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# Cycles of Genocide, Stories of Denial: Atom Egoyan's *Ararat*

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*This article focuses on Atom Egoyan's Ararat and explores how, through a convoluted narrative structure, Egoyan grapples with denial of the Armenian Genocide and the consequences of those denials for present generations—both Turkish and Armenian—illuminated in the film as an extension of the genocide. Egoyan uses a film-within-a-film to move beyond a popular definition of genocide as mass killing alone and links the understanding of stories, truths, and perspectives in everyday life to the dehumanizing acts of genocide. Employing the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' ethical theory of the Other (the ethical) and philosophical understandings of ontology (dehumanization) to illuminate the genocide and its ongoing denial, this article contends that Egoyan's focus on the generations of genocide survivors points to the ethical responsibility to one another that underlies everyday lives and sits at the heart of what is absent in the acts of genocide.*

*Keywords: Armenian Genocide, Emmanuel Levinas, Atom Egoyan, film*

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Do you know what causes so much pain? It's not the people we lost, or the land. It's to know we could be so hated. Who are these people who could hate us so much? How can they still deny their hatred, and so hate us, hate us even more?<sup>1</sup>

Atom Egoyan's *Ararat* focuses on the genocide of the Armenians by the Young Turks in the early part of the twentieth century. The Ottoman Empire repeatedly persecuted the Christian Armenian minority population prior to the outbreak of World War I, but it was not until the disintegration of the empire, the increasing wave of nationalism, and subsequent threats from Russia that the genocide of the Armenians began in 1915.<sup>2</sup> Egoyan's film can be regarded as a commentary on the polemics of representing this traumatic history, which in some communities—in particular, present-day Turkey—is misunderstood, denied, and often misrepresented as a civil war. This article focuses on the difficulties of representing a genocide that is cloaked in denial and, through a framework of Emmanuel Levinas' theory of the ethical, on how the repercussions of the events inform the narratives of *Ararat*.

Egoyan—a Canadian of Armenian descent—develops a film-within-a-film to illustrate the issues surrounding the representation of the genocide. At its core, the film is about the production and filming of an epic feature film on the Armenian Genocide, directed by Edward Saroyan (Charles Aznavour) and also titled *Ararat*. (For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the film-within-the-film as “Saroyan's film”; the title *Ararat* will refer to Egoyan's film.) *Ararat* is a self-conscious attempt to explain the difficulties arising in art's ability—and inability—to represent complexities resulting from a denied genocide. The stories that arise from this genocide inform the nucleus of Egoyan's circuitous narratives.

*Ararat* focuses on the way in which the characters reiterate and understand stories: stories about themselves, others, and the Armenian Genocide. For some, the Armenian Genocide is just a story, prompting one reviewer of the film to remark that “we are left emotionally chilled because Egoyan has chosen to tell a tale 87 years after the event.”<sup>3</sup> However, a serious examination of the film highlights the irony in such a comment: *Ararat* demonstrates that the history is not located only in the past and that the idea of an event’s occupying an enclosed temporal sphere is nonsensical. Thus, the stories people tell and how they listen and respond to the interlocutor are, for Egoyan, connected to the understanding of the Armenian Genocide and its denial today.

The central diacritical question about the aftermath of the Armenian genocide asks, What happens when subsequent generations deny the crime? While the Turkish government today denies the occurrence of the genocide,<sup>4</sup> Egoyan weaves repudiation into the stories and lives of the characters. As there are no codes in place for the Turkish people to remember these events as genocide, the strained relationships in *Ararat* silence the diasporic communities as they struggle to articulate their own testimony and their refusal of Others’ testimony.

The subject of denial corresponds to Levinas’ philosophy of the Other and his difficulties with ontology, whereby I am too obsessed with my own Being to be concerned with yours.<sup>5</sup> For Levinas, the core of his philosophy of the ethical lies in the concept of the “Other” who commands my highest respect. It is the concept of the lower-case “other”—at once alien, yet an extension of me and, thus, ontological—that Levinas detects in Western philosophy. This “‘egoism’ of ontology”<sup>6</sup> links directly to the concepts of genocide and denial portrayed in Egoyan’s film. Indeed, *Ararat* questions an undercurrent of self-obsession whereby the ability to deny someone’s history informs not only the genocide but also the characters’ interwoven lives. Closely connected to the ethical responsibility to the Other, denial of the genocide links with the Other’s right to be Other, because it refuses an ethical discourse in the encounter with the Other. In addition, the Levinasian understanding of the ethical exposes the devastating characteristics of genocide and of denial.

Interestingly, Egoyan comments that it is a “misleading thing to think that this is a film [only] about the genocide,”<sup>7</sup> presumably because the film relegates the genocide to individual memories and does not engage in a pictorial, historical analysis of mass murder—but also because Egoyan is more interested in the aftermath of the genocide.<sup>8</sup> *Ararat* generates bold statements on the values and difficulties of representation, and, despite Egoyan’s remarks, is one of the few films about Raphael Lemkin’s formulated term to mention the word “genocide.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, in an act of self-consciousness, *Ararat* does not shy away from its purpose: to connect implicitly and explicitly with all the violations arising out of article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG).<sup>10</sup> As I demonstrate below, *Ararat* is preoccupied with the consequences of living with the denial of an unfathomable event. In this respect, the film is deeper than the perceived view of genocide as mass murder alone.

The intricate structure of the film impinges on the perception of genocide and the way Egoyan perceives the legacy and consequences of the genocide on his characters. Through *Ararat*’s convoluted narrative structure, Egoyan portrays the genocide beyond a quantitative analysis of numbers killed, and thus effectively portrays what genocide *is* and what differentiates it from other human-rights crimes. Article 2 of the CPPCG identifies genocide as acts of gradations, specifying physical genocide (art. 2(a), 2(b), 2(c)), psychological genocide (art. 2(b)), biological genocide (art. 2(d), 2(e)) and implying cultural genocide (art. 2(e)). Physical genocide involves the intent to induce bodily harm

to the group or kill members of the group; according to the International Criminal Court, it may consist of torture or rape,<sup>11</sup> “deliberate deprivation of resources indispensable for survival . . . or systematic expulsion from homes.”<sup>12</sup> The mental and emotional harm inflicted on members of the group, including trauma from rape and torture, constitutes psychological genocide and may include “inhuman or degrading treatment”<sup>13</sup> and “detention [or] psychological oppression.”<sup>14</sup> The destruction of the group resulting from sterilization and rape is identified as biological destruction, and cultural genocide may be defined as the prospective loss of heritage and community. *All* these aspects point to the dehumanization of the Other as a condition of genocide by denigrating, destroying, or withholding the victims’ right to live as a group, and all these features are portrayed in *Ararat* as genocidal.

As the statement by Saroyan that forms the epigraph to this article suggests, *Ararat* captures the ongoing pain of the consequences of a denied genocide for subsequent generations. Using Saroyan’s film to depict genocide as the intended annihilation of a group allows Egoyan to deconstruct an understanding of genocide as mass murder, exploring questions—often unanswered—about the devastating effects of denial and the ethical proximity of the Other, depicted as a continuation of the genocide, from one individual to the next.

## Synopsis

*Ararat*’s complex narrative needs clarification. The film revolves around Raffi (David Alpay), a young man of Armenian descent who is coming to terms with his history. His mother, Ani (Arsinée Khanjian), is an art historian who has written a book on the artist Arshile Gorky (Gorky is the pseudonym for Vostanig Adoian, played in the film by Simon Abkarian), a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. Raffi’s father, a “freedom fighter” (sometimes referred to as a “terrorist”), was shot while trying to assassinate a Turkish diplomat, while Ani’s second husband died in mysterious circumstances. Ani’s stepdaughter, Celia (Marie-Josée Croze), who has a sexual relationship with Raffi, heckles Ani publicly, whenever she can, to find out the “truth” of her father’s death. The deaths of both fathers/husbands cause numerous tensions among Ani, Raffi, and Celia.

During one of her lectures on Gorky, Ani is visited by Saroyan, a world-renowned filmmaker who is directing a film about the Armenian Genocide, based on the journal of Clarence Ussher, an American missionary resident in Van in 1915.<sup>15</sup> Saroyan and his scriptwriter, Rouben (Eric Bogosian), want to incorporate Gorky as the protagonist in the film and ask Ani to become their art history consultant. Raffi, too, becomes part of the film crew.

Saroyan casts the half-Turkish Ali (Elias Koteas) in the role of Jevdet Bey, the governor of Van and one of the instigators of the genocide there. Ali lives an uncomfortable existence with his lover, Phillip (Brent Carver), a security guard at the art gallery where the Gorky painting *The Artist and His Mother* hangs. Phillip has a son, Tony (Max Morrow), and a homophobic father, David (Christopher Plummer), a customs inspector on the eve of retirement.

We see Saroyan’s film predominantly in flashback as Raffi, returning from a trip to Turkey to film the ruins that form part of his traumatic heritage, is stopped by David at customs. David suspects that Raffi’s unopened cans of film contain something more sinister and interrogates him as Raffi attempts to explain the 1915 genocide committed in the Armenian provinces of Ottoman Turkey, frequently dubbed, “the forgotten genocide.”<sup>16</sup> Raffi is eventually released from customs and reunited with his mother, Ani.

## Structures, Documents, and Stories

In many ways, *Ararat* is an overtly dichotomous film, both understandable and unfathomable, ethical and uncommitted, self-assured and uncertain. The intricacies of the film and the convoluted structures entwined in the sequences create serpentine narratives that weave in and out of periods and locations, making it unclear whether particular sequences belong to Saroyan's film or to *Ararat*. The circuitous network of plots and themes gives *Ararat* its postmodern approach, deconstructing the historiography and transmission of the Armenian Genocide by locating it fluidly both inside and outside its historical boundaries.

Egoyan deliberately adopts a ruptured narrative to reveal the protagonists' identities as fragmented, framed by the complications of relationships, past and present. *Ararat* ponders the issues associated with people who deny their history (as does the Turkish-descended Ali) and who are obsessed enough to nurture their history at the expense of their present (e.g., the young Armenian-descended Raffi). Ani struggles with her obsession with someone else's history (the real-life Armenian painter, and genocide victim, Arshile Gorky) while denying the history of Others. Moreover, Celia, Ani's stepdaughter, is independently preoccupied with her own personal histories at the expense of Others.

*Ararat's* complex narrative structure, which serves to illustrate the tensions between lives and histories, has confounded some critics and left many reviewers confused about the details of the film.<sup>17</sup> Often there are expectations, derived from classical literary and filmic narratives, that a historical film or one engaging with deep trauma should offer a linear, chained cause-and-effect relationship. But Egoyan is suspicious of documents and artifacts that *claim* certainty, because, for him, there is no single "truth" that can illuminate the complexity not only of the genocide but also of the need to understand, comprehend, and express calamitous, denied events.

Integrated into the structure of Saroyan's film is the issue of artistic license and the meaning attached to artifacts, as revealed in a sequence on the film set. When Ani visits the set of Ussher's house in Van, Saroyan follows her through the living area to the balcony, telling her that the set and the props faithfully mimic his mother's description of life in the Armenian provinces prior to 1915: the replication, for Saroyan, is an homage to his mother, a victim of the genocide. The camera follows Ani outside to the balcony, passing the exterior black façade, indicating a shift in balance and perspective with respect to authenticity and verisimilitude. Once outside, Ani questions Saroyan's decision to include the backdrop painting of Mount Ararat, because she cannot reconcile empirical truths with artistic license: the mountain would not be visible from the city of Van. Filmed in hues of murky yellow (the colors resemble the shade of a faded newspaper), this sequence evokes the physical remnants of the genocide: achromatic sepia photographs. As emphasized throughout the film, Saroyan places Mount Ararat on the set of his film because it represents a particular cultural link to Armenians in diaspora.<sup>18</sup> Because the set contradicts Ani's depiction of her historical reality, poetic license amounts, for her, to a distortion of "authenticity."

While documentary evidence is crucial to Saroyan's film (as mentioned above, his film dramatically documents the memoirs of Clarence Ussher),<sup>19</sup> other characters dismiss artifacts as erroneous. For instance, Raffi replays video documentary evidence of his trip to the Armenian ancestral land to David, the customs officer; avoiding Raffi's gaze, David remarks that there is "no way of confirming that a single word you've told me tonight is true." As far as David is concerned, the "documentary evidence" is

worthless, but for Raffi, the same footage contextualizes the genocide, even though documents often obscure meaning through necessary selectivity. After David's words, the film cuts to Raffi, his gaze fixed on the interrogator while Mount Ararat appears on the video screen of his camcorder. Raffi announces determinedly, "Everything I've told you tonight is exactly what happened." This sequence demonstrates the difficulty of art to represent, and artifacts to document—that is, art's power to capture *an essence* of intricate emotional and ethical notions *and* its failure to be comprehensive and exhaustive—questioned by both Egoyan and his critics.<sup>20</sup>

Egoyan, it appears, firmly resists imposing any universal values on the film.<sup>21</sup> People are, quite simply, complex. In *Ararat*, as in our daily lives, motivations are unexplained, and thus disappointment will befall those restless for formula and resolution. As one critical reviewer comments, "questions [of unfinished relationships, for example] are not resolved or even satisfactorily formulated."<sup>22</sup> However, to create a formula whereby all loose ends can be tied together is to ignore the ongoing traumatic effects of genocide over the generations. Thus, *Ararat's* unresolved narratives allow the legacy of the trauma to continue.

A crucial sequence (discussed below in more detail) helps to explain *Ararat's* fluid narratives. The painter Gorky—filmed in soft light and ethereal tones—erases the hands of his mother on his famous painting *The Artist and His Mother*.<sup>23</sup> For Celia, the hands are unfinished, symbolizing the imperative issues in her life, which remain unresolved. However, Ani's historical understanding of the genocide is limited to Gorky's story—for her, the painting is finished—and thus she is certain the past is complete, a past that is spoken monotonically. She discontinues negotiations with her own and others' histories.

Closure, it seems, is paradigmatic of a "truth" that does not always exist in non-linear narratives. In his critique of the freedom exerted upon the ontological Being, Levinas remarks, somewhat acerbically, that a "miracle of modern Western freedom unhindered by any memory or remorse... [opens] onto a 'glittering future' where everything can be rectified,"<sup>24</sup> commenting on the ability of Being to exercise a freedom of the self over Others. This invites abandonment or denial of the past by choosing the primacy of the self over the (traumatic) lives of Others. By commenting on the incompleteness of histories—especially a genocide that is denied—Egoyan, it seems, inverts this ontological "gift" of glittering futures. Framed around the narrative of an allegorical retelling of the genocide, *Ararat* illuminates the critical notions of respecting the Other's trauma and honoring the past.

Crucial to *Ararat's* self-conscious narrative is the intertwining of stories told between the characters. *Ararat* is a series of vignettes, episodes, and glimpses of memory that seem to constitute a cycle of stories. Indeed, in many ways, the characters do not interact; rather, they tell stories to each other, and these stories are crucial to understanding *Ararat* as a film about genocide told in a Levinasian ethical framework. For some of the characters—namely David and Ani—the passage from telling a story to *listening to the Other* forms the basis of their journey from self-obsession to facing. As Colin Davis explains,

the Other makes me realize that I share the world, that it is not my unique possession, and I do not like this realization. My power and freedom are put into question. Such a situation is ethical because a lot depends upon how I respond.<sup>25</sup>

*Ararat* firmly connects the questioning of the self's freedom and power to the genocide: the perpetrators and deniers never accomplish "this realization," believing others to be their "unique possession." The journey from ontological self-obsession (telling stories)

to upright exposure<sup>26</sup> (listening to stories) is elucidated in the narratives passed from one character to the next in present-day Toronto.

Thematically, stories and their meanings resonate strongly with those who tell and those who listen. In two separate sequences, Saroyan recounts to David, the customs agent, and Martin, his lead actor, the significance of the pomegranate; in her lecture on Gorky, Ani frames the artist's life around a story; Raffi describes the Armenian Genocide to David, and Saroyan is producing a story that is the product of Gorky's life. All these stories—including that of Saroyan, whose mother ate a pomegranate seed a day during the deportations of the Armenians—relate to the genocide. The characters formulate, rather than fabricate, stories in order to make sense of the genocide. Stories bind cultural and familial areas, connecting us to the Other, if the subject chooses to respond to the saying (listening) rather than to the said (the signification).<sup>27</sup> As Ani tells Rouben after Celia slashes the Gorky painting, art is “a sacred code.” For Ani, art is a link to the genocide, a denied event that is outside the saying, located in speechlessness, symbols, and incognizance.

The significance of a story's ethical attachment to an interlocutor and a receiver emerges when Raffi reads an account of the genocide to David. While being interrogated at customs for drug smuggling, Raffi is obliged to present David with the footage he shot in Ani, the ancient capital of the Armenian kingdom, now in Turkey. The moment is terrifying for Raffi: he grapples to find meaning in and evidence of the genocide, which leaves him in an intensely personal and private space while exposed to the interrogator, David. Raffi is shot in close-up, revealing only his face or his hands, a timid being, dominated by the physical authority and official position of the customs officer. In contrast, David is shot austere, in medium close-ups, and his phlegmatic presence contrasts to that of the deferential Raffi. The camera centers on the grainy, focused footage of Armenian ruins from Raffi's camcorder, then pans left, racking focus, to an extreme close-up of Raffi's face: the images on the camcorder are now blurred. Confounded, Raffi listens to his own voiceover: “When I see these places, I realize how much we've lost. Not just the land, and the lives, but the loss of any way to remember it—there is *nothing* here to prove that anything [i.e., the genocide] ever happened.” The filmic stylistic techniques employed, coupled with Raffi's voiceover, emphasize the erasure and denial of the genocide, resulting in a “blurred” perspective of the events. With Raffi's voiceover lingering, Egoyan then splices in Saroyan's wide-angled depiction of the deportation marches of Armenians from their homeland, demonstrating the textured layers of stories and denied trauma. Amid the perfervid musical score, now characteristic of Saroyan's film, the camera remains still as the young Gorky and his mother walk toward the camera. The sequence then cuts to a low-angle shot from Gorky's point of view—the glaring daylight hiding nothing—as he witnesses from a distance the brutality of the perpetrators toward the deportees. The sequence cuts to Gorky in his studio around 1934, tinged with mellowing, sorrel tones and delicate light, while the screams from the previous sequence continue, suggesting Gorky's remembrance of these events. As Jonathan Romney observes, these sequences help visualize the “transmission of testimony” and memory.<sup>28</sup> By entwining these sequences together, the film also raises questions about the possession of stories.

Indeed, ownership of stories is vital. For example, Celia's “story” about her father's death changes (she is adamant in different sequences that he committed suicide, was pushed off a cliff, or fell), leaving her with no ownership of this story. Murray Whyte

argues that because “Ani was the only one there [when Celia’s father died] . . . the story belongs to her alone.”<sup>29</sup> However, Ani does not own the story because she was the only witness; rather, it is hers alone because she is unwilling to accept Celia’s trauma or expression of pain and thus is reluctant to impart the story. Implicitly, *Ararat* equates this defacing of the Other with the denial of the genocide and the means to express the genocide.

Egoyan uses numerous methods to depict the convoluted motif of stories and retelling of truths. Jonathan Markovitz contends that “Egoyan presents decisions about how to represent history as highly calculated and far from natural or automatic”;<sup>30</sup> however, it is evident that the director is also deeply concerned with the dilemma associated with representation. For instance, in contrast to Raffi’s torment about the legacy of the Armenian people, Saroyan confidently asserts the ease of representing the genocide. Unlike *Ararat*, Saroyan’s film is punctuated with sweeping orchestral music, wide-angled panoramic shots, and sequences that are often over-lit. However, there is a curious incongruity between Saroyan’s film and the “story” he wishes to tell. As Whyte points out, Saroyan is “bristling with his own sense of moral superiority . . . [with the] ownership of the untold history as his to tell.”<sup>31</sup> But he tries to have it both ways: on the one hand, he is adamant that this is his mother’s story, while on the other hand he proposes to tell the objective “truth” of the genocide. Nevertheless, as Egoyan admits, “There are many stories in the film that are being borne by tellers who are unreliable . . . but that doesn’t diminish the need to tell it.”<sup>32</sup> Stories infiltrate both *Ararat* and Saroyan’s film as the genocide is lost in hermeneutic circles. As soon as a character recounts a story, the ownership of that story is challenged. The same applies to the characters’ understanding of the genocide, vindicates and clarifies *Ararat*’s non-chronological structure, and marries with the ethical responsibility of listening to stories (that is, formulating ways of understanding).

Twice in the film, characters accuse loved ones of “telling stories,” reducing the Other’s alterity (the Other’s Otherness) to a patronizing anecdote. First, Ani wanders into Raffi’s bedroom as morning light filters through the sequence. When Raffi finally wakes up, Ani accuses him of storytelling. After Raffi explains that he is in love with Celia, Ani replies, in Armenian,<sup>33</sup> “That’s a new twist to the story.” Hurt, Raffi pleads, “Why do you need to call it a story?” During their conversations, Egoyan uses a shot-reverse-shot technique, never allowing either character to infiltrate the other’s space. Later, again in bed, Raffi accuses Celia of fabrication after she tells him that her father committed suicide. Surprised, and mimicking the haughtiness of his mother in the previous accusation, Raffi remarks, “Oh, that’s new. I thought the story was my mum pushed him off a cliff.” Like Raffi earlier, the wounded Celia wonders why Raffi is turning a meaningful event in her life into a tale. By reducing these events in their lives to a “story,” the accuser disparages the Other with the imperialism of the self, repudiating the storyteller’s Otherness.<sup>34</sup> Egoyan says, “the . . . idea of the film . . . is that history is not just about telling a story. Someone has to receive it, someone has to listen, someone has to be curious and investigate.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, a story is “just a story” unless someone is willing to listen and—ethically speaking—receive. He continues,

What happens to stories that don’t get told? . . . What happens when people live with these things? It’s not just a question of the Armenian genocide. Those stories don’t go away. That’s the central emotional thrust of this film: what happens when things are left unsaid [and unheard]?<sup>36</sup>

The unsaid and the unheard are most evident in sequences that end with Ani speechless, silenced, with nothing to say. Egoyan lingers on these images of Ani as her struggle to Be<sup>37</sup> affects the exposure of the Other through speech and facing.<sup>38</sup>

*Ararat* implicitly asks whether it is ethically legitimate *not* to question our reasons for failing to listen to the Other. In other words, Why do people tell stories? The questioning is not only a psychological exercise but an ethical one, for, as Egoyan observes,

History is not only the responsibility of the person who speaks the truth. It needs someone to listen. *When* that person listens, *how* they listen, *why* they listen are all essential components of the communication of experience.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, in order to maintain an ethical rather than a literal “truth,” *Ararat* questions reliance on historical artifacts to expose the denied genocide.

### **The Struggle to be Ethical: Denying the Other, Confronting the Other**

Denial of the Armenian Genocide creates persuasive narratives rooted in what Peter Balakian correctly identifies as “part of the modern Turkish Republic’s founding mythology.”<sup>40</sup> This mythology, detailed meticulously by Balakian, reaches back to massacres of Armenians in the late nineteenth century<sup>41</sup> and pivots on the notion—often used by deniers—that genocide simply parallels mass murder.<sup>42</sup> Thus, quantitative arguments often appear in the denier’s thesis: as Balakian points out, there are “continued efforts to minimize the Armenian death toll,”<sup>43</sup> as if a lower number of deaths could constitute a rigorous argument that genocide did not occur. The quantitative argument, as David Alonzo-Maizlish confirms, “associates the moral magnitude of genocide with a presumption that the crime only exists when large numbers of people have been killed,”<sup>44</sup> and thus such arguments often overlook other key elements of the CPPCG. Although mass murder is *an* important element of the crime, genocide can be multidimensional, manifesting itself along a graduated scale with dehumanization of the group at one extreme and torture, biological absorption, rape, or killings at the other. The reticulate sequences within *Ararat* wrestle with notions of genocide beyond mass murder, replete with themes of denial and self-obsession.

*Ararat* is explicitly concerned with denial of the genocide and negation of the Other’s right to be Other. Arsinée Khanjian comments that the film centers around two families, “discovering and coming to terms with the truths and denials in their own lives . . . just like the Armenians have been trying to do for almost one hundred years.”<sup>45</sup> Despite this contrast between “truth” and denial, *Ararat* does not claim to explain or resolve these issues. However, what is unequivocal—a point touched upon above in the analysis of stories—is the characters’ (dis)engagement with others in a non-ethical manner. They deny the Other’s liberty to be Other, as reflected in the awkward conversations and the silences separating the characters, particularly those between Ani and the others. Ani remains baffled at the end of some sequences, as if questioning the foundations of her ontological self-preoccupation. Ani and Raffi, in particular, evolve from ontological self-obsession to the “relation with the [O]ther—the absolutely [O]ther—who has no frontier with the same,”<sup>46</sup> although that evolution is fraught.

Marrying the contemporary denial of genocide with the denial of the Other’s right to be Other, *Ararat* is replete with moments that challenge the characters’ ability to engage with the alterity of the Other, an other who threatens a self-centered perspective. Ani, for example, refuses to acknowledge Celia’s inquiry and pain over her

father's death. By denying Celia's perspective, Ani forms her identity around her "allergic reaction"<sup>47</sup> to the Other.

When Ani rushes onto Saroyan's set, after Martin's remarks about her self-importance and totalizing of the Other, she is struck by the epiphany of the Other: the self, says Levinas, "cannot find meaning within its being-in-the-world, with the ontology of sameness."<sup>48</sup> As a historian, Ani presupposes that she can, in Leonard Grob's words, "possess the world through knowing it";<sup>49</sup> *Ararat* demonstrates, however, that even people who are mired in their own history and who, as in Ani's case, dedicate their life to imagery cannot "see." By structuring the Gorky narrative as an extension of her pain and her self, Ani refuses to engage with the Other as Other, projecting the other as an extension of her Being. Her fixation on Gorky's traumatic experience of the genocide and on his mother, who died from starvation in her son's arms, means that she is unable to consolidate her relationship with her son.<sup>50</sup> When Ani finally allows herself a space in which, as Levinas puts it, the "ethical aspect [the alterity of the Other] dominates the passionate aspect [her work],"<sup>51</sup> the release of the self-obsession yields rather than sacrifices.

Egoyan himself finds it "very problematic" that somehow "moral authority . . . [means] you could silence someone else because you have experienced [pain]."<sup>52</sup> He refers specifically to the sequence in which Saroyan denies Ali, the Turkish actor, the opportunity to tell his story. This encounter occurs after Ali's substantial but caricatural portrayal, in Saroyan's film, of the notorious 1915 governor of Van, Jevdet Bey. Still in his Turkish uniform, Ali runs after the famous director, thanking him for the opportunity to play the part of Jevdet. The medium-close-up shots of Ali reveal the dismantled film set of Van, paralleling the deniers' distortion of the siege of the real city in 1915.<sup>53</sup> With his sword by his side, Ali suggests to Saroyan that the Armenian Genocide could be construed as a war. Saroyan is filmed in medium close-up, and the background is bleak but clear, as he refuses a dialogue with the actor because Ali's view negates his own. Thus, Saroyan rejects alterity. Through the intersection of sequences, *Ararat* draws parallels between Saroyan's refusal of Ali as Other, Ali's denial of the genocide, and Ani's unimpassioned denial of Celia's pain. When the characters act and interact, they behave unethically by silencing the Other's right to discourse and history. Ani's denial of Celia results in the slashing of Gorky's painting: Celia lacerates what she cannot understand.

Levinas argues that the only way to unburden the suffocating sense of self is to continue questioning relations with the Other. *Ararat* attempts to connect the treatment of the Other in interpersonal relationships with the dangers of behaving in an ontological framework. Thus, *Ararat's* mirroring of the denial of the genocide with David's refusal to accept his son's homosexuality invokes Levinas' claim that our ontological world does not give us cause to, "ethically speaking, be satisfied with it."<sup>54</sup> Haunted by Others, by Others' histories, and by the weighty reminder of the existence of the Armenian Genocide, the characters in *Ararat* are troubled and disturbed until the upright exposure releases the struggle to Be.

## **The Genocides in *Ararat***

The conventions for representing genocide are juxtaposed between Saroyan's film-within-a-film and the narratives in *Ararat*. In contrast to the dislocated narratives of *Ararat*, Saroyan's film derives from traditional conventions of historicity, documentary, and testimony and leads to an investigation into the medley of perspectives on genocide presented in *Ararat* and an analysis of the melding of the films.

Although Egoyan claims that *Ararat* is not a literal, historical interpretation of the genocide, historical reenactments are staged throughout Saroyan's film: group deportations; violent murders; naked women made to dance, then doused with kerosene and lit with a torch; and horrific rape, which in one sequence refers poignantly back to the mother-child image of Gorky and his mother. A woman lies on a wagon; the camera follows her arm to her hand, clasping the fingers of her child, hidden under the cart, as a Turk violently rapes her. These images of Christian Armenians intended for destruction (dehumanization, laceration, biological "purification," and possession) are clearly recognizable as genocide, as expressed in the CPPCG. In itself, Saroyan's film portrays the genocide effectively, but it does little to explore the impact of the trauma and the difficulties caused by denial.

Of course, the use of a film-within-a-film has specific advantages for Egoyan. He can unveil and "document" the genocide without claiming the film to be his (which, in the end, it is). More specifically, he uses this device to establish how the pain of the genocide affects future generations. Ayda Erbal maintains that *Ararat* "argues for a more complex but nuanced approach"<sup>55</sup> than Saroyan's film, a film Egoyan claims is not the film he would want to make. In an interview, he explains why:

I wrote this script of the movie-within-the-movie and then kind of filed it away, because I couldn't imagine making it, but felt a responsibility to make it . . . Then a few years ago our young son was asking about the genocide, and he asked the obvious question that a kid would ask . . . "Did the Turks say they were sorry?" I realized that if I told him no, the whole trauma would be transmitted to him . . . I want to talk about this moment that I'm having with my son right now, and I went back to the script.<sup>56</sup>

Erbal argues that Egoyan's use of the film-within-the-film sheds light on the "entertainment industry's abilities (or rather disabilities) of narrating that which is not narratable."<sup>57</sup> How a narrative narrates the unnarratable is unexplored in Erbal's review, quite possibly because of its logical conundrum, but the gist of her argument is important. Saroyan's film occupies a brief space in Egoyan's film not because the film-within-the-film is unnarratable (this would imply that it cannot be represented) but, rather, because Saroyan's film does not explore either the *ramifications* of the genocide or the dehumanizing effects on the Other present in the gradations of genocide and the denial that underpins the aftermath of the genocide. While Egoyan creates a philosophical inquiry, Saroyan produces a document. Saroyan's film is, in short, a depiction of the residue of his mother's traumatic memories and experiences. It is also an attempt to document the genocide.

Saroyan's documentation and its "unexplored ramifications of the genocide" in no way justify a refutation of the genocide. Indeed, in representing his mother's experience of the genocide Saroyan has no intention of creating a falsehood. Neither does his film suggest that the forced marches, killings, and rapes it portrays are fabricated. However, *Ararat* evidently raises issues about the difficulties of representing collective trauma and personal pain as objective fact.

By employing the film-within-the-film, Egoyan distances himself from the creation of a constructed history that, in the end, would be a deceitful narrative precisely because it would profess, rather arrogantly, to narrate an entire chronicle: a representation of memory. If, as one commentator has argued, through Saroyan's film "we are catching glimpses of the film [that is, *Ararat*] that this is supposed to be,"<sup>58</sup> then an essential point may be overlooked. Creating a historically accurate document is in some ways a fraudulent endeavor, because such a document professes to be axiomatic. It is only through expressions of the ethical that the characters in

*Ararat* understand emotionally, if not comprehend epistemologically, the fallout from genocide over generations.

Thus, in some ways, Saroyan's film is there not to enhance historical knowledge but, rather, to subvert and challenge insights into the genocide by revealing its consequences. *Ararat's* deconstruction of the images of killings and rapes in Saroyan's film<sup>59</sup> is evident at two critical points in the film. First, when Ani bursts onto Saroyan's film set—after Celia slashes Gorky's painting *The Artist and His Mother*—to inform Saroyan of her resignation as art history consultant, she disregards the production assistant's warning and interrupts a crucial shoot. The actor in Saroyan's film—Martin Harcourt, as Ussher—is appalled. The characters are almost silent, as if the trauma of the genocide has inflicted aphonia. The set lighting is subdued and delicate as Ussher attends a wounded child surrounded by destitute people. Coming out of character, Martin, outraged at Ani's self-importance, calls her to account, and, as he does so, the actors around him stay in character and can occasionally be heard weeping. The camera slowly zooms in during his monologue to Ani, which is worth quoting in full:

What is this god-damn-it? We're surrounded by Turks. We've run out of supplies. Most of us will die. The crowd needs a miracle. This child is bleeding to death. If I can save his life it may give us the spirit to continue. This is his brother. His pregnant sister was raped in front of his eyes before her stomach was slashed open to stab her unborn child. His father's eyes were gouged out of his head and stuffed into his mouth. His mother's breasts were ripped off. She bled to death. Who the fuck are you?

This is one of the most commanding sequences in the film, as it questions Ani and her totalizing of the self and her sanctimonious regard for the painting but not the film. It is also a unique way of representing the genocide, because it denotes the disintegration of the Other through the denial of the Other's alterity, the very nucleus of the intention to destroy a group.

Second, Martin's outburst is linked with the sequence in which the scriptwriter, Rouben, implores Martin to read Ussher's book, as everything he needs to play the part is contained in that text. Martin scoffs at this proposal—he has read the book, has read every known document, and even the Bible, yet he understands that, in the end, the compassionate response to the character Ussher will have to come from him alone. Thus, Martin's telling Ani how the experience affects him is more revealing of the horrors of genocide than the film's reproduction of the genocide through conventional images. Martin knows the history, but this does not automatically connect him to the genocide; it is only through his art—his acting—that he is in a position to understand it. Knowledge is important, but responding to the Other's pain and poverty<sup>60</sup> is fundamental, and as Martin exposes his "story" to Ani, the account of the genocide and its dehumanizing effect on the Other becomes disturbingly concrete.

Indeed, in *Ararat*, denial of the Other's right to be Other is closely connected to the genocide. As Bedros Afeyan points out, the affiliation between the present-day characters and the Armenian genocide is central, not contrary, to the film and its purpose:

The central issue becomes the inability of some people to let others be. It was intolerance of a different people after all that fuelled the Turkish desire to exterminate the Armenians. Tolerance, love, and fraternity, whether between family members or citizens, are the building blocks of harmony.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, *Ararat* explicitly toys with issues of hypocrisy and denial depicted in the genocide and in interpersonal relationships. Purposeful disregard forms an element of

dehumanization; in *Ararat* the genocide and present-day events are inextricably linked, because a core issue in the film is the *essence* of genocide: the corrosion and erosion of Others.

One commentator accuses Egoyan of an apparently shallow mirroring of David's denial of his son's homosexual relationship with current and past Turkish denial of the genocide.<sup>62</sup> Seen from an ethical perspective, however, this mirroring highlights the importance of considering the Other as Other and not as an extension of the self. Indeed, Levinas equates how we behave in war (or genocide) with the totalizing of the self:

The visage of [B]eing that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality which dominates Western philosophy. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individuals . . . is derived from the totality.<sup>63</sup>

The totality of the self and the totality of Being obfuscate the upright exposure of the Other, such that the other dominates a nebulous Other.

A deconstructed narrative may be confusing, but a constructed narrative seems to distance the spectator from intricate nuances of the formations and foundations of pain and the effects of genocide. Even though, as Taner Akçam argues, "the film explores the role of that history in selective memory and identity today,"<sup>64</sup> it deconstructs that memory as fragmented and often personal. Robert Solomon articulates well the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's understanding of the effect of history on our interpersonal relationships:

the unifying theme that will allow us to understand one another, and move beyond the Babel of competing voices is not in the realm of theory but rather of practice. We share a historical situation, a world, and by comparing and contrasting our various interpretations, in this historical context, we can achieve a "fusion of horizons" despite our differences.<sup>65</sup>

Unable to escape the terrible history of their ancestors, the characters in *Ararat* engage—often unknowingly—in a "fusion of horizons" with Others who share that history.

The staging of the film in the present indicates that genocide is not something that happened only in the past, in another country, far away, to other people, because treatment of the Other is at the core of genocide *and* of daily relationships. *Ararat* presents genocide not only in terms of the acts described in article 2 of the CPPCG but also as an aftermath. This is at least one way to make the genocide relevant today, regardless of who we are or where we are. For example, after Ani's outburst on the set of Saroyan's film, we return to David's interrogation of Raffi. The images of the remnants of Armenia on the camcorder are clear as Raffi reads a passage from the script of Saroyan's film. *Ararat* cuts to Saroyan's film as a German witness<sup>66</sup> reveals to Martin the horrors she has seen, describing the burning alive of Armenian women by the Turks, who command the naked women to "dance" before they are doused with kerosene and murdered. The sequence shifts from Raffi's voiceover and a high-angled shot of the horror from the German woman's point of view to Saroyan and Raffi's reaction to the take. The narrative finally settles on the young Gorky, shielded behind a rock and witnessing the brutal and unmerciful scene, the shot lit with the flames from the charring bodies. "How," the German woman asks, "shall I dig out these eyes of mine?"<sup>67</sup> Not only do her eyes witness the horror of the genocide, she also carries the responsibility of relaying the sight before her, thus extending the trauma, a fear earlier expressed by Egoyan with respect to his son. Through the blurring of present

and past, perspectives and stories, places and interpretations, *Ararat* locates the omnipresence of the genocide both in and out of its historicity. The killings of the Armenians in 1915, presented in Saroyan's film as reenactments, come across in *Ararat* as cerebral images and moments. Egoyan announces,

Maybe the closest we come to the sense of the desecration of genocide is not [in] the epic scenes in the film-within-a-film, but in the moment when Gorky erases his mother's hands. That, to me, is the purest expression of what those feelings would be.<sup>68</sup>

In a most poignant moment in the film, briefly mentioned earlier, Gorky dances to Armenian music in his studio in New York, clapping paintbrushes against his paint palette in time to the melody. Later, the sequence returns, with the relentless sound of the needle scratching the gramophone record's groove, as Gorky kneels by the painting and covers his hands in white paint, gently touching his mother's painted hands. Finally, with trembling fingers, Gorky erases his mother's hands, as if committing a heinous crime. He can barely look up into his mother's eyes—as if he fears her very Otherness. It is the very interconnection of apparently unrelated sequences that connects profoundly to the genocide.

The combination of elements in Saroyan's film and in *Ararat* produce the exploration of genocide as gradations, percolating in the Turkish and Armenian nations through the generations. Rather than attempting to present the past evidentially, *Ararat* explores questions of historicity, truth making, thoughts of denial (and, in particular, the Turkish government's denial), prejudice, discrimination, ethics, and injustice in our present lives. The film ultimately finds all pain to be of equivalent value. This is evident not in any one particular sequence but in the very structure of the film, that is, the *mise-en-scène* and the semblance of a sequence to connect and refer to another sequence of seemingly unrelated events.<sup>69</sup> For instance, after Raffi listens to his own voiceover on the camcorder while being interrogated by David as he watches images of Turkey, the sequence seamlessly cuts to Saroyan's film, where hundreds of people are slowly walking across the same land filmed by Raffi. Gorky and his mother are two of the many broken people kicked and beaten by the Turks mounted on horseback. This sequence fades to 1935, as Gorky sits by the window of his New York studio remembering these very events. Through the interweaving of time, space, and place, *Ararat* explores the present-day denial of intentional destruction through metaphors of contradiction and explorations of the Armenian Genocide (and its attested occurrence) and filmic metonymy. Subtly, yet convincingly, the intent to destroy and to continue to destroy (and deny) manifests itself in Egoyan's art *and* in his use of the film-within-the-film.

Mimicking the processes of genocide, as expressed in article 2(a) of the CPPCG, *Ararat* explores both the killing of members of the group (via Saroyan's film) and, through its intricate narrative structure, the resulting fallout and disintegrating effects on the victims and their families over generations. Both *Ararat* and Saroyan's film force the viewer to confront the immediacy of the genocide, and, despite its historical distance, the ethical obligation to recreate, represent, listen, and see cannot be ignored. The interception of sequences that link and bind the present and past gives Egoyan the means to create a deliberately ethical film.

The aesthetic power of art, representation, and the idea of creativity to heal (or, indeed, to express notions of healing) is at the center of this reflective piece of work. The capacity of art and its ability to engage the artist in "working through" trauma are represented in the film not only through the character of Gorky but also through the filmmakers themselves, whether Saroyan or Egoyan.

## Conclusion

In *Ararat*, Egoyan attempts to present genocide as more than mass murder by challenging its understanding through the fragmentation of narratives, stories, and denial. *Ararat* presents many truths about the genocide while maintaining a grip on the dangers of revisionism by asking what the consequences are for subsequent generations when a traumatic and circumstantiated history is denied and silenced. As Roger W. Smith argues,

Denial, unchecked, turns politically imposed death into a “non-event”: in place of words of recognition, indignation and compassion, there is, with time, only silence.<sup>70</sup>

As the Other is defaced in the genocide, *Ararat* attempts to reveal that the genocide is devalued and decontextualized. In their denial of the genocide, as indicated by Saroyan’s statement quoted at the beginning of this article, the repudiators deface yet again. Moreover, by creating a fragmented narrative, Egoyan implicitly remarks on the disintegration of the memory of the genocide and the fractured historical location of Armenian provinces, historic sites that expanded, diminished, and disappeared prior to and during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. As Romney explains, Armenia “is at once a real place and a complex abstraction.”<sup>71</sup>

*Ararat*’s open-ended narrative structure marries well with the unlimited paradigms of the Armenian Genocide. Through the endless stories that the characters reiterate and believe, the viewer fathoms the gravity of acknowledging the historical connection to a traumatic background. Leaving traumas unrepresented opens the possibility of denial; when the Other is unheard it becomes, in the Levinasian sense, unethical.

Struggles with one’s histories are integral to the defacing of the Other, while denial, a topic infiltrating the remembering of the Armenian Genocide today, lies at the heart of *Ararat*. Attempted refutation of the Armenian Genocide by the present-day Turkish government—and by key political figures in the United States<sup>72</sup>—allows Egoyan to create a film overflowing with perspectives (memories/stories obfuscated through tangible pain and intangible recognition) of genocide. The devaluing of an Other results in the denial not only of crimes against groups of people but of the individual’s right to be Other.

*Ararat* takes us beyond a common understanding of genocide as mass murder by questioning the ethical nature of the past and the present in the appearance of the Other in front of us. Principally, Egoyan offers a complex narrative, presenting the denial of genocide as mirroring the *struggle* to remain ethical. The characters are disturbed and disturbing, trapped in a state of either anguish or denial. Levinas effectively describes this disturbing state:

I have described ethical responsibility as insomnia or wakefulness precisely because it is a perpetual duty of vigilance and effort which can never slumber. Ontology as a state of affairs can afford to sleep.<sup>73</sup>

*Ararat* is astonishingly restless, in a “perpetual [state] of [ethical] duty,” as the protagonists are invariably lulled out of their slumber of Being. This film gradually depicts the significance of love and community, cultural and familial values, and the devastation of the effects of the loss, in Raffi’s words, of “any way to remember” the genocide. The sequences depicting Gorky and his mother, their closeness and enduring love, which find Gorky in New York painting a portrait of his mother and himself based on a photograph taken prior to the genocide, is juxtaposed to the close but testing relationship between Ani and Raffi.

By contrast, Saroyan's film, while documenting undoubtedly crucial events, fails to confront the trauma of denial for future generations and thus neglects the imperative of fathoming the genocide after the event. While the memory of the genocide in Saroyan's film is fixed, *Ararat* attempts to challenge this fixation by exploring the fluidity and selectivity of memory. Although Egoyan intersects narratives that overlap in time and location, the sequences are linked through the themes of denial and disrespect. Ultimately, *Ararat* asks what it means to deny the alterity of the Other: indeed, why it is ethically illegitimate to exclude and denigrate the Other. Clearly, *Ararat* demonstrates that genocide is a matter of graduated effects, not a quibble over numbers. Recalling the mass murders is vital, but reiterating that the killings occurred because of dehumanization, because of a choice to ignore the upright exposure of the Other, is pivotal, as this reflects how one responds to the Other today, and, indeed, how one deals with the repercussions of a denied genocide.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

1. Edward Saroyan in Atom Egoyan, dir., *Ararat* (Toronto: Alliance Atlantis, 2002). The copy of the film cited here is a videotape, not a DVD with chapters; subsequent references to the video are therefore not footnoted, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition.
2. For a thorough overview see Rouben Paul Adalian, "The Armenian Genocide," in *Encyclopedia of Genocide: Volume I*, ed. Israel W. Charny, 61–104 (Oxford: ABC-Clio, 1999); Taner Akçam, "The Genocide of the Armenians and the Silence of the Turks," in *Studies in Comparative Genocide*, ed. Levon Chorbajian and George Shirinian, 125–46 (New York: St Martin's Press, 2002); Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act: The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Armenian Question and the Wartime Fate of the Armenians as Documented by the Officials of the Ottoman Empire's World War I Allies Germany and Austria-Hungary," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32 (2002): 55–85; Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, "The Study of Mass Murder and Genocide," in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, 3–28 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Richard G. Hovannisian, "Confronting the Armenian Genocide," in *Pioneers of Genocide Studies*, ed. Samuel Totten and Steven Leonard Jacobs, 27–46 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002); Dennis R. Papazian, "Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide," *History: Review of New Books* 28 (2000): 78; William L. Shulman and Armenian Library and Museum of America, *The Armenians: Shadows of a Forgotten Genocide: August-October 1999* (New York: Holocaust Resource Center and Archives, Queensborough Community College, City University of New York, 1999); Roger W. Smith, Eric Markusen, and Robert Jay Lifton, "Professional Ethics and the Denial of Armenian Genocide," *Journal of Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9 (1995): 1–22; Eric D. Weitz, "The Modernity of Genocides: War, Race, and Revolution in the Twentieth Century," in *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective*, ed. Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, 53–74 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
3. Ingrid Randoja, "Ararat Crumbles," *Eye Weekly*, 14 November 2002, [http://www.eye.net/eyes/issue/issue\\_11.14.02/film/ararat.html](http://www.eye.net/eyes/issue/issue_11.14.02/film/ararat.html) (accessed 28 September 2003). To date, most

- responses to the film have been not academic but online, indicating the film's acceptance in the popular realm.
4. See Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Signal Facts Surrounding the Armenian Genocide and the Turkish Denial Syndrome," *Journal of Genocide Research* 5 (2003): 269–79.
  5. For Levinas, there is a crucial difference between the "other" and the "Other." Here I use the upper-case "Other" to denote the one whom I regard ethically and the lower-case "other" for the one whom I regard as an extension of me. It is important to note that Levinas also capitalizes "Being," as the self should also be respected. Although the concept of "Being" deeply informs metaphysical and ontological philosophy, Levinas frequently uses the term to refer to the self, the same, or existence and as a counter to the Other. See translator's note in Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Dequesne University Press, 1969), 26.
  6. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 46.
  7. Quoted in Barrett Hooper, "Atom and Arsinee Talk Turkey," *National Post*, 15 November 2002, PM4.
  8. Egoyan writes that the film is concerned primarily with "why 'what happened' has been so systematically ignored, and what the effects of that ignorance have been on successive generations." Atom Egoyan, "In Other Words: Poetic Licence and the Incarnation of History," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 73 (2004): 886–905, 893.
  9. A growing number of films about Rwanda use the word "genocide," but prior to Egoyan's 2002 film the practice was uncommon.
  10. *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, 9 December 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277, [http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/p\\_genoci.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/p_genoci.htm) (accessed 20 May 2008). Clearly, genocide is more nuanced than mass murder. Article 2 of the CPPCG states, 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.
  11. International Criminal Court, "Elements of Crimes," *Official Journal of the International Criminal Court* (9 October 2002), [http://www.icc-cpi.int/about/Official\\_Journal.html](http://www.icc-cpi.int/about/Official_Journal.html) (accessed 16 October 2007), art. 6(b), n. 3.
  12. *Ibid.*, article 6(c), n. 4.
  13. *Ibid.*, art. 6(b), n. 3.
  14. *Ibid.*, art. 6(e), n. 5.
  15. Akçam follows previous works in arguing that the uprisings in Van served as a justification for the genocidal deportations, even though the decision to deport the Armenians was made prior to the Armenian resistance in Van. See Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 153 and 200–01.
  16. See Balakian, *Burning Tigris*, xvii; Smith et al., "Professional Ethics," 1–22.
  17. For instance, Keith Uhlich remarks that "Egoyan uses the Armenian Genocide of 1915, as remembered by the painter Arshile Gorky," when in fact Gorky's life is fictionalized for artistic purposes for the film-within-the-film. Keith Uhlich, "Ararat," *CultureDose.net*, 22 December 2002, <http://culturedose.net/review.php?rid=10004346> (accessed 23 September 2003). Another Web site claims that Raffi tells David, the customs officer, of Hitler's famous comment about the Armenian Genocide, when in fact he tells Ali. The same Web site also states that Raffi's father is Ani's second husband, when in fact he is her first. The Wolf, "Ararat," *iofilm*, 2002, [http://www.iofilm.co.uk/fm/a/ararat\\_2002.shtml](http://www.iofilm.co.uk/fm/a/ararat_2002.shtml) (accessed 28 September 2003). One reviewer writes that the film-within-the-film's director is Turkish; in fact, his motivation for making the film is the persecution of his Armenian mother. The incestuous relationships of Raffi/Celia/Ani obviously confuse this reviewer,

- who sees the actor Marie-Josée Croze as Raffi's mother when in fact she plays his stepsister. Sue, "Ararat," *The Film Judge*, 28 February 2003, <http://www.filmjudge.ca/a/ararat.htm> (accessed 28 September 2007). Anthony Lane argues that the director should have "versed [the viewers] in the facts . . . and Egoyan . . . should . . . have made an exemplary documentary on the subject of slaughter." Anthony Lane, "World's Apart," *The New Yorker* 78, 35 (2002): 104. Other critics object that "Egoyan's fondness for circuitous narratives . . . emerges as something of a cop out within the framework of an historical film." R. Porton and R. Skla, "Communiqués: The Toronto International Film Festival," *Cineaste* 28, 1 (2002): 28.
18. Mount Ararat metaphorically shapes the consciousness of the disparate and diasporic Armenian community, located, as it is today, in eastern Turkey.
  19. Dr. Clarence Ussher documented the genocide of the Armenians in his memoirs: Clarence D. Ussher with Grace H. Knapp, *An American Physician in Turkey: A Narrative of Adventures in Peace and War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917; reprint, London: Sterndale Classics, 2002).
  20. Ironically, Ingrid Randoja accuses Egoyan of using "the *artificial* world of moviemaking as a gateway" to the genocide, which assumes that a documentary film or a nonfiction book could resolve the issues surrounding uncertainty and that these are somehow more authentic media than fiction or film. Implicit in Randoja's comments is the notion that film ("movie"making) lives somehow outside of consciousness and is an interpretation or expression of life. Randoja, "Ararat Crumbles" (emphasis added).
  21. However, *Ararat* has been lauded for its universal values. For instance, Mahmood Ahmad praises the film for its elucidation of the "inherent weakness of human nature [which is] . . . both universal and timeless." See Mahmood Ahmad, "Ararat: Intense and Original," *The Diamondback Online*, 14 October 2003, <http://www.inform.umd.edu/News/Diamondback/archives/2002/10/14/diversions1.html> (accessed 22 December 2003).
  22. Peter Bradshaw, "Ararat," *Guardian Unlimited*, 18 April 2003, [http://film.guardian.co.uk/News\\_Story/Critic\\_Review/Guardian\\_review/0,4267,938753,00.html](http://film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_review/0,4267,938753,00.html) (accessed 23 September 2007).
  23. Cynthia Fuchs states that this sequence "makes clear that no single history, whether personal or collective, can be complete." Cynthia Fuchs, "Ararat: 27th Toronto International Film Festival," *Nitrate Online*, 12 September 2003, <http://www.nitrateonline.com/2003/rararate.html> (accessed 28 September 2003).
  24. Quoted in Seán Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 78.
  25. Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 48.
  26. Upright exposure is "the nudity and the mystery" of the Other. See Emmanuel Levinas, "Interview with Salomon Malka," in *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins, 93–104 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), 48.
  27. Colin Davis argues that Levinas' philosophy is "directed towards the significance [*sic*] of Saying rather than the signification of the Said." Davis, *Levinas*, 79.
  28. Jonathan Romney, *Atom Egoyan* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), 179.
  29. Murray Whyte, "Facing the Pain of a Past Long Hidden," *The New York Times*, 17 November 2002, 23.
  30. Jonathan Markovitz, "Ararat and Collective Memories of the Armenian Genocide," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 20 (2006): 235–55. 242.
  31. Whyte, "Facing the Pain," 23.
  32. Quoted in Maryann Bird, "Moving the Mountain: A Meditation on Memory and Denial, Atom Egoyan's *Ararat* Explores the Armenian Genocide of 1915," *Time International*, 28 April 2003, 92.
  33. The importance of speaking an ancient and private language at crucial moments between family members is not lost here, recalling the use of Yiddish during similar situations in Jewish culture.

34. Levinas often refers to the imperialism of the self: "It [self-obsession] strips the ego of its pride and the dominating imperialism characteristic of it." Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 110.
35. Quoted in Cynthia Fuchs, "Ararat—At the Mercy of Viewers—Interview with Atom Egoyan," *Nitrate Online*, 29 November 2002, <http://www.nitrateonline.com/2002/fararat.html> (accessed 28 September 2007).
36. Quoted in Whyte, "Facing the Pain," 23.
37. "To Be" is an act or moment of self-preoccupation. Levinas provocatively contests Western philosophy's dominant adherence to Being as first philosophy. Self-obsession, he writes, is the "first truth of ontology," a "truth" he finds contentious. See Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage: Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Lévinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 60.
38. The face and facing are deeply connected to Levinas' terminology of the ethical. The face, and not necessarily the empirical face, is the very Otherness of the Other.
39. Atom Egoyan, *Ararat: The Shooting Script* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2002), xii.
40. Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 375.
41. *Ibid.*, 373. See *ibid.*, 373–91, for a detailed history and commentary on the denial.
42. Dirk Moses rightly asserts that "genocide is *not* a synonym for mass murder." He also goes on to argue that Raphael Lemkin, who coined the word "genocide" and worked his entire life for the criminalization of the acts, "was not thinking of the Holocaust when he invented the concept." Indeed, Lemkin had the Armenian Genocide in mind, among other such episodes. Dirk Moses, "Opinion: Genocide in Australia?" in *Making Australian History: Perspectives on the Past Since 1788*, ed. Deborah Gare and David Ritter, 185–86 (South Melbourne, Vic.: Thomson, 2008), 185.
43. Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 379.
44. David Alonzo-Maizlish, "In Whole or in Part: Group Rights, the Intent Element of Genocide, and the 'Quantitative Criterion,'" *New York University Law Review* 77 (2002): 1369–403, 1384.
45. Khanjian makes this comment in "Khanjian on *Ararat*," Serendipity Point Films, <http://www.serendipitypoint.com/ararat/frameset.asp> (accessed 22 October 2007). Khanjian, a Canadian of Lebanese and Armenian descent, also plays the role of Ani in the film.
46. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 203.
47. "Allergic reaction" is Levinas' term for my unethical response to the Other, designating them "other."
48. Quoted in Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, 60.
49. Leonard Grob, "Emmanuel Levinas and the Primacy of Ethics in Post-Holocaust Philosophy," in *Ethics after the Holocaust: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses*, ed. John K. Roth, 1–14 (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1999), 1.
50. Gorky's mother died in 1919 in Yerevan. See Peter Balakian, "Arshile Gorky and the Armenian Genocide," *Art in America* 84 (1996): 58–67 and 108–9, 63.
51. Emmanuel Levinas, R. Fernet, and A. Gomez, "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," in *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins, 165–81 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 165.
52. Quoted in Whyte, "Facing the Pain," 23.
53. Saroyan's film centers around the Armenian uprising and rebellion in Van, a case study often distorted by deniers to verify Armenian aggression against Turks. In addition, it is argued that the events in Van sparked the genocidal deportations. See Akçam, *A Shameful Act*, 200–202; Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 197–210, especially 209–10.
54. Quoted in Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, 64.
55. Ayda Erbal, Review of *Ararat*," *American Historical Review* 108 (2003): 957–58, 958.
56. Quoted in Renfreu Neff, "Script Comments: *Ararat*. Interview with Atom Egoyan," *Creative Screenwriting*, 2003, 19.

57. Erbal, *Reviews of Ararat*, 957.
58. Stanley Kauffmann, "Remembrances," *The New Republic*, 16 December 2002, 26.
59. See Whyte, "Facing the Pain," 23.
60. Levinas uses the term "poverty" to explain the vulnerability of the Other: "The disclosing of a face is nudity, non-form, abandon of self, ageing, dying, more naked than nudity. It is poverty, skin with wrinkles, which are a trace of itself." Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 88.
61. Bedros Afeyan, "An Analysis of Atom Egoyan's Film 'Ararat,'" *Armenian News Network / Groong*, 11 December 2002, <http://groong.usc.edu/tcc/tcc-20021211.html> (accessed 11 October 2007).
62. Joanne Laurier, "A Terrible Story Badly Told," World Socialist Web Site, 16 December 2002, [http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/dec2002/arar-d16\\_prn.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/dec2002/arar-d16_prn.shtml) (accessed 26 September 2007).
63. Quoted in Grob, "Emmanuel Levinas and the Primacy of Ethics," 10.
64. Taner Akçam, "Constructing of Collective Identities in Armenian—Turkish Relations," *The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 6 (2003): 1–13, 10.
65. Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 80. Thanks to Richard Shapcott for pointing me in the direction of Gadamer's thesis on the effects of history.
66. The use of a German witness may have been a deliberate ploy by Egoyan. Germany was allied with Turkey in World War I, and, as Dadrian points out, witnessed and documented the atrocities of the genocide: "documents [from Turkey's enemies] may be attempted to be dismissed by the deniers as wartime enemy propaganda. By the same token, eyewitness accounts of Armenian survivors of the mass murder may be depreciated by them as products of victim bias or of victim embellishments. But what have the deniers to say about the amplitude of documents with which are replete the state archives of Imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary, the two principal and committed World War I allies of the Ottoman Turks?" Dadrian, "Signal Facts," 272; see Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 184, 258–59. See also the photographs of Armin T. Wegner, a second lieutenant in the German army, at Armenian National Institute, "Armenian Deportees: 1915–1916" (2007), [http://www.armenian-genocide.org/photo\\_wegner.html](http://www.armenian-genocide.org/photo_wegner.html) (accessed 5 May 2007).
67. The German woman is, in fact, reading a poem titled "The Dance" by the Armenian poet and intellectual Siamanto, who was murdered in Constantinople, along with hundreds of Armenian intellectuals, on 24 April 1915, the day that marks the beginning of the Armenian Genocide, at the hands of the Young Turks. See *Bloody News from My Friend: Poems by Siamanto*, trans. Peter Balakian and Nevart Yaghlian (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 15, 41–43.
68. Quoted in Stephen Applebaum, "Atom Egoyan: Ararat," *BBC Movies*, 21 March 2003, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2003/03/21/atom\\_egoyan\\_ararat\\_interview.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2003/03/21/atom_egoyan_ararat_interview.shtml) (accessed 19 October 2007).
69. Writing before the release of *Ararat*, Hamid Naficy identifies Egoyan's filmic style, which applies equally to the current discussion: "His films embody . . . the inscription of closed and claustrophobic spaces both in the films' mise-en-scène and in the filming; ethnically coded mise-en-scène, characters, music and iconography." Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exile and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 37.
70. Roger W. Smith, "The Armenian Genocide: Memory, Politics, and the Future," in *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, 1–20 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 8.
71. Romney, *Atom Egoyan*, 103. Over the centuries, Armenia has at various times been fractured and conquered by the Romans, the Iranians, the Byzantine Empire, the Rurikid dynasty, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. I am grateful to Ron Goodrich for pointing out this connection and to Peter Balakian for his comments. See Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*; Richard Hovannisian, ed., *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

72. In one instance, Alfred Mueller gives a detailed account of the withdrawal from the US House of Representatives of House Resolution 596, set to recognize the occurrence of the Armenian Genocide. The resolution was withdrawn by the Speaker of the House ten minutes before it was to be debated, as a result of pressure from “the Clinton White House and from the Turkish government.” Alfred G. Mueller II, “Affirming Denial through Preemptive Apologia: The Case of the Armenian Genocide Resolution,” *Western Journal of Communications* 68 (2004): 24–44, 24. See also Balakian, *The Burning Tigris*, 388–89. The non-recognition of the genocide in the American political system further exacerbates the pain of denial for Armenians in diaspora. The issue will not go away: recently the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Congress voted for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. See Steven Lee Myers and Carl Hulse, “Vote by House Panel Raises Furor on Armenian Genocide,” *The New York Times*, 11 October 2007, A1(L).
73. Quoted in Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, 66.