths occurred in a civil war in which many Turks were also killed.

Kitchen hideout

Selim Deringil, a historian of the late Ottoman period at Istanbul's Bosphorus University, says "what you have is people talking at cross purposes and not really interested in what happened."

SEE ALSO:

- [Armenia remembers 1915 killings](#)
24 Apr 05 | Europe
- [Turkey 'must admit Armenia dead'](#)
13 Dec 04 | Europe
- [Turkey renames 'divisive' animals](#)
08 Mar 05 | Europe
- [Analysis: EU's Turkish challenge](#)
06 Oct 04 | Europe
- [Country profile: Turkey](#)
09 Mar 05 | Country profiles
- [Country profile: Armenia](#)
10 Apr 05 | Country profiles

RELATED INTERNET LINKS:

- [Turkish prime minister's office](#)
- [Armenian president](#)
- [Armenian National Institute \(US\)](#)
- [Agos \(in Turkish\)](#)

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites

TOP EUROPE STORIES

- [Turkish MPs back attacks in Iraq](#)
- [State funeral for Macedonia star](#)
- [France set for transport strike](#)

- [Turkish](#)
- [More](#)

Professor Deringil himself fell victim to the controversy, being forced to postpone a conference on the subject earlier this year after intense government pressure.

The ongoing controversy can pose problems for those delving into the past.

Berke Bas, on returning to her birthplace - the Black Sea city of Ordu - admitted she had concerns.

“ This is the biggest issue, Christians becoming Muslims. They don't see themselves as outsiders but they remain silent about their past, afraid ”

Newspaper editor

"I am sure there will be people who will approach this with disdain, saying 'Why am I digging up this history?' So many families deny the fact they had Armenian family members."

According to Professor Deringil, such stories are not unusual. He says thousands of Armenian children were saved by Turkish families.

"We do know that it was on such a scale that the then rulers of the Ottoman Empire issued secret orders to punish families who saved Armenian children."

The first memory of Nahide for Berke was being told how she was hidden under the kitchen sink, when she first came to the family.

After speaking with relatives, Berke discovered that at least five Armenian children were taken in by both sides of her family.



Berke returned to her birthplace in her search for the past

But acknowledging Armenian ancestors within Turkish families still remains a taboo for many, according to the editor of the local newspaper.

"These children were brought up in Muslim families. This is the biggest issue, Christians becoming Muslims," he said.

"They don't see themselves as outsiders but they remain silent about their past, afraid. Now, as a Turk, a Muslim you say that your ancestors were Armenian then you are called a 'Gavur', you are without belief, without a soul, and you are an outcast."

'Stunning stories'

But despite the reluctance of many to talk about their Armenian ancestry, Berke discovered that Nahide had a brother who survived 1915 and eventually ended up in Istanbul. Although he has since died, it is believed his daughter is still alive.

Berke returned to Istanbul to try to find her. She visited Agos, a weekly Armenian newspaper.

Printing both in Turkish and Armenian, the paper seeks to be a bridge between the 60,000 Istanbul Armenians living in the city and wider Turkish society.



Agos editor Hrant Dink says he is inundated by requests from both Turkey and abroad to find Armenian relatives.

"The mails I receive, the e-mails, the phone enquiries! The people who knock on my door, they contact me every day," he said.

"There are so many people from here and from abroad. They learn that they have a past. They're looking for information, wanting history and references, looking for relatives. I am involved in it personally everyday. There are stunning examples, so many stories reaching me."

Masterpiece: The Little Girl Who Came In From The Cold can first be heard on BBC World Service at 0805GMT/0905BST on Tuesday 2 August 2005 or online at the [Masterpiece website](#) for the following 7 days.

 [E-mail this to a friend](#)

 [Printable version](#)

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

[E-mail news](#) [Mobiles](#) [Alerts](#) [News feeds](#) [Interactive TV](#) [Podcasts](#)

[News Front Page](#) | [World](#) | [UK](#) | [England](#) | [Northern Ireland](#) | [Scotland](#) | [Wales](#) | [Politics](#)

[Business](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Science/Nature](#) | [Technology](#) | [Health](#) | [Education](#)

[Have Your Say](#) | [Magazine](#) | [In Pictures](#) | [Week at a Glance](#) | [Country Profiles](#) | [In Depth](#) | [Programmes](#)

[BBC Copyright Notice](#)

MMVII

• [Most Popular Now](#) | The most read story in North America is: [Turkish MPs back attacks in Iraq](#)

• [Back to top](#) ^^

[Help](#) [Privacy and cookies policy](#) [News sources](#) [About the BBC](#) [Contact us](#)