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Epistemic Injustice *from Afar*: Rethinking the Denial of Armenian Genocide

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ABSTRACT

Genocide denialism is an understudied topic in the epistemic injustice scholarship; so are epistemic relations outside of the Euro-American context. This article proposes to bring the literature into contact with an underexplored topic in a 'distant' setting: Turkey. Here, I explore the ethical and epistemological implications of the Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide as a pervasive and systematic epistemic harm. Using an interdisciplinary methodology, I argue that a philosophical exploration of genocide denialism requires examining the role of institutions and ideology in relation to the epistemic harm done by individual perpetrators. More specifically, I suggest that the individual, ideological, and institutional roots of genocide denialism constitute a *regime of epistemic injustice* in Turkey.

I. Introduction

What does it mean to think about epistemic injustice 'from afar?' The distance I allude to is in relation to the object of study, as well as to the social-political context through which this study becomes possible. I explore genocide denialism, an understudied topic in the epistemic injustice scholarship (with the exception of Altanian 2017, 2019; Suissa 2016), by reflecting on a setting outside the Global North. My argument suggests that the Turkish denial of the Armenian genocide constitutes a *regime of epistemic injustice* in Turkey. I analyze the three main factors that are constitutive of this *regime*[1] *of epistemic injustice*: (i) the supremacist founding ideology of the Turkish Republic, namely, Turkism, (ii) the institutional practices based on this ideology, (iii) and finally, individuals' 'active ignorance' and 'epistemic vices' (Medina 2013) that are cultivated through these institutional practices. Turkism is the foundation of contemporary Turkish nationalism, and in my analysis, key for understanding institutional and individual perpetrators of epistemic harm against Armenians in Turkey.

With this study, I contribute to the existing literature on epistemic injustice by putting historical and sociological studies into conversation with the analytical tools of epistemic injustice; this allows me to explore how this 'distant' context and interdisciplinary approach can effectively expand the conceptual framework of the scholarship. My argument builds on the premise that there is an interplay among *individuals* who perpetrate genocide denialism, the *ideology* (that of Turkism) behind denialism (and genocide), and the *institutions* (both educational and legal) supporting genocide denialism. The sections of the article are organized to discuss these *three pillars of genocide denialism* in the context of Turkey. I begin the article by giving a brief overview of the historical background of the Armenian genocide and Turkish denialism. In section two, I use Miranda Fricker's (2007) analysis of testimonial injustice to argue that

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Armenians are testimonially harmed by Turkish institutions. In section three, I examine Charles Mills' (2017a) criticism against Fricker's account, which suggests that her analysis lacks a proper understanding of the ideological basis of epistemic failures of individuals. Building on Mills' criticism, I examine Turkism as the ideological root of Turkish denialism. In section four, I turn to José Medina's work, where he challenges Fricker's account of testimonial injustice for not considering the phenomenon of 'credibility excess'[2] (Medina 2013, 58–59). Following Medina's analysis, I examine the relations among credibility excess, social privilege, epistemic vices[3] and active ignorance[4] to consider how they affect the perpetuation of genocide denialism by 'Turkish'[5] individuals. My argument builds on Fricker's framework as well as Mills' and Medina's criticisms and contributions, all of which I discuss in connection with the three pillars of genocide denialism I mentioned above.

I.I. A Brief Account of the Armenian Genocide and Turkish Denialism

From the nineteenth century on, Armenians came to be represented as 'troublemakers' and 'traitors' in the Ottoman empire. This hostile depiction, centered around 'treachery', began to accumulate during the period of reforms (the Tanzimat of 1839–76), when non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman empire began to access political equality for the first time in the empire's history (Astourian 1999, 25). Although the empire was based on a multi-ethnic model, political power was always structured around the exclusion of non-Muslim populations from decision-making processes. Anti-Armenian sentiments increased radically during the early twentieth century with the collapse of the empire and the founding of the Turkish Republic. Affecting this process was the rise of the Turkish supremacist ideology of Turkism (explored later in this article), which was also operative in rationalizing the collective violence against Armenians during 1915–16.

The declining Ottoman Empire had a significant non-Muslim population, among which Armenians especially were seen as a 'security threat' by the Young Turk[6] government. After the outbreak of World War I, in 1915, the government issued a decree for the deportation of the entire Armenian population, including women and children. During the deportations, groups of Armenian men, women, and children were massacred, and their wealth and property were confiscated.[7] Approximately one million Armenian lives are thought to have been taken during the years 1915–16 (see Kévorkian 2011; Bloxham 2005).

The official state policy in Turkey defends 'Armenian deportations' during wartime as a 'justifiable act of state necessity' to this day (Akçam 2006, 9).[8] It should be stressed that this position was also endorsed by the founding father of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal (see Göçek 2011). To support and sustain this official narrative, many Turkish historians systematically produced narratives on the 'Armenian Question'[9] that distorted the truth and silenced historical facts (for examples, see Akçam 1992, 31).

The Armenian diaspora's efforts to put international pressure on the Turkish government regarding the genocide date back to the 1970s.[10] It was in response to these efforts that Turkey's denialism took a more active form. The founding of the Turkish Directorate General of Intelligence and Research in the 1980s was a step towards the institutionalization and professionalization of Turkish denialism (Bayraktar 2015, 802). In the same period, the Turkish state began to hire and support Western scholars of Ottoman and Turkish history who were willing to rationalize and silence violence against Armenians during World War I (see Smith, Markusen, and Lifton 1995; Hovannisian 1999, 16; Mamigonian 2013; Erbal 2015).

Despite Turkey's longstanding official efforts, there is a consensus within the genocide studies scholarship that the events of 1915–16 constitute a genocide (Smith 2006; Bloxham 2005; Melson 2009). Many critical historians and social scientists agree further that the Armenian genocide and its denial have been an integral part of Turkey's nation-building (Göçek 2015; Akçam 1992; Hovannisian 1999; Üngör 2011; Ünlü 2018).

Against this historical backdrop, the majority of the population in Turkey is oblivious to Turkey's genocidal past (see Göçek 2015). There are many reasons for this, but four stand out as obvious: first, testimonies recognizing genocidal violence are silenced and criminalized and therefore cannot be voiced freely; second, the representation of Armenians in the collective social imagination often centres on 'treachery'; third, the majority of the 'Turkish' population maintain an active ignorance about Armenians and their history; and fourth, many Turks (and Kurds) have socio-economically benefitted from the confiscation of Armenian wealth and property as a consequence of the genocide (see Üngör and Polatel 2011). The next section explores the first of the above-mentioned factors.[11]

II. Testimonial Injustice against Armenians and Its Institutional Roots

My main focus here will be on examining how testimonial injustice relates to the power gap between social identities, using Fricker's framework. I link this with how Turkish institutions shape the power gap between Armenians and Turks. My discussion shows that educational and legal institutions have been at the forefront of facilitating testimonial injustice against Armenians in Turkey.

One of the ways in which an injustice is epistemic, Gaile Pohlhaus Jr. notes, is by wronging 'particular knowers *as* knowers' (Pohlhaus 2017, 13). Testimonial injustice is one such wrongdoing; where 'someone [is] wronged in their capacity as a giver of knowledge' (Fricker 2007, 7). Testimonial injustice is primarily characterized by Fricker as a matter of 'credibility deficit,' that is, not being granted the appropriate credibility one deserves as a knower (Fricker 2007, 21). Most of the examples Fricker uses to explain credibility deficit occur between social identities (or groups) that are divided by race or gender. In the following example given by Fricker, testimonial injustice arises between a member of an institution (the police) and a member of a racial minority:

> The injustice that a speaker suffers in receiving deflated credibility from the hearer owing to identity prejudice on the hearer's part, as in the case where the police don't believe someone because he is black. (Fricker 2007, 4)

In the above example, the Black man's testimony is doubted by the white police, and he suffers testimonial injustice because of it. That is, his testimony is not given due credibility. Fricker utilizes two notions to explain testimonial injustice: 'identity power' and 'negative identity prejudice'. Testimonial injustice happens because of the Black man's identity power (i.e. how the collective social imagination represents his social identity) and negative identity prejudice (i.e. the negative meanings associated with Black identity in white-dominated societies). Identity power then is directly related to how the collective social imagination represents a given social identity, whereas negative identity prejudice is about the negative prejudices attached to that social identity (Fricker 2007, 14). When social identities suffer from credibility deficit, they do so because of the negative stereotypes, prejudices and stigmas that are attached to their identities. Identity power refers to the power (or lack thereof) of being able to dominantly set the prejudicial lens through which one social identity (e.g. White individuals) 'hears' another (e.g. Black individuals) (2007, 34–6). It is the inability to hear, without prejudice, another social identity that causes testimonial injustice.

In connecting this discussion with our case, I argue that Armenians and Turks have very different identity powers in Turkey, since one is a majority group and the other is a minority group; and that to understand the nature of that power gap, we need to look at how Armenians are represented in the collective social imagination. As I show below, there is a systematic production of negative identity prejudice regarding Armenianness and Armenians through institutions, which impacts their representation in the collective social imagination.

Armenians are systematically and epistemically wronged through Turkish educational institutions and face testimonial injustice because they are not allowed to communicate knowledge about the violence they have historically suffered.[12] Historian Lerna Ekmekçioğlu summarizes this educational context as follows:

> Students in Armenian minority schools [in Turkey] are not allowed to learn Armenian history. Legally, students in Turkish schools (public, private, minority) can only learn history from textbooks prepared centrally by the Ministry of Education. These textbooks represent the state's perspective. By 'Turkish history' such books mean 'the history of Turks' [….] 'Turks' in this usage excludes non-Muslim, non-Turkish peoples of Turkey. *Minorities appear in these books largely as traitors ever ready to stab their host state in the back.* (2016, xii [emphasis added])

As the above description suggests, there is no testimonial credibility afforded to Armenians in these textbooks; their history and narrative are not part of the collective social imagination and are silenced systematically through educational institutions of the state. In addition, they are represented as 'traitors,' which means they should never be trusted. Here, we find the very source of testimonial injustice against Armenians: the negative identity prejudice of 'traitor' directly attacks testimonial credibility. Not only is their testimony silenced, but the credibility of their testimony is put into question. This is because, in the case of genocide denialism investigated here, identity power and negative identity prejudice involve not only a racial difference (as was the case in Fricker's above example) or ethnoreligious difference, but also the perpetrator-survivor dyad that maps onto that difference. Armenians are represented as non-credible because their knowledge of events contradicts the Turkish version of history and in that sense, their narratives are seen as a 'threat' to the collective Turkish memory. This link between ethnoreligious difference and the perpetrator-survivor dyad is central to my discussion, because perpetrators of testimonial injustice (those who do not give credibility to the Armenian narratives) tend to be from (or identify with) the same ethnoreligious group as the perpetrators of genocide (i.e., 'Turkish').

The Turkish judiciary is another leading institution responsible for testimonial injustice against Armenians, as the judiciary has actively taken up the criminalization of narratives recognizing the Armenian genocide. Journalists, scholars, human rights organizations and activists in Turkey who try to raise public awareness about the history and fate of Ottoman Armenians are threatened with legal penalties (Tarcan 2018; Committee to Protect Journalists 2005). Here, I want to briefly review the history of criminalization and testimonial injustice endured by Armenian journalist Hrant Dink.

Dink was an outspoken journalist who wrote extensively about Turkish-Armenian relations and the history of Armenians. In 2004, Dink was accused of 'insulting Turkishness' under the Turkish penal code, article 301, because of an article he published in the Armenian biweekly *Agos*. Dink was not the only one accused under article 301. Famous novelists Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak, as well as other journalists, were also accused due to their comments on the fate of Ottoman Armenians (see Mahoney 2006; Fowler 2016), but the charges against them were later dropped by the court. Among these journalists and novelists, Dink was the only one charged with a prison sentence, likely because of his Armenian identity. Dink's trial process illustrates a particularly strong example of testimonial injustice, as his article was intentionally misrepresented by the public prosecutor's office to fit the alleged crime of 'insulting Turkishness'. He was sentenced despite expert reports that found no evidence of 'insulting Turkishness' in his article. Dink was later assassinated in 2007 by a 17-year-old Turkish ultranationalist, Ogün Samast, believed to have ties with the Turkish deep state. As Dink's lawyer Fethiye Çetin shows in her book (Çetin 2013), Dink's assassination was directly related to his efforts to effect reconciliation between Armenians and Turks and his outspokenness about the Armenian genocide.

This discussion suggests that the denial of genocide constitutes a social and political climate where *epistemic harm leads to physical harm*[13] because of the racial hatred, silencing and negative identity prejudice cultivated in relation to denialism.[14] The racial hatred and negative identity prejudice against Armenians are based on the active ignorance (explored later in the article), misrepresentation and silencing produced by Turkish institutions. The non-credibility, when accompanied by racist nationalism (see Maksudyan 2005) and Turkish supremacy, can quickly create situations that target the livelihood of Armenian citizens of Turkey (as aforementioned examples suggest).

Lisa Guenther (2017) explores the connection between epistemic and existential harm, and although her discussion is not specifically concerned with the physical consequences of epistemic

injustices, her approach is very revealing of the existential implications of epistemic interactions. Guenther suggests that our epistemic capacities are intertwined with our identity and emphasizes the connection between *what we know* and *who we are* (2017, 201). Her discussion suggests that what we know can make us existentially vulnerable, and I agree completely. In Turkey, Armenians are existentially vulnerable because of what they know. Their experience of testimonial injustice is concomitant with existential harms. Their victimhood as a survivor group is denied narrativization and public recognition, and as a result their very identity (being/existence) is harmed because *surviving a genocide has become part of their identity*.[15] They cannot begin a healing process (Alayarian 2008, 27), which would require recognition of genocide and reparations. And their testimonial non-credibility (due to denial) makes their livelihood itself vulnerable in the Turkish social context of racist nationalism. In the next section, I explore the ideological roots of this social and political context which epistemically and existentially harms Armenians in Turkey.

III. The Ideology behind the Genocide and Its Denialism: Turkish Supremacy and Turkism

My decision to focus on ideology to understand the testimonial injustice practiced by Turkish institutions stemmed from Mills' (2017a) critical engagement with Fricker's framework (Fricker 2007). In connection, I explore here the ideological roots of Turkish supremacy in Turkism,[16] a blend of social Darwinism and ethnonationalism. Investigating this supremacist ideology is crucial for understanding not only the roots of testimonial injustice we explored in section two, but also the active ignorance of 'Turkish' perpetrators of genocide denial (which I explore in the next section).

Mills contends that Fricker's discussion of epistemic injustice overlooks the ideological basis of domination in real-world societies because he understands Fricker to be leaning towards a Rawlsian model of society (Mills 2017a, 101). According to this Rawlsian model, the society is construed as an ideal through 'a purely hypothetical exercise (a thought experiment) in establishing what a just "basic structure" would be' (Mills 1997, 10). Fricker's approach, according to Mills, presupposes such a Rawlsian ideal of society, where individuals *can* have equal access and opportunity to obtain social and political goods (Mills 2017a, 105).

Many may find Mills' criticism of Fricker unconvincing given the fact that, according to Fricker, her account is socially situated (Fricker 2007, 3–4), and most of her examples consider race-based and gender-based epistemic harm. It appears that for Mills, this is not good enough, because Fricker's account focuses on individuals' epistemic behaviors and does not trace those behaviors to an underlying ideology, even if she situates those behaviors within the context of collective social imagination (Fricker 2007, 14). Mills' philosophical intervention is to underscore why such individual failures are outcomes of racial ideologies. Hence, Mills' aforementioned criticism extends beyond Fricker and targets ideal theory in general (e.g. Mills 2017b, 72–90). He stresses that dominant theoretical frameworks in political philosophy fail to address the ethical and political implications of ideologies, e.g., white privilege (Mills 1997, 77). Mills situates his own position in the tradition of non-ideal theory, rooted in Marx's formulations of ideology and class oppression (e.g. in Marx's *The German Ideology)*. For Mills, Marx's idea that 'social class oppression negatively affects social cognition' is key to understanding epistemic domination and oppression (Mills 2017a, 101). To that effect, Mills argues that we can apply the Marxian concept of ideology to 'non-class social groups' such as gender and race. When Mills argues for treating race-based oppression, discrimination and harm through the rubric of ideology, the basic claim informing his theoretical move is that there are *epistemic effects* of the racial privileges we hold or lack in racially divided societies. In other words, racial privilege brings about epistemic privilege. Hence, according to Mills, 'this [racial] domination is also manifest *cognitively*, in belief systems, conceptual frameworks, and normative assumptions' and here the role of ideology is to 'justify, rationalize, legitimize, and/or obfuscate wrongful social domination' (Mills 2017a, 102–4). He further suggests that racial ideologies give birth to epistemo-logical contracts (Mills 1997, 97). And as I highlighted above (in section two), different degrees of

testimonial credibility are distributed to members of different races, on account of epistemological contracts based on racial ideologies. I strongly agree with Mills that bringing in the framework of ideology (such as white supremacy or Turkism) is key to understanding the social-historical context of epistemic oppressions.

Turkism is a racial ideology that resembles white supremacy in its attitude of bestowing credibility excessively and exclusively to members of a specific race, Turks.[17] Turkism is a Social Darwinist ideology, a theoretical model appropriated from Europe by the ethnonationalist elites of the late Ottoman empire (see Hanioğlu 2013, 1995, 32; Mardin 2008, 20). These ethnonationalist elites (Young Turks) had a hostile relationship with the 'great powers' of the century, while desiring to be like them (Hanioğlu 2013, 12). The modification of the ideology of Social Darwinism to fit the Turkish character, and to declare Turkish supremacy through the ideology of Turkism, suggests Turkish elites' *ambiguous relationship* (see Chaterjee 2008, 2) with Western imperialism.

One of the ethically and epistemologically relevant claims of Turkism is that it argues for Turkish superiority against non-Muslim and non-Turkish nations of the empire. This morally troubling epistemic orientation is an outcome of its social Darwinist roots, which can be observed through the common theme of 'struggle for survival' in many of the journals, memoirs, and publications of the Young Turk elite. For example, one of the most influential ideologues of Turkism, Yusuf Akçura, argues that 'every living being lives by destroying other living beings' (Ünder 2008, 430). As Mills suggested, this demonstrates how the desire for racial domination is *rationalized* through the rhetoric of survival of the race/species. Akçura also insisted that it was 'impossible to create a nation by uniting and blending various elements of the [Ottoman] Empire because [...] of enmity among the various nations [in the empire], and especially between the two religions' (as quoted in Hanioğlu 2001, 295). The framework of national and/or racial survival dominates Akçura's social vision––based on which he declares the necessity of enmity against non-Turkish elements of the empire.

In these Turkist narratives, Armenians were continuously represented as a 'threat to the survival of the Turks' on suspicion of their treachery (Astourian 1999). According to Turkism, there are two kinds of enemies to be defeated, internal and external, and these two were always suspected of mutual conspiracy. The Turkist enmity towards Christian minorities of the empire (most notably Armenians and Ottoman Greeks) was related to this suspicion of mutual conspiracy between internal and external 'enemies'. And, in fact, the expectation that local Armenians would side with the Russians (during WWI) was often used as a *rationalizing tactic* to mobilize violence against Armenians (Kévorkian 2011, 239). Hence, in this social Darwinist framework, the concept of enmity is key: on the one hand, it is used to rationalize the domination of the racially different; and on the other hand, it *justifies the violence* against the racially different. On this note, let us remember once again Mills' earlier claim that the role of ideology is to justify, rationalize, legitimize, and/or obfuscate wrongful social domination.

Historian Hans-Lukas Kieser's analysis of Dr. Mehmed Reşid, a Young Turk and a founding CUP member, sheds light on the significant role the social Darwinist mindset played in the implementation of genocide. The following lines give us a clear picture of the relationship between Reşid's ideology and his genocidal actions:

> In this situation, I thought to myself: "Hey, Dr. Reşid! There are two alternatives: Either the Armenians will liquidate the Turks, or the Turks will liquidate them! [...] Faced with the necessity to choose, I did not hesitate for long. My Turkishness triumphed over my identity as a doctor. Before they do away with us, we will get rid of them, I said to myself ... [...] I had seen that the fatherland was about to be lost, therefore, I proceeded eyes closed and without consideration, convinced that I was acting for the welfare of the nation." (As quoted in Kieser 2011, 136-137)

Kieser argues that Dr. Reşid blended together race, class, and religion in his idea of 'the enemy,' as did most Turkists in the 1910s. The pseudo-scientific racism directed at the Christian populations of the

Ottoman Empire, coupled with the identification of the Armenians as traitors, legitimized their death, both for Dr. Reşid and for his subordinates.

In my approach to and understanding of Turkism, apart from Mills, I am also thinking in line with a particular terrain in postcolonial theory, which understands twentieth-century 'Third World' nation-formation in relation to colonial and imperialist domination. Especially following Partha Chaterjee, I perceive the aspiration to Westernization (or modernization) in the context of Turkish nation-building as often ambiguous, because it was at once 'imitative and hostile to the models it imitates' (Chaterjee 2008, 2). I refer to this ambiguous condition as 'mimicry in hostility'. These Turkist elites were the dominant subjects of a great empire (now in decline), and, in *competitive hostility toward and in mimicry of the Western imperialist powers*, were willing to do whatever was necessary to be as 'powerful' and 'dominant,' while holding on to a strictly 'Turkish' character. What is significant for our purposes is to understand that the logic of Turkism, which maintains an ambiguous relationship with 'the West' (and whatever is representative of it, e.g., Christians and Christianity), continues to be voiced in contemporary Turkey. This is a forceful discourse that rationalizes violence particularly against non-Muslim minorities, with Armenians holding a special place due to the history of denialism. The Turkist mindset is carried over through the education system, most notably through history textbooks (see Dixon 2010), as 'Turkish' students learn from a very young age to rationalize violence, because it is taught to them that this is necessary for national survival. Hence, Turkism has been central to the collective social imagination in Turkey because it has been upheld by the institutions of the Republic.

IV. Genocide Denialism of the 'Turkish' Individual

Drawing on the aforementioned institutional and ideological narratives, my aim here is to show how these narratives shape the socially privileged individual's epistemic reservoir, causing what Medina refers to as epistemic vices and active ignorance. I argue that it is on the basis of this epistemic make-up that the 'Turkish' individual becomes a candidate for genocide denialism. To put it differently, I am interested in exploring the active ignorance and epistemic vices 'Turkish' individuals possess because they are related to the epistemic injustices Armenians suffer in Turkey.

My analysis of the individual perpetrators of epistemic injustice (genocide deniers) is inspired by Medina's argument against Fricker that 'credibility excess' (being granted undeserved credibility as a knower) should also be included in the discussion of testimonial injustice, alongside credibility deficit (Medina 2013, 58–70). Medina is able to develop this point because he sees a connection between credibility excess, social privilege and epistemic vices. His discussion suggests that individual perpetrators of epistemic harm often possess epistemic vices, that is, psychological and cognitive obstacles that hinder them from acquiring and incorporating alternative epistemic inputs and frameworks to the ones they stubbornly cling to. Medina further stresses that the formation of epistemic vices can be tied to receiving excessive credibility as a knower, and that such a 'psychological obstacle to knowledge can be found in *privilege*' (Medina 2013, 56, emphasis in the original). On this account, social privilege can impact the hearer's epistemic capacities––when the hearer and speaker have an asymmetrical position in terms of privilege (e.g. Armenians and Turks in the context of Turkey). Therefore, according to Medina, social privilege can be one of the root causes of epistemic obstacles, because 'privileged subjects often ignore the most violent and hard-to-swallow aspects of social confrontation' (Medina 2013, 33). Privileged individuals are able to ignore social justice issues, as they often have the advantage of not being epistemically challenged (due to credibility excess).

The next step in Medina's argument is to show the negative impacts of undeserved (excessive) credibility as they manifest themselves in three distinct epistemic vices, which are likely to belong to members of socially privileged groups: epistemic laziness, epistemic arrogance, and closed-mindedness. Epistemic vices are characterized as internal attitudes of resistance to hearing an issue differently. The impoverished epistemic capacities of the hearer, on account of her epistemic

vices, prevent the hearer from giving credit to the knower, therefore resulting in testimonial injustice. This is the sense in which testimonial injustice is intrinsically connected with epistemic vices (Medina 2013, 30–35, 56–57).

What Medina identifies as the epistemic deficiencies of privileged subjects on issues relating to social confrontation or social justice can be read together with sociologist Barış Ünlü's depiction of 'Turkish privilege'. According to Ünlü, in Turkey, there is a pervasive 'inability to see, hear, and feel certain things', which is intimately linked with 'Turkish privilege,' and tied to what he calls the 'Turkishness contract' (Ünlü 2018, 16–17).[18] He states that 'modes of Turkishness are experienced by most Turks almost automatically' and that these modes involve 'particular ways and forms of seeing, hearing, perceiving and knowing things' (2018, 13). Developing his framework through an engagement with Whiteness Studies, Ünlü is suggesting that Turkish privilege limits 'Turkish' peoples' social vision and that this limitation is also epistemically charged. Ünlü doesn't specifically focus on the role of Turkism and Turkish supremacy in his analysis of Turkish privilege; however, I am of the opinion that Turkish supremacy is an indispensable and constitutive element of Turkish privilege. Furthermore, as I suggested earlier, Turkism is a racial ideology that resembles white supremacy in its attitude of bestowing credibility excessively to 'Turks'. Tying this discussion back to Medina's work, one could argue that there is excessive testimonial credibility accorded to 'Turks' because they are the dominant and privileged members of the society in Turkey, making them prone to developing epistemic vices, as I will elaborate in what follows.

As I stated earlier, Medina lists three epistemic attitudes that can result from excessive credibility and social privilege: arrogance, laziness, and closed-mindedness (these are called epistemic vices).[19] Epistemic arrogance is related to social privilege in the sense that it is characterized by an inability to acknowledge one's epistemic mistakes and limitations (Medina 2013, 31). While epistemic arrogance is an attitude of resistance to admitting one's own limits as a knower due to a privileged position in society (and the credibility excess privilege is likely to bring along), epistemic laziness is a resistance to knowing more, again due to privilege. Medina frames the latter as an 'ignorance out of luxury' caused by 'the privilege of not needing to know,' which results in 'a lack of curiosity' about those issues that would threaten the integrity of the socially privileged subject (Medina 2013, 33). Closed-mindedness is also related to ignorance, but this ignorance, in contrast, arises 'out of necessity'. He writes:

> The cognitive predicament of the privileged involves, in some cases, […] a needing not to know that creates blind spots of a different kind: not just areas of epistemic neglect, but areas of an intense but negative cognitive attention, areas of epistemic hiding–experiences, perspectives, or aspects of social life that require an enormous effort to be hidden and ignored. Ignorance in these cases functions as a defense mechanism that is used to preserve privilege. (Medina 2013, 34)

Medina concurs that in the case of genocide denial – and here he is thinking about the denial of the Armenian Genocide – it is specifically the above description of closed-mindedness that is at stake (35). Although I agree that closed-mindedness is a very powerful vice that is effective in genocide denialism, my observation is that epistemic laziness and closed-mindedness function together in the formation of the 'Turkish' resistance to hear the testimonies of Armenians.

The 'Turkish' individual who is a candidate for denialism is prone to being epistemically lazy because she has the luxury of being ignorant, as she has the social privilege of not needing to know. What needs to be highlighted here is that this laziness (not needing to know) as well as closed-mindedness, although they operate on the individual level, are conditioned by the social-political context I underscored earlier. The Turkish state (which is grounded in Turkism) needs to instill epistemic laziness and closed-mindedness in 'Turkish' citizens (through educational institutions) because it 'understands' denialism as politically favorable compared to genocide recognition, as the latter would mean making amends. Particularly because of the aforementioned ideological and institutional reasons, and also to avoid reparations for the confiscation of Armenian wealth and property, the Turkish state actively denies the fact of genocide. Recognition would also entail a loss

of privileges for the 'Turkish' population who took over Armenian wealth and land. On a psychological level, the recognition of one's grandparents as genocidal criminals is not a position 'Turkish' individuals would be willing to assume.[20] Hence, epistemic laziness (the luxury of not knowing) and closed-minded (closing oneself to alternative narratives) is the perfect attitude for 'Turkish' individuals, making them prone to denialism.

This discussion suggests that the 'Turkish' subject is closed-minded in the sense that she cannot cognitively allow the incorporation of other perspectives regarding the 'Armenian Question,' because allowing them would threaten the integrity of her Turkish privilege. In addition, she is epistemically lazy in the sense of lacking the curiosity to know more about what happened to Ottoman Armenians. Both epistemic vices make the 'Turkish' subject prone to not 'hearing' the testimonies of the survivor group because it would threaten her privileged status as a citizen. It is important to underline once again that the Turkish state is directly impacting the development of epistemic vices. The education system especially is built to make sure that individuals develop closed-minded and epistemically lazy attitudes so that they will not challenge the official narrative regarding the 'Armenian Question'. "My insistence on stressing" the state's power over educational means does not imply that 'Turkish' individuals are not ethically responsible for undoing their epistemic vices, even if they lack the incentive to do so as a result of the psychological, material and credibility benefits bestowed upon them due to Turkish privilege.

A key notion that comes out of Medina's analysis of epistemic vices is active ignorance. Active ignorance is the cognitive end result of possessing epistemic vices. This is 'an ignorance that occurs with the active participation of the subject and with a battery of defense mechanisms, an ignorance that is not easy to undo and correct' (Medina 2013, 39). The term *active ignorance* emphasizes that the ignorance in question is not merely a matter of the absence of true belief or presence of false beliefs, but rather a certain 'active' resistance to incorporating true belief and rejecting false belief (Medina 2013, 57). For example, when I say, 'Turks have an active ignorance regarding the Armenian Genocide,' I mean that there is a cognitive and affective internal resistance that hinders 'Turks' (not all, of course) from entertaining the idea that there may in fact have been be a collective and systematic violence against Ottoman Armenians during WWI. Hence, active ignorance appears to be the condition of the 'Turkish' genocide denier: she actively resists hearing another perspective on the 'Armenian Question' and cannot incorporate true belief regarding this issue and, furthermore, cannot let go of her false belief due to her internalized and habitual epistemic attitudes (closed-mindedness and epistemic laziness). Hence, many 'Turkish' individuals are cognitively wired to defend the truth regime of the Turkish state (shaped by the ideology of Turkism) against 'threatening' narratives such as the recognition of the Armenian genocide.

To take a closer look at the various epistemic attitudes in Turkey, I now turn to a *Washington Post* article by novelist Elif Shafak, who describes four different epistemic attitudes on the 'Armenian Question':

> [1] There is still a powerful segment of Turkish society that completely rejects the charge that Armenians were purposely exterminated. Some even go so far as to claim that it was Armenians who killed Turks, and so there is nothing to apologize for […] [2] The prevailing attitude of ordinary people toward the "Armenian question" is not one of conscious denial; rather it is collective ignorance. These Turks feel little need to question the past as long as it does not affect their daily lives. [3] There is a third attitude, prevalent among Turkish youth: Whatever happened, it was a long time ago, and we should concentrate on the future rather than the past. "Why am I being held responsible for a crime my grandfather committed – that is, if he ever did it?" they ask. […] [4] Finally, there is a fourth attitude: The past is not a bygone era that we can discard but a legacy that needs to be recognized, explored and openly discussed before Turkey can move forward. (Shafak 2005)

Shafak's description succinctly represents four epistemic attitudes prevalent in the 'Turkish' society, although it is still problematically partial because there is no connection drawn between 'collective ignorance'[21] and official Turkish denialism. The Turkish state is able to eagerly maintain its denialist opposition because there is no public demand for recognition. This is because the 'Turkish' population, to a large extent, accepts the official narrative, is closed-minded to alternative perspectives, and

is epistemically lazy to learn more when confronted with challenging narratives. Moreover, Shafak's citation of the common response of the Turkish youth, 'Why am I being held responsible for a crime my grandfather committed – that is, if he ever did it?' suggests a particular type of Turkish denialism on the part of the Turkish youth. It is a denialism conditioned by epistemic laziness, illustrated by the words 'if he ever did,' which is indicative of a *not caring to know* what happened. This line of reasoning dismisses the ethical premise of genocide recognition. In fact, if this form of reasoning were ever valid, no country could be held accountable for its past crimes against humanity. Overall, I suspect that there is a strong connection between the first three epistemic attitudes. The first epistemic attitude (active denialism and lying) is necessary for maintaining collective ignorance and epistemic laziness (the second and third epistemic attitudes) in the society. When the majority of the population mainly possess the first three epistemic attitudes, the demand for recognition (the fourth epistemic attitude) will inevitably remain marginal.

As illustrated above, the first three epistemic attitudes, which are resistant to hearing Armenian testimonies, should be understood in connection with the cultivation and operation of epistemic vices. Therefore, when a 'Turkish' person claims wholeheartedly, as they often do, that 'Turks did not commit genocide against the Armenians,' this statement should not *only* be analyzed in terms of its epistemic status, namely, as a failure to know the truth, or as a result of the collective ignorance sanctioned by the Turkish state. This epistemic failure is conditioned by Turkish privilege, which requires developing internal attitudes of resistance, such as epistemic laziness and closed-mindedness, making individuals actively ignorant about the Armenian genocide. Internal resistances to knowing otherwise (epistemic vices) and external resistances (e.g., the limits of collective social imagination, censorship and criminalization) prevent 'Turkish' society from taking steps towards the recognition of the Armenian genocide. These reasons can also account for the slow pace of genocide recognition among 'Turkish' individuals.[22]

V. Conclusion

This article concludes that a systematic and pervasive case of genocide denialism creates a social and political context which necessarily partakes in a *regime* of epistemic injustice. I argued that a comprehensive understanding of such an epistemically unjust regime requires tracing its three pillars: individual, institutional and ideological roots. As I discussed the ethical and epistemological implications of genocide denialism in Turkey, I employed an interdisciplinary methodology, utilizing questions, concerns and concepts developed by the epistemic injustice scholarship. Considering my argument, it is clear that the responsibility of genocide recognition belongs not only to governments but also to individuals themselves, because unless they actively resist, they become deniers fuelled by an active ignorance.

Notes

1. I prefer to use the term regime to characterize this social-political context steeped in genocide denialism, because it is systematic, pervasive and founded upon the collective 'Turkish' social imagination, which I explore later in the article.
2. Credibility excess refers to the condition of being granted too much (undeserved) credibility as a speaker in testimonial exchanges due one's privileged status.
3. Medina coins the term active ignorance to address a type of ignorance that involves a *resistance* to incorporating true belief and rejecting false belief (Medina 2013, 57).
4. Another key term central to my discussion is epistemic vice, as discussed by Medina: 'a set of corrupted attitudes and dispositions that get in the way of knowledge' (Medina 2013, 30).
5. Throughout the article, I use scare quotes around 'Turkish' intentionally to highlight Turkishness as a mode of existence based on institutional and ideological ideas, attitudes and practices, rather than a self-evident ethnic identity. The main reason behind this preference is Turkey's imperial past. There are many ethnic minorities in Turkey (e.g. Circassians, Bosnians, Arabs, Georgian Muslims, Albanians), groups that were not ethnically Turkish

but became assimilated into the dominant Turkish identity as a result of the intensive Turkification policies of the Republic (see Aktar 2010).

6. The ruling Ottoman elite at the time, the Young Turks, were all members of the same political organization, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP).

7. There were also cases, where women and children were abducted, women raped and taken into Muslim homes and children placed in orphanages. The Young Turk government 'openly encouraged Ottoman Muslim households' to take in Armenian women and children (Ekmekçioğlu 2016, 34).

8. It is important to note that there is not one single official narrative, but multiple changing narratives across the Republic's history. For a discussion, see Jennifer M. Dixon's study (Dixon 2010).

9. This term is used in Turkey to address, either specifically, the 1915–16 Ottoman deportations of Armenians, or more generally, the history of the 'conflict' between Armenians and Turks, which includes Armenian Diaspora attempts to internationally lobby against Turkey's denialist politics.

10. Apart from the political efforts of the diaspora, Armenian citizens of Turkey have also developed ways to resist epistemically (see Medina 2013, 48–9) to the denial executed by the Turkish Republic (see Bilal 2019; Cheterian 2015, 15).

11. In the article, I explore the first three of the reasons listed above.

12. I had to limit myself to the exploration of testimonial injustice Armenians endure and refrain from a discussion of hermeneutical injustice, although I am aware that these two forms of epistemic injustice are deeply connected in the context of genocide denialism. In the literature, hermeneutical injustice is characterized as a wrong done due to the lack of epistemic resources necessary to make sense of a particular issue or experience (Fricker 2007, 149; Medina 2013, 90).

13. For a discussion of the relation between epistemic and non-epistemic harms, see Congdon (2017); Medina (2013, 183–5).

14. Apart from Dink's murder, there were also other racist hate crimes against Armenians: The suspicious death of the Armenian soldier Sevag Balıkçı on 24 April 2011, and the violent attacks against elderly Armenian women in the district of Samatya (in Istanbul) in 2012. For relevant news reports and articles, see Arango (2013) and Guitard (2015).

15. I would like to thank Melanie Altanian for pointing out this existential implication at the 'Epistemic Injustice in the aftermath of Collective Wrongdoing' workshop.

16. The Young Turk ideology of Turkish ethno-nationalism is also known as Turkism.

17. Throughout the history of the Turkish Republic, the racial category of Turk has changed, and for the majority of the population, lost its biological foundations as a result of the Republic's (assimilationist) Turkification politics. For relevant discussions, see Ünder (2008); Aktar (2010); Astourian (1999).

18. Ünlü's work (Ünlü 2018) is significant in suggesting that the Armenian genocide is constitutive of Turkishness.

19. As Medina notes, 'these vices are not universal and automatic features of the privileged.' His position aims to underscore that 'the social positionality of agents does matter for the development of their epistemic character, and that particularly extreme and damaging forms of epistemic vices […] can be found in privileged classes (Medina 2013, 40).

20. There is an exception to this. In 2008, coupled with the rage against the assassination of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, an 'I apologize' campaign was launched in Turkey. More than thirty thousand people gave their signatures to the campaign. The campaign message read: 'My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.' For the campaign website, see: www.ozurdiliyoruz.info. For a critical discussion of this campaign, see Erbal (2012).

21. Shafak appears to be referring to the absence of knowledge regarding the collective violence committed against Armenians in the past.

22. In 1992, Taner Akçam published the first critical book on the Armenian genocide in Turkey (i.e., one that rejects the official narrative). The publication of this book, among others released during the 1990s, slowly instigated the questioning of the Turkish official narrative in small circles. A leading journalist, Hasan Cemal, narrates his personal transformation after reading Akçam's books (Cemal 2012).

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