

Understanding genocide denial: Insights from the Armenian Genocide 110 Years Later



Armenere1915
TOGETHER WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Understanding Genocide Denial *Insights from the Armenian Genocide 110 Years Later*

Documentation and Lectures from the International Seminar in Oslo, October 30, 2025

Published by: iCenas forlag / Pannal.com

Editor: Shabnam Eghbali

Organizing Committee: Ann Færden, Mariam Matevosyan, Narine H.Harutyunyan, Shabnam Eghbali

Technical Design and Layout: Bahman Farhanieh

Cover Image: Professorboligen, Oslo

ISBN: 978-82-692871-6-5

Copyright: © 2026 Shabnam Eghbali / iCenas Eghbali forlag.

All rights reserved. This material is protected by copyright law. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without the prior written permission of the editor or the respective contributors.

Table of Contents

Foreword by the Publisher and Co-Organizer.....	1
Foreword by the Main Organizer.....	2
Program.....	4
Michael Margaryan - Representative from the embassy of Armenia in Stockholm.....	6
Understanding and Preventing Genocide: A Responsibility for All.....	6
The Armenian Legacy.....	6
The Global Failure to Learn.....	6
Diplomatic Efforts and “Never Again”.....	6
Individual Responsibility and Moral Clarity.....	7
The Nordic Missionaries and Bodil Biørn.....	7
A Legacy of Courage.....	7
Shabnam Eghbali.....	8
A handful of soil from my ancestor's land.....	8
The Driving Force.....	8
The Pain of Denial.....	9
Conclusion.....	9
Odik Nikgol.....	10
Hairapet’s Story: A Legacy of the Armenian Genocide.....	10
The Anatomy of Trauma.....	10
The Shadow Across Generations.....	11
Taner Akçam.....	12
The Anatomy of Denial: Why and How States Deny Genocide.....	12
Argument 1: Denial as a Modern Custom.....	13
From Pride to Denial: The Enlightenment and Beyond.....	14
Denial as an Inherent Part of the Plan.....	14
The Two Misunderstandings of Denial.....	15
The Continuity of the Mindset.....	15
The Construction of “Alternative Truths”.....	15
The Fragility of Truth and the Manufacture of Silence.....	16
Denial as a Tool of Power.....	16
The Five Stages of Silencing History.....	16
The Turkish Operation of Erasure.....	17
The Erasure of Evidence and the “Battle of Documents”.....	17
The Eradication of Factual Truth.....	17
The Example of April 24, 1915.....	18
The Case of Krikor Zohrab.....	18
The Silencing of the Perpetrator.....	18
Conclusion: Denial as a Political Struggle.....	19
Joachim Savelsberg.....	20
Knowing as a Process: The Sociology of Genocide Knowledge.....	20
The Recognition Timeline.....	20
The Erasure of Memory and the Institutionalization of Denial.....	21
The Architecture of Truth vs. The Strategy of Recognition.....	22
The Architecture of Memory: Residual Culture and Global Evidence.....	23
Rituals of Sanctification and the Hegemony of Human Rights.....	24
The Counterproductive Consequences of Denial.....	24
The Sociology of Knowledge: The Epistemic Circle.....	25
Suren Manukyan.....	26
The Narrative of Denial.....	26
Historical Roots of Denial.....	26
The Industry of Denial.....	28
The Impact of Denial.....	29
A Global Struggle for Humanity.....	31
Nora Sveaass.....	32
Introduction and Purpose.....	32

A Personal Case Study.....	32
The Dynamics of Torture and Human Rights Violations.....	33
Psychological Terror and the Threats Against Loved Ones.....	35
The Forms of Denial.....	36
The Society of Denial: 9 Points of Impact.....	37
Conclusion.....	38
Hanne Sophie Greve.....	39
Genocide: A Rose by Any Other Name.....	39
Freedom, The Rule of Law, and Criminal Liability.....	39
The Elements of a Crime.....	40
The Armenian Genocide: Historical Context and the 1915 Declaration.....	40
The Aftermath of the Genocide and the Failure of Justice.....	41
The Failure of the Malta Tribunals and Early International Law.....	41
The Pre-War Years and the Vision of Raphael Lemkin.....	42
Barbarism and Vandalism: The Two Pillars of Destruction.....	42
The Birth of the Genocide Convention.....	43
Bård Larsen.....	44
The Norwegian Government's Stance on the Armenian Genocide.....	44
The Norwegian "Consensus Policy" and the "G-Word".....	44
The Flaw of the "Retroactivity" Argument.....	45
Legal Caution vs. Historical Fact.....	45
The "Dialogue" Argument: A Diplomatic Shield.....	46
The "Historian" Argument and the Reality of Realpolitik.....	46
The Role of Media and the "Sloppy Excuse" for Non-Acknowledgment.....	46
Historians as Proxies for Propaganda.....	47
The Weaponization of History in Authoritarian States.....	47
The Weaponization of History: From Turkey to the United States.....	48
The Danger of Reversing History: A Warning.....	48
Ellen Stensrud.....	49
Understanding Genocide as a Process.....	49
Genocide as Stages and the Role of Denial.....	49
The Shadows of the Cold War and the Failure in Rwanda.....	50
From Srebrenica to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).....	50
The Dilemmas of the Genocide Label and R2P in Practice.....	51
The Crisis of R2P: From Libya to Institutional Paralysis.....	52
The Paralysis of the Security Council and the Illusion of Protection.....	52
Moving Beyond the "G-Word": Coalitions of the Willing.....	53
The Atrocity Prevention Lens vs. Peace Diplomacy.....	53
Conclusion: Denial as a Precondition for Genocide.....	54
Khachatur Gasparyan.....	55
Identity and Trauma.....	55
The Psychological Mechanisms of Denial and Intergenerational Trauma.....	56
The Vicious Cycle of Proof.....	56
Complicated Grief and Identity Formation.....	56
Defense Mechanisms and Rationalization.....	56
Self-Deception and Historical Falsification.....	56
Clinical Consequences of Denial.....	56
The Silence of Survivors.....	56
The Obstruction of Truth and Accountability.....	57
Denial as a Moral and Human Problem.....	57
The Paradox of Mourning and the Stagnation of Grief.....	57
Collective Trauma and Cultural Transmission.....	57
Internalization and Externalization of Trauma.....	57
Survivor Syndrome and the Necessity of Mourning.....	57
The Paradox of Denial.....	57
Beyond Trauma: Post-Traumatic Growth and Resilience.....	58
Pathological Grief and Health Outcomes.....	58
Recognition and Collective Validation.....	58
The Paradox of Resilience.....	58

Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG).....	58
Cultural Narratives and Adaptive Meaning-Making.....	59
Domains of Post-Traumatic Growth.....	59
Transformation of Values and Existential Reconstruction.....	59
Conclusion.....	59
Lene Wetteland.....	60
The Persistence of Impunity: From Chechnya to Ukraine.....	60
The Strategy of Doubt and the Culture of Impunity.....	60
The Strategic Abuse of Historical Trauma.....	61
A Path Forward: Identity, Facts, and Targeted Justice.....	61
Conclusion: The Banality of Denial and the Power of Persistence.....	62
Sigrun Marie Moss.....	63
Dialog med myndighetene.....	64
Debatten i offentligheten.....	66
Suggested Reading.....	68
Organizations and Acknowledgements.....	70

Foreword by the Publisher and Co-Organizer

This booklet is a collection of the voices and insights shared during the international seminar held in Oslo on October 30, 2025. Across these 64 pages, we document the consequences of the denial of the 1915 Genocide and seek answers on how we can learn from the past to protect the future.

The seminar brought together award-winning researchers and experts from around the world to highlight why recognition from political authorities is crucial, and how denial inflicts new traumas upon the victims. Commemorating 110 years since the Armenian Genocide of 1915, we discussed the deep scars that a lack of recognition leaves on society. This publication is based on the speakers' verbal contributions. Since the presentation slides are not included, the texts have been revised to ensure they are complete and coherent in their own right.

Key questions addressed:

- What are the consequences of denial for individuals and society?
- What is required to achieve genuine reconciliation?
- What role do international legal definitions play in prosecution?
- Why is political recognition (such as from Norway so important)?

As both a co-organizer and a contributor sharing my own family history, it is my hope that these texts will serve as a resource for teachers, students, policymakers, and everyone fighting for recognition and justice. A great debt of gratitude is owed to all the speakers who contributed their expertise and their words.

The initiative for this seminar originated from the organization Armenere1915, and it has been an honor for me to work closely with Ann Færden, who has put in a tireless effort in every stage of the project to make this collection possible. A special thanks also goes to Mariam Matevosyan and Narine H. Harutyunyan from the Armenian Apostolic Church in Norway, both of whom provided invaluable assistance in the planning and execution of the event.

As the Chair of Armenere1915 and the publisher at iCenas Publishing, finalizing this material has been a personal mission. A big thank you also goes to Bahman Farhanieh for his invaluable technical assistance in the design of this booklet. The goal of this publication is to spread knowledge about a vital topic and facilitate further dialogue and understanding.

Shabnam Eghbali

Chair of Armenere1915, Contributor, and Publisher at iCenas Forlag

Oslo, April 2026



Foreword by the Main Organizer

Dear seminar participants and readers,

I hope all of you who took part in the seminar, as well as everyone reading this collection, will read and distribute this written documentation which has the focus on the background for - and the consequences of genocide denial.

It is with the greatest thanks to Shabnam Eghbali, chair of the organization Armenere1915, that we can publish most of the lectures at the seminar "Understanding Genocide denial: Insight from the Armenian genocide 110 Years later".

I have read through all the lectures. While reading I am thinking how important this is as each lecture lives up to the goal of the seminar: How insight from the Armenian genocide will be taken into the present: what can we learn from the past for the future. This is done through documenting the different aspects of denial of genocide from the personal stories by Shabnam Eghbali and Odik Nikgol through Taner Akçam: How and why states deny genocide; Joachim Savelsbergs: Knowing as a process; Suren Manukyan: The effect of the denial of the Armenian Genocide; Nora Sveaass: The psychology of denial; Hanne Sophie Greve: The rule of law and the birth of the UN 1948 Convention; Bård Larsen: The Norwegian government's reluctance; Ellen Stenrud: UN and the prevention of genocide; Khackatur Gasparyan: The reconciliation process when genocide is denied; Sigrun M Moss: The challenge of reconciliation and Lene Wetteland: The culture of impunity and learning from the past.

This seminar has come about through different experiences with the denial of the Armenian genocide. The unifying thought has been that combating denial is more important than ever as denial of atrocities and genocide takes place during the current wars. Genocide is intended killing of the group you belong to as well as destruction of schools, health facilities and cultural heritage. You cannot imagine the cruelty unless you witnessed it and for those who were, they hardly bear to recall. Odik Nikgol and Shabnam Eghbali took on the responsibility not to be silent about their family's history. These two women's stories were the pillars of this seminar.

Another pillar is how the Armenian people welcome you as a Norwegian despite the reluctance of different Norwegian governments to recognize the Armenian genocide. This reluctance is embarrassing and stands in strong contrast to the work for Armenians by Fridtjof Nansen and Bodil Bjørn. This embarrassment led to the start of this seminar after I met Shabnam by coincidence. She told me about her book and the two of us set out to do something about the denial. I thank Shabnam for her friendship through all this, as well as Odik, Narine Harutyunyan and Mariam Matevosyan representing the Armensk Apostoliske Kirkesamfunn in Norway.

I also thank my dear Armenian friends over the years, Armen Soghoyan and Khachatur Gasparyan that facilitated the important collaboration with Suren Manukyan and Edyta Gzoyan at the Armenian Genocide Museum and Institute. I also thank all the other speakers who promptly answered yes to take part, many with long travels and busy schedules. Without your contribution this seminar would not have been possible and successful with a fully booked auditorium.

A special thanks goes to Nora Sveaass and Sigrun M Moss at the Department of Psychology at the University of Oslo (UIO) who helped in planning of the seminar and writing of the grant application to Fritt Ord. Discussions with Karl Emil Vogt and others at the Norwegian Holocaust center in planning - and support of the seminar has been very important, as has also the support from Taner Akçam at the Promise Armenian Institute at the University of California in Los Angeles. The faculty of medicine at UIO through Dag Quale and Suraj Thapa supported us with the free use of the auditorium which gave the seminar an important platform and was of great help in balancing the budget. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the Norwegian Helsinki Committee for their invaluable advice and professional guidance throughout the process. Lastly, we thank Fritt Ord because without the grant this seminar would not have been possible.

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was invited to the seminar but was unable to come. We therefore asked for a meeting to inform them about the different themes from the seminar. This meeting took place on the 12th of December with 9 of us representing speakers and the planning committee. The information from the seminar did not change the MFA's stance on why they refuse to recognize the 1915 atrocities as a genocide.

True reconciliation cannot be built on denial. As we approach the 111th anniversary of the Genocide, we are currently authoring a new chronicle to publicly challenge the double standard and consequence by the Norwegian government in their reluctance to use the word genocide.

To ensure full transparency and to preserve the historical record of this process, we have included at the end of this booklet the original letter from the MFA declining the invitation and the chronicle from the Turkish ambassador published in Aftenposten as an answer to our previous chronicle a year ago "110 år etter folkemordet på armenerne tier Norge fortsatt". Our fight to combat denial and secure formal political recognition will continue.

Ann Færden

Psychiatrist PhD, Armenere 1915

Oslo, April 2026

Program

Program for the seminar: Understanding genocide denial: Insights from the Armenian Genocide 110 Years Later

- 9.00 – 9.30 Opening: Armenian ambassador To Scandinavia
Personal stories: Shabnam Eghbali; Odik Nikgol
- 9.30 – 10.00 Denialism and Denial of the Armenian Genocide: Professor Taner Akçam,
Promise Armenian Institute, UCLA California
- 10.00 – 10.30 Knowing about genocide. Armenian suffering and epistemic struggles:
Professor Joachim J Savelsberg, University of Minnesota
- 10.30 – 11.00 Coffee Break
- 11.00 – 11.30 The effect of the denial of the Armenian Genocide: Society and individual:
Professor Suren Manukyan, The Armenian Genocide museum
- 11.30 – 12.00 The psychological effect of denial of and impunity for human rights violations:
Professor Emeritus Nora Sveaass, University of Oslo
- 12.00 – 12.30 Commentaries from the four presentators about the effects of denial
- 12.30 – 13.30 Lunch with music
- 13.30 – 14.00 The International Criminal Court vs the acceptance of genocide by governments
Lagmann: Dr. juris Hanne Sophie Greve, Judge at the European Court of Human
Rights (1998-2004)
- 14.00 – 14.30 Norwegian politics and the Armenian Genocide. How Geopolitics Overrides
Principles and Morality: Historian Bård Larsen, think tank Civita
- 14.30 – 15.00 Genocide prevention via the UN: Ellen Emilie Stensrud, The Norwegian Center for
Holocaust and Minority studies
- 15.00 – 15.30 Commentaries between the three presentators
- 15.30 – 16.00 Coffee Break with music
- 16.00 – 16.30 The reconciliation process when genocide is denied for genocide survivors: Professor
Khachatur Gasparyan, Medical Psychology department, Yerevan State Medical
University
- 16.30 – 17.00 The challenge with the reconciliation processes: The Holocaust and Rwanda
examples: Professor Sigrun Marie Moss University of Oslo
- 17.00 – 17.15 What can we learn from the past for the future: Head of the Documentation Hub Lene
Wetteland, Norwegian Helsinki Committee
- 17.15 – 18.00 Discussion: What can we learn from the past for the future? All presenters
- 18.00 End of seminar

Chairs for programs: Professor Armen Soghoian, Professor Anton Weiss-Wendt, Psychiatrist Ann Faerden



Michael Margaryan - Representative from the embassy of Armenia in Stockholm

Understanding and Preventing Genocide: A Responsibility for All

Genocide is one of the darkest and most tragic aspects of human history. Throughout centuries, long before the term itself was created, genocidal events have brought unspeakable suffering, wiping out entire nations and communities and leaving deep scars on societies and individuals alike.

Understanding and preventing genocide is crucial, not only to honor the memory of its victims but also to protect future generations from similar horrors.

The Armenian Legacy

From my own nation, the trauma of the Armenian Genocide still runs deep. The stories of our great-grandparents are part of our earliest memories and stay with us through our life. Over a million Armenians were systematically murdered by the Ottoman Empire, with entire communities forced from their homes, subjected to massacres, and driven into deserts to die of starvation and exhaustion.

The Global Failure to Learn

Over the decades that followed the Armenian Genocide, the world has gone very far along the path to establish international order and preventing such occurrence. As a global community, we continue to commit to prevent such atrocities. However, genocides continue to unfold; at the end of the 20th century and so far into the 21st, we have witnessed atrocities that remain horrific reminders of the world's failure to prevent mass violence.

The Rwanda genocide, where in just a few months in 1994 nearly 800,000 Tutsi were killed, remains a striking example of how the slow response of the international community to the early warning signs allowed the violence to escalate unchecked. We do not seem to have learned the lesson.

Yes, we often cite the Rwanda genocide as an example of slow response. Yes, we constantly speak about the failure to recognize the Armenian Genocide as paving the way to impunity, but we do not seem to be getting any closer to prevent or stop genocide. The tragic consequences of inaction and the global failure to prevent the atrocities when warning signs were already evident remains an underlying issue.

Diplomatic Efforts and “Never Again”

With all this in mind, Armenia, since its independence, has invested considerable efforts in universalization as well as implementation of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This was the first human rights treaty adopted by the UN, enshrining the world's solemn pledge: "Never Again shall humanity allow the systematic destruction of peoples."

- 1998: Armenia introduced resolutions marking the 50th anniversary of the Convention at the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Commission.

- 2015: Armenia initiated a General Assembly resolution proclaiming December 9 as the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime.
- Current Initiatives: This year, as we mark the tenth anniversary of the International Day, we have introduced a new draft resolution to convene a high-level meeting on December 9.

Individual Responsibility and Moral Clarity

On a personal level, we have a responsibility to act. It can be easy to feel disconnected from events occurring in distant parts of the world, but being indifferent can be just as harmful as direct participation. However, in all instances of crime and horror, there are those for whom being human has a real meaning.

As the humanitarian and Nobel laureate Albert Schweitzer once said: *"The purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others."* The fight against genocide is not just the responsibility of governments or international organizations; it is a shared responsibility that belongs to all of us. Each of us has the power to make a difference by standing against hate and injustice.

The Nordic Missionaries and Bodil Biørn

In the shadow of the Armenian Genocide, missionaries from the Nordic countries found themselves as witnesses to unspeakable horror. Many had come to the Ottoman Empire with the quiet intention of teaching, healing, and serving communities far from home. I have no doubt that today we will be speaking a lot about Bodil Biørn, the mother of so many Armenian children.

As the violence unfolded around them, their roles changed. They became protectors, caregivers, and voices for the silent. Amid the fear and devastation, these missionaries held on fiercely to their sense of duty and compassion. They chose to stay when leaving would have been safer; in doing so, they became lifelines and later some of the few witnesses who could speak the truth about what had happened.

A Legacy of Courage

Together, the stories of the humanitarians of the past and present form a quiet but powerful chorus of resistance—not through arms or rhetoric, but through presence, care, and moral clarity. Their legacy is not just in the lives they saved, but in the example they set: that even in the face of overwhelming cruelty, compassion can persist, and that one person's courage can reverberate far beyond their time. In remembering them, we are reminded that the truest form of humanitarianism is rooted not in heroism, but in the refusal to look away.



Shabnam Eghbali

My name is Shabnam Eghbali. I am a telecommunications engineer by training, but today I am a writer. As one of the organizers of this seminar and as a descendant, I am here to share my story— a story woven into one of the darkest chapters of human history: the Armenian Genocide.

First, I will tell you my grandmother- Tata's story. Then, I will share how this affects me today.

A handful of soil from my ancestor's land

It was a dark, cold night in April 1916. Tata, only eight years old, had to flee from Western Armenia. The Ottoman Empire was in the middle of a genocide, and her family was among those who had to escape. Together with her father and her heavily pregnant mother, they began a dramatic journey. My great-grandmother had to find a safe place in the city of Mush to give birth. To protect Tata my great-grandfather took her to an acquaintance in Maku, a border town in Iran. He went back to save his wife and newborn child, but they never returned. The acquaintance turned out to be a traitor, and 8 years Tata was thrown onto the street, alone and with nothing.

Now I would like to read a short selection from my book «*A handful of soil from my ancestor's land*»

Confused, and with the bag in my arms, I stood at the end of the alley. It was the end of April, the sky was cloudy, and the wind brought cold air. I wasn't wearing warm clothes. Everyone who passed by looked at me. I didn't know this city. My legs couldn't carry me anymore. I put the bag next to the wall and sat on the ground. I was hungry; I hadn't even eaten lunch. A little later, I opened the bag to see if there was anything to eat. But inside the bag, there were only two sets of baby clothes my mother had sewn a few days before we left. A pearl necklace with a cross and the Bible my mother inherited from her father were also there. I looked through the Bible, and my eyes fell on a picture safely placed between two pages. A photo of me and my parents. Tears rolled down my cheeks. Little by little, it got dark, but nothing happened. A passerby, who had maybe seen me standing and sitting there all morning, gave me a piece of bread and I ate it without chewing it properly. When he saw this, he asked me something. I didn't understand what he said, so he gave me another piece of bread, then he took off his big, thick scarf, put it over my shoulders, and walked away.

I didn't know how long I had been sleeping. The man who woke me was the same one who gave me bread and his scarf the night before. He held out his hand to me and said something. His eyes were blue, the same color as my fathers. He picked up my bag and gestured for me to follow him.

The Driving Force

I grew up hearing my grandmother's stories about what she heard and saw during the escape and the hardships of her life afterwards.

I grew up witnessing her grief, longing, sleepless nights, and panic attacks. She had two dreams: to find her parents and relatives, and to sue Ottomans. She didn't succeed in achieving her dreams, so the responsibility fell on me. These stories, plus a question my son asked me when he was in middle

school, were the driving force for writing my family history. My son asked me: "Why is our family tree so small and thin?"

The Pain of Denial

But it is not easy to carry this legacy. I want to share what the denial does to me personally.

I feel it physically inside me when people choose to deny the Armenian Genocide. It creates doubt and uncertainty, even when the facts are crystal clear; sometimes I find myself having to search the internet, over and over, to make sure that the Genocide actually happened. This is how the rejection of the truth can affect a person, even a descendant.

When I speak about this, I sometimes receive hate messages and threats. Such resistance hurts. It gives me sleepless nights.

The massacres end, but the violent consequences of the genocide remain. For descendants, it is an inherited burden, a suffering that continues today.

The Turkish state's denial and propaganda have tragically worked: some of the younger generations in my own family reject our story. They cheer for Turkey and call their own roots "dirty". This is the price of denial – it destroys my identity.

When someone denies what my ancestors have been through, they take away my history. My identity and my family's memories are made invalid. This leads to a feeling of insecurity, and confusion.

My DNA test revealed many relatives, but most have no idea who their ancestors were. They live in Turkey, and when I contact them, they don't want to stay in touch anymore. This is because it is a crime to talk about the Armenian Genocide in Turkey.

Conclusion

Denial prevents reconciliation. For a wound to heal, you must first admit that it is there. Denial stops this process. It puts a lid on a tragedy and denies the victims the right to talk about what happened. Grief can never end when the truth is hidden. In this way, denial stops people from healing their wounds and from building a safe and stable future.

In closing, I would like to thank you for listening. I would also like to invite you to read my book, which has been purchased by the "Kulturrådet" and is available in Norwegian, English and Persian. All profits from the sale go directly to school children in need in Iran and Armenia.



Odik Nikgol

Hairapet's Story: A Legacy of the Armenian Genocide

History is marked by countless rises and falls, mountains and valleys in humanity's long struggle with violence: wars, murder, torture, executions, abuse, starvation, destruction, and genocide. These atrocities have carved deep and lasting scars, both physical and psychological, into the lives of those who endured them and into the generations that followed.

I wish to tell a story that has cast a long and unshakable shadow over our family. It is the story of my father, Hairapet, born in Edessa (Bethlehem of the East), and for a brief time raised with his family in his hometown, now called Şanlıurfa, or simply Urfa, in southeastern Turkey.

As Hairapet's daughter, I feel a duty to shed light on one of those dark moments. In Urfa, in 1915, my father and his family witnessed unspeakable violence—the murder of their loved ones at the hands of Ottoman militias. Together with his mother and three sisters, he stood powerless as his unarmed father and four brothers were executed in their own garden.

He saw them fall before his eyes, one after another, beheaded in front of the remaining family. He saw his mother and sisters scream and wail, while his mother smeared the blood of the dead upon her face and body, desperate to follow them into the realm of death.

Two of his older sisters were taken by nomads. Soon after, his mother ended her life, leaving him and his little sister alone in the wilderness near the Euphrates River. He later watched his sister's body decay after her death. He himself was captured and enslaved by nomads. Years later, he escaped and joined the French army as a soldier. Later still, he joined an Armenian guerrilla group, determined to bring the genocide before an international court, but his efforts were in vain. Eventually, he fled to Iran, where he found refuge within the Armenian community.

The Anatomy of Trauma

His mind was filled with fear, contempt, insecurity, and despair.

- Fear for the safety of his wife and children as an Armenian family in a foreign land.
- Contempt, because as a child he had witnessed cruelty, murder, and the destruction of his people.
- Insecurity, because no one had helped a nation that suffered hunger, violence, abduction, rape, and beheadings—its sons and daughters enslaved, violated, or subjected to inhuman experiments.
- Despair, because the images of that day returned to him again and again, haunting his every thought.

The horrors he witnessed and the years that followed changed him forever. They painted the cruelty of humankind in blood before his eyes. That day, he lost faith in politicians and in the world. That day, sorrow, loneliness, and helplessness were buried deep within him, to remain there forever.

The Shadow Across Generations

He passed his story on to us, his descendants. This is a horrific, unforgettable, and seldom-told story about my father—a story of our grandparents, uncles, and aunts. It is an unresolved trauma that lives within us, the descendants; a story of the Armenian Genocide, still unacknowledged to this day.

It is a long and sorrowful story we have heard and carried since childhood. It is my childhood story—unforgettable and traumatic—etched into my and my sisters' memories, never truly processed, because its cause cannot be erased or undone. It lies silently within the body, awakened by every reminder, manifesting as physical and emotional pain: premature aging, anxiety, fear, depression, and a constant sense of danger.

My siblings and I have lived lives shaped by these memories—stories of murder and war that seep into our thoughts and cast their shadows over us. These painful memories have become part of our very being, yet we can do nothing to release them. Unhealed trauma endures across generations, transforming and resurfacing in countless ways.

The trauma was never resolved, never recognized internationally. This neglect has created a spiral that continues from one generation to the next. I still remember running for help, or searching for a doctor, to bring my father back from his tormented state. I remember him as a gentle and caring man, hiding his pain behind a mask of calm and longing. I remember the tears in my eyes as I witnessed his aggression, remorse, depression, and despair.

I do not remember fairy tales from my childhood. I remember only these stories, carved deeply into my memory as tales of grief and loss that will never fade.



Taner Akçam

The Anatomy of Denial: Why and How States Deny Genocide

It is difficult, after these two sentimental talks, to invite you into the space of rational thinking—but that is precisely what I am going to do. My language may feel so cold that you might even feel as if you are freezing.

Thank you, Ann, for inviting me, and thanks as well to the other organizers. It is a great pleasure to be here and to have the opportunity to speak on such an important topic. I have been invited to speak about denial broadly, and the Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide specifically. In this brief presentation, I will explore what denial actually is, how it functions, why it persists, and what makes it such a powerful political tool.

Let me begin with what I call the “one-million-dollar question.” I have been working on the Armenian Genocide for more than thirty-five years, and every single time someone meets me, their first question is: “Why do the Turks deny the Armenian Genocide?” I will answer this now, and we can discuss it further during the Q&A.

I will then turn to the general anatomy of denialism, examining its defining mechanisms, narrative strategies, and the ways in which it manufactures alternative realities, using the Turkish case as a guiding example.

Let me now turn to this “one-million-dollar question”: Why does Turkey deny the genocide?

If there is one simple answer to this question—easy to keep in mind—it is one word: continuity. This is my answer to Turkish denial. The Turkish government—or the modern Republic of Turkey—was established by the same party that organized the genocide. It is that simple. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) is the party that organized the Armenian Genocide, and it is also the same party that organized the Turkish “national liberation war.” The logical consequence is that a significant number of the founding members of the Turkish Republic were members of the CUP.

This is the major dilemma Turkey is facing today. An important part of its founders either participated directly in the killing process or became wealthy through the seizure of Armenian assets.

This reality has three main dimensions. Let me outline them.

The psychological and identity crisis: Every nation needs heroes; every nation has founding fathers. If Turkey were to openly recognize the Armenian Genocide, it would have to turn its heroes into villains and murderers. This is the psychological difficulty of acknowledgment. If you speak openly about the genocide and what happened, you risk undermining the national identity that has been constructed. This is the central difficulty, and such a transformation can only occur within a truly democratic structure.

Compensation and reparations: Second, if you acknowledge a wrongdoing in the past, you must provide compensation. Without compensation and justice, recognition is meaningless. If Turkey were to recognize the genocide, it would have to admit that there was a systematic extermination. Even if

one were to accept the fantasy that the Ottoman Empire simply “sent all the Armenians to Florida”—from the mountains of Anatolia to a beautiful place with better weather—this would still not change the underlying reality: the entire Turkish nation is sitting on the wealth and property created by the Armenian population. Accepting such a fantasy does not erase the fact that this wealth was expropriated. Once you admit that something was wrong, the issue of reparations and the restitution of resources becomes a massive problem—one that Turkey is not ready to confront.

The national security concern: The third important layer is what I call the national security concern. This is a very serious problem, and it can be compared to Israel’s attitude toward Palestinians. The Turkish government believes there is a strong interconnectedness between genocide recognition and territorial integrity. Armenians historically lived in what is known as Western Armenia, which today constitutes the eastern part of Turkey.

Even though there are not many Armenians today actively claiming these territories, the Turkish government uses the fear of territorial claims as a justification to suppress any acknowledgment of the genocide. The argument is straightforward: “If we recognize the Armenian Genocide, Armenians will demand a significant portion of our territory. This would threaten our national security—and territory cannot be given; it can only be taken.”

Legal restrictions and the court system: This national security argument is also highly visible in Turkish legal cases. If you read court judgments, you will see this clearly. For example, in 2007, when the court sentenced the son of Hrant Dink for using the term “genocide,” it ruled that such usage was not protected speech. The reasoning was that it posed a direct threat to national security. If national security is under threat, the state claims the right to restrict freedom of expression. These are among the central arguments used by Turkey to deny the Armenian Genocide.

Let me now move to the second part of my presentation. I have four major arguments for understanding the denial of genocide:

1. **Denialism is a modern phenomenon:** As a concept, denialism is very new.
2. **Denialism is an intrinsic part of the Armenian Genocide:** It did not emerge after the genocide; it was part of the genocidal process itself.
3. **Denialism is a structure and an institution:** It is not merely an ideological attitude toward a past event; it is built into the system.
4. **Denialism has its own “facts” and “truths”:** The assumption that there is only one single truth is not correct. As I will show, there are different forms of truth.

Argument 1: Denial as a Modern Custom

My first argument is that attempts by states to hide mass killings and other atrocities are a distinctly modern phenomenon. In earlier times, state violence—even on a massive scale—was viewed not only as normal but often as an object of praise. Far from hiding it, political leaders and rulers throughout much of recorded history openly celebrated such violence in the monuments they erected and the inscriptions they left behind.

We have numerous examples from ancient periods in which kings and rulers proudly declared the slaughters they carried out. The Persian King Darius, for instance, was so proud that he recorded on a monument exactly how many Armenians he had killed. We see the same pattern among Assyrian kings

or Timur (Tamerlane). In many historical inscriptions, rulers publicly and explicitly glorified their violence.

Statements such as the following were not uncommon:

- “I cut their throats publicly.”
- “I tore out the tongues of those who slandered or uttered blasphemies against my god, Ashur.”
- “I fed their corpses, cut into small pieces, to dogs and pigs.”

These are real examples from monuments and inscriptions of the ancient period. As you can see, there was no denial, because there was no perceived need to hide the violence.

From Pride to Denial: The Enlightenment and Beyond

We observe a fundamental shift from pride to denial, and the reason for this transformation lies in the Enlightenment.

The attitude of states and societies toward mass atrocities changed significantly during and after the Enlightenment. A basic shift occurred in how violence was understood. While violence has remained a constant tool of statecraft to this day, the way it is conceived, presented, and justified has evolved dramatically.

Violence came to be seen as an aberration—something that deviates from normal behavior and is morally reprehensible. The moral language that emerged after the Enlightenment treats violence as something outside the bounds of acceptable human conduct. As a result, when violence is committed today, it must either be justified through various arguments—or, if justification is insufficient, it must be denied.

In this sense, the moral vocabulary developed during the Enlightenment has made denialism an indispensable component of modern violence. We can observe this clearly in Gaza today; there has been a profound shift in how violence is framed and understood.

Denial as an Inherent Part of the Plan

The Armenian Genocide was not an exception to this modern pattern. Denial was not something that emerged afterward; it was a fundamental part of the process from the very beginning. It was embedded in the system and developed alongside the deportations and massacres.

In other words, the denial of the Armenian Genocide did not arise after the events—it was built into the plan itself. The deportations and mass killings were carried out under the guise of a “legal” resettlement policy. The official deportation order, published in the Official Gazette on May 27, 1915, and put into effect on June 1, 1915, presented the entire measure as a lawful relocation operation.

In these documents, even the term “Armenians” does not appear. The state framed the policy as the relocation of a population for security reasons during wartime. This constituted the legal framework of the genocide.

The authorities carefully structured the process in such a way that the extermination operations were separated from the “legal” framework of resettlement. This distinction was not only practical—it was a deliberate strategy designed to create plausible deniability.

Today, hundreds of documents in the Ottoman archives depict these events as nothing more than forced population transfers. Deaths from starvation or exposure are presented as unfortunate accidents beyond the control of the government.

One reason for this careful construction was constant international scrutiny. The Ottoman Empire was allied with Germany, and German consuls, military officials, and missionaries were present throughout the empire. At the same time, because the United States had not yet entered the war, American consuls and missionaries were also active in the region. The Ottoman authorities had to organize the process in such secrecy that neither the Germans nor the Americans would fully grasp what was happening on the ground.

In this sense, secrecy itself was not incidental—it was a structural component of the extermination process.

The Two Misunderstandings of Denial

This brings me to my core argument: denialism is a structure. There are two fundamental misunderstandings about denial, particularly in the Turkish case.

First, denialism is often treated as a mistaken but perhaps tolerable attitude toward past atrocities. Second, it is assumed that confronting denial is merely about establishing a moral stance toward a single historical crime, as if that crime were confined to the past and disconnected from the present.

Both misunderstandings are rooted in what I call **temporal compartmentalization**—the tendency to separate past and present into distinct, isolated categories and to ignore their interconnectedness.

However, it is deeply problematic to sever the relationship between denial and contemporary political realities. Denial is not simply an ideological position regarding the past; it is a systematic structure that continues to shape present-day policies. It is a deeply embedded mindset that has influenced institutions over time. In its institutionalized form, it remains an active force shaping Turkey's domestic and foreign policy today.

Because denialism functions as a structure in Turkey, it can be compared to the South African Apartheid regime. Both systems were built upon the principles of discrimination and the exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities.

The Continuity of the Mindset

Historically, the so-called “Armenian Question” was, at its core, a demand for equality and social justice. Instead of addressing these demands, the Ottoman state reframed them as a security threat—much like how demands for Palestinian equality are often portrayed as a threat to the Jewish state—ultimately leading to policies of elimination.

Today, the same mindset that produced the Armenian Genocide continues to operate in relation to the Kurds and Turkey's neighbors. This is a key reason why Kurds still lack basic rights. The institutions that facilitated the genocide have not disappeared; they continue to function. This continuity helps explain Turkey's aggressive policies toward Armenia and toward Syrian Kurds.

The present situation can only be understood within this broader historical framework.

The Construction of “Alternative Truths”

Another crucial point is that denialism produces its own “facts” and its own “truth.” Denial is often misunderstood as simply rejecting established facts. This assumption rests on the belief that facts,

opinions, and interpretations are clearly separable, and that truth is grounded in an agreed-upon set of facts.

We tend to say: “This is a fact—the Armenian Genocide happened,” and we distinguish this from mere opinion. However, this understanding is insufficient.

Denialism does not operate by simply rejecting truth. It functions in a much more complex and ambiguous space. It actively constructs its own “facts” and its own version of “truth” in order to counter historical reality.

The Fragility of Truth and the Manufacture of Silence

We must begin by distinguishing between different types of truth. This is the core difficulty we are facing. I will explain this using Hannah Arendt, who draws a clear distinction between factual truth and rational truth. This distinction is essential for understanding the phenomenon of denial.

Arendt argues that truths in mathematics, science, and philosophy—such as Euclidean geometry, Einstein’s theory of relativity, or Plato’s philosophy—can always be rediscovered if they are forgotten or lost. Someone else, at some point, can discover these truths again and bring them back.

However, the human field is entirely different. If we lose the historical facts of what happened, we cannot bring them back. Once they are gone, they are gone. When factual truth is obliterated, it becomes almost impossible to reconstruct. Only recorded events can be considered “truth” in a historical sense. If there is no record, there is no truth. This is the fragile nature of the truth we are dealing with.

Denial as a Tool of Power

Normally, historical truth rests on two main pillars: official documents and witness testimonies. Denialism has the capacity to undermine both.

If a witness account can be discredited, one can simply produce other witnesses who claim that the events never happened. As for official documents, new ones can be created; in that case, one document is simply placed against another. The crucial point, therefore, is that denialism is not merely the rejection of factual truth—it is a tool of power that actively shapes what is accepted as truth.

The struggle over which version of truth prevails is fundamentally political. Denial cannot be defeated solely in academia by placing one document against another. It can only be overcome through political struggle.

The Five Stages of Silencing History

My argument here builds on Michel-Rolph Trouillot, the anthropologist from the University of Chicago. He developed a theory of four “moments” in which silence enters the historical process. I expand his framework to five stages in order to better explain the denial of the Armenian Genocide.

Trouillot asks: How do we silence history? How do we deny what happened in the past? His answer identifies four key moments:

1. **The moment of fact creation:** the production of initial sources.
2. **The moment of fact assembly:** the creation of archives—since a single document is never enough.
3. **The moment of fact retrieval:** the construction of narratives based on those archives.

4. **The moment of retrospective significance:** the production of a national history that a society can embrace with pride.

To these four, I add a fifth:

5. **The moment of destruction or disqualification of critical documents:** when evidence contradicts the dominant narrative, it is either destroyed or declared inauthentic.

The Turkish Operation of Erasure

This framework helps us understand how the Ottoman and later Turkish authorities operated. They carried out a systematic process consisting of several interrelated steps:

- They created and assembled their own facts and archives.
- At the same time, they hid or destroyed the bulk of documentary evidence that clearly demonstrated genocidal intent. This destruction took place both during and after the genocide.

A striking example is the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (the Special Organization), which played a central role in the extermination of Armenian deportees. If you search today for official documents related to this organization in the Ottoman archives, you will find almost nothing. These records were either systematically purged or remain inaccessible.

The Erasure of Evidence and the “Battle of Documents”

There is a massive gap in the historical record. Documents related to the Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa are missing, and the records of the Central Committee of the Committee of Union and Progress—the very party that organized the genocide—have largely disappeared. We do not know where these documents are, or even whether they still exist. We also know that specific files from the Ministry of the Interior were removed, particularly after the armistice of 1918.

How do we know this?

The answer lies in the postwar investigations and trials of CUP members. Military tribunals were held in Istanbul between 1919 and 1922. In total, approximately 62 separate cases were tried, involving around 200 defendants. During these proceedings, important information came to light. Because a new government was in power, efforts were made to locate incriminating evidence against CUP members.

In their testimonies, some defendants openly admitted that they had taken files from the Ministry of the Interior. They claimed that the records of the CUP Central Committee had been “lost.” Without these testimonies, we would have no knowledge of what happened to these documents.

The Eradication of Factual Truth

Through this process, the authorities succeeded in almost entirely eradicating the factual basis of the genocide—removing documents that could directly demonstrate intent.

Yet genocide is a massive operation, and documents occasionally surface. When such documents appear outside the official archives, however, they are immediately dismissed as inauthentic by the Turkish state.

A well-known example is the controversy surrounding the Naim-Andonian documents. Some original documents surfaced in Aleppo. An Ottoman bureaucrat, Naim Bey, who worked in the deportation

office, sold these materials to the Armenian journalist Aram Andonian, who later published them. In response, the Turkish government produced extensive and influential “scholarly” work—taken very seriously in some circles—arguing that these documents were forged.

The Example of April 24, 1915

How does the construction of “alternative facts” actually work?

Let me give you a concrete example based on Ottoman archival documents from the genocide period. As you all know, April 24, 1915, is considered the pivotal date of the Armenian Genocide. On that day, approximately 200 Armenian intellectuals were arrested and sent to two locations in central Anatolia: Çankırı and Ayaş.

The historical consensus—what you believe—is that these individuals were taken in groups and murdered along the way. However, the official Ottoman archive presents a very different narrative, one carefully constructed to maintain the appearance of a legal process.

According to these official Ottoman documents, several Armenians—leaders or high-ranking members of the Dashnaksutyun (the Armenian Revolutionary Federation), as well as other intellectuals—simply “escaped” while in transit. This is a deliberate way of constructing a paper trail.

Based on these documents, the former director of the Turkish State Archives, Yusuf Sarıncı, wrote an academic article in which he “proved”—using Ottoman archival materials—that none of these intellectuals were actually murdered. Instead, he argued that they either escaped, were released, or were transferred to other locations for trial. In other words, the Ottoman state produced a sufficient number of “factual” documents in 1915 and 1916 precisely to sustain this version of events.

The Case of Krikor Zohrab

Let me give you a very important example of how this mechanism works.

Krikor Zohrab was a prominent Armenian intellectual and a member of the Ottoman Parliament. He was arrested and sent toward Diyarbakir. Thanks to witness accounts, we know that he was killed—his head was crushed with a stone. We know this only through survivor testimonies and later accounts.

However, if a student of history goes to the archives today to research the Zohrab case, they will encounter a completely different story:

1. **A doctor’s report** stating that Zohrab died of heart failure.
2. **A priest’s testimony** from Urfa claiming that he witnessed Zohrab’s death from a heart attack and buried him according to Armenian religious rites.
3. **Talat Pasha’s correspondence**, noting that newspapers reported Zohrab’s death as due to heart failure and that his wife had been officially informed by the authorities.

If you rely solely on these “official” documents, these become your truths. There are no other official archival records that contradict them.

The Silencing of the Perpetrator

So how do we know what actually happened?

The truth emerged only through coincidence. One of the perpetrators spoke too openly and revealed what he had done. The Turkish authorities realized that it was dangerous to keep him alive, because he was exposing the truth. They eliminated him to silence him.

That is the only reason we know how Zohrab was killed. Without this accidental disclosure, the manufactured version of events would have remained unchallenged.

Conclusion: Denial as a Political Struggle

This brings us to a central conclusion: denialism is not simply about rejecting facts—it is a structure.

You cannot combat denialism by merely presenting documents. Do not assume that you can change the mindset of a denier by placing a piece of evidence in front of them. Do you really believe that you can change the mind of Benjamin Netanyahu or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan by showing them a document and saying, “Look, you should acknowledge these mass atrocities”? They will simply dismiss it.

They will continue to deny the events using the materials they themselves have produced.

Of course, the academic struggle remains essential. We must continue to conduct research and defend historical truth within scholarly frameworks. But defeating denialism is ultimately a political matter. It requires political struggle.

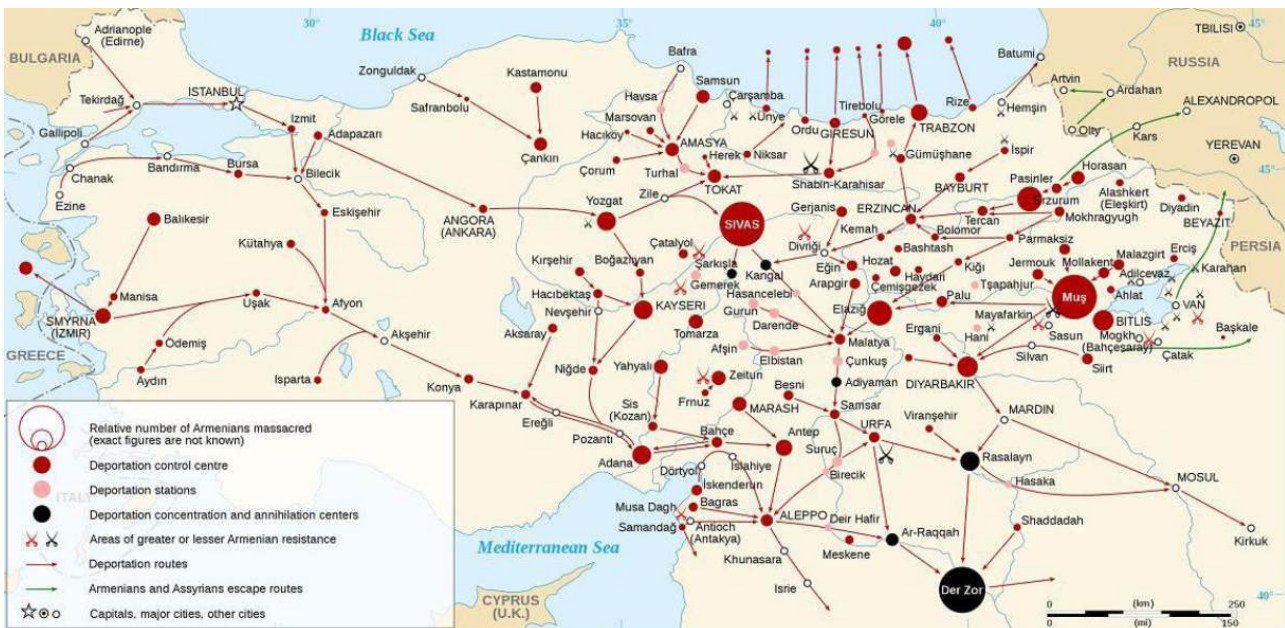
Only through political change can the structure of denial be dismantled.



Joachim Savelsberg

Knowing as a Process: The Sociology of Genocide Knowledge

Thank you very much, and thanks to the organizers. It has been a wonderful experience in Oslo so far. I want to discuss knowing about the Armenian Genocide and Armenian suffering—the theme of the "epistemic struggle," which is in the subtitle of my most recent book. I will read a few paragraphs from the book along the way.



- Each dot shows a massacre. There are three types of massacres: in a control center (red dot), in a station (pink dot), in a concentration and annihilation center (black dot). The size of the dot shows the relative number of killed Armenians.
- Each pair of swords shows an area of Armenian resistance: greater resistance (red swords) or lesser resistance (black swords). The different size of swords is to save space into the map, it means nothing.
- Dots in Black Sea representing Armenians (mainly women and children) drowned into the sea (see Armenian Genocide for references).

This map represents the geographic distribution of the Armenian Genocide. Each dot represents a location of massacres: red dots for control centers, pink dots for stations, and black dots for concentration and annihilation centers. This represents the facticity of the Armenian Genocide. However, I will not talk about the facticity today; I will talk about *knowing*. While Taner Akçam discussed denial as a structure, I view knowing as a process—a constant struggle between denial, silencing, and acknowledgment. From a sociology of knowledge perspective, we study the conditions under which this struggle occurs.

The Recognition Timeline:

Pre-1988: 2 countries (Uruguay, Cyprus)

1988–2017: +26 additional countries

Between 1988 and 2017 the number of countries that have formally recognized the Armenian Genocide. Norway is not among them. Two things are remarkable here:

1. **The Long Silence:** For nearly three-quarters of a century (until 1988), not a single country had formally recognized the genocide.
2. **The Exponential Increase:** After 1988, there was a sudden, almost exponential increase in official acknowledgments.

This leads to two questions: Why was there total silence for almost 75 years, and why did it suddenly change after 1988?

The Nature of Silencing: Why is this silencing so astonishing? I was born in Germany in 1951, six years after the end of World War II and the Holocaust. I know something about silencing; it took a decade and a half before I began learning about the reality of the Holocaust in "thin slices." It came to us as a shock and intensified the intergenerational conflict with our parents and teachers.

But silencing is also common among victimized peoples. We see this with Holocaust survivors, and I found the same in my interviews with Armenians in France and the United States. Many spoke about silence within their families. I attended meetings of the Armenian Cultural Organization of Minnesota, where speakers discussed growing up with a silenced Armenian identity.

The Example of Peter Balakian: I want to share an example from the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Peter Balakian. This is a paragraph from my book describing an exchange he had with his mother:

Inquiring with his mother about his grandmother's strange rituals, Peter was told: "*Oh, in the old country, at a certain age, women smoke pipes once in a while. It's a sign of wisdom.*" Naturally, his mother's answer—by silencing so much—only raised more urgent questions. He knew the "old country" meant Armenia, but his notion of it was blurry, and he did not know why its mention made him feel so uneasy.

The Erasure of Memory and the Institutionalization of Denial

The Emptiness of the Physical Space: When Peter Balakian inquired about his grandmother, his mother would change the subject. She told him on another occasion that the "old country" was gone, and the absence of physical markers accompanied this silence. Where others might display a map or a photo of a place dear to them, there was only emptiness in the Balakian home. This emptiness added to young Peter's unease. This is a clear illustration of how, in the upbringing of a famous Armenian-American, the history of Armenia and the genocide played no role—there was only silence.

The Three Faces of Denial: In addition to silence, there is active denial. The renowned criminologist Stanley Cohen, in his book *States of Denial*, distinguishes between three types: factual, interpretive, and implicatory denial.

- **Factual Denial:** Claiming the event simply did not happen.
- **Interpretive Denial:** Agreeing that something happened, but redefining it (e.g., "it wasn't genocide, it was a civil war").
- **Implicatory Denial:** Acknowledging the facts but denying the moral or political implications (e.g., "it was justified" or "we are not responsible").

We find all three forms in the work of Fatma Müge Göçek, a scholar of Turkish origin at the University of Michigan. In her book *Denial of Violence*, she conducts a content analysis of 300 memoirs of Turkish

officials throughout history. While she finds rare instances of acknowledgment, the narrative is overwhelmingly dominated by these forms of denial.

Cultural Cleansing and the Rewriting of History: Denial also manifests in the physical world through the renaming of squares and the rededication of buildings in Turkey that were historically affiliated with Armenians. This is an attempt to wipe out not just the memory of the genocide, but the memory of the Armenian presence in the Ottoman Empire altogether. We see this in the neglect and allowed destruction of the cultural remnants of Armenian life.

Furthermore, the state exerts control through education and the production of textbooks. Here is a quotation from a Turkish textbook that illustrates how history is turned upside down for Turkish children:

"The entry of the Ottoman state into World War I was viewed as a great opportunity by the Armenians. By invading Erzurum, Mush, and Bitlis in Eastern Anatolia, Russia further incited the Armenians in these regions."

The Architecture of Truth vs. The Strategy of Recognition

The Reversal of Truth in Education: So, based on figures from these biased sources, the claim is that 300,000 Armenians—not 1.5 million—lost their lives, not due to genocide, but due to "war and sickness." Yet, these same official records, claim Armenians killed around 600,000 Turks in just five cities and forced another 500,000 to migrate.

As you can see, this is a total reversal of historical truth. But this is exactly what Turkish children are exposed to when they learn the history of their motherland. This narrative is bolstered by the celebration of the sanctity of the Ottoman Empire—through commemorations of the Conquest of Constantinople and the glorification of Mehmed the Conqueror (Fatih Sultan Mehmed), whom President Erdoğan has found ways to celebrate in the most remarkable ways.

The Geopolitics of Denial: Then there is the persistent Turkish pressure in international relations: *"Do not dare to recognize the Armenian Genocide, or our military cooperation will come to an end."* This explains why recognition took so long in the United States; President Joe Biden was the first sitting U.S. President to officially use the word "genocide."

This combination of silencing and denial explains the void until 1988. But we must then ask: Why the sudden increase in recognition after 1988?

The Power of Witness Testimony: First, even if the Turkish state wishes them away, witness testimonies cannot be easily wiped out. I must take a small exception to Taner Akçam's argument for a moment; while much was destroyed, there are vast witness testimonies from consuls and missionaries all over the Ottoman Empire from 1915.

Many of these were summarized in the famous 1916 volume of the British Parliamentary "Blue Book" series by James Bryce and Arnold J. Toynbee. I have added to this by stepping into the Minnesota Historical Society archives and analyzing the diary entries and correspondence of Carmelite Christie. She was a missionary and school director in Tarsus, on the Mediterranean coast of the Ottoman Empire.

The Documentation of Horrors: I will quote from my book again regarding Christie's records. She writes about massacres in villages near Yozgat:

"The dead were left unburied. They told of a village of three hundred where 200 had been butchered. There are many murders on the road. Women were outraged in the usual manner, and young women were stolen and taken away. Robbery was a daily occurrence."

She continues:

"I heard today of a poor woman at Gülek station who was without any food. The woman threw her two little ones into the shallow stream. The inhumanity of man to man, of which we take daily knowledge, is almost a past belief."

Here is the documentation of a witness to the horrors of 1915. Furthermore, we analyze contemporary witnesses—such as the 60 English-language interviews conducted by J. Michael Hagopian, which are now part of the USC Shoah Foundation archives at the University of Southern California. These accounts merge the accumulated knowledge absorbed by respondents during their lifetimes with their raw, personal memories.

The Architecture of Memory: Residual Culture and Global Evidence

The Statistics of Suffering: These witness statements reinforce what I call sedimentary genocide knowledge. Many themes known from historiographic literature appear here as well. In the 60 interviews conducted by J. Michael Hagopian, the following depictions were recorded: 39 accounts of deportations, 29 of starvation and dehydration, 25 of robberies, and 43 of massacres and killings. Specifically, there were 12 accounts of shootings, 7 of mutilation or decapitation, 8 of beatings, and 7 of rape. Such data provide a statistical backbone to the oral histories.

The Contribution of Scholarship: In addition to oral history, we have a wealth of scholarship. Many prominent scholars are here with us today. I would also like to list a number of important names from among Turkish scholars—representatives of the perpetrator people—who have contributed vital evidence regarding the facticity of the Armenian Genocide. We have eyewitnesses, we have victim-survivors, and then we have residual culture.

Residual and Reactive Culture: Residual culture can be found, for example, in the Nubar Library of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) in Paris, which holds a wealth of archival documentation about Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire. We also see this in local exhibits, like the one at St. Sahag Armenian Church in Minnesota, which invited congregants to bring family objects for a deeply impressive exhibition. Such exhibitions are appearing all over the globe.

A prime example is the catalogue of the Centennial exhibition on the Armenian Genocide at the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris, curated by my friend Claire Mouradian. This is overwhelming evidence. It forms part of what I call reactive culture—culture created in response to the genocide. This includes literature like Franz Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, and works by Peter Balakian such as *Black Dog of Fate* and *The Burning Tigris*.

The Staircase of Gravestones: I want to specifically mention a filmmaker close to me, Serge Avédikian, a French-Armenian filmmaker and actor. In his film *We Drank the Same Water*, he visits Sölöz, a village near Lake Iznik, south of Istanbul. This is the village where his grandparents lived before they were driven toward the Syrian Desert in 1915.

His grandparents were actually saved by the Governor of Kütahya (Faik Ali Bey), a very courageous man who eventually paid for his bravery with his life. They were able to return to Sölöz in 1918, only to be displaced again after 1923, eventually ending up in Marseille.

In Sölöz, Avédikian tries to identify traces of Armenian culture. He finds a staircase built out of Armenian gravestones. At the top of this staircase is a gravestone with a very touching epitaph a mother wrote for her deceased young son. It has been desecrated, placed in the middle of village life next to a tire, with young men leaning against the wall, looking at passersbys. This is the physical reality of denial: the literal building of a new society on the desecrated ruins of the old.

Rituals of Sanctification and the Hegemony of Human Rights

The Monument as a Pilgrimage Site: Film still by Serge Avédikian, used as the cover for the book *Knowing About Genocide*. Reproduced with the artist's permission. Beyond the film, there are the memorials themselves. The most famous is Tsitsernakaberd in Yerevan. I will quote from a text that summarizes the core message of the genocide for Armenians with great density and intensity:

"The Memorial Complex in Yerevan is dedicated to the memory of 1.5 million Armenians who perished in the first genocide of the 20th century at the hands of the Turkish government."

The victimization and the perpetrator are both present in this condensed version of history. Completed in 1967, the monument has since become a pilgrimage site and an integral part of Yerevan's architecture. Set on a hill dominating the landscape and in perfect harmony with its surroundings, its austere outlines convey the spirit of a nation that survived a ruthless campaign of extermination. It is a powerful reminder to humankind of the horrors of the Armenian Genocide.

The Sociology of Rituals: Memorials, of course, come to life through rituals. In the tradition of Performance Theory and the Yale School of Cultural Sociology, we understand rituals as the physical assembly of groups of people. Their attention is directed at the same object; they share a common mood and are mutually aware of each other's emotions.

The outcome of such a ritual is a sense of community and the sanctification of an object—in this case, the sanctification of Armenian identity and the memory of the genocide, which are so closely intertwined. In 2016, I participated in the Global Forum Against the Crime of Genocide and attended the Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity ceremony. I felt very intensely the power of these rituals.

Global Solidarity and Human Rights Hegemony: Here is an image (image shown) from that ritual. You see the President, the head of the Armenian Church, and celebrities like George Clooney, alongside survivors of the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides, approaching the eternal flame to lay flowers. It is a powerful experience that brings home the memory of the Armenian Genocide in a unique way.

But how do we reconcile memorials, books, and testimonies with the persistent attempts at denial? We must look at the consequences of denial within what we call the era of Human Rights Hegemony. We borrow this term from Antonio Gramsci, though we apply it differently. By "Global Human Rights Hegemony," we mean the taken-for-granted knowledge of norms protecting the dignity and rights of individuals. These norms are actively transmitted by non-state actors— "organic intellectuals" such as social movements, NGOs, filmmakers, and journalists.

The Counterproductive Consequences of Denial

Legal Challenges: *Griswold v. Driscoll*: When the global human rights hegemony is challenged by the denial of mass violence, it often provokes counterproductive consequences for the denialists. I dedicate two chapters of my book, *Knowing About Genocide*, to such instances.

The first occurred in Massachusetts, where a Turkish-American organization sued the Department of Education to force the inclusion of denialist materials in the state's school guidelines. The case,

Griswold v. Driscoll, went all the way to the Supreme Court, which declined to hear it. The state won, and the denialist materials were excluded. More importantly, this attempt at denial backfired; it mobilized the Armenian community to establish the Armenian Heritage Park on the Rose Kennedy Greenway—a memorial that might not have existed without the catalyst of that court case.

French Legislation and the Density of Representation: In France, we see a similar pattern. In 2001, France formally recognized the genocide, and in 2012, it attempted to criminalize its denial. Despite massive Turkish state pressure and threats to terminate military and economic cooperation, the legislation moved forward.

Our sociological analysis of French legislative transcripts revealed a fascinating "density of representation." There was a direct correlation between the presence of Armenian cultural organizations in an electoral district and the likelihood that its representative would speak in favor of acknowledgment. This grassroots mobilization eventually led President Macron to declare April 24th a national day of commemoration in 2019.

Symbolic Geography in Education: Today, the Armenian Genocide is part of the mandatory curriculum in France. In the educational guidelines, the genocide is placed alongside trench warfare—events deeply ingrained in the French national psyche. This creates a "symbolic geography" where the Armenian experience is no longer "othered" but is central to the history of the 20th century.

The Sociology of Knowledge: The Epistemic Circle

Knowledge as a Process: Toward my conclusion: what I present is a sociology of knowledge regarding genocide. For us, "knowledge" is the perceived certainty that a phenomenon is real. It is a "matter-of-course" assumption—that which people take for granted. Following the theories of Berger and Luckmann, Schütz, and Scheler, we see knowledge as a constant struggle between acknowledgment, denial, and silencing.

I use the term "epistemic circle" to describe how these conflicting knowledge repertoires interact. While denial tries to break the circle, the sedimentation of truth over 115 years has made the reality of the genocide an objectified part of our world.

The Closing of the Circle: I want to end with a final quotation from my book:

"Finally, once sedimented over the course of 115 years, knowledge repertoires about the Armenian Genocide constitute a "matter-of-course" understanding of history. Resistance appears vain, even absurd. Survivors can no longer protect new generations from knowledge. Students read curricula, visit memorials, and watch documentaries. Learning about the Armenian Genocide is now part of the socialization process. At this point, the circle of knowledge closes."

The reality of the genocide has become instilled in the minds of new generations. At this stage, denial is no longer fighting against a memory; it is fighting against reality itself.



Suren Manukyan

The Narrative of Denial

Note: Due to a technical recording error during the seminar, a small portion of this presentation could not be documented in its entirety.

...product of wartime hardship rather than as a result of a deliberate and systematic policy of extermination based on ethnic and religious identity. Such language underscores the Turkish state's claim of the genocide and its consistent refusal to recognize it, perpetuating a narrative that attributes responsibility to impersonal historical circumstances rather than intentional state action.

The 2024 Message The April 24th message was even more explicit in its defiant denialist statements, which distort the historical facts and are also contrary to international law. These biased and partial statements about history undermine the reconciliation efforts between the two communities and encourage radical groups.

Conclusion on Institutionalized Policy Here we see the rhetoric repeated annually by the highest representatives of the Turkish state, which demonstrates how denial operates as an institutionalized and self-reinforcing policy.

Denial as a Process: Each April, leading Turkish officials publicly reaffirm a narrative that seeks to obscure historical accountability, normalize impunity, and invert the roles of victims and perpetrators. The persistence of this state-sponsored discourse highlights both the continued political sensitivity of the Armenian Genocide and the perceived necessity for the Turkish state to sustain and legitimize its denial in order to preserve foundational myths of national identity.

Beyond Politics: Denial is not a static position, but a continuously renewed process that shapes public consciousness, political behavior, and intergroup relations. Its effects extend far beyond the spheres of politics, influencing collective memory and psychological well-being across generations.

Historical Roots of Denial

Denial of the Armenian Genocide continues to affect societies and individuals. Specifically, I will explore its historical background, societal impact, and psychological and identity-related dimensions. Let's commence with a very, very brief historical context.

The roots of denial can be traced back to the years of the genocide itself and its immediate aftermath. As Professor Taner Akçam has already presented, one of the earliest Turkish publications that can rightfully be considered a foundational text of Armenian Genocide denial and falsification is the book titled: *The Aspirations and Revolutionary Activities of Armenian Committees before and after the Proclamation of the Constitution*. It was published in Ottoman Turkish in Constantinople in 1916 and translated into French a year later.

This volume was compiled and published by the Ottoman Empire's Ministry of the Interior. It offered all the concepts that we use even now. As early as 1919, Mustafa Kemal, the founder of modern Turkey, in a keynote speech in Ankara, outlined key points that would later form the foundations of the official state narrative.

For Kemal, denial was not only a way to justify the Turkish nation's emergence and to whitewash the crimes committed, but also a political necessity. His inner circle included numerous perpetrators of the genocide, and a large segment of the Turkish population had participated in the extermination and dispossession of Christian minorities. Kemalist denial of the Armenian Genocide served both as protection for these groups and as a unifying ideological tool for the new Republic.

This speech, delivered during the second Congress of the Republican People's Party between October 15 and 20, 1927, and lasting over 36 hours, became known as the Nutuk. It became the canonical account of Turkish national formation. Equally significant as what the Nutuk contained was what it omitted: the Armenians and the other minorities were erased from the foundational narrative, and the memory of their fate was forbidden to be acknowledged.

Institutionalized Education: So now, after decades of education, the state began instilling in the new generation the image of Armenians as treacherous enemies, while carefully overlooking the Ottoman Empire's crimes. The goal was to promote a homogeneous national identity rooted in denial.

International Suppression – The Musa Dagh Case: The Turkish state sought to suppress discussion of the genocide not only within its borders, but even internationally. There is a famous case—a very, very interesting case that I think needs to be researched more: the case of how the Turkish state stopped the creation of a film based on the famous novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, written by the Austrian writer Franz Werfel.

Turkey exerted diplomatic pressure on the United States, leading the U.S. State Department to demand that the company MGM, which had already purchased the rights to this novel, suspend the project. The tactic was clear: to delay, to obscure, and ultimately allow the memory of the crime to fade with the passing of survivors and witnesses. The logic was: "Just wait until all the survivors die." This period is key for understanding how collective trauma, although unsaid, shaped Armenian identity.

Silence in Soviet Armenia: Silence took distinct forms in Soviet Armenia and in the diaspora. In Soviet Armenia, the topic of the genocide was effectively taboo. Although nearly every Armenian family had been affected by the tragedy, the state ideology demanded forgetting. The reasons for this silence were both diplomatic and ideological; the Soviet Union sought to maintain good relations with the newly established Turkish Republic, with which it shared anti-imperialistic positions. Sustaining the memory of the genocide would have meant directly accusing a neighbor—a politically unacceptable move.

Censorship and repressions followed. Families destroyed personal photos, letters, and relics from Western Armenia out of fear they would be denounced as nationalists. Mention of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) could prompt arrest or worse. The memory did not disappear; its embers persisted in private conversations, whispered voices, and in the distant gaze captured in grandmothers' photographs. Yet, it lacked the language and public space to be openly expressed.

The Apathetic Silence in the Diaspora: This was the case in Soviet Armenia, but interestingly—and despite the absence of state censorship—the diaspora also repressed the genocide memory for decades. There, the genocide became a kind of forgotten history for a period of about 50 years. The

world fell into an "apathetic silence" regarding the Armenian Genocide. The results had been so grievous for the Armenians, and the failure of the international community to address the consequent problems was so thorough, that the world chose to ignore the legacy of the Armenian genocide. With the consolidation of Communist rule in Russia and nationalist rule in Turkey, the chapter of the Armenians was considered closed.

Survival and the "Conspiracy of Silence": People wanted to Forget about the Great War and its miseries. As for the Armenians, they were too few, too widely dispersed, and too occupied with their own survival to know how to respond. After the genocide, hundreds of thousands of Armenians dispersed around the world—to Syria, France, the United States, Bulgaria, and Egypt. They began their lives anew, often in poverty and without language or rights. The immediate priority was not to remember, but to survive.

Under such conditions, silence became a form of self-protection. In many families, the word "moratsir"—forget—was very widespread, because the traumatic memories were so overwhelming. Any mention of the genocide was frequently met with the plea to forget, out of fear of instilling a victimhood complex in children. Silence, both in the Soviet Union and in the diaspora, was not an absence, but an active form of trauma presence. It existed without language, without symbols, and without public expression, yet carried an intense internal force.

1965 - The Turning Point: This "conspiracy of silence" endured until the 1960s, when a new generation of Armenians broke the imposed silence. The 50th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide commemorations in 1965 marked the turning point. Younger Armenians began criticizing their parents for remaining quiet and initiated an era of activism demanding justice.

In the Soviet Union, massive demonstrations occurred—something absolutely unimaginable for the Soviet Union at that time—and the decision was made to construct the memorial complex (Tsitsernakaberd). In the diaspora, the establishment of Armenian studies centers in major universities and the emergence of militant organizations, such as ASALA for example, forced the issue back into global consciousness.

The Industry of Denial

Confronted with this renewed attention, the Turkish state launched a concerted counter-campaign to reinforce denial. Retired diplomats and state-linked historians, including Kamuran Gürün and others, produced selective publications using Ottoman materials to construct an appearance of scholarly legitimacy. This effort led to the creation of an entire industry of denialist literature.

The campaign also extended internationally. The Turkish government invested heavily in public relations efforts, particularly in the United States, to block recognition initiatives. Turkey emphasized its strategic alliance with Washington, warning of potential risks to U.S. policy in the Middle East should recognition occur. In 1982, for example, the Turkish government donated 3 million dollars to Washington and founded academic chairs in Turkish Studies and culture at major universities worldwide. While denialist narratives often prevailed, in 1985.

Academic Revisionism: In 1989, scholars published a statement in the New York Times urging the U.S. Congress not to recognize the Armenian Genocide. Most of them lacked relevant expertise and were financially linked to Turkish state interests. Prominent figures such as Stanford Shaw, Heath Lowry, and Justin McCarthy became central to this revisionist network, producing works that portrayed Armenians as disloyal rebels while exonerating Turkish authorities. This systematic campaign of distortion and academic influence sought to construct an alternative history. Denial thus

became an integral part of modern Turkish statecraft, serving to protect national identity, maintain international legitimacy, and suppress internal dissent.

Article 301 and Hrant Dink: Domestically, the Armenian Genocide remains a deeply sensitive issue. Under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, "insulting Turkishness" is a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment, and references to the Armenian Genocide are often prosecuted under this provision. The Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink was among those targeted. Simultaneously, foreign parliamentary resolutions recognizing the Armenian Genocide are met with diplomatic protests and accusations of promoting "false Armenian claims".

The Role of Azerbaijan: Alongside Turkey, Azerbaijan has also adopted a state-level policy of Armenian Genocide denial, extending into education, media, and academia. Azerbaijani history textbooks are filled with denialist narratives, portraying Armenians as aggressors and fabricating counter-myths about Armenian atrocities against Turks.

For example, in April 2024, the Azerbaijani Embassy in Ankara organized a panel titled "*Armenian Atrocities Against Turkic People in the South Caucasus and Anatolia*". At this event, the President of the Turkish Historical Society absurdly claimed that Armenians organized mass killings and blamed the Turks. The Azerbaijani Ambassador to Turkey echoed this distortion, asserting that imperialistic powers incited the Armenians to provoke a "genocide against the Turks". Ahead of the 100th anniversary of the genocide, the Azerbaijani President pledged full cooperation with Erdoğan in denialist campaigns, declaring that Azerbaijan will join in countering "the lies of the Armenians" regarding the genocide.

Symbolic Violence and Memory Violence: Literature produced in Azerbaijan by government-backed publishers and academics reinforces this narrative and ensures its transmission through the school curriculum. Denial of genocide is not a passive act of forgetting; it is an active, ongoing form of violence. In many ways, the process is symbolic and political long after the physical destruction has ended. Scholars describe this as "memory violence".

The term "symbolic violence", coined by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the subtle, often invisible forms of domination that are exercised through language, discourse, and cultural representation. It is violence that operates not through direct physical force, but through the imposition of meaning—by shaping how people understand reality and by legitimizing certain narratives while silencing others. Such forms of aggression target the meaning and memory of the victims rather than their physical existence.

The Impact of Denial

Denial inflicts harm in several interconnected ways:

1. **Blocks Justice and Reconciliation:** Recognition is an essential precondition for restitution, apology, and the moral treatment of wrongdoings. Denial sustains impunity. In the case of the Armenian Genocide, more than a century of official denial has made genuine reconciliation between Armenians and Turks nearly impossible. It perpetuates distrust, fuels nationalistic resentment, and prevents both societies from confronting the moral consequences of the past.
2. **Erases and Silences Narratives:** This is not limited to political statements; it extends into law, education, media, and cultural production. In Turkey, the memory of Armenians was systematically removed from textbooks, monuments, and public discourse. Research was criminalized, and the language of genocide was prohibited. This deliberate amnesia created a

distorted public history in which the victim ceases to exist. The destruction of churches, cemeteries, and toponyms — a physical erasure of presence — further reinforces this moral obliteration.

3. **Moral Inversion:** Denial functions as a form of moral inversion. It shifts blame from the perpetrators to the victims, recasting the narrative so that those who were annihilated become "traitors" and "rebels". Such inversion normalizes injustice and legitimizes continued discrimination. It also encourages new acts of hostility by framing acknowledgment itself as an "insult to the nation". The assassination of the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in 2007 stands as a tragic example of how denial-based nationalism can still incite real violence.

The Glorification of Violence: What you can see here is the killer—the person who assassinated Hrant Dink—and he is being glorified in a police office by the Turkish police. They photographed Turkish officers standing with him, just glorifying and celebrating the killing of the Armenian journalist.

Finally, denial perpetuates trauma across generations. For the descendants of victims, every act of denial reopens the wound, undermining the process of mourning and collective healing. In this sense, genocide denial is not the final chapter of history, but its continuation by other means.

Societal and Psychological Consequences: Let me very briefly go through the societal and psychological consequences for both the perpetrator and victim communities.

For the Perpetrator Society: Denial has become an integral part of national identity construction. Since the early years of the Republic, state ideology has been built on a carefully created version of history that portrays the founding fathers as modernizers and saviors, while erasing the violence against non-Muslim minorities.

This falsification of history created a national narrative of the "moral purity" of the founding fathers, where acknowledgment of the genocide is seen not as a moral responsibility, but as a threat to the nation's legitimacy. Recognizing the Armenian Genocide would shatter the very foundations of the history of Republican Turkey. It would reveal that the "anti-imperialistic war" was, in fact, also a war against the Armenian and Greek minorities, and that the Republic's founders were involved in crimes.

Collective Moral Corrosion: The state doctrine, institutionalized through education, media, and law, has created long-term results—what we call "collective moral corrosion". When a society collectively denies a mass atrocity, it normalizes impunity and erodes empathy. The denial of past crimes creates conditions for intolerance toward present minorities. As Professor Akçam mentioned, this is the case with the Kurds and others, as the refusal to recognize past injustice desensitizes the moral fabric of society.

Individual Impact and Psychological Defense: On an individual level, this kind of denial creates an environment of historical falsification, leading to an inner conflict between inherited national narratives and suppressed truths. Feelings of fear and guilt arise, and denial functions as a defense mechanism in this society.

These dynamics are beautifully described in two books: Elif Shafak's *The Bastard of Istanbul* and Fethiye Çetin's *My Grandmother*. They present how denial fragments personal identity, creating a split between the desire for truth and the pressure of collective silence.

The Impact on the Victim Community: In victim communities, denial has generated both mobilizing and traumatic effects. On one hand, denial has served as a unifying force; the ongoing refusal to recognize the Armenian Genocide has galvanized Armenians worldwide around the demand for truth and justice. The struggle for recognition has strengthened collective memory, historical scholarship, and activism.

At the same time, it has created a kind of dependence on the struggle for recognition. The constant need to assert historical truth and resist denial has turned the pursuit of justice into a core element of national identity. We feel we have to prove, over and over, that the genocide was a genocide. This creates a perpetual struggle to affirm the truth.

Secondary Traumatization and "The Second Killing": On an individual level, denial represents a form of re-traumatization, or what is often called "the second killing." When the suffering of one's ancestors is neglected or denied, the trauma is not confined to history; it emerges in the present as a persistent wound.

It produces a circle of silence and fragmented memory, acting as an obstacle to healing. This constant feeling of pain prevents survivors and their descendants from mourning publicly, from integrating the past into collective history, and from achieving a sense of closure.

A Global Struggle for Humanity

The denial of the Armenian Genocide is not solely a domestic policy of Turkey or Azerbaijan; it has long been sustained by international silence and complicity. This is why the recognition of the Armenian Genocide is so important. It shows that genocide cannot be allowed to undermine universal human rights.

This struggle is not just an Armenian struggle; it is a struggle for humanity. As we repeat in the Armenian Genocide Museum: the Armenian Genocide is not just a part of Armenian history—it is a part of human history. The suffering of human beings is universal. Therefore, the denial of the Armenian Genocide perpetuates the genocide itself—psychologically, morally, and politically. It continues to wound the descendants of victims and corrupts the moral conscience of perpetrator societies.



Nora Sveaass

Introduction and Purpose

Today we are talking about understanding genocide denial and what insights we have gained after the Armenian Genocide took place. But we are also talking about: What can we do in order to stop the ongoing mass atrocities we see in the world today? We have an obligation to survivors and to hold them responsible to account. This seminar has been planned for quite a while, but it has more current relevance than we could ever have imagined.

I will talk about the psychological pain and the intended suffering in serious human rights violations, and about the reactions and long-term consequences for individuals as well as for communities. I will then reflect a bit on the ways in which we encounter denial and impunity for the crimes committed, and talk about what consequences denial and impunity have on individuals and communities as collective traumas.

The Destruction of Humanity: I want to start with the conclusion: namely, that impunity and denial are among the most effective tools to destroy humanity. It is the destruction of human beings as right-holders—as individuals with the right to be respected and with citizenship. It is a destruction of shared identity and history, and when such a destruction takes place, it is indeed difficult to go on, as we have heard so clearly expressed many times already today.

Two Key Quotations: I would like to quote two very strong statements in this field. The first is from John Calvin in the 16th century, a central figure of the Protestant Reformation who was deeply engaged in questions regarding justice and moral discipline. He said:

"There is not anything that has brought greater trouble than the liberty given to the wicked to offend with impunity."

So, impunity is far from a new issue. The next quotation is more recent, namely from Ervin Staub, a psychologist and the author of *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (1989), where he describes the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, Cambodia, and Argentina. He says:

"We have a profound need for our pain and suffering—especially when it is born of injustice—to be acknowledged, known, and respected."

He further emphasizes and describes how our identities are rooted not only in our groups, but also in the history of our group. This becomes especially important when our group is partly destroyed or dispersed.

A Personal Case Study

From my own contact with survivors of serious human rights violations, I would like to mention a case of one woman from the former Yugoslavia. She had fled to Norway after her husband had been killed. She was raped by the men who had already killed her husband, and she was left pregnant.

She had two children already with her husband, and they were in the same house where their mother was raped and their father was abducted and then killed. My client had given birth to the child before she came and saw me for the first time.

The Psychological Power of Recognition: She said it was painful to look into the baby's eyes, as she felt that she was looking into the eyes of the rapist. She wanted to talk, but she had serious problems doing so. During these sessions, she often had to lie down because she was exhausted, afraid, and out of words.

At some point, I said to her — actually in a bit of desperation, because it was difficult to know how I could approach this serious problem: her third child was actually the child of the murderer of her two other children, so it was not easy to deal with.

Those were the days when sexual violence in war had finally been included into the legal framework as a war crime and a Crime Against Humanity. These were also the days of the ICTY. I said to her: "*You have been subject to war crimes. You are a wounded soldier.*"

At this point, she tried to sit up and looked at me very curiously, almost asking for more. And then I said: "*As we speak now, there is an ongoing court where those responsible for the crime you were a victim of are standing trial. They are to be held responsible for what they did to so many women in Bosnia.*" At this point, she really stood up. She looked at me, and the words obviously sank in. For the first time, she could speak without breaks and sobs. It is like my good friend and colleague Paz Rojas from Chile always said: "*Impunity for acts of torture is nothing but a continuation of the torture.*" Again, facing the possibility of justice also gives hope, and my Bosnian client, I think, was a very good example of this.

The Dynamics of Torture and Human Rights Violations

I am talking about serious human rights violations, including torture, sexual violence, forced disappearances, executions, and illegal detention—crimes that may take place in peacetime as well as in war. I will start by describing torture, because my point is that the dynamics involved in the infliction of torture, as well as the effects it has on the victims, have many parallels to the other forms of violence we are talking about today, such as crimes against humanity and systematic destructive acts.

When I talk about torture now, I am sure you will have reflections on the larger picture. Despite the well-established knowledge that people may have very different reactions to the traumas experienced, we also know that there are many similarities across nations, individuals, and countries.

The Breaking of Bodies and Minds: It is worth mentioning that one of the most famous books on torture is called *The Breaking of Bodies and Minds: Torture, Psychiatric Abuse, and the Health Profession*. This was written by Eric Stover and Elena Nightingale in 1985. The title expresses so well what torture actually is: namely, the breaking down of bodies and destroying of minds.

The UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT), Article 1, refers to any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as... [and then a list of purposes is mentioned]. What I want to highlight is the reference to "intentionally inflicted pain or suffering, mental or physical". These two terms are often used to describe different forms of torture, but in fact, a clear distinction is never possible.

Characteristics of Violent Acts: What characterizes these violent and prohibited acts?

1. **Total Power Imbalance:** They are carried out in a context of a total power imbalance. One part is in total control of the other.
2. **Lack of Protection:** There are no ways in which the person can defend him or herself, and nobody is there to protect you.
3. **Unpredictability:** You do not know what will happen, but what you do know is that what *will* happen will be painful. This is an overwhelming experience in itself.

Those who are in control leave no doubt about their intention to create pain and suffering. They create a climate of absolute power and may apply different methods to inflict pain. The overall aim seems to be full control, humiliation, and dehumanization.

The Psychology of Shame and Disorientation: This is often done by forcing the individual into situations that create deep shame—for instance, sexual acts against the person, forced nudity, or being forced into performing unacceptable acts. This is extremely humiliating and degrading, and you do not forget. In this process, identity is attacked; values and ideas are ridiculed, and people may be forced to shame their own religion.

The situation is, as mentioned, characterized by total insecurity and a total lack of predictability. You know what is happening now, but you do not know what will happen next. Intervals are often very irregular, which is intended to create confusion—because waiting for pain to happen may be almost as bad as experiencing it. There is nobody to trust and no one to lean on. In addition, there is the shame and even guilt that some people are made to feel—for instance, by being told that because of what they have done, their family will be targeted. There is powerlessness, helplessness, and no sense of agency.

Systematic Breakdown of Reality: An important way to break down a person is to take away what we use to orient ourselves. The clues that usually give direction and information are systematically gone; a deep sense of disorientation and chaos is the result. When a person experiences that a violent action by some in the system is completely denied by others, a sense of deep disturbance is created.

I highlight this because it is so easy to recognize from other violent contexts: the systematic attempts to create confusion, to break down the sense of what is true and what is false, right or wrong. It becomes impossible to understand the meaning of what is happening. Predictability and control are completely and systematically removed. Combined with rumors, false information, and conflicting orders—a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situation—this reinforces helplessness and insecurity. Identity, values, and relations are broken down.

Enhanced Interrogation and State Policy: We see the psychological horror involved here: the creation of deep fear, creating panic, and exploiting phobias to humiliate and scare. These were also among the "13 methods for enhanced interrogation" that were deemed necessary by the Bush administration and thereby argued as justified. Among these methods were so-called stress positions, the use of known phobias to create fear, shackling, and waterboarding.

In addition to creating fear as described above, organized mock executions are frequently reported from different parts of the world. The "enhanced methods" I mentioned were also included in one of the letters by Donald Rumsfeld about accepted methods in the fight against terror.

Furthermore, there is sleep deprivation, frequently used by Israeli intelligence according to the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), an Israeli NGO that has extensively documented sleep deprivation as part of interrogations. Being deprived of sleep by frequent waking or being prevented

from falling asleep has serious health consequences, as does detention in isolation or solitary confinement.

Psychological Terror and the Threats Against Loved Ones

I already mentioned the emotional violations perpetrated in connection to threats—such as threatening loved ones, either by forcing the victim to observe violations against family members or being informed about violations done against them, or threats that this will be done. We know that perpetrators use recordings of people shouting and crying, telling the victim: "*This is your wife, this is your mother, this is your child.*" These are the threats, and you never know whether they are false or whether they are true.

All this time, there is nowhere to complain, nowhere to communicate about what is happening. What remains is the sense of being alone, not seen, and forgotten. It may be life-threatening to talk or protest, so silence, as well as self-censorship, may be a kind of protection.

The Denial of Basic Needs as Torture: A very important part of this picture is the denial of basic needs. We can think about ongoing situations in the world today: the denial of access to air, sunlight, food, water, a place to sleep, to move around, or a minimum of hygiene and healthcare.

The denial of all of these aspects, or even some of them, may amount to torture. In fact, states may be found guilty of torture before any "beating" has even taken place. That is important to note.

Physical Violations and the Istanbul Protocol: Despite, I have not even mentioned direct physical harm to the body—beatings, pulling out nails, amputations, flogging or falaka (beating the soles of the feet), hanging by arms or legs, etc. These are all serious attacks against the body that may result in lifelong pain, reduced functionality, or disabilities.

There is much to say here, but I will refer you to the UN manual, the Istanbul Protocol (the *Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*). Here you will find an overview of torture symptoms and reactions, as well as ways of documenting and reporting it.

The Inseparability of Body and Mind: As can be seen, despite the often-used terms "mental" or "physical", it is not actually possible to distinguish between the two. In genocide or in torture, we are all one piece. I can think of no physical attack against me that would not give me mental scars or at least serious reactions. Any physical assault is proof of the power and strength of the other, and their willingness to break me down. In addition to being very painful, such beatings are in themselves serious blows to identity and dignity. The result is often, once again, a sense of not being worth anything

The Organized Destruction of Meaning: It is nevertheless possible to create serious pain without directly harming the body. Solitary confinement, systematic fear, waterboarding, and sleep deprivation may not leave visible scars, but we know from psychological and medical research that these kinds of stress-related experiences cause serious bodily damage and psychosomatic illnesses. We must never forget the time aspect—how long this stress lasted and how long people endured the pain are critical factors.

More than 30 years ago, I wrote an article called "*Organized Destruction of Meaning*", describing how authoritarian regimes manipulate and destroy all meaningful relations and actions. Under the heading "The Dictator's Power Menu", I described the following tactics:

- Anything can happen at any time; you never know when the violations will happen.
- Power is everywhere—omnipresent.
- Silence is health; it is best not to know, talk, or protest.
- No smoke without fire; meaning if something happens to you, there must be a reason—you must be guilty of something.

The power is there to interpret reality for us. George Orwell has described this much better, but the idea is to create total insecurity, making individuals unable to act, being controlled, and losing agency in their own lives. These are serious blows.

The Forms of Denial

I will now turn to the question of denial and ask: In what ways are serious human rights violations—including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide—denied or rejected?

1. **Open and Ruthless Denial:** The total denial of crimes committed, as we see today in the case of Armenia. The fact that violations went on so brutally for so long, resulting in extreme violence and the killing of more than half the population—probably the highest percentage ever—and then the audacity to deny this, is unbelievable.
2. **Collateral Damage:** The term used to say "it just happens, it cannot be helped." It is to be understood as unintentional harm, always happens in war. This framing hides and neglects serious crimes by making them seem accidental.
3. **Exclusion from the Agenda:** We have seen this with regard to sexual violence in war. In the 90s, feminist groups had to fight a hard battle to argue that rape and sexualized crimes must be regarded as strategic warfare and serious human rights violations.

The Legal Breakthrough for Sexual Violence: "It was after this strong advocacy in the 90ties that things changed in relation to sexual violence against women in armed conflict. Conflict-related sexual violence was termed a war crime and a Crime Against Humanity. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) defined these acts as war crimes and crimes against humanity—a very important step in acknowledging the sexual human rights violations that had taken place over years, and still take place.

Then we have the UN Security Council, which adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Other resolutions followed, focusing on the prohibition of sexual violence, including against women, children, and men (such as the 2016 resolutions).

Denial through Justification: Then there is the kind of denial expressed when human rights violations are described as "needed" or "justified acts"—either for the protection of the country or the safety of particular groups.

- **Argentina:** In Argentina, the killings by the military dictatorship were framed as a necessary strategy to "get rid of Communist groups".
- **The War on Terror:** We remember the attempts by the Bush administration to redefine the concept of torture to justify its use in the "War on Terror".
- **Palestine:** Today, we see attempts at justifying of mass killings against Palestinians in the occupied territories.

In these cases, we see attempts to justify serious violence and aggressive attacks on civilians, as well as upholding occupation. Closely related to this are the many attempts at redefining and reinterpreting what is actually happening.

Distorting Reality and the Danger of Breaking Silence: Civilians and the upholding of occupation, as in the case of Israel and Palestine—closely related to this are the many attempts at redefining and reinterpreting what is happening. This distorts people's sense of reality, and I think this is the basis of all of this: distorting people's own experience by retelling events in different and incorrect ways.

What also follows is that breaking the silence is dangerous. It involves danger to talk, to tell, or to point at what is happening. Dead or mutilated bodies are found in the street; people disappear or are imprisoned and tortured. These are very effective mechanisms.

Just to go back to Argentina: people were afraid of reporting the missing. It was impossible to grieve in the open. Secrecy and silence created chaos and pain. Denial, whether direct or indirect, is also in place when transitions occur—from conflict or authoritarianism to peace and democracy. When this happens without justice, it is a transition with impunity for the crimes committed.

The Myth of "Moving Forward": Threats are often made by those who have lost power, and the argument is always: *"We have to look ahead; we cannot keep looking back. It takes too much time; we must move forward."* To many people, this is a serious injustice that cannot be accepted.

There is also a version of justice which is almost as bad: "sham justice". We have seen this, for instance, in Peru. There have been a number of cases in court where witnesses and survivors have gathered in numbers, yet all the defendants have been acquitted. People have faced hindrances all along the way. So again, yes, there was "some kind of justice", but nobody was ever found guilty; nobody ever faced the consequences.

The Nightmare of Denied Experience: Discussing the pain and the losses are seen as serious threats by these aggressive actors. You mentioned yesterday, and again today, your grandmother—how you felt personally offended when people said that this was a "very complex discussion". It's not complex: it's about dying, it's about killing, it's about injustice.

When losses and pain are treated as if they never happened, or as if something is wrong with the person and his or her imagination, it is a nightmare. Having others redefine or downright deny your experiences creates a wide range of feelings, both individually and in the group.

The Society of Denial: 9 Points of Impact

We are talking about confusion, humiliation, and helplessness, which may also breed hate, aggression, and revenge. Denial, the absence of responsibility, and the lack of accountability after violence has taken place are, in many ways, a full repetition of what survivors suffered when the violence was ongoing. Being treated without dignity and without rights represents a blow not only to mental health and daily functioning, but an attack on identity itself.

What characterizes a society where atrocities are denied? I will try to repeat some of these points:

1. **Destruction of the Democratic Ideal:** In a society where justice is denied, there is no attempt to create a shared story about the events—what happened, who was responsible, and how these acts can be repaired.
2. **Obstruction of Healing:** The need for places of memory and memorials is crucial. Honoring the dead and telling their stories are healing steps that are denied or made extremely difficult.

3. **Moral Ambiguity:** Denial and impunity create problematic moral positions where it becomes difficult to distinguish right from wrong, or to establish the rule of law.
4. **Invalidation of Experience:** Impunity invalidates what has happened and limits effective communication between citizens. For example: What do I tell my kids? I know what my family experienced, but the books and the official texts say something different.
5. **Polarization:** Without a common ground of truth, healing is difficult. The society remains polarized, and there is little hope for reconciliation when one is constantly confronted with lies and distortions.
6. **The Persistence of Shame:** The truth remains untold. There is no disclosure, no confirmation, and no acknowledgment for those who have suffered. This strengthens powerlessness, guilt, and shame.
7. **The Risk of Vigilantism:** While we have seen people in Latin America rise up and claim justice through civilian protest, impunity can also lead people to take the law into their own hands, which is not always a wise path.
8. **Historical "No Man's Land":** Denial is a continuation of the dehumanizing process. Then leave people in a historical no man's land, making it impossible to move on because they need to be seen, respected, and to receive reparation and redress.
9. **Chronic Mistrust:** Survivors remain discriminated against, seen as "enemies", "liars", or "difficult people". This breeds mistrust in others and in oneself, making it hard to reconstruct a life.

Conclusion

Having said all these things—basing myself on the dynamics of torture and trying to illustrate how this also happens in the larger world today—I just want to say: we must by all means fight all forms of denial. I truly agree that this is not just a "mistake"; it is a power tactic, systematically employed both at the level of genocide and in the small torture interrogation room.

Thank you very much, and keep up the struggle for justice, against denial, and for human rights.



Hanne Sophie Greve

Genocide: A Rose by Any Other Name

I slightly changed the subject of my presentation. I shall speak on genocide and its name. "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," as written in *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. When in nature a new species is discovered, it is provided with a name; it is its existence that distinguishes the species, not the name.

The Story of Cain and Abel: According to the Bible, while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel? What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground." Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

The Moral Imperative: Thou shalt not kill," as the Sixth Commandment reads. It is the moral imperative. As in the case of Cain and Abel, killing a human being is an offense against the Creator, regardless of whether a state has identified murder as a criminal offense.

A noun is the word used to identify a concrete or abstract item, such as living beings, actions, qualities, and ideas. "Killing" is one specific action that means to cause someone to die. The noun does not address the issue of whether killing is permissible or acceptable.

Human Dignity and Freedom: Human beings share a common nature. Every person is unique—a subject, not an object—and endowed with a dignity that is inalienable. The sanctity of human life is a core value of civilization. The world community professes its belief in the worth and dignity of the human being, not to be gained or lost. Freedom is the one sole, original, inborn right belonging to every human in virtue of her or his humanity.

Freedom, The Rule of Law, and Criminal Liability

The Nature of Freedom: Every human, in virtue of her or his humanity, possesses freedom. Freedom signifies the absence of the will of others. Freedom can only legitimately be constrained by freedom itself; right is the sum of conditions under which the choice of one can be united with the freedom of others. The right to freedom is thus a right to coercion as well—for only when shielded by the rule of law can everyone have security.

The Foundations of Criminal Law: Criminal law is the body of law that relates to crime. It prescribes conduct perceived as threatening, harmful, or otherwise endangering to the public. Criminal law authorizes the punishment of people who violate such laws. While national criminal laws are enacted by legislatures and may vary according to jurisdiction, justice and the rule of law necessitate certain universal principles:

1. **Nullum crimen, nulla poena sine lege:** There can be no punishment without a law authorizing it.

2. **Non-retroactivity:** Criminal law cannot be applied retroactively in a way that negatively affects a person's rights. An action that was legal when it was committed cannot later be criminalized.
3. **General Principles of Nations:** However, an act or omission which, when it was committed, was criminal according to the general principles of law recognized by the community of nations, is punishable.

The Elements of a Crime

Every crime is composed of criminal elements. These elements are facts that must be proven for a criminal conviction. Some crimes have few elements, others have many; some crimes encompass elements that may be divided into several separate crimes. A crime with many elements is likely to be more serious than the separate crimes it may also represent.

The application of law involves the combination of legal provisions and facts. The existence of a fact is a question of proof. To establish criminal liability, the essential elements of a crime are:

- **Actus Reus:** The wrongful deed.
- **Mens Rea:** The "guilty mind"—the criminal intent or recklessness.

Each element of a crime must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt for a criminal conviction.

The Armenian Genocide: Historical Context and the 1915 Declaration

The 1915 Declaration: On 24th May 1915, France, Great Britain, and Russia issued a declaration condemning the massacre of Armenians in Turkey by Ottoman authorities as Crimes Against Humanity and Civilization, for which all members of the Turkish government would be held responsible, together with its agents implicated in the massacres.

The Decline of the Ottoman Empire: In 1915, one to two million Armenians lived in the Ottoman Empire, the majority in Eastern Anatolia or Western Armenia. Eastern Armenia was part of Tsarist Russia. In the 18th century, the Ottoman Empire had declined; several Christian nations in the Balkans gained independence. As Christians, the Armenians had fewer rights and less protection than the Muslim majority population in Turkey. Supported by European Great Powers, the Armenians demanded better conditions. The Ottoman Empire feared that the Armenians would want independence.

The Rise of the Young Turks: The Sultan instigated and launched large-scale massacres of Armenians in the 1890s. Following a *coup d'état* in 1908 and another in 1913, the Committee of Union and Progress, known as The Young Turks, held power in the Ottoman Empire. Turkish nationalism prevailed.

The Path to Extermination: On 2nd November 1914, the Ottoman Empire joined the Central Powers in the First World War. In February 1915, Armenians in the Ottoman forces were disarmed and transferred to unarmed work battalions. On 24th April, the arrest of more than 2,000 Armenian leaders started.

In late May, a law concerning the movement of the Armenians to Syria was enacted—the factor and basis for extermination. Ottoman official instructions, such as those to the police officer in Aleppo, notified that The Young Turks had decided to exterminate every Armenian living in the Ottoman Empire.

The Aftermath of the Genocide and the Failure of Justice

The Intent and Scale of the Massacres: Regardless of segment or conditions, children, women, and the sick should be killed as well. A person disobeying the instruction was not considered a friend of the government. Official Ottoman statistics say that 800,000 Armenians were killed in the period between 1915 and 1917–18. German sources estimated it was 1.5 million. The League of Nations estimated one million. At the Paris Peace Conference after the First World War, Grand Vizier Damat Ferid Pasha confessed officially to the massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.

Treaties and International Law: The Treaty of Sèvres, which ended the war between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire, contained provisions requiring the prosecution of persons accused of crimes against the laws of humanity. The Ottoman Empire recognized the Allied Powers' right to set up international courts to try war crime cases. However, the Treaty of Sèvres was never ratified. Following the Turkish War of Independence, it was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

The Ottoman Courts-Martial: War crime cases were brought before Ottoman Courts-Martial operating in Turkey from April 1919 to the end of March 1920. The courts found that it had been the intent of the Ottoman leadership to physically exterminate the Armenian people. The main leaders of the Young Turks—the Three Pashas: Talaat, Enver, and Djemal—were sentenced to death in absentia. Years later, Armenians murdered Talaat and Djemal, and Enver died fighting the Red Army.

Obstacles to Justice: The problems of the courts were always insurmountable. Much incriminating material relating to the Armenian question had been removed from the archives. The Ottoman Empire was being dissolved; political pressure made it exceedingly difficult to try cases against defendants that had not left the country.

The Failure of the Malta Tribunals and Early International Law

The Malta Exiles: Some leaders were sentenced to death and executed; others were given prison terms. The British transferred persons given prison sentences and suspects to the British Crown Colony of Malta, where efforts were made to establish an international court. However, the mismanagement of evidence in Turkey meant that the material could not be used in criminal court cases, and the courts ended their work in August 1920. The next year, the Young Turks were released and returned home. No criminal case was ever heard in Malta.

The Gap in International Law: Legislation for the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide did not exist after the First World War. Yet, the genocide against the Armenians remained a focal point for international criminal law. The Ottoman Empire's extermination policy outraged the moral sentiment of people across Europe, and the ensuing lack of criminal responsibility for the perpetrators was considered deplorable.

The Concept of Universal Repression: A principle of universal repression applies to crimes considered to represent a threat to the interests of the entire international community. These are called offenses against the law of nations (*delicta juris gentium*). The League of Nations, established to prevent new wars and new atrocities, organized international conferences for the unification of criminal law.

The 1927 Warsaw Conference: A list of offenses against the law of nations was drawn up at the first such conference meeting in Warsaw in 1927. This list included:

- Piracy
- Counterfeiting of coins, banknotes, and securities

- Trading of slaves
- Trading of women and children
- Intentional use of any instrument capable of producing a public danger
- Obscene publications

The Pre-War Years and the Vision of Raphael Lemkin

The Failure to Define Terrorism: At the third conference in Brussels in 1930, the word "terrorism" was added in brackets to the "intentional use of any instrument capable of producing a public danger." As a result, the conference discussed and attempted to define terrorism, but could reach no agreement. Simultaneously, clouds gathered over Europe.

The Rise of the Nazi Dictatorship: The German Enabling Act of 23rd March 1933 gave Hitler, as Chancellor, the power to make and enforce laws without the involvement of the Reichstag and the President. This marked the transition to the totalitarian Nazi dictatorship, and the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany increased.

Raphael Lemkin's New Legal Categories: Raphael Lemkin, a Belarusian-born lawyer, was a lecturer of comparative law at the Institute of Criminology of the Free University of Poland and Deputy Prosecutor of the District Court of Warsaw. At the fifth international conference in Madrid in October 1933, he suggested that one should not continue to discuss terrorism as such, but rather look at the separate issues that would constitute general dangers.

This was the week when the German delegation left the League of Nations. Lemkin argued that one should have several such special crimes. Two of them were of specific significance:

1. **Acts of Barbarism:** Acts of extermination, massacres, and pogroms undertaken to ruin the existence of an entire human group.
2. **Acts of Vandalism:** The destruction of the cultural heritage of a group.

The Core of the Crime: Lemkin argued that certain offenses against the Law of Nations, like trading slaves or women and children, are punishable due to humane principles. Other provisions aim at the maintenance of normal peaceful relations between groups. The goal of attacks against an individual as a member of an ethnic, religious, or social group is not only to harm the individual but also to cause damage to the group to which the person belongs. First and foremost, these are acts of extermination—massacres and pogroms—actions undertaken to ruin the existence of an entire human group. What Lemkin had in mind were the kind of atrocities he had seen, which were ghastly enough to threaten entire societies.

Barbarism and Vandalism: The Two Pillars of Destruction

The Case of the Ottoman Empire: Such as the Ottoman destruction of the Armenians—these acts could be termed barbarism. Taken separately, all the acts were punishable in their respective national codes; however, considered together, they should constitute offenses against the law of nations. This is because they endanger both the existence of the group concerned and the entire social order.

The Destruction of Cultural Heritage: An attack targeting a group can also take the form of systematic, organized destruction of the arts and cultural heritage in which the unique genius and achievement of the group are revealed. These achievements are a part of the world of all humanity.

Thus, the destruction of the works of art of a nation must be regarded, according to Lemkin, as acts of vandalism.

A Denial of Human Value: Acts of barbarity as well as acts of vandalism represent a denial of any intrinsic value of the human person. They reject all the values of civilization accumulated over centuries, and they also shock the conscience of all humankind.

The Birth of the Genocide Convention

The Invention of the Name: It generates extreme anxiety about the future. Lemkin proposed, unsuccessfully, an international convention in 1933 concluded to ensure the repression of these offenses. The Armenian experience made Lemkin's concepts of barbarity and vandalism intrinsically related. In 1943, Lemkin invented the name "Genocide"—*cide* meaning murder—for the combined acts of barbarity and vandalism.

From Nuremberg to the United Nations: The International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg did not address genocide as a specific crime; the Shoah, or Holocaust, was not described as genocide in the final verdict. Its different elements were punished as Crimes Against Humanity. However, punishing the elements separately was unsatisfactory.

On 11th December 1946, the United Nations General Assembly adopted, with unanimity and no abstentions, Resolution 96(1). This resolution addressed the crime of genocide as a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups. Such denial shocks the conscience of humankind. Moreover, the destruction of these groups results in great losses to humanity in the form of cultural and other contributions.

The 1948 Convention: The UN Economic and Social Council was requested to prepare a draft. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was adopted on 9th December 1948. It has since been widely accepted and ratified by the overwhelming majority of states. The Convention provides a precise definition of the crime, the required intent, and the prohibited acts.

The Legal Status of the Armenian Genocide: The International Court of Justice considers the prohibition of genocide as an absolute norm (*jus cogens*) of international law. The principles underlying the Convention are recognized by civilized nations as binding on states even without a conventional obligation.

The extermination of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, as described, meets the definition of genocide—both the required intent and the prohibited acts according to the Convention. The fact that there were no specific criminal provisions for genocide at the time does not alter the truth that the reality was genocide. It is recognized that the Shoah (Holocaust) was genocide, but it was the genocide against the Armenians that triggered the conceptualization of genocide as an international crime.



Bård Larsen

The Norwegian Government's Stance on the Armenian Genocide

I am going to keep it quite simple because the topic is, to be blunt, quite simplistic. My topic is how the Norwegian government approached the question of the Armenian Genocide. Much of this is taken from our own debates with the Norwegian government and the Foreign Ministry regarding their arguments for not acknowledging the Armenian Genocide.

I think this quote here pretty much sums up the position of the Norwegian government, as well as many other governments.

The Academic vs. Political Divide It was in 2007 that the Democratic Congressman Adam Schiff asked the then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice:

"You come from academia. Is there anything in your background or training that would lead you to believe that the murder of one and a half million people was not a genocide?"

And she said:

"Yes, I do come from academia, but now I am Secretary of State."

So, now I can just leave the floor.

The Norwegian "Consensus Policy" and the "G-Word"

The Avoidance of Recognition: The Norwegian government, on every occasion they are confronted with this issue, always gives the same answer: "No, we cannot recognize the Armenian Genocide." They express deep sympathy for Armenians and accept that a lot of people were murdered during the First World War, but they stop there.

When Torbjørn Jagland was Prime Minister in 2001, he said there are "clearly different views" on how the great tragedy that befell the Armenians should be described. I also had the pleasure of being in Yerevan for the 100-year commemoration, where Jagland was present as the head of the Council of Europe. I was a very happy Norwegian in the audience because I thought, "He is coming, he is really going to turn the car around." But when he went up on the floor, he described it only as "atrocities and tragedies." He didn't use the "G-word," of course. I think that was a minor scandal.

A Consistent Diplomatic Pattern: **Erna Solberg**, the Conservative Prime Minister in 2015, sent an ambassador instead of coming herself—which is a very important signal, not to send the highest officials. Anniken Huitfeldt, the former Foreign Minister, was in Yerevan not long ago. She visited the memorial site, but well, she didn't want to use the "G-word" either.

There was no statement from the President of the Parliament when he went to Armenia recently, and there is no real support in the Parliament to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide. So, the question is

always: should the Government deal with this, or should the Parliament? In reality, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have in Norway; it is the same arguments all the time.

The Foreign Ministry's "Drawer" of Arguments: Norwegian foreign policy is, to a very high degree, what I call a consensus policy. There is not much change between different governments. The Foreign Ministry has a lot of power to formulate Norwegian foreign policy, so every time this question is raised, they take the same arguments out of the drawer.

They use these same arguments regarding the Holodomor in Ukraine, and I guess also, eventually, the question of Gaza. But what exactly are their arguments? That is what I am going to examine next.

The Flaw of the "Retroactivity" Argument

The "Murder" Analogy": First and foremost, the government's argument is that the term "genocide" does not have retroactive effect. To me, this is quite absurd. I use a bit of a "tabloid" example here: If "X" kills their neighbor the day before a law making murder punishable comes into effect, since the law is not retroactive, "X" goes free from punishment theoretically. But does that mean they did not commit murder? It is a simple logical question.

The Origins of the Convention: As discussed before, the "father" of the Genocide Convention, Raphael Lemkin, drew the idea largely from the background of the Armenian Genocide. Taken to its most absurd conclusion, the government's logic would mean that the Holocaust was not a genocide either, because it happened before the Convention came into effect in 1948 (and entered into force in 1951).

Furthermore, the argument states that since the perpetrators have long since died and the form of government—the Ottoman Empire—no longer exists, neither the Armenian Genocide nor the Holodomor will ever end up in The Hague. Therefore, they argue, it is not for the government to judge.

The UN's Own Position: However, if you look at the Convention itself, the preamble states that "at all periods of history, genocide has inflicted great losses on humanity." This makes it quite clear that the Convention recognizes that genocide happened before the law was written. There is also guidance from the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention stating that even UN officials should not avoid engaging in discussions about past genocides and other crimes against humanity.

Legal Caution vs. Historical Fact

The "Shifting" Legal Argument: Basically, I think the point that genocide has no retroactive effect is not valid. While it is a question of law, genocide is also a matter of historical fact. Some international law scholars are cautious about using the term in a strictly legal sense. For instance, William Schabas has noted that even when we know perfectly well that a genocide has been committed, it may be difficult to pursue legally because the requirement of intent (*mens rea*) can be so hard to prove in court.

The Lemkin vs. Lauterpacht Debate: I assume many of you know the book by Philippe Sands, *East West Street*. In it, he discusses how Raphael Lemkin and Hersch Lauterpacht disagreed on which legal path to follow.

- **Lauterpacht** focused on "Crimes Against Humanity" to protect the individual.
- **Lemkin** insisted on "Genocide" to protect the group.

This disagreement is based on the same logic we see today: just because a specific legal charge might be difficult to secure a conviction with, it does not mean the genocide did not occur. It simply means other charges might sometimes be more "suitable" for a courtroom, but the historical reality remains.

The "Dialogue" Argument: A Diplomatic Shield

A Shared Narrative with Turkey: The third argument used by the Norwegian government—which I find the most difficult to accept—is that using the term "genocide" makes dialogue between Turkey and Armenia more difficult.

After I wrote a piece in *Aftenposten* about why Norway must acknowledge the genocide, we received a reply from the Turkish Ambassador in Oslo, Gülin. He stated that the "only way forward is to promote empathy and dialogue" so that parties can work toward "healing and reconciliation."

There we have it: the official Turkish wording is exactly the same as the wording used by the Norwegian government.

I want to put it in a more common-sense way. Most of us understand that it is very hard to achieve reconciliation, peace, or respect—or whatever terms you want to use—when the perpetrator does not admit to the crime.

You could probably compare it to rape. If the perpetrator refuses to admit that they committed the act, it is nearly impossible to reach some sort of understanding or closure, if such a thing is even possible at all.

The "Historian" Argument and the Reality of Realpolitik

The Ad Hoc Argument: It is also very, very often argued that "it is up to historians to decide." This conflicts a little bit with the legal issue, of course, which is maybe cognitive dissonance—I don't know—but if it's up to the historians to decide, the legal matter is almost made neutral. This is an ad hoc argument. Historians in the relevant fields are in pretty much total consensus about what happened. This is very, very important, I think.

The Cynical Reality of Foreign Policy: Let me just take a pause here, because I think if we look at it really cynically, the reason why Norway doesn't want to acknowledge the genocide is easy to understand. I mean, this was something that happened 110 years ago; most Norwegians have barely heard about it, or not heard about it at all.

So, when it comes to other interests—such as Turkey as an ally in NATO and trade—it is not a very difficult decision for the Foreign Ministry. This is, of course, very cynical, but I think that is where it's all really coming from.

Politically Constructed Controversy: The problem with making this a "controversial" question is basically playing the ball into the Turkish side. The question of this being "controversial" is politically constructed. By accepting that it is a debate, we allow the political interests of the perpetrator to outweigh the established facts of history.

The Role of Media and the "Sloppy Excuse" for Non-Acknowledgment

The Construction of Controversy: And they are not really interested in distinguishing between professional controversy—which we could just show them without even going into the details—and the political controversy. It is the same with the Norwegian media, and I think this is very important. Close to every time the Armenian Genocide is discussed in the Norwegian public—even by the

National Broadcasting Company (NRK)—it is always presented as "the controversial question of the Armenian Genocide."

The journalists are, of course, not really well-informed and they are a bit lazy. They have this understanding of it being "controversial," but they don't know about the discourse among historians and experts on genocide. By using this kind of sloppy excuse for not acknowledging the Armenian Genocide, the government contributes to this controversy. That is exactly what Turkey wants.

The "Drawer" of Arguments: I think this is highly problematic. These are basically the four arguments that the Foreign Ministry uses every time this topic comes up. We just got a letter from the Foreign Ministry yesterday, didn't we? And guess what? It was the same four arguments again and again.

They just pull them out of the drawer when they understand they have to answer something—because they were invited here four weeks ago, right? They answered yesterday with the same arguments again. So, I just want to say a few things about historians and stuff like that.

Historians as Proxies for Propaganda

The Control of History: So, I just want to say a few things about historians and stuff like that. I am a historian myself. George Orwell said that "who controls the present controls the past," which is true; and equally true is that the one who controls the past also controls the present.

There are tens of thousands of historians—I've never counted them, if there is such a register—but you would probably find a few hundred historians who would say that there are aliens controlling the Earth or whatever, you know? So, using "historians" as such a source of controversy is highly problematic.

Academic Proxies: I think historians acting as a proxy for governmental propaganda is widespread. All authoritarian societies have historians working for them. We know a lot about this from the Soviet Union, of course, and things like that.

The Weaponization of History in Authoritarian States

The Pressure to Conform: I think one can look at this as a way of Turkey threatening people to conform to their historical narrative. This points to the problematic side of how history is used in general, especially in authoritarian states.

In Hungary, the history department in Budapest has been partly destroyed, and the really good professors of history are now working in Vienna. There is an institute called Veritas (The Truth) which is now running the Department of History, and their main topic is building up a patriotic narrative of the Hungarian nation. According to them, everything that went wrong in Hungary was inflicted by people from the outside; Hungary never did anything wrong. This includes, of course, research on the government of Horthy, and suppressing facts about how Hungarian civilians—even parts of the resistance—participated in the destruction of the Jews.

The Rise of Patriotic Narratives: You have the same in Russia now; you see that Stalin is coming back in the tube stations and monuments everywhere. In Poland, you have the same, with the former government creating a historical narrative that is patriotic, focused on conservative family values, and firing historians who try to go deeper into the problematic sides of Polish society.

The Turkish Historical Society: And then you have Turkey with the Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*). My impression is that their main object is still "telling us the real story" about the Armenian Genocide—which, of course, means continuing the narrative of denial.

The Weaponization of History: From Turkey to the United States

The "True National" Narrative: I think we can see that this approach is relatively common in all kinds of authoritarian societies. But now, you see it especially in national-conservative authoritarian states. It is very important for them to create a history where the "true nationals" never did anything wrong. Since committing genocide is the "worst of the worst," that is why the Turks are using so much energy in denying this historical fact.

They have established their own state-controlled institutions for patriotic "history-consciousness," creating schoolbooks and textbooks. As we have discussed, history surfaces again and again: authoritarian movements weaponize history to reshape identity and justify their politics.

The Global Trend: From the Middle East to Florida: We can see that this is also happening in the United States with the Stop WOKE Act and other things spearheaded by Ron DeSantis, and, of course, the attack on universities. It is the same logic: rewrite the past to serve present agendas.

In America, that means not talking too much about slavery. They are now saying—which is kind of a moral world turned upside down—that they should not talk about slavery because it makes the pupils feel "insecure" and "unsafe" in the classroom to discuss it.

The Danger of Reversing History: A Warning

The Attack on the Holocaust Memorial: Taner, you talked about the Holocaust in Germany. You have a point, but there is still something important to say about that. For instance, when Björn Höcke—one of the most fanatical right-wing leaders in the AfD—spoke a few years ago, he talked about the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. He said it was a "monument of shame" and that it should be removed, arguing that Germany shouldn't have to dwell on such things. He spoke about turning the historical narrative in Germany 180 degrees around: that patriots should feel that "we didn't do everything wrong," and so on.

The Obsession with History: What really surprises me is how important history is for this kind of leadership. The idea surfaces again and again, and it still surprises me a bit. But it is something you can see everywhere. As has been said today, more or less: Nations become sick when they fail to confront their own past. And, of course, they tend to become even more authoritarian at the end of the day.

So, that is basically what I wanted to say. Thank you.



Ellen Stensrud

I was invited here to talk about genocide prevention, while the topic of this conference is denial. So, what is the link between the two, one might ask?

Often, denial is seen as something that comes after a genocide—even 110 years after a genocide, which is the case with the Armenian Genocide. But prevention is something that comes, or should have come, before a genocide or the mass atrocities, as I will talk about today.

This conception should be nuanced. Indeed, the phenomenon of denial—or its opposite, truth-telling—and prevention are closely interlinked. I will structure my talk as follows:

Understanding Genocide as a Process

I'll say a little bit on how we understand genocide. I will then talk about developments in genocide prevention, particularly the part that touches on the actual topic: prevention within the United Nations. I will then move on to what we in the academic field call the atrocity prevention lens, and finally wrap up with some thoughts about genocide and denial.

The Logic of Categorization This picture shows the division of Jews and non-Jews; it depicts the racial categories in the infamous Nuremberg Laws of 1935. I'm sure most of you have seen this before; most Holocaust museums have this on display. Its purpose is to teach visitors about a core feature of the Nazi regime's attacks on Jews and how this was based on racial categorization and religious identity.

Genocide is Not an Event, But a Process Just as importantly, this teaches us something about the nature of genocide: it was a process, not one single decision with a specific endpoint in mind. A common message—maybe the most common message indeed in Holocaust education—is that the Holocaust did not start with Auschwitz. This has been repeated so many times that it is often not really "unpacked," but it is one of the core messages of both Holocaust education and genocide studies.

The Escalation of Violence The insight that genocide is a process is a key takeaway from comparative genocide studies. Genocides typically unfold gradually. Usually, there is a close dynamic between the political and legal level of discrimination on the one hand, and the escalation of violence on the ground on the other hand.

Genocide as Stages and the Role of Denial

Beyond Chronology: A closely related way of understanding genocide is seeing it as unfolding through specific stages. I'm not going to go through all of these stages that are usually mentioned, but they include, for example, discrimination, dehumanization (this being one example), polarization, and of course, persecution and extermination.

The final stage in these categorizations is usually denial. It is often underlined, if you read this carefully, that the stages may happen in a different order or simultaneously. However, this point may

be lost in debates and popular conceptions of genocide. Despite the caveats, it may also be lost in exhibitions and educational programs, as these often follow a chronological logic.

Denial as a Present Threat: For instance, the theme of this conference, denial, is often seen to be the last phase of genocide—as something happening after the actual genocide is even stopped or completed. However, as I will return to later in my presentation, countering denial is also central to preventing atrocities *before* they manifest in full-blown genocides.

This is particularly difficult in situations of genocide as compared to other forms of abuse or the killing of civilians. This is because the term is so politically explosive. It will often be met with strong resentment from the countries that are accused of genocide or their allies.

The Shadows of the Cold War and the Failure in Rwanda

Avoiding the "G-Word": Moving on to prevention, I will now leave the years of the Cold War a little bit in the shadows. As you know, the Genocide Convention was adopted at the beginning of the Cold War, but institutionally, not much happened until the end of that era. Although, as has been described in historical research, there were a lot of genocide debates.

Does anyone here recognize this picture? Yes, that's right—Srebrenica. When the genocide in Rwanda was unfolding in 1994, the United States and several other Western countries first and foremost wanted to avoid having to intervene. Therefore, as has been very well described and documented, they avoided the "G-word"—the genocide word—which they feared would entail an obligation to send their own soldiers to the country.

Political Reluctance and the "Somalia Effect": Even when the genocide was already unfolding in Rwanda, you had these debates about: "Oh, we can't use the word because it's a legal definition", "It's very difficult", "It's a question of legal determination", and so on. Importantly, this happened against the backdrop of a failed intervention in Somalia the year before, which was a disaster, particularly for the American forces. The American administration definitely did not want to commit to sending American forces again to a risky operation on the African continent.

The US and other major powers had reluctantly accepted that a UN force was sent to monitor a ceasefire from 1993, but they would not strengthen its mandate despite warnings of a possible genocide.

The Heartbreaking Communication: It is actually, I think, quite heartbreaking to read the communication between General Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian who led the UN force in Rwanda, and the UN Peacekeeping headquarters in New York, then led by later Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Among other things, Dallaire wanted to seize weapons from the Interahamwe militia, which was later central to the genocide. But he was ordered to refrain from such use of force.

From Srebrenica to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

The Failure of Safe Zones: The following year takes us to Srebrenica. As you know, in the summer of 1995, the war was raging in Bosnia, and the Bosnian Serb forces surrounded the small town of Srebrenica. The war had long been characterized by ethnic cleansing and attacks on civilians. Dutch UN forces had been tasked with protecting Srebrenica as a so-called "safe zone," but the UN was unable to protect the city's civilians when the Serbian forces, led by Ratko Mladić, carried out the worst massacre on European soil since the Second World War. Women, small children, and the elderly were evacuated, but 8,000 boys and men were killed and thrown into mass graves outside the city. For

this, Mladić was convicted of genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Illegal but Legitimate: Kofi Annan later admitted that the UN had misjudged the situation; once again, the international community had failed the civilians. These failures led to a recognition that there was a need for new principles that could strengthen the protection of civilians. The Genocide Convention had obviously fallen short in Bosnia and Rwanda.

However, the need for protection was not the only consideration. The 1990s were the decade of humanitarian interventions, culminating in NATO's bombing of Serbian forces in Kosovo in 1999. The military operation was carried out without a UN mandate, which would have been halted by a Russian veto in the Security Council. A subsequent investigation led by Carl Bildt of Sweden concluded that the operation was "illegal but legitimate." Well, not everyone agreed to the latter. In addition to Russia, a number of countries in the so-called Global South were concerned that humanitarian intervention was a cover for Western imperialist attempts at regime change.

The Birth of R2P: Out of this dilemma grew the so-called Responsibility to Protect doctrine. The doctrine was based on the belief that with the sovereignty of states also comes the responsibility to safeguard the welfare and security of the state's own population. States that do not fulfill this responsibility have not earned the right to be respected as sovereign states. In such situations, according to this thinking, the international community can take over the responsibility of protecting.

This line of reasoning found its way into a working group set up by Kofi Annan, who was then Secretary-General of the UN, and in a somewhat rephrased form, received unanimous approval at the UN General Assembly in 2005. So, this year we are actually celebrating the 20th anniversary of this principle—which, as you understand, did not actually solve everything.

The Four Atrocity Crimes: So, what is the Responsibility to Protect? According to this doctrine or norm—I am a bit hesitant to use the word "norm" because it almost has a legal ring to it, but it's more a political principle—known in the atrocity prevention community as R2P, states must protect their own populations against:

1. War crimes
2. Crimes against humanity
3. Ethnic cleansing
4. Genocide

These are the so-called atrocity crimes. In Norway, it's a real problem in our debates about prevention that we don't really have a word for "atrocities" that can be translated directly and used as a principle for international law. If states fail to provide such protection, the international community can intervene by force through the UN Security Council.

The Dilemmas of the Genocide Label and R2P in Practice

The Last Resort: In other words, forceful intervention is a measure of last resort. Only if peaceful means have manifestly failed can the United Nations resort to force through the Security Council. As recent debates on the destruction of Gaza, for example, have clearly illustrated: debating genocide—or even the risk of genocide—during an ongoing conflict leads to a number of problems. We have already pointed out the problems of even debating genocides that happened in the past, so no wonder it is difficult to debate ongoing situations.

The Hierarchy of Suffering: The fixation on the genocide issue often leads to a hierarchy of suffering, where we may inadvertently accept attacks against civilians that fall below the very strict legal threshold of genocide. There is also a risk that the contested question of genocide leads to legal debates that divert attention from civilian suffering, rather than spurring action.

The Promise of R2P: Through the unanimous endorsement of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in 2005, it could appear that some of the conceptual problems of genocide prevention had been solved. This is because R2P extends far beyond the obligation to prevent genocide alone.

Should, for example, the starvation campaign in Gaza be understood as a war crime, a crime against humanity, or part of a genocide? Well, according to the **norm**, it does not really matter. States have committed to protecting civilians from all such abuses anyway. How, then, has the adoption of R2P affected genocide and atrocity prevention at the UN through its practice?

The Crisis of R2P: From Libya to Institutional Paralysis

The Libya Intervention (2011): In 2011, in the wake of the Arab Spring, civil war raged in Libya. Reports emerged of threats against civilians, particularly during the fighting for the city of Benghazi. UN Security Council Resolution 1973 is the one resolution that has had the greatest impact on the understanding of "Responsibility to Protect" in practice. It authorized military intervention to protect Libya's civilians. Norway took part in this, and it is often referred to as an R2P intervention.

No major powers vetoed the resolution. However, as we know, the military operation did not end with the bombing of Gaddafi's forces around Benghazi. Several countries pressed on—notably France and the UK—and NATO went beyond the mandate of Resolution 1973. The Libyan regime fell; chaos and civil war followed. The foremost example of the practical implementation of R2P ended in disaster, and to this day, this significantly impacts the understanding of the doctrine.

The Retreat to Empty Phrases: At the same time, the US and NATO regime-change operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were encountering increasing problems. In the years following Libya, the UN Security Council has referred to the "Responsibility to Protect" on numerous occasions, but primarily to the responsibility of *states* to protect their own populations.

In practice, then, the commitment that grew out of the painful experiences of Rwanda and Srebrenica has been reduced to empty phrases. These are habitually repeated in Security Council resolutions or General Assembly debates without any practical consequences. When the "Responsibility to Protect" was adopted 20 years ago, the authority to protect civilians by force was necessarily allocated to the UN Security Council.

The Legal Constraint: According to the UN Charter, the Security Council is the only body that can legally prescribe military force for anything other than self-defense. But as we see today, this leaves the protection of civilians hostage to the political interests of the permanent members.

The Paralysis of the Security Council and the Illusion of Protection

The Power of the Veto: This possibility of the use of force added weight to the "Responsibility to Protect." However, the Security Council has five permanent members with veto powers and ten elected members, all of whom are concerned with protecting the interests of themselves and their allies. For this reason, they often resort to the principle of non-intervention.

Resolving the tension between sovereignty and protection was an illusion. The countries now under the scrutiny of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) — Myanmar and Israel — ended up there precisely because the Security Council is paralyzed.

A Political Commitment, Not a Legal Obligation: Moreover, by giving the responsibility to the Security Council, the "Responsibility to Protect" did not create any new legal obligations; it was a political commitment building on existing international law, with all its flaws.

Today, as we look at situations such as Myanmar, Sudan, or Gaza — from where horrific reports are just emerging — it may seem meaningless to talk about the "Responsibility to Protect" through the UN.

Multilateral Paralysis: We are living in a time where the political willingness to prevent human rights abuses and atrocities seems almost absent at a multilateral level—that is, through UN Security Council action. The Council is partly paralyzed by the return of great power rivalry, and partly by indifference.

The Erosion of the Rules-Based System: Added to this is the erosion of respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. This is particularly evident in how powerful states—which previously, at least nominally, have supported the idea of a rules-based system—now have supported, both economically and morally, Israel's destruction of Gaza.

Rethinking the Agenda: This should not lead to an abandonment of the "atrocities prevention" agenda. Rather, it should push all of us to rethink how prevention could be advanced despite the crisis at the multilateral level. In fact, it has always been difficult to implement prevention through the Security Council.

Moving Beyond the "G-Word": Coalitions of the Willing

The Need for Influential Actors: If the prevention agenda is to survive, it requires influential actors at other levels to take the atrocities prevention agenda seriously—not just using rhetorical support in General Assembly debates as a fig leaf for inaction. Civil society actors, such as large humanitarian organizations, influential states, and regional organizations, need to form "coalitions of the willing" to keep the prevention agenda alive.

Non-Military Prevention: This does not imply that they always have to use the controversial language of R2P, nor does it imply a renewed push for military interventions. When we think of atrocities prevention, we might picture the Rwandan Patriotic Army invading Rwanda to stop the genocide of the Tutsis, or the UN arriving in East Timor.

However, we should perhaps rather think of how political and diplomatic pressure was able to end post-election violence in Kenya; how economic sanctions and boycotts influenced the situation in South Africa; or economic and arms support for victims, as we see with Ukraine. When an atrocity or a genocide reaches the stage where military intervention is the only solution, prevention has already failed.

The Atrocities Prevention Lens vs. Peace Diplomacy

Risk Factors and Realism: What this does require is an understanding of risk factors and a willingness to see conflicts and humanitarian crises as potential mass atrocities or genocide situations. Actors need to apply what researchers call the "atrocities prevention lens." Analyzing conflicts through this lens is potentially very different from seeing a situation through the more conventional "**peace diplomacy lens**" that Norway usually employs.

The Danger of Neutrality: In a peace negotiation perspective, conflicts are best solved when the parties are brought to the negotiating table and an agreement is reached. However, in some atrocity situations—particularly where there is a risk of genocide—such an approach might be misplaced and even dangerous.

The Case of Myanmar: This picture here is from Myanmar, from Rakhine State, where the Rohingya minority lived. The picture is from 2012, during a period of unrest. Most Western actors, including Norway—who were deeply involved with Myanmar at that point—did not look at this as a potential atrocity or genocide risk.

They preferred to see it as a situation of "inter-communal violence." This was very convenient because it didn't interfere with the major narrative of the time: the democratization narrative. There was a deliberate choice not to take the atrocity risks in Myanmar seriously, and we all know how that ended.

Conclusion: Denial as a Precondition for Genocide

The Unwillingness to See: So, to look at many recent atrocity situations—for example, Myanmar, to some extent Gaza, or the horrible attacks on civilians in Tigray, Ethiopia—common to these situations is many actors' unwillingness to apply the atrocity prevention lens. They fail to see these conflicts as potential atrocity or genocide situations.

This brings us back to this conference's topic: denial. Denial is not always something that happens after a genocide; it also happens before and during it. Denial at these stages takes the form of an unwillingness to see the risk factors—not only by perpetrators or their allies but also by states who are unwilling or unable to understand that there is a potential for a mass atrocity unfolding. Therefore, you cannot simply separate denial and prevention.

The Legacy of Denial: I want to wrap up with some quick comments about the legacies of denial. Denial follows all genocides. We heard in the previous presentation how controversial it is to talk about the genocide against Armenians. All genocides are followed by some kind of denial; I can't think of any instance where there isn't some form of denial surrounding the debates. So, that is not unusual.

What I have tried to point out to you is how denial is also part of the pre-genocide and during-genocide phases, and how it hinders prevention. Finally, denial has long-term consequences. There are other people in this room who know much more than myself about the long-term consequences of denial at the individual and political levels of societies.

The Factor of Unaccounted Atrocities: I want to end by drawing attention to a commonly recognized risk factor in genocide studies: the factor of unaccounted atrocities. The existence of past atrocities or genocides where no one has been held accountable is a major risk factor for future genocide.

With that, I want to wrap up my presentation by acknowledging how extremely important it is to raise the issue of denial—but also to remember that it's not something that only happens after the fact. It is actually a precondition for genocide. Thank you.



Khachatur Gasparyan

Identity and Trauma

Thank you for the introduction of my professional and personal background. I would like to begin with a formative episode from my academic experience. During my studies at the M. Lomonosov Moscow State University, my PhD supervisor, A. Podolskiy, posted a thought-provoking question: “Why is it that Armenians so often refer to the genocide within the first sentences of self-introduction? Is there nothing else through which identity is articulated?”

This question prompted a critical reflection that has shaped both my personal and academic trajectory. I came to understand that, for Armenians, national identity is deeply intertwined with the historical experience of the Armenian Genocide. These elements are not merely historical references but constitute core components of collective identity and memory.

Subsequently, my academic work has focused on trauma psychology, particularly in relation to collective and historical trauma. As has already been noted by previous speakers, denial is widely conceptualized as the final stage of genocide. It manifests in several forms, including outright denial (the rejection of the occurrence of genocide), minimization (the downplaying of its scale and intentionality), and false equivalence (the framing of events as mutually reciprocal or equally justified). Scholars such as Gregory Stanton and Henry Theriault have extensively analyzed these patterns.

Closely related to denial are strategies of historical revisionism. These include deliberate efforts to reinterpret or distort historical records and collective memory in ways that obscure responsibility and hinder societal confrontation with past violence. From a psychological perspective, such processes have profound consequences: they compel survivors and their descendants to repeatedly reexperience trauma. Denial not only invalidates suffering but also disrupts processes of healing, justice, and long-term coexistence.

The relationship between denial and impunity is further illustrated by a statement attributed to Adolf Hitler, who remarked: “Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?” This observation underscores a critical dynamic: the absence of accountability can foster conditions in which future atrocities become more conceivable. Perceived impunity may embolden perpetrators by reinforcing the belief that such actions will remain unpunished.

Finally, reconciliation in the aftermath of genocide must be understood as a complex, fragile, and ongoing process. It is contingent upon multiple interrelated factors, including acknowledgment, justice, and remembrance. As highlighted in prior presentations, for Armenians, the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide remains a matter of profound significance, reflecting not only political considerations but also the psychological need for validation and historical truth.

The Psychological Mechanisms of Denial and Intergenerational Trauma

The Vicious Cycle of Proof

Denial generates what may be conceptualized as a “vicious cycle of proof,” wherein Armenians are persistently compelled to validate the historical reality of the Armenian Genocide. This ongoing demand for verification produces a sustained emotional burden, characterized by repeated traumatic memory and the reactivation of past experiences. Consequently, unresolved aspects of grief are transmitted across generations, placing upon descendants the implicit task of completing interrupted mourning processes. This dynamic lies at the core of the Intergenerational Trauma.

Complicated Grief and Identity Formation

Within psychological literature, such phenomena are often framed in terms of unresolved trauma or Complicated Grief. These processes produce ambivalent consequences for both victim and perpetrator groups. For Armenians, the genocide has evolved into a central axis of collective identity, functioning as a unifying and meaning-making narrative. At the same time, this centrality may also perpetuate psychological vulnerability through the of unresolved loss.

Defense Mechanisms and Rationalization

From a psychological perspective, denial is sustained through various defense mechanisms. Among these, rationalization plays a central role, whereby perpetrators and their successors reinterpret genocidal violence as an unintended byproduct of broader historical processes, such as World War I, or attribute it to geopolitical and economic contingencies. Such explanatory frameworks displace responsibility onto secondary factors, thereby obscuring intentionality and moral accountability.

Self-Deception and Historical Falsification

These processes are further reinforced through mechanisms of self-deception, particularly evaluative self-deception, which allows individuals and groups to maintain a morally favorable self-image while distorting historical reality. By positioning themselves as neutral or “above” the conflict, actors engaged in denial reconstruct narratives that legitimize their stance and perpetuate falsified interpretations of the past.

Clinical Consequences of Denial

Empirical research indicates that exposure to denial is associated with heightened psychological distress, including increased prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Prolonged or unresolved grief may further contribute to depressive and anxiety-related symptomatology. Clinically, these conditions are frequently comorbid, interacting with a range of trauma-related disorders and compounding overall psychological burden.

The Silence of Survivors

Intergenerational trauma is often compounded by the silence of survivors. Many descendants report limited or fragmented knowledge of their familial past, as survivors frequently refrained from transmitting their experiences. This silence, when combined with external denial, may contribute to processes of identity fragmentation and psychological splitting—a defense mechanism that hinders the integration of traumatic memory and obstructs healing.

The Obstruction of Truth and Accountability

Denial fundamentally obstructs processes of truth-telling and accountability by promoting moral and legal misrepresentation. In response, affected communities engage in diverse strategies aimed at restoring historical truth and facilitating healing. These include documentation, education, legal advocacy, and cultural production—particularly in literature and film—which serve as vehicles for memory preservation and collective meaning-making.

Denial as a Moral and Human Problem

Ultimately, denial must be understood not only as a political phenomenon but also as a profound moral issue. The acknowledgment of victims' dignity and suffering constitutes a foundational condition for reconciliation. In this sense, confronting denial is inseparable from affirming shared humanity and reinforcing collective responsibility to prevent future atrocities.

The Paradox of Mourning and the Stagnation of Grief

Collective Trauma and Cultural Transmission

Collective trauma is not only experienced at the individual level but is also embedded within cultural norms and social practices that are transmitted across generations. In the Armenian context, commemorative rituals, public gatherings, and collective remembrance practices play a central role in sustaining historical consciousness related to the Armenian Genocide. While collective trauma may arise from diverse events—including natural disasters, pandemics, or armed conflicts—genocide represents a qualitatively distinct category due to its intentional, systematic nature and its enduring impact on identity and intergroup relations.

Internalization and Externalization of Trauma

Psychological responses to trauma commonly involve processes of internalization and externalization. Internalization refers to the incorporation of traumatic experiences into the inner world, often manifesting through intrusive thoughts, dreams, or other subconscious expressions. Externalization, by contrast, may involve the projection of distress into somatic or behavioral forms, including psychosomatic symptoms. These processes are not mutually exclusive; rather, individuals and communities often oscillate between them over time.

Survivor Syndrome and the Necessity of Mourning

Research in trauma psychology—particularly within the context of the Holocaust—has identified patterns commonly described as survivor syndrome. A central component of recovery in such contexts is mourning, understood as a necessary psychological process that enables individuals to integrate loss and reestablish continuity in life. Mourning functions not merely as an emotional response but as a therapeutic process; without it, the إمكانية of psychological resolution and forward movement remains significantly constrained.

The Paradox of Denial

A fundamental paradox emerges when the intrinsic need for mourning is combined with the denial. While human beings possess an inherent psychological and even biological drive to process loss, denial obstructs this process by invalidating the very reality that must be mourned. As a result, individuals and communities are prevented from completing the grieving process, leading to prolonged or unresolved grief.

Unresolved or Complicated Grief is characterized by persistent emotional distress, including anger, sadness, and longing, alongside difficulty accepting loss. In such cases, the trajectory of grief is disrupted, limiting the capacity for adaptation, transformation, and the construction of meaning.

Beyond Trauma: Post-Traumatic Growth and Resilience

Pathological Grief and Health Outcomes

Pathological or unresolved grief must be understood within a broader biopsychosocial framework that encompasses personal, cultural, and societal dimensions. These psychological conditions are often associated with adverse physical health outcomes, including stress-related illnesses and increased vulnerability to both mental and somatic disorders. Thus, trauma extends beyond the psychological domain, influencing overall well-being and even shaping sociopolitical attitudes and behaviors.

Recognition and Collective Validation

Public acknowledgment and recognition play a critical role in addressing historical trauma. Symbolic acts—such as official recognition of the Armenian Genocide—carry profound psychological significance, as they validate collective memory and contribute to processes of healing and dignity restoration. Such recognition is not merely political but deeply connected to collective identity and moral justice.

The Paradox of Resilience

Importantly, exposure to trauma does not inevitably result in psychopathology. While approximately one-third of trauma survivors develop conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a substantial proportion demonstrate resilience or even positive psychological transformation. This raises a critical question: what accounts for the adaptive functioning of the majority?

Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG)

This phenomenon is conceptualized as Post-Traumatic Growth, referring to the potential for individuals and communities to experience positive transformation following adversity. PTG encompasses enhanced personal strength, deeper existential reflection, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and a renewed sense of meaning.

Philosophically, this transformative potential resonates with ideas articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche, who suggested that adversity may foster strength, and Viktor Frankl, who emphasized the human capacity to find meaning even in suffering. Within this framework, trauma is not solely a source of pathology but may also serve as a catalyst for growth and redefinition.

Prominent examples of post-traumatic growth can be identified in the lives and works of notable Armenian figures such as Arshile Gorky and William Saroyan. In the case of Saroyan, his family's migration to the United States during the Hamidian massacres illustrates how trajectories shaped by collective violence may nonetheless evolve toward creative expression and psychological growth, rather than being exclusively defined by trauma-related pathology such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Cultural Narratives and Adaptive Meaning-Making

Across cultures, including Armenian society, widely shared aphorisms—such as “time heals all wounds” or “everything happens for a reason”—serve as informal cognitive frameworks for coping with adversity. While often dismissed as platitudes, such expressions may function as mechanisms of meaning-making, enabling individuals to cognitively reframe traumatic experiences and sustain psychological resilience.

Domains of Post-Traumatic Growth

Empirical research on Post-Traumatic Growth identifies five principal domains through which positive transformation may occur:

1. **Appreciation of Life** – the development of a heightened sense of gratitude and awareness of life’s value.
2. **Relating to Others** – the deepening of interpersonal relationships and increased empathy.
3. **New Possibilities** – the recognition of alternative life paths and reevaluation of prior goals and assumptions.
4. **Personal Strength** – the realization of previously unrecognized inner resilience.
5. **Spiritual and Existential Change** – a transformation in core beliefs, values, and existential perspectives.

These domains collectively illustrate how trauma can disrupt pre-existing cognitive and emotional frameworks, compelling individuals to reassess their values and reconstruct meaning.

Transformation of Values and Existential Reconstruction

Traumatic experiences often precipitate profound disruptions in an individual’s assumptive world—the set of beliefs that provide coherence and predictability to life. When such foundational structures are destabilized, individuals are compelled to reconstruct their internal value systems. This process entails not only psychological adaptation but also existential reorientation, through which new meanings, priorities, and identities are formed.

In this sense, trauma may function as both a source of suffering and a catalyst for transformation. The reconstruction of meaning following the collapse of prior belief systems represents a central mechanism through which individuals move beyond trauma toward growth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while trauma—particularly in the context of collective violence—produces profound and enduring psychological consequences, it does not invariably lead to pathology. Alongside suffering, there exists the potential for resilience, growth, and transformation. Understanding this duality is essential for a comprehensive psychological and ethical engagement with trauma.

Thank you for your attention.



Lene Wetteland

The Persistence of Impunity: From Chechnya to Ukraine

Hello everyone. Thank you for your patience; it has been a long but very interesting day, so I hope you will bear with me. My presentation will be shorter than the others, but given the depth of our discussions so far, I am very grateful for the dialogue.

I work for the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, where I head the Documentation and Accountability Hub. Currently, we maintain two major databases: one covering Ukraine and one for the North Caucasus. Working on these databases reminds us daily that gathering facts—objective, verifiable facts—matters more than ever.

The Cycle of Impunity: The importance of this work is highlighted by a chilling pattern we see in our data. In comparing our database from Chechnya with the one from Ukraine, we see that the same Russian officers who blew up apartment buildings in Chechnya in the early 2000s are attacking civilian targets in Ukraine today.

Because impunity persists, fueled by denial and propaganda, the perpetrators of the past become the perpetrators of the present. They learned that they could get away with it.

A Summary of Lessons: To summarize what we have discussed today and look toward the future, I have divided my thoughts into two parts:

1. What the perpetrators have learned from the past.
2. What the rest of us—human rights activists and the international community—must learn to move forward.

The Strategy of Doubt and the Culture of Impunity

The Purpose of Propaganda: What the perpetrators have learned is that denial and propaganda work. It was very moving this morning to hear Shabnam say that sometimes she even feels the need to Google the Armenian Genocide to ask: "Did it actually happen?" This is the extent to which denial, propaganda, disinformation, and misinformation actually work.

We see the same now with Russia and Ukraine. The main purpose of the propaganda and the denial is not necessarily to make you believe in a specific alternative version; as long as it makes you doubt all versions, it has succeeded. This creates a landscape where the truth feels unattainable.

Impunity as an Incentive: Perpetrators have also learned that impunity is the norm. As my example from the 2000s showed: Russian officers committing atrocities in Chechnya twenty years ago are continuing to do the same in Ukraine today.

Regarding the Armenian Genocide, while some were sentenced *in absentia* and justice found them in different ways, for the most part, there has been overarching impunity for these serious actions. This raises a very good question that was asked here earlier: What is actually left to stop perpetrators from committing these atrocities when impunity is so overarching and everywhere? I will get back to that, but I agree with Gregory Stanton that there are definitely ways to address this.

The Strategic Abuse of Historical Trauma

The Weaponization of Memory: Another thing perpetrators learn is exactly which strings to pull with their adversaries. For example, in the Armenian context, if Azerbaijan wants to attack Armenia, it is strategically "clever"—in the worst sense of the word—to use blockade and starvation. They know that Armenians will instinctively think of the genocide. It is in their genes; it is in their memory. They will say, "There is a genocide happening now as well."

This then triggers a secondary discussion: "Is it *really* genocide, or is it other crimes? At what level of severity are we?" Meanwhile, people are dying from starvation and a lack of medicine. By knowing this is an argument the Armenians will bring forward, adversaries can abuse the situation, ensuring more atrocities happen while the international community is stuck in a definitional debate.

The Power Imbalance in Denial: Similarly, Turkey knows they have far more resources than Armenia to maintain a denialist narrative. Turkey is a larger state, a member of NATO, and has "more" of everything. They can keep the denial going, knowing that Armenians are forced to bring it up again and again. This is incredibly tiresome and emotionally draining for Armenians, while the international community is forced to listen to these "colliding versions" of history.

The Role of the "Big Brother" and Internal Politics: Russia also knows that in this landscape, Armenia is perhaps the party with the fewest resources. They know Armenia needs a "Big Brother" to help, especially in the conflict with Azerbaijan. Russia takes advantage of this, pretending to help while pursuing their own agenda.

Finally, even a more authoritarian Armenian government can use this to their advantage. They can point to the "external" threat or the historical genocide to deflect from the human rights situation in Armenia today. The diaspora focuses so heavily on the genocide that internal human rights violations against citizens living in Armenia—under previous governments and to a certain extent today—can be overlooked.

A Path Forward: Identity, Facts, and Targeted Justice

The Strength of Armenian Identity: Unfortunately, perpetrators have learned a lot and used it to their benefit. But to be more positive, the rest of us have also learned something. We have spoken much about the trauma that unites Armenians—for better and for worse. On the positive side, Armenians have a strong identity, a proud history, and a rich culture that stays with them everywhere. Whenever I travel, I visit the Armenian quarters of a city to see another part of town, use my few phrases in Armenian, and I am always invited in for tea, coffee, or a talk.

As Professor Taner Akçam mentioned, the challenge is finding the balance. This memory is a vital part of the identity, but how much of a role should it play today as we try to improve conditions in modern Armenia? We must care for the trauma and the stories while simultaneously finding a way forward for the people living there today.

The Battle for Factual Truth: We have learned that factual truth matters. In my job at the Documentation and Accountability Hub, we know we must start documenting immediately. We have to

be extremely cautious because documents can be falsified. In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as well as the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, we see videos and statements that are not genuine.

We must navigate this abundance of both information and misinformation. We document and save for the long term. It took a long time to create the ICC (International Criminal Court) and the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia), but it happened. As long as we collect testimonies and evidence, they will be used at some point. In the meantime, we preserve the history of the victims and survivors so their legacy is honored, even if victors often try to write the history.

Targeted Sanctions and Universal Jurisdiction: To answer the question from the previous panel about what can be done: there are tools like targeted sanctions. We write detailed sanction briefs describing why a specific individual should be on a list and send them to Canada, the EU, or Norway.

If granted, these individuals—usually men—cannot access bank accounts or travel. They feel a form of punishment; they lose the ability to enjoy the money they gathered through torture, killing, and corruption. Additionally, we use Universal Jurisdiction. We prepare cases so that if a perpetrator travels to a country like Norway, we are ready to start a prosecution immediately. We have learned to be prepared, to document, to preserve memories, and to be ready when the right occasion comes up.

Conclusion: The Banality of Denial and the Power of Persistence

The Culture of Denial: I guess the final lesson learned is simply this: we must not give up. We are in it together. At some point, we will ensure that a cultural work—like a Hollywood movie about a love triangle set in the Ottoman Empire during the genocide—can actually be shown without interference.

I am referring to the movie *The Promise*. It was not shown in Norwegian cinemas because of protests from the Turkish government. It is, at its core, a love drama; it just happens to be set during the Armenian Genocide. Stopping its screening is a form of the "banality of denial." It continues to this day. If people had been allowed to watch that movie, ordinary people would have learned so much more about the genocide through that story.

A Shared Commitment "This is why we continue. We are in it together, we do not give up, and we will continue pursuing justice across our different arenas—whether through documentation, law, psychology, or culture. Thank you very much.



Sigrun Marie Moss

Note: This contribution is not included in the present publication, as it is scheduled for publication elsewhere at a later date.

Dialog med myndighetene

Anerkjennelse som politisk og rettslig spørsmål

Bakgrunn for dialogen: I forkant av seminaret «Understanding Genocide Denial: Insights from the Armenian Genocide 110 Years Later», inviterte arrangøren Armenere1915 representanter fra Utenriksdepartementet (UD) til å delta. Dessverre hadde de ikke anledning til å møte, men besvarte invitasjonen med å redegjøre for UD's syn på det armenske folkemordet.

Nedenfor følger korrespondansen mellom arrangørene og departementet.

Svar fra Utenriksdepartementet (29. okt 2025)

Utenriksdepartementet takker for nedenstående invitasjon til utenriksministeren og utviklingsministeren til å delta ved morgendagens seminar. Dessverre har ingen av dem anledning til å delta. Vi beklager at svaret kommer så sent.

For ordens skyld er det verdt å nevne at norsk syn på det som skjedde i 1915 og hvordan man fra det internasjonale samfunn prinsipielt forholder seg til dette, ikke er endret.

Norge arbeider aktivt for å bekjempe straffrihet for grove internasjonale forbrytelser fordi vi er overbevist om at det er negativt for forsoningsprosesser dersom ansvar for grove forbrytelser ikke blir slått fast.

Norske myndigheter anerkjenner fullt ut de overgrep det armenske folk har vært utsatt for.

Spørsmålet om den norske regjering skal definere disse overgrepene nesten 100 år tilbake i tid som folkemord, reiser likevel flere problemer.

Overgrepene mot armenerne i 1915 fant sted før folkemordkonvensjonen og vedtektene for Den internasjonale straffedomstolen ble vedtatt, og dermed før den internasjonale forbrytelsen folkemord ble fast definert i folkeretten. Det er vanskelig å feste merkelappen folkemord på hendelser som fant sted før de relevante folkerettslige normene ble vedtatt, og med tilbakevirkende kraft på disse. Det er også først og fremst rettsvesenets oppgave å avgjøre hvorvidt en alvorlig internasjonal forbrytelse har funnet sted.

Folkemord krever en særskilt utryddelseshensikt hos de som begår systematiske og omfattende overgrep. Tragedien som armenerne ble utsatt for, er i dag først og fremst en oppgave for historikerne, snarere enn et aktuelt spørsmål for rettsvesenet. Det viktigste nå er å fremme dialog og forsoning i regionen og understøtte den tyrkiske reformprosessen.

Lykke til med morgendagens seminar.

Dialog med UD etter seminaret

Etter seminaret sendte Armenere1915 en ny henvendelse til UD for å dele innsikt fra de internasjonale forskerne og be om et møte for å utdype seminarets tematikk.

Møtet ble holdt på embetsnivå den 12. desember 2025, med representanter fra seksjonene for Øst-Europa, humanitærrett, og fred og forsoning. Vi var åtte personer som møtte UD. Vi argumenterte for viktigheten av en offisiell erkjennelse av det armenske folkemordet, men UD fastholdt sin holdning, i tråd med svaret i brevet som er sitert over.

Debatten i offentligheten

Benektelsens ansikt

Seminaret i Professorboligen fant ikke sted i et vakuum. Samtidig som forskere diskuterte folkemordbenektelse akademisk, utspilte den samme debatten seg i norske aviser. For å belyse hvilke krefter som er i sving når man snakker om anerkjennelse og forsoning, har vi valgt å inkludere uttalelsen fra Tyrkias ambassadør, Gülin Dinç, til vår kronikk i Aftenposten i forbindelse med 110-årsmarkeringen for folkemordet på armenerne.

Hennes tekst er et tydelig eksempel på det som i academia kalles «offisiell benektelse» – der man anerkjenner at «lidelser fant sted», men kategorisk avviser det juridiske ansvaret og selve begrepet folkemord. Ambassadøren gjentar her Tyrkias faste linje om at historien må overlates til historikere, samtidig som hun berømmer norske myndigheter for å støtte seg til et «juridisk rammeverk».

Vi avviser at lidelsene klassifiseres som folkemord

Gülin Dinç - Tyrkias ambassadør til Norge

«Anerkjennelse av folkemord er viktig, Støre, også for armenerne», skriver Ann Færden og Bård Larsen i Aftenposten 19. juni. Kronikken deres viser nok en gang at hendelsene i 1915 fortsatt vekker stor debatt.

Først og fremst vil jeg understreke at Tyrkia ikke benekter lidelsene mange osmanske armenere opplevde i denne perioden. Vi avviser imidlertid at disse lidelsene klassifiseres som folkemord, fordi en slik betegnelse åpner for at lidelsene kan utnyttes gjennom en selektiv rangering av menneskelig lidelse.

Under oppløsningen av Det osmanske riket led tyrkere, armenere og alle andre folkeslag i imperiet sterkt. Historiske kilder viser at rundt fem millioner tyrkere og andre muslimer ble massakrert i denne katastrofale perioden.

«Folkemord» er et juridisk begrep. FNs konvensjon om forebygging og straff av folkemord fra 1948 slår tydelig fast at konkrete bevis, intensjon om å utslette (*dolus specialis*), og en dom fra en kompetent domstol er nødvendig for å avgjøre hvorvidt en handling utgjør folkemord.

I motsetning til folkemordene i Nazi-Tyskland, Kambodsja, Rwanda og Srebrenica, møter ikke hendelsene tilknyttet Det osmanske rikets fall disse juridiske kravene. I løpet av de mer enn 100 årene siden 1915 er det aldri funnet noe dokument eller noen form for bevis som antyder at den osmanske regjeringen hadde en «spesiell intensjon om å utslette» sine armenske undersåtter.

I tillegg til det manglende juridiske grunnlaget fastslo Den europeiske menneskerettsdomstolen (EMD) i 2015 at hendelsene i 1915 var et tema for legitim offentlig debatt.

Den trakk et klart skille mellom den entydige rettslige anerkjennelsen av holocaust av en internasjonal domstol og mangelen på en tilsvarende avgjørelse om 1915-hendelsene. Derfor er vi

glade for at våre norske kolleger også støtter oss til et juridisk rammeverk når de tilnærmer seg disse hendelsene.

Vi vet at det er betydelig uenighet og debatt omkring det som skjedde, og vi er villige, klare og trygge på å kunne diskutere fortiden.

Derfor er våre omfattende osmanske arkiver åpne og tilgjengelige for forskere. Selv om vi i 2005 foreslo overfor Armenia å opprette en felles historisk kommisjon – bestående av eksperter fra Tyrkia, Armenia og andre land – har vi ennå ikke mottatt noe svar fra armensk side.

Det vi trenger, er å oppnå en balansert og informert forståelse av dette komplekse og smertefulle kapittelet i vår felles historie.

I så måte er den eneste veien videre å fremme empati og dialog, slik at begge parter kan arbeide mot heling og forsoning, og legge grunnlaget for en fremtid basert på gjensidig respekt og fred.

Vi bør forstå at enhver form for politisering av historien hverken gagnar det akademiske arbeidet med å søke sannheten eller fremmer innsatsen for normalisering.

Debatten fortsetter

Spørsmålet om anerkjennelse og oppgjør er fortsatt gjenstand for aktiv debatt i den norske offentligheten. I forbindelse med de siste års markeringer har vi bidratt med noen kronikker som belyser de politiske og moralske utfordringene ved Norges offisielle linje.

<https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kronikk/i/63GPxo/110-aar-etter-folkemordet-paa-armenerne-tier-norge-fortsatt>

<https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/gwMW09/derfor-benekter-tyrkia-folkemordet-paa-armenerne>

<https://www.minerva.no/armenia-folkemord-historie/folkemord-og-fornektelsens-banalitet/504252>

<https://www.dagsavisen.no/debatt/hvorfor-nekter-norge-a-ankjenne-folkemordet/10302249>

Suggested Reading

- **Taner Akçam:**
 - *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton University Press).
 - *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide* (Palgrave Macmillan).
- **Joachim J. Savelsberg:**
 - *Knowing about Genocide: Armenian Suffering and Epistemic Struggles* (University of California Press).
 - *Miray Philips and Joachim J. Savelsberg. "Social Fields, Journalism, and Collective Memory: Reporting on the Armenian Genocide in Legal, Political, and Commemorative Field Events."* *Memory Studies*, Vol. 17, Nr. 4, pp. 709–723.
 - *Diaries and Bearing Witness of the Armenian Genocide: Micro-foundations of a Circle of Genocide Knowledge.* *Zeitschrift für Genozidforschung*. Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 111-134.
- **Hanne Sophie Greve:**
 - *Frihetens faner: Om folkemord og diktatur* (og hennes omfattende arbeid med internasjonale straffedomstoler).
- **Bård Larsen:**
 - *Det store tidsfordrivet: Om fornektelse av folkemord og politiske massedrap* (Civita).
- **Nora Sveaass:**
 - *Sveaass, N., Agger, I., Sønneland, A.M., Elsass, P. & Hamber, B. (2014). Surviving gross human rights violations: exploring survivors' experience of justice and reparation.*
 - *Sveaass, N. & Woolf, L. (2020). Human Rights: A Psychologist's Path to "Do no Harm".*
 - *Sveaass, N. (2023). The politics of torture: legal, social and political dynamics.*
 - *Sveaass N, & Wessells, M. (2020). Human Rights: How do they matter for the Profession of Psychology?*
- **Suren Manukyan:**
 - *The Structural and Institutional Dimensions of the Armenian Genocide* (Key articles through the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute).
- **Ellen Stensrud:**
 - *The Rohingya Crisis, the Democratisation Discourse, and the Absence of an Atrocity Prevention Lens* (og flere publikasjoner ved HL-senteret om forebygging av folkemord).
- **Sigrun Marie Moss:**

- *The Social Psychology of National Identity and Conflict* (Research on political psychology and recognition).

Organizations and Acknowledgements

Armenere1915 is a Norwegian organization dedicated to raising awareness about the Armenian Genocide and promoting its official recognition. For more information, visit: armenere1915.no

The Armenian Apostolic Church in Norway has been a vital supporter of this project and the local Armenian community.

The Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities (HL-senteret) is an independent research and education center in Oslo.

Visit: hlsenteret.no

Fritt Ord (The Freedom of Expression Foundation) – This project was carried out with partial financial support from Fritt Ord. Visit: frittord.no

The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (AGMI) – World-leading institution for the study, preservation, and commemoration of the 1915 Genocide. Visit: genocide-museum.am

iCenas Forlag is the publisher of this documentation. Visit: pannal.com

This publication documents the international seminar held in Oslo to commemorate 110 years since the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Featuring insights from award-winning researchers and experts, the booklet explores the deep scars left by denial and the vital importance of political recognition. By bridging historical truth with the psychological impact of trauma, these proceedings serve as a crucial resource for anyone fighting for justice, reconciliation, and the prevention of future crimes against humanity.



Norwegian Helsinki
Committee



HL-SENTERET
The Norwegian Center for
Holocaust and Minority Studies



**UNIVERSITY
OF OSLO**



FRITT ORD

