

About the Author

Full text biography:

Chris Bohjalian

Birth Date:

1960

Known As:

Bohjalian, Christopher A.; Bohjalian, Christopher Aram

Place of Birth: United States, New York, White Plains

Nationality:

American

Occupation: Novelist

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Awards:

Oprah Winfrey Book Club selection, 1998, for Midwives; Anahid Literary Award, Columbia Armenian Center, 2000; New England Book Award for fiction, New England Booksellers Association, 2002.

Personal Information:

about this author

Born August 12, 1960, in White Plains, NY; son of Aram (an advertising executive) and Annalee (a homemaker) Bohjalian; married Victoria Blewer (a photographer and artist), October 13, 1984; children: Grace. Education: Amherst College, B.A. (summa cum laude), 1982. Politics: "I imagine I have some. Generally, I vote Democratic." Religion: Episcopalian. Memberships: PEN, Phi Beta Kappa. Addresses: Home: Lincoln, VT. Agent: Arlynn Greenbaum, Authors Unlimited, 31 E. 32nd St., Ste. 300, New York, NY 10016; Dean Schramm, The Schramm Group, 4804 Laurel Canyon Blvd., Ste. 749, Sudio City, CA 91607. E-mail: chris@chrisbohjalian.com.

Career Information:

Burlington Free Press, Burlington, VT, book critic, beginning 1987, "Idyll Banter" columnist, 1992--; Vermont Life magazine, Montpelier, VT, book critic, beginning 1991; freelance journalist and novelist. New England Young Writers Conference at Bread Loaf, faculty member, 1991-92.

Writings:

NOVELS

- · A Killing in the Real World, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 1988.
- · Hangman, Carroll & Graf (New York, NY), 1991.
- · Past the Bleachers. Carroll & Graf (New York, NY), 1992.
- · Water Witches, University Press of New England (Hanover, NH), 1995.
- · Midwives, Harmony Books (New York, NY), 1997.
- · The Law of Similars, Harmony Books (New York, NY), 1999.
- · Trans-Sister Radio, Harmony Books (New York, NY), 2000.
- · The Buffalo Soldier, Shaye Areheart Books (New York, NY), 2002.
- · Before You Know Kindness, Shaye Areheart Books (New York, NY), 2004.
- · The Double Bind, Shaye Areheart Books (New York, NY), 2007.

- · Skeletons at the Feast, Shaye Areheart Books (New York, NY), 2008.
- · Secrets of Eden, Shaye Areheart Books (New York, NY), 2010.
- · The Night Strangers, Crown Trade (New York, NY), 2011.

OTHER

· Idyll Banter: Weekly Excursions to a Very Small Town, Harmony Books (New York, NY), 2003.

Also author of *Chris Bohjalian's Idyil Banter* Web log. Contributor to numerous periodicals, including *Reader's Digest. Cosmopolitan*, and *Boston Globe Magazine*.

Media Adaptions:

Past the Bleacher's was adapted for a Hallmark television movie in 1995; Midwives was adapted for the stage by Dana Yeaton, 2000, and by Lifetime cable channel for a TV movie; Secrets of Eden, Lifetime, 2012.

Sidelights:

Chris Bohjalian has published a number of critically acclaimed novels, including *Midwives, The Double Bind, Skeletons at the Feast, Secrets of Eden,* and *The Night Strangers.* "The people in Bohjalian's novels are confronted with domestic tragedies and professional crises; many of his works focus on the aftermath of dramatic loss," observed *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor Booth Austin. "Bohjalian's works explore the ways in which social controversies play themselves out in the domestic arena."

Bohjalian once told *CA*: "I view myself fundamentally as a novelist. Although I am also a weekly newspaper columnist and freelance journalist, it is my novels that matter to me most. I have no particular agenda for my writing--especially my fiction--no particular goal. I write because it gives me enormous pleasure, and I can't imagine I'd be happy doing anything else."

Bohjalian published his first novel, a mystery titled *A Killing in the Real World*, in 1988, and followed that with *Hangman*, a ghost story. His third work, *Past the Bleachers*, which deals with a couple grieving for their eight-year-old son who died of leukemia, became a Hallmark television movie in 1995.

A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer characterized *Water Witches*. Bohjalian's fourth book, as "a moving, life-affirming novel suffused with ecological wisdom." The plot centers on a Vermont ski lodge that wants to develop the wilderness that surrounds it. Environmentalists oppose the development, among them local residents who are the "witches" of the title (modern-day dowsers who can find underground water with a forked stick). Bohjalian's protagonist and narrator, Scott Winston, is a transplanted New York lawyer who represents the interests of the developers. As Scott becomes more aware of the situation and is affected by the New England environment, however, his allegiance begins to shift. "With wit, insight and mordant irony," the *Publishers Weekly* reviewer noted, "Bohjalian charts Scott's metamorphosis from rationalistic materialist and skeptic to one who believes in higher powers and the interconnectedness of all life." Janet St. John, writing in *Booklist*, also praised *Water Witches*, observing that "Bohjalian manages ... to retain a proper distance from his characters so that they become believable, realistic, and human without submitting to the author's political correctness."

Bohjalian's *Midwives* was selected by talk-show host and book-club maven Oprah Winfrey as one of her book-club picks. Again set in Vermont, the book tells the story of Sibyl Dansforth, an experienced midwife who performs a caesarean section on a woman who has stopped breathing to save her unborn infant. However, it turns out that the woman may not have been dead at the time, and Sibyl must go on trial for involuntary manslaughter. "The description of the nightmarish Caesarean ... is harrowing; it is also the book's most effective passage," related Suzanne Berne for the *New York Times Book Review*. Narrated as a remembrance by Sibyl's grown daughter, an obstetrician, the novel details the course of Sibyl's trial and the inevitable conflicts it raises between midwifery and the mainstream medical community. Reba Leiding of *Library Journal* praised Bohjalian as a "thorough writer," noting that the book is filled "with information about pregnancy and childbirth, and the characters are well developed, especially Sibyl and her trial lawyer." Michelle Green of *People* called *Midwives* "a superbly crafted and astonishingly powerful novel." A reviewer for

Publishers Weekly commented that "readers will find themselves mesmerized by the irresistible momentum of the narrative and by Bohjalian's graceful and lucid, irony-laced prose."

In an online *BookBrowse* interview, Bohjalian commented: "I interviewed over sixty-five people while researching *Midwives*, including (of course) a great many midwives, nurse-midwives, and parents who'd had their children at home. That research was instrumental in all the 'birth' stories in the book, and in the development of the characters and their language." It was after the publication of *Midwives* that Bohjalian--until then a fairly obscure writer--got the call from Oprah Winfrey telling him she'd picked his novel for her book club. "I understood two things right away. All of a sudden I was on the same short list of writers of the caliber of Toni Morrison, Wally Lamb, and Alice Hoffman (all previous Oprah choices). I also understood that *Midwives* was going to sell a lot more copies, and it was the greatest professional blessing I could have," he told *Grand Rapids Press* reporter Curt Schleier.

In *The Law of Similars*, Bohjalian further explores the central theme of *Midwives*, the conflict between traditional and alternative forms of medicine. Homeopath Carissa Lake treats Vermont deputy state attorney Leland Fowler for asthma. Leland is not only cured, he is attracted to Carissa, the first woman he has been drawn to since the death of his wife. But when one of Carissa's patients dies and the man's wife demands a criminal investigation of Carissa, Leland must face the ethical conflict of whether or not he can fairly prosecute a woman with whom he is falling in love.

The Law of Similars drew a considerably less enthusiastic response from critics than Midwives. According to Pam Lambert of People: "Unlike Midwives ... which builds to a wrenching courtroom climax, this book ends with a disappointing whimper." A Publishers Weekly reviewer remarked that the immorality of some of Leland's actions undercuts his appeal as a protagonist. Liz Rosenberg, writing in the New York Times Book Review, found the characterizations flat compared to those in Midwives but concluded that "despite its flaws, The Law of Similars is fast-paced and absorbing."

Bohjalian subsequently produced two more novels that explore the edges of what is acceptable societally: *Trans-Sister Radio* and *The Buffalo Soldier*. The first, as Erica Jacobson wrote in the *Burlington Free Press*, "introduces school teacher Allison Banks, her teenage daughter, her ex-husband and the man who loves her while on his way to surgically becoming a woman." Reviewing *Trans-Sister Radio* in the Brisbane *Sunday Mail*, Robyn Garner noted: "There are dramatic changes in store for all--some expected, some coming out of left field--but they are approached with a refreshing level of honesty and integrity. All credit must go to Chris Bohjalian for this sensitively handled, thought-provoking piece of fiction. Fans of his earlier books ... will not be surprised to hear that there is nothing camp, overplayed or remotely stereotyped in his portrayal of Dana." According to *Lambda Book Report* contributor Susan Branch Smith, readers "will find a page-turner that sheds a mainstream light on a well-hidden part of America. And all of us can take hope from the life that Dana makes for herself in the face of intolerance and change."

"All of my books, at least my good ones, are fictional memoirs," Bohjalian told Jacobson. "It's an individual chronicling the seminal event in her life." Jacobson added: "For every hour [Bohjalian] spends writing, he spends another researching everything from school board meetings to state's attorneys. He interviewed at least thirty-five people for *Trans-Sister Radio*, traveled to Colorado to spend time with people going through gender reassignment surgery and sent the manuscript to [a woman] doctor ... who specializes in sex changes as well as once having been a man herself."

The Buffalo Soldier is a departure from Bohjalian's fictional memoir format. He writes it in the third person, with different sections showing the perspective of different characters. The book, again set in a Vermont town, centers on a couple who have lost their twin daughters to a flood. Struggling to work through their grief, Laura and Terry Sheldon decide to become foster parents, since Laura is unable to have more children. Into their home and their all-white community comes Alfred Benoit, a ten-year-old African American child who has been shunted from home to home and is consequently "secretive, shell-shocked, silent," in the words of Book reviewer Paul Evans, who added: "What elevates The Buffalo Soldier ... is the presence of young Alfred. As the adults in his newfound home fret, dissemble and nearly disintegrate, the boy becomes stronger and eventually comes into his own."

Alfred comes into his own in large part because of Laura's kindness and because, as Evans put it, "he is helped by a neighbor, an old man [named Paul Hebert] who, like Alfred, feels out of place in the community. He gives Alfred a book on the buffalo soldiers of the 1860s, black riders in the U.S. cavalry. For Alfred, those riders become dream heroes,

inspirations. An experienced horseman himself, the old mentor even teaches Alfred to ride." In the meantime, the Sheldon family falls apart as Terry buries himself in his work as a state trooper and has a momentary desperate affair with a woman who becomes pregnant. Evans commented: "While Bohjalian isn't the page-turning storyteller that, say, Stephen King and Alice Hoffman are, he may be something rarer yet equally fine, a remarkably empathetic writer who cares sufficiently about his characters to invest them with genuine warmth, an almost tragic dimension that's rare in mainstream, accessible fiction. With this novel, he's again proved himself a valuable resource—an author of concern and attention."

Robin Vidimos, in a piece for the *Denver Post*, commented: "*The Buffalo Soldier* is a story that pulls at the reader's heart, but it would be nice to see Bohjalian stretch a little more. He's very good at getting into his characters' souls, but there is a sense, this time, that he could be telling a lot more about what makes them tick. He uses a combination of conflicts to drive his plot; it is tempting to wonder how the plot might have deepened if one of them, perhaps the extramarital affair, had been cut." Vidimos concluded, though, that the reader should find much to like in this latest novel, despite the fact that Bohjalian has decided to abandon quotation marks to denote speech.

Lynette Ingram, in a *Tennessean* book review, wrote: "Distributing the narrative among the perspectives of four major characters, Bohjalian weaves shadings of moral complexity into this richly textured novel. Interspersed with journal entries and correspondence from Captain George Rowe of the Buffalo Soldiers and his Comanche wife, the story of one family's problems expands to explore the wider concepts of unconventional alliances and reconfigured community." *Seattle Times* writer Nancy Pearl, however, judged that "Chris Bohjalian stumbles badly in his eighth novel ... a coincidence-strewn, credulity-straining tale of a family's redemption from a devastating tragedy." Pearl found that "here even the main characters never seem fully realized, so that it is nearly impossible to feel empathy (or sympathy) for what they're going through." Philip Herter of the *Boston Herald* observed that "opting for a prescription of fresh air and wholesome exercise, *The Buffalo Soldier* raises more questions about race in America than it attempts to answer. As the novel ducks the real social issues that give it weight, it seems the author is exploiting a hot-button topic for effect. ... Putting a black protagonist into an all-white town is a potentially powerful idea for a novel, but in *The Buffalo Soldier* it remains little more than a notion."

In an online BookPage interview, Bohjalian gave a different view on the purpose of the book: "By design, The Buffalo Soldier is about multigenerational love," Bohjalian said. "I hope it illuminates the fact that friendship can transcend age." Interviewer Alden Mudge responded: "Not only does the book do that, but through the sympathetic portrayal of the widely varying perspectives of its ensemble of characters, The Buffalo Soldier sheds light on the whole question of what constitutes a family in contemporary America." Bohjalian told Mudge: "I write domestic dramas. Sometimes that term sounds pejorative, but that's not how I mean it. I write about ordinary people in what I hope are extraordinary circumstances."

Bohjalian examines another family in crisis in *Before You Know Kindness*. The work concerns Spencer McCullough, an animal rights activist who is accidentally shot and crippled by his twelve-year-old daughter, Charlotte, after she discovers her uncle's hunting rifle. Spencer's employer, the Federation for Animal Liberation, seizes the opportunity to promote its antihunting agenda, creating rifts in the McCullough family. "Bohjalian excels at getting inside each character's head with shifts of diction and perspective," noted a *Publishers Weekly* critic, and *Booklist* contributor Kristine Huntley stated that the author's "characters leap off the pages as very real, flawed, but completely sympathetic human beings."

The Double Bind, Bohjalian's tenth novel, centers on Laurel Estabrook, a young social worker who works in a Vermont homeless shelter after surviving a brutal attack years earlier. When a schizophrenic street person named Bobbie Crocker passes away, Laurel takes charge of his possessions, which include photographs of entertainers such as Chuck Berry as well as images of West Egg--Laurel's hometown and the playground of Daisy and Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. "The author employs a remarkable, and risky, conceit in this novel," observed San Antonio Express-News contributor Jennifer Roolf Laster. "The people in Fitzgerald's masterpiece The Great Gatsby become real again within the fictional confines of The Double Bind." Determined to learn more about Bobbie's past, Laurel visits Pamela Buchanan Marshfield, the elderly daughter of Tom and Daisy, who appears to harbor a deep secret. Writing in Library Journal, Joy Humphrey called The Double Bind "a complex exploration of the human psyche and its efforts to heal and

survive," and a critic in *Kirkus Reviews* wrote: "Conflating literary lore, photographic analysis and meditations on homelessness and mental illness, Bohjalian produces his best and most complex fiction yet."

Inspired by the diary a German woman kept during World War II, Bohjalian's twelfth novel, *Skeletons at the Feast*, is a geographical and temporal departure for the author, set during the waning days of the Reich in Germany. Here a group faces a perilous journey across war-torn Germany, one step ahead of the advancing Soviet army. Anna Emmerich is eighteen, a beautiful young aristocrat from Prussia, traveling with her younger brother and mother. Joining her is a Scottish prisoner of war, Callum Finnella, who worked on Anna's farm and has become her lover. In addition, a Jewish escapee from a train headed for Auschwitz, Uri Singer, joins the group and becomes an unlikely leader and protector as the band makes its way westward.

Andrea Y. Griffith, writing in *Library Journal*. found this novel "immensely readable" in spite of its characters, who are "more like archetypes than individuals." Griffith felt that the author provides "a fresh perspective and details the brutal realities of World War II." Similarly, a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer noted: "Although most of the characters lack complexity, Bohjalian's well-chosen descriptions capture ... the dehumanizing desolation wrought by war." Higher praise came from a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor who felt that the events in the novel ranged "from harrowing to inspiring." In a similar vein, *Bookreporter.com* reviewer Ray Palen called *Skeletons at the Feast* a "fearless account of one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th century."

Bohjalian turns to a nuanced murder mystery with *Secrets of Eden*, "his most splendid accomplishment to date," according to *Library Journal* reviewer Julie Kane. The novel begins with the tragic murder-suicide of Alice and George Hayward. Alice has just been baptized by the Reverend Stephen Drew before her husband kills her and then himself. The event shakes Stephen from his faith, and he attempts to find some solace with Heather Laurent, the author of inspirational books about angels. Stephen leaves his church for Heather, who meanwhile forms a bond with Katie, the girl left orphaned by these deaths. Heather has her own connection to such tragedies, for her own parents died in the same manner. Soon officials begin to suspect that perhaps George did not kill himself after all, and suspicion begins to fall on Stephen, who was privy to Alice's secrets.

Secrets of Eden earned widespread critical acclaim. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer termed it a "masterfully human and compassionate tale." Likewise, a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor dubbed it a "schematic tale of battered wives, murderous husbands and the consequences for their traumatized daughters." Further praise came from Kane, who termed this novel a "breathtaking piece of fiction." *Booklist* writer Carol Haggas also had a high opinion of the work, noting that Bohjalian "weaves subtle nuances of doubt and intrigue into a taut, read-in-one-sitting murder mystery."

Bohjalian blends family drama with psychological thriller in *The Night Strangers*. Chip Linton is trying to find some peace in rural New Hampshire. An airline pilot, he is one of only nine survivors of an emergency landing he attempted, and he is tormented by that tragic event, thrust into clinical depression. He, his wife, Emily, and their twin daughters decide on a new start in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, but they are unnerved by people and events in the sleepy town. A group of gardening women seem to be paying too much attention to the family, and then there is the matter of the heavily bolted door in the cellar of their Victorian house. It bears thirty-nine bolts, the same number of people who died during the emergency landing of Chip's jet.

Booklist contributor Joanne Wilkinson found this a "suspenseful ... genre-bending novel ... [with] spooky twists and turns." Similarly, Library Journal reviewer Christine DeZelar-Tiedman termed it a "compelling story ... [that is] truly frightening." A Publishers Weekly writer likewise dubbed this a "gripping paranormal thriller," and concluded that the "slow-mounting dread makes this a frightful ride."

Related Information:

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- Booklist. March 1, 1995, Janet St. John, review of Water Witches, p. 1177; February 15, 1997, Jennifer Henderson, review of Midwives, p. 1001; March 1, 2002, Kristine Huntley, review of The Buffalo Soldier, p. 1089; August, 2004, Kristine Huntley, review of Before You Know Kindness, p. 1895; December 15, 2006, Kristine Huntley, review of The Double Bind, p. 20; December 15, 2009, Carol Haggas, review of Secrets of Eden, p. 22; August 1, 2011, Joanne Wilkinson, review of The Night Strangers, p. 36.
- · Boston Herald, March 24, 2002, Philip Herter, review of The Buffalo Soldier, p. 48.
- Burlington Free Press (Burlington, VT), May 7, 2000, Erica Jacobson, "Vt. Fodder Adds Character to His Fiction," p. D1; October 19, 2000, Erica Jacobson, "Midwives on Stage," p. D3.
- · Denver Post, April 14, 2002, Robin Vidimos, review of The Buffalo Soldier, p. EE3.
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 February 1, 2007, review of The Double Bind, p. 87; February 15, 2008, review of Skeletons at the Feast;
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Published Reviews:

Title .

Bohjalian, Chris: THE SANDCASTLE GIRLS

Source:

Kirkus Reviews . .: pg.(1)

Document Type:

Book review

Book review, bookreview1.

Bohjalian, Chris THE SANDCASTLE GIRLS Doubleday (Adult Fiction) \$25.95 7, 17 ISBN: 978-0-385-53479-6

The granddaughter of an Armenian and a Bostonian investigates the Armenian genocide, discovering that her grandmother took a guilty secret to her grave. Laura, the narrator of Bohjalian's latest, is doing genealogical research, attempting to learn more about a fact that has always intrigued her: Her Boston Brahmin grandmother, Elizabeth, and her grandfather, Armen, were brought together by the Armenian genocide. Flash back to 1915. Elizabeth has journeyed to the Syrian city of Aleppo, along with her father, on a mission sponsored by an American relief group, the Friends of Armenia. They have come in an attempt to deliver food and supplies to the survivors of the Armenian massacre. The Turks are using Aleppo as a depot for the straggling remnants of thousands of Armenian women, who have been force-marched through the desert after their men were slaughtered. Elizabeth finds the starved women, naked and emaciated, huddled in a public square, awaiting transports to Der-el-Zor, the desert "relocation camp" where, in reality, their final extermination will take place. Elizabeth takes in two of these refugees, Nevart and an orphan Nevart adopted on the trail, Hatoun, who has been virtually mute since she witnessed the beheading (for sport) of her mother and sisters by Turkish guards. By chance, Elizabeth encounters Armen, an Armenian engineer who has come to Aleppo to search for his wife, Karine. Armen has eluded capture since murdering his former friend, a Turkish official who had reneged on his promise to protect Armen's family. Despairing of Karine's survival—and falling in love with Elizabeth—Armen joins the British Army to fight the Turks. Among archival photos viewed by Laura decades later is one of Karine, who did reach the square mere days after Armen left Aleppo. How narrowly did Karine miss reuniting with Armen, Laura wonders, acknowledging that, but for tragic vagaries of fale, the family that produced her might never have come to be. A gruesome, unforgettable exposition of the still too-little-known facts

Title:
The Sandcastle Girls
Source:
Publishers Weekly 259.22 ;: pg.67(1)
Document Type:
Book review
Book review, bookreview2.

The Sandcastle Girls

Chris Bohjalian. Doubleday, \$25.95 (320p) ISBN 978-0-385-53479-6

Bohjalian's powerful newest (after The Night Strangers) depicts the Armenian genocide and one contemporary novelist's quest to uncover her heritage. In 1915, Bostonian Elizabeth Endicott arrives at a compound in Aleppo, Syria, to provide humanitarian aid to Armenian refugees. A fresh-thced nurse just out of college, Elizabeth has learned only rudimentary Armenian, but soon befriends Armen Petrosian, an engineer who lost his wife and daughter during the chaos of the deportations and mass murders. Though Armen departs for Egypt to fight with the British Army in WWI, their relationship blossoms into an epistolary romance. The atrocities of the genocide and the First World War continue, and Bohjalian spares no detail in his gritty descriptions. Nearly a century later, Laura Petrosian is living in the suburbs of New York City when a friend alerts her to a possible photo of her grandmother being used to advertise an exhibit about "the Slaughter You Know Next to Nothing About." As she explores her past, Laura discovers that what she once considered to be her grandparents' eccentricities—their living room was dubbed the "Ottoman Annex"-speak to a rich and tragic history. Though the action occasionally feels far-off, Bohjalian's storytelling makes this a beautiful, frightening, and unforgettable read. Agent: Jane Gelfman Schneider. (July)

Title:
The Sandcastle Girls
Source:
Booklist 108.19-20 .; pg.46(1)
Document Type:
Book review
Book review. bookreview3

The Sandcastle Girls.

By Chris Bohjalian.

July 2012, 320p. Doubleday, \$25.95 (9780385534796).

Between April 1915 and April 1916, one and one-half million Armenians were killed by the Ottoman Empire during WWI. Bohjalian uses this as the backdrop for his new novel. Elizabeth Endicott accompanies her father to Aleppo, Syria, to bring aid to the Armenian deportees. While there, Elizabeth meets Armen Petrosian, an Armenian engineer working for the Germans and searching for his wife and child, though certain they are already dead. In spite of the loss and horror around them, they fall desperately in love. The story is told through the eyes of Laura Petrosian, Elizabeth and Armen's great-granddaughter. After seeing an exhibit of photographs of the Armenian victims, she discovers letters and photos and begins to piece her great-grandparents' story together. Soon "the slaughter you know next to nothing about" takes over her life, and she makes profound discoveries about her ancestors and herself. This is a powerful and moving story based on real events seldom discussed. It will leave you reeling.—Elizabeth Dickie

Title:
Bohjalian, Chris. The Sandcastle Girls
Source:
Library Journal 137.10 ,: pg.88(1)
Document Type:
Book review
Book review, bookreview4.

* Bohjalian, Chris. The Sandcastle Girls. Doubleday, Jul. 2012, c.320p. ISBN 9780385534796, \$25.95, F

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Repeatedly (and embarrassingly accurately) referred to here as "The Slaughter You Know Next to Nothing About," the Armenian genocide of 1915-16 takes center stage in Bohjalian's (The Night Strangers) intergenerational novel. Elizabeth Endicott, a recent Mount Holyoke graduate, accompanies her Bostonian banker father on his philanthropic mission to Aleppo, Syria, to aid Armenian refugees fleeing atrocities committed by the Ottoman government. Her friendship with Armenian engineer Armen, who has lost his wife and baby daughter, flourishes when they are apart and can only communicate in letters. Years later, Laura Petrosian, seeking out a photograph of a woman rumored to be her Armenian grandmother, uncovers these letters among a wealth of documents—a treasure trove for an Armenian American novelist searching for pieces of her family history. VERDICT Bohjalian powerfully narrates an intricately nuanced romance with a complicated historical event at the forefront. With the centennial of the Armenian genocide fast approaching, this is not to be missed. Simply astounding.—Julie Kane, Sweet Briar Coll. Lib., VA

Title:
The Sandcastle Girls
Source:
Bookmarks...; pg.35(1)
Document Type:
Book review
Book review, bookreview5.

(EXCELLENT)

Chris Bohjalian is the author of 14 previous books, including the best-selling Midwives (1997), Before You Know Kindness (**** SELECTION Jan/Feb 2005), The Double Bind (**** May/June 2007), and Skeletons at the Feast (**** July/Aug 2008). The Sandcastle Girls draws from his own ancestral history.

THE STORY: When Laura Petrosian, a contemporary New York novelist, decides to find out more about her Bostonian grandmother and her Armenian grandfather, she delives into the horrors of the Armenian Genocide. In 1915, Boston magnate Silas Endicott brings his daughter Elizabeth to the Syrian city of Aleppo to aid refugees of the Armenian massacre. After witnessing thousands of naked, emaciated women awaiting transport to a "relocation" camp, she by chance meets an Armenian engineer, whose wife and young child have perished. Their friendship soon blossoms into romance. Decades later, Laura discovers an old photo from that time and starts to understand the terrible secret that Elizabeth took with her to the grave.

Doubleday. 299 pages. \$25.95. ISBN: 9780385534796

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Miami Herald [EXCELLENT]

"But even though the descriptions of the brutality are devastating.—Armenians were executed by soldiers, killed by neighbors, marched into the desert to die--the book isn't a lecture. Instead, it's a bittersweet reflection on hope even in the darkest circumstances." AMY DRISCOLL

Minneapolis Star Tribune [EXCELLENT]

"It's not difficult to figure out the ending, but it is handled with such skill that it seems perfect. ... His descriptions of the brutality, the genocide, make it obvious that this time it's personal." CURT SCHLEIER

USA Today [EXCELLENT]

"I was reminded of Boris Pasternak's iconic work [Dr. Zhivago] after reading Chrls Bohjalian's stirring new novel. ... Bohjalian makes a near-century-old event come to life in a way that will make readers gasp with shock that such a terrible event—Turkey's determination to kill all the Armenians in their country—is such a small part of our knowledge of world history." CAROL MEMMOTT

Washington Post [EXCELLENT]

"Bohjalian defliy weaves the many threads of this story back and forth from past to present, from abuse to humanity, from devastation to redemption. His ability to add irony and wit makes the contrasting horrors even more intense." EUGENIA ZUKERMAN

Entertainment Weekly (EXCELLENT)

"The storytelling structure is precariously ornate in this ardent historical romance. ... Drawing for the first time on his own heritage, Bohjalian (Midwives)--the grandson of Armenian survivors--pours passion, pride, and sadness into his tale of ethnic destruction and endurance." LISA SCHWARZBAUM

CRITICAL SUMMARY

When readers open a new Bohjalian novel, they're never sure what's going to lie between the covers. The Vermont-based author, who has previously written about gay marriage, animals' rights, and the Holocaust, this time turns to the Armenian Genocide—the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians by the Turkish government. Using Laura (a stand-in for Bohjalian) and her grandparents' romance as the anchors, Bohjalian explores the atrocities with great humanity, though his descriptions of brutality are not for the faint of heart. Despite the novel's violent themes, it also offers insightful reflections on the richness of love, heritage, and the persistence of hope. "Bohjalian's The Sandcastle Girls may be a novel," concludes the Washington Post, "but, based on his family history, it is a valuable and powerful piece of evidence pointing to the undeniable." He's done it again.

from Books & Authors

The Sandcastle Girls (2012)

Chris Bohjalian (Author)

Author Chris Bohjalian draws on his Armenian heritage to create a story about love, family, and secrets. In 1915, Mount Holyoke graduate Elizabeth Endicott travels with her father from Boston to Aleppo, Syria, to aid the victims of the Ottoman government's acts of violence. There the wealthy young American woman meets an Armenian engineer, Armen, whose wife and child have been killed in the massacre. When Elizabeth and Armen part, they continue their friendship through a series of letters. In 21st-century Pelham, New York, novelist Laura Petrosian learns of a photograph that supposedly depicts her grandmother. When she begins to investigate her family's history, Laura discovers Elizabeth's collection of letters from Armen and a shocking revelation from the past.

MAIN CHARACTERS:

Elizabeth Endicott, Friend (of Armen), Graduate (college), Grandmother (of Laura), Traveler, Wealthy, Woman (American), Worker (aid), Armen, Engineer, Friend (of Elizabeth), Widow(er), Laura Petrosian, Granddaughter (of Elizabeth), Writer (novelist)

GENRE:

Historical fiction

SUB GENRE:

Literary

SETTING(S):

Armenia, Pelham, New York, United States

SUBJECT:

Family history, Armenian history, Massacres, Writers, Friendship

TIME PERIOD:

20th century AD, 1910s (Decade) AD, 21st century AD

EXPERT PICKS

New York Times Hardcover Fiction Best-Seller List, August 19, 2012 New York Times Hardcover Fiction Best-Seller List, August 12, 2012 New York Times Hardcover Fiction Dest-Seller List, August 5, 2012

RECOMMENDED SIMILAR TITLES
The Chaperone - Laura Moriarty
Cutting for Stone: A Novel - Abraham Verghese
Equal of the Sun - Anila Amirrezvani
The Gendarme - Mark T. Mustian
Gray Wolves and White Doves - John Balian
Necessary Lies - Diane Chamberlain
One Breath Away - Heather Gudenkauf
Sarah's Key - Tatiana de Rosnay
Sea Change - Karen White
The Storyteller - Jodi Picoult
Sweet Salt Air - Barbara Delinsky

Gale Document Number: GALE|M1300194305 Gale Database: What Do I Read Next?, 2014

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Sandcastle Girls (Bohjalian) - Discussion Questions

Summary	Author 810	Book Reviews	Discussion Questions	Full Version Print

Discussion Questions

- 1. Though *The Sandcastle* Girls is a novel, author Chris Bohjalian (and fictional narrator Laura Petrosian) based their storytelling on meticulous research. What can a novel reveal about history that a memoir or history book cannot? Before reading *The Sandcastle Girls*, what did you know about the Armenian genocide? How does this history broaden your understanding of current events in the regions surrounding Armenia?
- 2. What lies at the heart of Armen and Elizabeth's attraction to each other, despite their seemingly different backgrounds? What gives their love the strength to transcend distance and danger?
- 3. The novel includes characters such as Dr. Akcam, Helmut, and Orhan, who take great risks opposing the atrocities committed by their superiors; Bohjalian does not cast the "enemy" as uniformly evil. What do these characters tell us about the process of resistance? What separates them from the others, who become capable of horrific, dehumanizing acts?
- 4. Discuss the bond between Nevart and Hatoun. What do they demonstrate about the traits, and the trauma, of a survivor? How do they redefine motherhood and childhood?
- 5. Bohjalian is known for creating inventive, authentic narrators for his novels, ranging from a midwife to a foster child. Why was it important for *The Sandcastle Girls* to be told primarily from the point of view of a woman? How was your reading affected by the knowledge that the author is a man?
- 6. In chapter 9, Elizabeth courageously quotes the Qur'an to appeal to the conscience of the Turkish lieutenant. What diplomacy lessons are captured in that moment? For the novel's characters—from aid workers to Armenians who tried to convert—what is the role of religion?
- 7. When Laura describes the music of her 1960s youth, her steamy relationship with Berk, her belly-dancing aunt, and other cultural memories, what is she saying about the American experience of immigration and assimilation? Culturally, what did her grandfather sacrifice in order to gain security and prosperity in America?
- 8. Discuss the various aid workers depicted in the novel. What motivated them to assist in this particular cause? Do Alicia, Sister Irmingard, and Elizabeth achieve similar outcomes despite their different approaches? What overseas populations would you be willing to support so courageously?

- 9. Does Ryan Martin use his power effectively? How does Elizabeth gain power in a time period and culture that was marked by the oppression of women?
- 10. The vivid scenes of Gallipoli bring to life the global nature of war over the past century. As Armen fights alongside Australians, what do we learn about the power and the vulnerabilities of multinational forces? What did it mean for his fellow soldiers to fight for a cause so far removed from their own homelands, and for his own countrymen to rely on the mercy of outsiders?
- 11. At the end of chapter 19, does Elizabeth make the right decision? How would you have reacted in the wake of a similar tragedy?
- 12. How do Laura's discoveries enrich her sense of self? Discuss your own heritage and its impact on your identity. How much do you know about your parents' and grandparents' upbringing? What immigration stories are part of your own family's collective memory?
- 13. As she tries to explain why so few people are aware of the Armenian genocide, Laura cites the fact that the victims perished in a remote desert. The novel also describes the problem of trying to document the atrocities using the cumbersome photography equipment of the day. Will the Information Age spell the end of such cover-ups? For future generations, will genocide be unimaginable?
- 14. Which aspects of *The Sandcastle Girls* remind you of previous Bohjalian novels you have enjoyed? (*Questions issued by publisher*.)

top of page (summary)

O RODITHIS 🚅 (1941).

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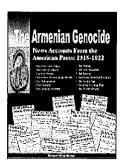
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Newspaper coverage of the Armenian Genocide as it was happening was persistent and detailed. In 1915 alone, the New York Times published 145 articles, one every 2-3 days, on the continuous massacres of Armenians. Although the term "genocide" had not been invented yet, the reports described the Turkish slaughter of the Armenians as "systematic," "deliberate," "authorized," and "organized by the government," a "campaign of extermination" and "systematic race extermination."

The New York Times

News Accounts of the Armenian Genocide 1895-1919

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September 10, 1895

"Another Armenian Holocaust"

April 21, 1909

"Turks Blame "Armenians"

April 23, 1909

October 7, 1915

"Aiready has \$75,000 " to Help Armenians"

October 18, 1915

"Thousands Protost "Armonian Murdors"

November 1, 1915

Published by Richard D. Kloian, founder of the Armenia Genocide Resource Center (AGRC), and is now being distributed by The Genocide Education Project.

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"American Wemen in Perii at Hadjin"

March 20, 1915

"Whole Plain Strewn by Armenian Bodies"

April 28, 1915

"Appeal to Turkey to Stop Massacres"

September 24, 1915

"500,000 Armonians Said to have Perished"

"Ald for Armonians Blocked by Turkey"

November 12, 1916

"Armenian Horrors Seen by Germans"

June 7, 1919

"Reports Asia Minor Looking to America"

These articles are from *The Armenian Genocide: News Accounts from the American Press, 1915-1922* by Richard D. Kloian.

This site is published by The Genocide Education Project, a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization

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The New York Times

September 5, 1895

September 10, 1895

RUSTEM PASHA MOVED TO TEARS

Salisbury Said that Turkey Would Yield To the Demand of the Powers or Would Be Dismembered.

LONDON, Sept. 4,? The Post will to-morrow publish a dispatch from Paris saying that a Constantinople letter is published in Paris containing what purports to be the text of a dispatch sent by Rustem Pasha, the Turkish Ambassador to Great Britain, to the Turkish Foreign Minister, giving an account of an interview the Ambassador lately had with Prime Minister Salisbury. The letter says:

"I began telling Lord Salisbury that the Ottoman Government did not oppose the execution of Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin, and that it was in perfect agreement with the signatory powers, but that it could not admit control by an international commission.

"Lord Salisbury interrupted me, saying:

"I have only to repeat to you what I have said, namely, if your Government refuse, we shall appeal to the powers. We shall demand the assembling of a congress and apply Article 61, with an international commission. Now, I beg you to understand that if your Government continue further opposition, this will be the signal for the dismemberment of Turkey."

"Tears come to my eyes, and I feel overcome. I am telegraphing to you an account of this painful interview."—"RUSTEM PASHA."

The Post will also publish a dispatch from Constantinople saying that the demand of Great Britain, France, and Russia that they be represented on the permanent committee controlling the execution of reforms in Armenia causes the Sultan much concern.

He prefers to accept the original scheme of reforms proposed by the powers. He has given greater latitude to the Grand Vizier in order to facilitate his efforts to arrive at a settlement of the pending questions.

ANOTHER ARMENIAN HOLOCAUST

Five Villages Burned, Five Thousand Persons Made Homeless, and Anti-Christians Organized.

LONDON, Sept. 9, ? The Daily News will tomorrow publish a dispatch from Kars, stating that fresh outrages have been perpetrated in the Erzinslan district.

A band of brigands attacked a company of Turkish gendarmes on Aug. 12, killing a Sergeant. Therefore, the Turkish authorities, without making any inquiry, decided that the assailants were Armenian revolutionaries from Kemakh, who intended to release exalted Armenians who are still in the prison at Kars.

A force of 1, 000 Turkish troops was sent to Kemakh, and five villages were pillaged. Five thousand persons were rendered homeless. Men, women, and children were tortured. Four monasteries were sacked.

It is reported that the Turkish minor officials have formed an anti-Christian society to slaughter Christians if the Porte accepts the scheme of reforms the powers insist upon.



The New Hork Times



MARCH 20, 1915 (4:3)

WHOLE PLAIN STREWN BY ARMENIAN BODIES

Turks and Kurds Reported to have Massacred Men, Women and Children.

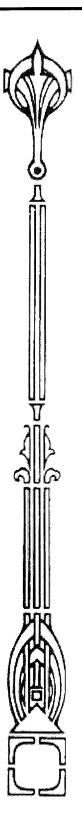
London, March 19. — Appalling accounts of conditions in Armenia have reached the officials in London of the Armenian Red Cross Fund and have been given out by them.

The latest recital is from an Armenian doctor named Derderian, who says that the whole plain of Alashgerd is virtually covered with the bodies of men, women, and children.

When the Russian forces retreated from this district the Kurds fell upon the helpless people and shut them up in mosques. The men were killed and the women were carried away to the mountains.

The organizers of the Red Cross Fund say there are 120,000 destitute Armenians now in the Caucasus.





The New York Times

SEPTEMBER 24, 1915 (2:3)

500,000 ARMENIANS SAID TO HAVE PERISHED

Washington Asked to Stop Slaughter of Christians by Turks and Kurds.

Special to The New York Times.

WASHINGTON, Sept.23.—Charles R. Crane of Chicago, a Director of Roberts College, Constantinople, and James L. Burton of Boston, Foreign Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, visited the State Department today and conferred with Acting Secretary of State Polk and other officials regarding the slaughter of Armenians by Turks and Kurds in Asia Minor. They will attend a meeting of a general committee, to be held in New York within a few days, to devise a plan for appealing to the American people for funds and aid for as many of the unfortunate Armenians as can be helped.

It was learned, in connection with the conferences held here today, that general representations have from time to time been made to the Ottoman Government by Ambassador Morgenthau for humane treatment of Armenians. Despite these representations, the slaughter of Armenians has continued.

The records of the State Department are replete with detailed reports from American Consular officers in Asia Minor, which give harrowing tales of the treatment of the Armenian Christians by the Turks and the Kurds. These reports have not been made public. They indicate that the Turk has undertaken a war of extermination on Armenians, especially those of the Gregorian Church, to which about 90 percent of the Armenians belong. The Turkish Government originally ordered the

deportation of all Armenians, but some time ago, after representations had been made by Morgenthau, the Ottoman Government gave assurances that the order would be modified so as not to embrace Catholic and Protestant Armenians. Reports reaching Washington indicate that about 500,000 Armenians have been slaughtered or lost their lives as a result of the Turkish deportation order and the resulting war of extinction. Turkish authorities drove the Gregorian Armenians out of their homes, ordered them to proceed to distant towns in the direction of Bagdad, which could only be reached by crossing long stretches of desert. During the exodus of Armenians across the deserts they have been fallen upon by Kurds and slaughtered, but some of the Armenian women and girls, in considerable numbers, have been carried off into captivity by the Kurds. The reports that have been sent to the State Department by its agents in Asia Minor fully confirm these statements made in the appeal sent to this country by Viscount Bryce, formerly the British Ambassador to the United States, to try to stop the slaughter of the Armenians. Viscount Bryce stated that the horrors through which the Armenians have passed have been unparalleled in modern times.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES

ALEXANDRIA, Sept. 23, (Dispatch to The London Morning Post.)—British refugees from Urfa, who arrived in Alexandria yesterday, brought terrible tales of sufferings of interned allied subjects. They were not supplied with food, furniture, or servants, and were housed in an Armenian monastery the monks in which had been massacred.

They witnessed the Armenian massacres of Aug. 19. Urfa was the centre of ghastly scenes. The Turks systematically murdered men and turned women and children out into the desert, where thousands perished of starvation.

The last batch of women and children left Urfa on Aug. 24. They were delayed a fortnight at Alexandretta, awaiting a ship in filthy quarters and half starved. They finally embarked for Alexandria in an American warship.

BILL MILHOMME

SUNDAY, APRIL 15, 2012

1915 Boston Globe Armenian Massacre Headlines April - October

ARMENIAN HORRORS GROW.

Massacres Greater Than Under Abdul Hamid, London Paper Says.
Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

LONDON, Friday, Aug. 6. The Daily Chronicle says:

"A tragic episode of the war in the East is the wholesale massacre of the Armenians in the eastern vilayets of Asia Minor by the Turks and Kurds. Regarding the terrible scale of these massacres, greater than any which occurred under Abdul Hamid, there is now no room for doubt, and the statements made on the subject last week by Lord Bryce in the House of Lords were officially corroborated by Lord Crewe.

Between April 1915 and October 1915 the WWI Central Powers (Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Bulgaria) imposed a tight news embargo regarding the forced removal and deportation of Armenians throughout Turkey. It was through the information provided by American missionaries, US Consulate officers and the American Ambassador that information was secreted to the news media of the era, including the Boston Globe

ABOUT ME



BILL MILHOMME
MASSACHUSETTS,
UNITED STATES
Spiritual, trying t

Spiritual, trying to understand the

meaning of life.

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PREVIOUS POSTS

Turkish Deportation Proclamation: June 28, 1915

1912-1915 Taurus Mts. & Adana [Construction of the...

Friends of Armenia, Boston, Massachusetts USA 1894...

Armenia College: Renamed Euphrates College 1852-19...

Photographs Sakaian Aghin Caravan Deportation Rout...

St. Patrick's Day History

"De Aghin" Samuel Sakaian & Almas (Sakaian) Shahab...

From Aghin: Samuel Sakaian & Almas (Sakaian) Shaha...

Aghin Kimden

"From Aghin": Samuel Sakaian & Alma (Sakaian) Shah...



TELL OF HORRORS DONE IN ARMENIA

Report of Eminent Americans Says They Are Unequaled in a Thousand Years.

TURKISH RECORD OUTDONE

A Policy of Extermination Put In Effect Against a Helpless People.

ENTIRE VILLAGES SCATTERED

Men and Boys Massgored, Women and Girls Gold as Staves and Dintributed Among Moslems.

TURKS EXTERMINATING ARMENIAN RACE

Sword, Gallows and Famine Wiping Out Christians in Asia Minor.



THOUSANDS PROTEST ARMENIAN MURDERS

Only One Man and One Woman Dissent from Resolutions Denouncing Outrages.

TURKS HAVE KILLED 500,000

Evidence, Taken from State Department, Shows Quarter of a Million
Women Violated.

SAYS EXTINCTION MENACES ARMENIA

Dr. Gabriel Tells of More Than 450,000 Killed in Recent Massacres.

600,000 DRIVEN INTO EXILE

Unless Neutral Powers Intervene, Says Nubar Pashan Almost the Whole People is Doomed.

TURKISH OFFICIAL DENIES ATROCITIES

Consul General Here Calls Report of Outrages on Armenians a Fabrication.

BUT HE ADMITS SEVERITY

Djelal Boy Says a Revolution Was Plotted in Van and Suspects Had to be Removed.

FALLEN NATIONS THE MARTYRDOM OF ARMENIA

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TURKS DEPOPULATE TOWNS OF ARMENIA

Traveler Reports Christians of Great Territory Have Been Driven from Homes.

600,000 STARVING ON ROAD

Adds That More Than 100,000
Greeks Have Been Deported from
the Mediterranean Coast.

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TURKISH OFFICIAL DENIES ATROCKTIES

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THOUSANDS PROTEST ARMERIAN MURDERS

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TURKS EXTERMINATING ARMENIAN RACE

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CHRISTIANS MASSACRED BY TURKS.

With Christians Covered With Oil and Set on Fire One Incident of the Hely Wat-Whole of Armenia One Vest Graveyard - Letter From Roman Catholic Missionary, Himself Near Death From Wounds.

ARMENIANS KILLED BY TURK ORDER

Special in The Sper-Telegram,

TIPLIS, Transcaucasia, April 21,-Bayasid, in Turkish Armenia, dated April 31, relates that twenty-three men have arrived there from Arzen-Kaleh and Suckham, near Lake Van, in Turk-ish Armedia. They bring a recital of the shooting on orders from the Turk-ish authorities. of local Armenians. These twenty-three mea succeeded in ascaning.

These twenty-three mea succeeded in escaping.

The Armenians of Arrich-Kaleh and Suckbam have been called upon to provide supplies and assistance for the frest number of refugees it is expected will come from the Valleyet of Van

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Upcoming Events | Friends of Armenian Culture Society

www.facsboston.org Cached

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Friends of Armenia | One Nation... One Struggle

www.friendsofarmenia.com Cached

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'The Sandcastle Girls' by Chris Bohjalian - The Boston Globe

www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2012/07/16/the-sandcastle...

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company profile includes company reviews, comments and other important ...

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Dear Friends, Tickets offered by the Friends of Armenian Culture Society for the June 1st concert by the Boston Pops Orchestra (The Armenian Night) are now SOLD OUT.

Friends Of Armenia in Wrentham, Massachusetts (MA ...

www.nonprofitfacts.com/MO/Friends-Of-Armenia.html Cached

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Attn: Maureen

THE NEW YORK TIMES INDEX. April-June, 1915.

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TRIPLE Entente. see Quannuple Entente.

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TROLSEN, T-letter on Viking precedent for Germany's policy, quoting ancient saga, May 18, 14:6,

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