Chapter 2
Theoretical Considerations

Abstract In this chapter, the theoretical background and concepts are outlined. Since this book is essentially about how we (should) think about a particular object, such as the Armenian Genocide, it requires a specific theory of knowledge to develop theses of what can be thought and known to begin with. The epistemological theory that should provide this framework for the present purposes is constructionism. In a next step, the question can be specified as how we, in the present, should think about a *past* event. Departing from a generally constructionist background, this chapter thus presents further thoughts on our perspective of the past and the histories we write about it, and how they relate to our present social and political lives. More specifically, the phenomena of identity and guilt are assumed to be of pivotal interest in this regard. Finally, since the entire debate revolves around the question whether this past event amounts to an occurrence of genocide, the concept of genocide is also presented and discussed, demonstrating that the difficulties we encounter when trying to classify specific cases may also be due to the difficulties to grasp the phenomenon of genocide in a concise and universally accepted definition.

2.1 A Constructionist Approach

In this chapter I want to outline the theoretical background framing my approach to the conflict discussed here. Basically, the paradigm I am following here is an interpretive one, or more precisely what is often described as "constructionism".[1]

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[1] For a general overview of interpretive paradigms see for instance Richter (2002), for an introduction to constructionism as I try to understand it here, see Glasersfeld (1997a, b). A term often used synonymously with constructionism is constructivism. Anderson (1999: 57) suggests a differentiation between these two: while they agree about the constructed nature of our socially relevant reality, constructivism situates the constructing processes in the cognitive and organic

Just to avoid ambiguity from the very beginning, I would like to point out what this label in my understanding does *not* designate: it does not attempt to express that whatever we think is happening might indeed only be happening in our minds; this notion in my understanding may be better regarded as part of the philosophical school of solipsism, rather than of social scientific constructionism.

What the interpretive approach in social science indeed does postulate is that how we come to think of any particular event happening in the "ontologische Wirklichkeit"[2] (ontological reality) is not a mirror image or a simple function of that event but instead involves human agency. This is not only a reference to selective perception or to the awareness that all our thoughts are based on some physiological, i.e. neuronal, basis. In the interpretive paradigm, the emphasis rests more on the stipulation that we experience this reality not in an unadulterated receptive process, but by always and necessarily making sense of it, or, in other words, by attaching meaning to it.[3] We are not experiencing the world as it ontologically is and then develop our interpretations and meanings from there, but rather the process of experiencing is already tainted by interpretation. We can only look at this world through some specific eyes, through a specific lens, and that lens is shaped by interpretive processes. Even though it may make sense to differentiate them for certain analytical purposes, I would venture to claim that present experience, interpretation and the generation of expectations are essentially closely intertwined—inseparable. There is no experience without interpretation (at least none that might be cognitively relevant).

This process of interpreting the world should neither be understood as a conscious effort, nor as a strictly logical or reasonable one. How we come to think of something relies heavily on our previous experiences, on our habitual way of generating meaning within and of this world. In my opinion, and also of paramount significance in the context of this work here, one of the pivotal devices utilized by us to generate meaning is categorization. We would be ineffably overstrained if we were to face every single phenomenon we come across as a phenomenon for its own sake. To relieve our mental endeavors and thereby remain capable of acting, we revert to categorization to make sense of something, to "know" what it is, what it means.

To illustrate this by a quite trivial example: it would be tremendously difficult for us to survive, not to speak of navigating, in our daily urban traffic without any

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individual, whereas constructionism locates them in social relations. Understanding the terminology this way and recalling my propensity to methodological individualism, I tend to subscribe more to the constructivist position. However, since I believe this is not a well-established distinction, as useful as it may be, and since I prefer the term constructionism simply for aesthetic reasons, I hope it will be acceptable if I do not follow her in this respect. I hope this still falls under the protection of academic freedom. . . .

[2] Glasersfeld ((1997a, b)): 97.

[3] Lueger (2000: 36) differentiates between "Realität" as the world of the physical objects, and "Wirklichkeit" as the world as we experience it, the world as it is represented in our heads. "Realität ist immer Realitätsbeschreibung" ("reality is always describing reality", my translation), as Richter (2002: 117) claimed.

knowledge of it. We know (a) what we need to look out for, i.e., what is relevant in this context, such as a red traffic light; we know (b) where to look for it; and upon spotting it, we know (c) how to interpret it and how to react to it: stop.[4] To highlight an important point: to know how to act upon something we need not (only) recognize this something in its own right, but also *as* something. This has been called the "Als-Struktur der Erkenntnis"[5] (as-structure of recognition) and it essentially is what makes any specific object a sign.[6] Therefore, recognition of any given thing is always twofold: we recognize it (a) as itself, as the specific object we are dealing with in a specific situation; and (b) as something else, i.e., as a representative of a broader category of objects. And because of this second feature we are capable of drawing some inferences about this object and the situation we are encountering it in.

To give another example which might be less obvious yet no less trivial: a table. When entering a room, we visually spot an object, and again we recognize it not only as the object that it indisputably is, but *as something*: a table. This being a table is not something inherent in the object itself, it is an active attribution of our own. In other words: meaning does not reside in the objects themselves, but is attributed to them by an agent.[7] Again we "know" what the relevant traits are which we need to look for (four legs, a plate on top etc.), while disregarding those we "know" to be irrelevant in this case (the material it is made of, its exact height, if its shape is round or square etc.).[8] And this knowledge of the relevant criteria is on the one side a result of previous experiences with tables, experiences which taught us under what circumstances an object might successfully be described as a table; "successful" in this context denoting that our attributions were confirmed by the developments and outcomes of the situation, i.e. a correspondence between the expectations we developed based on our interpretation, and how the events following this

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[4] This is of course not to state that every particular sign unavoidably triggers a particular behavioral response. There is obviously more than one sign present in any situation, and there is the choice on the side of the agent which signs are the relevant ones and how to interpret them (in a wider sense, not only as a deliberate decision). But the crucial matter is that we can identify the object as a sign and know how to interpret it, and that this interpretation shapes how we think of that situation we are in.

[5] See Keller (1989): 121.

[6] Or symbol, if you prefer. Just as for the difference between constructivism and constructionism, (I hope) it is not necessary to distinguish between these two for the purposes of this study.

[7] As already emphasized by Alfred Schütz, see Miller (1998): 187. As Nichanian (1998: 262) put it: "»Meaning« does not wait in the heart of events in the moment when they take place. It can occur only as the result of an interpretation, that is, of a labor directed against other interpretations or the lack of interpretation."

[8] For the concept and significance of "relevance" in constructing meaning, see Schütz (1960; 1972). The importance of relevance in classifying and establishing meaning may be quite tellingly illustrated by how quickly the relevant criteria may change for the classification of our fellow human beings. Just a couple of decades ago in Austria it was of paramount relevance of what skin color people were, or the shape of their noses etc., while today this does not seem to be acceptable anymore—at least officially....

interpretation confirmed these expectations (for instance because we engaged in certain behavior and successfully achieved our goals in this particular situation). And on the other side the relevant criteria are derived in interdependency on the situational context. By knowing in what kind of situation we are in at present, we are also able to develop certain expectations about what we might encounter in this situation—and what might be expected from us. And the relationship between object and situation is interdependent since the recognition of the object also facilitates the recognition of the situation. Ultimately, this classification allows us to activate meanings we learned in the past about *this kind of* object/situation, and by adapting it to some present particularities we may develop the meaning of this situation, which in turn is the basis for our present thinking and acting.

To exhaust the example even further, by identifying the table and other objects in the room, we know we are presently standing in a dining room. Together with recognizing the face on the other side of the table as the face of a particular person (another sign, pointing for instance to some specific shared interests and experiences to talk about), and with recognizing the contortions of her face as a smile (another sign, pointing to friendliness, an invitation to feel at ease and chat) and various other signs, we make an interpretation of the entire situation to finally arrive at a "right" conclusion regarding what kind of situation we are in, and how to "adequately" (and thus "successfully") act in it. With regard to the table, our insight might prompt us to put our plate on it, rather than our shoes, or instead of sitting on it, turning it upside down, etc.

Going beyond recognition and knowledge, I would suggest conceiving of meaning not only as what something *is*, but also how it is evaluated. Just like a symbol or category evokes certain roles and scripts and associations, so does it carry certain value judgments and emotions.[9] This might be less obvious in the example of a table, which might be quite neutral with regard to emotions, but more apparent in the recognition of a facial expression as a smile or of a verbal expression as slander, where the interpretation may also carry strong emotional components.

Another important point I would like to emphasize is that the meaning of an object is always relational. By virtue of being a symbol, an object always relates to something else, but equally important as already *Ferdinand de Saussure* worked out, it also decisively excludes some specific *other* meanings. Symbols are always embedded in extensive symbolic systems where they are deeply intertwined.[10] To illustrate this again by the example above: recognizing an object as a table involves certain meanings and guidance for action, such as putting my plate on it, and excludes the meaning of a laundry rack, which is why I refuse to put my wet clothes on it. And it refers to the broader, situational meaning of a nice dinner with a friend, prompting me to engage in certain modes of interaction, such as small talk, while refraining from others, such as wrestling.

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[9] See for instance Hill (1995): 88.

[10] See for instance Göttert (Göttert and Jungen 2004): 27ff; Keller (1989): 129ff; Weiß (1994): 34ff.

All these processes involve agency, and that is what in my opinion the term "constructionism" best emphasizes: that neither the classification we apply to the particular object nor the meaning we eventually attribute to the object are received passively by our sensual perception, imposed on us by the object. Instead they are actively and incessantly construed by us, based on former experiences, the expectations we had before entering this situation and so forth. Therefore, in a constructionist paradigm, to explain the thoughts and actions of an agent in a particular situation, it would be less important to examine what was "really" happening but rather to try to find out how the agent interpreted the situation, what meaning she attached to it. The focus of attention shifts from an analysis of the event itself and the circumstances under which it unfolded to an analysis of assumptions, interpretations, streams of thoughts the agent followed in that situation. An analysis of the circumstances alone fails to provide an adequate basis for understanding why the agent behaved in a particular manner, because it fails to take into account the crucial medium that translates these circumstances into these actions: the agent herself.[11]

Furthermore, symbols and their meaning are not only relational to other symbols and meanings, but also to the specific person nourishing them. To make another blunt postulation, in my understanding of constructionism, meaning is not an attribute of a symbol or object, but it is relative to and dependent on the agent (re-) producing it.[12] There can be no meaning without someone interpreting the symbol at hand. Accepting this premise emphasizes again the necessity to study how human beings generate and deal with meaning, in order to understand what is happening in our social lives, and why it is happening.

All of this should not be misunderstood as prompting the inference that the meaning we construe is completely arbitrary or voluntary, invented out of the blue. As its relational quality already suggests, meaning is always developed from currently existing cognitive resources, and these in turn are dependent on our past experiences.[13] That in my opinion may explain why certain attributions of meaning can remain astonishingly stable over time, at least on a more superficial level. And this also clarifies why they cannot be imposed on others by means of policies, courts, legislatures, or hierarchical power in general. All these influences play decisive roles in shaping our social lives and experiences and therefore our mental frames, but the relationship between them and our generation of meaning is not determinative, simply because the recipient of these influences is not passive but

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[11] And this is certainly not a call to disregard the situation itself. Depending on the specific cognizance which is of interest it may be important to learn for instance what situations are interpreted by the relevant agents in this particular way. In the end we have very little, if any, direct influence on how other people interpret the world, and at times an intervention into the situation may be more appropriate than into the relevant cognitive processes themselves—but certainly not always!

[12] For a discussion on this, see for instance Herkner (2001): 140ff; Keller (1989): 85ff.

[13] As Miller (1998: 187) mentions, for Alfred Schütz meaning is generated by (a) the sedimentation of past experiences, and (b) our intentionality toward the future.

herself an active generator of meaning, using these influences as one (albeit important) input among others.

This brings me to another point that deserves being stressed, i.e., the attribute "social" I habitually put in front of "constructionism". It is as trivial as it is important to note that obviously we do not develop all of these processes as some secluded monads (*Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*), but in constant interaction with the social world around us. After all my gibberish it may come as a surprise, but I did not invent the category "table" on my own (even though retrospectively I would stand in awe if I had done so); instead, I adopted it by observing, listening, imitating other people, in parallel enriched it with my own experiences and thoughts, and eventually I arrived at an integrated concept, *my* integrated concept of "table".[14] Even though I cannot for the life of me remember anybody ever explaining the concept of "table" to me, I ultimately developed a concept of "table" which is sufficiently similar to those which other people in my surroundings sustain, to allow us to consider our concepts as equivalent. We believe our concepts of "table" are identical (or at least equivalent) and we hardly ever come across situations in which we are forced to realize they are not, and that is why the concept of "table" "works" for us. By virtue of such implicit "convention", a concept becomes a socially shared symbol, what *George Herbert Mead* designated "signifikante Symbole" (significant symbols).[15] We verify that our interpretations of objects and situations are the "right" ones because others behave in the very same manner towards these objects and situations, thereby confirming our expectations about their behavior—they become "successful" interpretations and expectations.[16] Thus, our interpretations evolve into "sozial gebilligtes Wissen" (socially approved knowledge) and ultimately "natürliche Weltkonzepte" (natural concepts of the world).[17] Apparently, there are other concepts which fall far behind from working so smoothly, for instance because they are less widely and long established, or they are more complex, or they are of sufficient significance to force us into the most minute examinations. One of these concepts, I think, is the concept of genocide.

For the context of this study here it seems imperative to underline that this theory about the generation of meaning and learning is not confined to our everyday, more or less unreflected knowledge; rather, it extends also to scientific examinations and descriptions of the world. Even though not deploying an explicitly constructionist

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[14] More accurately: "I am arriving" rather than "I arrived", because obviously this concept is more of a process itself, rather than a product; it is constantly evolving and transforming, with the changes being more or less significant.

[15] See Richter (2002): 72.

[16] See for instance Berger and Luckmann (1986); Keller (1989).

[17] Schütz (1972): 98 and 86. It should be noted that of course our concepts will never be literally identical, a certain amount of individuality and interpersonal deviation will always remain. They must merely be similar enough for us to be able to anticipate or at least retrospectively understand the other's behavior based on our own interpretation of reality. That alone can already confirm that we have both deployed sufficiently similar interpretation and conception of the present. For more on this, see also Glasersfeld ((1997a, b)): 220ff.

approach himself, this may be illustrated with a quotation from the foreword of *Markus Dreßler*:

> Wissenschaft, ob philologisch oder vergleichend-historisch, liefert Interpretationen der »realen Welt«. Es geht dabei nicht um »Wahrheitsfindung«, um den Anspruch, einen Ausschnitt der »Wirklichkeit« »wahrheitsgetreu« abzubilden beziehungsweise zu erfassen, sondern darum, daß Erscheinungen, auf die man in der »Wirklichkeit« stößt, in nachvollziehbarer Art und Weise beschrieben und in »sinnvolle« logische Zusammenhänge eingeordnet werden. Wir konstruieren also »sinnvolle Zusammenhänge«, um Ausschnitte aus der »realen Welt« individuell zu verstehen und anderen verständlich zu machen—ohne jedoch den Anspruch zu haben, »Wirklichkeit« im Sinne einer absoluten Kategorie zu erfassen.[18]

Finally, I think the case study here merits pinpointing an additional feature in the process of constructing meaning: language. Probably one of the most powerful devices for classification and the exchange of meaning is language. First of all, it should be noted that terminology is itself already classification: words are labels for abstract concepts, pointing at an infinite amount of objects which may potentially be subsumed in this category. They do not relate to any specific object itself, but to the general category. Thus, whenever we communicate in and about this world, we are doing so with reference to abstract concepts.

Even more, the causal relationship between language and reality is still debated. It may be a truism that the living environment which we experience to some extent shapes our language,[19] but the arrow from cause to consequence arguably works also the other way: our language to some extent shapes how we experience our environment. Language offers neither a natural or "the correct" representation of the world, nor is it invented by its every speaker herself by deliberate contemplation of her environment; rather it is learned from early ages onwards, and thereby certain concepts, i.e. words, are accommodated. Thus a person learns from very young age certain distinctions (such as between table and chair), but others she does not (such as distinguishing between different kinds of tables by virtue of their being of a different material). In other words: by learning categories via language, we also learn which are the relevant criteria and categories in our social world. And this, in turn, affects the way we perceive and think of the world:

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[18] Dreßler (1999: 5): "Science, philological or comparative-historical, supplies interpretations of the »real world«. It is not about »discovery of truth«, about the aspiration of »veritably« depicting or capturing an extract of »reality«, but about describing phenomena which we encounter in this reality in a comprehensible manner and about integrating them into »reasonable« logical relationships. We thus construe »reasonable relationships« to individually comprehend extracts from the »real world« and make them comprehensible for others—but without claiming to capture »reality« in the sense of an absolute category" (my translation).

[19] Think for instance of the classical example that Inuit dispose of a large vocabulary with regard to different types of snow, whereas peoples inhabiting sand deserts possess a broader terminology to identify and distinguish different kinds of sand. This leads to a fascinating experience we sometimes come across, of learning to take a different perspective on some phenomena when we learn to get hold of them in another language. For more on this, see for instance Holocher (1996): 119ff; Keller (1989): 128f.

Welche Eigenschaften wir jedoch bemerken, als Eigenschaften fassen, worauf wir also aufmerksam werden und wie die Welt strukturiert ist, hängt von der Sprache, und zwar von der jeweiligen Sprache ab. Insofern baut jede Sprache ihre eigene Welt. [. . .] Unterschiede, die die Sprache nicht vorsieht, werden auch in der Beobachtung meist übersehen.[20]

This is also one of the reasons why discourse analysis has become so prominent in political research as well over the last couple of years, and why agenda setting is such an important momentum in the political process. By our categorial language system we are able to define a problem, and thereby to assign it to a certain frame[21] which in turn shapes our abilities and options for resolving this very issue, as well as the criteria by which we can later on evaluate a policy.[22] That is why an examination of public discourse is so important, particularly in democratic systems, because to identify who is dominating a certain discourse also reveals a lot about potential and actual power, and a timely re-framing of an issue may put the entire cause on a different track.

To take this one step further, language presumably not only influences our categorizations but also our evaluations. Just as language is a medium through which we express attitudes and emotions, so language also affects them. A rather vague or amorphous feeling becomes more tangible if we put it in concrete terminology; our judgments become more definite and precise once we have found the right words to capture them. As previously mentioned, for instance the classification of an event as "genocide" carries a very strong impact on our emotions and evaluations, and these will presumably be quite different if we opt to call the very same event "civil strife". Thus, subsuming a particular event into the category of genocide is already enough to pre-dispose our judgments, without knowing anything about the event itself.[23]

To summarize: in constructionist theory as I understand it, the important points for the topic I am trying to cover are (a) the object is *understood* (or interpreted) to be a table, but that is different from asserting it *is* a table: "table" is but one way of describing and making sense of an object, and it is far from being a natural, peremptory or exhaustive description or understanding of it; (b) this our

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[20] Keller (1989: 126f): "Which properties we notice, perceive as properties, what we become aware of and how the world is structured, depends on language, the respective language. In that sense every language construes its own world. [. . .] Differences, which are not accounted for in language, are most often overlooked during observation" (my translation). Alfred Korzybski dubbed this capability of language, i.e., this pre-structuring of our perceptions and knowledge by language, the "linguistische Unbewusste", see Holocher (1996): 53. For more on this topic see also Berger and Luckmann (1986): 39ff; Schlieben-Lange (1991).

[21] The concept of "framing" is widely used in social sciences. To give at least one definition of a frame to account for its further usage in this work, I will offer the one found in Rein and Schön (1993: 146): "In our use of the term, framing is a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading, and acting. A frame is a perspective from which an amorphous, ill-defined, problematic situation can be made sense of and acted on."

[22] See also Matouschek et al. (1995): 212.

[23] See also Cameron and Kulick (2003); Langenmayr (1997): 199.

understanding depends to a large degree upon classification of the respective phenomenon, supplemented by situational variables such as aspirations; (c) classification is based on (not) meeting certain criteria; (d) these criteria are not self-evident or natural, but are socially determined as being the relevant ones within a given context (e) therefore, just as our social worlds and the contexts we are living in change, so do our notions of what is relevant in a specific situation and therefore our categories and our classifications; (f) by its abstract and taxonomical nature, language is an important device in shaping our classification as it offers and thereby creates categories for us; (g) this classification by itself already carries certain meanings and influences our behavior by invoking specific roles or scripts,[24] and at the same time it instructs us which it is *not*, thereby excluding other meanings and forms of behavior; (h) supplemented by situational aspects such as our current desires and fears, the specific meaning we attach to a particular phenomenon in this particular situation is derived. And this is then the basis for our ultimate evaluation, emotion, further cognition and action in the face of this phenomenon, in this situation.

Now, admittedly, all of this might be quite trivial or on the other side maybe confusing, but I think it is important to keep in mind when we encounter quarrels which immanently revolve around differing interpretations and meanings. Obviously there are a number of instances where we face misunderstandings, disagreements or even arguments every day how to classify and evaluate certain phenomena, and what a certain category "really" means. To give a few more prominent examples: (social) justice, war, freedom, home, welfare, prosperity, economic growth, quality of life, integration, equality, friendship, family, the other/alien, affection, sexuality, power, oppression, sustainability, tolerance, religion, or the current subject: genocide.[25]

After this general background of my own approach pursued here, I think it is appropriate to elaborate a bit on some more specific concepts which are of relevance in the affair discussed here. Generally speaking, my understanding of all of them is based on this constructionist approach, and I shall now try to explain what this understanding has in store for these phenomena, as there are: the trias of history, memory and the past; their relationship to the political realm; the notion of collective identity and collective guilt; and the relevance of historical narratives, i.e., "myths".

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[24] Concepts such as role, script, frame, or scheme, were most importantly elaborated by Erving Goffman. See for instance Goffmann (2002). See also Treibel (2004).

[25] What makes the constructionist approach so universal and for many of its critics so void and generic, is, as also Lederach (1995: 7–9) puts it, that meaning in this paradigm is involved in *every* social conflict, and not only in those which already at the surface level revolve around definition and classification.

2.2 History, Memory, and the Past

Just as I claimed above for our thinking of the real world, so our thinking of the past can be conceptualized from a constructionist approach as well. In this understanding, history is not, and can never be, an account which simply mirrors the past, but instead is an actively constructed cognition about the past. In contemporary literature on history and memory, there is frequently a distinction drawn between (a) history on one side, understood as the scholarly examination and description of the past by professional historians, and (b) memory on the other, understood as the myths, stories, personal memories and so forth which we sustain in our personal and communal lives.[26] However, while some important qualities that differ between these two approaches towards the past are not to be neglected,[27] the assertion is nowadays quite accepted that both of them, history just like memory, are equivalent in the sense of not being mirror-like representations but creative attempts to reconstruct the past against the background of a particular present context.[28] Anyway, to keep concepts separate, I shall use the term "past" to refer to past events as they have actually taken place, what in the philosophy of historical science is often expressed as *res gestae*. By contrast, *historia rerum gestarum*, or the account of what has actually happened, shall run under the labels of "memory" where it refers to personal and collective memory, or "history" where scientific accounts of the past are denoted. Since for the purpose of this paper there is no imperative to distinguish between history and memory, I shall for the sake of brevity use only the term "history" to indicate any account of the past, be it scientific or lay, private or public, personal or collective. Where such differences do happen to matter, I shall try to make these distinctions explicit at the place of concern.

It may be appropriate to briefly support the postulation that history and memory are creations of the present rather than reproductions of the past. This claim may go into two directions, the first referring to the imperfection of perception and storage, while the later indicates how this imperfection forces or better *allows* us to construct history as we inevitably do. (a) As noted above during the discussion of how structures of relevance shape our perception (see Sect. 2.1), our attention to things we witness in our daily lives is already highly selective. We become aware of certain things while ignoring others. Therefore, already what we potentially *could* remember is limited. Likewise, also professional historians studying *a selection* of historical sources will be *further selective* about what they extract from these sources.

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[26] See for instance Erll (2005): 41ff; König (2008a, b): 125ff.

[27] Which sound pretty much like general differences between "scientific" and "everyday" knowledge, for instance with history following explicit methods, reflecting its own interests and assumptions, thus being conscious of its perspectivity, open to falsification, and more exact and complete than memory—at least by postulation. See for instance König (2008a, b): 16, 125ff.

[28] For instance Echterhoff (2004): 68; König (2008a, b); 11, 112–114.

(b) This selectivity extends to our memories: we store only a certain amount of the things we notice (just as we probably store some of the things we do not consciously notice), while we forget about others, at least in the sense that we cannot proactively and consciously recall them later on. (c) This is not just a matter of storage capacity, but maybe also due to the way memory operates, at least if *Astrid Erll*'s suggestion is accurate that we facilitate our work of remembering by abstracting from a specific situation and storing some general scheme rather than the unmitigated impression of the situation. According to her, such schemes represent general memories applicable to various situations, and comprise some blank spaces which can be filled with a few characteristics of the particular situation being stored.[29] To give an example, I would suggest it requires far less mental resources to remember that there was "a table" in the room than remembering "this table"; storing the information that there was a table, possibly amended by a few specific, relevant features such as color or shape, is easier than remembering the entirety of this particular table. However, by consequence we might remember visually that there was an object with four legs and a tabletop in the room, possibly that it was black and located next to the window, but we may not remember its material. Anyway, what we retain from the past appears to be necessarily incomplete and occasionally requires stuffing to cover up these white spots.

It should be noted that these points are not restricted to the storage in our personal memory but extend to written or oral testimonies we produce about what we experienced, or what we heard others experienced—and therefore these points also pose limitations to the accuracy and comprehensiveness of collective memories such as myths, as well as professional studies about the past (which in turn rely on the accounts and other materials produced by contemporary witnesses).

Now, as elaborated in the preceding section with regard to our general thinking, so are these processes highly dependent upon pre-existing mental concepts.[30] For instance, the notions of relevance I have mentioned above will navigate our attention/storage to those objects we (also unconsciously) consider worthwhile of our attention and memory, dismissing objects not deemed relevant enough.

However, and most crucially, also (d) the activation of memories just like the confrontation with historical sources involves cognitive processes a critical analyst may describe as "distortions". Obviously, memories are retrieved in certain situations, thus their activation is embedded in specific contexts. Just like new perceptions in the present, memories and other sources are thus viewed in light of this current context, i.e., framed by the knowledge and interests and affects we harbor in this specific situation. Considering memories hence as basically another kind of stimulus in the present, memories need to be made sense of, they need to be interpreted, to carry meaning—just like any other phenomenon we encounter in

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[29] Erll (2005): 85.

[30] With pre-existing not in the sense of being there before birth, or being a primordial given which is pre-defined by some external entity, or being immune to change, but instead simply meaning that there exist some concepts which we already bring with us into any present situation.

the actual moment. And that meaning by assumption is generated each time anew when a memory is retrieved. However, of course also the meanings we have attached to a phenomenon in the past are stored, indeed I would suggest they are an essential component of the memory about the entire phenomenon itself, and are retrieved when we re-activate the memory of the phenomenon. And therefore the meaning we attach to a phenomenon may be astonishingly stable over time, which is supplemented by a relative stability also of our cognitive dispositions, such as our classificatory systems. This contributes to our propensity to evaluate phenomena, which we perceive as identical or at least similar, in the same or at least in similar ways—though we certainly also deviate from this tendency, which is then curiously branded as "inconsistency". This, however, should not distract us from the idea that the meaning we currently attach to a phenomenon is still a *current* production, not a re-activation of a past meaning.

In that sense, it is accurate that history and memory (unlike the past) are per se rooted in the present: "[v]ielmehr entsteht die Vergangenheit erst durch die soziale Konstruktion in Form des Erzählens, Dokumentierens und Deutens."[31] To prove the persistency of my constructionist bias, I want to recall one of the most telling maxims of constructionist theory which goes back to *Heinz von Foerster*: just as a judgment on a work of art would likely tell me more about the judge than about the piece of art itself,[32] so does any discourse about the past reveal probably more about its participants than about the past itself. At the very least, I would add, I can deduce something about the past/art *after* I know something about the interlocutor. In the words of historian *Taner Akçam*:

> In other words, the only reality is today, and history ends up being a representation of present-day perceptions of the past. [...] We think, when we are talking with each other, that we are discussing history, but what we are actually doing, more often than not, is discussing our present.[33]

To emphasize this point: already the questions we raise about the past are driven by certain modes of thinking and interests which in turn are rooted in the present. And so are the methods we choose to examine the past, how we strive to find answers to these questions, including our selection of sources.

(e) Most importantly, the way we then process these gathered data and the conclusions we draw is based on interpretation: to make sense of what happened, and to understand why it happened, we need to apply theoretical concepts which we borrow from contemporary theories. For instance, to understand why certain

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[31] Arenhövel (2000: 11): "rather, history emerges only through a social construction of narrating, documenting and interpreting" (my translation). See also for instance Bruner (1998): 52; Erll (2005): 7; König (2008a, b): 14f; Polkinghorne (1998): 24f. This suggested characteristic of the very nature of memory may contribute also to the explanation of "Deckerinnerungen" [screen memories, Erll (2005): 47; Assmann (2006a): 261) or "Scheinerinnerungen" (mock memories, Erll (2005): 85], i.e., thoughts we have and which we experience as memories, without there being any corresponding past events.

[32] See Glaser (1999): 59.

[33] Akçam (2004): 248f.

historical agents acted in a specific manner, historians (and everybody else who indulges in historical discussion) retrospectively apply some more or less explicit models supposed to explain why the historical agent chose this very behavior. These include for instance theories revolving around oedipal complex, lust for power (with "power" being defined and understood in present terms), religious identity (with present understandings of religion and what it implies for identity), ideology, class, gender and whatever other more or less explicit theories about human nature and behavior we utilize also in our daily interactions, presupposing that such factors remain constant throughout human history, some sort of an anthropological constant.[34]

Finally, (f) as far as history is verbalized, becoming an oral or written account of the past, singular entities are pressed into the tight corsets of abstract notions, i.e. words, and this process again involves an awful lot of interpretation—being a feature inherent in language per se (see Sect. 2.1).

All of this contributes to a plurality of histories and memories for one and the same event, in diachronic (multiple histories occurring at different points in time) and synchronic (multiple histories occurring at the very same time) perspective.[35] It also explains that history/memory may change, as already *George Herbert Mead* observed: "We speak of the past as final and irrevocable. There is nothing that is less so [. . .] the past (or some meaningful structure of the past) is as hypothetical as the future."[36]

Yet this should not be misunderstood as a plea for arbitrariness in history and a relativization of historical accounts. Not all our versions of history are of the same quality and, to use the concept frequently referenced in constructionist theories instead of truth, the same viability. Quite obviously some theories about the past lose credibility where they cannot be aligned with the historical evidence available—what *Reinhart Koselleck* described as a source's right to veto.[37] Furthermore, different models of the past can be compared with regard to their plausibility and explanatory power. Other principles employed in scientific research or everyday interaction, such as *Ockham*'s Razor, may be applied to decide which explanation to give preference. The conclusion to be drawn from constructionism in my opinion is by no way complete arbitrariness or relativity. Rather, it is primarily an epistemological suspicion against any claims for ultimate truth, next to an imperative demand for humility and openness to alternative explanations and conceptions.[38]

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[34] The approach of understanding past events by present theories was called "Präsentismus" (presentism) by Wagner (1998: 70). Obviously many theories which attempt to explain human behavior and social processes by their very nature already presume universal application. I am definitely not in the position to reject these assumptions, here I just wanted to indicate that this is not only very ambitious but also far from being self-evident and in many instances sustainable only by considering the underlying assumptions a priori immune to verification and falsification.

[35] Erll (2005): 119.

[36] Quoted in Blustein (2008): 68.

[37] See König (2008a, b): 138.

[38] See also Blustein (2008): 178.

In sum, historical analysis based on various models and assumptions provides important insight and is the best we can do to address our questions about the past; yet we should remain aware that such research is based on present paradigms and rests on massive interpretive efforts, and therefore ultimately does not represent the past "as it was" but instead an active reproduction by the narrator.[39]

2.3   History and Politics

Here I presume that history is not simply a matter for those curious about the past, but also of salient political significance. It is more than appropriate that quite a number of political scientists have thrown a great deal of thought into the manifold ways in which history affects contemporary politics.[40] A substantial amount of these political analyses deal with more tangible questions of "transitional justice", which embraces complex topics such as restitution, lustration, reparation, or criminal prosecution. To my perception and for obvious reasons there seems quite some work devoted to these questions in the German language (although with comparatively limited contribution from Austria), which has resulted in some German designations being adopted also in other languages, such as "Vergangenheitspolitik" (politics of the past) or "Geschichtspolitik" (politics of history), or in a less political context also the notorious "Vergangenheitsbewältigung"(coming to terms with the past). Moreover, a significant amount of research focuses less on policies which seek to remedy the past, but instead on those which interfere with collective or public memory, i.e. the predominant narratives we develop about our past within our society. These are sometimes described as "Erinnerungspolitik", "Gedächtnispolitik", or "Erinnerungsmanagement". In this work, I will deal exclusively with this second branch.

More precisely, for the purpose of this study I would like to emphasize two seminal and interrelated functions which history serves in any given polity: (a) the motivation and legitimization of policies, and (b) the construction of social groups.[41]

(a) To begin with a quite obvious observation: all our actions connect to previous events, and not only in the sense that due to the continuity of time any action is of course not just an entity of its own but instead embedded in the constant temporal

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[39] See for instance Erll (2005); König (2008a, b): 112–114.

[40] See for instance, for German and other contributions König et al. (1998); Landkammer et al. (2006); Frei et al. (2000); Bock and Wolfrum (1999); Elster (2004); Knigge and Frei (2000); König (2008a, b); König et al. (2008); Schneider and Jochum (1999); Smith and Margalit (1997); Arenhövel (2000); Flacke (1998); Schwan (1997a); Wodak et al. (1990, 1994, 1998).

[41] See also Erll (2005): 27.

flux of activity. Rather, present action, and particularly political action, is driven by motivation and requires legitimacy. And these motivations and legitimizations too are not merely functions of the present but instead rely heavily on the past, or, more accurately, history and memory. For the purpose of this study, I shall restrict myself to the legitimatory dimension.

For instance, if a government seeks the relocation of a certain group, it must offer a convincing rationale to legitimize this particular policy. There could be non-historical reasons to do so, such as the anticipation of a major earthquake, or the desire to move workforces closer to industrial centers. Yet frequently it is historical reasons which are invoked, for instance by referring to ethnic violence which more or less recently occurred in this area, and relocating the concerned people is justified either as punishment and/or prevention of similar occurrences.

Such events may be historical in a narrow sense, i.e. events we know of primarily through tradition and/or historical research but not through personal experience. Returning to the political realm, a well-known example of historical reference to prepare, motivate, or legitimize certain policies is the notorious speech given by then President of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, *Slobodan Miloşević*, at Gazimestan on June 28, 1989. Recalling the Battle of Kosovo Polje some 600 years before, this public address reflected and served to enhance Serbian nationalism, paving the way for nationalist policies to come.[42] Another interesting point are territorial claims, which quite often are vested either in numeric ("this is our land because we pose the majority of the population") or historical cloak ("this is our land because we were here before you").

However, for the context of this paper I would prefer to consider history in a broader sense, i.e. as any representation of the past, regardless of the temporal distance concerned. Therefore, it would also be a historical rationale to promote actions which are responses to events which took place just the day before.[43] The essential point in defining history, what distinguishes it from other cognitions, is thus not its temporal distance but its being an interpretation of past events, thereby framing them in the wider context of the world, making sense of them, giving them meaning which in turn may stimulate further (re-) action.

Already for this reason alone history is an important element in politics, and the selection of the "right" narrative, the right version of the past, a critical political

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[42] For a more detailed account and examination on this see Volkan (1999): 85–95.

[43] In that sense, also our system of justice rests on a "historical" rationale: criminals being punished and victims being compensated not because of their *current* situation but based upon historical events (mitigated notably by other considerations about the present). It would be interesting to consider the relationship between the very concepts of justice and history: the retrospective paradigm inherent in justice, how far back in time justice extends, and the like. Unfortunately, questions as these are way beyond the scope of my capabilities, and, fortunately, of this work.

question. And therefore any polity actively does and indeed cannot avoid engaging in the writing and promotion of particular narratives, because obviously and for good reasons education, research, cultural policies, public and representational activity etc. are salient political tasks. And thereby the political realm is one agent amongst many who shape our history (not the past), and thereby also the background for the meanings we generate and the actions we pursue. This must not necessarily be conceived as an instrumental or determinant role politics may resume in this sphere, but rather, as *Helmut König* in reference to *Jürgen Habermas* put it, that these political processes of deciding on questions about remembering "laufen [. . .] unterhalb der Schwelle politischer Entscheidungsprozesse ab: sie nehmen aber direkt Einfluß auf das politische System, weil sie den normativen Rahmen der politischen Entscheidungen verändern."[44]

(b) The second aspect of the historico-political relationship I want to elaborate on is the generation and preservation of social groups. These are, within my understanding of a constructionist paradigm, not primordial or natural entities. Rather, they are created by taxonomic processes: certain criteria are established as being the relevant ones, and by application to real persons these are classified into more or less distinct social groups. Examples for such relevant criteria include kinship, citizenship, race, class, religion, ethnicity, nationhood, culture, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle, ideology, musical preferences, and so forth. For the political realm, this way of analyzing groups primarily in constructionist terms is best known under *Benedict Anderson*'s "imagined communities".[45] The concept of collective identity is crucial for the way I suggest to understand the conflict at hand, and therefore I would like to elaborate a little on it before turning to its political dimension.

2.3.1   Collective Identity

Generally speaking, I argue that the evaluation of the events of 1915 remains a hot topic until today. With all this time having elapsed since, the obvious question is: why? And the response to this legitimate question certainly is manifold again, and I cannot offer an exhaustive explanation. However, a comprehensive response in my opinion would in some way need to take into account that this evaluation carries strong implications for what may be called "collective identity". Since collective identity at least to me seems a frequently used but highly ambiguous concept, it appears appropriate to shed a little light on how I would suggest thinking of it for

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[44] König (2008a, b: 17): "take place [. . .] beneath the brink of political decision making: but they directly impact the political system, because they alter the normative framework of political decisions" (my translation).

[45] Anderson (2006).

the purposes of this paper, and how it relates to this very topic and to constructionist theory.

I would like to assume at this point that for various reasons we tend to develop something I bluntly call "identity", an understanding of who we are and how we became this person. Identity, I think, is an essentially relational concept, establishing not only sameness but also difference. That is, it only makes sense to speak of identification and identity when the identified object (for instance: me, us) is differentiated from other entities (you, them) in the presence, or the same entity but in a temporal distance (the past me, us). It involves first of all determining how, i.e. by what traits, identity can be ascertained, and by consequence then second which entities are essentially identical and which are alien. It therefore provides us with (or rather: it is) a relational means to sort our social world into distinct compartments like me and you, us and them, including further subdivisions as we see fit. Beyond that, if we want to think of these compartments not as something arbitrary and fluctuating but rather as stable or even natural, we may also idealize these traits as exhibiting our "true" self, thereby offering some guidance how to think and act so as to remain loyal to this true self.

Therefore identity is relevant as it offers us orientation in this world—at least to some extent it tells us something about the nature of things (including me or other people), it helps us to understand them, and to some further extent how they should be (to live up to their true self) and how we should act towards them. Moreover, it thereby reduces complexity by reducing the number of potential orientations we may reasonably use to adjust our thoughts and lives. For instance, if we know who and how we *really* are, it is far easier to arrive at some conclusions about what is important in our lives, which ones the right and best choices are, why we acted and reacted in particular ways in the past, where we are going and so forth.

At this point I believe it would be beneficial to introduce a distinction between two fundamentally different understandings of identity: (a) in an essentialist conception identity may be understood as some true self of the individual. Thus, an individual "discovers" who she really is. Identity here is some primordial, natural, a priori given. By contrast, (b) another approach may postulate that there is nothing like a genuine and distinct identity which is independent of the person describing it—at least nothing we could "objectively" discover. Here, particular modes of one person's being may surface for a variety of reasons, but deriving from them something like an inner core underlying this person is first and foremost a cognitive construction of the observer—an observer who, as previously discussed, is selective in the observations she makes, in the ways she assigns meaning to these observations, and so on. Moreover, one salient reason for showing these qualities is exactly that we do perform this mental construction of identity, and that we believe in it. Based on a specific construction of identity, a person obtains a particular orientation in life and pursues certain interests and activities, thereby in turn affirming and enforcing her "true" characteristics up to the point where they eventually seem or become true. For instance, if I believe that I am a funny person, the chances are higher that I will actually behave in ways I consider funny than if I thought of myself as a serious contemplator—which, in turn will of course reinforce

this picture I have about myself. In that sense, identity becomes to some degree similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy, because who I am on the one side and who I consider myself to be on the other, these two are interdependent things, developing in close interaction.

As I understand it, both of these concepts of identity share the notion that an individual's identity is constituted by certain characteristics. The sole difference lies in the origin or mode by which these characteristics come into effect: in an essentialist understanding, these qualities unfold their powers beyond our control and we are well advised to discover them so that we can pay them their due respect. By contrast, in the second, more constructionist understanding, these qualities may or may not be a priori given, but what eventually determines the constitution of any identity are not these qualities per se but rather the *belief* in the existence and effectiveness of these qualities. And based on my constructionist premises, I guess it would be tantamount to heresy if I was not to stick to the second concept.

Now, this is not the place to offer a conclusive theory of collective identity, not to speak of my incapacity to do so anyway, but unfortunately I believe that talking about collectives and collective identity will be a central aspect of this work. Loosely speaking, I believe there are three ways how the idea of collective identity is frequently interpreted, pointing to three different dimensions all of which justify the usage of the term "identity": (a) first there is the process of identifying a group itself, of generating the idea that there exists an entity, a collective, which is not exhaustively described as "only" a random accumulation of arbitrary individuals; instead, this entity is constituted by some quality which all its members share. In more determined versions the group itself becomes a distinct phenomenon, endowed with a number of attributes which exceed the sum of the attributes of its individual members. I would suggest that this first notion of collective identity essentially represents a description of a group itself.

(b) Building upon the first dimension but going beyond it, there is also an identification of an individual person with other members of the group, not necessarily as a genuine sameness but as a significant similarity which suggests that her relation to them is different from the ones she has to others. This is often perceived as an experience of unity, of human bonds, and an important source of loyalty and solidarity, and for our purposes here it may be important to stress that it is not restricted to synchronic relationships but may extend far back in time (or forth, for that matter). Ultimately, I think this understanding of collective identity therefore is a description of our relationships with other group members (and by implication of our relationships with non-members as well).

(c) And finally there is a notion that an individual's membership to a group reveals something important about her personal self. In other words, the characteristics which distinguish this group are also her own characteristics, and therefore there is an overlap and interdependency between herself and the group she presumably is part of. Likewise, if the group changes so will its individual member (unless this change results in an exclusion of the individual)—and the other way around.

Here collective identity refers to a description of the personal self, it is a part of the broader personal identity of an individual.[46]

So I believe there are three different dimensions which may be confounded in the concept of collective identity, i.e. the description of a group, of interhuman relations, and of individual people. Anyway, it seems to me that while in some discussions of collective identity only one of these dimensions is actually at stake, more often it is actually some peculiar mixture of them, and that certainly contributes to the continued discussions about this topic—and also to its appeal. Ultimately, I believe these three dimensions of collective identity are interrelated and hard to separate in any conclusive contemplation about one of them. While a theoretical separation may still be possible and in some instances for heuristic reasons also beneficial, for the purpose of this work I would like to understand collective identity as the combination of all three of them, even though that may admittedly leave the concept somehow vague.

To add further complexity, I believe these dimensions can be inflated by a few further differentiations: first, by whom these descriptions are generated. Basically, I would claim that they can be made with regard to the other or to the self. In other words, I personally can make a description as a more or usually rather less independent observer, describing the essential qualities of another group, of the relations among its members, and/or of its individual members. This may range from a refined sociological analysis all the way to the crudest racial prejudice. And on the other hand these descriptions can refer to the self, as a description of my own group, my own relationships, and my own personal self in light of this group identity. I believe this second sense is the one most commonly understood by collective identity, and it is here where we derive substantial orientation and comfort for our daily lives.

And second, what I suggested above with regard to identity in general applies also to the notion of collective identity: it can be conceptualized in an essentialist way, alluding to some true inner core of this group, or its social relations, or my personal identity; or it may be conceived as a mental construction, where its ontological reality is situated nowhere else but in an individual's mind. In practice I believe that most of those who generate such a description of a collective identity will consider it a combination of these two, with some qualities being beyond human agency, but some others, maybe less deeply ingrained in the described collective, as being more subject to reflection and active change.

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[46] Even though other authors conceptualize collective and personal identity as different entities within an individual, I would rather consider them as part of one and the same element of an individual's personality (I understand also Akçam (2004: 41) this way, suggesting to consider national identity as an "integral part" of individual identity). In this very personality, various elements may compete or even contradict each other, but eventually it is the sum of all the identifications which makes up what a person considers to be her true self. This understanding is in my opinion compatible with Margalit's (1997: 202) assertion that a collective identity may threaten or enrich someone's personal identity—even though he may have derived his proposition from a very different concept, and intended it in a very different way.

It may not come as a big surprise that I tentatively subscribe to the constructionist understanding of collective identity. I guess there are a few caveats usually brought forward against this paradigm I better pre-empt at this point. First, it should be emphasized that this constructionist understanding does not deny that people "objectively" share or differ in certain characteristics. As already noted, an independent observer may discern specific groups, depending on the quality of the criterion deployed. However, the crucial point about constructionism is that these criteria and these groups become socially relevant only by human cognitive agency, i.e., by recognizing these particular similarities/differences as *relevant* for our social conduct and hence the groups resulting from cleavages as appropriately reflecting human communities: this is the correct, right, true, relevant way of grouping people, rather than some other way. As I understand it, this is not to say anything about the group being "false", whatever that would mean, but only to direct attention to the point that they too are created, rather than representing a given entity indepent of human agency.[47] It may be worthwhile to consider an illustration given by *Ian Hacking*, who distinguishes between the construction of an idea (in this case the idea of a group), and the construction of an object (the group itself).[48] What constructionist theory, at least in my understanding, is all about is the construction of the idea, it does not make any claim about the object itself, its ontological reality or how it comes into being.[49]

Second, understanding collective identity as a social construction rather than a primordial given does not necessarily mean it is any less real or effective.[50] Constructionism as understood here alludes only to the way things are created, their composition and therefore also their potential for change. By consequence group identity as a social construction may generate group cohesion and solidarity, or inspire its members' personal identities just as if it was a natural thing. However, at the same time I would blindly and without any evidence concede that these functions might be conceived stronger in an essentialist paradigm, simply because establishing the essential qualities as being beyond our control, as being something true and unchangeable, will leave them less volatile and more compelling. Anyway, by the same token and third, collective identity in a constructionist paradigm is not without sense or purpose, since inspiring for instance solidarity may very well be

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[47] See also Özkırımlı (2000): 144f.

[48] Hacking (2002): 27ff.

[49] This hopefully complies largely with the notions uttered in Volkan (1999): 34–38. See also Blustein (2008): 121; Giesen (1999); Hall (1996); Wagner (1998): 45. A harsh critique of the "Plastikwort" (plastic word) "collective identity" can be found in Niethammer (1995), who argues for its total renunciation. However, in my understanding he arrives at this critique because he himself considers it to be a constructed phenomenon, and then criticizes its essentialist pretensions. If this understanding is accurate, then I think it is not in conflict with my suggestions here, and I would also argue that it is still useful to retain the notion of collective identity: not as an essentialist entity, but to describe some specific and socially relevant cognitive content of human minds.

[50] See also Özkırımlı (2000): 222.

described as an essential component of our social lives. Finally, collective identity is not arbitrary. As was already explained for constructionist theory in general, we do not develop our ideas in a social void. We learn our taxonomies and meanings from a very young age, and they are confirmed by our social environment on a daily basis. They therefore assume quasi-primordial qualities, they become naturalized. That is why they are capable to persist, sometimes even with astonishing stability, over long periods of time. And that is also why collective identities cannot be created, modified or eradicated just by an act of political will. There is only a finite number of collective identities we are capable of nourishing and sustaining, otherwise it gets all too complex to make sense of the world and ourselves, and also feelings of unity may lose their specialness if they extend too far. Therefore, if a hypothetical leader wanted to establish a new collective identity, she must compete with those identities which already exist. If an specific identity does not resonate with the people who are supposed to accept and integrate it, it will not succeed to become effective and "real". She must therefore persuade her audience and its future holders that it is a relevant, "true" identity, possibly even truer than those which already exist and are well established. This is apparently very difficult, considering that the other identities may have been around as long as can be remembered, and have been incessantly confirmed by our social environment. It may sometimes work to introduce new collective identities about a specific other, although also this is hardly ever a matter of planning and wilfull control only, and it is certainly even more difficult to alter the collective identity of the self, i.e. modifying my own perception of who and what my group really is. In the end, changing my collective identity resonates in my personal identity and any changes and dissonances are therefore likely to evoke resistance.

Now, how does all of this relate to the events of 1915 and their ongoing debate? If I want to approach this question from the angle of collective identity, I first need to postulate that a significant number of those who have an interest in the present struggle about how to evaluate these events experience a bond of collective identity with the agents back then. By virtue of what qualities is a matter for another dissertation (at least), but it may be something like notions of shared nationhood, ethnicity, culture, religion, heritage, kinship, history and so forth. Therefore, these allegations evoke resistance today because of the solidarity and loyalty which the current actors feel with the historical ones. Moreover, without any proof I dare to claim that some of the current agents experience this entire affair as an accusation against the group as a whole rather than the actual perpetrators: first by a perception that the allegations are directed against the collective itself; and second by a perception that the guilt of the actual perpetrators extends to the entire group. And thereby these accusations do not only degrade the actual perpetrators, but also those who share their group membership, thereby debasing the collective component of their own personal identity. So I believe that the concept of collective identity may partially explain the heated debate today because it opens the forum for another phenomenon: collective guilt.

2.3.2   Collective Guilt

To begin with, the notion of collective guilt may be used as an allegation in at least two directions: first in the obvious direction from victim or prosecutor against an offender by accusing a collective of having committed some offense; but secondly also in the direction of alleged offender against prosecutor, by portraying her accusations as indiscriminate, prejudiced, stereotypical. For instance, at least to my perception it used to be and to a certain extent still is a common strategy in Austria to travesty criticism about the role of Austria and/or Austrians in the Holocaust into a hyperbolic accusation of "collective guilt", implying that alien, ignorant know-it-alls are raising generalized and simplified accusations against each and every Austrian, utterly disregarding their actual individual thoughts and comportments.[51] This facilitates an indigent rejection of the initial criticism, which according to *Birgit Rommelspacher* hampers a genuine confrontation with the past wrongdoing.[52] Indeed, since the same contention could be made for the case studied here, it could have been included in the arguments discussed later on (see Chap. 4). However, I did not come across this counter-allegation in the sources I reviewed— in my opinion a highly interesting phenomenon, given its frequency in the Austrian context, and thence either a honorable case for the contra-genocide literature, or maybe nothing but a consequence of the Republic of Turkey's persistent denial of *any* kind of guilt, thereby not even getting to the point where the idea of "collective guilt" could enter the discussion. Thus I would like to prepone the discussion of this aspect already to this section instead of skipping it altogether, first of all because I believe it is of theoretical relevance and second because it constitutes a caveat with the potential to arise in the future.

Notions of collective guilt certainly were not invented only after the Holocaust. Indeed they can be traced back to age-old ideas such as liability and vengeance based on kinship.[53] So it comes as no surprise that also accusations against the Ottoman Empire, or the Republic of Turkey, about the horrible fate of the Ottoman Armenians at times implied or at least resembled something akin to collective guilt. A politically prominent case in time is a declaration by the Supreme Council, or Council of Ten, at the Paris peace negotiations:

> The Turkish people have, by murdering the Armenians without any cause, descended into a condition of guilt. Therefore, the responsibility shall be met entirely by the Turkish people.[54]

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[51] It may be that this sensitivity and suspiciousness about collective reproaches is only partly based in actual allegations of collective guilt by the victorious powers after World War II. According to Rotherspieler (1982: 86) there are no official documents which explicitly raise such collective guilt accusations against the German people, yet allegations are inherent in many collective punishments which were discussed against Germany. Nevertheless, to my perception it has become a convenient strategy in Austrian discourse to fend off any kinds of admonitions by inflating them until they become porous, easy to see through, and hence easy to refute altogether.

[52] Rommelspacher (2002): 50f.

[53] For a brief history see for instance Rotherspieler (1982): 20–26.

[54] Quoted in Akçam (2004): 192.

As explained above, I hold that one of the reasons why many Turks today react very sensitive to these continued genocide allegations is because they are perceived to imply that their collective identity becomes afflicted by a stain that may generically be called "collective guilt". Quite clearly this rejection of collective guilt was articulated by the new Minister of the Interior immediately after World War I, *Mustafa Arif Bey*, in a discussion in the post-war parliament on December 12, 1918:

> Your Honourable Assembly, together with the Government, confirms that some events linked to this matter did take place. Nobody asserts that these did not happen. But I think that if, among millions of Turks, we go as far as admitting that 100.000 were implicated, it is not acceptable to consider the entire race responsible for the misdeeds that they committed.[55]

And in a similar vein the postwar Grand Vizier *Damat Ferid Paşa* held that the real culprits were

> those three missing people: Talât, Enver and Cemal, who had fled to Germany in October 1918. There are also a handful of secondary accomplices. [. . .] the innocent Turkish nation [was] free of the stain of injustice [. . .] the whole blame rested squarely on the few leaders of the CUP, who, through their alliance with Germany and their control of the army, had terrorized the rest of Turkey into submission.[56]

After having alleviated the absoluteness of "collective identity" a little in the previous section, re-framing it from an essentialist to a more constructionist concept, it may hence be worthwhile now to approach also the idea of collective guilt in a similar vein. Eventually this may help us to identify more clearly what exactly it is that is claimed here, and against whom these allegations are directed—and, conversely, what is not alleged and who is not charged.

What I would like to begin with is the assertion that in my understanding guilt for a certain event presupposes responsibility for this event, and this responsibility in turn requires retaining a certain degree of control within this event. However, control in this context here must be understood in a very broad sense, i.e. not only as the power to determine the occurrence or outcome of the respective event. Rather, control can be assumed to be given if the agent has the freedom and capacity to control her own role and her own actions in this event, and be it to a very limited degree. I think this understanding complies with a decision of the German *Bundesgerichtshof* from March 18, 1952:

> Mit dem Unwerturteil der Schuld wird dem Täter vorgeworfen, daß er sich nicht rechtmäßig verhalten, daß er sich für das Unrecht entschieden hat, obwohl er sich rechtmäßig verhalten, sich für das Recht hätte entscheiden können. Der innere Grund des Schuldvorwurfs liegt darin, daß der Mensch auf freie, verantwortliche, sittliche Selbstbestimmung angelegt und deshalb befähigt ist, sich für das Recht und gegen das Unrecht zu entscheiden, sein Verhalten nach Normen des rechtlichen Sollens einzurichten und das rechtlich Verbotene zu vermeiden. . .[57]

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[55] Quoted in Kévorkian (2006a, b): 12.

[56] Quoted in Akçam (2006): 217f.

[57] BGH St. 2, 194ff, quoted in Rotherspieler (1982): 254): "By guilt's judgment of unworthiness, the perpetrator is accused of unlawful conduct although he [sic] could have acted lawfully, could have opted for lawful conduct. The inner core of the accusation inherent in guilt is that man is

It appears to me that this understanding of guilt is in opposition to the very concept of collective guilt. The way this concept is often used in daily interaction, a person that is said to be afflicted with collective guilt is not necessarily guilty of any action of her own, not even a situation she participated in or was somehow personally involved in any other way. Instead, collective guilt seems to imply nothing else than a person being guilty by virtue of her membership to a particular group. In other words: a collectivity in its entirety is blamed for a particular viciousness—by virtue of whatever grounds, that shall be discussed below—and therefore any single member of this collectivity acquires some share of the blame, irrespective of her personal responsibility in the reprehensible event. Now, there appears to be a certain discrepancy between guilt on the one side, which involves a person's choice and agency (or chosen inactivity), and collective guilt on the other side, which appears to be independent of these traits, resting on ascribed group membership only.[58] Apparently collective guilt is therefore fundamentally different from the concept of personal guilt as I have outlined its basic premises above—it is not just an extension of personal guilt. They rest on different notions of guilt and responsibility. As *Carl Gustav Jung* tried to explain, in a legal, moral, intellectual sense guilt could only be individual; however, there was also an irrational, psychological idea of guilt which could be extended to groups and collectives, a kind of "magic impurity".[59] It therefore merits examining the very nature of collective guilt in a little more detail.

2.3.2.1   On the Origins of Collective Guilt

The first question about collective guilt I would like to tackle relates to its very origin. Just like an evil act constitutes the source of personal guilt, we may ask what

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designed toward free, responsible, ethical self-determination and therefore capable of deciding in favor of law and against tort, of orienting his conduct following the norms of legal imperative, and of avoiding the legally prohibited" (my translation). According to Schlink (2007: 11), guilt presupposes that a person is capable (a) to appreciate rightful conduct, and (b) to act according to this appreciation.

[58] See also Barkan (2004): 313f. With regard to the previous distinction between essentialist and constructionist conceptions of collective identity, I believe accusations of collective guilt could be raised in both scenarios: on the one side interhuman bonds seem factual, real, and therefore more compelling in an essentialist account, yet on the other side a constructionist approach could allow for the idea that an individual willingly opted to join a group responsible for an immoral act.

[59] See Rotherspieler (1982): 21. The same has been suggested more recently when Rensmann (2004: 170) claimed there was no collective guilt in a moral or legal sense, but only a *feeling* of collective guilt. Note that there may also be different understandings of collective guilt, as for instance mentioned by Jeffrey Blustein (2008: 126–128), who understands genuine collective guilt as some particular guilt being ascribed to virtually all individual members of a group. However, as Blustein himself noted, there remain some further issues, for instance that the ascription of guilt to a person assumes that this person remains the same over time—yet how can this be presumed for a collectivity? I shall not adopt this model of collective guilt mentioned by Blustein, but rather use the vague but more widely resonating understanding of Jung and Rensmann.

kind of events, acts, omissions or other phenomena may bring collective guilt into existence. This might also provide us with a deeper understanding of what collective guilt essentially is. I want to start out by describing two notions which in my opinion do *not* provide a convincing basis for collective guilt.

First, I would like to discard a somewhat meager notion of collective guilt, i.e., one which describes it as a transcendent one-to-one transferrence of our "normal" personal guilt from one person to another by virtue of some special bonds, be it family, blood, ethnicity, nationality, religion or whatever. I do not see a sound reason to assume one person guilty of murder because her sister killed another person. Moreover, it appears somewhat arbitrary what kinds of bonds are strong and important enough to pass on such guilt. Similarly, there seems to be some arbitrariness in how far such collective guilt extends. It does not appear to be a cogent case that someone should be guilty of her sister's murder, but not for the murder of the granddaughter of her mother-in-law's cousin. Or should all social bonds matter, without any constraints? Would we then be guilty for every crime committed anywhere? Unless there is some good reason coming up for why and how personal guilt should be transferred by affiliation, and why by a particular type of bonds and how far these transferrences reach, I do not see a reason to sustain this notion.

The second idea I deem better kept at bay is based on what *Taner Akçam* described as the "individualization" of collectives, i.e., extending descriptions of individuals by analogy to groups as well, thereby tacitly equipping collectivities with individual traits.[60] Examples of such traits are for instance suggested speaking of a group's body, its will, agency, problems—and guilt. Here the transference of guilt is not from person to person, but rather from one member of a group to the group as a whole. However, since at least in a constructionist understanding a collective can only exist, act, or assume responsibility in a metaphorical sense, to me it is not clear how the inference works by which guilt is attributed to a group as a whole, and what it should express if a group is said to be responsible or guilty. In the words of *Karl Jaspers*:

> Ein Volk als Ganzes gibt es nicht. Alle Abgrenzungen, die wir vornehmen, um es zu bestimmen, werden durch Tatbestände überschnitten. Die Sprache, die Staatsbürgerschaft, die Kultur, die gemeinsamen Schicksale—alles dies koinzidiert nicht, sondern überschneidet sich. Volk und Staat fallen nicht zusammen, auch nicht Sprache und gemeinsame Schicksale und Kultur. Ein Volk kann nicht zu einem Individuum gemacht werden. Ein Volk kann nicht heroisch untergehen, nicht Verbrecher sein, nicht sittlich oder unsittlich handeln, sondern immer nur der einzelne aus ihm. Ein Volk als Ganzes kann nicht schuldig und nicht unschuldig sein, weder im kriminellen, noch im politischen (hier haften nur die Bürger eines Staates), noch im moralischen Sinn.[61]

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[60] Akçam (2004): 247. See also Rotherspieler (1982): 281–287.

[61] Jaspers (1946: 19): "There is no such thing as a people as a whole. As a matter of fact, all boundaries, which we create to determine it, are intersected. Language, citizenship, culture, shared fates—none of these coincide, they intersect. People and state do not fall in one, nor do language and shared fate and culture. A people cannot be turned into an individual being. A people cannot perish heroically, cannot be a criminal, cannot act morally or immorally, only the individual within

What he rejected here was essentially the paradigm which *Roger Brubaker* described as "groupism", as "the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations, and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed", to regard them as "internally homogeneous, external bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes".[62] Nevertheless, *Jaspers* did not unequivocally reject a certain understanding of collective guilt in his praised work "Die Schuldfrage". He developed a more comprehensive model which discriminated four types of guilt—criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical guilt—and being guilty in one of these dimensions does not necessarily imply guilt in another one. Now, of interest for the discussion here is the idea political guilt, which in his proposal results from the responsibility of a citizen for the actions of her state.[63] I guess one examples that could be subsumed under this category can be found in an early statement of the Allied Powers *vis-à-vis* the Ottoman Empire, according to which the Turkish people "are guilty of murdering Armenians without any justification. Therefore the Turkish people must bear the whole responsibility. [...] a nation must be judged by the Government which rules it."[64]

I do think there is some merit in this idea, even though it definitely requires further discussion and elaboration which, however, is beyond my capacities.[65] But what seems to me of great importance is that in *Jaspers'* conception this *political* guilt was separated from *moral* and *criminal* guilt. In other words, the fact that citizens are guilty of the misdeeds of their government does not imply they are guilty in a moral or criminal sense. What this category indicated, I believe, was that all citizens of the guilty state were *liable* for the wrongs committed by their government, i.e., responsible for compensation and restitution; but this was different from being obliged to feel guilty before their own conscience (moral guilt) or being found guilty in court (criminal guilt).[66] And it was this political perspective alone by which for him it made sense to speak of collective guilt.[67]

Another etiology of collective guilt may be developed following *Bernhard Schlink*. In his model, collective guilt, as a form of guilt which people acquire exclusively because others in their group have committed a wrong, may have two reasonable origins: (a) on the one side they too may profit from these wrongs, for instance by inheriting wealth or better chances in life from their criminal progenitors, endowments the descendants of the alleged victims are deprived of;

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it can. A people as a whole cannot be guilty or innocent, neither in a criminal sense, nor in a political one (here the citizens of a state are liable), nor in a moral one" (my translation).

[62] Quoted in Moses (2010): 22.

[63] Jaspers (1946): 10–16.

[64] Quoted in Akçam (2006): 218.

[65] See for instance discussions in Rotherspieler (1982): 256–261.

[66] This also seems to concur with the concept of „Kollektivhaftung"as developed by Rotherspieler (1982: 19). He discriminates "Kollektivhaftung" (collective liability) from „Kollektivschuld" (collective guilt), and understands it as the collectivity's obligation to compensate victims for the wrongs committed by its rulers.

[67] Jaspers (1946): 10–20.

(b) and on the other side because they continue to act in solidarity with the perpetrators, despite their knowledge about the wrongdoing.[68] I think that *Schlink* as well as *Jaspers* point to something very important in the discourse on collective guilt, which I would like to discuss within the framework of an alternative concept, and be it merely for the sake of discriminating it from collective guilt in the senses I have rejected above: collective responsibility.

2.3.2.2   Collective Responsibility

First I would like to point out that what I am chiefly interested in here is guilt in a moral sense, not guilt as understood for instance in a legal or religious context. With that being said, I would like to summarize the concepts of *Jaspers*' and *Schlink*'s guilt into a more general model of responsibility. Both depart from the notion that we are not only responsible for our own acts. First, we also carry responsibility for acts which are performed on our behalf or from which we directly or indirectly profit. That is one way to read *Jaspers*' political guilt: if a group of people acquire a certain extent of power by virtue of our support for them, and they abuse that power for a morally reprehensible action, then we too are also in a sense responsible for this wrong, because it was our support which enabled them to perform the wrong in the first place.[69] Therefore, as a citizen I carry the responsibility to object to policies I consider wrong, particularly if they are conducted in my name. This responsibility in turn certainly varies with the nature and degree of the wrong and our support for its facilitation or its implementers. Similarly, our objection to the wrong may range from cautiously voiced discontent and dissent all the way to civil disobedience and active resistance.

Whereas the political guilt of *Jaspers* is still a guilt acquired by the contemporaries of the wrongdoers, the first source of collective guilt (gaining profit from the wrong) by *Bernhard Schlink* encompasses also descendants who definitely did not have a chance to interfere at the time the wrong was committed: if we discover that some of the prerogatives or material benefits we inherited from our progenitors were obtained through injustice, it appears to be morally questionable if we simply decide to ignore this information and thereby accept this injustice as part of our lives, as lying beyond our reach.[70] The point where *Schlink* seems to be headed is that in fact we *can* do something about it: we can at least attempt to rectify the past wrong by present action. Popular examples are for instance restitution, reparation,

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[68] Schlink (2007): 21–23; Schlink (1998): 435–438.

[69] This is rather obvious in a democratic regime where politicians obtain power by popular vote. However, support also involves elements like paying taxes or simply being a citizen of that political community, since also sheer population figures are often powerful tools in political struggles.

[70] Apparently from a more socialist perspective it could be objected how *any* inherited prerogative or material advantage could be considered just, but that is not the issue of this paper. Here I shall confine myself to our predominant capitalist ethics, which is already complicated enough for me.

affirmative action programs and so on. By the fact that we benefit from the past wrong we indeed acquire the responsibility to rectify rather than just ignore it. By contrast, if we argue that this responsibility decreases with temporal distance, maybe even to the point where it fully disappears, we are at least required to provide an explanation about the gradient of this decrease and how far in time responsibility would eventually extend—and of course a justification for these assumptions.[71] This has been summarized by *Raphael Gross* under the term of an "intergenerationelle Ethik" (intergenerational ethics) which comes into being by our "inheriting" historical deeds we did not commit ourselves, but which nevertheless refuse to expire or dissolve, like the victim's harm and the victor's benefit do not expire or dissolve just like that.[72]

So, in my understanding there is a sense in which responsibility exists not only for our own immediate actions, but also for events we are "merely" related to. If we want to cherish justice as a universal value, independent of agent and situation, then we are not to turn a blind eye to injustice that is happening without our direct contribution but nevertheless extends its reach into our own lives. This leads farther on to my interpretation of *Schlink*'s point about guilt by solidarity: we are not personally responsible for what other people do or fail to do, but we are very well responsible for how we mold our relationships with them. If a person commits a wrong but we keep cherishing and supporting her, are we not to a certain degree re-confirming and rewarding her, thereby indirectly supporting the wrong she committed?[73]

As *Gesine Schwan* summarized the essence in *Jaspers*' elaboration of guilt, to her understanding his model guides us into in a prohibition of indifference, thoughtlessness and moral laziness.[74] I believe this can be seen as some kind of a meta-moral responsibility, that is, as the responsibility to endorse and live up to moral principles.[75]

So, what this responsibility I want to suggest essentially embraces is the willingness (a) to examine and assess alleged wrongs in the past, and (b) to resume the

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[71] To give another stupid example—if a woman stole a ring and gave it to her girlfriend, would we not expect the girlfriend to hand back the ring? But if the woman killed a neighbor to take possession of her house, and later on her daughter inherited that house, would we expect the daughter to return the house? Of course all the various dilemmas of historical justice and reconciliation would need to be taken into account here (e.g., can a past wrong be simply rectified without committing another wrong in the present?), but at least the principal question of *responsibility* remains the same.

[72] Gross (2000): 170f.

[73] As Lickel et al. (2004: 50f) conclude in their empirical study on collective guilt and collective shame, intergroup conflicts may be attenuated if group members clearly distance themselves from wrongdoers within their own group, since this reduces the chances that collective guilt is attributed to them.

[74] Schwan (1997a): 50f.

[75] And just as another straying thought: maybe the failure to consistently exercise this basic responsibility lies at heart of any allegation about hypocrisy.

responsibility we have in our present lives and draw the appropriate consequences from these our examinations and evaluations:

> Furthermore, although it may be unfair to blame a group for wrongs done in the past, we may be justified in blaming that group for failing to collectively exercise its capacity to determine what its influence and significance will be and for failing to fulfill its duties of response.[76]

If we fail to do so, we acquire guilt—but the important point I wish to make is that this is not the guilt earned by the initial perpetrator, nor is it a simple or even necessary extension of it. Instead it is a new and to a certain degree independent kind of guilt, for it originates only in the responsibility just described. It is independent from the perpetrator's guilt in the sense that we can avoid any personal guilt even though the wrong was committed by someone from our ingroup, if we only live up to our own personal responsibility. It is therefore a very different type of guilt, because it is rooted in a different wrong and a different responsibility. Just consider another feature of guilt, the confession of guilt: what could such a confession be like for someone who acquired collective guilt, without any personal guilt? What could she relate other than what she had learned by hearsay? It therefore cannot and should not substitute for or be mixed up with the individual guilt acquired by the initial perpetrator.[77] It is the awareness of this difference, I think, why it is usually treated in the German context under the label of the "Zweite Schuld" (secondary guilt).[78]

What makes this second type of guilt a distinctly *collective* phenomenon is that the underlying responsibility is based on our interhuman relations and the solidarity we (fortunately, sometimes) demonstrate therein. Departing from the idea that moral principles should apply universally to all people, irrespective of their group affiliations, also the emerging responsibility should extend to our entire environment, not only to our own tiny and personal microcosm. This holds true more than ever for the collective we identify with, and the actions that are thus taken on behalf of this collective and ourselves.[79] And in this sense I think it is therefore appropriate to treat this phenomenon under the label of "collective *responsibility*" rather than "collective *guilt*", since in my proposal here it is responsibility which includes some collective elements.[80] Out of this responsibility, guilt may possibly but not

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[76] Blustein (2008): 148.

[77] To give another historical reference: according to Rotherspieler (1982: 101) the importance of keeping collective and personal guilt clearly separate, particularly in the conscience of the German people, also led US Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and Secretary of State Cordell Hull to oppose policies of collective punishment in the aftermath of World War II.

[78] Giordano (1987).

[79] I think it is worthwhile recalling a peculiar observation mentioned also by McGarty and Bliuc (2004: 114): that it is as common to feel proud as it is rejected to feel responsible for things one has not personally done.

[80] Also the "political guilt" of Jaspers in my opinion may be better understood as a responsibility, or, in hindsight, as a liability. See also Barkan (2002: 341) who follows historian Ali Mazrui in his assertion that guilt is not transmitted, but rights and responsibilities are.

necessarily emerge. Yet the important point to bear in mind is that this guilt is in turn (a) personal, depends on personal choices and must not automatically extend to everyone who carries the same responsibility, and (b) that it is of an essentially different kind than the guilt of the perpetrator.[81] It is the guilt of how we are dealing with the actualized injustice, its perpetrator and its victim, rather than the guilt of bringing this injustice about in the first place. Finally, and most importantly for the discussion examined here, the responsibility of the successors is not confined to material restitution and compensation, it may even be totally devoid of them—indeed, it also involves how we choose to remember the injustice:

> Of course, the young people of today—including Turkish youth—are not responsible for what happened then. But we are collectively responsible for what will become of the genocide in their historical memory and consciousness and in ours.[82]

And this brings me to the seminal question about the "right" memory, which I personally believe is best expressed in the concept of historical narrative.

2.3.3 Historical Narratives

So, I suppose the main point so far was to postulate (unfortunately with quite some repetitiveness) that collectives, just like collective identities, are mental constructions. To relate this to the main interest of this work, it is now important to emphasize that history is an important element in the creation and preservation of collectives. This is far from being an innovative or provocative idea, as it was already quite elaborately explicated for instance by *Friedrich Nietzsche* in 1874.[83] However, to reflect it in a less philosophical framework, I will try to embed it within the growing amount of literature analyzing the connection between history and identity under the paradigm of "narratives".[84]

In the framework of this broader psycho-historical paradigm, both history and memory (and not the past itself!) are understood as incorporating and transmitting meaning, and they do so by episodic modality—in short, they maintain and transmit meaning in the form of narratives. In order to extract meaning out of the incessant flow of events as they happen, i.e. to understand and make sense of them, the person trying to do so (the narrator) identifies a certain chain of presumably interconnected events. By associating them along a specific storyline, a narrative emerges: (a) the narrator establishes the beginning of the story: everything prior is negligible, everything of relevance for this story happens at this point or thereafter; (b) she

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[81] This also seems to match with Bloxham's (2005: 18) assertion that moral and historical responsibility for the massacres of the Armenians extends to the great powers and their conduct at that time, while the criminal responsibility lies with the Ottoman government.

[82] Auron (2003a): 137.

[83] Nietzsche (1964). For a discussion see for instance Assmann (1995a, b).

[84] On narratives in general, see for instance White (1990); Straub (1998a, b, c).

selects some events occurring over a certain period of time, out of a theoretically infinite number of events which occurred in this period—these are the events of the story; (c) she chooses a particular way to capture and express these events: specific terms, phrases, pictures, analogies, allegories and so on; (d) she puts them in relation to one another, most notably in a temporal and causal sequence; (e) ultimately, by reverting to certain general rules and values, she arrives at a conclusion about the story, its meaning.[85]

Obviously, the creation of a narrative involves a number of subjective elements, and therefore there is not just a single meaning in any past episode; human agency is involved in the creation of narrative and thence meaning by selective processes starting with the story's (non-) elements and ending at the rules and paradigms by which the story is eventually assessed. To give a most blunt example: the story of my alarm clock not working, my morning coffee spilling over, and missing the bus ultimately explains not only my being late at work, but the same story with different references and under a different context and paradigm could be used to account for my bad mood, my bad morning organization, my being haunted by bad luck, as a plea not to bother me today, as a justification for going home earlier at night, as an excuse for being a bit absent minded, and so forth.

Two more curious aspects about narratives deserve mention: first, narratives strive to be what I would call "persuasive narratives", i.e., narratives succeeding to persuade their audience that their offered meaning is the "right" one, both in the sense of being right in regard to veracity (this particular meaning is in accordance with the story, whereas other conflicting meanings are not) and in regard to the situational context: any story may have several meanings, but the one I offer in my story is the one most appropriate for the present situation. Taking for instance a story about some historical battle, it depends at least as much on *present* context as it does on the story itself if it will be understood as conveying some meaning about the morality of warfare, the performance of specific weapon systems, human qualities such as heroism and recreance, how minor decisions may determine destinies and so on.

In order to persuade their audiences, narrators deploy certain narrative techniques to smoothen their stories, as *Donald Polkinghorne* pointed out: (a) they condense their stories, bypassing or only briefly touching parts that do not support or even contradict their intended meaning; at the same time (b) they exaggerate and elaborate other parts which emphasize their aspired meaning; and (c) they rationalize, i.e., offer interpretations to make a story more consistent and guide the audience to the "right", the intended meaning.[86]

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[85] I have compiled this enumeration of generative steps of any narrative somehow arbitrarily and eclectically. For alternative suggestions which provided the basis for my suggestion, see Polkinghorne (1998): 18; Gergen (1998): 172–176; Erll (2005): 145; Kaplan (1993); Throgmorton (1993): 122.

[86] See Polkinghorne (1998): 24–26.

Moreover, narratives are not created out of the blue. Rather, there are specific templates or "plots" available for narratives, acting as some kind of schemes which need to be filled with the concrete contents of the story to tell.[87] This allows many stories to look very much alike even though their content is drastically different, turning them into some *loci communes*. This allows for an easier recognition of the story and thereby also of its meaning, such as an excuse, a justification, or an allegation, and on the other side these schemes usually reflect a narrative/meaning nexus which is already widely established and considered proven, thereby also facilitating rapid acceptance by the audience.[88]

It may be worthwhile to now attempt to incorporate this theory of narrative into the previously outlined constructionist paradigm. First, it should be pointed out that narratives are highly influenced by the very orientations and cognitive structures we use in our daily lives. For instance, our values, our structures of relevance, and our mental concepts determine which stories we consider worth telling, which aspects and events of the past we do (or do not) include, how we assess and evaluate them, and thereby ultimately what meaning we would like to and indeed do deliver. In that sense, narratives are created along the guiding principles provided by our cognitive structures and mental concepts, and therefore an analysis of narratives might allow for some inferences about the cognitive elements beneath them.[89]

On the other hand, given that these cognitive structures are inherent in narrative, narratives become a vehicle for the dissemination of these very cognitive structures. By their illustrative character, narratives provide templates and exemplify how these can be applied. Thereby narratives serve the reproduction of cognitive elements such as meanings, values, structures of relevance, mental concepts etc.

To give two examples of such elements of "cognitive structures" that I mentioned previously and which shall become important again in the discussion of genocide: (a) structures of relevance which determine selections: by getting to know others' narratives we also learn the selections they performed. We learn which elements are socially relevant and apt to explain past episodes, and which

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[87] See Polkinghorne (1998): 18, 24–26. It should be noted that the entire terminology I am deploying here is of course not sanctioned. Other authors such as Thomas Kaplan (1993) use for instance the term "plot" to denote a story with causal relations, and Stanley Cohen (2001) seems to use a very similar model, albeit focused on justifying and denying responsibility, under the label of "accounts" rather than "narratives".

[88] This somehow resembles the argument that the genre of a particular narrative (or a plot) plays a pivotal role in its eventual meaning. In other words, not only the "hard facts" determine the meaning of a story, but obviously also its narrative mode, such as romance, comedy, tragedy, or satire. See for instance Bruner (1998): 65–67; Gergen (1998): 177–180; Straub (1998a, b, c): 105–112; Erll (2005): 146. There is nothing I could add to this, yet I have to confess that I am a bit cautious of overrating the importance of genre. Not only because genre to me seems already a very high level of abstraction, possibly disregarding the multiple meanings available within one story, but also because any actual story may indeed use elements from various genres. Eventually, I would think that we also identify the genre of a story by the meaning(s) it comprises—which leaves us with the chicken-egg conundrum (or more appropriately: a circular causal chain).

[89] By the way, in my understanding this is also a core belief of discourse analysis.

elements are irrelevant—and we are free to emulate these same selections ourselves once we get to account for present and future episodes in our own lives.

Maybe even more obvious is the case for (b) definitions (or mental concepts in general): on the one hand we need to harbor a particular notion of genocide, however vague, in order to meaningfully employ it in a story. Furthermore, this concept we nourish carries certain meanings, and by applying this concept also these meanings enter our story. On the other hand, our story at least implicitly also represents a rationale why we decided to classify this episode as genocide: the way we tell our story must corroborate our evaluating the event as genocide—at least it must certainly not contradict it. It thereby also extends our general notion of genocide by adding yet another specific example. And at the same time it may add a few nuances to this our general notion and shape its meaning a little further.

To summarize this point: because narratives are construed along the guiding paradigms predominant in a social group, these paradigms are inherent features of the resulting narrative, they are reproduced in it. And because these narratives are passed on to our fellow human beings, these same paradigms are passed on to this audience, albeit of course modified by some individual "noise". Hence the tautological trap of constructionism: narratives are shaped by dominant cognitive structures, and they contribute to their creation (or more accurately: reproduction) and dissemination. Thus, within a constructionist paradigm, narratives may be understood as contributing to our thinking of and our orientation in the world.[90]

To comment on this tautological reasoning, I would suggest it does not make much sense to ask which of these came first, which of them ultimately is cause and which is consequence—cognitive structure or narrative. I would rather consider these two, as being fundamentally co-generative and interdependent, thus co-evolutionary, one existing only in dependency of the other. Apparently, there cannot be a narrative without underlying cognitive structures: by the very virtue of the fact that a narrative is based on selections, mental concepts, meanings etc., there cannot be a narrative without cognitive structure. On the other hand, narratives are among the most important devices that enable the existence and social sharing of cognitive structures. Attempts for linguistic expressions, in our daily lives very often in the form of narratives, support these structures' conscious identification and elaboration; by narratives we can express these cognitive structures in the face of others and hence disseminate them; and finally in the sense that it is in the form of narratives that meaning of past events is ultimately captured and enunciated, narratives contribute to the reproduction and modification of our cognitive structures.[91] At the risk of running into a currently popular topos instead of providing a

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[90] See, also for other functions narratives are said to accomplish, for instance White (1990); Straub (1998a, b, c: 126–137); Kreis (1998): 447; Erll (2005): 87; Hobsbawm and Ranger (1996): 9.

[91] I think that this also applies for scientific concepts: even if they are ultimately expressed (conceptualized) in abstract definitions, they are founded in real world events which were narrated *before* we came to think about such a definition. Wodak et al. (1990: 258) mentioned that narratives provide examples to prove, justify, and rationalize prejudice—I would think that the sample applies *mutatis mutandis* to academic idealtypes.

genuine explanation, I would suggest to think of these two as complementary and mutually dependent rather than as two distinct entities.

Even if I wanted to—which I do not—I am obviously unable to empirically or logically demonstrate that all our dissemination and discussion of the past is essentially in narrative format; however, I hope not to overstretch patience towards all my suppositions by claiming that the vast majority of our historical knowledge is acquired, preserved, and propagated via narratives.[92] With that being said, a point made before about both history and memory may be extended to narratives: they do not only encapsulate historical fact or truth, but also meaning, as present in any narrative. By virtue of its narrative form hence also non-historical elements, meanings, enters our knowledge and how we think about the past.

To conclude, historical narratives, in the shape of memory and history, contribute to the gratification of a rather basic human need. I would not go as far as claiming it was an anthropological constant, but I hope not to overstep the mark by describing the desire to give things a history, to see and understand them in light of their past, as being, uhm, pretty widespread. This may have its origins in our consequentialist and temporal patterns of cognition: narratives explain how things came about, why they are the way they are. Furthermore, they align things in a broader temporal perspective, locate them on a temporal continuum and hence within the temporal and consequential world order at large. Thereby they ultimately also cater certain expressivist functions, such as creating bonds and providing an origin (a "home").

Thus there are important narratives which recount the past of a group, giving us a number of seminal elements to form a collective we may identify with: (a) as the term "identity" already suggests, it is important to establish sameness of the disparate elements attributed to this identical entity. These elements can be different in a temporal, spatial, material, and/or social sense, at the least. If we want to reasonably talk of "the Armenians" or "the Turks", treat them as distinct entities, then we must somehow be able to account for their identities. Historical narratives, I suggest, play a key role in this respect, since they offer us intelligible stories about the origins and history of our community. They thereby tell us something about "its" accomplishments, age, historical highs and lows, ultimately, how it came to be what it presently is. And since this collective identity is part of our own personal identity, it thereby tells us something about ourselves as well, staffing us too with

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[92] My explications cover mostly historical knowledge passed on to us, i.e. concerning events we have not personally witnessed, since this is essentially what is relevant for this issue I am working on. It may be, even though I am not sure, that the role of narratives is different with regard to the memory of personally witnessed events. Yet I personally tend to believe that narratives are also important for what we remember of our personal lives (see also Assmann (2006a): 128–134). Anyway, pursuing a constructionist paradigm, I am less interested in the content of history/memory, the facts and truths, than in their meaning. And with regard to meaning I believe narratives are equally relevant for personal or second-hand memories.

historical roots and history.[93] Paraphrasing *Burkhard Liebsch*, we need the past to supply the future with a provenance.[94]

As a consequence of this, (b) these narratives provide episodical illustrations of what we typically are like, hence who we "really" are—and who we are not. Thereby they provide examples of how we should behave (and how we always used to behave) as cherished members of our collective, thus establishing typical attributes of our group. It may be argued that this applies primarily for rather traditional communities in which role models are drawn from idealized images in the past—but interestingly this objection may become inverted by pointing to the emergence of modern nation states, which heavily rely on national myths (see below) and also rest much more on national homogeneity than previous multicultural empires.[95]

(c) Furthermore, by offering rationales for our current situation, historical narratives provide two decisive elements for our contemporary being: the historical motivations and legitimizations for future actions mentioned previously, as well as a framework for our knowledge of the world, the context we use to make sense of our current (and future) situations and actions, the meaning we find for them.

Finally and most significantly, (d) narratives contribute to the creation of in- and outgroups to begin with.[96] As *Walther Zimmerli* and *Joachim Landkammer* put it: narratives create the very "we" that the narrative is always presupposing.[97] By virtue of the features mentioned above, they not only inform us about our current relations, about present in- and outgroups; rather they project this demarcation between people and by consequence also these very groups back in time,[98] making them antagonists or allies already ages ago. And most importantly, they establish these groups as stable over time: we have our progenitors, they have theirs, and by creating a "fictitious genealogy" under the tacit assumption that these collectives have not changed over time, a conflict becomes not just a contemporary issue but

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[93] And is it not curious that we ascribe "age" to a community? As if human communities just like individuals had a beginning, a date of birth, and could therefore be of differing ages. As if the members of that group had not been born to some parents themselves, as if there could be a missing link somewhere in time, a gap without progenitors, just because we today think that group had not existed back then, but mine had, or as if that group had changed meanwhile while mine had remained static. And this age is even presented as an achievement, a source of collective pride. Here age itself becomes an accomplishment, next to or sometimes even more cherished than the achievements we are currently struggling for. And most interestingly this past accomplishment is appropriated by myself and experienced as my own.

[94] Liebsch (1995): 264.

[95] For this last point, see König et al. (2008): 18, 382.

[96] See for instance Erll (2005: 179) who argues that identity and alterity are established by narratives. For the importance of alterity, an other, to establish identity, see for instance Niethammer's (2000: 251f) interpretation of Freud. See also McIver (2003); Akerlof and Shiller (2009) who dedicate their entire book to the importance of stories for macroeconomics.

[97] Zimmerli and Landkammer (2006): 266.

[98] For instance, by tracing the "roots" of Austria back to 996, by virtue of a document with the analogue name Ostarrîchi.

one persisting for long and thus for good reasons. The present conflict thus becomes either a mere prolongation of past problems or at least further complicated by the presumed continuation of the adversarial relations our ancestors had with their ancestors.[99] It is this principle of historical continuity of collectives which also facilitates claims of entitlement, for instance a certain territory to be ours because it used to be ours long ago, for such a long time.[100]

2.3.4   Historical Narratives and Politics: Myths

With regard to their political function such narratives are often described under the heading of "myth". This is not to postulate a clear divide between myths and narratives in general, but rather to highlight the political implications of narratives by their strong normative and group-formative functionality and the orientation we derive from them.[101] In my opinion the term "myth" re-emphasizes the imaginative and constructionist nature of narratives. Furthermore, another interesting feature of "myth" is its close relation to the religious realm, underlining that myths sometimes adopt some religion-like qualities, thereby increasing their potential to foster a sense of community and shared meaning.[102]

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[99] See, also for the quoted "fictive genealogy", Akçam (2004): 244–249.

[100] There are of course some caveats to the simplifications I am asserting here, and therefore a few qualifications are imperative: apparently there is not a single narrative for any particular group, nor do the multiple existing narratives always amount to such a Manichaean portrayal of them and us. More accurately, a large amount of narratives tell of switching relational status from friend to foe (or vice versa): just recall the paramount importance of stories about treason. Furthermore, of course our stories about today sometimes, when they allow for a bit more complexity, do acknowledge that the boundaries between groups and hence the groups themselves were different at previous times. However, the main point is that these narratives, especially where used for political ends, tend to render simplified pictures of the past, and are ultimately more expressions of present thinking than past events anyway.

[101] Following the definition of myths in Erll (2005: 116): "Mythos ist eine Geschichte, die man sich erzählt, um sich über sich selbst und die Welt zu orientieren, eine Wahrheit höherer Ordnung, die nicht einfach nur stimmt, sondern darüber hinaus auch normative Ansprüche stellt und formative Kraft besitzt"(„Myth is a history which we recount to gain orientation about oneself and the world, it is a truth of an higher order which is not just true but also makes normative claims and possesses normative force", my translation). Similarly in Assmann (2006a: 39f), and I think it also coincides with Blustein (2008: 179–203). A narrower definition is given by König et al. (2008: 385), who claims myths would encompass episodes which date back to ancient times. Nevertheless, also for him myths essentially serve purposes of identity formation.

[102] See König et al. (2008: 112f) who is following Friedrich Wilhelm Graf in claiming these characteristics for collective memory. I dared to pass these qualities on to the concept of narrative/ myth instead.

These characteristics have given rise to a significant amount of academic attention being paid to concepts such as "collective memory", "cultural memory", "social memory", "communicative memory" and the like.[103] Indeed, there are some collectives whose composition rests to a significant degree on the notion of a shared history. Whereas they may tend to describe themselves more as "Schicksalsgemeinschaften" (communities of fate), communities who are united by sharing the same fate, in line with what I said above they are appropriately considered as "Erinnerungsgemeinschaften"[104] (communities of remembrance) or "Gedächtnisgemeinschaften"[105] (communities of memory) since what unites them is a communal remembering of a past event, a consensus about what is worthwhile to preserve by communal remembrance. Resorting to my constructionist bias I would go a step further and claim it is not so much their joint remembrance of a past event but rather their joint interpretation of that past event—which of course presupposes its remembrance. In that sense, I think also the label "Interpretationsgemeinschaften" is quite apt.[106]

One very special community and/or collective identity which often rests heavily on such constitutive myths and which attracted an extensive amount of scholarly research is the national community. In 1861 *John Stuart Mill* held:

> Man kann sagen, eine Gruppe von Menschen konstituiere eine Nation, wenn diese Menschen untereinander durch gegenseitige Sympathien verbunden sind, die zwischen ihnen und irgendwelchen anderen nicht bestehen. [...] Ein solches Gefühl der nationalen Zusammengehörigkeit kann aus den verschiedensten Ursachen entstanden sein. [...] Am stärksten in diesem Sinne wirkt [...] eine gemeinsame politische Vergangenheit: der Besitz einer nationalen Geschichte und die sich daraus ergebenden Gemeinsamkeit der Erinnerungen: kollektive Gefühle des Stolzes und der Scham, der Freude und des Leides, die sich an die nämlichen Ereignisse der Vergangenheit knüpfen.[107]

And probably the author most frequently quoted with regard to the constitutive importance of history in the formation of nations, *Ernest Renan*, in 1882 stated:

> Eine Nation ist eine Seele, ein geistiges Prinzip. Zwei Dinge, die in Wahrheit nur eins sind, machen diese Seele, dieses geistige Prinzip aus. Eins davon gehört der Vergangenheit an, das andere der Gegenwart. Das eine ist der gemeinsame Besitz eines reichen Erbes an

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[103] See for instance Halbwachs (1967); Assmann and Harth (1991); Assmann and Firese (1998a, b); Assmann (2006a, 2007); Platt and Dabag (1995); Loewy and Moltmann (1996); Straub (1998a, b, c); Esposito (2002); Erll (2005); König et al. (2008).

[104] For instance Burke (1991): 298; Meyer, Leggewie (2004): 279.

[105] For instance König et al. (2008): 64.

[106] According to Erll (2005: 153), Stanley Fish actually coined the term in 1980 in order to describe communities which emerged out of a shared interpretation of a written text.

[107] Quoted in König et al. (2008: 383f): "You could say a group of people constitutes a nation when these people are connected by reciprocal empathy, which exists between them but not between any others. [...] Such a feeling of national affiliation can have emerged for various reasons. [...] A shared political history is the strongest force in this direction: the possession of a national history and the resulting communality of memories: collective feelings of pride and shame, of joy and pain, which connect to these past events" (my translation).

Erinnerungen, das andere das gegenwärtige Einvernehmen, der Wunsch, zusammenzuleben.[108]

More recently, highly intriguing studies have emerged about historical narratives or myths and their political relevance,[109] and it is this paradigm, the study of national communities in light of historical narratives, which provides a stimulating field of inquiry for political science as well. Towards the end of this paper I shall thus return again to this matter and try to put this topic in a discussion of some alleged Turkish nationalism (see Sect. 5.1). But before, a few more general words about myth and its political relevance for identity formation may be beneficial.

Previously I argued in circular reasoning for an interdependent understanding of narrative and meaning, and at this point I would like to include identity in this vicious tautology: also the relationship between identity formation and its maintenance on the one hand, and the generation and communication of historical narratives on the other, is best conceived as interrelated and procedural in nature. While I have so far focused on how narrative influences identity, it should at least briefly be noted that also identity and group formation are part of the wider frame determining how we perceive reality, including the past, and how we hence fabricate our historical narratives.[110]

Given all these inherent qualities of history, it is not surprising that historical questions quite frequently attain seminal status in political conflicts.[111] Going beyond the distinction of past/history/memory which I have presented before, historian *Bernard Lewis* hence distinguished between "remembered history" as some form of collective memory; "recovered history" as the attempt by professional historians to reconstruct what collective memory has already forgotten; and "invented history" as that version of the past which is created in order to achieve new political ends.[112] Meticulously sticking to the constructionist approach I have pledged to pursue here, it may hence be concluded that "history" is a social construction, and so is "us" a social construction, and ever more so "our history". As *Peter Wagner* summarized it:

> Der Verweis auf eine gemeinsame Geschichte kann die Existenz und die Solidität kollektiv geteilter Glaubensordnungen deswegen nicht erklären, weil es streng genommen keine »gemeinsame Geschichte« gibt, sondern immer eine Vielzahl von Erfahrungen, deren jede

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[108] Quoted in François and Schulze (1998: 17): "A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which actually are but one, characterize this spiritual principle. One of them belongs to the past, the other to the present. One is the shared possession of a rich heritage of memories, the other the present consensus, the desire for a shared life" (my translation). For more on Renan, see for instance König et al. (2008): 383f.

[109] See for instance Flacke (1998); Hobsbawm and Ranger (1996); Wodak et al. (1998); with regard to Turkey also Özyürek (2007a).

[110] This thought leads way back to the origins of the *mémoire collective* by Maurice Halbwachs (1967). See also Assmann (2006a): 150–158.

[111] For more on the relation of memory and politics see especially the articles in Bock and Wolfrum (1999); König et al. (2008).

[112] See Erll (2005): 44.

sich von jeder anderen unterscheidet. Die Beschwörung von »gemeinsamer Geschichte«, beispielsweise in Theorien nationaler Identität, ist eine Vorgehensweise, die immer in der jeweiligen Gegenwart vorgenommen wird—als eine spezifische Repräsentation der Vergangenheit, die diese mit Blick auf die Schaffung von Gemeinsamkeiten bearbeitet. Dieses Vorgehen mag durchaus »funktionieren« in dem Sinne, dass der Gedanke von Zusammengehörigkeit und Nähe von unterschiedlichen Menschen in der Gegenwart geschaffen wird. Aber es ist nicht die Vergangenheit in der Form »gemeinsamer Geschichte«, die diese Wirkung produziert, sondern die gegenwärtige Interaktion zwischen denjenigen, die vorschlagen, die Vergangenheit als etwas Geteiltes anzusehen, und denjenigen, die sich davon überzeugen lassen und diese Repräsentation für ihre eigene Orientierung in der sozialen Welt annehmen.[113]

To conclude, historical narratives are important devices to generate and express meaning of historical events, including our very own actions, and identity. Turkish academic *Esra Özyürek* stipulated that "in contemporary Turkey representations of the past have become metaphors through which individuals and groups define their cultural identity and political position."[114] However, for these identities and meanings to be viable it requires also that they are accepted by others. It is tremendously difficult to sustain certain beliefs, meanings, stories, identities etc. when they are incessantly described as wrong, maybe even as outright lies. Even worse, not only may they themselves be denounced as erroneous, there may also be competing narratives circulating which follow an entirely different direction than the one we ourselves favor.

I take it here as a given that the majority of human beings, and hence of human collectives, favors identities and hence narratives beneficial to them.[115] By

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[113] Wagner ([1998](#): 69f): "Reference to a shared history cannot explain the existence and solidity of collectively shared beliefs, because strictly speaking there is no »shared history« but always a plurality of experiences which differ from each other. The incantation of »shared history«, for instance in theories of national identity, is an approach which always takes place in the present—as a specific representation of the past, designed with regard to the creation of communalities. This approach may »work« in the sense that the notion of togetherness and proximity is created among different people in the present. However, it is not the past shaped as »shared history« which produces this effect, but the present interaction between those who propose to view the past as something shared, and those who let themselves be convinced and adopt this representation for their orientation in their social world" (my translation).

[114] Özyürek ([2007a](#)): 2. See also König et al. ([2008](#)): 624. For Hahn ([1996](#): 164), the Shoah as a *pars pro toto* for the cruelties committed by the Nazis served as the foundation for a fundamental consensus, facilitating community as well as providing a basis from which moral conflicts could be tackled. A quite illustrative example of current politics is an article by Maen Rashid Areikat, chief representative of the Palestinian Liberation Organization to the US, published on December 28, 2011, in the *Washington Post*. Presumably in order to back the at this time intensively promoted aspirations for a Palestinian state, he wishes to present to the American audience "what the Palestinians, as a people, are all about"—which he does by an excursion in history, going back as far as 10,000 B.C. to the town of Jericho, which in turn is the foundation of a political myth to support the Palestinian identity and its deep roots to its historic homeland.

[115] See the various articles in Branscombe and Doosje ([2004a](#), [b](#)). However, I think it would be inappropriate to describe any given identity as per se positive or negative—it depends very much on the context, for it is the context which may alter the meaning of a particular identity. For instance, a victim identity may be experienced as something utterly negative, not so much because

consequence, if an opposing movement develops an antagonistic narrative portraying us as a bad individual/collective, this will most probably engender resistance. Ultimately this alternative narrative may devalue our identity in the eyes of others as well as ourselves. It may cause a need to revise and reconfigure our identity, or even to develop a new one. Even more, considering that the narratives we harbor were so far used to understand our social lives and to motivate and legitimize the actions we took, contesting these narratives suddenly amounts to questioning our worldview as well as our behavior. It would of course be an inexcusable overstatement to claim *any* competing narrative could shake the foundations of our identity. Maybe it should be better conceived as an impetus to reframe specific aspects or dimensions of our general cognitions. For instance, certain narratives certainly are momentous to our moral stance, including the moral status we assign ourselves—in a sense, our "moral identity". Contradicting narratives may now put into question our evaluation of others, our own moral identity, or ultimately even the moral categories which have guided us so far.[116] And that is why I believe conflicts about historical interpretations may arouse such strong resistance, because they may challenge those narratives which are substantial for our sense of our identity and the world.

2.4   Genocide

An outstanding element in the controversy studied here is the concept of genocide, and I believe it is essential to understand just what genocide is, or seems to be, in order to better comprehend the entire row about it. I shall therefore just briefly touch upon some of the most controversial elements in the idea of genocide, most of which we will encounter again at other places of this paper. As a starting point I believe the definition offered by the United Nations is the best to begin with, given that it is still the most authoritative available.

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of the past experience itself but because it may convey a sense of helplessness, dependency, weakness—in relation to the perpetrator, whose identity may express agency, power, autonomy. On the other hand, the same victim identity may also imply positive features, for instance when it is associated with a high moral status, a claim for attention and recognition (see also Sect. 4.5)— again in relation to the perpetrator with an identity potentially of brutality, selfishness, of being anti-social.

[116] For the nexus between narrative and moral identity, see Gergen (1998): 201.

2.4.1 The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

The term "genocide" was introduced in 1943 in "The Axis Rule in Occupied Europe" by *Raphael Lemkin*, a Polish Jew who had escaped from Nazi persecution to the United States of America.[117] The United Nations (UN) adopted the concept and worked to its wider international recognition. In a first step, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 96(I) on December 11, 1946, offering a first definition of genocide and stipulating the intention of preparing a convention (a process which involved various UN bodies and member states, and also *Lemkin* himself happened to resume a consulting role). The ultimate outcome represents the most prevalent definition of genocide even until today, codified in the "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" (UNGC).[118] It was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in resolution 260 A (III) on December 9, 1948, and went into force on January 12, 1951. It has never been revised or updated by the UN and still serves as the legal template for the crime of genocide as it is prosecuted for instance by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, as well as the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR). Currently there are 142 parties to this convention, including the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council as well as the two immediate stakeholders in the debate which is my subject here: the Republic of Armenia accessed the convention on June 23, 1993, and the Republic of Turkey on July 31, 1950.[119]

Genocide itself is explained in article 2 of the convention as follows:

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.[120]

To get a better feeling for this definition and the concept of genocide generally, it may be beneficial to discuss some of its pivotal or most controversial features in a little more detail. Actually there was a lot of debate around the UNGC, particularly

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[117] Chaumont (2001: 175) notes that the German synonym for genocide, "Völkermord", was already used to describe massacres in World War I. The term "Genozid" by contrast was a literal translation of the English neologism "genocide", and thus newly introduced with Lemkin's work.

[118] For the full text see also Sect. 7.2: Appendix B.

[119] See http://www.treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=UNTSONLINE&tabid=2&mtdsg_no=IV-1&chapter=4&lang=en#Participants, accessed on June 9, 2013.

[120] Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (December 9, 1948): article 2.

regarding the definition of genocide at the time it was issued, and diverging views are still widely expressed.[121] As the benchmarks I mentioned just before already indicate, the UNGC raises quite a number of questions. One might say that these are very theoretical and academic debates, but I believe it is quite telling that we will encounter them again when we turn to the arguments about the events of 1915. It may be true that (some of) these appear to be very theoretical questions, but since the concept of genocide has practical consequences, both legal and, as this study hopes to clarify, also political and social ones, also any problems and inconsistencies in this concept include practical consequences.

First, there is the issue about "the intent to destroy". Apparently, the crime of genocide does not only consist in the genocidal act alone, but needs to be supplemented by a genocidal intent in order to qualify as genocide. This not only raises some questions about the difficulties of proving intention to destroy a group, but also about how to consider trickier ones such as those around order and subordination, aides to *génocidaires* who in turn lack this intent, and so forth. Moreover, there is also the issue that if we are not assessing if a specific individual is guilty of the crime of genocide, but instead if an entire *event* (which, in fact, is a series of events)[122] amounts to genocide or if a *collective* has committed genocide, then this also requires us to determine whose intention it is that matters. Does *everyone* involved in these events need to harbor genocidal intent? Or just *anyone*? Or some curious "qualified majority"? Or does it make a difference if it were (only? including?) those who committed the actual killings, or those who ordered them, or those who organized them, or. . .? And would they need to have this intent from the very outset, and/or at any time during its execution, and/or at (or even until) the very end? Either way, I shall come back to the question of intent again in a later chapter (see Sect. 4.12).

Second, there is the clause about "in whole or in part". Apparently a perpetrator according to the UNGC does not necessarily need to seek destruction of the entire group. That rather encompassing and wide definition might stir some objections, with some advocating that genocide should really be reserved for cases where really all of the group should be destroyed. Anyway, there is no qualification of this in part, neither in quantitative nor in qualitative terms. And if it is understood in numeric terms, would it be a relative or an absolute number? This too is a matter we will face again when we turn to the specific case studied here (see Sect. 4.5.3).

Maybe the point of criticism most often voiced is the enumeration of the persecuted groups. Many have argued that this list, which is notably presented as an exhaustive rather than an indicative one, fails to offer protection to some groups which arguably also deserve to be protected, such as groups based on sexuality or

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[121] For some details about the preparation of the UNGC and further discussions on the definition it entails see for example Schabas (2000); Kuper (1981); Dabag and Platt (1998); Chorbaijan (1999); Fein (1993); Van Schaack (1997); Auron (2003a): 46; Chaumont (2001): 177–179.

[122] I guess this alludes also to the very interesting question how we can summarize a tremendous series of events into one single episode. I have no idea about the philosophical dimensions of this question, but in my head it brings a few bells to ring the tune of narratives discussed above.

sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status, culture, or political alignment. Already at the drafting deliberations of this convention, some argued that the typology of groups should be widened to also include for instance political and socio-economic groups. The initial resolution 96(I), adopted on December 11, 1946, defined genocide as an act committed on "religious, racial, political or any other grounds", thereby not only including political but also "other" groups. However, the calls to include political groups faced objections by disparate countries such as the Soviet Union, Poland, Iran, the United Kingdom, or neoterist *Raphael Lemkin* himself on grounds of the deficient stability of these groups and their lack of characteristic properties.[123] According to *Helen Fein*, this was a major drive why some members in the US Senate for 40 years successfully opposed the ratification of the UNGC.[124] Until today many consider this the major flaw in the UNGC, demanding even that the United Nations account for this shortcoming by drafting another convention to prosecute the crime of "politicide".[125] On the other side there are scholars who would like to see the concept of genocide even *more* restrictive relative to the target groups. For instance *Yehuda Bauer* suggests that genocide should really be confined to the attempt to destroy a *genos*, i.e. a group constituted by hereditary features which cannot be chosen freely. He argues this

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[123] For more on the history of the UNGC see Schabas (2000); Kuper (1981); Fein (1993). With special respect to the exclusion of these political groups see Van Schaack (1997); Chalk and Jonassohn (1998): 295. However, it should also be added that some countries, among them the Soviet Union, wanted to follow Lemkin's initial suggestion to explicitly include also forms of "cultural genocide", such as restrictions to use a particular language, religion, literature and other cultural institutions. This, too, did not assemble sufficient support among other UN member states. See Schabas (2000); Kuper (1981): 30f.

[124] Fein (1993): 11. By contrast Kuper (1981: 29f) claims that the US failed for long to ratify the UNGC because they objected most of all to the right to foreign intervention.

[125] Fein (1993): 11. A strong advocant is for instance Van Schaack (1997). As the delegation from Ecuador explained during the drafting process, one fear was that "if the convention did not extend its protection to political groups, those who committed the crime of genocide might use the pretext of the political opinions of a racial or religious group to persecute and destroy it, without becoming liable to international sanctions" (quoted in Schabas (2000): 138).

And Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (1998: 295–300) pointed out that the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees acknowledges persons who are persecuted because they belong to a political group as refugees. Hence, people fleeing persecution for this reason to another country are protected by the United Nations by granting them refugee status, while those who remain in the country and are killed for the very same reason are not protected by the UNGC. However, I believe this critique must be alleviated since the UNGC is not the only device in international law to inhibit politically motivated prosecution, thinking for instance of human rights. Anyway, there seems to be some inconsistency, overlap and gap, in international law which groups should be protected from what offenses. For instance, the offense of "crime against humanity", as defined in the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (2007, article 3) prohibits acts "against any civilian population on national, political, ethnic, racial or religious grounds". Note that these categories are congruent with those in the UNGC, except that political motives are included. By contrast, article 2 of the same statute, which defines the crime of genocide, adheres to the definition in the UNGC, thereby excluding political groups again.

would limit the potential victim groups to national, ethnical, and racial groups.[126] Anyway, we will come across this issue again in Sects. 4.9 and 5.3.

Another point of contestation, which I think is also related to the question of intent, is: who can be considered the perpetrator of genocide? The UNGC stipulates in article 4:

> Persons committing genocide or any of the other acts enumerated in article III shall be punished, whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals.[127]

But this also is far from being self-evident, and during the deliberations within UN bodies, some states questioned whether rulers or public officials should be prosecuted by this convention, whereas others instead saw genocide as essentially a state crime and wanted to charge primarily, if not exclusively, such rulers and public officials.[128] *Helen Fein* criticized that according to the UNGC definition, even individuals or smaller terrorist groups could be accused of genocide if they killed their individual targets because of their membership in a particular collective. To contrast this from the crime of genocide that she embraces, she preferred to label this "collective terror".[129] And as some of the alternative definitions which I will discuss below demonstrate, it appears that most authors agree with her that genocide is not "just" the crime of an individual but a concerted effort, possibly even requiring state authority.

One last point I would like to mention is less controversial but still important to emphasize because I believe it is in contrast to most popular notions of genocide: to identify an event as genocide does not require that *all* of the acts listed in article 2 are committed; nor does it require that a particular type of these acts, such as murder, is included in these events. Instead it is sufficient if *any* of them occurs. So, in theory genocide may also occur without any killings at all, it may be confined for instance to transferring of children to another group, or to causing serious mental harm.

2.4.2 Some Alternative Propositions

In view of all these predicaments, a number of scholars have tried to come up with alternative concepts of genocide.[130] I think some of them merit mentioning, just to

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[126] Bauer (1999): 34f. Apparently this seems to imply that in Bauer's understanding national and ethnic groups are *not* defined by cultural features but by hereditary ones instead, which I believe is not at all self-evident either.

[127] Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948: Article 4.

[128] Schabas (2000): for instance 62f.

[129] Fein (1993): 17f.

[130] For a review see Chalk and Jonassohn (1998); Fein (1993).

give a better contrast and deepen the sensitivity for the concept of genocide before engaging all of the arguments about genocide in the context investigated here.

Frank Chalk and *Kurt Jonassohn* understand genocide as "a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrators."[131] So, whereas they extend the UNGC with respect to the kinds of protected groups (any group, however it is defined by the perpetrator), they reduce the actions which constitute genocide to those of actually killing members of the victim group. They do not include a clause such as "in part", which could be interpreted that genocide occurs only if effort is made to destroy the entire group. However, as they go on to elaborate, a group does not need to be annihilated in its entirety, what is essential is the presence of intent to destroy that group.[132] Interestingly, they also include a specification of the perpetrator of genocide, limiting it to a state or another authority. What they do not address is by virtue of whose actions or decisions or intentions a state or authority may be said to enact genocide. Finally, as *Helen Fein* in my opinion rightly pointed out, the insertion that the killings must be "one-sided" is quite troublesome too[133]: would then for instance the engagement of a number of Jews in the resistance movement invalidate the position that the Nazis engaged in genocide? Maybe this can still be discarded by declaring it measures of self-defense, which only defers the issue to the establishment of offense and defense, challenging in its own right but especially when the assumed agents are human collectives. And even if they were not self-defense, and even if the Nazi mania of a Jewish world conspiracy would have been true, would that have given them the right to persecute and slaughter them all? If that is the case, would then not those who resist oppression and persecution by default already be excluded from protection against genocide?

Another scholar who deserves great credit for the advancement of our understanding of genocide is *Vahakn N. Dadrian*. In 1974 he offered the following definition for genocide:

> Genocide is the successful attempt by a dominant group, vested with formal authority and with preponderant access to the overall resources of power, to reduce by coercion or lethal violence the number of a minority group whose ultimate extermination is held desirable and useful and whose respective vulnerability is a major factor contributing to the decision for genocide.[134]

Just like *Chalk* and *Jonassohn* he relates genocide to a political authority, as an ideal type presumably envisioning some state authorities. However, in his definition, the perpetrator is explicitly a "group", which of course raises interesting questions about individual responsibility. Moreover, also the insertion of "dominant group" could be problematic, since it excludes genocidal attempts between largely

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[131] Chalk and Jonassohn (1990): 23.

[132] Chalk and Jonassohn (1990): 23–26.

[133] Fein (1993): 13.

[134] Quoted in Fein (1993): 13.

equal groups or groups which both have access to power. Therefore genocidal events between two minority groups within one single state would potentially not be genocide. And how would we evaluate the same actions if they occur between two dominant majority groups in different states? In line with the UNGC but in contrast to *Chalk* and *Jonassohn*, he does not make any claim about the comportment of the victim group, such as provocation or resistance. Yet he deviates from the UNGC by not specifying the nature of the potential victim groups, except that they must be in the minority. One point which is noteworthy in my view is that in this definition there is no specification of genocide as being a crime against a collective, and no required intent to destroy the target collective. The purpose of genocide is "only" to reduce the number of the victim group. I confess that this notion includes some components which appeal to me, for reasons I shall explicate toward the end of this paper (see Sect. 5.3).

Another political scientist who engaged for a long time in research on genocide is *Robert Melson*, offering the following definition:

> Genocide is defined here as a public policy mainly carried out by the state whose intent is the destruction in whole or in part of a social collectivity or category, usually a communal group, a class, or a political faction.[135]

I think where this definition clearly diverges from *Dadrian* is in identifying the state as the main perpetrator, by contrast to a dominant group in *Dadrian*'s definition. Here the state harbors the intent to destroy, and also acts as the main agent in its implementation. *Melson* retains some core features of the UNGC, such as the intention of the perpetrator to destroy a group, and even the clause of "in whole or in part". However, as for the other two definitions already discussed, *Melson* does not restrict the kind of groups which are subjected to genocide, even though he contends what these "usually" are, citing, interestingly, economic and political groups as usual instances of genocide—two groups which were deliberately not included in the UNGC.

There is one last definition which I would like to touch upon, and again it comes from another distinguished genocide scholar. *Helen Fein* suggested that

> Genocide is sustained and purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim.[136]

The first apparent feature this definition includes is that singular actions do not constitute genocide. It also clearly addresses the question about the victims' resistance, although it rather points out that genocide is constituted by acts sustained even though the victim has already surrendered or does not represent a threat. That is, it neither explicitly excludes nor includes victims who in fact do offer resistance or pose a threat. As in the two previous definitions I referenced,

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[135] Melson (1992): 26.
[136] Fein (1993): 24. Repeated in Fein (1999): 157.

Fein also does not specify the nature of the victim groups. Nor does she include any qualification about the perpetrator, i.e., any restriction that genocide could be enacted only by state authorities, or majority groups. However, for her, genocide is again a crime against a collectivity, most notably the physical dimension (its body?) of the collectivity, and that it can be destroyed by an assault against the social reproduction of its members.

The conclusion I wish to draw here is that a number of scholars have contributed immensely to the study of genocide. They have emphasized a number of critical points and offered suggestions how to overcome them. Nevertheless, it appears that not one definition has yet succeeded to convince the community of genocide researchers. Indeed, I believe the differences remain substantial. As I tried to show, there is dissent about (a) the nature of the perpetrator, (b) the actions which constitute genocide, and (c) the nature of the victim. These differences, apparently, are fundamental. Disregarding other inevitable causes, such as political interests, this certainly also explains why the UNGC has not been revised to date. And I am not aware of any serious or promising attempts to do so in the near future. This of course also opens the risk that the engaged disciplines follow diverging paths in their preoccupation with genocide. That is, the legal realm may end up nurturing a quite different idea of genocide than the one which is deployed in social sciences or other areas of study. On another side, this may also be reasonable since different disciplines adhere to different paradigms and pursue different ends. On the other hand, it may produce curious outcomes, for instance if the prospective warning systems developed mostly in social sciences are tuned towards a different phenomenon than the one retrospectively prosecuted within the legal realm. Of course it would be naïve and even counterproductive to demand that alternative concepts be inhibited all along—they are beyond doubt the main drive for the improvement of our concept of genocide, rather than an impediment. What appears imperative nevertheless is that a certain feedback loop is built into the process by which the ultimate concepts are eventually developed in politics and jurisdiction, to ensure they are in line with the research and investigations which are conducted in the academic arena. I think it is therefore appropriate to return to the concept of genocide toward the end of this paper (see Sect. 5.3).

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