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DESTRUCTION OF MEMORY AND MEMORY OF DESTRUCTION

Elad Magomedov

KU Leuven

Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between violence, memory, and historical erasure in modernity, arguing that certain forms of political violence aim not merely to shape history but to obliterate its conditions of possibility. Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, and W.G. Sebald, the paper traces two distinct but converging strategies of silencing the past: the organized lie – a deliberate, state-engineered falsification of factual reality – and equanimity, a cultivated indifference that renders atrocity banal despite the continued visibility of its traces. These mechanisms neutralize the disruptive potential of memory, which otherwise resists the homogenizing force of official narratives. Arendt's concept of the organized lie is compared to atomic annihilation, wherein falsification spreads through networks of interrelated facts, dissolving the fabric of historical intelligibility. Violence, in this context, is not a political instrument but an apolitical force that undoes the very structure of worldhood and temporality. The paper argues that historiography must move beyond the accumulation of empirical data and toward a reconstruction of the intentional destruction of history – Influenced by what Sebald calls a "natural history of destruction." By shifting focus from world-producing to world-dissolving violence, historiography must recognize that violence is not simply enacted within history but is directed at history itself: at its intelligibility, continuity, and transmissibility. The task is not to discern the annihilative force that renders the past incommunicable or meaningless, and to bear witness to what resists re-inscription into the historical record.

Keywords: Violence, history, historiography, organized lie, forgetting, destruction, annihilation, remembrance.

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Introduction

In his *Untimely Meditations* on history, Nietzsche asks us to imagine a dialogue between a man and an animal from a grazing herd. The man, being the

rational animal, is by his nature condemned to remember the past, and hence condemned to problematize time. The animal, by contrast, "does not know what yesterday and today are," and is instead only concerned with the "pleasure and displeasure, enthralled by the moment and for that reason neither melancholy nor bored" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 60). The animal is not capable of embedding their concerns in a broader temporal coherence of past and present: the worst hunger it may know is confined to the now, which is permeated by it like paper can be permeated by ink. Yet the animal will never know hunger as a *historical* injustice, which – as Marxist thought suggests – is infinitely worse than the instant in which food is lacking. It is worse, because the historical injustice connects this unjust instant to the one of yesterday, thus elevating hunger from permeating not just the present, but time itself. If the animal were to remember the past, it would also see that time is not only the reoccurrence of hunger and injustice, but rather that hunger and injustice are the essence of time. Once this is understood, the solution is clear: to change time itself.

But, as Nietzsche points out, the non-rational animal *doesn't* remember, and for that reason its conversation with man never starts: "Man may well ask the animal: why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only look at me? The animal does want to answer and say: because I always immediately forget what I wanted to say – but then it already forgot this answer too and remained silent" (Ibid.). Like the animal in Orwell's famous novella *Animal Farm,* the animal is bound to forgetfulness. Even though its world is progressively deteriorating, the signs of that deterioration are themselves deprived of any meaning before they reach the animal's senses. For Orwell, the cruelty of time consists precisely in the imposed inability to read the signs of that cruelty. This is precisely what occurs when Orwell describes how Stalin establishes his power on the fact that nobody can remember what the revolution was all about. Or stated more generally, authoritarianism thrives where, as Aleida Assmann points out, the asymmetrical relation between memory and history is compromised and their difference is eliminated. When history and memory are reduced to one another, the past is fully controlled by official discourse.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* is, of course, a mere allegory. Its animals are not truly animalic; they are not "beasts" in Derrida's sense of *bête,* which – according to the logocentric framework – is animality without rationality. On the contrary, in so far as Orwell's animals are an allegorical representation of a human state of affairs, his animals must be understood as being rational, i.e. as *humans.* Just like with Nietzsche's animal, forgetfulness for humans is intrinsically linked with silence, but with humans the relation between silence and memory changes: whereas the animal forgets because it lacks memory, forgetting in

humans is a *modality* of memory. Given this situation, what role does silence play in human forgetting?

In the following pages, Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt and W.G. Sebald will be brought together to focus on the mechanisms by which authoritarian regimes and modern power structures *silence* the past. As I will argue through conceptual analysis, silencing the past is the means that can serve the political project of producing collective amnesia. This can occur either through an active erasure of the past, or by rendering it meaningless by generating collective indifference. My argument is that both strategies neutralize the disruptive force of memory, which otherwise has the potential to challenge the present and open political futures. In addition, I contend that not all violence is political, and that phenomena such as the atomic bomb or systematic historical falsification are instances that destroy history itself rather than merely reshape it. Drawing an analogy between nuclear chain reactions and the cascading falsification of historical facts in totalitarian regimes, we will see how violence can destroy not only material reality but also the conditions of sense and memory. The paper concludes that historiography must do more than recount the effects of violence; it must recover the silenced past and acknowledge violence as a force that threatens the very fabric of worldhood and historicity.

Concretely, the section “Silence of the past” explores conceptually the relation between memory and forgetting by bringing together Benjamin and phenomenological insights on temporality. After that, in “Organized lying”, Arendt is invoked to specify the means through which collective amnesia is induced by political institutions. I will clarify this by focusing on Arendt’s distinction between traditional and organized lying, and by relating the later to Chomsky’s notion of “equanimity”. The section on “Total annihilation” connects the violence of the organized lie to that of the atomic bomb by identifying total annihilation as their distinctive structural similarity. This will lead me to my main thesis, namely that we must draw a conceptual distinction between world-productive and world-dissolving violence, which I will elaborate through Sebald in the final section.

Silence of the past

For us rational animals, silence often manifests meaning. For example, it can be the reproachful silence of offence, or the complicit silence of those who witness injustice but choose to ignore it. Whether it be one or the other, Heidegger tells us that silence here must be understood not as the absence of vocalization *(phōnē),* but as the articulation of *Rede,* which is his translation

of *logos*. Logos, for Heidegger, is not just our typically human ability to cognize rationally, but first and foremost our ability to let phenomena speak for themselves, to grant phenomena a voice. When phenomenology taught us that the past is never truly past but always remains present as the *horizon* of the present, it asserted that the past is not silent but always 'speaks' though the present by endowing it with sense. Simply put: if the item on my table gives itself as "book" as soon as I direct my gaze at it, this is because the sedimented past in which the meaning of this object was established still operates in the present and releases this present in terms of sense. This counts as much for how we make sense of our present situation in general, as it does for concrete objects of perception: in writing this text, for example, I engage not just my attained knowledge of the English language, but also the authors I've studied. The past, therefore, is only past to the extent that it is never truly silent, but instead "calls out" like Heidegger's "voice of conscience" *(Gewissensruf)* to remind us of what things were and still are (Heidegger, 1996, §55).

It is this voice – the voice of *logos* disrupting the silence of the past – that Walter Benjamin puts at the center of his analysis of history. Benjamin follows Nietzsche's anti-Hegelianism in localizing the most important aspect of history not in its *telos,* but its *archè.* The historian's task is essentially archeological. Rather than focusing on what constitutes the landscape or horizon of the present, the historian must see that present as rubble under which lies buried a past that never had the chance to become present. Focusing on this untimely *(Unzeitgemäße),* the historian must dig through the debris of official history, so as to uncover, layer by layer, not its 'foundation' (Heidegger's *Ursprung*), but *that which had to be forgotten in order to make place for the present.* The untimely archè sought by the archeologist hence entails uncovering what had to be silenced into oblivion by official history. But what was thus silenced and buried always leaves a trace. The remnants and ruins of the past are dissipated along the landscape of the present and *resist* integration into the official history: these can be for instance the architectural remnants of a people who supposedly never existed. Such fragments, which never fully belonged to the established historical order, possess a disruptive force that can destabilize official narratives and challenge hegemonic structures of power. If the archeologist attends to these ruins, the silence of the past is disrupted by noise that renders the present unbearable.

That the silence of the past can become noisy, indicates that memory, as understood by Benjamin, has the power to destabilize the present. This destabilizing power of memory can be compared to the power Sartre ascribes to imagination. In *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre explains that the present conditions, considered on their own, lacks the power to effect any change. No matter how dire our circumstances, the present alone cannot motivate us to

change our situation (Sartre, 2003, pp. 457-458). To achieve such change, we must first take distance from the present by imagining an alternative: the existing world can only become world-to-be-changed when it appears in the light of a world as it *could* be. Sartre thus shows that imagination transforms the present by releasing it from its entrapment in a single possibility, i.e. that of the actual. One can hence say that imagination is not merely the medium that opens the future, but simultaneously one that *breaks open* the present. In that sense, what phenomenology calls the "openness" of consciousness towards the future, is not a given (as Heidegger has it), but a *project*. The project may as well fail, while the present and the world may just as well remain what they were yesterday. In short, the future may remain closed, leaving one unable to imagine any alternative to the given state of affairs. As Vaclav Havel indicates in a short essay from 1987, one of the terrible achievements of the Soviet totalitarian regime in the 20th century was precisely its success in reducing the future to a single possibility (Havel, 1987, pp. 14-21). The same idea was expressed by another dissident writer, Yevgeny Zamyatin, who in his novel *We* (1924), which was written only a couple of years after the October Revolution, described how the totalitarian state neutralizes subversiveness by surgically removing the faculty of imagination from the brain. In both examples, the desired effect is to totalize the present instant as the only possibility of being – or to turn man into Nietzsche's animal: unable to remember, unable to regret, and therefore unable to change time.

While imagination changes the present from the point of view of what does not (yet) exist, memory does the same from the perspective of what *could-have* existed. The "could-have," moreover, is a complex modality, since it involves *both* memory and imagination. To understand the present in its full extent, means to also understand that the past could have been different: the Armenian genocide could have been prevented, the atomic bomb could have never been made, and so on. At their best, both imagination and memory are productive: the one produces the future, the other produces the past – but both of those faculties can also be degraded to a mere *reproduction* of the present. When this happens, the *untimely* – that which could have been yesterday or could be tomorrow – is silenced by a present that refuses to change. In this sense, the inertia of official history renders us into a semblant of Nietzsche's animal: enthralled by the present, and therefore unable to be disturbed by what *could have been.*

Organized lying

The sharpest analysis of how the untimely past is subjected to state-regulated silence is provided by Hannah Arendt. She observes, for example, that factual

truths, which pertain to human deeds, are entirely dependent on memory: once they are forgotten, there is no retrieving them from oblivion (Arendt, 1961, pp. 57-60). Arendt follows Benjamin by positing that the past always leaves a trace, but she diverges from him in her awareness that state-regulated destruction of the past can become a totalized political project. While Benjamin was certainly aware of the state-engineered suppression of truth and regulation of memory, he never lived to witness WW2's aftermath and the subsequent discovery of what in the early 1950's Arendt called the "organized lie".[2] For this reason, Benjamin's concern with state-regulated suppression of historical truth was not as radical as the politics of collective amnesia described by Arendt in essays such as *Truth and Politics* (1967).

Since the advent of our 'post-truth era', the strategies Arendt discerned in how states pursue politics of collective amnesia, have been widely studied. In *Truth and Politics,* Arendt famously distinguishes between the traditional and the organized lie (Arendt, 1961, pp. 252-253). The traditional lie aims to dissimulate some particular fact, without affecting the truth of the fact itself. The truth is merely concealed, but remains intact. The traditional liar is hence somebody who seeks to turn a particular truth into a secret, hiding a fact from public view to gain some advantage. As Arendt explains, lying is a form of *action,* oriented towards changing the world. The liar is somebody who wants the world to be different; but rather than actually changing its shape through future-oriented action, the liar only seemingly changes the world by puncturing a hole in its factual fabric. By contrast, the organized liar aims not to dissimulate some particular fact, but to change the fabric of factuality itself. Rather than changing some concrete given within an otherwise unchanged context, the organized lie seeks to modify the context itself. As Arendt notes, factual truths, which pertain to human deeds, are entirely dependent on our ability to talk about them, hence to remember them: once they are forgotten, there is no retrieving them from oblivion.

The transition from memory to oblivion in state-regulated amnesia of the organized lie involves a tremendously destructive force. The politics that seeks to truly silence the past, is inevitably involved in a project of *totalized* destruction. It must destroy the fact *and* its trace, the event *and* its witness, the past *and* the possibility of its return in memory. In each case, the organized lie essentially aims at what amounts to "historization of the ahistorical", i.e. a process through which something historical is removed from the domain of history and replaced with an imaginary alternative that does not belong to the order of history yet behaves as if it did.[1] While Arendt herself never uses this term, her work following *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (1951), specifically the third part on ideology and propaganda, was continuously preoccupied with history and its neutralization by a fake Ersatz. The recurrent theme of these preoccupations

was her exploration of the insight that factual truths, unlike rational truths, are entirely dependent on human memory. As she puts it, if due to some catastrophe humanity loses all its knowledge, there is still a chance that it may one day rediscover rational truths such as the Pythagorean law. By contrast, if we lose our memory of the basic "who did what, where, when" as inherent to the fact – which always pertains to something said or done by somebody – then there is no retrieving it from oblivion. The same insight was intuitively shared by Stalin in his unprecedented effort to organize collective amnesia against his enemies. Already in 1939, when Arthur Koestler was finishing *Darkness at Noon,* it was clear that the monumental authority and power of Stalinism was partly rooted in the fact that historical records were altered and certain individuals would disappear from photographs (Koestler, 2019).

There currently exists a good amount of literature that examines some aspect of Arendt's discussion of historization, but one particular element is still undertheorized. This entails the phenomenon where criminal states make people forget the state's crimes by cultivating indifference. This phenomenon was first addressed by Noam Chomsky in 1969 with regard to the Vietnam War. Specifically, he observed "the terrifying detachment and equanimity with which we view and discuss an unbearable tragedy" (Chomsky, 1969, p. 371). The equanimity described by Chomsky is interesting because it achieves some of the effects aimed at by Arendt's organized lying, but it does so through an entirely different procedure. In both instances, some part of history is silenced and rendered impotent, by which it is marked for oblivion; but in contrast to Arendt, Chomaky's case occurs not by eliminating the material traces of the facts, but rather *in spite of* their material presence. Consider for example what in retrospect appears as the general indifference with which the Western world witnessed the events of September 2023, when the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh fled the region following a swift military offensive by Azerbaijan. Or the catastrophe that struck Sudan since the start of the brutal civil war in April 2023, involving mass displacement of over 14 million people, famine and disease, war crimes, and other atrocities. In all these cases, political violence becomes possible not in the lack of those who witness the truth, but despite their presence – and, indeed, even *because* of the indifferent state of these witnesses. Here, truth is as impotent as when it is successfully dissimulated by propaganda. While these events possess the disruptive power of a catastrophe for those who are directly affected them, they are experienced by the indifferent and uninvolved witness as *trivial.* They are neither untimely (since they do not disturb the present) nor timely (since they are not integrated into the horizon of the present), but instead they immediately dissolve in the flux of mundane world-time. Put differently, they're catastrophic nature is silenced. Alluding to Arendt, one could call this phenomenon the "banality of violence": the violence that brings about these

catastrophes no longer appears in the grandeur of its destructive force, but rather as something unmemorable, something already forgotten.

This kind of silence can no longer be understood as “meaningful”: it is not the constitutive silence that bestows the present with its sense through sedimentation or some other constitutive power. Rather, it is the silence of what was sentenced to oblivion. If, as Benjamin points out, what is silenced and buried always leaves traces that are able to disrupt the silence, the disruption occurs because the past becomes noise. The ideal goal of state-regulated amnesia would be to stop this noise of the past, to achieve a silence that is eternal absence, the silence of total oblivion – Ideal annihilation.

Total annihilation

While equanimity or indifference tends towards the same oblivion as the one produced by the organized lie, there is still an important difference between the two. Equanimity does not involve an active effort to destroy the facts and their traces. For this reason, whatever has been forgotten through indifference may still be retrieved through remaining traces of the forgotten fact. Equanimity is hence characterized by a lack of violence that characterizes organized lying. Since the organized lie intends a total annihilation of the fact and its traces, as well as of the very possibility of remembering the targeted history, it is closer to the atomic bomb than equanimity. To be sure, the organized lie achieves within the domain of *res cogitans* what the atomic bomb achieves within the domain of *res extensa:* total annihilation.

The structural affinity between organized lying and the atomic bomb is not a mere metaphor. As Arendt indicates in the prologue to *The Human Condition,* “Scientifically, the modern age which began in the seventeenth century came to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century; politically, the modern world, in which we live today, was born with the first atomic explosions” (Arendt, 1958, p. 6). This idea must not be dissociated from Arendt’s later writings, which consistently relate the organized lie to modernity itself, as is also reflected in her description of the organized lie as the “modern lie” (Arendt, 1961, pp. 252-253). Certainly, the organized lie is not in any way placed among the foundations of the modern age; yet it is undeniable that the organized lie is itself a fundamentally *modern* phenomenon. This modern aspect is not limited to the fact that it requires modern ideology and bureaucracy for its effectuation, but is also related to the specifically modern concept of history as a process presupposed by both. Atomic explosion involves starting natural processes of fission or disintegration of existent matter that would have never started on their own, whereas organized lying involves initiating the anti-historical

process of annihilating the past. In this sense, the atomic bomb and the organized lie are bound together by the kind of *violence* both are capable of, which is a typically *modern* kind of violence.

To be sure, atomic annihilation is a chain reaction of fission. As a transmission of nothingness from one disintegrating atom to another, it involves a contagion of destruction. To materially disintegrate in the nuclear sense, destruction must expand through a network of atoms and unweave the molecular fabric that holds a substance together. In a similar manner, the organized lie differs from the traditional variant, in that it seeks to destroy not a concrete and localized fact, but a network of facts that constitute the "fabric" of the past. If an imposture is a web of dissimulations (Breeur, 2019), the impostor – whether an individual or an institution – finds himself necessitated to maintain the lies *in the face of* a reality that resists nihilation. Imposture overcomes this resistance when it successfully expands the nothingness of the lie, destroying one fact after another, until the lie covers the entire truth it nihilates – just like atomic annihilation expands over the entire substance that it annihilates.

Orthodox phenomenologists may frown upon this analogy between destruction in the domain of the *cogito* and the domain of matter. Is this analogy not an epistemological confusion? A mere contamination of phenomena by metaphysical constructions? Such criticism would already assume a priority of sense over matter. The existence of the nuclear bomb, and the possibility of world-annihilation contained in it, suffices to show that the entire body of phenomenological literature, to the extent that it prioritizes consciousness over matter, fails to understand both matter and metaphysics when it posits the priority of consciousness over both. Since phenomenology cannot think anything *outside* of sense (i.e. phenomena), its concept of violence is bound to be understood *in terms of* sense. As a result, it sees violence in relation to world (horizon), temporality, inter-subjectivity – in short, violence as world-productive, or *political* violence. But this politization of violence already takes it out of its proper domain, which is not that of sense of destruction, but the destruction of sense.[2]

This alone leads us to a remarkable paradox: the essence of Arendt's political modern lie is itself *apolitical.* To further conceptualize this apolitical violence, let us shift the focus from its sense to its causal power. Doing this will allow us to discern violence as the difference that repeats itself over various domains, be they political or not.

Violence precedes politics

The idea that the essence of Arendt's political violence is itself apolitical allows us to highlight the relationship between violence and oblivion not in

conjunction with, but in separation from, its political meaning. Of particular interest in this regard is W. G. Sebald's 1997 lecture *Luftkrieg und Literatur,* where he claims that the bombardment of Germany by the allied forces left the Germans with a collective trauma, which remains repressed (forgotten) to this day. For Sebald, these bombings are misunderstood when we embed them into history as the process through which the major players of WWII politically paved their way to victory. Instead, these were campaigns of destruction, revealing a type of violence that is usually overshadowed by the political objectives invoked to justify it. In its desire for retaliation for the Blitz, the British air force unleashed a destruction in which all principle of modern war becomes visible: not the production of history, but its annihilation—or as Sebald puts it, "life in the terrible moment of its disintegration.[3]"

If the German people repressed this trauma, it is not merely because Nazi-Germany attained the position of the perpetrator and inexorably found itself restricted by a taboo. Rather, it is primarily because of the *ahistorical* character of that violence, a character that reveals something universal about the particular German repression. Certainly, by foregrounding the impersonal and procedural nature of the industrial destruction-machine, the Nazis exemplified annihilation within the confines of genocide. But this kind of mechanized violence, as a *principle* of destruction, was not exclusive to the Holocaust. Indeed, the Allied bombings of Germany were marked by a similar form of mechanical violence, albeit driven by different motives than those of the Nazis: the Royal Air Force did not intend to destroy the German people as such, but it did intend the *total destruction* of cities like Dresden and Hamburg. This is evidenced by the fact that the initial target of the Manhattan Project was Germany, until it surrendered just three months before the Trinity Test on July 16, 1945 (Antón, 2024).

Whether it is the Allied bombardments or the genocide, we tend to remember the meanings that violence attained for us in its aftermath, but we rarely remember the violence itself. That is why we know much about the effects of violence, yet can say little about it as a cause. We remember history, but not its destruction. It is not irrelevant that when Sebald critiques the ability of memory to articulate the trauma of the past, his primary target consists in the manifold encyclopedic facts collected by historiography. With regard to the RAF bombing campaign of Dresden and Hamburg, Sebald points out that the factual and statistical knowledge about the quantity of damage, in itself reveals very little about what happened. The fact that "there were 31.1 cubic meters of rubble for every person in Cologne and 42.8 cubic meters for every inhabitant of Dresden," does not illuminate what this all actually *meant.* When taken at face value, the fact alone is levelled down to a quantum, losing its 'quality' as it fails to convey the reality of the destruction that it is supposed to

represent. One could indeed argue that here too factual discourse effectuates something akin to banality of violence.

But do we really gain anything by thematizing the violence that otherwise tends to escape our factual discourses? What we gain, I believe, is the means to attain the very sense of historiography: *to gain a clear and distinct idea of what happened.* Evidently, there is barely anything to gain if historiography is reduced to a mere summary of horrors to which people had been subjected during, say, an attempted genocide. But neither is there anything to gain from a mere encyclopedic summary of factual material, as it occurs too often in historiography. What is needed first and foremost is an effort to articulate the essential problem that underlies all history: namely the fundamental fact that humanity's attempts to construct a future are cyclically met with attempts to destroy it. To politicize all violence is precisely to reduce the destruction to construction. As an alternative, we must acknowledge that historiography should not only reconstruct all productive steps taken towards the establishment of the present (including the sacrifices), but just as much reconstruct the attempts at destroying the past that at some point was a present. Sebald teaches us that such endeavor cannot be attained by factual discourse alone. Instead, it requires us to engage our imagination and to draw out, as sharply as we can, the contours and details of what was essentially a *project* of annihilation – *not for the sake of something else, but for its own sake.*

By shifting our attention from world-forming to world-dissolving character of violence, we can see how violence is not something within history but that which undoes history itself. A failure to comprehend this inevitably results in the forgetting of said violence. To forget, in this context, means to turn the constant disruption of history into historical continuity.

Conclusion

As opposed to common belief, not all violence is political, and not all detriment amounts to violence. If history consists in a fundamental tension between world-productive and world-dissolving forces, and politics is essentially concerned with the production of a world, then violence subsists on neither side of politics. Violence only resembles politics to the extent that it involves an intention directed at reconfiguring the world, yet it is thoroughly apolitical in so far as that intention aims *only* to negate. This has the contra-intuitive consequence that the organized lie and the detonation of the atomic bomb cannot in themselves be considered as political acts.

The task of historiography cannot be merely to record the history *of* violence, but also to articulate the violence *towards* history. In the case of the RAF bombing campaign, it does not suffice to merely sum up the damage; what is

needed is primarily a reconstruction of the initial aim and its manifestation: to destroy the city of Hamburg, to reduce it to nothingness. Similarly, one does not understand Stalin by reconstructing his role in the history of the rise and fall of the Soviet Union. Instead, historiography has the task of recording the Stalinist project of annihilation. It suffices to compare the different ways in which historiography has handled Russia's past and that of Nazi-Germany, to see that the historical reconstruction of the Nazi project of destruction is an anomaly in historiography's general style of reconstructing past violence. Despite the extensive efforts on part of the Nazis to destroy all evidence of their violence, historiographers generally managed to aptly capture and reconstruct it. Today, we know what Hitler, Himmler, Eichmann and others did, and we can see why the nature of their actions is fundamentally misunderstood if one interprets those actions as world-productive. We know that something is wrong when anyone is willing to negotiate the Nazi crimes by referring to the historical end for the sake of which they were committed. In reality, our reason for condemning Nazi violence never entails our political disagreement with it; rather, we condemn it because of its fundamental contradiction with the concept of world and history – or politics – as such, which is also something that Hannah Arendt saw very well. Whoever is not willing to acknowledge that contradiction has only one alternative: to treat Nazism as if it were a legitimate political position. As Arendt correctly suggests, only worldless extremists are willing to commit to such belief.

But although Nazism does not have a monopoly on violence, it nevertheless remains an exception in the way historiography relates to that past. That exceptional position should be extended to all violence outside of Nazi-Germany's past. The violence of Stalin and the NKVD, of Turkey against the Armenians, the Americans in Vietnam, the Russians in Chechnya and Ukraine, of the IDF in Palestine and West Bank, the scientists who built the atomic bomb, to name a few – is yet to be emancipated from perspectives that focus on politics and world-production.

Notes

[1] For a detailed analysis of "historization of the ahistorical," see Elad Magomedov, "Arendt's Modern Lie Through Sartre's Imaginary: A Phenomenology of the Phantasm in Digital Propaganda," in Arendt Studies, published online on June 11, 2025.

[2] For an elaborate version of this argument against the phenomenological objection, see Breeur, R. & Magomedov, E. (2025) E.N.D.: Exploring Nuclear Disaster. No Index Press.

[3] For a detailed analysis, see Magomedov, E. (2026). Repetition of the Nameless Presence. Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities (31:6).

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Ethical Standards
The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.