Remembrance and Denial of Genocide: On the Interrelations of Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustice

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Genocide remembrance is a complex epistemological/ethical achievement, whereby survivors and descendants give meaning to the past in the quest for both personal-historical and social-historical truth. This paper offers an argument of epistemic injustice specifically as it occurs in relation to practices of (individual and collective) genocide remembrance. In particular, I argue that under conditions of *genocide denialism*, understood as *collective genocide misremembrance* and *memory distortion*, genocide survivors and descendants are confronted with *hermeneutical oppression*. Drawing on Sue Campbell's relational, reconstructive account of remembering, I argue that genocide denialism involves disrespectful challenges to memory, which systematically misrecognize rememberers. Adopting the case of Turkey's denialism of the Armenian genocide, I discuss two interrelated mechanisms through which this can happen: i) through the systematic portrayal of survivors and descendants as *vicious rememberers*, and ii) through distortions of the very concept of 'genocide'. Based on this, I show how hermeneutical and testimonial injustice are crucially interrelated when it comes to "contested" memories of historical injustice and the biographical testimony it gives rise to.

Keywords: Hermeneutical ignorance; genocide denialism; Armenian genocide; genocide remembrance; biographical testimony; memory authority

Introduction

When human beings experience traumatizing events, such as genocide, they have a legitimate interest to understand what happened to them and to render it intelligible to themselves and others – this is especially so for survivors and descendants. Specifically, remembering genocide is important for *self-constitution*, *social criticism,* and *justice*. Insofar as we consider *truth* crucial to our integrity and projects of self-constitution, this requires that our social environment provides adequate and meaningful epistemic resources, or if they are lacking,

provides a space in which survivors and descendants can articulate significant social experiences and generate shared interpretations of those experiences as *epistemic equals* within the affected community (i.e., society post-genocide). However, what if these processes are disrupted by genocide denialism? What obstacles and even risks are those facing who seek to truthfully remember past injustice and understand its legacy, when the latter are systematically obscured by genocide denialism?[1]

In this article, I shed light on the ways in which genocide denialism subjects genocide survivors and descendants to *epistemic injustice* with respect to practices of (individual and collective) genocide remembrance. More specifically, I argue that genocide denialism, as *collective genocide misremembrance* and *memory distortion*, constitutes *hermeneutical oppression* of genocide survivors and descendants. Drawing on Sue Campbell's relational, reconstructive account of remembering, I show that genocide denialism involves disrespectful challenges to memory, which systematically misrecognize rememberers. Genocide denialism thereby poses unwarranted institutionalized constraints on a core human capacity through which we express our personhood, as well as moral and epistemic agency. Adopting the case of Turkey's denialism of the Armenian genocide, I discuss two interrelated mechanisms through which this can happen: i) through distortions of the very concept of 'genocide'; and ii) through the systematic portrayal of survivors and descendants as *vicious rememberers*. This shall make evident how hermeneutical and testimonial injustice are crucially interrelated when it comes to "contested" memories of historical injustice and the biographical testimony

[1] Note that I am focusing in this paper on the meaning and implications of genocide (and its denialism) for survivors and descendants of the victim groups. Of course, especially given the collective nature of the crime of genocide and the (group) supremacist ideologies it involves, descendants of the former perpetrator groups also have their reasons and motivations for remembering (or denying) the genocide. These likewise often relate to their self-constitution, self-esteem or their idea of justice.

it gives rise to. Before going into my analysis of genocide remembrance under conditions of its denialism, I start by introducing the concept of *hermeneutical injustice* and more specifically, *(wilful) hermeneutical ignorance*, which will be central to my argument.

Putting Epistemic Injustice in Context: From "Hermeneutical Gaps" to "Hermeneutical Distortions"

In her 2007 book, Miranda Fricker introduces two basic types of epistemic injustice, testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. There, Fricker is interested primarily in the discriminatory and systematic cases of both types of epistemic injustice, since these are the cases most relevant from the point of view of social injustice. Accordingly, she conceptualizes them specifically in relation to contexts of racial and sexist oppression. In this section, I briefly discuss how her central case of hermeneutical injustice in particular differs from the type of hermeneutical injustice constituted by historical and ongoing genocide denialism, insofar as the latter presents a case of *agential and epistemically culpable* hermeneutical injustice, or at least I will argue so.

According to Fricker's central case, discriminatory hermeneutical injustice is "…the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (Fricker 2007, 155). She thereby seeks to establish a *structural and epistemically non-culpable* notion of hermeneutical injustice; whereas opposed to testimonial injustice, there is no identifiable agent or perpetrator of hermeneutical injustice.[2] Hermeneutical injustice rather *manifests itself* in a doomed attempt on the part of a subject to render a

[2] "My hope in exploring such examples was to illuminate a sub-category of genuine hermeneutical inabilities: those that are structurally unjust, so that they are wrongful even while they are *epistemically non-culpable*." (Fricker 2013, 49)

significant area of her social experience intelligible to herself and others; wherein she experiences a kind of "hermeneutical darkness" (149). Fricker's main examples used to illustrate her central case of hermeneutical injustice are experiences of *sexual harassment* and *post-natal depression*. The reason, she argues, why women were historically subjected to "hermeneutical darkness" when confronted with such experiences is because of conceptual gaps in the collective hermeneutical resource. As neither the concept of *sexual harassment* nor that of *postnatal depression* existed in the collectively shared hermeneutical resource, women had their experiences obscured from not only collective, but also self-understanding. Consequently, Fricker argues, there is no epistemically culpable perpetrator behind such failures of understanding. This predicament is due to background conditions of *hermeneutical marginalization*, which is more like an unintended consequence of the marginalization of women "from participating on equal terms with men in those practices by which collective social meanings are generated" – these are, most importantly: journalism, politics, academia and law. Such marginalization from relevant societal practices can result in hermeneutical gaps. That is, the marginally experienced world will fall through the cracks of our shared social understanding. These hermeneutical gaps will become even more robust if there exist *positive interpretation*s of said social experiences, such as when mistreatments like sexual harassment are commonly interpreted as flirting or complimenting.

While it is plausible that Fricker choses these examples to introduce the central case of hermeneutical injustice, it is not so evident that such hermeneutical injustice is purely structural and epistemically non-culpable. After all, women are *not coincidentally* marginalized from practices through which shared meanings of the social world are generated. Their marginalization from such epistemically relevant societal practices is legitimized through a sexist ideology that seeks to maintain overarching relations of patriarchal domination. This also explains why there exist predominant positive interpretations of such

experiences, as mentioned before. Women will encounter opposition to their claims of experiencing wrongful treatment, e.g., sexual harassment, because it is not in the immediate interest of those doing the harassing to accept a woman's interpretation of said behaviour. For these and other reasons, some have suggested reconceptualising, or complementing hermeneutical injustice with *wilful hermeneutical ignorance*. Fricker indeed considers this as a further type of epistemic injustice rather than as a case of hermeneutical injustice, in order to preserve its distinction from cases of purely structural and epistemically non-culpable hermeneutical injustice. I do not wish to dispute whether it should be one or the other. For the purpose of this article, this brief overview should just highlight that there can be situations in which those experiencing wrongdoing are indeed able to develop adequate, collectively shared interpretations and conceptual resources – where the "collective" here is, e.g., a consciousness raising group constituted by women who share similar experiences.[3] The main problem is that they might still fail to have them recognized and make them part of the collective hermeneutical resource due to some cognitive opposition on behalf of those with dominating power. In other words, what matters here is *to whom* they try to express or communicate their interpretation of significant social experiences. According to Rebecca Mason, such wilful hermeneutical ignorance refers to

> …defective knowledge practices among members of more powerful groups [that] can produce and maintain distorted understandings of the social experiences of marginalized groups despite contrary, and arguably better, interpretations that fail (through systematic hermeneutical marginalization) to gain voice in dominant discourses. (Mason 2011, 300)

[3] There can still be women who do not have such an environment or access to consciousness raising groups, which will keep them especially vulnerable to the distorted meanings provided by their society, as I will mention later in relation to Jenkins' analysis of rape myths.

Here, hermeneutical injustice ensues from socially dominant groups and their opposition to or denial of hermeneutical resources provided by marginalized groups. This shifts our attention to a *privileged unwillingness*, rather than *inability* to comprehend marginalized epistemic inputs. In contrast to Fricker's central case of hermeneutical injustice, conceptions of wilful hermeneutical ignorance recognize *marginalized hermeneutical agency*; that is, the ability of marginalized groups to perform actions in order to generate accurate understandings of relevant social experiences. They further recognize *epistemically culpable, motivated ignorance*. As Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. argues,

> …it is not in the immediate interest of the dominantly situated to acquire and maintain epistemic resources calibrated to the marginally experienced world, since doing so moves epistemic power away from dominant situatedness and can make clearer the injustices that maintain dominant privilege. (2012, 721)

This makes hermeneutical injustice a problem of active or protective *privileged ignorance* (see Medina 2013). Such ignorance becomes pernicious when it leads to epistemic harms, such as *practices of silencing* (see Dotson 2011), which shows the mutually reinforcing loop between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. I will return to this point in later sections.

However, through this reconceptualization, are we perhaps losing a crucial element of harm that Fricker identified in her central case of hermeneutical injustice? Do we neglect the manifestation of "hermeneutical darkness", i.e., being unable to render a particular social experience intelligible to oneself? Are we not just reducing hermeneutical injustice to testimonial injustice, where the testimony and epistemic inputs of concern are those contributing especially to *interpretation* and *understanding*?[4] We can save the "hermeneutical

[4] Testimonial injustice is usually discussed in relation to knowledge generation. Here, testimony refers to a capacity of conveying knowledge or other kinds of epistemic inputs (e.g. evidence, doubts, and critical ideas) conducive to knowledge. Hermeneutical injustice, on the other hand, is

nature" of the epistemic wrong by taking into account that the privileged ignorance on behalf of those with dominating power does not only entail rejecting or ignoring marginalized hermeneutical inputs (e.g., interpretations), thereby silencing them. Most importantly, it also entails constant efforts of sometimes more subtle and perfidious distortion and redescription in order to maintain problematic understandings in the dominant discourse and thereby secure relations of domination. While this might not lead to "hermeneutical darkness" for *every member of a marginalized group*, these mechanisms are still systematic and pervasive enough to undermine *some members'* capacity of intelligibility.

This has been aptly analysed by Jenkins (2017) in relation to rape and domestic abuse myths, which she argues present a case of hermeneutical injustice. Survivors of rape or domestic abuse can be subject to hermeneutical injustice despite the formal existence of these concepts, because the collective hermeneutical resource of their society provides them only with partial and problematic understandings of rape and domestic abuse. Jenkins thus distinguishes between *formalized* and *operational* or *working understandings* and conceptions based on widespread societal practice, which lead to a definitional exclusion of certain situations from counting as rape or domestic abuse. She thereby shows that the mere existence of an apt, formalized hermeneutical resource is not enough to ensure hermeneutical justice. Widespread rape myths create societal conditions that generate hermeneutically unjust obstacles for survivors to make use of the concept and apply the formally defined concept to

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concerned with our capacity of interpreting and understanding social experiences, thereby also generating self-understanding. However, as I argue later in relation to memory and biographical testimony, such self-constitutive practices also require an audience able and willing to understand our words as we intend them. Further, this suggests that testimony cannot only generate (propositional) knowledge, but also contribute to another important epistemic state, that of *understanding*. This has been acknowledged recently particularly in scholarship on moral testimony (see, e.g., Hills 2009; Sliwa 2012).

their experiences, because they are made to believe in the distorted operative concept of rape. Such distortions aim at silencing survivors, because rape myths essentially imply *victim blaming*, which in turn stigmatizes them. As a result, rape and domestic abuse myths contribute to their hermeneutical marginalization, and they do so primarily at the conceptual level.

In what follows, I argue that the hermeneutical injustice of genocide denialism is owed to similar conditions and mechanisms. For one, there is arguably no lack of a concept in the collective hermeneutical resource; the concept of 'genocide' is formally defined by a legal convention that most nation states have acceded to, including Turkey.[5] In addition, hermeneutical injustice is rooted in wilful hermeneutical ignorance of those individuals and institutions with dominating power. The broad idea here is that genocide denialism generates and sustains problematic understandings of historical events and processes despite the availability of a formally defined concept of genocide. These distortions, based on which the concept is systematically used in a given community, generate unwarranted constraints on survivors and descendants' capacities of faithful recollection, thereby wronging them in a capacity crucial for responsible moral and epistemic agency. This amounts to *hermeneutical oppression*, which I define as unwarranted institutionalized constraints on the hermeneutical agency of survivors and descendants. *Hermeneutical agency* here refers to actions performed to generate shared meanings and understandings of the past in the quest for both personal-historical and social-historical truth, as I elaborate in the following.

Genocide Remembrance: A Complex Epistemological/Ethical Achievement

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[5] Note that Turkey officially recognizes other genocides, such as the Holocaust/Shoah and the genocides in Rwanda, Cambodia, and Srebrenica. See, e.g., the newly established website "We Remember" by the Turkish Presidency's Directorate of Communications: https://weremember.gov.tr/genocides.html.

When analysing the role of Armenian genocide remembrance in the Turkish context, we have to acknowledge a crucial background condition. Namely, that the Armenian Genocide was the middle phase of an overarching relationship of Turkish domination over Armenians, where "[e]ffective elimination of Armenians from Turkey did not […] signal an end to the relationship, but rather the maximization and consolidation of a powerful Turkish domination over Armenians" (Theriault 2009, 92; see also Astourian 1990). Ongoing genocide denialism, then, should be viewed as an ongoing means to obscure and thereby manifest and sustain these relations of domination and conditions of social injustice.[6]

Against this background of enduring social injustice, remembering genocide has both an explanatory and justificatory function. On the one hand, it helps descendants explain and understand present social inequalities, thereby contributing to individual and collective self-knowledge and self-understanding. On the other hand, it can justify epistemic, social and political resistance by revealing the continuities between past injustice (i.e., genocide) and current injustice (i.e., epistemic oppression). Put differently, it presents a case of legitimate *counter-memory that seeks to delegitimize* unjust practices and processes that constitute official collective memory and based on that also national identity and belonging. Under such conditions, remembering genocide has not only socio-political and moral value, but also epistemic value; it functions to re-establish both survivors and descendants' equal moral as well as epistemic status. This is because genocide denialism systematically and pervasively calls into question the epistemic authority of survivors and descendants in ways that constitute testimonial and hermeneutical oppression.

This indicates that the concept of 'genocide' is not merely a legalistic concept, but a hermeneutical resource crucial for truthful recollection. Respectively, genocide denialism is

[6] This likely applies to other cases of ongoing, state-sponsored genocide denialism as well, such as the official Serb denial of the Bosnian genocide.

not merely the refusal of a legal characterisation of the crime as genocide, but a refusal to acknowledge genocidal intent – a definitional element of the crime of genocide – that amounts to the denial of an established historical fact.[7]

We can further elucidate this relationship between truth, identity and remembrance by taking into account the United Nations Commission on Human Rights' acknowledgment that victims of gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law have an inalienable right to the truth, giving rise to a duty assigned to states to preserve memory. The right to truth is also a collective right, for

> [a] people's knowledge of the history of its oppression is part of its heritage and, as such, must be ensured by appropriate measures in fulfilment of the State's duty to preserve archives and other evidence concerning violations of human rights and humanitarian law and to facilitate knowledge of those violations. Such measures shall be aimed at preserving the collective memory from extinction and, in particular, at guarding against the development of revisionist and negationist arguments. (United Nations Commission on Human Rights 2005, 6)

Now in the context at hand, we are far from a situation that respects these rights and principles: Not only did impunity in the aftermath of the Armenian genocide lead to recurrent violence against Armenians and other targeted groups, but also, it provided a robust foundation for long-term revisionism and denialism.[8] Nevertheless, what does "[a] people's

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[7] See Garibian's important critique against the presumption that one could distinguish between the "denial of the characterisation of a crime as genocide" and the "denial of historical facts", here discussed in reference to the European Court of Human Rights' 2013 ruling on *Perinçek vs. Switzerland*. Garibian (2016, 238) writes: "Such a distinction is nonsensical: denying a crime's legal characterisation as genocide amounts precisely to denying the specific intent, which defines this crime (namely the intention to destroy the entirety or a part of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group). And denying this specific intent amounts, in this particular case, to denying the 'reality of clearly established historical facts'…"

[8] Attempts at prosecuting wartime criminals and establishing justice in the aftermath of the genocide permanently ended when Mustafa Kemal took power in 1923. Beside the fact that

knowledge of the history of its oppression is part of its heritage" mean in this case? When it comes to knowledge about having suffered genocide, such heritage certainly consists of cultural and human loss, trauma, grief, and shame. However, it is also a heritage of collective and cultural survival, perseverance, and resilience. Accordingly, genocide denial also amounts to a denial of such heritage generated by the genocide and with it, a complex individual and collective identity based on both personal-historical and social-historical truth.

Hence, especially in the face of genocide denialism, one cannot ignore or downplay the value of the concept of genocide for good historical interpretation and practices of truthful and responsible (biographical) memory. Genocide denialism has real constructive power and material consequences because it imposes alternative, inaccurate, and misleading "labels", which are accompanied by disinformation and distortion campaigns that try to justify them – all with the aim to deny genocidal intent. Among them most commonly: "Armenian question", "Armenian issue", "events of 1915", "Armenian massacre", "Turkish-Armenian controversy", "Armenian relocation", "Armenian problem", "Armenian version (of history)" or "Armenian tragedy". Rather than erasing Armenians and the genocide completely from official collective memory, genocide denialism in fact generates pernicious ignorance about historical injustice and its legacy, as well as social relations and identities. It is against this background that genocide remembrance becomes not only an issue of social cohesion or honouring the dead, but an act of resistance to ongoing epistemic oppression and active contestation of state-imposed identities and unjust social relations.

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many criminals, including the Young Turk leadership and hence those mainly responsible for the genocide – Talaat, Enver and Djemal Pasha – were able to escape their death sentence, Kemal considered all sentences imposed by the Ottoman courts-martial (active from 1919–1922) as null and void. He granted amnesty especially to those who supported his new Turkish-nationalist government. For more on these first ever attempts at prosecution by an international tribunal, see, e.g., Garibian (2016) and Balint (2013).

To summarize, remembering genocide is not only morally, but also epistemically valuable. Personal and collective memory are (re-)constructive practices that aim at giving meaning to the past and that generate knowledge and understanding of both past and present social experiences. Such a reconstructive account of memory suggests that information is not just neutrally stored and transmitted from the past to the present, but selected according to certain criteria, it is retained in memory, and it can be regularly re-interpreted depending on changing present conditions and significance. As Sue Campbell (2006, 363) points out, memory change over time is indeed a normal feature of our recollective processes.

This is especially the case when faced with new conceptualizations of harm, such as in the case of 'genocide'. The fact that such new normative descriptions are newly legitimized does not mean that they are new. Rather, 'the point of many new conceptualizations of harm is to make long-standing types of social interaction apparent, and this point is important for understanding oppressive harms' (Campbell 2003, 187f.). It then becomes our moral responsibility to 'elaborate on and distinguish when a shared understanding of the past through a new categorization of harm is legitimate and when it is not' (Ibid.). Notably, here I am discussing two kinds of harms and their normative descriptions or understandings that matter for the analysis of genocide denialism. On the one hand, understanding past actions, practices and processes on the basis of a newly legitimized normative description that is 'genocide'; on the other hand, the ongoing actions and practices of genocide denialism and their normative description as 'epistemic injustice'. By use of this new normative vocabulary, we can make visible some of the oppressive harms constituted particularly by genocide *denialism*, for it requires 'considerable rethinking of the conceptual schemes through which such harms have been naturalized' (Ibid. 187). As I will show in more detail in the next section, such *naturalization* (or *rationalization*) is achieved by practices of ignorance, including distortions and redescriptions, on behalf of the state and its institutions.

Campbell develops her account of reconstructive memory against the background of the so-called 'false memory debates' during the 1980s and 1990s. Due to the ways in which these 'debates' were framed in the dominant discourse, 'thousands of women were thought to have mis-remembered or confabulated a history of child sexual abuse under the influence of their therapists – the view prevailed that the sociality of memory distorts and contaminates memories' (Campbell, Koggel, and Jacobsen 2014, xv). To guard against such systematic efforts to discredit survivor testimony, Campbell instead offers an account of reconstructive memory that does not automatically imply memory arbitrariness, such that it becomes a threat to truthful accounts of the past. Rather, it urges us to reflect on the criteria, presumptions and normative commitments of reconstruction.

This sociality of memory, especially of biographical memory, makes faithful recollection indeed a complex epistemological/ethical achievement for which we can be held accountable, which is why we need to look at ways in which social influence may either facilitate 'good remembering' or distort memory. According to Campbell, this distinction can be made insofar as good remembering aims at truth and is guided by the virtues of *accuracy* and *integrity*. An accurate recollection involves the concern to recall the facts, but also 'to get their significance right' (Campbell, Koggel, and Jacobsen 2014, xvii). Integrity is

> a trait in virtue of which self-consciously fallible rememberers take a stand for their own account of the past, often in the face of compelling dominant narratives that circulate in communities with which they identify […]; but any concern with integrity is also a concern with selves and their identities. (Ibid)

As Campbell rightly emphasizes, given the reconstructive nature of memory, there must be 'more to good remembering than that our memory declarations are true' (Campbell 2006, 262) in the sense of representing the facts; it also often involves getting something right about the significance of the past as judged from the standpoint of the present. This importance of

significance to truthful recollection then points to two directions: 'towards conceptions of accuracy that include significance as a dimension of accurate representation, and towards conceptions of integrity that show how we are held and hold ourselves responsible for getting that significance roughly right.' (Ibid.) Importantly, truth is not external to such responsible, reconstructive memory. In fact, unless we acknowledge that responsible rememberers care about truth or truthful recollection, we cannot credit individuals with caring about self-knowledge or integrity. (Campbell, Koggel, and Jacobsen 2014, 67) Campbell thereby introduces epistemic aspects or standards that have moral significance in relation to memory, ultimately inviting considerations of epistemic justice, respectively injustice.

Now for the purpose of my argument here, I do not think we need to delve more deeply into this account of successful and responsible reconstructive memory. Whichever virtues or norms we introduce, it will raise questions about our ethical responsibility to learn 'to share memory in ways that are respectful, reflective, and appropriately challenging […] to distinguish respectful from disrespectful challenge, and that we make ourselves accountable for doing so' (Campbell, Koggel, and Jacobsen 2014, 167). Our main concern with genocide denialism, then, is that it violates such ethical and epistemic responsibilities towards particular rememberers, thereby constituting hermeneutical oppression. Genocide denialism fails to credit survivors and descendants with caring about truth, hence self-knowledge or integrity; it systematically challenges and calls into question their capacity to remember accurately and with integrity. Thereby, genocide denialism indeed exploits the reconstructive nature of such memory, by fuelling a destructive scepticism about memory in contexts of group-based injustice.

By urging us to pay attention to the kind of respect we accord people as rememberers, Campbell opens up the sphere of remembrance to normative evaluations of vulnerability of rememberers and particularly fragile memory narratives:

> As traditional links between memory and moral agency highlight the importance of self-narrative, we can look for much of our cultural respect for rememberers to be realized in the types of narratives we allow or encourage them to engage in and in the various narrative positions we allow them to hold. (Campbell 2003, 36)

Such abilities and opportunities to engage in (personal and group biographical) memory narratives are especially important when it comes to repairing a sense of self that has experienced harm or abuse. As trauma researchers have long established, an audience listening to trauma narratives is essential to such self-repair – and in cases of social violence and genocide, social repair. This is where we see the interrelation of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, because 'in order to construct self-narratives… we need not only the words with which to tell our stories but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them' (Brison 1997, 21, as quoted in Campbell 2003, 44). Against this background, how does genocide denialism render particular memory narratives and rememberers vulnerable in ways that subjects them to hermeneutical and testimonial oppression? In the next section, I want to distinguish two dimensions or ways in which this happens. The first relates specifically to remembering subjects, the second to what is being remembered and how, or the particular memory narratives.

Genocide Denialism as Hermeneutical Oppression

One way to challenge the memory of genocide is by systematically and pervasively calling into question the credibility of survivor testimony, based on which descendants engage in historical interpretation and knowledge generation in light of current significance. How can we consider them *epistemically disrespectful* challenges? For one, they are based on the widespread epistemic prejudice of Armenians as treacherous and easily suggestible. Armenians are traditionally represented as 'puppets of Western imperialism', whose experiences and memories have been distorted through what is considered 'a myth of

genocide' in order to legitimize Armenian nationalism and imperialist interests.[9] Drawing the argument further, future generations are said to have bought into this myth due to continued Turcophobia, Islamophobia and radical Armenian nationalism.[10] Thereby, genocide denialism discredits their *integrity*, because it portrays them as easily suggestible, naively giving in to Western imperialist narratives of genocide because they have no agency or sense of self; their identity seems to be dictated by others. It further discredits their *accuracy*, because they are portrayed as irresponsibly selective rememberers who misrepresent the past for ultimately flawed purposes. This suggests they would fail to get the significance of the past right; for example, instead of caring about truth and justice – or, what the Turkish government calls 'just memory'[11] – they seek legitimation of their nationalistic goals, which leads them to select historical facts in epistemically irresponsible, partial ways. Hence, genocide denialism confronts them with epistemically disrespectful challenges by systematically portraying them as inherently *vicious rememberers*.

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9 This view of Armenians goes back at least to the Ottoman era under Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909) that lead to the Hamidian massacres of 1894-1897. These massacres, just like the genocide, were blamed on the Armenians themselves, as for example Hugo von Radolin, German ambassador to Paris, had claimed: '[I]t would be the Armenians who would provoke a massacre and 'sacrifice thousands of their compatriots' in order to force a Great Power intervention' (Radolin to Caprivi, 15 March 1894, as quoted in Ihrig 2016, 34). At the same time, the British were suspected to be the masterminds of these atrocities and any reports about them were dismissed as baseless British atrocity propaganda. (Ihrig 2016, 37, 181)

10 "The acceptance of this version [of history] by others has become the national objective for Armenia and the radical groups within the Armenian Diaspora […]." (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021a)

11 A view introduced by former Turkish minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu's article "Turkish-Armenian Relations in the Process of De-Ottomanization or 'Dehistorization': Is a 'Just Memory' possible?" based on which subsequent political statements of 'condolence' were articulated (see e.g., Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021b).

However, in order to claim that survivors and descendants would use inadequate hermeneutical resources to recollect and interpret the past, it seems that one has to introduce various conceptual distortions of 'genocide' into the dominant societal discourse. Introducing such misconceptions of normative vocabulary is a common way of silencing survivors of injustice and therefore constitute unjust challenges and distortions of particular memory narratives. For example, one way to do so is by misrepresenting the historical context in which the concept was developed. The crime of genocide was first legally codified after the Second World War in December 1948 through the United Nation's Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It is commonly and officially acknowledged that Raphael Lemkin (1944) coined the term 'genocide', seeking to find a name for a crime for which he thought there was no proper legal instrument yet that would help in the prevention and prosecution of such crimes. However, while this is generally acknowledged, the important role of the Armenian genocide in motivating Lemkin to fight for its recognition as a crime under international law is wilfully occluded.[12] Indeed, one of the experiences that initiated his activism was the trial of Soghomon Tehlirian in Berlin in 1921. Tehlirian was acquitted by the Berlin court despite murdering one of the main architects of the Armenian genocide Talaat Pasha, who had escaped to Germany after the Ottoman Empire and its allies lost the war in 1918. This experience convinced Lemkin that perpetrators of genocide ought to be prosecuted by courts and not by individuals. He expressed this on public television in 1949, which further substantiates the historical fact that Lemkin defined the

[12] Again, this can be derived from the Turkish Presidency's website "We Remember", which includes a section on the origins of the concept of genocide: https://weremember.gov.tr/what-is-genocide-2/the-origin.html.

concept also against the background knowledge of the Armenian genocide.[13] Claiming that the concept of genocide does not apply to the Armenian genocide is therefore false when seen against the background that this was one of the historical events that prompted Lemkin's subsequent activism. This is on the condition – and I find it a plausible one – that acknowledging the historical context in which the concept was created also helps to make sense of the concept itself or is even necessary in order to understand the purposes for which this concept was generated.[14]

Another common strategy can be described as apologist and amounting to victim-blaming. This is commonly referred to as the *provocation thesis*. It suggests that 'genocide' can only be applied to 'innocent victims', implying that Armenians – as a *race* – were not innocent but treacherous instigators, who tried to break up the Ottoman-Turkish Empire. The claim that Armenians were not the innocent and passive victims that they claim to be suggests that somehow, they collectively got what they deserved. They were traditionally seen as a 'problematic group' and thus, claims for genocide recognition are seen as a continuation of such 'problematic Armenian nationalism and terrorism that has plagued the Turks for centuries'.[15] Such 'justification' of genocide can only be achieved by simultaneously distorting social reality, which is done through the exaggeration of Armenian threat by claiming that Armenians, together with imperial powers, were threatening Turkish existence. Such exaggeration of Armenian threat by relating it to a general imperialist conspiracy is

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13 As part of its "U.N. Casebook" documentary series, CBS broadcasted a panel discussion with Raphael Lemkin on the U.N. Genocide Convention on February 13, 1949. The excerpt is available on vimeo: https://vimeo.com/125514772. Accessed 3 August 2021.

14 Lemkin's (1933) prior elaborations are also illuminating in this regard.

15 Two of the perhaps most notorious defenders of this provocation thesis among Western scholars are Samuel Weems, author of *Armenia: Secrets of a "Christian" Terrorist State* (2002) and Justin McCarthy, author a.o. of *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire* (2001).

somewhat analogous to how Adolf Hitler, in a speech on March 1942, characterized the conflict at the Eastern Front in order for the troops to adopt the necessary anti-Semitic doctrines of the regime, by assimilating the Jews into the image of the enemy:

> Today we see the dispersion of cooperation among the Jewish wire pullers over a whole world. They unite democracy and Bolshevism into a community of interest engaged in a shared attack by a conspiracy that hopes to be able to annihilate all of Europe. (Herf 2006, 147, as quoted in Pauer-Studer and Velleman 2010, 350)

In the Ottoman context, such official propaganda helped to incite the necessary anti-Armenian and anti-Christian sentiments and ideologies and to gain support from the Muslim majority population more generally. Such arguments are used until today to support the claim that what happened from 1915–1917 was a symmetrical, civil war between two nations with equal strength.

Another conceptual distortion is to blur the distinction between the legal application of the genocide convention, thus potentially violating the 'principle of legality', and the use of the concept of 'genocide' for historical interpretation, remembrance, and subsequent state responsibilities. However, if this distinction is acknowledged, deniers attack the memory of genocide by arguing that because history is always subject to interpretation, the 'genocide thesis' is a flawed and partial interpretation of the past – an 'Armenian view of history'. This creates confusions about the processes of historical interpretation and the motivations behind a certain interpretation. As already mentioned, this suggests that applying the concept of genocide to the extermination of Ottoman Armenians is not motivated by a desire for truth and justice, but e.g., by Armenian nationalism.

What I hope to have illustrated here is that genocide denialism is not just a matter of 'memory conflict' or 'memory disagreement'. Framing it as a conflict or disagreement about history is misleading particularly in light of such state-imposed, factually and normatively

distorted concepts and policies, which serve to systematically delegitimize genocide remembrance and thereby further constrain, epistemically de-authorise and demonize survivors and descendants.

This brings us to the interrelations between testimonial and hermeneutical oppression in practices of genocide remembrance, insofar as it shows the complex relations between narrative or testimonial position and memory authority. More specifically, genocide denialism disadvantages and renders some people *epistemically nonauthoritative* from the start. In the remainder of this article, I briefly explain these interrelations and hence, why genocide denialism indeed constitutes a *double epistemic wrong* (see Fricker 2007, 159).

Genocide Denialism as Intersecting both Testimonial and Hermeneutical Oppression

As already mentioned, a reconstructive, self-constitutive practice of genocide remembrance requires not only adequate hermeneutical resources provided by our social environment (such as the concept of 'genocide') – but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them. Hence, performing testimony is part of the many valuable memory activities through which survivors and descendants give meaning to the past and express their personhood, as well as responsible moral and epistemic agency. As we know from testimonial injustice, the success with which we perform such testimony depends not just or primarily on the reliability of our cognitive mechanisms, but also the social positions we can or cannot occupy. Applied to practices of remembrance, this means that 'how we are positioned as rememberers creates and informs relations of power because control over the significance of the past helps determine the success of particular social agendas and the lineage of social authority' (Campbell 2003, 51). Since the aim of genocide denialism is, among other things, to maintain dominant privilege, it is evident that one of the most effective ways to do so is by undermining the capacity of genocide survivors and

descendants to speak to others authoritatively about the past, and more specifically, their biographical past. This is made easier by the vulnerable positions of particular memory narratives in the first place, as I have shown in the previous section. Conditions such as belief in partial or problematic definitions of genocide, victim-blaming, as well as testimonial incompetence of interpreters of memory claims (see, e.g., Altanian [2021] on the latter) all contribute to their hermeneutical marginalization. Such conditions seek to not only disenfranchise survivors and descendants from speaking for themselves and generating self-understanding in relation to experiences of genocide and its legacy. In addition, they have their voices disenfranchised from the collective endeavour of giving meaning to the past, thereby maintaining a socially unjust status quo.

To sum up, genocide denialism generates restrictive interpretive practices and structures that render the application of the concept of genocide to a group's historical experience implausible and inacceptable, thereby *misrecognizing the group's history and identity*. Such practices and structures are also connected to credibility conferrals to those attempting to testify and give meaning to the past, thereby *misrecognizing individual testifiers.* As I have tried to illustrate, genocide denialism aims to ignite public scepticism towards genocide recognition and remembrance, by encouraging widespread vigilance as regards the suggestibility of memories of survivors and descendants and by demonizing them anew through a negative misrepresentation of their memory claims. Through genocide denialism, survivors and descendants are indeed 'doubly deauthorized as knowers on account of who they are and what they claim to know' (Jones 2002). They are doubly epistemically wronged owing to two forms of disrespectful challenge to memory. Firstly, their articulation of experiences of historical injustice are already assigned a low credibility due to the ignorance and misunderstandings surrounding the subject matter of genocide; but if the speaker is also subject to an identity prejudice, then there will be a further credibility

deflation. (Fricker 2007, 159) The first corresponds to hermeneutical oppression, hence unwarranted institutionalized constraints on their capacity of personal-historical and social-historical interpretation and truthful reconstructive memory. This is due to various normative conceptual and factual distortions that aim to prevent them from making sense of past experiences and their legacy by use of the formally recognized concept of genocide. The second corresponds to testimonial oppression, hence unwarranted institutionalized constraints on their capacity to testify to the past. This is, among other things, due to the introduction of identity prejudices that confer an epistemically inferior status to survivors and descendants: they are systematically portrayed as lacking the virtues required for responsible remembrance. Based on this, hearers will tend to make identity-prejudiced credibility judgements when confronted with their biographical testimony. This, in turn, further reinforces and sustains socially and politically unjust relations that lay the foundation for such epistemic wrongs.

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