DENIALISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES: THE EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE OF NATIONAL NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT: An analysis of how national narratives are inevitably forms of epistemic injustice, depriving individuals of epistemic and moral agency. Denying access to knowledge about the past is a tool of all autocratic regimes, commonly used for the purpose of retaining power and exerting dominance over individuals or groups subordinate to the ruling elite. Yet such narratives and the falsifications used to buttress them, are not the exclusive instruments of autocracies but can be found to pervade the national narratives of what we often nominally label as democracies. The denial of crimes against humanity and genocide are the most egregious examples of the harms perpetrated against victims and survivors. Miranda Fricker's writings on epistemic injustice are employed in the analysis. Turkish and Azerbaijani genocide denial of the Armenian Genocide are used to illustrate how epistemic injustice lies at the heart of denialism.

Keywords: epistemic injustice, Miranda Fricker, denialism, genocide, Melanie Altanian, national narratives.

Introduction

When history is weaponized by those determined to hold on to power, serious harms and deprivations of minority rights occur, often taking the form of violence, and in extreme cases, genocide. Histories of discrimination and oppression are willfully distorted by perpetrators to maintain their positions of power. Perpetrators and their successors will erase all markers of an alternative national narrative as they construct their national myths. This was the case with Türkiye's century-long denial of the Armenian Genocide, Azerbaijan's pseudo-history of the Caucasus leading to the genocide of the Armenians of Artsakh, and the Serbian denial of the Bosnian Genocide.[1] The United States was not immune to such national mythmaking, evidenced in the Civil War Lost Cause narrative as it spread into mainstream media and came to dominate how history was taught in most of the nation's South.[2] The phenomenon I am describing is denialism. While not providing a comprehensive account of the harms of denialism, I will argue that such harms extend beyond the physical and psychological harms perpetrated against victim groups. My focus is denialism as it primarily pertains to crimes against humanity, atrocity crimes, and genocide. In diagnosing these harms, I will turn to the work of social epistemologists such as Miranda Fricker and Melanie Altanian who provide invaluable tools for investigating how epistemic injustice contributes to the harms of denialism. Many other contemporary epistemologists and social thinkers have contributed to the deepening our understanding of epistemic injustice and expanding its application to a broader range of social problems. Combating denialism is a complex endeavor, one that can only begin when the phenomenon is more fully understood.[3]

[1] I have adopted the historic name "Artsakh" for the region in the South Caucasus where Armenians have lived for 3,000 years. Under the rule of the Czarist Russian Empire, this region became known as Nagorno-Karabakh, a name often used by non-Armenian sources when referring to the Soviet oblast (province) of Nagorno-Karabakh.

[2] See my *Pragmatism Today* article, "Why Controlling the Historical Narrative Matters: A Jamesian Response," (Marsoobian 2020, 93-107) in which I argued that the distortions of national narratives, both in the United States and internationally, engender harms to subaltern groups. Using William James' dedication oration for a Civil War memorial to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Regiment of the Massachusetts Infantry, I traced how the history of U.S. slavery was whitewashed into a benign chapter in American history, known as the Lost Cause. The Southern states secession from the Union was sacralized, and in many ways, permeated the broader national narrative of the United States. This narrative served to perpetuate many of the harms that impacted African Americans for the next hundred years, the chief of which was racial discrimination and violence under Jim Crow.

[3] While my essay is limited to philosophical work, other disciplines have engaged in combating denialism. Such work is too numerous to mention, but examples can be found in history, social psychology, and the law. With regard to genocide denial, historians have turned to archives and perpetrator evidence to debunk denialism, while social psychologists have explored the testimonies of victims and perpetrators. Law has long grappled with the conflicting issues of hate speech, free expression, and legal sanctions against genocide denial. One example from social psychology is: Bilali, Rezarta, Yeshim Iqbal, and Samuel Freel, 'Understanding and Counteracting Genocide Denial', in Leonard S. Newman (ed.), *Confronting Humanity at its Worst: Social Psychological Perspectives on Genocide* (New York, 2019; online edn, Oxford Academic, 21 Nov. 2019), https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1093/oso/9780190685942.003.0011, accessed 26 Oct. 2024. An important collection of essays from the legal perspective is: *Denialism and Human Rights*, edited by Ro-

Miranda Fricker's 2007 book, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing,* significantly reoriented analytical epistemology in recent years. New and important topics of epistemological investigation have opened, focusing on the harms inflicted against subaltern groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, and Native peoples. Critical race theorists, feminist epistemologists, and political philosophers have successfully explored the sources of injustices that have silenced the voices of many whose contributions to knowledge remained invisible for far too long. The philosopher Ben Almassi provides a useful taxonomy of the work that has emerged in the years since Fricker's work. My focus in this essay is upon the first two Almassi's categories, which he identifies as "phenomena of epistemic injustice and the nature of wrongdoings involved" and the "attendant consequences and repercussions of the wrongdoings of epistemic injustice." He has also identified "individual and structural changes to prevent or mitigate" epistemic injustice.[4] The fourth category, "restorative" or "restitutive measures," I addressed in an earlier article I published on reparations.[5]

I will not attempt to widen the focus to all such forms of silencing but will primarily focus on the harms of denialism, specifically on the denial of crimes against humanity and genocide in their relationship to the creation of national narratives. While my approach expands upon Fricker's work in one particular direction, I will not take up possible shortcomings in the initial theoretical framework she laid out. Shannon Sullivan has provided a critical modification of Fricker's approach to epistemology by employing John Dewey's transactional pragmatist epistemology as a more useful substitute for analytic philosophy's commitment to representational models, models that were successfully critiqued by Richard Rorty in the 1970s and 80s.[6]

Denialism's Consequences: Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide

Part of my motivation to discuss epistemic injustice comes out of a need to understand the conditions that foster the high levels of violence we have been experiencing around the globe in the post-Cold War period. The roots of many of these conflicts can be found decades earlier, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period which saw the rise in the nation state and the decline of multiethnic empires. Mass violence, such as genocide, does not spring up overnight. How the past is remembered, and in many cases manipulated, plays an oversized role in the course and nature of the violence. Historical wrongs are erased and minimized; perpetrators are rehabilitated and, in many cases, glorified. Societal structures, such as educational systems, media, and law, are used to construct new narratives and suppress alternative narratives and testimonies. It is here that Fricker's conceptual framework for epistemic injustice is most helpful. The case studies I use to illustrate my claims are taken from the Turkish and Azerbaijani state denial of the genocides perpetrated against the Armenian peoples in the early twentieth century and most recently in the first quarter of the twenty-first century.[7] Parallel illustrations could be drawn to the con-

land Moerland, Hans Nelen, Jan Willems. Cambridge University Press, (2016). See especially the chapters by Sévane Garibian and Rob Kahn.

[4] Almassi writes: "we consider this burgeoning literature on epistemic injustice, the greatest amount of attention has been given to the following areas, in roughly descending order of emphasis:

1. phenomena of epistemic injustice and the nature of wrongdoings involved;
2. attendant consequences and repercussions of #1;
3. individual and structural changes to prevent or mitigate #1;
4. restorative, restitutive, or retributive responses to #1."

"Epistemic Injustice and its Amelioration: Toward Restorative Epistemic Justice," *Social Philosophy Today* 34 (2018): 95.

[5] "The Social Self and Social Death: Rethinking Reparations for Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity," *Pragmatism Today*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Winter 2020).

[6] Shannon Sullivan, "On the Harms of Epistemic Injustice: Pragmatism and Transactional Epistemology," in the *Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, Routledge, 2017.

[7] There are many objective (non-Azerbaijani) sources that describe the genocide against the Armenians of Artsakh that began in 2020 during the Second Karabakh War and culminated in the ethnic cleansing of 150,000 Armenians from their historic

flicts in the Balkans, the Middle East, and most recently in Ukraine.

Fricker and Epistemic Injustice

Let me briefly layout the two central components of epistemic injustice as they were formulated by Fricker back in 2007. The first is "testimonial injustice." This occurs when the speaker's credibility is questioned while she is making a claim to knowledge (i.e., "testifying"). The withholding of credibility is due to a prejudice based on the "negative" identity of the speaker, often this is an unconscious prejudice on the part of the hearer. Such prejudices persistently and systematically cause the hearer to withhold credibility or set an unattainably high standard to warrant belief in the speaker's testimony. In Deweyan terms, the transaction between speaker and hearer does little to further inquiry. At a more sophisticated level in debates about historical events, the ethnic identity of both witnesses and the scholars who employ such testimony, is used to question the objectivity of the account, often leading to its dismissal as prejudiced and inherently nationalistic. This was the case when Armenian historians first began publishing about the Armenian Genocide. In the eyes of some academics, this withdrawal of credibility did not change until a few – a very few -- Turkish historians themselves began to publish on the genocide, some of whom were brave enough to publish in Turkey.[8]

The second component of epistemic injustice is "hermeneutical injustice." This injustice relates to our incapacity to interpret aspects of our social experience. In Fricker's words: "[This is] the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collectively shared understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (Fricker 2007, 155). Certain members of a society are thus deprived of any role in the social process of meaning-making in the world (Fricker 2013, 49).[9] This is where the educational system and the pressures of conforming to the social norms of the hegemonic community, whether based on gender, ethnicity or religion, play an oversized role. The hermeneutical resources of the community lack the conceptual tools to make sense of an important aspect of one's experience. All members of the greater community, whether in the subaltern or hegemonic group, are conceptually impoverished. Hermeneutical injustice thus plays a key role in the mythmaking of national narratives that are used to oppress minorities and keep the dominant elites in power. I will illustrate this further toward the end of my essay.

To illustrate hermeneutical injustice, Fricker uses the concepts of "sexual harassment" and "marital rape." Sexual harassment training, which many of us in academia undergo on a regular basis, is a hermeneutical resource to help us identify the harm of sexual harassment and not dismiss such behavior as merely harmless flirting (Fricker 2007, 153). Nonconsensual sexual intercourse with a marital partner was a behavior not often questioned by women because the concept had no traction in family and religious traditions, and certainly was not prohibited by law – and still isn't in many parts of the world. Change in this regard has been slow.

Early Feminist Pragmatists and Epistemic Injustice

Fricker's framework and the examples she draws from women's experiences have played an important role in

homeland in September 2023. A document with hyperlinks to such sources can be found on the International Association of Genocide Scholars website under IAGS Resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh, September 2024: https://genocidescholars.org/publications/resolutions/.

[8] Taner Akçam, a historian currently at UCLA, has a long list of articles and books that have established the now accepted judgment that the Ottoman Turkish government carried out a pre-planned and systemic extermination of its Ottoman Armenian citizens. He suffered personal and professional threats as a result.

[9] Miranda Fricker, "How is Hermeneutical Injustice Related to 'White Ignorance'? Reply to José Medina's 'Hermeneutical Injustice and Polyphonic Contextualism: Social Silences and Shared Hermeneutical Responsibilities.'" *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collection*, 2 (8) 2013: 49-53.

the contemporary development of feminist philosophy, especially in the analytic tradition. We should note that social reformers during the progressive era in the U.S., especially those who are now recognized as pragmatists, whether they used the label or not, were fully aware of the asymmetric power relationships that contributed to epistemic injustice. One such reformer, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), is now widely accepted as an important feminist philosopher and social reformer whose work complements the early pragmatists. Katrin Wille, in a recent article in a symposium on "Democracy as a Form of Life," makes a persuasive argument for the importance of Gilman's descriptive identification and analysis of what Wille calls the cognitive function of the sentiment of "unease."[10] Wille argues for conceptualizing "unease" as a powerful sentiment for understanding the experience of asymmetrical power relationships between dominant and subaltern groups, such as happens to women and racial minorities. For some, this unease may result in a loss of self-confidence, a questioning of one's worth. As Fricker writes: "[This] dissonance between received understanding and your own intimated sense of a given experience, […] tends to knock your faith in your own ability to make sense of the world, or at least a relevant region of the world" (Fricker 2007, 163). Yet for some like Gilman, who were able to conceptualize the unease, this powerful sentiment motivated them to question the hermeneutical resources of their time and place. Gilman, like her fellow reformer Jane Addams, was able to take a global perspective regarding the injustices generated by power asymmetries. She saw how the concept of state sovereignty contributed to the harm experienced by subaltern groups, especially ethnic and racial minorities.[11] She was a strong advocate for the establishment of international law and global governance well before the World Wars brought the world community to see the value of international humanitarian and human rights law, let alone global organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations. She and Jane Addams were the forces behind the establishment of the Women's Peace Party in January 1915 that arose in response to the First World War. More than ten years earlier, she wrote the lead article in the 1904 inaugural issue of a magazine entitled, *Armenia,* a magazine on which she served as honorary editor. In this article, titled "International Duties," she wrote:

> A growing perception of inter-personal relation has been followed by the legal enforcement of a certain standard of conduct on all citizens for the common good; and that is what is beginning to take place in our growing perception of international relations. Nations can be "bound over to keep the peace" as well as individuals; and will be presently, when we are stronger in our grip on this new social concept of a well-ordered world. (Gilman 1904, 11)[12]

The magazine was dedicated to bringing issues related to the on-going persecutions and massacres of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire to the attention of the American public. She and other social reformers such as Julia Ward Howe, Lucia Ames Mead, and William Lloyd Garrison, contributed articles highlighting the cultural contributions of Armenians to world civilization and the steps needed to prevent the loss of such world-historical

[10] Katrin Wille, "Unease as a Feminist-Pragmatist Concept," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy,* XII-2, 2020.

[11] I full statement of her case against state sovereignty is captured in the same essay: "Up to this age the largest social concept common to us was that of the nation, with some faint sense of outlying responsibilities in a common racial stock, or a common faith. Each "sovereign state" was held to be sole arbiter of the destinies of its people, and no other state had any right to interfere. Whatever oppression, injustice, cruelty went on inside the borders of a given country, might call for individual disapprobation among citizen, but not for national recognizance. The nation could only act when another nation offended it which is like a period of inter-personal justice when each resented a man's assault on himself, but allowed him to maim, slay and torture his own family, or to live in filth and indecency, unobstructed. A growing perception of inter-personal relation has been followed by the legal enforcement of a certain standard of conduct on all citizens for the common good; and that is what is beginning to take place in our growing perception of international relation. Nations can be "bound over to keep the peace" as well as individuals; and will be presently, when we are stronger in our grip on this new social concept of a well-ordered world" (Gilman 11).

[12] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "International Duties," *Armenia,* no. 1, 1904.

knowledge.[13] Gilman established the conceptual foundations of humanitarianism and the human rights movement by thinking globally.

The Epistemic Injustice of Turkish Denial of the Armenian Genocide

Returning now to the issue of hermeneutical injustice, I would like to shift the focus slightly and take up where Gilman left off. This relates to an experience with students and academics I commonly encountered during many years of work within and outside of Türkiye. These were individuals who had been brought up in that nation's centrally controlled national education system. An often-heard refrain was, "I had never heard of the Armenian Genocide or anything that would come close to resembling a genocide of Armenians" or simply, "Why had I not heard of this?" This ignorance is the result of impoverish hermeneutical resources, resources centered around the concept of genocide. Often, Turkish students do not learn about the darker aspects of their nation's history until pursuing higher education abroad or do so surreptitiously in some select university course that operated under the radar. What students do learn about genocide is through a highly filtered treatment of the Nazi Holocaust. This treatment is filtered through the lens of their country's "noble effort" to rescue and protect Jews fleeing Nazism. While some of these rescue efforts can be documented, a darker picture is suppressed of the republic's collaboration with the Nazi regime. This collaboration is symbolically captured in the repatriation by Hitler of the Talaat Pasha's remains from Berlin to Istanbul for a state funeral in 1943.[14] Talaat, the chief architect of the Armenian Genocide, was convicted and sentenced to death in a Turkish military tribunal in 1919 for his crimes against the Armenians but had fled to Berlin and was assassinated by an Armenian Genocide survivor. Mustafa Kemal, after his successful war against Greece and the allies and his abrogation of the Treaty of Sevres, began the process of rehabilitating the genocide perpetrators of the Committee of Union and Progress (the Young Turks). According to the historian Hans-Lukas Kieser[15], Talaat Pasha's reburial symbolized his being "fully rehabilitated and installed as an outstanding figure in public Turkish history" (Kieser 2018, 420). In the national curriculum, the genocide perpetrator is now made an innocent victim of an Armenian terrorist. Armenian terrorism, backed by Russian Czarist power, was used at the time of the genocide to justify the deportation of the Armenian civilian population away from the "so-called" war zone. The false claim of military necessity was part of the denialist strategy at the time of the genocide in 1915. Approximately one and a half million Armenians died through massacres, executions, and starvation as a result. This is the same claim of terrorism that fifty years later became connected to the Armenian terrorist campaign that targeted Turkish diplomats for assassination in the 1970s and is now used to demonize most Armenians in the diaspora. The descendants of the genocide survivors in the diaspora are the "bad Armenians," while the small number of Armenians who still currently live in the country as Turkish citizens are the "good Armenians." It is these same "good Armenians" whose voices are silenced when they attempt to publicly commemorate the Armenian Genocide every April 24th. Testimonial injustice is at play here, but it is not just the Armenians of Türkiye who experience this harm. For the average Turkish citizen also experiences this harm. For a Turk who might otherwise be sympathetic to fellow human beings commemorating the loss of their ancestors, the concept of genocide is unavailable. An impoverished hermeneutical resource op-

[13] In a passing reference in this same article, she draws an analogy between the mistreatment of subject minorities and Native Americans. She writes, "Our Indian policy, for instance, would profit much if we committed ourselves to a high standard of international agreement on the treatment of subject races" (Gilman 12).

[14] See Stefan Ihrig's important contribution in this regard, *Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler*, Harvard University Press, 2016.

[15] Kieser, Hans-Lukas *(2018). Talaat Pasha: Father of Modern Turkey, Architect of Genocide.* Princeton University Press.

erates that prevents them from properly understanding the experience of their fellow Turkish Armenian citizens. Again and again, reinforced in the news media, in the educational curriculum, in fictionalized television and film entertainment, and in pronouncements from the government and politicians, genocide is equated with the Holocaust. Simply put, the nationalist narrative proclaims that there were no death camps, no gas chambers, no Auschwitz in Türkiye, so there was no genocide. Ottoman Turkey was fighting for survival against foreign invaders and a civil war was taking place in their midst with the Armenians, Assyrians, and ultimately, the Pontic Greeks as the chief antagonists. As the denialist say, there were deaths on both sides, Muslims and Christians alike.

As an aside, the great irony here is that in 1950 Türkiye was among the first twenty countries to ratify the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. These twenty ratifications brought the Convention into force in January 1951, 37 years before U.S. ratification. Yet most Turkish citizens do not understand the scope of the law and how it extends far beyond the biological destruction of individuals, nor do they understand that the chief architect of the concept of genocide, Raphael Lemkin, began developing the concept well before the Holocaust in response to the Armenian Genocide and the 1921 Berlin trial of the assassin of Talaat Pasha. I have written on these issues before but only raise them here to highlight what is left out when national narratives come to dominate the educational process in a nation state.[16] Such historical erasures should be a warning, not just for authoritarian states such as Türkiye, but even for ostensible democratic states such as the United States. As I warned in my 2022 *Pragmatism Today* article referenced earlier, there is a backlash against opening the U.S. history curriculum to "voices who have been silenced, especially African Americans and Native Americans." The "bête noire" of this rightwing attack has been the 1619 Project and what certain political leaders label "woke ideology." This backlash has only accelerated since I wrote those words in 2022.

The Harm of Epistemic Oppression

Returning now to Fricker, we need to sum up how the two components of epistemic injustice work together. Testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, operate together to contribute to epistemic oppression and the inequality it entails. I quote Fricker's summary:

> [T]he primary harm of hermeneutical injustice consists in a *situated hermeneutical inequality*: the concrete situation is such that the subject is rendered unable to make communicatively intelligible something which it is particularly in his or her interests to be able to render intelligible. This reveals another deep connection with the wrong of testimonial injustice. The primary harm of . . . testimonial injustice concerns exclusion from the pooling of knowledge owing to *identity prejudice on the part of the hearer*; the primary harm of . . . hermeneutical injustice concerns exclusion from the pooling of knowledge owing to *structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource.* The first prejudicial exclusion is made in relation to the speaker, the second in relation to what they are trying to say and/or how they are saying it. The wrongs involved in the two sorts of epistemic injustice, then, have a common epistemic significance running through them—prejudicial exclusion from participation in the spread of knowledge. (Fricker 2007, 162, emphasis added)

While I have some reservations with her chosen non-transactional phrase, "the pooling of knowledge," her point is well-taken. Much good philosophical work continues to evolve in response to Fricker's work on epistemic injustice. I chose to illustrate my point with examples taken from the denialism that is central to the genocidal processes during and in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide, but as a scholar who works in the field of genocide studies more broadly, I could easily illustrate similar epistemic oppression as evidenced

[16] See: "Breaking the Silence: Digital Memorialization and Cultural Reparations in the Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide," in Mass Violence and Memory in the Digital Age: Memorialization Unmoored, Eve Monique Zucker & David J. Simon, eds. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

in treatment of indigenous peoples in North America. While many are aware of massacres such as Wounded Knee, probably less so the 1637 Pequot genocide in my home state of Connecticut, few, until recently, were aware of the epistemic oppression of the U.S. and Canadian boarding school system that operated for Native children for over a century. Under the guise of "civilizing the savage," the rich heritage of indigenous knowledge was suppressed, and many native languages were lost. The loss of language is a form of hermeneutical injustice that deprives future generations of Native Americans the ability to understand and pass on the knowledge of their ancestors. Such knowledge may well have changed the trajectory of the climate crisis we are now facing.[17]

The Epistemic Harms of Turkish and Azerbaijani Denialism

In groundbreaking work by Turkish-American philosopher Imge Oranlı and Armenian-German philosopher Melanie Altanian, Fricker's framework of epistemic injustice has been applied to the case of the Armenian Genocide. I cannot adequately summarize all their insights here that first appeared in a special issue of journal *Social Epistemology* on "Epistemic Injustice and Collective Wrongdoing."[18] Altanian has further developed her analysis in her 2024 book, *The Epistemic Injustice of Genocide Denialism* (2024).[19] I briefly take up her insights at the conclusion of my essay.

As a number of highly credible historians have argued in recent years, the current Turkish state has much invested in keeping alive the national narrative first articulated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the early days of the Turkish Republic. Atatürk laid out the story of the founding of the Turkish Republic in his 1927 speech, the Nutuk.[20] The narrative soon became sacralized. Deviations from the strict storyline were quickly suppressed. Just one example: The Nazis banned Austrian-Bohemian writer Franz Werfel's story of Armenian Genocide resistance as portrayed in his historical 1933 best-selling novel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* (*Die vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh*). The popularity of this work was a danger to the Turkish Republic's narrative of its founding that required the erasure of the genocide of its Armenian citizens. The fact that this book could reach its own citizenry, required action to make this hermeneutical resource unavailable. Copies were suppressed and translations forbidden.[21] This painful episode culminated with the coercion of Istanbul Armenians into staging burnings of Werfel's book in the courtyard of the St. Pangalti Armenian Church. In the words of Ayda Erbal and Talin Suciyan, "As a last act of symbolic perversion forced upon them, [Turkish Armenians] would not only denounce the author, but also denounce the book's content, hence denouncing themselves and denying their own history."[22] This act of hermeneutical injustice was globalized when Turkey pressured the U.S. State Department and Hollywood's MGM studios to shelve the novel's adaptation into

[17] Subsequent to writing these words, U.S. President Biden took a major step forward in formally apologizing for the federal government's role in establishing and operating the Native boarding school system. On October 26, 2024, he apologized for the systemic abuse endured by generations of Indigenous children in boarding schools at the hands of the federal government. He forcefully condemned the crimes that were committed in the system and called for the incorporation of the truth of these crimes into U.S. history. See: https://www.youtube.com/live/9EQpfpdp-JY?feature=shared

[18] Issue 2: Epistemic Injustice and Collective Wrongdoing; Guest Editors: Melanie Altanian and Nadja El Kassar, *Social Epistemology : A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy* Volume 35, 2021.

[19] Melanie Altanian, *The Epistemic Injustice of Genocide Denialism,* Routledge, 2024.

[20] According to Turkish sociologist Fatma Müge Göçek, the speech was "adopted as the official Turkish national narrative and became sacralized by the state". Göçek stated that, because the law criminalizes insulting Atatürk, Turkish historians have been unable to analyze the speech critically. She said: "It is evident that the text commences the birth of the Turkish nation with 1919, removing in the process the demise of the Armenians in 1915 through state violence to the realm of Republican prehistory." *Göçek, Fatma Müge (2011).* "Reading Genocide: Turkish Historiography on 1915". In Suny, Ronald Grigor; Göçek, Fatma Müge; *Naimark, Norman M.* (eds.). *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire.* Oxford University Press. pp. 42–52.

[21] It wasn't until 2007 that the first Turkish translation of the novel was published in the Türkiye. The publisher was subsequently criminally prosecuted.

[22] Ayda Erbal and Talin Suciyan, "One Hundred Years of Abandonment," April 2011 Magazine, *Armenian Weekly*, April 29, 2011. https://armenianweekly.com/2011/04/29/erbal-and-suciyan-one-hundred-years-of-abandonment/ Accessed 10 September 2021.

a major motion picture staring Clark Gable in 1934. Such pressures continue today. Delegitimizing group identity by erasing the history of the group facilitates the reversal of the perpetrator – victim relationship in genocide. A similar erasure has occurred in Türkiye's ally Azerbaijan. The full resources of the oil rich Azerbaijani state have been marshalled for more than three decades in a campaign of denialism. The rhetoric of the Ilham Aliyev regime buttressing their claims that they are the victims of Armenian settler colonialist ambitions in the South Caucasus is used to justify their aggression against the indigenous Armenians of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) – an aggression that culminated in September 2023 in what many legal scholars argue was the genocide of the Armenians of the region. As a price for peace Azerbaijan, backed by Türkiye, now demands that the Republic of Armenia remove all references to the genocide from the preamble to its constitution and remove the image of Mount Ararat from its national coat of arms. As Altanian argues, the ruling regimes in Türkiye and Azerbaijan have much invested in keeping their nationalist narrative alive:

> In the case of Turkey, the maintenance of the social order imposed under Turkism and Turkish nationalism is dependent on long-term genocide denialism. From the perspective of those in power, acknowledging the Armenian genocide would ostensibly (a) jeopardize the legitimacy of the state and its institutions and (b) uncover unjust power imbalances. Genocide denialism misinterprets and conceals genocide survivors' and descendants' experiences to perpetuate domination. However, it does not necessarily prevent them from comprehending their experiences. Marginalized persons often find their own ways to express their suffering and speak out against their oppression. (Altanian 2024, 97)

Resistance against epistemic oppression continues. Despite the Nazi and Turkish attempt to suppress the *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, the novel became a world-wide sensation and the most-read book in the Warsaw Ghetto, and some have argued, helped inspire the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Yet as we all know, the threats against minorities or subaltern groups, did not end with the defeat of National Socialim. The support by Western democratic states of autocratic regimes around the world marked Cold War dynamics for the decades following the end of the war. This was true with Türkiye. Rightwing military dictatorships and ostensibly democratic parliamentary governments adhered to the national myths and continue to deny the Armenian Genocide along with the genocides of the Assyrians and Pontic Greeks.

Protesting epistemic oppression and revising national narratives have had mixed results since the end of the Cold War. While there was a small opening within Türkiye to reexamine its history in the period between 2005 and 2013, this space quickly closed in the years following the suppression of the Gezi Park protests in May 2013. Public civil protest for all intents and purposes no longer exists in Türkiye. When it does occur, it is violently suppressed. We have seen this in countless other authoritarian regimes, such as those in Azerbaijan, Iran, Myanmar, Venezuela, and Afghanistan, in which alternative voices have been effectively suppressed. Reparative justice, so central any process of transitional justice, is effectively impossible under the conditions we find in these regimes. In democratic or semi-democratic societies there have been varying degrees of success in opposing epistemic injustice and in re-examinations of national narratives.[23] In the United States progress was made in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter protests, but a strong backlash is taking place evidenced by the support for rightwing autocratic politicians we are witnessing today. Internationally, geopolitical dynamics complicate progress. Given the imbalance in the power dynamics of the region, no one can predict the fate of the Armenians in the Caucasus, I hope that the resistance will continue, and a different outcome from that of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, will result.

[23] While the insights of such philosophers as José Medina may be useful in analyzing the dynamics of protest movements in some societies, the complete or near complete shutdown of public space for protest in regimes such as Azerbaijan and Türkiye make it difficult to see how these ideas can be carried out in these countries. See his, *The Epistemology of Protest: Silencing, Epistemic Activism, and the Communicative Life of Resistance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.

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