The notion of Genocide

The aim of this article is not a general discussion of the notion of genocide as such. I assume the definition given by the United Nations Convention: those acts defined as «killing, causing serious bodily harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction, imposing measures to prevent births, forcibly transferring children... with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such»¹.

Neither is it the aim of this paper to deal with the historicity of the Armenian genocide. Historical research has been the main trend in studies on this subject, and there is today a great deal of scientific literature in that field of history². Thanks

to this research we are at present in possession of strong evidence for the historical reality of the Armenian genocide. Such is the evidence resulting from those studies that one would be tempted to ask: if the Armenian massacres do not constitute a flagrant case of genocide, what then might genocide be?

On the basis of this factual evidence, new paths are now opening for further research: inquiry into the historical contexts and motives of the Genocide; its social, economic, religious, and political backgrounds; the intrigues of international policy; legal implications and consequences, and so on: in short, an inquiry to elaborate a deeper historical comprehension of the fact both in retrospect and in perspective.

Another way of inquiring into the Genocide would be that of a reflection, so to speak, to a second degree, that is, a reflection of an anthropological, psychological, sociological, philosophical, and theological nature as to what historically happened. This kind of inquiry, which is presently taking its first steps, can also certainly help us to understand history better and deeper.


We must also mention the two main centres active in collecting documents and testimonies: The Zoryan Institute at Cambridge MA, and the Institut für armenische Forschung in Bochum, both also paying special attention to oral history.


These considerations seem to me to offer a valuable justification for a reflection on the Armenian genocide in a philosophical perspective, that is from the standpoint of a philosophy of history, on the basis of all those historical elements that the research carried out up to now, in the multiple fields of history, has gathered and brought to light, of whatever nature they may be: political, social, literary, artistic, or else. At the same time such an approach will also take advantage of the progress made on the different ways of searching into the Genocide at that level of inquiry which we have considered as a reflection to a second degree.

I shall designate, for convenience, our present approach as «metahistorical». Soon I shall clear up better the sense in which I use the term «metahistorical», but I can already say that this kind of approach has not yet as such sufficiently captured the attention of scholars, except for some very recent papers⁵. I believe that, if duly carried out with a rigorous methodology, such an approach will help us to better understand in general how life may be still possible after death; it will also help to shed more light on how in particular Armenian collective identity has been perceived and expressed by the surviving Armenian community after the great Catastrophe of the Genocide.

Needless to say that our inquiry moves at a level of speech which is not the one dealing with the factual evidence of the


event itself, but is the one searching for a deeper comprehension of it as a human tragedy as well as of its relationship to the survivors as to its meaning for their present identity. Hence it will be helpful to remember that all human effort of comprehension, by its very nature, has something hypothetical. That is why I propose the forthcoming reflections as a subject for further discussion and elaboration.

Having made these basic statements, I would like to add that in defining the notion of genocide, I agree with the «humanistic definition» proposed by Israel W. Charney in his article: Genocide: The Ultimate Human Rights Problem. Charney points out that «a combination of legal considerations and political pressures brought about a definition under the existing United Nations Convention Against Genocide that emphasizes the willful effort to destroy the identity of any national, ethnic, racial, or religious entity». The result was that cultural measures such as forbidding the use of a language, or preventing marriages among members of a faith, would qualify as genocide. In contrast, the mass murder of millions of opponents of a regime does not constitute genocide since murder on a political basis is excluded from the current legal definition. Then Charney proposes his humanistic definition: «To me the issue is the wanton murder of a group of human beings on the basis of any identity whatsoever that they share – national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, geographical, ideological».

A «metabistorical» approach

Let us now state more accurately the object of the present paper.

Our main purpose is to try an analysis of those basic components of the Armenian genocide which have characterized its execution. I think that for a deeper approach to such a global and absolute act as genocide, which puts to a whole group of people and in the most radical way the question of being or not being, a consideration in terms of a general, almost juridical, definition only is not enough. We have to attempt in these cases to perceive the specific identity of the single event, in its existential context and issues. Only by doing so can we have a

6 See Genocide, Essays..., cit., in n. 1, pp. 4-7

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really human approach to a highly human fact: human in its absolute tragedy. That is why I consider our present approach as a metahistorical one, intending by «metahistory» that ground of inquiry and reflection on which we try a further comprehension of the historical event moving from considerations of an intellectual order, be it philosophical, religious, or else. No doubt that what is real in similar issues belongs also to history and develops throughout history. Hence a «metahistorical» approach means only transcending the purely factual aspect of history, its purely phaenomenal dimension.

Doing so we suppose that we may speak of reality, of life, and of death as having sense and not assume them as complete nonsense. This latter might be in fact a temptation suggested by genocide itself. But we start here supposing the existence of a meaning, even if obscure and mysterious, hard to deal with, or at the limits of absurdity. In other words we suppose the possibility of thinking or rethinking history, even if it appears under the sign of catastrophe, not only in the causal concatenation of events weaving their plot, but also and especially in their relations to the existence and the destiny of man and of mankind, and more especially to those of the community, of the group of persons, or of the whole people we are dealing with. Hence, we shall try to realize what genocide meant for the Armenian people not only from a factual or phenomenal viewpoint of human life in its political, economic, social, psychological, linguistic, artistic, cultural, religious, and other implications, but from a «metahistorical» viewpoint, that is, considering human life in its existential roots, on the ground of meaning.

The study will be developed in two phases: a) we shall discuss first some general issues related to genocide as such as, for instance, its «completeness», its «unique» character, and so on; b) then we shall consider how and to what extent such a tragedy may have conditioned and, eventually, continue to condition the life and the existence of the Armenian people in that the perception and the survival of Armenian identity of the Armenian self-image are concerned.

Patterns of genocide

The first point we would like to call attention to is the meaning of the term genos, a Greek word which is at the basis
of the term «genocide». Genos meant originally generation, progeny, issue, species, race. Certainly it keeps this original and basic meaning in the definition of genocide. In fact the main feature of this definition is that of being an act perpetrated against a group of persons because of their belonging to a nation, a race, a religion, and eventually to an idea according to Charney's humanistic definition. Hence, a group is nothing other than a generation of people belonging to some nation, race, religion or whatever.

The fact that genocide has primarily to deal with a generation or group of persons, because of a common and distinctive feature that marks them profoundly, already implies in its notion that genocide means neither the complete destruction and the consequent extinction of a race, a nation, or a religious group nor does it mean something unique in the life of a people or of any other group of persons, since acts of genocide can be committed on different generations of the same people or group of persons. A glance at historical genocides will allow us to individuate some typological patterns of this sad reality:

a) A first distinction must concern the kind of features for which a group of persons is to be eliminated.

We can pick out a whole series of features related to a link of kinship among the members of the group: actually all manner of links which may be included in concepts such as race, tribe, clan, ethnic group, nation.

A second basic series of features, as attested by history, is that related to convictions which may have a strong influence on human life. These are actually religious or ethical convictions; to these we have to add, if we accept Charney's humanistic definition of genocide, political and ideological convictions.

b) The features related to a link of kinship make necessary further distinctions and specifications:

i. A first point to be taken into consideration is the relationship of the group projected for extermination to the land in

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which this happens. There have been slaughters of peoples perpetrated in their own land, in the very country that has been the cradle of their ethnicity, the cradle of their aboriginal culture, their «homeland». But there have also been massacres committed on peoples living in lands of migration, of adoption, of initial hospitality.

iii. Another point to deal with is the effective «completeness» of the execution. There have been cases where entire tribes or ethnic groups have almost disappeared from the stage of history or at least have given up their own identity. Such was, for instance, the case with the Hereros in southern Africa or with some groups of Indians in America.8

iii. At this point the problem of the survivors arises: what has been or is the impact of the genocide on those who have survived? Has it led them to lethargy or, on the contrary, was something new born from the seed shed from those who died? The cases of the Armenian and Jewish peoples, for example, certainly belong to this latter eventuality, although in different ways and to different degrees. Paradoxically, the existence of survivors makes the situation, from a certain viewpoint, even more tragic, since the genocide persists or may persist to live as a perpetual bleeding wound in their collective memory.

This continuance of the genocide is not a problem concerning merely immediate survivors nor only their children — second generation of survivors —, but it often has a very real and strong impact on the forthcoming generations as long as the tragedy is kept alive in their collective memory.

Neither is that continuance a question of a purely psychological disease. The «psychological» perspective9 in analyzing


9 Many interventions at the above mentioned Conference in Tel Aviv (see note 7) dealt with the psychological impact of the genocide on the generations of survivors. For other works see above n. 4.

A very important aspect of this psychological impact, in the Armenian
the genocide’s memory is certainly very important, but not sufficient, in our opinion, to reveal its deeper sense and whole impact in the life of the community. To this point we shall turn later.

iv. The problem of survivors leads us to consider what is perhaps one of the most central issues that a genocide may have in the life of a people: its «uniqueness» or singularity, that is its especially unrepeatable character because of its awful radicality.

As a matter of fact, reality as such is unique; all that is real, as an existing individual or a temporal event, is singular, unique, irrepeatable. However, the more the thing or the event has a «strong individuality», i.e. distinguishing features of its own or to unusual degrees, the more its singularity and uniqueness are prominent. A genocide is an event in which the tragic aspect of life reaches the limit. And, no doubt, all tragedy is something incomparable, peerless, unrepeatable in itself.

This character of singularity, «uniqueness», unrepeatability of every genocide is an extremely important feature to be distinguished from the effective «completeness» of the execution. The latter constitutes a case of absolute end, but at the same time it seals this end placing it in the archives of history, not in the memory of a living community which feels the genocide as its own tragedy. It is such a survival of the genocide in the collective memory of a people that constitutes certainly one of its most awful and horrifying aspects. As examples we can allege the Armenian and Jewish cases.

A further element that helps make this memory even more acute – if such an expression is allowed –, concerning the experience of community death, is the degree of evolution of the community’s self-consciousness. This has been developed to a very high degree, for instance, among Jews and Armenians with a double effect: survivors, the paralipomaenoi, the «remnants» we would say using the Biblical term\(^{10}\), made a tremen-

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\(^{10}\) «Mnats’ordats» [Remnants] is the significant title of the masterpiece of one of the greatest Armenian novelists, Hakob Oshakan (1883-1948), himself a survivor of the Genocide. This title, however, does not refer to the survivors as such, but to the «sentiments, traditions, and aspirations», these
dous experience of community death because of the keen awareness of their own identity and history, but at the same time they could draw benefit from that same awareness to recreate and use at best those extraordinary mechanisms of self-preservation and survival created by their ancestors through their long and troubled history both in domestic as well as in extradosmic situations either in «colonies» or in diaspora\textsuperscript{11}.

The questions we have raised in the four latter paragraphs, with special reference to genocides related to kinship links, may also be applied, making due allowance to what is peculiar of each case, to crimes perpetrated because of religious or political convictions, when people sharing those convictions can be distinguished and identified as a community in analogy with an ethnic, national, or racial group.

On the basis of these general outlines let us now try to gain a deeper insight into the Armenian genocide in its inner dynamics, in other terms, to try to describe what genocide meant as a «final solution» for the Armenian people.

\textbf{The «unique» character of every genocide}

A lot has been spoken about the «uniqueness» of the Jewish genocide as a «Holocaust». No doubt, it has been and remains something unique not only in the thousands of years of the Jewish people’s life, but also in the history of mankind. We think, however, as it appears clearly enough from what we have been saying, that every genocide has some quality of its own,

\textsuperscript{11} For a distinction between these two concepts and for a further distinction within the concept itself of «colony», see: Gh. KHOSDEGIAN (= B.L. ZEKIYAN), «Les colonies arméniennes, des origines à la fin du XVIII\textsuperscript{ère} siècle», in Histoire des Arméniens, ed. by G. DEDÉYAN, Privat, Toulouse, 1982, p. 390; B.L. ZEKIYAN, «Le croisement des cultures dans les régions limitrophes de Géorgie, d'Arménie et de Byzance», in Annali di Ca' Foscarì, (Serie Orientale 17), XXV, 3, 1986, p. 91, n. 14; id., «Hrand Nazariantz, gli Armeni e l'Italia. Da una vicenda interculturale verso una nuova tipologia di confronto etnoculturale», in Annali di Ca' Foscarì, XXIX, 3 (Serie Orientale 21), 1990, n. 9, pp. 138-139. It is on the basis of the conceptual distinctions proposed in these writings that we prefer to use «colony» in the plural, and «diaspora» in the singular.
something especially awful and horrible: an irrepeable embodiment of inhumanity in its conception, execution, memory, since it is a human tragedy or, better, the Tragedy itself. And nothing that is human or related to man’s spirit, for good or for evil, can be a mass-production. So we would disagree with Yehuda Bauer’s statement that «the Armenian tragedy or the destruction of ethnic groups in South America are located somewhere between the terms «genocide» and Holocaust».

We think that if a concept is to be assumed as specifically expressing a given reality – as «Holocaust» to express the most specific feature of the Jewish genocide –, then for the definition of other realities it is better either to use other concepts or to apply the classical category of «analogy» in order to avoid such distortions of language as to speak in quantitative terms of extremely delicate human realities.

On the other side, it is a fact that the juridical, anthropological, sociological, psychological, and philosophical reflection on genocide has been mainly carried out by scholars of Jewish origin on account of the Tragedy of their own people. Hence, a major effort by scholars of other ethnicities to elaborate more specific hermeneutic categories for different cases of similar tragedies would also be suitable; to pay, at least, a greater attention to the category of analogy, as we already have pointed out.

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Eradication and Catastrophe

What becomes immediately evident to whomever is concerned with the Armenian case, is the complete eradication of a whole people from its homeland, from its ancestral country where its identity, its language, its culture and genius had been formed and expressed through a living process of about three thousand years of history. What seems to us to be the most characteristic feature of this eradication is that it is in no way a purely factual situation, but is effectively a de jure and absolutely violent proscription from the land: a condition of exile perpetually renewing itself as long as the image of the homeland is not cancelled from the collective memory of the people.

It seems that the Armenian genocide has something peculiar in this respect. Of course, in history we meet several cases of evacuating or cynically «cleansing» a land from its older inhabitants, be it through war-time or post-war forced population movements, or be it by means of a veritable genocide. Just to avoid contemporary chronicle, however tragic it may be, we might mention two well known historical cases. As an example of the former case we can cite the expulsion of the Greek

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population from Anatolia after the defeat by the Turks in 1922, and for the latter case the slaughter of the many indigenous populations of the American continent. Since we are dealing with genocide, let us consider only these latter examples. Although drastically decimated, the few survivors of these unhappy peoples could, however, continue to live on their lands, the lands of their forefathers; they could continue to nourish their collective imagery with something which was not completely alienated from them. Theoretically such was also the case with the survivors on the Land of the Jewish people after the first and perhaps most radical genocide of their history: that which is generally known as the «Destruction of Jerusalem».

*The dream of the lost Homeland and its double impact*

For the survivors of the Armenian genocide, the Homeland appears, on the contrary, as the limit of a radical impossibility, the horizon of what actually is unthinkable or can only be imagined as a historical fiction or a fiction epic. First we must here clear up that in this present context we mean «homeland» not in reference to the national feeling of the Armenians for the territory that forms the present-day Republic of Armenia. We mean «homeland» as related to the historic and ethnic reality of Armenia prior to the Genocide. This formed in the collective awareness and imagery of the Armenians a unique and whole homeland, notwithstanding its administrative and political division between three Empires.  

We must also add that we speak here of «homeland» in a mixed sense: it supposes of course the ethnic connotation of the territory felt as Armenia and the implications of such a connotation, but it also puts emphasis on what made the peculiarity of that part of territory within the global reality of Armenia. This is a very important matter to make due allowance for. In fact, even those survivors who moved to that part


14 That is why the revolutionary movements, which arose at the end of the 19th century to resolve the «Armenian question», aimed at uniting the country; «united Armenia» was one of the three basic traits of the future, projected State, besides the qualifications of «free» and «independent» (azat, ankakh, miats'cal Hayastan).
of Eastern Armenia where the Armenian Republic was founded in 1918, have had for generations, up to our days, a strong longing for their lost «homeland»: for Karin, for Sasun, for Van, and so on, without forgetting the «eternal Ararat/Masis».

Armenia’s literary, artistic, and musical production of the past seven decades is full of yearning expressions of that longing. And anyone, listening especially to the simpler strata of the population, can easily ascertain how deep and strong that feeling is. I myself could experience this on several occasions.\(^\text{15}\)

Such a psychological condition leads the collective imagery of the survivors to see the homeland as the Pole of absolute positivity. In contrast with this fictional positivity, the privation of the homeland appears then as a radical negativity, as the Antipode, the only real national «malheur». Hence the obsession of being a «hapless people – dzbbakht zhogbouurd», and the horror of an imminent extinction, phenomena so peculiar to the Armenian collective psychology.

What we are saying now regards, of course, mainly the post-Genocide generations of the diaspora. However, besides the strong longing for the lost land, also frequent among the generations of survivors in the Republic of Armenia, even the horror of extinction is not alien to their psychology, and in general to the post-Genocide Armenian psychology at all. The sense of security, inspired by such a powerful State as the Soviet Union, was certainly an influential factor of at least relative serenity. But a cruel signal was enough to set off again the mechanism of horror. The massacres on the unarmed Armenian population of Sumgait, an industrial town in Azerbaijan, in February 1988, made all the Armenian population of Armenia relive the phantom of a new genocide.

The contrast between the lost and the «dreamed» land becomes all the more tragic since the «myth» of Armenia\(^\text{16}\) as being the Eden, the earthly Paradise or, at least, the cradle of

\(^{15}\) Probably, it will not be useless to remember here that half, perhaps more than the half, of the population of the newly created Republic of Armenia was made up of survivors of the Genocide (about 400,000 people). For basic reference works on the processes of formation and the first years of the Armenian Republic one can see the monumental and already classic volumes of R.G. Hovannisian, Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918, UC Press, Berkeley CA, 1967, repr. 1984; In., The Republic of Armenia, vols. I-II, \textit{ibid.}, 1971, 1982).

\(^{16}\) «Myth», in an anthropological-structural sense.
a new post-deluvian mankind, has a deep-seated history in the
development of the Armenian self-image, especially in later
centuries when the Armenian people, suffering a multisecular
foreign dominion, strengthened and overstressed the psychological
mechanisms of self-defense17.

Actually the privation of the land, although it may often
have expressions of much sentiment and romance, in its forms,
is nonetheless pregnant with effects that touch upon the inti-
mate cords of the identity of a people. It constitutes the con-
crete dimension in which the Armenian self-consciousness lives,
feels, and thinks, and will do so – it seems – for a long while.
It would not be a ventured hypothesis, we think, if we said
that, to some extent and in changing, evolving forms, this will
constitute perhaps a permanent dimension of the Armenian
identity18.

In fact, the loss of the land meant in its source the abrupt,
catastrophic, submersion of a whole world19: a world of values,
traditions, monuments, loves, memories, of all those things that
constitute the spiritual and material space where the identity of
a people makes itself real and reflects itself. This loss has meant
then a continuous challenge for the survivors. Their actual
existence as Armenians can only make sense as a tension to

17 Hayastan, erkir drakhtawar (Armenia, land of Paradise) are the first
words, in old Armenian, of the very popular song of Hovhan Mirza
Vanandets'i (1772-1840). This paradisiac, regenerative vision of the soil of
Armenia seems first to reach its more articulated formulation by the Mekhit-
tarist hieromonk Mük'ayël Ch'amch'ean, the father of modern Armenian
historiography, and finds a very favourable humus in subsequent Romanti-
cism. Another Mekhitarist, Fr. Lewond Alishan, the leader of the Armenian
Romantics who exercised a strong influence on the whole generation of
intellectuals of the 19th century, was also one of the main representatives
of the same ideology.

On his theory of Armenian as the language of Paradise, see: P. MüLLER,
«Die Suche nach der 'lingua adoptivae' bei Lewont Ališan (1820-1901)», in
18 A similar hypothesis was forwarded also by H. Nolte from a different
viewpoint in connexion with his Trauerarbeit theory, in his article quoted (n.
4). Nolte speaks of «einer(r) Vergangenheit, die nicht vergeht» (p. 64).
19 An absolutely catastrophic vision of the Armenian Genocide was elab-
orated by G. Kortian in his paper to the Conference «Identität in der Frem-
de», organized at the «Evangelische Akademie», Mühlheim/Ruhr, in 1987 by
the «Stiftung für Armenische Studien» of Bochum: «Ist die Identität nach
der Katastrophe möglich?». The Proceedings of this Conference were pub-
lished in the above quoted volume: Identität in der Fremde (n. 4), in which,
however, Kortian's paper does not appear.
recover the lost world, of course not necessarily in a physical sense, although more than once social and political movements have strongly expressed such an orientation to the extent of terror, or what has been called «Armenian activism»\(^{20}\).

«Recovering» the lost Homeland

To «recover» a lost world, on a different ground than that of physical possession, means to make it live again, to re-collect its fragmented, dispersed, destroyed reality in a new synthesis, a new dimension, a new living image. Genocide is not only the pole of a radical Negativity, but as such it is at the same time the anti-pole, the anti-image, without which the Armenian survivors could hardly grasp their actual existence. There is an ineluctable connection between this existence and Genocide, not only in a general sense that death and victims and sacrifice are very often a source of new vitality – as certainly happened in the case both of the Jews and of the Armenians –, but also in a more specific sense in that the image of the lost homeland is an important, if not basic element for an Armenian self-consciousness.

Again must we note that, if these considerations have an immediate field of application mainly among the Armenians of the diaspora, they are nonetheless true also for the Armenians in the remnant homeland of present-day Armenia.

First, for the more evident reason already mentioned (see n. 15) that at least, half of the population of the newly created Republic of Armenia, in 1918, was made up of survivors of the Genocide.

We must now make more explicit a second deeper reason which was already implied by what we have been saying above. We spoke of the longing of the survivors and of their descen-

dants. But an equally significant and important feature also calls our attention: the sentiment spread among the population of the Republic of Armenia, both indigenous and by descendants of the survivors, of a common loss, of a loss affecting the nation as a whole, throughout the territory of Western or Turkish Armenia where the Genocide was perpetrated and from where the Armenian people were forever banished. What we said about the literary, artistic, and musical expressions of this sentiment has a general value, irrespective of the origins of the writer, the artist, or the composer, whether indigenous or a descendant of the Genocide survivors.

This sense of a common, national loss with regard to the lost Land is in direct connection with the highly developed self-awareness of national identity of the Armenians which we have already alluded to. It shows, at the same time, that the memory of the Genocide is felt and lived by the Armenians as a part of their national self-consciousness in relation to a basically common experience and attitudes.

This community, however, does not at all mean uniformity or unanimism, even in the theoretical formulation and explanation of the deeper impact of the Genocide, of its consequences, of the place it occupies or should occupy in the life of the Armenians as a national community, or of the ways to better heal its still bleeding wounds.

The Italian philosopher Roberto Ardigò once pronounced a wise aphorism: «The fact itself is divine, its explanation is only human». We think what Armenians share profoundly is the reality itself of the Genocide, its common and overwhelming memory. Differences may concern both structural and superstructural issues. By «structural» we mean differences related to the perception itself of the fact in the life of the community: its intensity, its nuances, its major polarization on one or the other aspect of the fact. By «superstructural» we mean all that regards the explanation and interpretation of the fact to whatever degree and level of spontaneous or scientific reflection. Of course, this study itself is a superstructural approach.

The debate on Armenian identity as well as on the place and the function of the memory of the Genocide in relation to it has had new accents in these last years, especially following Armenia’s independence. As far as the Genocide is directly concerned, two main topics are being more acutely debated: a) the «centrality» or less of its memory in the national self-con-
A radical, dialectic negativity and a positive, polyvalent resolution

At this point the polyvalent dynamics proceeding from the antithesis between Genocide, as a community death, and life, as a survival process, come into play to avoid transforming the former’s radical negativity into an absolute one.

It is a radical negativity, since it signifies a catastrophe; it is not absolute, since it shows a prominent dialectic character, delivering a chain reaction of vital issues. We think that the dialectic schema, either in its Hegelian or Marxist, existentialist or other forms, independently from one’s philosophical world vision, may offer a very fitting hermeneutic key for the analysis of the privation-possession, adhesion-tension relationship in the Armenian collective imagery, consequent to its paradoxical condition between Genocide and survival, between Homeland and exile.

The position of these different moments will be interchangeable according to the perspectives out of which they function. Thus the loss of the homeland represents the moment of «thesis» and the possession, that of «antithesis» on the level of factual history, of what actually happened. This real, historical inversion of a people’s relationship to its homeland constitutes the very essence of the Armenian Tragedy. But on the ground of psychological and social dynamics sustaining survival, another inversion takes place – the «inversion of the inversion» we can call it – putting as the moment of «thesis» the imaginary regaining or reconstruction of the homeland, and as the moment of «antithesis» its present distance.

21 A research centre, called «Armenian Research Center in Humanities» (ARCH), founded by a depute at the Parliament, Ashot Oskanian, a former teacher of philosophy at the Yerevan State University, is leading special studies and meetings on similar subjects. It started the publication of a periodical (annual) called Ink’nut’ion (Identity). The first volume, appeared in 1995, collects contributions from Armenia and the diaspora. The second volume will contain the Proceedings of a Conference, held in Yerevan on April 17th through 19th, having as a general topic «The basic question of national identity and modernity», where the issue of the Genocide often came under discussion. This conference was followed by another, organized by the Government, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Genocide, and was inaugurated with a prologue by the President of the Republic.
This second grade or double inversion, which explains how vital dynamics may issue from a radical negativity, constitutes at the same time the great risk that the Armenian struggle for survival has to face at every moment: that of degenerating from the level of spirituality to the level of fiction, and of mistaking that fiction for reality.

In any case, the continuous effort of re-creating a new, spiritual reality instead of a lost physical one has something of epical at a point where epics rejoin tragedy. It seems to us that the notion of «epic tragedy» – assuming both notions in their technical sense – is the best way to qualify the struggle that the Armenian generations, heirs of the Genocide, have to maintain day by day, especially in diasporal situations, in order to survive as Armenians, which means to keep alive the heritage of the martyrs, to maintain faith in it.

But such a qualification opens a new chapter of inquiry: to elaborate at a deeper semantic and existential level the epic-tragic vision of the Armenian Genocide. Here let us only point out that the literary creation which has always been considered as the most expressive one of the Armenian soul is the Book of Lamentation of Saint Gregory of Narek. According to recent research, this Book, the Code par excellence of the Armenian people, belongs to the field of tragedy in the very sense of the word\(^{22}\). We can make a similar statement as to its epic character. Is it a pure coincidence that the tragedy of the Armenian soul was also her epos?

THE ARmenian CASE

Abstract
The aim of this article is not a general discussion of the notion of genocide as such. Neither is it to deal with the historicity of the Armenian genocide in particular. It reflects on the genocide in such a perspective as that of a philosophy of history, leaving from the concrete case of the Armenian genocide. A similar approach, if duly carried out with a rigorous methodology, will help to better understand how life may be still possible after death, and how Armenian collective identity has been perceived by the surviving community after the Catastrophe. The author stresses the importance of the lose of the Homeland, the «eradication», as a moment of radical negativity; nonetheless it is not absolute, since it shows a prominent dialectic character, delivering a chain reaction of vital issues.

Key Words