

THE DUAL REALITY OF DESTRUCTION: THE DISSIMULATION AND SIMULATION OF THE ARMENIAN-ASSYRIAN GENOCIDE



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Abstract

The paper examines the denial of the Armenian-Assyrian genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire, situating it within a broader discussion on state-sponsored historical manipulation and genocide denial. The Turkish state's politics of denial strategically exploits ambiguities in the legal definition of genocide and is simultaneously embedded in the Turkish national identity. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's concept of the *organized lie*, I argue that Turkish genocide denial operates as a *propagandistic myth*. This propagandistic lie dissimulates historical facts and simulates alternative facts, an alternative history, through denial of factual evidence, censorship, school curricula, and even scholarly research that lacks intellectual integrity.

Within this denialist narrative, the Assyrian genocide plays a disruptive role. The Assyrian genocide took place at the time of the Armenian genocide but is remembered differently and is largely transmitted through oral history. This difference in remembrance and transmission disrupts the coherence of the Turkish denialist narrative, exposing its contradictions. Far from being a marginal manifestation of the concept of genocide, the Assyrian Genocide transcends something local and uncovers something structural about genocide and truth. The Assyrian genocide reveals the internal mechanism of the genocidal machine, demonstrating how denial is an extension of the genocidal process itself.

This disruptive role opens a broader reflection on genocide. Building on Marc Nichanian, Giorgio Agamben and Gilles Deleuze, I conceptualize genocide as a limitless, absolute destruction that operates on different levels; the physical extermination of the group, the erasure of the genocidal event and the undermining of the fact itself. The absence of evidence can paradoxically serve as evidence, while traces such as oral transmission and suppressed memories, can function as signs that compel interrogation of the denialist narrative. Genocide is rooted in material reality but necessarily exceeds it and must be understood both as fact and as sign.

Keywords: Armenian-Assyrian Genocide, Hannah Arendt, Marc Nichanian, Gilles Deleuze, Giorgio Agamben, Turkish propagandistic myth.

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Introduction

Genocide is the most destructive and foundational event in human history. It challenges our conventional categories of truth and reality. The existential question that initially drives this article is deceptively simple, even banal: "Why does the average Armenian have a strong memory of the Armenian Assyrian genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire? And why don't I?" While this personal question remains central, the article develops its inquiry through a series of more academic and philosophical investigations. The first chapter explores Hannah Arendt's concept of the organized lie. Here I examine the denial of the Armenian genocide and argue that Arendt's framework of the organized lie is useful in understanding the Turkish state's propagandistic relationship to its past.

In the second chapter, I shift the focus to the Assyrian Genocide (*Seyfo/Ferman*), which remains largely overlooked in dominant historical narratives. Placing Arendt's conceptual framework in the background, I argue that the Assyrian Genocide plays a crucial and disruptive role within the broader context of Turkish denialism. The everyday continuity of life of Assyrians in western cities today, stands in stark contrast to a silenced, destroyed, un-mourned, unprocessed, and unspeakable past, a world that was annihilated. There is a tension between the naturalness and spontaneity with which life, and thus the world, continues to move forward, and the almost un-discussable, almost vanished past. This tension is philosophically significant. What happened to the Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire and how this genocide has been transmitted reveals something about how history works, about how genocides are carried out, remembered, and repressed. The *Seyfo*, the Assyrian Genocide, exposes a crucial Christian dimension of the genocide and acts as an embodiment of truth in the denial of the Armenian narrative. From the concrete example of the Assyrian genocide, we can learn something about genocide and its essence in general, which ultimately escapes all example.

In the third and final chapter, I engage with philosophical writings of Marc Nichanian, Giorgio Agamben and Gilles Deleuze. Nichanian breaks with the historiographical tradition that treats the genocidal event as a historically verifiable fact, as an event that can be proved with documents. Nichanian's idea invites a reconceptualization of genocide, I will built on his argument and distinguish three levels of destruction, apart from the physical killings. I also propose that Deleuze's concept of a sign is philosophically complementary with what Nichanian writes. Where Nichanian opens the space for understanding genocide beyond the fact, Deleuze allows us to think genocide as both fact and sign. This dual perspective is grounded in both material reality and invisible absences produced by denial. It offers a more nuanced account of genocide. Ultimately, the article seeks to build a bridge between traditional

historical evidence and the fragile but powerful ways truth and remembrance manifest themselves in the genocidal process as a whole.

Turkish Denial and Hannah Arendt's organized lie

In the essay 'Truth and Politics', included in the bundle *Between Past and Future*, Hannah Arendt makes a distinction between the traditional lie and the modern lie. First, the traditional lie differs from the modern lie in terms of transparency. The traditional lie is concerned with secrets in the common sense meaning, the lie is about information people did not have access to. The modern or organized lie, on the other hand, is about things everyone knows (Arendt, 1994, p. 150). Second, the traditional lie is a local lie; it wants to deceive the enemy or specific persons, and it is never the aim to mislead 'everyone' or an entire population (Arendt, 1994, p. 151). The liar still refers to the truth even when he is lying. The liar is aware of the truth, knows exactly what the truth is, but consciously prefers to say something other than that truth, the non-truth. The lie opposes the truth but continues to acknowledge it (Breeur, 2019, p. 37). The latter is not longer the case in the organized lie, which alters the entire context, the very fabric of reality itself. It is not a lie that is inserted into a web of truth, instead the whole web is recreated, an alternative reality is fabricated (Arendt, 1994, p. 151). Reality, facts, what is true, is destroyed, annihilated, nullified, and replaced by an alternative reality. Reality is dissimulated and a substitute reality is simulated (Breeur, 2019, p. 19). This substitute for truth functions autonomously; it works and has real effects. The organized lie functions like a web that multiplies itself and sustains its own life. The opposite of truth, then, is not misunderstanding, mistake, illusion or fiction but the (organized) lie (Arendt, 1994, p. 147). The organized lie is yet never a flawless simulation. Factuality has something imperturbable. Truth always resurfaces. Arendt speaks of a stubbornness that is intrinsic to truth. There is a perseverance, an element of compulsion to truth that ruptures the simulated narrative (Arendt, 1994, p. 139). There is a reciprocity, a kind of interplay, in which the simulated sheet of fabric continually tries to stich itself shut, only to be torn open again by the stubborn nature of fact. One can nullify truth, but there is no completely successful substitute for it (Arendt, 1994, p. 157). Truth is resilient and flexible, like a plant growing in the cracks of walls. The vulnerability of truth is, as is often the case with vulnerability, both a weakness and an unyielding strength.

Factual truth differs from mathematical truths and axioms because it is always at risk of being destroyed. If a mathematical formula or law of nature were to be forgotten for some mysterious reason, it could, at the very least, be rediscovered (Arendt, 1994, p. 129). This is not necessarily the case for

historical truths. Once destroyed by an organized lie or propagandistic myth, they may be wiped from the face of the earth forever (Arendt, 1994, p. 129).

There are some fundamental problems inherent to historiography. One of these is that brute facts must be interpreted and turned into historical facts (Arendt, 1994, p. 139). Historical facts are constructed with documents, witnesses, testimonies. Another inherent problem is that testimonies can always be suspected, no matter how numerous testimonies may be. After all, it is possible for thousands of testimonies to be fabricated (Arendt, 1994, p. 141). Yet Arendt argues that these challenges do not undermine the notion of factuality itself. Nor does this imply that historical facts are merely interpretations, to be manipulated at will (Arendt, 1994, p. 136). This is precisely what the propagandistic lie does. The organized lie gnaws at facts in the writing of history. Historical facts are contingent, things could have happened otherwise. It is precisely this contingency that does not prevent us from producing alternative facts and falsehoods (Arendt, 1994, pp. 149-150; Breeur, 2019, p. 13). Historical facts, such as the occurrence of a genocide against the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire can be denied. A propagandistic myth is a form of an organized lie where sometimes very fundamental historical facts are being denied. The way Turkey handles its own genocidal past can be understood as such a myth, and thus as a manifestation of what Arendt calls the organized lie.

In what follows I will argue in more detail how the Turkish propagandistic myth can be seen as Arendt's organized lie. Like it is stated above, the organized lie is not about secrets in the traditional sense (Arendt, 1994, p. 150). The facts are known. Even though Turkey censors and manipulates information; the facts are accessible. There is so much fact present, yet almost nothing is capable of having an effect. Truth is impotent. Lies are potent. It makes no difference that large numbers of Armenians, Assyrians and Pontic Greeks were massacred; an alternative explanation is invented. Truth no longer holds power, while lies and alternative versions of history have more impact (Pomerantsev, 2020, p. 153).

A second difference between the traditional lie and the organized lie is that the organized lie aims to deceive a large audience. In the case of genocide denial, this 'large audience' are the Turkish citizens, but also the international community, or in other words 'everyone' (Arendt, 1994, p. 191). The discussions on whether or not the Armenian genocide amounts to genocide sows doubt and suggests that there is something fundamentally open to debate, while in reality the matter is clear.

A third aspect, which ties in with the first, is that the element of contingency is almost entirely missing from the propagandist's narrative (Arendt, 1994, pp. 149-150). Lying may require effort, but the propagandist can align perfectly

with what the listener wants to hear; everything is seamlessly woven together. The repulsive, the ‘accidental’, the improbable, that which does not fit the narrative, the event that only had a tiny chance of happening but nonetheless did, is much harder to comprehend (Arendt, 1994, pp. 148-149). Something else could always have happened, yet this “something else” is replaced with something more probable and less shocking than genocide. For that reason, the philosopher, writer, journalist, historian or academic that approaches thought or research with integrity is always more vulnerable. The speaker of truth is because of the element of contingency *by default* in a weaker position.

The forth aspect concerns the core of the organized lie, the idea that the organized lie manipulates the whole context and is not a lie injected the context of an acknowledged truth (Arendt, 1994, p. 151; Breeur, 2019, pp. 18-19). Mass killings and deportations are not denied outright, instead, they are carefully integrated into an alternative context and historical narrative, one that no longer appears to be genocide. An entirely simulated reality is constructed, in which basic historical facts are denied on the basis of in principle dismantlable arguments. Legal loopholes in the definition of genocide are exploited, and Armenians are framed as mere casualties or traitors. What elevates the denial to the level of the propagandistic myth is the far more subtle manner in which history is rewritten. One strategy is to simply claim that what is true is fake, for example by dismissing the testimonies in *The Blue Book* as forgeries. Another strategy is to sow doubt by flooding the information space with plausible sounding alternatives. The boundary between truth and falsehood becomes blurred and this is enough to render truth impotent. A third strategy is to modify the material reality itself, by destroying mass graves and testimonies. This interplay between, on the one hand, denying information and on the other hand, producing alternative information, is precisely what the propagandistic myth does. The dissimulation and simulation of the genocide may be separated for pedagogical reasons, but these are two operations of the lie that happen simultaneously. The genocide is denied, while at the same time a past without genocide, and thus a present without any memory of the genocide, is simulated.

A propagandistic myth is not sustained by occasional lies. The myth can only succeed if countless documents and narratives are both dissimulated and simulated. It is an extensive process (Breeur, 2019, p. 24). Moreover, new lies are constantly being produced to patch up the cracks that facts create in the simulated narrative. Uğur Ümit Üngör writes in his article “Lost in Commemoration: The Armenian Genocide in Memory and Identity” that Turkey denies a genocide its own people remember. He refers here to elderly Kurdish villagers who retain vivid memories of the events (Üngör, 2014, p. 147). There are also other material traces of the past, such as half-destroyed monasteries and Armenian inscriptions that are now only partially legible. The testimonies in *The Blue Book*, which must be repeatedly and spontaneously framed as

fiction, also illustrate the compelling force inherent in factuality. At certain moments, the stubborn truth breaks through, thanks to thinkers who engage in genuinely honest scholarly research.

One final key aspect of the Turkish propagandistic myth relates to the myth as a form of false memory. There need not be an active liar involved; the myth operates on its own and produces real-world consequences. Ordinary Turkish citizens are not deliberately lying in the manner of a traditional deceiver, they sincerely believe that no genocide occurred (Arendt, 1994, p. 147). In her essay Hannah Arendt also refers to Plato's well-known allegory of the cave, in which no one inside the cave actually despises the truth itself (Arendt, 1994, p. 127). The reference to Plato's cave highlights the important role of self-deception in the organized lie. People who actively contribute to the lie are not enemies of the truth, they are convinced that the shadows in the cave are reality. They believe that the myth is not a myth, that the myth is reality. Specifically in the case of Turkey his means that for them, the genocide never occurred. The memory they hold and that is being worked on is one of a non-genocidal past. The propagandistic myth is, of course, not simply the result of the spontaneous clash of memories or ignorant citizens unaware of what is happening. On the one hand, the majority of citizens are simply ignorant; on the other hand, within this ignorance lies an element of self-deception. At certain moments, a person may notice that something does not add up, that is the truth revealing itself. Despite the discomfort this causes, this person continues to live within the propagandistic myth. The myth, the lie, in which genocide deniers live, functions because, and as long as, it allows them to deny the truth. It requires enormous effort to maintain the myth, but it succeeds and becomes easier as the events recede further into the past. The Turkish propagandistic myth has a solid foundation, this cannot be overstated. From the very beginning, the Turkish memory of the Armenian genocide was shaped by a propagandistic myth and has no basis in truth. This narrative is perpetuated spontaneously and smoothly; the fabricated past is a fact.

The Assyrian Genocide, Seyfo, Ferman

Within the context of this denialist narrative, the Assyrian genocide plays a crucial, disruptive role. The Assyrian genocide occurred simultaneously with the Armenian genocide but is remembered differently and is largely transmitted through oral history. Through the case of the Assyrian genocide, I wish to understand the essence of genocide.

Assyrians are a Semitic people originating from Mesopotamia, the region surrounding the Euphrates and Tigris rivers (Atto, 2017, p. 181). Assyrians refer to the genocide of 1915 with the emblematic name *Sayfo*, meaning "sword" in

Aramaic (Yacoub, 2016, p. xi). Both Assyrians and Kurds also use the word *Ferman*, meaning "official decree", this emphasizes that the mass killings were ordered from above (Talay, 2017, pp. 136-137). During the genocide, approximately 250,000 Assyrians were killed, this is more than half of the population. A way of life and entire sets of skills and traditions were lost (Yacoub, 2016, pp. 88-89). Despite later-emphasized differences in the diaspora, Assyrians in the Ottoman Empire were seen as a single ethno-religious group, which is important for meeting the legal definition of genocide (Yacoub, 2016, p. 5).

Although the Armenian, Assyrian and Greek Pontic genocide occurred simultaneously, literature on the Armenian genocide is far more extensive and detailed. The Assyrian genocide is transmitted and remembered differently, it is also far less known than the Armenian genocide. There are several reasons for this.

First, the Assyrians were smaller in number and financially less powerful. Second, there was no significant intellectual elite. The local clergy were educated but the general population was not (Yacoub, 2016, p. 22). Third, after the genocide, there were few survivors left to represent the events through written testimonies, literature, or art, due to ongoing repression. After the genocide, the Assyrian survivors returned to their destroyed villages, where they lived withdrawn, isolated, and anonymous lives (Atto, 2017, pp. 282-283). The local clergy prioritized the survival of their people above all else. The genocide was not spoken about publicly; writing about it was discouraged. From a socio-political perspective, there was no space for writing or publishing about what had happened, such actions were interpreted by the Turkish government as an act of treason (Atto, 2016, p. 186). The Assyrians assimilated in order to survive, which resulted in only a handful of written testimonies and monographs (Talay, 2017, pp. 132-133).

Fourth, in contrast to the Armenians, the Assyrians did not flee Turkey after the genocide. As a result, there was no Assyrian diaspora capable of drawing international attention or publishing freely (Atto, 2016, p. 184). The written testimonies were only edited and published once later generations of survivors lived in the West, meaning that Assyrians began constructing a memory only around the 2000s (Atto, 2016, p. 141). The Assyrians' drive to assimilate created a gap in knowledge among the descendants of survivors. What was passed on to the next generations was a traumatic distrust toward Muslims, along with platitudes such as "they-killed-us." Memories of the past are transmitted orally, often in the form of laments (Atto, 2016, p. 185). There is, however, no supporting narrative within the Assyrian diaspora. Assyrians do not have a clear understanding of what happened in the past. Most cannot read or write in their mother tongue and are unfamiliar with their own history. On the one hand, illiteracy, and on the other, ongoing repression and the lack

of freedom to mourn the genocide, have resulted in a void in Assyrian collective memory. Today, descendants struggle to access the specific events of the past. Their ancestors, unintentionally, repressed a memory that they themselves now try to recover. In this sense, one could say that the Assyrian genocide is a 'more successful' genocide, a completed forgetting.

The remembrance of the *Seyfo* is a relatively recent development, and so is its denial. The denial of the Assyrian genocide occurs in much the same way as the denial of the Armenian genocide. For example, Bülent Özdemir claims that the Assyrians were neither deported nor exterminated, which contradicts historical reality. Another way the genocide is denied is by labeling the Assyrians, like the Armenians, as traitors to the country while simultaneously erasing the Christian dimension of the genocide (BarAbraham, 2017, pp. 135-136, 224-225).

A third way in which the Assyrian genocide is being denied, differing from the Armenian genocide denial, is by framing it as a complete myth created by the Assyrian diaspora. Salahi Sönyel, in *The Assyrians of Turkey – Victims of Major Power Policy*, argues that Assyrians migrated for economic reasons rather than persecution by Turkish authorities. He claims that any links drawn between Assyrians and the Armenian diaspora, or claims of shared suffering, are propaganda and lobbying efforts (BarAbraham, 2017, p. 220). Özdemir, in turn, claims that the Assyrians assert a genocide experience in order to construct an identity around it (BarAbraham, 2017, p. 225). He writes the following about oral transmission: "telling from father to son within the family" has, over time, developed into an important element in the diaspora and helped to "construct a myth" (BarAbraham, 2017, p. 228). Özdemir also calls the oral transmission of the genocide unreliable. The issue of oral transmission and testimony, is an inherent methodological problem in historiography but does not diminish the authenticity of the testimonies themselves. The main reason for the oral transmission, as previously stated, is ongoing repression. This form of denial ignores that the oral dimension of the Assyrian genocide actually demonstrates the mechanism of genocide. The fact that these accounts have been passed down orally is not a weakness but rather shows how intense the repression has been. There are sufficient writings, but if they are scarcer, it is because the genocide carefully erased its traces. The lack of documentation itself serves as evidence. Around the year 2000, when Assyrians began (re)writing and remembering the events, there was no established framework for denying the Assyrian genocide as there was for the denial of the Armenian genocide. Few historians were sufficiently trained in Assyrian history, and as a result, denying the Assyrian genocide was a difficult task. There was not enough knowledge about the Assyrian communities and villages. The gradually growing awareness within the Assyrian diaspora, or put differently, the delay in Assyrian remembrance, exposes the strength and

durability of truth. Cracks appeared at certain moments in the Turkish narrative. For example, when a mass grave is uncovered, material reality breaks through the lie. Or when a new document surfaces that must be incorporated into the organized falsehood. In the case of Turkey, however, a crack emerges not only in the form of isolated facts but in the form of another genocide, the Assyrian genocide. The Assyrian genocide creates a rupture in Turkey's lie about the Armenian genocide. The concealment and simulation of the Assyrian genocide was a new challenge; suddenly something new emerged. The Turkish Historical Society only established a department in 2007 to be able to take an official stance on the Assyrian genocide (BarAbraham, 2017, p. 223).

It is remarkable how a well-executed genocide, whose descendants have barely any memory of it, can reemerge almost a century later as a huge rupture. This rupture is a repercussion of the contentless but consistently repeated and transmitted phrase, "they-killed-us." This very vague and sparse phrase, orally passed down by the Assyrians, reveals the power of truth. The Assyrian genocide dismantles itself in the same way an organized lie expands. The vulnerability of truth, which, is always both a weakness and a strength, reveals its strength here. Truth may seem less potent and credible than an organized lie, but at the same time it possesses a stubbornness. In the case of the Assyrian genocide, that stubbornness is very clear. A minimal oral transmission of a genocide, without any substantial form of historical narrative, still manages to shatter the seemingly web-like structure of the organized lie, even if only briefly.

Genocide as a fact and a sign

The question of whether genocide can be classified as a historical fact is methodologically and philosophically challenging. Armenian-French philosopher Marc Nichanian takes on this challenge and explores it through a conceptual argument. It will be explored how genocide is not merely the destruction of a group. Different levels can be distinguished beyond the physical annihilation of the group. The first level is the destruction of specific facts, the second is the destruction of the genocidal fact itself, and the third is the destruction of factuality as such. This new exploration of the concept of genocide will lead to a reflection on what genocide structurally entails and what it reveals about our philosophical understandings of truth and falsehood. Then, the ideas Giorgio Agamben on the evidentiary dimension of genocide will be discussed. Both attempt to render genocide factual despite its inherent denial. Finally, Deleuze's concept of signs is used to reflect on genocide as both fact and sign.

Is genocide a fact? According to Nichanian, genocide is not a fact (Nichanian, 2009, pp. 1-2). It may seem counterintuitive when Nichanian, who is Armenian himself, repeatedly states that (the Armenian) genocide is not a fact. Of course, he does not mean this in a denialist way. According to him, something may very well have taken place, something may have happened in history, without it being able to attain the status of a historical fact. (Nichanian, 2009, p. 2) In genocide, *the genocidal will* destroys the genocidal violence itself, preventing the event of genocide to become a fact (Nichanian, 2009, p. 9). The genocidal will destroys itself as a fact, but does so through, by means of, and thanks to the archive. A crime can only qualify as genocide if there is a specific intent to destroy the group. Perpetrators often destroy evidence. In the Armenian genocide, documents were destroyed before any trial had taken place. However, beyond this literal, material destruction, which makes it difficult or even impossible to trace intent, the "specific intent" will almost never be explicitly stated in a document. Nichanian refers to these two aspects of the archive when arguing that genocide can never be a fact. Yet historical facts are supported and constructed based on archival material. Genocide is the destruction of the archive in the sense that it annihilates the very conditions needed for an event to be recognized as genocide in the first place (Nichanian, 2009, p. 12). The same holds for testimony. The major problem with testimonies is that they are archived to prove genocide took place. As a result, witnesses are expected to prove their own death in the most truthful way possible, ideally stripped of trauma and emotion (Nichanian, 2009, p. 28). In short, Nichanian argues that despite testimonies and documentation, genocide should be seen as a sign rather than a historical fact. The standard process by which events become facts fails in the case of genocide. The problem of "specific intent" in genocide is supposedly "solved" by examining patterns of action and context through source material, including testimonies. However, this enters the domain where interpretation of "bare events" within a "historical narrative" occurs, which is also where the seeds of genocide denial are planted. While examining context may seem to offer a solution, it simultaneously carries a superficial yet real danger. Interpretation as solution is also the very space and moment where the propagandistic myth can emerge and live on as an alternative, coherent, and seemingly valid version of history.

Genocide inherently contains its own denial; denial is both the core and the continued manifestation of the genocidal act (Nichanian, 2009, p. 72). The genocidal will concretely persists in denialist discourses and propagandistic myths. Genocide, then, is not merely the physical extermination of a group of people. In addition to the actual killing of the targeted group, three further levels can be distinguished. The first is the level of specific facts. Genocide destroys this or that particular fact, for instance, a telegraphic document or a mass grave. The propagandistic myth operates on this level in various ways:

lies about material remnants and broader historical distortions aim to destroy concrete facts.

On the second level, genocide destroys itself as a fact. This is the core of Nichanian's argument. Within this second level, several branches can be identified, all of which are forms of destruction that contribute to genocide's self-erasure as a fact. The first branch is that genocide, along with the archive, also destroys testimonies. This can occur literally, through the destruction of documents, or figuratively, by instrumentalizing the witness (Nichanian, 2009, p. 101). A second branch is the destruction of memory. At a later point in time, genocide often attempts to erase the memory of the survivors. In the case of the Assyrian genocide, this effort has, without doubt, been entirely and absolutely successful. The forgetting of the destruction becomes part of the destruction itself. Genocide annihilates the culture and history of the targeted group. It is as if they never existed, as if they never died (Nichanian, 2009, p. 55).

At the third level, and in connection with the previous two, genocide destroys factuality itself. Genocide can only destroy this or that particular fact, because it destroys itself as a fact and it can, only destroy itself as a fact because it ultimately undermines factuality in general. (Nichanian, 2009, p. 70). Factuality is destroyed not because the perpetrators or genocide deniers reject the notion of factuality. On the contrary, the fact is destroyed from within precisely because perpetrators, victims, historians, and genocide deniers all share the same understanding of what a fact is: something that can be proven through documents and archival evidence. There is a consensus on what constitutes a fact and how a historical fact is constructed (Nichanian, 2009, p. 141). In the propagandistic myth, the dead or the deportations are not always denied. One common strategy is to acknowledge all the facts yet still claim that it was not genocide (Nichanian, 2009, p. 22).

One could argue that genocide is an event that escapes the network of facts, or the truth-network. It is never fully absorbed; the process never completes itself, remains resistant, and is always overshadowed by denial. The genocidal event is a bare fact, balancing on the boundary between the truth-network and the network of lies. It is not elevated to the status of a fact and thus does not fit into the web of facts, while being forced into the network of lies. Genocide is the collision of these two worlds, their meeting point reveals something more fundamental about the way we structure reality. The genocidal event, as a borderline case, exposes the fragility of our categories of truth and falsehood. The challenges of truth are real. Falsehood cannot simply be corrected by truth (Nichanian, 2009, p. 72). Genocide is the event that reveals to us, more than any other event, that our categories of truth and falsehood are inadequate. Its roots reach deep into our fundamental philosophical concepts.

We must come to understand the deeper structures of genocide, the penetrating and absolute destruction that manifests on multiple levels. It is crucial to realize that falsehood is not merely the negation of truth, as in a local or incidental lie, falsehood is a fabricated, internally consistent lie. This lie is flexible, self-expanding, and self-replicating. Similarly, truth is not fixed or stable, contrary to our commonsense understanding of it. Truth, like falsehood, is dynamic. Historical truths can vanish. As Arendt writes, and as previously discussed, there is a difference between mathematical truths and historical truths. Historical truths can simply disappear if they are not remembered. Perhaps the dynamism present in the organized lie, and equally present in truth, offers a way to rethink our ideas of truth and falsehood. Do we need to rethink facticity itself? Or do we simply need to find a way to rescue facticity from the grip of what Nichanian calls historiographic perversion? How can we ensure the propagandistic myth ceases to exist? We must find a way to once again say, collectively, in full consensus, that what happened, took place; that what took place is a fact. The following section will attempt to seek a way out of the denial that is inherent to genocide.

Agamben's paradox of the witness in *Remnants of Auschwitz* attempts to escape the framework of genocide denial. His argument unfolds as follows: the survivor, the one who testifies, is not the ultimate witness, because the true witness is dead. The survivor does not testify to the event itself, but rather to the impossibility of bearing witness to it. Based on this paradox of the witness in spite of himself, Agamben argues that Auschwitz is irrefutably proven (Agamben, 2018, p. 180). Agamben refuses to accept the unprovability and undecidability of genocide. He makes an internal shift, a redefinition of what testimony means. Agamben saves the witness from being reduced to a functional role in constructing evidence for the fact. He leaves no room for historiographic perversion. The impossibility of testifying becomes the very proof of genocide; unprovability itself is the evidence (Nichanian, 2009, p. 17). Agamben succeeds in offering a philosophically and conceptually valid argument that cleverly disarms genocide denial. However, his argument can be seen as somewhat outdated; he may not possess the "ultimate" witness, but he does rely on an ideal witness. Primo Levi is one of the rare survivors whose testimony is widely read and who, in doing so, escapes the grip of archival instrumentalization. Not all genocides, however, have such visible and recognized witnesses. Many fall under the radar simply because they are less well documented or even almost undocumented. This is especially true in the case of the Assyrian genocide. Yet, the more critical question remains: is it really about documentation at all? Even with abundant archival material, as in the Armenian case, genocide still falls prey to a structural discourse of denial. Despite this wealth of evidence, there never seems to be enough to irrefutably prove genocide. Both Agamben and Nichanian's argument have a

similar structure. Agamben claims that the impossibility of testimony is the very testimony. Nichanian similarly argues that the absence of a document that explicitly states genocidal intent is not accidental but a product of the genocidal will itself. That absence is not a gap in the archive but an essential characteristic of genocide. It is not a weakness in the evidence but part of the evidence itself. Genocide includes a total destruction: the killings, the testimonies, the suffering, the physical and immaterial remnants, the erasure of memory and history. The genocidal will aims to destroy all of this. The missing document, the erased witness, the forgotten memory – as in the Assyrian case – the propagandistic myth that replaces reality and ultimately erodes truth: all these voids and silences are not marginal but central to the operation of genocide. This should not be misunderstood as a mere negative definition of genocide, where lack becomes proof in itself. Traditional historical research remains valuable. But it is equally vital to grasp genocide's essentially destructive nature, one that operates on multiple levels and always includes its own denial. Genocide gives birth to its own myth of negation. Any serious conceptualization of genocide must reckon with this auto-negating core. The destruction, and what is destroyed, are intrinsic to what genocide is. The absence is not just a void, it is evidence. The death that has been murdered must be restored as death, so that mourning becomes possible again. Only then can there be a burial to attend, a space to grieve, and a fragile memory to preserve.

If genocide is not a fact, then what is it? - is the next urgent question. According to Nichanian, genocide is a sign (Nichanian, 2009, p. 81). Nichanian remains unclear about what he means by "sign", he does not elaborate further on what genocide as a sign entails. What is clear, however, is the absence of a philosophical and moral-speculative dimension in genocide understood as a fact. Both the sign and the fact refer to the naked event, but a sign is not understood as something that can be validated in the way a historical fact is, with documents and 'impartial', 'objective' knowledge. Genocide as a sign, therefore, encompasses an ethical and philosophically more speculative dimension that genocide as a fact does not (Nichanian, 2009, p. 89). A broader understanding of genocide is necessary. The concept of genocide currently suffers from internal contradictions, has become politicized and diluted, and is increasingly appropriated by both legal and historical frameworks. While expanding its definition is legally and politically delicate, a philosophical rethinking of genocide is essential in order to arrive at a deeper and more meaningful understanding. We accept Nichanian's argument that genocide is not a fact; philosophically, this is an important and valid claim. However, his analysis ultimately ends on an unproductive note, offering only the suggestion that genocide should be understood as a sign, without elaborating on what this entails.

Genocide as a sign might be better understood by approaching the notion of the sign through a Deleuzian lens. In *Proust et les signes*, Gilles Deleuze distinguishes four types of signs: worldly signs, signs of love, sensuous signs, and signs of art. While these specific categories may not directly apply to the concept of genocide, what is relevant in this context is Deleuze's more general view of signs: for Deleuze, a sign is that which provokes thought, something that compels us to think (Deleuze, 2008, p. 12). "There is always the violence of a sign that forces us into the search, that robs us of peace" (Deleuze, 2008, p. 11). A sign challenges us, it lures or provokes us into understanding. A sign is a kind of violence upon thought, an impact on our thinking. It is not something explicit that floats on the surface of conventions; a sign is ambiguous, and it requires interpretation, effort to be grasped. It is through the violence of the sign that we approach its essence. We arrive at the truth of a sign by cultivating a certain kind of sensitivity and receptivity, much like someone who, over time, masters a craft (Deleuze, 2008, p. 4,10-12). The sign overtakes us thus in a violent and unwelcome manner. In the context of signs, Deleuze also speaks of "involuntary memory"; the kind of memory that is triggered by a sensory experience (Deleuze, 2008, p. 14). Why a (material) thing has an effect on us is unclear and contingent. Suddenly, through a sensory experience, one remembers the past splintered, fragmentary and in a fleeting way. A past, that existed but was not visible. The truth of genocide is revealed. A sign can be anything: a mass grave, a testimony, an old inscription, a passed-down platitude. They all compel us to remember genocide and to perceive its essence. This essence includes, among other characteristics, absolute and continuous destruction, as well as inherent denial (Deleuze, 2008, p. 35,37-38). It is only in genocide as a Deleuzian sign that one can come to understand that absence functions as evidence. Genocide as a sign still refers to materiality; to the archive, to the mass grave, to genocide as fact. The archive as fact, the literal archiving of documents, still serves a purpose. There are always material traces that do not disappear, and we must preserve them somewhere because they may one day compel thought. These elements that do not vanish are manifestations of the stubbornness of truth, they are the cracks in the fabric of the propagandistic myth, the dents in our thinking. The elements that are remembered have always been repressed without resistance but suddenly can no longer be repressed. This does not necessarily mean that whatever violently strikes our thinking is immediately meaningful; it must still be incorporated into a historical discourse.

The sign, in a Deleuzian sense, reveals the workings of genocide more precisely than Nichanian's notion of the sign, which merely points to the absence of a moral and philosophical dimension. In this sense, Deleuze offers a valuable addition to Nichanian's open-ended conclusion. Genocide, in the Deleuzian sense, is a sign that is, on the one hand, connected to materiality;

the sensory experience strikes at spontaneity and evokes the repressed past. On the other hand, genocide transcends this materiality and refers to more than just the mass grave or the source stored in an archive. Genocide as a sign points to something deeper. In this depth, through that disruptive and violent moment, one discovers the denial that is inherent to genocide. The truth of genocide imposes itself involuntarily, in the form of facts. Facts, material remnants, can suddenly function as signs and challenge the lie. They break through the dominant simulated narrative. The notion of violence also returns; it is violence that frees us from the violence of oppressive domination and ongoing destruction. It is through Deleuze's compelling sign that we are able to enter, discover, and create Nichanian's moral-philosophical dimension of genocide. Approaching genocide as a sign through Deleuze's perspective allows for a better grasp of the complexity of the idea of genocide, which is both everyday and theoretical, both material and moral-philosophical.

In this idea of genocide as a sign, the related concepts of archive and testimony also function as signs. The archive as fact refers to the depot, the storage facilities specifically set up to preserve testimonies. The archive as sign aligns more closely with a broader and more affirmative vision of the archive, as briefly discussed by Agamben in *Remnants of Auschwitz*. The archive is not merely the depot, but extends to everything that is unsaid yet sayable, everything that seeks and is able to make visible the event that, within the perverse logic, appears to be invisible and unprovable (Agamben, 159-62.; Nichanian, 95). The witness as sign can and may express the experience of genocide as something personal, local, fragmented, and meaningful. This broader understanding of the archive also concretely includes the oral tradition of the Assyrians and their platitude. "They-killed-us" functions as an archive in the sense of a sign. This can be converted into a factual archive, but it does not need to submit to the logic of denial. In the same broad sense, this article is also a form of testimony and an expression of the Assyrian archive as a sign. The unsaid is always on the verge of being said, and the archive that no one dusts off will one day be dusted off. What is invisible, but exists, will eventually become visible, whether through an article like this one, or through an Assyrian mother in a flowered skirt and a white headscarf who gently begins to clean in her memories.

In short, genocide is therefore not, as Nichanian claims, merely a sign. Thanks to Deleuze's concept of signs, as discussed above, one can argue that genocide is both fact and sign. Genocide as fact and genocide as sign are two dimensions of the same bare event, of the same reality. These two dimensions, which exist alongside and through each other, never fully overlap and always retain a minimal gap in reality. This gap persists because genocide denial, whether structural or not, continues to exist to varying degrees. Once both dimensions are active, they become difficult to disentangle. It is essential

to consider both the destruction and the absence of evidence – which functions as evidence in itself – as integral parts of genocide. There is a reality that surpasses the objective reality of the historical fact. We reach this reality when we see through the phenomenon of genocide denial, through the propagandistic myth, and thus when we fully undergo the violence of the sign. This means that genocide unfolds and is absorbed juridically, ethically, philosophically, in relation to material reality, and immersed in trauma. It implies that genocide is both fact and sign, that genocide is not always drowned by the propagandistic myth, that we do not have to fight for breath while already having drowned long ago.

Conclusion

This article has shown, through Hannah Arendt's concept of the organized lie, how Turkey upholds a propagandistic myth surrounding the Armenian Genocide. Historical facts are denied, and alternative facts are manufactured in service of the organized lie. The Assyrian Genocide, largely transmitted through oral tradition and only recently receiving efforts toward recognition, further reveals the dynamics of genocide and denial. While Turkish historians often use this oral tradition to discredit the Assyrian testimonies, it is precisely this mode of transmission that discloses the workings of genocide. The oral memory is a result of continued oppression and marginalization in the aftermath of genocide. The Assyrian platitude "they-killed-us" embodies the destructive force of genocide and the stubborn persistence of truth, it functions as a rupture in Turkey's propagandistic myth. In the last chapter, the question was raised whether genocide is a fact at all. Drawing on the work of Marc Nichanian, I argued that genocide cannot be reduced to a verifiable historical fact, since the document proving intent will always be absent. Building on Nichanian's notion of unlimited destruction, I have described genocide as an absolute and total annihilation that unfolds on three interrelated levels. First, genocide destroys specific facts; the level at which the propagandistic myth operates. Second, genocide annihilates itself as a fact, this is the level targeted by Nichanian's argument. Third, and in relation to the first two, genocide undermines factuality itself, attacking our most fundamental philosophical categories of truth and falsity.

Because genocide involves not only the physical destruction of a group but also its denial, I invoked both Agamben's paradox of the witness and Nichanian's framework to argue that absence and denial can function as evidence of genocide. In the final section, I turned to Gilles Deleuze's concept of a sign to formulate a response to Nichanian's open-ended question of how genocide might still be understood beyond traditional historiography. For Deleuze, a sign is something violent that compels thought, it disrupts the present and

triggers an involuntary memory. In this same way, the repressed memory of genocide breaks through the dominant narrative: a document resurfaces, a mass grave is unearthed, the Assyrian platitude is passed on. These material remnants function as signs that pierce through the reigning interpretation, allowing genocide to be grasped as a sign. Genocide as sign enables us to comprehend it as absolute destruction, including the inherent denial that follows. Genocide is both fact and sign: it relates to material reality, but understanding it fully requires looking beyond that materiality. Beyond the instrumentalized witness, beyond the literal destruction, beyond the source in the depot, toward the meta-reality, toward the destruction of destruction, toward the Assyrian platitude and a deeper understanding of the Armenian drive to archive.

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