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# The Armenians Themselves Burnt Their Own Houses and Desecrated Their Own Churches

*Luigi Villari's Nakhichevan in 1905*

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## Abstract

Luigi Villari's book *Fire and Sword in the Caucasus*, published in London in 1906, is widely quoted by the scholars who study the history of South Caucasus at the time of the first Russian Revolution in 1905. After a short introduction about the interesting figure of this author, the first part of the article will take into consideration Villari's peculiar attitude toward the Armenians. The larger part of the article will consider his first-hand description of the massacres perpetrated by the Azeris (Tartars) in the region of Nakhichevan. As a matter of fact, Luigi Villari's testimony of the tragic events of 1905 is more interesting than ever to understand the origins of a contrast that continues—even if in a deeply different situation—to stain with blood the relationship between Armenians and the South Caucasian Turks.

## Keywords

Armenophobia – Armeno-Russian relations – Armeno-Tatar war – Nakhichevan

## 1 Between Italy and England

Luigi Villari's book *Fire and Sword in the Caucasus*, published in London in 1906, is widely quoted by the historians who study the history of South Caucasus at the time of the revolution in 1905. However, this book and its author

deserve more attention than they have received so far, primarily because the recent war in Nagorno-Karabakh has renewed the interest in what Villari wrote about the first clashes between Armenians and Tatars (present day population of Azerbaijan Republic). As a matter of fact, his pages give a vivid and first-hand description of a conflict, which has arrived up to nowadays.

Luigi Villari (1876–1959) is actually a remarkable figure, also thanks to his family origins. His father, Pasquale Villari (Naples, 1827–Florence, 1917) was a valued historian, author of important books on Savonarola and Machiavelli. He also was senator of the Reign of Italy and Ministry of Public Education from 1891 to 1892. Luigi Villari's mother, Linda White (1836–1915), was an English writer, author of numerous books, some of which about Italy, she also translated into English several of her husband's works. Therefore, Luigi Villari was perfectly bilingual; even more, according to Mary De Rachewitz (2005: 165), Ezra Pound's daughter, "Villari spoke Italian with a British accent".

In the first part of his long life, Luigi Villari worked as a journalist and travelled a lot, especially in Eastern European countries; later he was vice-consul in New Orleans in 1906, then in Philadelphia and Boston until 1910. Afterwards, he became Italian delegate for the Society of Nations and was an official of the Commission for Migration in Rome. In the years between the two world wars, Luigi Villari adhered to fascism and had an important role in the propaganda of the regime in Great Britain, thanks to his perfect knowledge of the English language. In his activity of propaganda, he was in direct contact with Mussolini (Colacicco 2022).

## 2 Villari and the Armenians

In this article, I will take into account only one specific issue of Luigi Villari's body of work, i.e., his pages devoted to the region of Nakhichevan within the aforementioned *Fire and Sword in the Caucasus*.

In this book, Villari's point of view is that of a liberal, well-educated representative of Europe—or, in his words, of the 'civilized West'—at the peak of the Belle Epoque. Despite the author's Eurocentric and paternalistic approach, it is a remarkable book, which immediately strikes for the width of information on the history of Caucasus and of its many peoples. Furthermore, we can appreciate the clarity of the analysis of the complex and controversial situations described. Before we approach the part of the book devoted to Nakhichevan, it is important to understand the distinct attitude Villari had towards the Armenians (see Ferrari 2021), which he chose to clarify straight from the introduction to the book: "I may perhaps seem to be unduly partial towards the Armenians,

but all I can say in explanation of my attitude is that I went out with an absolutely unbiassed mind, and that the conclusions at which I have arrived are the result of inquiries from all sources, including many which are decidedly unfavourable to that nationality. I have dwelt particularly on this point, as the Armenians are certainly one of the most unpopular races of the East, and they have been grossly labelled by ignorant and prejudiced critics, including some of English nationality" (Villari 2017: 7).<sup>1</sup>

These words demonstrate how Villari was well aware of the negative stereotypes on the Armenians, then widely spread in the Russian Empire and mostly related to two aspects: cowardice on one side, dishonesty and greed on the other (Suny 1983). These stereotypes originated from the peculiar history of the Armenians who had been previously recognised as a warlike population (Ferrari 2004). After the fall of the national kingdoms from the 11th to the 14th centuries, their military attitude declined and they developed remarkable trading skills, which led them throughout the world, from Europe to Russia, from the Ottoman Empire to Persia and India.

Also, in southern Caucasus the Armenians managed to gain control of a significant part of the local economy, particularly after the conquest of the region by the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 19th century. This privileged placement in the new socio-economic context was also favoured by the considerable social differentiation of the Armenians within the whole Transcaucasian society. Indeed, beside a restricted aristocratic layer of population, mainly concentrated in Karabakh and Eastern Georgia (Małalyan 2007; Ferrari 2011), they possessed the most developed bourgeoisie of the region and were bearer of a commercial tradition, which had allowed the accumulation of large fortunes.

During the 19th century the Armenian bourgeoisie of Transcaucasia managed to further widen the sphere of influence of its activities, successfully participating in the birth of the new textile, mining, and oil industries (Ferrari 2000: 92–100, 207–217). Unfortunately, it was precisely this notable economic success to arise the progressive resentment of other populations—namely the Georgians and the Tatars of Caucasus, who will later be known as Azeris—both of them less dynamic in trade and getting more and more resentful of the dominant role of the Armenians, especially in their main towns, Tiflis (Tbilisi) and Baku (Suny 1979; Dadayan 2007; Step'anyan 2010). Even though the majority of Transcaucasian Armenians were actually peasants, they were perceived first of all as skilled and unscrupulous bourgeois. Villari (2017: 118–119) was aware of

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1 Indeed, the Azerbaijani side complains that "Luigi Villari's book is also clearly biased towards Armenians" (Shafiyev 2008: 246).

this bias: “The outward characteristics of the Armenian are not attractive. [...] Of course, this is not true of the whole people, and in any case applies chiefly to the urban classes; in my own experience I have met many Armenians whose manners and habits were those of men and women of the world, and among whom, apart from their kindness and hospitality to me, I felt myself in the company of polished Europeans. The hospitality of the Armenians is very great, although seldom accompanied by courtly manners. The result is that they are usually unpopular; and to their real defects others are added by their enemies, which find easy credence among those who cannot get over their unconciliating behaviour.

The Armenians also enjoy a reputation for sharp and not always straight business methods, and they are accused of being usurers. There is some ground for both charges, no doubt [...] But on the whole it cannot be admitted that they are really dishonest, most of them are perfectly honourable, and by a commercial ability amounting almost to genius, they have got the economic development of the country into their own hands”.

Therefore, Villari not only didn't share the negative biases on the Armenians, but he highlighted their being 'polished Europeans', a fact that in his Eurocentric perspective appeared highly positive. From this point of view, his vision of the Armenians largely contrasted with that he had of the Azeris (Tartars): “The Tartars are in every respect the opposite of the Armenians. Their outward characteristics are most sympathetic. They have a dignity of bearing and a charm of manner which endear them to all who come in contact with them. These qualities are indeed common to most Mohammedans, who have a chivalry and gentlemanliness which make us forget even serious faults, and disregard the wrongs and sufferings which they inflict on less attractive Christian peoples. They have been a ruling military caste for centuries, and this has made them an aristocracy of *grands seigneurs*. I have met Tartars whom, although I knew them to be utter scoundrels, I could not help liking. There is something magnificently mediaeval about them which the virtuous but *bourgeois* Armenian lacks” (Villari 2017: 122).

Despite this exterior admiration Villari (2017: 122) highlights in various parts of his narration the prevalent responsibility of the Azeris in the clashes with the Armenians and asks himself the reason for their aggressiveness. The answer, again, is thoroughly clear: “The reader will ask why the Tartars should hate the Armenians more than other Christians—Russians and foreigners. I think the reason lies in the fact that the Armenians are in large numbers, whereas the other Christians are comparatively few; secondly, the Armenians are permanent inhabitants, whereas the Russians come as soldiers, officials, temporary workmen, and leave after a few years, and the foreigners come to make their

pile and also leave soon. Then the Armenians tend to regard every town where they are fairly numerous as being within the Armenian sphere of influence and their progress is to some extent at the expense of the Tartars”.

If the socio-economic dimension had an important and even prevailing role in the interethnic clashes between Armenians and Azeris that burst in Baku and in other towns in Transcaucasia, in Nakhichevan the events followed partly different dynamics. This specificity of the region was well understood by Villari, as we can see in chapter XIV of his book, titled “Nakhichevan and the May massacres”.

### 3 Villari and the Nakhichevan Massacres

Villari reached the town of Nakhichevan, after which the region is named (Ayvazyan 1986; idem 1995; Karapetian 2012; Oganisyan 2016) by train, having left from Erevan. Nakhichevan was still devastated by the violent conflicts between Azeris and Armenians: “I spent several days visiting the town and the neighbourhood, which gave me a clearer idea of this great racial feud than I had obtained either at Baku or at Tiflis. In the two latter places the issues are more complex; at Baku social and labour problems are mixed up with racial and religious hatred, and the situation is further complicated by the presence of large numbers of Russians, and by the activity of the Social-Democratic party; at Tiflis all the various Caucasian races are represented, but the Tartars are not numerous; only quite recently have Tartar-Armenian disturbances occurred there at all. But in the Nakhitchevan district the two races are face to face, and the question appears divested of extraneous issues. Nor are the Armenian Committees at all active, and there are no Tartar ‘intellectuals’” (Villari 2017: 204).

A description of the town follows that, after a brief reference to its biblical past and to its appearance, concentrates on its situation after the Russian conquest: “In 1829 Russia, after her last war with Persia, received Nakhitchevan, together with Erivan, by the treaty of Turkoman Chai. The Armenians played the same role in this conquest as they had done in that of other parts of the Caucasus, and it was largely through their action that the local princes were dispossessed. But if the khans no longer actually rule they are still very wealthy and exercise enormous influence over the rest of the Moslem community, who have looked on them as their natural leaders for centuries. Various members of the princely family, which bears the Russified cognomen of Nakhitchevansky,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> About this important family, see Nagdaliev 2006.

have entered the Russian public services, chiefly the army. To-day Djafar Kuli Khan Nakhitchevansky, an ex-officer, is Mayor of the town, while his brother Raghim Khan has also been in the State service and is a man of great local authority" (Villari 2017: 205. See also Bournoutian 2016).

Villari's comment is quite correct since, in spite of the important role played by the Armenians in the Russian victory over Persia, the Tsarist government decided to maintain the social and economic status quo in all Transcaucasia, where the Muslim elements went on dominating as in the past. Because of its same ideological structure, the Russian government had no interest in breaking up the socio-economic structure of the region to favor the Armenians (Ferrari 2000: 111–114).

According to Villari (2017: 206–207), Azeris represented the three quarters of the population of the town and owned almost all the buildings, also those inhabited by the Armenians, who were only one quarter of the total. In the countryside the proportion between the two populations was two to one, 65,000 Azeris and 33,000 Armenians. Such a demographic unbalance was due to various historical factors, first of all to the deportation of Shah Abbas at the beginning of the 17th century, but also to the precarious situations of the local Armenians after the Russian conquest. Actually, the Russian government was scarcely present in this remote border region, where the Azeris had an almost complete economic and social control, especially in the countryside: "Public safety has never been assured, and murders were almost daily occurrences in the rural districts. The Tartar khans and begs are oppressive landlords, especially towards their Armenian peasants, and some of them are little better than brigand chiefs, keeping armed bands of retainers who regularly "forage" for them. It is said that certain begs live almost entirely by plunder, and many villagers certainly do. If the outrages and oppression to which the Armenians had been subjected in Persian times were no longer so violent and redress was sometimes obtainable before the Russian courts, yet life was anything but pleasant for them".

Not by chance, many Armenians of Nakhichevan preferred to emigrate to Tiflis, Baku, Elizavetpol or other towns of the Russian empire, but in this way they incremented the demographic disadvantage in comparison with the Muslim component. In such a situation, the interethnic conflict between Armenians and Azeris, which burst out in Baku in February 1905, inevitably assumed a particularly violent aspect, which Villari (2017: 207 (fn.)) relates in a very interesting way, basing on the witnesses of several people: "For the account of the Nakhitchevan troubles I am indebted to information supplied by the Archimandrites Mesrop and Karapet Ter-Mkrtchian, who were eye-witnesses, and contained in their reports to the Viceroy, and by that given by other Armenian

and Tartar notables, as well as to corroborative evidence obtained from two of the foreign contractors working on the Nakhitchevan railway and other impartial sources”.

On the basis of the information he had received, Villari (2017: 208) states that after the clashes in Baku in February 1905 the situation was becoming increasingly tense. As early as April the Armenians, inferior in number and almost without weapons, had pleaded for the protection of the Russian authorities, but they had been unsuccessful as the governor of the district, the Finnish M. Enkel, and his Georgian assistant M. Gogoberidze, were harshly anti-Armenian. Also, the local officials, from the mayor to the head of the Police, were more or less hostile to the Armenians. Even M. Taranovskij, vice governor of the region of Erevan, couldn't dissimulate his aversion for this population.

This 'Armenophobia' should be correctly considered in the peculiar historical context of the Russian empire when Villari accomplished his travel. As a matter of fact, the integration of the Armenians in the Russian empire was actually mainly positive, not only in the economic sphere, but also in the cultural, political and even military ones. The number of Armenian distinguished officials in the imperial army was noteworthy (Avetisyan 2008). For example, during the Russian-Turkish war in 1877–1878 on the Caucasian front up to six generals were Armenians. One of them, Michail Loris-Melikov (1826–1888), even became the most important minister of Alexander II (Danilov 1998; Petrosyan 2005). His extraordinary career is the best evidence of the positive integration of the Armenians within the Russian empire.

Nevertheless, also the Armenians were affected by the centralistic and repressive politics that prevailed in the last decades of the Russian empire, especially after the murder of Alexander II in 1881. What made the authorities in Petersburg particularly suspicious was the fact that the development among them of a modern *intelligentsia*, oriented toward radical values, had been proceeding faster than among other nationalities of the Russian Empire. The Russian government was worried by the appearance, around 1890, of revolutionary parties like Hnchak and Dashnak, which were at the same time nationalist and socialist. In those years, the Armenians began to be perceived by many Russian officials as a potentially disruptive element (Ferrari 2000: 238–244, 269–279). This is certainly the case of prince Anatolij Golicyn, who was general governor of the Caucasus from 1896 to 1905 and promoted an aggressive politics towards the Armenians, which culminated with the confiscation of the Church properties in 1903, the lowest point of the Armenian-Russian relations.<sup>3</sup>

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3 However, Villari (2017: 106–116) was very informed about this political evolution, which he describes with remarkable precision.

Within this situation of political crisis with the Russian authorities, the Armenians of Nakhichevan underwent repeated and unpunished attacks from the Azeris until on 20th May they decided to close their shops in the town. After three days, however, the vice governor of Erevan arrived in town to reassure the local Armenians together with Džafar Naxičevanskij, mayor of Nakhichevan, archimandrite Karapet and M. Melik-Agamalov, the Armenian mayor of Erevan (Villari 2017: 208).

Convinced by their promises the Armenian merchants reopened their shops on 25th May. Yet, also thanks to the fact that the small Russian garrison had been sent out of town for military training, many Azeris led by a well-known outlaw, broke into the bazar and began to sack the Armenian shops and to massacre their owners. For the Armenians, taken by surprise and unarmed, there was no escape. At the end of the plunder almost all shops were put on fire and about fifty people died. The sacked goods were secured in the houses of the wealthy Azeris of the town, a fact that Villari (2017: 210) comments upon with these meaningful words: “The stolen goods were hidden away in the houses of various prominent Tartars both in Nakhitchevan and the neighbourhood. It was clear that although the original cause of the outbreak was racial hatred, the desire for plunder played no small part in bringing it about”.

The other villages of the district followed in the same course. According to Villari, out of fifty-two Armenian—or mixed population—villages, forty-five withstood massacres and looting. Villari’s (2017: 212–213) opinion on the responsibilities for these massacres is absolutely neat: “As to the responsibility for these atrocities, it rests in the first place with the Tartars, and secondly with Russian authorities who neglected to take measures for the protection of the Armenians. It cannot be denied that the blood-guiltiness is largely on the heads of the khans and begs, the natural leaders of the Moslem community. It was universally admitted by all impartial people that if the brothers Nakhitchevansky had raised a finger the outbreak would have ceased instantly, for they exercise an almost absolute influence over their co-religionists. I myself realized this on talking to Tartars of the lower class, who spoke of the Nakhitchevansky almost with veneration. But they never moved”.

During his stay in Nakhichevan Villari tried to be informed on the May massacres. The first person he contacted was the archimandrite Mesrop, religious head of the Armenian community, who lived in a small house next to the church, inside the Tatar quarter: “Father Mesrop could speak good German, for he had been educated at Dorpat,<sup>4</sup> and was altogether a cultivated man. I was

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4 The German-language university of Dorpat, now Tartu in Estonia, played a very important



much struck with his impartiality, for after having given me his views on the situation, he concluded, 'But you must not hear our side only. As you are a foreigner seeking for information, I strongly advise you to call on the Tartar khans as well and learn what they have to say'" (Villari 2017: 216).

Villari followed the advice of the Armenian ecclesiastic and went firstly to Raghim Khan: "I first visited Raghim Khan, and what I have said of the Tartar peasant applies still more strongly to this man. He is a true *grand seigneur*, a typical Mohammedan feudal lord, owner of wide lands and master of many peasants, both Armenian and Tartar. [...]. Raghim Khan himself is a dark man of middle height, not as handsome as many Tartars I have met, but with a fine gentlemanly bearing and a pleasing manner. He was attired in the uniform of a Russian official, although he has now retired from the public service. He is better educated than most Tartars and has travelled a good deal in Russia and in foreign countries; he knows Russian perfectly, but speaks no Western tongue" (Villari 2017: 217–218).

In his conversation with Villari this *grand seigneur* attributed the responsibility of the raids completely to the Armenians who, according to him, had treacherously attacked the Azeris who had simply defended themselves. Asked about the plunder of houses and churches, this is what Raghim Khan answered: "Do you know how that happened?" asked Raghim. "*The Armenians themselves burnt their own houses and desecrated their own churches*, so as to throw the blame on us!"

And he went on talking about the Armenians as a bunch of vile, treacherous, bloody, and murderous people. Villari's (Villari 2017: 219–220) comment on the words of the Azeri aristocrat is extremely meaningful: "I left Raghim's house much edified by my conversation, for if what I heard from the worthy Tartar cannot be taken exactly as a contribution to recent Caucasian history, it was a most interesting revelation of the Tartar mind, and incidentally showed what contempt he has for the judgment and discriminating power of the Western stranger".

Villari (2017: 220) spoke similarly with Raghim's brother, Djafar Kuli Khan, who had served with honor in the imperial Russian army and was at the time mayor of the city. He also appeared as a refined 'oriental' gentleman, quite reticent when he reached the point of talking about the May events and bitter towards the Armenians, but less ready than his brother to blame them.

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role in the education of many Armenian intellectuals of the Russian Empire (see Balekjian 1988).

However, Villari could listen also different versions of the clashes in Nakhichevan, in particular that of a foreign railway contractor to whom Raghim Khan had directed him in order to have confirmation of his own statements. It is worth quoting the full passage, which is interesting not only for the information Villari (2017: 221) could derive but also to exemplify his incurably Eurocentric attitude: “I found him at home early one morning, a burly, good-natured, homely Austrian who talked German with a strong Tirolese accent; his wife, a German Bohemian, was everything that a good *Hausfrau* should be. It was a pleasant change to be among ‘white folk’ once more, and it made me realize how small are the differences between Englishmen, Germans, Italians, and Frenchmen, when compared with those between West Europeans and Orientals. Herr F, when questioned as to the events of last May, instead of confirming the Tartar version, described the occurrence almost exactly as I had heard it from Armenian sources. His report on the Tartars in general and on the khans and begs in particular was the reverse of flattering”.

In the following days Villari and his travel companion Gordon J. Browne, the author of some pictures which accompany the book, decided to visit the villages around Nakhichevan, led by an Armenian interpreter. They first visited some villages which still bore the signs of massacres and fires, with plundered churches. The only exception to this desolate landscape was represented by an Armenian village, which could avoid that fate: “The last village at which we stopped was Sheikh-Mahmud, which is wholly Armenian. It was not attacked by the Tartars, as its inhabitants were armed, and in fact the villagers from many other villages which had been plundered and burnt by the Tartars, took refuge here. We were taken to see the little church, all bright with ornaments and decorations. ‘You see,’ the priest said to us, ‘what our churches are like when they have not been plundered; all the churches in the district were like this before the Tartar robbers came last May’” (Villari 2017: 225).

This event gave Villari the chance for an important consideration on the necessity for the Armenians to be armed in order to defend themselves. This is a significant point for the Italian traveller, who compares this situation to that of the Balkan Christians, who at that time were struggling with the Ottomans in a similar way. Villari actually believed that the prejudice widespread in Europe on the fact that the eastern Christian populations were cowards and incapable of defending themselves from the Muslims depended on the fact that they were usually unarmed and at the mercy of armed enemies. Every time they were given weapons, they demonstrated to be as effective fighters as the Muslims. This happened not only in the Balkans, but also in the Caucasus, where the Armenians could courageously defend themselves, once they had come into possession of weapons. Even an Armenian priest confessed to

Villari he had changed his mind with regard to the use of weapons: “One of their priests told me that until recently he had always counselled his flock against the use of force and advised them to remain peaceful. ‘But now, seeing that the Government will not or cannot protect us, my advice to them is: Arm yourselves, and if attacked shoot without hesitation’” (Villari 2017: 224–225).

This passage is really meaningful, because it touches one of the most sensitive points of modern Armenian history, i.e., the political role of the Church, accused by many well-known authors—from Hovsep Emin to Khachatur Abovean and Raffi—of having prejudiced the self-defense and the development of a modern conscience because of its loyalist preaching, hostile to the use of weapons (Ferrari 2010).

At the same time, Villari (2017: 226) clearly highlights the substantial differences between the Russian context and the Ottoman one: “We must not, however, neglect the differences. The Christians in the Caucasus are not precluded from carrying arms in the same way as are their coreligionists in Turkey; nor are the Russian law courts as farcical as those of the Ottoman Empire, and redress is sometimes obtainable, brigands and murderers are sometimes punished. A Baku lawyer had collected a vast mass of material concerning the Nakhitchevan affair which he was going to send to the authorities at St. Petersburg, and the villages had joined together to bring an action for damages against the Governor of Erivan”.

The difference is truly substantial and Villari (2017: 227) gives a quite optimistic analysis of the political situation of the Armenians of the region. In the concluding part of the chapter, he states that “[...] the Armenians are the most capable race in the Caucasus, and in spite of Tartar outrages and the Armenophobia of the Muscovite bureaucracy, they will unquestionably end by becoming the predominant element in the country”.

The belief that the Armenians were destined to a great future thanks to their economic and cultural dynamism was very strong in Villari. He (2017: 244–245) expressed this belief very clearly in the pages devoted to the visit of the ruins of ancient Armenian capital, Ani, that had been part of the Russian empire since 1878:<sup>5</sup> “Is the state of Ani symbolical of that of the Armenian nation, and are they destined at last to disappear or be absorbed into other races, other religions? I do not think so, for with all the sufferings and persecution they have undergone they still preserve a vigorous national life. Many of them have

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5 On the significance of Ani in the decades of Tsarist power, see Watenpaugh 2014; Pravilova 2016; Ferrari 2019.

been massacred, but the survivors are not absorbed. Their industry is more active than ever, and education is making great progress. They have built up the oil trade of Baku, they monopolize the commerce of Tiflis, and at Rostov-on-Don, Baku, Odessa, Moscow, Kishinieff, Constantinople, Bombay, Calcutta, and many another city far removed from their ancestral homes, they form industrious, intelligent, and prosperous commercial communities. A people with such a past and such a present need surely not despair of its future”.

Villari's words may sound too optimistic, but we must remember that they were written in a time when, notwithstanding the massacres perpetrated in the years 1894–1896 in the Ottoman empire and the complex political evolution of the Caucasus he was witnessing, the global situation of the Armenians could still appear very promising. In addition, as aforesaid, the tension between Armenians and Russians observed by Villari during his journey would be rapidly overcome, especially thanks to the efforts of Golicyn's successor, I.I. Voroncov-Daškov, who reached the Caucasus in May 1905 and undertook significant effort to recover the loyalty of the Armenian community, or at least of its more moderate members. In August 1905, the Church had its properties restored, a measure which significantly reconciled the moderate component of the Armenian community to Russia (Önol 2018: 139–182).

#### 4 Conclusions

Villari's optimism about the Armenians was tragically contradicted by the genocide in the Ottoman empire in 1915. The destiny of the Armenians of the Russian empire was certainly different. As a matter of fact, despite the several negative policies of the communist regime the Soviet period witnessed a substantial development of the Armenians. Unfortunately, the region of Nakhichevan constituted a painful exception to this process. After the renewal of the interethnic clashes between the Armenians and the Azeris in 1919–1920 this region was assigned by Moscow to Azerbaijan in 1921. This choice led to a complete disappearance of the Armenian population of Nakhichevan in the Soviet period and to a systematic destruction of the Armenian artistic heritage in the last decades. This recent evolution, that can truly be considered a cultural genocide, takes on a really dangerous significance in the light of the 2020 and 2023 conflicts, that have put a tragical end to the Armenian presence in Nagorno-Karabakh. The risk that Nagorno-Karabakh will follow the fate of Nakhichevan is definitely very high. In such a context, Luigi Villari's clearheaded description of the interethnic clashes of 1905 is more interesting than ever to understand the origins of a contrast that continues—even if

in a deeply different situation—to stain with blood the relationship between Armenians and Azeris.

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