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Anxieties of Naming

Conceptual Controversies around the Armenian Genocide

Abstract

Synthesising insights from political theory and Holocaust and genocide studies for a trans-disciplinary analysis, this article aims to explore a topic that has not been systematically investigated in the study of the Armenian genocide, despite its obvious importance and contemporary relevance: anxieties of naming and conceptual controversies around the Armenian genocide. More specifically, it assesses the scholarly and political implications of historiographical, ethical, and pragmatic anxieties regarding the concept of genocide. The fundamental argument of the article is that, although these anxieties expressed by scholars across the board need to be taken seriously, the alternative concepts proposed as substitutes not only seem much vaguer but also fail to capture the harm caused by the destruction of a people.

Introduction

The denial of the Armenian genocide has been scrutinised from a variety of angles since the 1990s. Thus, there today exists a rich and ever-expanding scholarly literature devoted to the investigation of this particular phenomenon. This is not entirely surprising, given the fact that "one striking feature of the Armenian genocide is its denial by the heirs of the perpetrators".[1] What has remained unexplored, however, is the radically sceptical attitude displayed in theoretical debates towards the very concept of genocide and, more significantly for the purposes of this paper, the ramifications of this scepticism for the naming of the destruction of the Armenians. The entire dispute boils down to a single question: If the notion of genocide is such a contested term, having been embroiled in deep controversy since it was invented, why insist on this concept?[2] For the sake of clarity, I will split this sceptical outlook into three parts, because the same question appears to be an expression of three different anxieties: historiographical, ethical, and pragmatic. I must explicitly state from the outset that these anxieties cannot be construed as a trivialisation of the

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1   Yehuda Bauer, Rethinking the Holocaust, New Haven 2001, 59. Bauer's remarks seem to reflect a scholarly consensus. See: Roger W. Smith/Eric Markusen/Robert J. Lifton, Professional Ethics and the Denial of the Armenian Genocide, in: Holocaust and Genocide Studies 9 (1995) 1, 1-22; Israel W. Charny/Daphna Fromer, Denying the Armenian Genocide. Patterns of Thinking as Defence-Mechanisms, in: Patterns of Prejudice 32 (1988) 1, 39-49; Donald Bloxham, The Great Game of Genocide. Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians, Oxford 2005, 207-234; Uğur Ümit Üngör, Lost in Commemoration. The Armenian Genocide in Memory and Identity, in: Patterns of Prejudice 48 (2014) 2, 147-176; Fatma Müge Göçek, Denial of Violence. Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence against the Armenians, Oxford 2015, 1-66; Talin Suciyan, The Armenians in Modern Turkey. Post-Genocide Society, Politics and History, London 2016; Jennifer M. Dixon, Dark Pasts. Changing the State's Story in Turkey and Japan, Ithaca 2018, 32-94; Ömer Turan/Güven Gürkan Öztan, Devlet Aklı ve 1915. Türkiye'de 'Ermeni Meselesi' Anlatısının İnşası [Raison d'État and 1915. The Construction of the 'Armenian Question' Narrative in Turkey], Istanbul 2018.

2   For a lucid account of the history of the concept of genocide, see: Ann Curthoys/John Docker, Defining Genocide, in: Dan Stone (ed.), The Historiography of Genocide, Basingstoke 2008, 9-41.

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violations and injustices entailed in the Armenian genocide. Nor can they be viewed as an endorsement of denialism in any of its forms, because none overlooks the fact that the Armenians as a group were persecuted and murdered. However, each anxiety in its own way and for different reasons leads to the rejection of the concept of genocide as an appropriate term by which we can understand the systematic destruction of the Armenians or assess its consequences.

In this article, building on insights drawn from political theory as well as Holocaust and genocide studies for a transdisciplinary analysis, I will critically analyse the most prominent approaches that raise objections to the genocide concept, most of which have been expounded in detail with particular reference to the destruction of the Armenians. The hypothesis I will advance here is that, although these interventions offer valuable insights on the subject, the terms proposed as possible substitutes not only appear to be vaguer but also fail to capture the specific harm involved in the specific atrocity called genocide since Raphael Lemkin invented the term in the early 1940s to denote "the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group".[3]

Why is the practice of naming such a controversial issue and why does it have an agonistic dimension? This question has long been a hotly debated issue among scholars working in the field of Holocaust and genocide studies.[4] It has also recently attracted the attention of political theorists. One obvious answer to this question is that naming is open to multiple and often rival or conflicting interpretations. Indeed, many scholars have often, and rightly, stressed that there is an ineluctable difficulty in naming events as violent and traumatic as the Holocaust or the Armenian genocide, that naming violence is inescapably entangled with politics, and that "no names are innocent or politically neutral".[5] That said, it would be scholarly dubious as well as ethically and politically cynical to claim that all concepts are wholly susceptible to strategic and ideological manipulation. To be sure, concepts are not fully isolated from public controversies and political struggles. Yet this is not to say that we should get rid of all concepts in order to be able to occupy an Archimedean point from which a truly neutral picture of reality can be obtained. Rather, as the political theorist Mathias Thaler remarked, it simply means that the concepts "we employ to understand, evaluate, and orient ourselves in reality are themselves part of that reality".[6] For instance, regarding the destruction of the Armenians, each term reflects a different meaning and priority. Terms such as 'massacres' or 'extreme violence' are extremely vague. Others such as 'relocation' or 'forced migration' unquestioningly repeat the official master narrative in Turkey. The term genocide differs from others in that, as Maria Pia Lara pointed out, it is a "morally disclosive concept" that adds a new dimension to our understanding of the destructive aspects of the event and which can serve as a reflective stimulus or as a moral filter.[7] The widespread assumption particularly in the field of genocide studies is that defining and naming a particular atrocity is crucial simply because how we conceptualise it affects what we can do to prevent it, which indeed finds its strongest expression in the motto "never again".

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3   Raphael Lemkin, Axis Rule in Occupied Europe. Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress, Clark 2008, 79.

4   The 'uniqueness debate' has revolved, among other things, around the significance of naming. For a critical analysis, see: Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, The Politics of Uniqueness. Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship, in: Holocaust and Genocide Studies 13 (1999) 1, 28-61. Its continued impact was also assessed in several chapters of a recent volume: Claudio Fogu/Wulf Kansteiner/Todd Presner (ed.), Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture, Cambridge 2016.

5   Dominick LaCapra, History and Memory after Auschwitz, Ithaca 1998, 53-54, 206-207.

6   Mathias Thaler, Naming Violence. A Critical Theory of Genocide, Torture, and Terrorism, New York 2018, 5.

7   Maria Pia Lara, Narrating Evil. A Post-Metaphysical Theory of Reflective Judgement, New York 2007, 11-12.

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Prevention is certainly a challenging and noble endeavour. However, from the perspective of political philosophy, the attention to the practice of naming is critical primarily because understanding the harm and trying to repair it is an equally important goal. How we understand the harm and try to repair it is dependent on how we name or conceptualise the destruction of a group. In my concluding remarks, I will briefly discuss the significance of the harm caused by genocide and related issues. First, however, we need to take a closer look at the conceptual controversies and anxieties and assess their scholarly and political implications.

Historiographical Anxiety

A paradoxical feature of the history of the concept of genocide is that criticisms of this term seem to have increased simultaneously with its increasing impact on scholarly literature and public debate. A recurring theme voiced particularly by historians is that it is a highly politicised legal term that is not conducive to historical inquiry. For instance, Donald Bloxham, one of the leading scholars in the field of genocide studies, treats the destruction of the Armenians as genocide, but he nonetheless states that it is "more a legal term than a historical one, designed for the *ex post facto* judgments of the courtroom rather than the historian's attempt to understand events as they develop".[8] The same anxiety can also be detected in the perspectives of many scholars who participated in a taboo-breaking academic conference held in Istanbul in 2005 and entitled "Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire. Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy", where the destruction of the Armenians was critically discussed for the very first time in a scholarly environment in Turkey.[9] The historians Fikret Adanır and Halil Berktay, both part of the organising committee of the Istanbul conference, drew attention to the juridical and normative dimensions of the concept of genocide and argued that such a juridical approach is completely inappropriate for historical analysis: The main task of the historian is to understand the past on the basis of available historical evidence and explore the causal connections among different phenomena, events, and moments without passing any normative judgement on them.[10] The term genocide, they remarked, is more often than not hijacked by nationalist groups and exploited in competitions of victimhood.[11]

In a similar vein, the political scientist Jacques Semelin stressed that the term has not only been instrumentalised in memory wars but also applied to all contexts of extreme violence and to very different cases of mass murder in public and journalistic discourse.[12] Thus, not surprisingly, the overuse of the concept leads to its abuse.

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8 Donald Bloxham, The First World War and the Development of the Armenian Genocide, in: Ronald Grigor Suny/Fatma M. Göçek/Norman Naimark (ed.), A Question of Genocide. Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire, New York 2011, 275.

9 For a brief commentary on this significant landmark in Turkish memory debates, see: Sossie Kasbarian/ Kerem Öktem, Subversive Friendships. Turkish and Armenian Encounters in Transnational Space, in: Patterns of Prejudice, 48 (2014) 2, 125; and Vangelis Kechriotis, From Oblivion to Obsession. The Uses of History in Recent Public Debates in Turkey, in: Historein 11 (2011), 112-113.

10 All the papers presented at the Istanbul 2005 conference were compiled in a volume. See: Fikret Adanır, Kıyım, Soykırım ve Tarihçilik [Massacre, Genocide, and the Historian's Craft]; and Halil Berktay, Resmi Söylem Ne Diyor? [What does the Official Discourse Say?], in: İmparatorluğun Çöküş Döneminde Osmanlı Ermenileri. Bilimsel Sorumluluk ve Demokrasi Sorunları [Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire. Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy], Istanbul 2011, 4-5, 41.

11 Halil Berktay, A Genocide, Three Constituencies, Thoughts for the Future, in: The Armenian Weekly, 24 April 2007, 4-5; M. Hakan Yavuz, Contours of Scholarship on Armenian-Turkish Relations, in: Middle East Critique 20 (2011) 3, 231-251.

12 Jacques Semelin, Purify and Destroy. The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide, London 2007, 309-310.

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On top of all this, the very lack of consensus in the scholarly community as to what does and does not constitute genocide adds more confusion to an already thorny issue. At one pole of the scholarly spectrum, Steven Katz defined the notion of genocide so narrowly that it could only be applied to cases of intended total destruction, as in the extermination of European Jewry.[13] At the other pole, there are scholars who define it so broadly that any type of mass murder becomes a genocide. This latter view, endorsed by Israel Charny on the grounds that it is fully inclusive of all non-combatant victim groups of mass killing, suggests that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki also amounts to genocide.[14]

Given all this controversy and politicisation, would it not be better to banish this problematic concept from empirically oriented historical research altogether? Indeed, echoing the concerns of Adanır and Berktay cited earlier, the historian Christian Gerlach made such a proposal and offered a more systematic and thorough criticism: "The main problem here is that genocide is a normative, action-oriented concept that has historically and essentially been created for the political struggle, not for scholarly analysis. It is a *politischer Kampfbegriff*."[15] From a historian's point of view, Gerlach argued that as a normative term "designed for moral condemnation", it leads to the widespread, but unproductive "who suffered most?" approach, which is instrumentalised by "pressure groups promoting the memory of their fate".[16] With one foot in legal and ethical discourse and the other in the history of ideas, he remarked, this problematic concept does not provide the historian with a useful framework for exploring the problem of mass violence. In Gerlach's view, it is misleading and simplistic analytically, too, because of its exclusive focus on the state to which the intent to destroy a group is attributed. Such a state-oriented approach automatically leads to monocausal explanations and conclusions that are equally oversimplified: a monolithic state actor driven by one single motive, a restrictive concentration on race or ethnicity (and hence on racism or ethnic nationalism) as the sole motive for extermination, and finally an overemphasis on a single and completely passive or powerless victim group. The problem, maintained Gerlach, is that the occurrence of extreme violence or mass killing is dependent on the support and involvement of diverse social groups and actors that are driven by a multitude of motives and interests. Furthermore, would it be correct to single out one single group as the sole victim when, in fact, various population groups become victims of extreme physical violence in extraordinary processes that involve high levels of brutality and mass slaughter? On a more controversial note, Gerlach wrote: "During World War I, Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Kurds in the Ottoman Empire died in forced settlement and massacres, and many Turks were also killed."[17] Thus, emphasising the involvement of diverse groups in mass violence, multicausality, and the existence of multiple victim groups, Gerlach proposed replacing the term of genocide with what he called the "extremely violent societies approach" which is "derived from empirical observation and made for analytical purposes".[18]

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13 Steven T. Katz, The Uniqueness of the Holocaust. The Historical Dimension, in: Alan S. Rosenbaum (ed.), Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide, Boulder 2009, 55-74.

14 Israel Charny, Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide, in: George J. Andreopoulos (ed.), Genocide. Conceptual and Historical Dimensions, Philadelphia 1994, 63-94.

15 Christian Gerlach, Extremely Violent Societies. An Alternative to the Concept of Genocide, in: Journal of Genocide Research 8 (2006) 4, 463-464.

16 Gerlach, The Extermination of the European Jews, Cambridge 2016, 4.

17 Gerlach, Extremely Violent Societies. Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World, Cambridge 2010, 2.

18 Gerlach, Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World, 8. Another author makes a similar criticism but offers a different term: Antonio Ferrara, Beyond Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing. Demographic Surgery as a New Way to Understand Mass Violence, in: Journal of Genocide Research 17 (2015) 1, 1-20.

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While Gerlach's extremely violent societies approach, with its stress on multicausality and wide-scale involvement of various groups and actors in different instances of mass killing, might be viewed as a welcome corrective to rudimentary and essentialist arguments and analyses in the field of genocide studies, it does not seriously challenge the concept of genocide for two main reasons.

First, there has been a growing tendency in the study of genocide to consider monocausal and binary explanations outdated. In this respect, the charge that the genocide approach is too state-centred, too focused on the intentions of rulers, and too concentrated on race or ethnicity appears to attack a straw man.[19] The tendency towards multicausality has become particularly manifest in the historiography of the Armenian genocide where we have witnessed an unmistakable development from monolithic and essentialist accounts to multicausal interpretations since the early 2000s. Scholars such as Taner Akçam, Donald Bloxham, Uğur Ümit Üngör, Raymond Kévorkian, and Ronald Grigor Suny have published pioneering works that greatly expanded our knowledge of the Armenian genocide.[20] While these scholars disagree on a number of important issues such as the origins, contributing causes, circumstances, phases, duration, and consequences of the Armenian genocide, they all agree on two fundamental issues. First, the acts perpetrated against the Armenians constituted genocide. Second, and more significantly, the entire process of destruction, although by and large orchestrated by the leaders of the ruling party, the Committee of Union and Progress, was ultimately supported and carried out by various groups and actors who were driven by a mixture of motives including ideological, economic, and security purposes.[21]

Second, the alternative term offered as the replacement of the genocide concept, namely extreme violence, has several serious pitfalls that are hard to overlook. The concept of violence itself is equally controversial as genocide, if not more so.[22] Furthermore, because it is a catch-all term that covers radically different forms of mass violence, it cannot be expected to have any analytical or discriminatory function. Indeed, the whole idea behind the concept of genocide is to differentiate this particular phenomenon from other instances of extreme violence not in terms of scale, intensity, or brutality, but rather in terms of a qualitative criterion, introduced by Lemkin, the creator of the term: the intention to destroy a particular national, ethnic, or religious group. Once we lose sight of this important criterion, we may yield to the dangerous temptation to lump together radically different types of extreme violence. As Hannah Arendt stressed in her writings on thinking and judging in the aftermath of the Eichmann trial, the faculty of judgement is the capacity to draw proper

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19 For an illuminating discussion, see the review by Hannibal Travis, in: Journal of Genocide Research 14 (2012) 1, 99-104.

20 Bloxham, The Great Game; Uğur Ümit Üngör, Confiscation and Colonization. The Young Turks' Seizure of Armenian Property, London 2011; Raymond Kévorkian, The Armenian Genocide. A Complete History, London 2011; Taner Akçam/Ümit Kurt, The Spirit of the Laws. The Plunder of Wealth in the Armenian Genocide, New York 2015; Ronald Grigor Suny, "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else". A History of the Armenian Genocide, Princeton 2015.

21 Bedross Der Matossian, Explaining the Unexplainable. Recent Trends in the Armenian Genocide Historiography, in: Journal of Levantine Studies 5 (2015) 2, 155-156. On the microhistorical aspects of the Armenian genocide, see: Ümit Kurt, Antep 1915. Soykırım ve Failler [Antep 1915. Genocide and Perpetrators], Istanbul 2018; Ümit Kurt, Theaters of Violence on the Ottoman Periphery. Exploring the Local Roots of Genocidal Policies in Antep, in: Journal of Genocide Research 20 (2018) 3, 351-371; Ümit Kurt, The Curious Case of Ali Cenani Bey. The Story of a Génocidaire during and after the Armenian Genocide, in: Patterns of Prejudice 52 (2018) 1, 58-77. See also Bauer's commentary on the issue of multicausality in the Armenian genocide: Bauer, Rethinking, 46, 58.

22 For an analysis of different conceptions of violence from the perspective of political theory, see: Richard J. Bernstein, Violence. Thinking without Banisters, Cambridge 2013.

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distinctions. Thus, the conflation of different forms of extreme violence should give us pause. This is not just a conceptual problem. It also entails some important moral and political implications. Consider, for instance, Gerlach's suggestion that Armenians were "just the worst affected of several victim groups" that also included Turks.[23] Undoubtedly, many groups became targets of mass atrocities and suffered from extreme violence in the late Ottoman Empire. However, this does not mean that they were targeted in the same way. For the Turks, there were no plans for the destruction of the national group as such. Such a sweeping generalisation can only be made if we fail to consider this qualitative criterion. Simply put, "genocide is not the murder of people but the murder of a people".[24]

That being said, none of this implies that historiographical anxieties expressed by scholars across the board are misplaced or can be construed as an implicit endorsement of denialism. Particularly the scholarly concern that the genocide concept has been misused and abused in popular discourse and public controversies as well as in ugly competitions and comparisons by journalists and activists is a fully justified consideration. Yet perhaps the most common sense and straightforward response to this worry would be to state that there is not a single concept in the social sciences and humanities that is altogether beyond controversy. Furthermore, alternative terms proposed as substitutes such as "extreme violence" or "massacre" are extremely vague and fail to convey the specificity of the phenomenon. Thus, there is no need to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Most significantly, if we yield to this anxiety and stick to alternative terms, the harm of genocide may forever escape our comprehension, a harm that is morally and existentially distinct and hence cannot be captured by other concepts.

Ethical Anxieties

A completely different criticism was offered by the philosopher and literary critic Marc Nichanian who likewise attacked the concept of genocide head on. Standing in the philosophical lineage of continental European thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Giorgio Agamben – and in critical dialogue with their perspectives on the Holocaust – Nichanian confronted the politics of naming with particular reference to the systematic destruction of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. In addition, his arguments raise some crucial questions specifically about the themes of representation, testimony, and memory. More significantly for the purposes of this article, Nichanian's critical orientation is primarily impelled by conceptual and ethical concerns. This in itself represents a bold departure from mainstream professional historiography, which is weary of conceptual and ethical considerations. Yet Nichanian's deeply sceptical outlook has two additional preoccupations that give a distinctive flavour to his perspective, thereby setting it further apart from other anxieties concerning the concept of genocide. First, in order to begin to grasp the real meaning and significance of the destruction of the Armenians, Nichanian insisted that we need to free ourselves from the "realist insult" or "historiographic perversion". He maintained that, far from representing a satisfactory response to this insult, the generic term 'genocide', because of its conceptual vagueness and controversial nature, in fact evokes and reinforces it in several ways. Second, unlike those

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23 Gerlach, Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World, 93.
24 Suny, "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else", 351.

scholars who express historiographical and pragmatic concerns, Nichanian implicitly argued that we have to turn our face to the victims and survivors and place them at the centre of our analysis if we wish to understand the real impact of events as traumatic and catastrophic as the annihilation of the Armenians. I aim to assess the strengths and weaknesses of these two arguments, but will first contextualise Nichanian's claims by briefly discussing his critical engagement with the 'historians' debate' in France regarding the Armenian genocide.

Nichanian's sceptical attitude towards the concept of genocide grew out of "two affairs" in France which he defined as a *Historikerstreit* of major significance among scholars on the Armenian genocide – an allusion to the well-known German 'historians' debate' of the 1980s on the Holocaust. The first affair was the 1994 trial of the British-American historian Bernard Lewis on charges of denialism which was occasioned by an interview with the daily *Le Monde*. The doyen of Middle East history was summoned before the law by a French court for having "contested the existence of the Armenian genocide".[25] In response to the question of why the Turkish government refuses to recognise the Armenian genocide, Lewis remarked in the *Le Monde* interview that, although what occurred in the Ottoman Empire was a "horrible human tragedy", it cannot be called a genocide because "there is no serious proof of a decision or of a plan on the part of the Ottoman government regarding the extermination of the Armenian nation".[26] Furthermore, Lewis maintained, the Armenians were involved in an armed rebellion against the Ottoman government, the deportation was not total but partial in nature, and there was no campaign of racial hatred. For all these reasons, Lewis concluded, the comparison with the Holocaust is misleading and hence this tragedy cannot be defined as a genocide.[27] It is important in this connection to stress that Lewis simply took it for granted that other instances of group destruction can be classified as a genocide insofar as they are in some way comparable to the Holocaust.[28] In 1999, five years after the Lewis affair, the French historian Gilles Veinstein's candidacy for a prestigious chair at the Collège de France triggered a second controversy, in particular among historians, regarding academic freedom, responsibilities of scholarship, and the interpretation of past atrocities such as the Armenian genocide. This second affair in France stemmed from an article Veinstein published in the journal *Histoire* at the height of the Lewis affair. Because of his support for Lewis's position, Veinstein was also accused of denialism. Nichanian argued that it would be misleading to view these two affairs as isolated incidents

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25 The charges against Lewis were based on the Gayssot Law of 1990, which stipulates that punishment should be imposed on those who "call into question the very existence of one or several crimes against humanity" during the Second World War, as defined by the International Military Tribunal of Nuremberg. Interestingly, the court reached the guilty verdict but avoided the issue of denialism and convicted Lewis of "occulting the elements contrary to his thesis" and hence of neglecting "his duty of objectivity". See: Marc Nichanian, The Historiographic Perversion, New York 2009, 23. For a critical discussion of the entire Lewis affair, see: Yves Ternon, Freedom and Responsibility of the Historian. The Lewis Affair, in: Richard G. Hovannisian, Remembrance and Denial. The Case of the Armenian Genocide, Detroit 1999, 237-248, here 245.

26 Nichanian, The Historiographic Perversion, 20.

27 Nichanian, The Truth of the Facts. About the New Revisionism, Remembrance and Denial, 249-252. See also: Bernard Lewis/Buntzie Ellis Churchill, Notes on a Century. Reflections of a Middle East Historian, London 2012, 287-288; and Guenter Lewy, The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey. A Disputed Genocide, Salt Lake City 2005.

28 For a critical interpretation of this assumption, see: Dirk Moses, The Holocaust and Genocide, in: Dan Stone, The Historiography of the Holocaust, New York 2004, 533–555. See also: Taner Akçam, The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity. The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire, Princeton 2012, xxix-xxx. For a more thorough conceptual criticism of this assumption, see: Martin Shaw, What is Genocide? Cambridge 2015, 53-65; and Mohammed Abed, The Concept of Genocide Reconsidered, in: Social Theory and Practice 41 (2015) 2, 328-356.

and that they rather represent a "new wave of [denialism]".[29] Indeed, these two affairs, as Nichanian carefully documented, were followed by an avalanche of essays and interviews on the destruction of the Armenians published in the French press, to which many prominent scholars (including Jay Winter, Eric Hobsbawm, Raul Hilberg, Robert Maggiori, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and Jean-Luc Nancy) contributed by simply restating Lewis's initial arguments. These scholars disputed neither the reality of the facts concerning massacres and deportations nor the destruction of the Armenians. Nonetheless, as Nichanian remarked, they either refused to qualify these atrocities as a genocide for the reasons summed up by Lewis or alternatively stated that how to name these historical events is not the business of courts but a matter of scholarly interpretation. From these controversies in France, Nichanian drew the conclusion that "genocide is not a fact" and refused to use the generic term genocide, opting instead for the term *Aghed* as a proper noun, which is the common word for 'catastrophe' in Armenian. What did Nichanian mean when he claimed that "genocide is not a fact"? And why did he argue that the insistence to use the term genocide is part and parcel of the "realist insult"?

In his lucid and inspiring analysis of contemporary controversies about the concept of genocide, the philosopher Berel Lang rightly argued that Nichanian's provocative thesis is by and large a critical response to Lewis's disputable contention that no proof of any intention to exterminate the Armenians on the part of the Ottoman administration has ever been discovered.[30] Indeed, Nichanian remarked, if the proof of genocide is dependent on the discovery of the intention of the perpetrators and if this in turn is only a matter of scholarly interpretation, then genocide cannot be a fact: The intention underlying genocide is just a question of interpretation that is open to the possibility of dispute or even denial. Thus, by repudiating the generic term genocide, Nichanian aimed to place the extermination of the Armenians beyond the reach of historical investigation as well as the possibility of verification or refutation. However, in doing so, as Lang contended, Nichanian responded to Lewis's troublesome argument with a radical and equally problematic division between fact and interpretation, which is moreover philosophically dubious inasmuch as it assumes an extremely positivist account of intention – one that treats all scholarly interpretations reaching conclusions about intentions as nonfactual. Why must any reference to intention go beyond facts?

While Lang's question is certainly a legitimate objection (to which I will return shortly), Nichanian's thesis is more complex and much deeper than this criticism implies. On a more radical level, and with reference to Hayden White's criticism of the "fetishism of the facts and nothing but the facts" of conventional historiography, Nichanian questioned and ultimately rejected the idea that the discussion and assessment of historical facts concerning events as traumatic and damaging as the Armenian genocide or the Holocaust should be left to historians alone.[31] It is not merely because scholars from other disciplines might also add their insights to enable us to probe more deeply into these dark pages of the past, which is a sound and reasonable scholarly approach that needs no further justification. There is in fact more to Nichanian's thesis: He took aim at those historians who still cling to the conventional wisdom that the historian's craft merely consists in sorting out and de-

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29 Nichanian, The Historiographic Perversion, 22.
30 Berel Lang, Genocide. The Act as Idea, Philadelphia 2017, 67-68. For an illuminating take on Lang's work, see the discussion in: Book Forum, in: Journal of Genocide Research 20 (2018) 3, 412-445.
31 Hayden White, Historical Truth, Estrangement, and Disbelief, in: Fogu/Kansteiner/Presner, Probing the Ethics, 53; Nichanian, The Historiographic Perversion, 59-74.

termining the facts and understanding the past on its own terms, thereby keeping its distance from ethically and politically charged concepts and issues.[32] My intention here is not to engage in postmodernist scepticism about historical objectivity. Even beyond postmodern relativism, however, "the view from nowhere" approach to scholarly objectivity has been thoroughly scrutinised by both critical theory (Jürgen Habermas) and hermeneutics (Hans-Georg Gadamer).[33] Such a naïve account of objectivity simply ignores the critical and hermeneutic insight that historical facts are not simply lying somewhere to be uncovered, nor are they completely isolated from contemporary concerns or controversies. Nichanian's attack on this kind of "documentary positivism" strikes a chord with this enduring critique within continental European thinking.[34]

In this context, it is of particular importance that Nichanian's perspective, in terms of both its content and its style of argumentation, is greatly indebted to Derrida's aporetic deconstructive thinking. Even the title of Nichanian's work, *The Historiographic Perversion*, reflects this influence, for it is a quotation taken from a highly influential text written by Derrida on law and violence, in which he argued that the extremeness of the Nazi extermination machinery stemmed from the fact that "it produced the possibility of the historiographic perversion" by simultaneously keeping its archive of destruction and making possible the effacement of testimony.[35] Building on this insight, Nichanian contended that genocide is not a fact, not least because the destruction of the archive (and hence of the fact) is part of the genocidal will. Neither in the Armenian genocide nor in the Holocaust, maintained Nichanian, whether validly or not, did the perpetrators explicitly state and publish their intentions or leave behind any official documents that would unequivocally announce their decisions.[36] Consequently, the planned murder does not consist of mass killing alone. It is in fact a double murder in the sense that it aims at the eradication of all traces of extermination.[37] As Bauer also noted, the documents of the perpetrators are more often than not designed to mislead or hide rather than to inform or reveal. In this respect, the perpetrators of genocide almost always try "to murder the murder" and prevent others from documenting what has happened.[38]

How to challenge this "historiographic perversion"? Nichanian's answer to this perplexing question is that in our effort to understand the injury caused by the destruction of the Armenians, we need to hear the voice of silenced witnesses, as there can be no satisfactory narrative of this atrocity without the testimonies of the victims and survivors. The perpetrators of crimes might have refrained from explicitly stat-

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32 For a further discussion of Nichanian's work along these lines, see the review by Michiel Leezenberg, in: Journal of Genocide Research 14 (2012) 2, 244-247.

33 Jürgen Habermas, The Postnational Constellation. Political Essays, Cambridge 2001, 130-156; Charles Taylor, Interpretation and the Science of Man, in: Review of Metaphysics 25 (1971) 1, 3-51.

34 The term "documentary positivism" was coined by one of the leading scholars in the field of genocide studies: Dirk Moses, Moving the Genocide Debate Beyond the History Wars, in: Australian Journal of Politics and History 54 (2008) 2, 250-251.

35 Jacques Derrida, Force of Law, in: Gil Anidjar (ed.), Acts of Religion, New York 2002, 82-96.

36 One of the leading historians of the Armenian genocide, Taner Akçam, has consistently challenged this assumption in many of his writings throughout his academic career. For a recent contribution to this much discussed topic, see: Taner Akçam, When was the Decision to Annihilate the Armenians Taken?, in: Journal of Genocide Research 21 (2019) 4, 457-480. For an illuminating discussion of Akçam's contributions to the study of the Armenian genocide, see the critical commentary from expert commentators in the field in: Review Forum, in: Journal of Genocide Research 15 (2013) 4, 463-509. See also the commentary by a leading Holocaust scholar: Dan Stone, The Holocaust and 'the Human', in: Richard H. King/Dan Stone (ed.), Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History. Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide, New York 2007, 235-236.

37 Nichanian, The Historiographic Perversion, 28, 55.

38 Bauer, Rethinking, 23-24.

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ing their decisions in official documents or tried to destroy the traces of destruction. Historians might have different interpretations or entertain varying views on the concept of genocide or its applicability to the Armenian case, but one thing is absolutely certain: For both the victims and the survivors, the reality of destruction was not a matter of interpretation. They were aware of the fact that they were the collective target of such a project. For their descendants, meanwhile, this heritage has never been absent from the present, even when it has remained unspoken.[39] Nichanian remarked that the historical and ethical consequences of both the *Aghed* and its denial can be fully grasped if we turn our attention to the testimonies of the leading Armenian writers of the time and the family narratives of the survivors – which correspond to what the memory scholar Jan Assmann called cultural memory and communicative memory respectively.[40] Thus, in parallel with the absolute dichotomy between interpretation and fact, Nichanian now appeared to posit another radical division between history and memory. However, even survivors' memories and testimonies, as Nichanian warned us once again of the unavoidable aporia or impossibility, cannot serve as proof of the existence of the genocidal intention. All this prepares us for Nichanian's most radical and problematic argument: that neither historical analysis nor conceptual or philosophical clarification can help us comprehend the nature and consequences of the *Aghed*. Only artistic testimony or literature can help us "approach the Catastrophe".[41] Does this not come dangerously close to the aestheticisation of ethical and political matters and historical atrocities? Literature or storytelling certainly provides important devices for the representation of genocidal pasts, as it has the power to disclose those aspects of human experience that seem extremely difficult to define or discuss through concepts. Furthermore, it helps present generations see things through an ethical filter and put themselves in the places of distant others, thereby triggering their capacity for political judgement.[42] However, this does not mean that it can be a substitute for historical or conceptual analysis.

While Nichanian's criticism of mainstream historiography is compelling, the conclusions he arrived at are debatable and open to further scrutiny. To be sure, Nichanian demonstrated the limitations of documentary positivism and the inadequacies of any perspective that focuses exclusively on the intentions and motives of the perpetrators. Indeed, a more satisfactory approach can only emerge when we pay attention to the testimonies of survivors and the enduring effects of the *Aghed* on their descendants. This is not just an epistemic requirement, because scholarly objectivity inescapably raises ethical as well as epistemological issues. As the political theorist Thomas McCarthy pointed out, representations of the past can also be faulted for their indifference and unfairness to the victims of history.[43] In this respect, Nichanian's critical intervention offers a welcome warning to such normative blindness. Granted that documentary historiography, due to its aloofness from conceptual and ethical issues, has significant shortcomings, why draw the radical conclusion that "genocide is destined to annul itself as fact" and that it is therefore factually indemonstrable?[44] Similarly, granted that there are difficulties in determining and judging intentions in the destruction of groups, why posit a radical division between fact and

39 Nichanian, The Historiographic Perversion, 8, 19, 25; see also: Harry Harootunian, The Unspoken as Heritage. The Armenian Genocide and Its Unaccounted Lives, Durham 2019.
40 Jan Assmann, Collective Memory and Cultural Identity, in: New German Critique (1995) 65, 125-133.
41 Nichanian, The Historiographic Perversion, 9, 15.
42 Lara, Narrating Evil, 12-16.
43 Thomas McCarthy, Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the USA. On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery, in: Political Theory 30 (2002) 5, 629.
44 Nichanian, The Historiographic Perversion, 30, 96.

interpretation and assert that intention cannot be factual? It might be helpful to turn to the way in which the creator of the genocide concept, Raphael Lemkin, interpreted the problem of intention. Surely, there must be "a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves".[45] That being said, what matters in Lemkin's view is not the level of intention behind the act but the destruction of groups "where intent is constituted by the act".[46] Rather than engaging with the extensive conceptual literature, Nichanian rejected the term genocide tout court, instead preferring the proper noun *Aghed* to characterise the destruction of the Armenians. There is nothing inherently wrong with this term, which can be interchangeably used with the concept of genocide. Yet Nichanian resolutely rejected this possibility on the grounds that the generic term is not pure enough (in other words, it is open to interpretation) and thus an inescapable part of the realist insult. In opting for the proper noun, as Lang rightly argued, Nichanian tended to make this atrocity a unique occurrence and to place it beyond the reach of historical and conceptual investigation as well as the possibility of verification or refutation, thereby claiming a status of sacralisation and uniqueness for the *Aghed* and possibly for similar genocidal atrocities: "a version of the Uniqueness Hypothesis, with uniqueness extended here to many Uniquenesses".[47] However, is sacralisation the right antidote to outright denialism or to the banalisation of a genocidal past by subsuming it under vague and excessively all-encompassing concepts such as extreme violence? Such sacralisation might perhaps enhance a sense of solidarity among and with the members of the victim group. At the same time, however, like all forms of sacralisation and political theology, it might heighten a division between "us" and "them", foster irreconcilable communitarianisms, and fuel a race between victims. The generic term, by contrast, not only specifies the distinctive harm of genocide but also removes that harm from the realm of the sacred by integrating it into the realm of academic and public debate, where historical facts are unearthed, intentions debated, memory narratives revised, historical injustices acknowledged, apologies made, losses and harms repaired (always imperfectly to be sure), and agreements negotiated.[48] Unfortunately, Nichanian's otherwise insightful intervention leaves little room for this kind of historical or conceptual analysis and political thinking. Instead, it tends to turn the Armenian genocide into an event bordering on the sublime and the ineffable – a common tendency, widespread among continental postmodern thinkers such as Derrida, Lyotard, and Agamben, from whom Nichanian took his inspiration to discuss conceptual, ethical, and political matters in theological and aesthetic terms.[49]

Pragmatic Anxieties

The scholars who express the third anxiety do, in fact, agree by and large that the concept of genocide is applicable to the destruction of the Armenians. Some of the scholars in this category have written extensive critical pieces, both scholarly and journalistic, about Turkey's long-standing denial of the annihilation of the Arme-

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45 Lemkin, Axis Rule, 79.
46 Douglas Irvin-Erickson, Raphael Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide, Philadelphia 2017, 127.
47 Lang, Genocide, 71.
48 Charles Maier, Overcoming the Past? Narrative and Negotiation, Remembering and Reparation, in: John Torpey, Politics and the Past. On Repairing Historical Injustice, Lanham 2003, 296-298.
49 Lara, Narrating Evil, 75.

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nians. However, they argue that the insistence on its employment not only automatically leads to a communication breakdown with the Turkish public but also hampers the process of coming to terms with the past in Turkey. For instance, the sociologist Fatma Müge Göçek, one of the leading critics of the Turkish historiography on the Armenian genocide, had often expressed her reservations about the term along these lines and until very recently stuck to the concept of massacre.[50] In a similar vein, the political scientist Baskın Oran, who has always been a vocal critic of Turkey's official narrative, claimed that the rigidity of Turkey's nationalist position on the matter is to some extent a reaction to the insistence mainly on the part of the Armenian diaspora to apply the concept of genocide. On a more controversial note, he called on the Armenian diaspora to give up this "terminological fetishism" for the sake of achieving reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia.[51]

It is vital to realise that such a pragmatic orientation is by no means restricted to Turkish scholars. A similar emphasis can be observed in Paul Boghossian's root-and-branch attack on the concept of genocide. After raising a series of objections to the 1948 UN Convention's definition of genocide, while at the same time fully acknowledging that the concept applies to the destruction of the Armenians, Boghossian remarked:

> "We should be careful not to do something that many in the Armenian community seem to want to do – and that is to frame the issue that divides them from the Turkish government as resting exclusively on the applicability of this special label 'genocide' to what happened in 1915. The word is too fragile a reed to sustain so much weight. Even without the availability of the concept of genocide, we can still point out that in 1915 over a million Armenian men, women and children were either intentionally killed or died during mass deportations that were conducted with wanton disregard for life. We can observe that there was no conceivable moral justification to sanction the Ottoman Government treating some of its subjects in this way. We can add that it not only brutalized and dehumanized them, but also confiscated their lands and possessions, and attempted to destroy their centuries-old culture so as to make it seem that they had never lived in those lands in the first place. And that to this day its successor, the Government of the Republic of Turkey, engages in an elaborate and expensive campaign to deny and cover up the fact that all these events occurred. What I think we should resist is the temptation to capture all this in one neat word."[52]

While Boghossian's main concern does not lie in achieving reconciliation between Turkey and Armenia, he did explicitly state that the insistence on the concept of genocide has become an obstacle to further public debate.[53] What is, then, the most appropriate way to name and characterise the destruction of the Armenians, which Boghossian summed up in more than 150 words? Interestingly, Boghossian's

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50 Fatma Müge Göçek, Turkish Historiography and the Unbearable Weight of 1915, in: Richard Hovannisian (ed.), The Armenian Genocide. Cultural and Ethical Legacies, New Brunswick 2008, 337-338.

51 Baskın Oran, 'Son Tabu'nun Kökenleri. Türkiye Kamuoyunun Ermeni Sorunundaki Tarihsel-Psikolojik Tıkanışı [The Origins of the 'Last Taboo'. The Historical-Psychological Blockage of Turkish Public Opinion on the Armenian Question], in: Osmanlı Ermenileri [Ottoman Armenians], 411-413. For a critical commentary on the emphasis on reconciliation, see: Henry C. Theriault, Genocide, Denial, and Domination. Armenian-Turkish Relations from Conflict Resolution to Just Transformation, in: Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies 1 (2009) 2, 89-90.

52 Paul Boghossian, The Concept of Genocide, in: Journal of Genocide Research 12 (2010) 1-2, 79-80.

53 For further reflection on this topic, see: Elazar Barkan, Can Memory of Genocide Lead to Reconciliation?, in: Hovannisian (ed.), The Armenian Genocide, 389-408.

summary fully corresponds to the spirit if not to the letter of Lemkin's original conception of genocide. However, if we are to reject this concept due to pragmatic considerations, and if alternative terms such as 'atrocity' or 'massacre' are too broad to be convincing, which term should be employed as a reasonable substitute to adequately describe the nature of the harm caused by such a destructive and traumatic phenomenon?

In his perceptive and illuminating response to Boghossian's analysis, the legal scholar William Schabas claimed that another concept, namely "crimes against humanity", would serve this purpose.[54] Schabas's fundamental thesis is that this term not only fully covers the harm caused by the destruction of a people but also avoids all the controversies invoked by the genocide concept. It should be noted, however, that in his earlier work Schabas regarded the destruction of the Armenians (alongside the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide) as one of the "primary historical examples" of genocide in the twentieth century.[55] In addition, he now fully endorsed Boghossian's perfectly legitimate claim that what applies to the atrocities against the Armenians is not the UN Convention as a legal document but rather the concept of genocide. Thus, his shift of emphasis in naming the same phenomenon, as Schabas himself acknowledged, can only be attributed to pragmatic considerations. That being said, while Schabas's proposal might initially appear to alleviate pragmatic anxieties, I would argue that it falls short of achieving its intended goal. To demonstrate why this is so, I will briefly assess his main arguments.

One obvious advantage of invoking the concept of crimes against humanity, Schabas claimed, is that it undermines many of the objections that have been raised since the 1980s by Turkish authorities with regards to the technical issues about the definition of genocide provided by the UN Convention. This is certainly an understandable concern because a significant portion of public and scholarly controversy in Turkey revolves around the technical aspects and legal implications of the 1948 Genocide Convention.[56] Schabas's contention is that shifting the debate from genocide to crimes against humanity would both weaken denialist arguments in Turkey and widen the goal posts for the Armenians. It may thus, so the argument goes, make an important contribution to efforts aiming to obtain recognition for historical injustices against the Armenians. Furthermore, in an argument which echoes the concerns of Göçek and Oran, Schabas maintained that making the case for the concept of crimes against humanity would also stimulate the process of coming to terms with the past in Turkey. Hence, it would be more pragmatic and effective, he suggested, to opt for the concept of crimes against humanity, which may help the "growing number of Turks who understand how progress and reform in their country is linked to acknowledgment of the past".[57]

In Schabas's view, the "stubborn insistence" upon the genocide concept stems from the widespread misconception that anything short of this term either amounts to betrayal and denialism or to a trivialisation of past injustices. Quite on the contrary, he contended that the concept of crimes against humanity has not only a respectable genealogy but also a much more relevant historical origin. First of all, what

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54 William Schabas, Commentary on Boghossian. The Concept of Genocide, in: Journal of Genocide Research 12 (2010) 1-2, 92.

55 William Schabas, Genocide in International Law. The Crime of Crimes, Cambridge 2009, 15.

56 For a discussion of Turkey's official narrative, see: Jennifer Dixon, Defending the Nation? Maintaining Turkey's Official Narrative of the Armenian Genocide, in: South European Society and Politics 15 (2010) 3, 467-485.

57 Schabas, Commentary, 94.

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is most striking about this concept is that its first use in an international official document and legal context was the joint declaration in 1915 of Russia, France, and the United Kingdom asserting explicitly that atrocities committed by the Ottoman government against the Armenians constituted crimes against humanity. According to Schabas, the fact that the term was employed at the time for designating the destruction of the Armenians increases its relevance to contemporary debates.[58] A second and equally important moment in the genealogy of the concept, as Schabas remarked, was its reappearance during the Nuremberg Trials at the suggestion of Hersch Lauterpacht. As one of the creators of the language used in the Nuremberg Charter, Lauterpacht did not approve of any references to the concept of genocide on the grounds that it would undermine the protection of individuals by overemphasising group identity, whether as victims or perpetrators, which in turn might enhance the sense of 'us' and 'them', thereby reinforcing tribal attachments and group hatred.[59] The conclusion Schabas drew from all this is that the category of crimes against humanity, because of its long pedigree, neither diminishes our understanding of atrocities nor trivialises historical injustices. Would it therefore not be much better, Schabas asked, to refocus the entire debate about the destruction of the Armenians on the concept of crimes against humanity?

While there is some truth in this diagnosis driven by pragmatic anxieties, Schabas's proposal is misleading for three main reasons. The most obvious problem with the category of crimes against humanity is that, much like extreme violence and mass murder, it is an umbrella term that fails to acknowledge the specificity of the phenomenon. Second, according to the master narrative in Turkey, the Armenian massacres are at best seen as a tragic consequence of the First World War. However, there is nothing for which the new republic founded after the event could be held responsible. This means that Schabas's alternative term is equally suspicious as far as this master narrative is concerned. Third, this pragmatic proposal, insofar as it puts the emphasis on progress and reform in Turkey, reflects the priorities of the Turkish public, thereby relegating the expectations of the descendants of the victims to a secondary position. Yet, as Jürgen Habermas and Saul Friedländer have argued in the context of the historians' debate on the Holocaust, the question of scholarly responsibility requires not only avoiding distortions about the national past but also extending "an anamnestic solidarity with its victims" and hearing their voices.[60] Facing up to the challenge of naming past atrocities and injustices without any distortion might well be the first step in assuming this responsibility.

Conclusion

The argument I have advanced in this article is not merely that the terms proposed as substitutes to the genocide concept are either too vague or designate a completely different set of phenomena. Equally significantly, as I have suggested throughout, these alternative terms cannot capture the distinctive harm entailed in the destruction of a national or ethnic group. Yet this invites a further question: What exactly is

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58 Schabas, Genocide, 19-20; and Schabas, Commentary, 92, 94.

59 Philippe Sands, East West Street, New York 2017, 273, 281; and Philippe Sands, My Legal Hero. Hersch Lauterpacht, https://www.theguardian.com/law/2010/nov/10/my-legal-hero-hersch-lauterpacht (10 October 2019).

60 Jürgen Habermas, New Conservatism. Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate, Cambridge 1989, 233; and Saul Friedländer, Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe, Bloomington 1993. See also: McCarthy, Vergangenheitsbewältigung, 623-648.

the distinctive harm of genocide that distinguishes it from other atrocities? It goes far beyond the scope of this article to explore this complex but critically important topic. Now that I have shown the scholarly and political implications of different conceptual anxieties around the Armenian genocide, however, it is possible, by way of conclusion, to touch on this philosophically significant question.

The two best-known answers to this question are those of Raphael Lemkin and Hannah Arendt, yet their perspectives are radically different. Perhaps the most striking difference is that Arendt placed the emphasis on the unprecedentedness of the Nazi crimes while Lemkin refused to restrict the definition of his concept to the extermination of European Jewry. "Extermination of whole peoples", wrote Arendt, "had happened before in antiquity as well as in modern colonization." Yet the Nazi genocide was unprecedented because it was not motivated by strategic or utilitarian considerations: "The killing program was not meant to come to an end with the last Jew to be found on earth, and it had nothing to do with the war except that Hitler believed he needed a war as a smoke screen for his non-military killing operations."[61] As Dan Stone remarked, Lemkin acknowledged the specificity and extremity of the Holocaust, but he viewed it not so much as a unique or unprecedented event, but as a phenomenon with quite a long history, which includes the destruction of the Armenians.[62] Since a detailed analysis of this controversial topic deserves a separate treatment in its own right, I will not dwell on it any further here. Instead, I will briefly concentrate on the different ways in which these two influential figures understood the harm entailed in genocide. For Arendt, genocide is an attack on human diversity and the harm it entails is first and foremost an existential loss to humanity.[63] Thus, in this view, genocide damages humanity. While this interpretation has a long legal history, it tends to neglect the impact of genocide on the victims. Lemkin agreed that genocide damages not just individuals and the groups to which they belong but also humankind. However, he was primarily preoccupied with its impact on the victims, as can be seen clearly both in his autobiography and in his unfinished work on the history of genocide. "As soon as I could read, I started to devour books on the persecution of religious, racial, or other minority groups", Lemkin wrote on the very first page of his autobiography, and added: "I was fascinated by the frequency of such cases, by the great suffering inflicted on the victims and the hopelessness of their fate, and by the impossibility of repairing the damage to life and culture."[64] For Lemkin, as Lang rightly pointed out, genocide is a "double murder", affecting "the individual victims but also, and prior to the individuals, the group of which they are members".[65] It targets people on the basis of their national, ethnic, religious, or racial identity, in other words: on the basis of what they are, not what they have done. Of course, it is vital to realise, in this context, that by murder we do not simply mean the immediate physical destruction of a group. The destruction of culture is also a component

61 Hannah Arendt, Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship, in: Jerome Kohn (ed.), Responsibility and Judgment, New York 2003, 42.

62 Dan Stone, Raphael Lemkin on the Holocaust, in: Journal of Genocide Research 7 (2005) 4, 539. See also: Mark Mazower, After Lemkin, in: Jewish Quarterly 41 (1994) 4, 5-8.

63 Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil, New York 1992; and Hannah Arendt, Introduction into Politics in: The Promise of Politics, New York 2005, 159-163, 175. See also: Seyla Benhabib, International Law and Human Plurality in the Shadow of Totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt and Raphael Lemkin, in: Constellations 16 (2009) 2, 331-350; Christopher Macleod, An Alternative Approach to the Harm of Genocide, in: Politics 32 (2012) 3, 197-206; Shmuel Lederman, A Nation Destroyed. An Existential Approach to the Distinctive Harm of Genocide, in: Journal of Genocide Research 19 (2017) 1, 112-132.

64 Donna-Lee Frieze (ed.), Totally Unofficial. The Autobiography of Raphael Lemkin, New Haven 2013, 1-2; and Steven Leonard Jacobs (ed.), Lemkin on Genocide, Lanham 2012, 3-57.

65 Lang, Genocide, 127.

of genocide. As an heir to the romantic Herderian tradition, Lemkin saw national, ethnic, and religious groups (or "ascriptive groups", to use a more sociological term) as sources of meaning and identity.[66]

Consequently, for the purposes of my argument here, the eradication and appropriation of the cultural institutions, property, and spaces of the Armenians should be seen as part of this overall destruction process.[67] This means that the Armenian genocide was not only a coordinated plan of mass murder but also led to the violent physical uprooting of the Armenians from their homeland, which is a process that involves stories of mass murder, confiscation, kidnapping, and conversion.[68] The harm inflicted in this way is categorically distinct from the harm caused by other forms of extreme violence because it involves a loss of meaning and identity that exists primarily through intergenerational connections. When these sources of meaning are irreparably damaged or destroyed, the members of the group do not merely lose their cultural heritage. Even more significantly, as Claudia Card remarked, they become "socially dead".[69] The legacy of social death casts a long shadow which goes far beyond its immediate victims and extends to the present. The multi-generational afterlives of genocide usually come to the fore in the memoirs of the descendants rather than in the macro-histories of the Armenian genocide. Harry Harootunian's recent work is a case in point: In his memoir on the enduring legacy of the Armenian genocide, the historian demonstrated powerfully how the experience of social death becomes an unspoken heritage and how this multigenerational heritage lingers in the unspoken and the everyday, thereby revealing the true extent of the harm entailed in the destruction of the Armenians both for the victims and their descendants.[70] Furthermore, when this historical injustice is not officially and publicly recognised in the country in which it occurred, its non-recognition becomes an enduring or ancillary harm.[71] Using mitigating terms such as extreme violence, mass murder, or crimes against humanity, rather than calling genocide by its proper name, is certainly better than denying the existence of destruction. However, to the descendants of the victims, it adds an enduring harm to a historical injustice.

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66 Benhabib, Arendt and Lemkin, 237.
67 Peter Balakian, Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide, in: Holocaust and Genocide Studies 27 (2013) 1, 57-89.
68 Suciyan, The Armenians in Modern Turkey, 21.
69 Claudia Card, Genocide and Social Death, in: Hypatia 18 (2003) 1, 63-79. Abed found the term social death too strong and offered the concept of social alienation as a substitute. See: Abed, The Concept of Genocide Reconsidered, 353-355.
70 Harootunian, The Unspoken as Heritage.
71 Jeff Spinner-Halev, From Historical to Enduring Injustice, in: Political Theory 35 (2007) 5, 578-580; Theriault, Genocide, Denial, and Domination, 93.