



“VWI invites the Institute of History at the University of Bern”

Thursday, 27 June 2019, 3.00 pm
1010 Vienna, Rabensteig 3, 3rd Floor

Devrim SEZER

TWO CONCEPTS OF GENOCIDE ARENDT, LEMKIN, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ARMENIANS



The memory of the destruction of the Armenians was suppressed and silenced in Turkey until almost the end of the twentieth century. Today, many scholars concur that one of the striking features of the Armenian genocide is its denial in the public memory of the perpetrator community. For the last two decades, this colossal amnesia has been scrutinised by an increasing number of scholars, writers, artists, civic initiatives, and the descendants of the victims from a variety of perspectives. And yet, notwithstanding this growing

acknowledgement, there exists a strong public and official resistance to the concept of genocide in Turkey, not least of all because it is regarded both as a legal term invented long after the event and as a synonym for the Holocaust of European Jewry.

This presentation, located at the crossroads of political theory and Holocaust and Genocide Studies, aims to stimulate further scholarly and public debate on the destruction of the Armenians by examining the origin and meaning of the concept of genocide in the writings of Hannah Arendt and Raphael Lemkin. It identifies two strikingly different conceptions of genocide in the thought of these two influential figures. Furthermore, it suggests that the insights gleaned from this comparative analysis can sharpen our understanding of the failure to come to terms with the Armenian genocide and help us to reconsider the dangers in utilising the Holocaust as a major standard by which to determine the applicability of the concept of genocide to different historical contexts. Finally, it aims to respond to the criticisms of the sceptics who draw attention either to misuses of the term of genocide in public debates or to its conceptual vagueness.

Commented by Christian GERLACH

Devrim Sezer is a Research Fellow at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) and Associate Professor of Political Thought at Izmir University of Economics. He has published articles in *History of Political Thought and History of European Ideas*, co-edited two books, contributed chapters to edited volumes, and co-translated Arendt's posthumously published *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (edited by Ronald Beiner, Chicago 1982) into Turkish (Istanbul 2019).

Christian Gerlach is Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Bern. His research focuses on National Socialism and the Second World War, mass violence in comparative perspective, and the history of agriculture, food, nutrition, hunger, and rural 'development'. His most recent publications include *Extrem gewalttätige Gesellschaften* (2011) and *Der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (2017).

Please register at anmeldung@vwi.ac.at by latest Wednesday, June 26, 12.00 am and bring your ID.

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