

On Denialisms or, *Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?*^{1 2}

Alexis Papazian³

From 1965 onwards and gradually, every 24th of April the Armenian diaspora openly and publicly commemorates the Armenian Genocide, initiated in April, 1915. It took 50 years of silent remembrance within Armenian families and communities to open up the trauma of the genocide in a just demand for recognition.

The genocide is one of the historical events that, since then, construct and shape the identity of the large part of armenian organizations and families in their current places of residence. At par, the denialist policies carried out by the Turkish state and its allies are a barrier that separates all possibility of symbolic and material reparation of a republic that was born negating the genocide that shaped it as such.⁴

We start by differentiating between denial and denialism. While the former is the personal or institutional action of negating facts of the past, denialism is born as a proposed narrative about the past that is distorted, modified, and presented through seemingly solid “arguments” that are weak at their core. We affirm that **the strongest denialist narrative is that which is not seen as such**, promoting and enabling the justification of future crimes. **State denialism** acquires a stable potency that translates these practices to everyday life, transcending generations that are educated in a negationist culture. The practices of distortion and self-justification of crimes against

¹ Quote by Adolf Hitler, pronounced the 22 of August of 1939 before the invasion of Poland

² Original text available in “Puanóptico” magazine, published by the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters (UBA)
<https://revistas.filo.uba.ar/index.php/elpuanoptico/article/view/3868>

³ PhD in anthropology and history professor (UBA). Lecturer in the Cátedra Libre de Derechos Humanos of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Lecturer in the free Human Rights Department of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, Lecturer for the Bachelor's Degree in Intercultural Education and member of the Luisa Hairabedian Foundation. Contact: investigacionflh@gmail.com

⁴ Note that the Republic of Turkey was established as such beginning in the years 1921-1923. See *Perfil*, April 28, 2020, “The Turkish Ambassador Responds to a *PERFIL* Article” available at: <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/internacional/embajador-de-turquia-vural-altay-responde-a-una-nota-de-perfil.html>
The ambassador’s publication constitutes a right of reply to an article entitled “Pandemic and Genocide: The Armenian Claim in Times of Coronavirus” published April 23, 2020, available at: <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/internacional/pandemia-coronavirus-genocidio-reclamo-armenio.phtml>

humanity and genocide are a constructive part of these crimes committed by modern and contemporary States. Denialism operates not only as a post-genocide discourse, but also as a part of the process of genocide.

I would like to highlight some fragments the Turkish ambassador to Argentina had the fortune of publishing in the newspaper Perfil April 28, 2020³. The reader is invited to analyze the following text observing the denialist narrative, explicit in each sentence of the ambassador:

Every year, we observe with concern the pathologic obsession of certain circles against Turkey and the Turkish people, as well as the propaganda and rhetoric of the unilateral Armenian focus on the events of 1915 in several newspapers...

At the start of 1900, the Ottoman Empire was fighting several battles in various fronts to impede its collapse. While known as the “most loyal ethnic group” in Ottoman society, some Armenian groups succumbed to radicalization, insurgency, and ethnic cleansing in attempt to found an ethnically homogenous armenian homeland in Anatolia, which represented a threat to the security and territorial integrity of the Empire and its people. This said, ethnic terror by minorities, among which Armenian gangs took the lead, is well documented.

The most authorized document about the protracted or, in other words, unfinalized First World War on Turkey is the Treaty of Lausanne of July 24, 1923. This treaty, in addition to not mentioning a “genocide,” does not even make reference to the armenians. This fact alone is enough to affirm that the armenian “genocide” arose as a lie fabricated in the following decades...

Accusing a nation of a crime as despicable as genocide, that was never committed, is a grand mistake that history and memory will never forget.

The crime of genocide has a strict definition in the widely recognized Convention of 1948 on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide which established

requirements such as the existence of concrete evidence, the judgement of a competent court, and the intention to physically destroy as occurred in the case of the Holocaust and the genocides of Cambodia, Rwanda, and Srebrenica. Therefore, terming the tragic events of 1915 as “genocide” is not only legally unfounded, since a legal judgement does not exist, but also constitutes an aggression against an entire nation.

These paragraphs contain substantial historical inaccuracies; they do not mention the Istanbul Trials (1918) where members of the Turkish government were tried for crimes against the Armenian population, and they do not report the existence of period documents (from many European powers, including Germany, an ally Turkey) that describe the specific killings and deportations of specific Armenians that occurred from April, 1915 onwards.⁵ They say nothing about the Treaty of Sevres (prior to that of Lausanne) in which Armenian claims were included, only to later be relegated by the understanding of the Turkish Nationalist Movement and the European powers (Turkey has been and is a central ally for Europe and the United States). On the other hand the Turkish official illustrates this with other genocides, entering into a perverse game where “recognizing a situation” permits negating another, which we aptly and popularly call “double standard,” in addition to transferring the claim made to the Turkish State to an affront on the Turkish people (nation). Finally, he chooses to ignore the Trial for the Right to the Truth of the Armenian Genocide, carried out in federal courts in our country which in 2011 had a final resolution, declaring that “... *the Turkish State HAS COMMITTED THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE in persecution of the Armenian People, in the period between 1915 and 1923.*”

Lastly, it is important to point out that **it is not just Turkey**. Although the criticisms relegated to the lack of recognition of the Armenian Genocide have put the denialism of Turkey in the spotlight, we do not intend to fall into the fallacious singularity that would make us think of denialism as a political tool that only Turkey has used. The genocides that have occurred all over America against hundreds of indigenous nations have been overlooked by the “Universal History”; in the same way the massacres, deportations, and exterminations committed by

⁵ The Luisa Hairabedian Foundation maintains a digital archive of historical documents that prove the systematic and intentional actions against the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire/ Republic of Turkey. See: <https://verdadyjusticia.org.ar/centro-de-documentacion/>

colonizer nations in Africa and vast regions of Asia have been framed within colonial and post colonial politics, but the effects of systematic violence against those “others” whom Europe considers (or considered) inferior still need to be explored further. Similarly, (and with substantial success) **denialism has been part of the politics of the dictatorships of the Southern Cone** of Latin America to the point that even in countries with a large quantity of Human Rights organizations —like ours—, we observe expressions and practices with an alarming recurrence that, definitely, enter within denialist logics.