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Genocide

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The problem of genocide

The one thing one can say with certainty about the term genocide is that it has come into ubiquitous and general usage in a matter of decades. By contrast, despite the rising levels of environmental destruction and species' extinction, 'ecocide' has had only limited purchase. And, again, despite the ongoing possibility of humankind's universal extermination by way of nuclear Armageddon, the concept of 'omnicide' is even more remote from popular consciousness.

Not so genocide. While scholars of the subject continue to vigorously dispute with one another as to how it should be defined, not just a Western but an increasingly global public seem to know what it signifies, however rough and ready their conception. Is this because the mass murder of ethnic or national communities, perhaps over and above recognised warfare, is something to which they can particularly relate as a significant aspect of recent or contemporary history? Or might it involve an acknowledgement of the extirpation of whole interrelated tribes or peoples – implied in the *genos* in genocide – far back into the civilisational record? Then, again, has genocide become simply a short-hand for proclaiming a horror at some profanation or abuse of the things we hold most dear?

The place to turn for clarification, in the first instance, might be to the individual who coined the term. Raphael Lemkin grew to adulthood in a reconstituted state of Poland. A leading practitioner of international law, in 1933 Lemkin expounded in a League of Nations legal forum on the need for 'Barbarity' and 'Vandalism' to be incorporated as crimes *delicta juris gentium* – that is, offences against the law of nations, and to which universal jurisdiction would apply. We might note the wider context of Lemkin's proposition and, perhaps, the reason for its initial failure. Lemkin would have been acutely

aware of not just the marginalisation but the pronounced vulnerability of what had come to be called 'minority' groups within the new self-proclaimed nation states of 'the New Europe'. A Minorities Treaty framework inaugurated at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 claimed to protect their cultural and linguistic rights under League aegis but Lemkin, as a member of a supranational Jewish group – for which the Treaties were most keenly intended – recognised the formula's inadequacy in instances where such 'collectivities' came under immediate and/or sustained physical attack on their persons or their culture. Implicitly, Lemkin was putting his finger on a consequence of, arguably, the major, long-lasting world-historical change of the Great War: the drive towards culturally homogeneous national states in place of historically multi-ethnic empires. In a specifically European or near-European context, the ascendancy of such states in place of Ottoman, Russian, Austrian and in part German predecessors threw into relief the ongoing existence of diverse ethnic and religious groups who did not 'fit' the national self-image, or, possibly worse, by their real or perceived behaviour, disrupted the nationalising-cum-developmentalist agendas of the new or reformulated polities. Even the post-revolution Soviet 'state of nations' was one in practice increasingly dominated by its Russian centre. For Lemkin the nation and national self-determination were a *good* thing. What, from the 1930s, he was waving to 'the international community' was the potentiality of the nation state directly murdering or suffocating out of existence what in his understanding were 'national cultures' which lacked the security, desire or wherewithal to create their own sovereign polities.

To be sure, Lemkin's emerging conception of genocide begs many definitional questions. For instance, in his first public airing of the term in his seminal 1944 *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, he describes cases where Nazi attacks on specific national groups involved 'a coordinated plan of different actions' aimed at destroying the 'essential foundations of the life' of those groups, with the ultimate purpose of their annihilation – *as groups*.[1] Implicitly, if not explicitly, this would imply a self-identified victim group coherence, even an ascription of some fixed, primordial existence. Empirical observation, however, might suggest otherwise. The Nazis, for instance, claimed to *know* Jews as a single racial entity and set out to destroy them as such. Yet in practice by the mid-twentieth century a ubiquitous European Jewish population lacked commonly binding cultural, religious, ethnic, national, let alone

1 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), p. 79.

biological characteristics. This might more broadly suggest that identification of an aggregate population as some integral community (national or otherwise) is a matter of the perception of the perpetrators in cases of genocide, and not necessarily one, or at least the same one, shared by those who are their victims. One might go further and argue that the destruction of groups such as the 'kulaks', or Vendeans referred to below, suggests that genocide in practice may have little or nothing to do with the victims' *actual* communal attributes but rather is a function of the manner in which a regime chooses to identify people from a geographic region, or approximate social grouping, as an alleged *ethnic-like*, collective threat to wider state or society. That said, one would want to note that something of Lemkin's original formulation carried through into the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as adopted by the United Nations in 1948. A tribute in itself to Lemkin's persistent, often one-man advocacy for this new instrument of international law, it describes genocide as 'acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole, or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group'.[2]

What became universal acclamation to the principle, however, did not translate into a universal imperative to 'outlaw' genocide as Lemkin had sought. At stake was something more than the drafters' debates in 1946–1948, and proposed emendations thereafter for a more elastic interpretation of what might constitute a 'group'. The redundancy of the Convention, or more precisely the repeated unwillingness by UN members to invoke it in cases of its violation through to the 1990s, had much more at root to do with the raison d'être of the nation state *qua* modern sovereign polity. With the creation of social cohesion and unity the *sine qua non* for the realisation of its political and socio-economic potential, and hence survival, within an intrinsically competitive international system of such states, the political elites of any emergent participant were bound to be alarmed by perceived centrifugal tendencies associated with communal alterity. Whether or not such tendencies posed a genuinely existential threat, Zygmunt Bauman has proposed that regimes repeatedly sought to resolve the 'problem' by one of two strategies. The first *anthropophagic* route, amounts to forcible assimilation of all distinct elements of the population into clones of the dominant self. The second *anthropoemic* strategy, operating on the assumption that such assimilation is neither achievable nor desirable, seeks to literally vomit out

2 Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 44–49, for full text.

the unwanted elements beyond the frontiers of state territory, by expulsion or deportation.[3]

The pertinent question, however, is how far does the Bauman analysis take us towards an explanation for genocide? On one level, it is clear that what he is describing is the underlying structural violence of the modern state leading in turn to the possibility of ethnocide or the potential *preconditions* for genocide. One particularly valuable signpost, for instance, is his reference to targeted groups as the state's 'strangers', even though, as in the case of traditional hunter-gatherers or nomads (albeit often with their habitus extending across transnational boundaries), these are usually a country's *most* indigenous populations. That said, the Bauman argument *of itself* does not provide sufficient signposting as to when, how and why a programme of systematic, sustained, state-organised extermination of a communal group, or groups, is conceived and then enacted. Instead, Bauman's critique is valuable for a different reason. It highlights the fundamental contradiction between a post-1948 universal lip-service to human rights, including a global village identity politics in which we are all supposedly enabled – *as individuals* – to *be* ourselves, and a *general* statist repudiation of communal entities operating outside, or at variance with the 'normative' developmentalist goals of state. From this perspective, it might suggest that the distance between coercive strategies against recalcitrant or simply anomalous groups as described by Bauman and wholesale annihilation is much narrower than is usually assumed. Our further premise is that far from being an aberrant and thus limited phenomenon, the prevalence and persistence of genocidal violence points to it being a systemic by-product of a modern, world-historical trajectory. The key is trying to understand the particular state crises which have catalysed full-blown genocide. To pursue the argument, we might best begin with the one case universally recognised in the public mind as such.

The Holocaust and its hinterland

The destruction of close to six million European Jews, or something in the region of 72 per cent in the countries under Nazi hegemony, is remarkable for more than just the numbers involved.[4] It was necessarily transnational, it was sustained across four years of total war, and whether derived from a

3 Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 18.
4 Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 520.

conscious blueprint or not, developed as integral to German domination of the continent. Certainly, it brooked no distinction between men, women and children, or between proportionally very small numbers of Jews, as in Norway, compared with, for instance, Poland where they constituted close to 10 per cent of the country's population. Yet the launching of the 'Final Solution' came out of the Nazis' *failure* to eruct Jews from the Greater German Reich to places beyond Europe, a failure compounded by the stymieing of the 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union. Jewish mass murder began in the midst of Operation Barbarossa. Some 2.5 million Soviet Jewish inhabitants were subsequently liquidated, largely in mass shootings.[5] The worsening German politico-military crisis in turn precipitated a widening of the mass killing to embrace all of European Jewry under Axis rule. For them, rail trans-shipment in cattle trucks to specially built extermination camps situated in a subjugated Poland was the norm, with the complex at Auschwitz-Birkenau the main continent-wide locus of destruction from spring 1943 through to autumn 1944. Here, as in the other death camps, gas chambers were developed as the preferred technology of annihilation. In practice, a less than refined death machinery combined with the sadistic, irrational and gratuitous violence of the camps are at odds with the 'industrial', scrupulously timetabled and seemingly very modernist aspects of extermination which, over time, have become canonic elements of 'the Holocaust'. Another canonic element is the Nazi insistence that they were acting to protect a superior Aryan race from biological contamination by one hardly deemed human at all. Yet this very obsession with Jewish blood, combined with charges of some 'international Jewish conspiracy' to overthrow Western civilisation, might equally suggest something less modern and more a recrudescence of much older patterns of Christian anti-Semitism in which the Jews were seen as cosmic evil incarnate. Indeed, set against a reality of steady Jewish assimilation and integration into most European countries, with Germany arguably the model *par excellence*, the notion that Nazi genocide against the Jews was enacted on grounds of their irreducible, irremediable, not to say diabolical 'otherness', might point to a phenomenon unhinged from history and outside rational inquiry.

An argument for the singularity of the 'Holocaust', however, would have to be weighed against evidence of synchronous or near-synchronous mass killings by several states either also against Jews, or against other ethnic

5 Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009), pp. 521, 524.

groups. From this perspective the Nazi assault might read as one at the very extreme end of a spectrum, but also as part of a geographically, closely interconnected sequence of mid-century genocides. The subjective *perception* of Jews as dangerous and threatening to the social organism was certainly endemic throughout the continent and under conditions of Nazi hegemony provided a pretext for many European state elites, or elements of their wider populations, to abet or directly assist the German destruction of Jews, or, as in the case of Romania, to initiate an autonomous programme of deportation and mass murder. Such pan-European animus, however, also extended to Roma (gypsies), with similarly genocidal consequences. That said, in specific post-imperial regions, the opportunity to 'cleanse' the state or would-be state of other heterogeneous, allegedly 'alien', communities, led under the crisis of wider war to a Ustasha Croat assault on Serbs, a Chetnik Serb one against Muslims, not to say an attempt by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) to eliminate all Poles on its own self-liberated Volhynian patch. Seen together these represent aspects of a 1939–1945 pattern in which ultra-nationalist movements in Eastern Europe sought, in conditions of extremis, to complete a full and final surge towards the homogeneous nation state initially begun half a century earlier in the wake of the European continental empires' collapse.

However, to perceive these accelerated developments arising purely as a consequence of Nazi domination, or the mimicking of their racist proclivities by fascist leaning acolytes, may be to miss a more all-embracing tendency at work. Already in the late 1920s the Stalinist drive towards 'Socialism in One Country' via the collectivisation of agriculture had seen an assault on the strongest tier of peasant resistance – the so-called 'kulaks' – go one step further through the conscious effort to cripple those national or regional communities with the greatest potentiality for an independent non-Soviet existence. In a union of republics which was supposedly also a colour-blind family of nations, the state manipulation of scarcity in the wake of collectivisation in order to cause or amplify famine was particularly directed at the Ukraine, North Caucasus, Volga region and Kazakhstan. The best estimate of resulting Soviet deaths during 1932–1933 puts the total figure at some 7.7 million. An estimated 4 million of these were in the Ukraine – the *Holodomor* ('killing through hunger') – with perhaps a million each in the other three main regions.[6] If this marks an early peak in Stalinist domestic mass murder,

6 Pavel Polian, *Against Their Will: The History and Geography of Forced Migrations in the USSR* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2004), p. 87.

what is equally significant is the manner in which, thereafter, the attack on national, ethnic or religious communities became *more* pronounced. Even before the Ribbentrop–Molotov carve-up of the Eastern European rimlands between Nazi Germany and the USSR in August 1939, Soviet 'national operations' emerging out of the 'Great Terror' led to the judicial murder of nearly a quarter of a million Soviet citizens, very largely of Polish, Baltic or other rimland nationality.[7] In the two years following the Soviet takeover of eastern Poland, violence against its Polish population in particular may have equalled, if not exceeded, that meted out by the Germans in its western half. To be sure, after their 1941 assault on the USSR, Nazi responsibility for the mass death of millions of Poles, Ukrainians and Belarusians as well as Soviet POWs, vastly exceeded that by Stalin's NKVD. Nevertheless, the latter's targeted destruction through deportation of entire if relatively small national groups, such as the Crimean Tatars, Chechens and Meshketians, is indicative of a high phase of war and postwar social engineering geared towards the cleansing of supposedly suspect populations throughout Russia's western, Black Sea and Caucasian borderlands.

There again, if we were looking for an extension of this pattern across transnational boundaries, we would find it on the southern, formerly Ottoman side of the Caucasian range, though here with the concentration of genocidal mass killing perpetrated a world war earlier. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) assault on the Armenian population of Anatolia in 1915–1916 is recognised by most contemporary scholars (if not, for reasons of political self-interest, some governments) as a nearly paradigmatic case of genocide, with half or more of the empire's estimated 2 million Armenians slaughtered directly, or at the behest of the regime.[8] What is again striking, however, is that this sequence of killing also included other Christian, notably Syriac communities, and also metamorphosed postwar, under the new, overtly Turkish, national regime of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), into attempted or actual genocidal cleansings of other Anatolian, non-Turkish peoples, including Greeks and Kurds. Thus, taken as a whole, the sequence of murderous deportations and outright mass killings of 'minority' peoples in the western Eurasian rimlands from *c*. 1912 to 1948, would seem to represent more than the sum of its parts. It cannot be put down entirely to Hitler,

7 Terry Martin, 'The origins of Soviet ethnic cleansing', *Journal of Modern History* 70 (December 1998), 856.

8 Hilmar Kaiser, 'Genocide at the twilight of the Ottoman Empire', in Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 382–383, for a careful extrapolation.

Stalin, extremist ideologies, authoritarian regimes, or even war itself, even though these were all major drivers towards genocide. Nor to the role of dedicated, secretly organised killing units – the CUP's *Teskilati Mahsusa*, one early crude prototype – or even party-cum-state security apparatuses such as the Nazi SS or Soviet NKVD, though the latter were clearly the archetypal planners, organisers and resource managers of genocidal *process*. Instead, the scope, scale and intensity of the killing within a relatively telescoped time-scale and demarcated geographic range might suggest a particular phase in historical development.

But this in turn poses a question as to the relationship between the hegemonic core of the emergent international system, their anti-system defiers – most obviously Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia – and genocide itself. The manner in which leading Western powers sought to regularise a genocidal 'unmixing of peoples': Greeks, Turks and others, at the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (itself a consequence of the postwar debacle of a British-sponsored Greek invasion of Asia Minor), suggests that while system leaders were wary of condoning people-extermination *per se* they were willing *in extremis* to contemplate hardly less violent anthropoemic solutions to the 'problem' of multi-ethnicity. Lausanne's protocol on compulsory population exchange, or 'transfer', indeed, became the model for various other 'unmixing' projects – including the initial, non-implemented British partition of Arab–Jewish Palestine in 1937, and its actual 1948 enactment by a newly independent state of Israel. By this point, however, the procedure had become normative through the Western Allied end-of-war agreement with Stalin for the eviction of upwards of 12 million 'minority' peoples, the majority ethnic Germans, from the reconstituted, but territorially adjusted states of Eastern Europe. Again, as with the earlier Lausanne sequence, violent eviction spelt death for hundreds of thousands of victims.[9]

One might argue that by dint of the existence of sovereign national polities which at the very least were prepared to absorb their 'expelled' ethnic kin and even treat them as citizens, the margin between what has become known as ethnic cleansing and genocide remains an important one. Certainly, one might imagine that there could have been even more catastrophic death

9 The death toll for the ethnic cleansing of Germans is hotly contested. Recent research by Pertti Ahonen et al., *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and Its Aftermath* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), p. 140, puts the figure at 600,000. For the earlier Greco-Turkish sequence, see Renée Hirschon, ed., *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2003).

tolls than those that actually transpired had the British not sanctioned partition of imperial India in 1947 into India and Pakistan.[10] But here, as in the later 1993 Owen–Stoltenberg peace plan for the post-Yugoslav ethnic division of a previously communally mixed Bosnia, the emphasis on the creation of viable new, or reformulated nation states as against the protection of politically weak communal groups could also be read as evidence of the West's preparedness to rubber-stamp already implemented genocidal facts on the ground. The postwar burying of the Minorities Treaties and the explicit exclusion of deportation from the terms of the Genocide Convention, were undoubtedly part of the historic international background which enabled Serb or Croat agencies of state or their proxies to do their worst in 1990s Bosnia in what many would regard as a *bona fide* case of genocide. But if all this speaks of ambiguities in Western thinking as to the hinterland of the phenomenon plus of a repeated omission by the system leaders to effectively respond to its actual or potential enactment, might there be something to be said for considering earlier cases where Western *commission* was to the fore?

Genocides before the Holocaust period

In 1923 the historian of civilisations, Arnold Toynbee, charged the intrusion of what he called the 'Western formula' – the 'political idea of nationality' – into old world empires as the cause of their destabilisation and, more immediately, the spasm of both Greek and Turkish atrocities which he had just witnessed at first hand in Asia Minor.[11] From a somewhat different angle, a generation later, Hannah Arendt argued that the origins of Hitlerite and Stalinist totalitarianism were to be found in the nineteenth-century accelerated momentum of the forerunner European nation states towards colonial imperialism.[12] At *fin de siècle*, the peak of this Western advance was marked by a series of native revolt subjugations which spilled over into outright extermination. Arguably the most concentrated episode (though not in terms of death toll), was that meted out in 1904–1905 to the Herero and Nama peoples in German Southwest Africa. The immediate causes of such genocides would seem to be at variance with the 'nationality' model. The Herero destruction was not triggered by questions of alterity *per se* but rather by their violent

10 Ian Talbot, 'The 1947 Partition of India', in Dan Stone, ed., *The Historiography of Genocide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), pp. 420–437.
11 Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey: A Study in the Contact of Civilisations* (London: Constable and Company, 1923), pp. 16–17.
12 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian, 1958).

resistance to the subaltern status demanded of them by the colonialists. In which case, one might argue that this was nothing new under the sun but rather the repetition of a narrative which had befallen untold numbers of peoples who had attempted, ultimately unsuccessfully, to defy imperial rule across millennia.

Yet there were important differences between the slaughter of peoples of the modern imperial world as against that of the ancient. For one thing, the Western imperialist takeover of Africa, parts of Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean was all evidence of the way the globe was becoming interconnected through the West's economic as well as political hegemony. This ascendancy was not predicated on the extermination of peoples *per se*. Relatively weak colonial masters in Africa, for instance, were dependent on local labour supply which usually involved the co-option of local elites or, where that failed, some other strategy including classic divide and rule. Where colonial projects involved sometimes sudden, market-driven grabs for natural resources, however, the pretence of working with indigenous elites could be abandoned altogether in favour of the forcible mobilisation of whole populations for effectively unpaid, hyper-exploitative labour. One irony of this situation is that the most egregious case of violent mass death in *fin-de-siècle* Africa – the drive to extract wild rubber by concession companies in the so-called Congo Free State – was *not* an act of genocide as such but rather of a terror-driven asset-strip. Its knock-on effects in terms of the displacement and consequent massive starvation of an entire tropical region's population led to an estimated 5 million deaths.[13] Of course, in this episode we have insight into how direct exterminatory violence and hyper-exploitation might operate hand in hand. Both Soviet Gulag and Nazi slave camps would test the synergy to its limits.

Nevertheless, the commodification of conquered colonial lands and their natural resources and their opening up to the global market-place through modern forms of production could also *directly* lead to genocide. In tropical Africa, or the Central and Southern Americas, large native populations, even in the latter case after epidemiological collapse, mostly held their demographic own against European settlers. However, elsewhere, in what Alfred Crosby has dubbed the Neo-Europes, smaller groups were vulnerable to direct extirpation, especially where they resisted settler encroachment.[14] The

13 Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 230–233.

14 Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

alternative was usually flight or forcible removal to some other territory – or 'reservation' – where the *indigènes*' traditional habitus was non-operable, repeatedly leading to psychic as well as physical group collapse. That said, and ever since the initial Eastern seaboard settler wars against the Tsenacommacahs and Pequots in the 1620s and early 1630s, systematic genocidal massacre was a core component of native destruction throughout three centuries of largely 'Anglo' expansion across continental North America. The culmination of this process from the mid-1860s to mid-1880s coincided both with the transcontinental spanning by railroad and the final, merciless extirpation of native Araucanian resistance by the Argentinian and Chilean military in the Southern Cone pampas, primarily in the agribusiness interest. In Australia, too, 'Anglo' attrition or outright liquidation of Aborigines from the time of 'first contact' in 1788 reached its zenith in Queensland in these same decades, as a dedicated Native Mounted Police strove to cleanse the territory of indigenous tribes in favour of further millions of cattle stock. Undoubtedly, in all these instances, Western racism and contempt for natives as 'savages' played a critical role in psychocultural justifications for genocide.

The lethality of these encounters was amplified by advances in Western military technology, such as breach-loading rifles and machine-guns. Occasional instances where native peoples were able to adapt and sustain modern war-fighting techniques to slow down the Western advance may have deflected some possible genocides into the arena of negotiated settlements. The case of the New Zealand Maori may offer one such instance. However, the more likely destruction of native peoples in the way of Western imperialism was not the only genocidal consequence of this stage of proto-globalisation. Destabilisation of the old world empires also created repeated crises for particularly Russian, Chinese and Ottoman polities as they attempted to consolidate their hold on formerly porous frontier regions in the face of potential foreign penetration. To be sure, arguably the most spectacular mid-eighteenth-century genocide – the destruction of the nomadic Dzungar confederation by the Qing dynasty in the far reaches of Chinese Turkestan – was an indicator of how an empire's domestic anxieties about a perceived internal threat might have resonance with similar fears expressed by, in this case, an eastwards advancing Russian Empire. However, the 1864 Russian genocidal eructation of the Circassians from the North Caucasus into Ottoman territory followed a more pronounced pattern, with the Circassians in Russian eyes, the supposed post-Crimean War proxies of a British conspiracy. In turn, the resulting destabilisation of Ottoman Anatolia, not least

through the difficulty of resettling masses of traumatised Circassian refugees, contributed to growing intercommunal tensions in the region and, in the mid-1890s, the first bout of major exterminatory blood-letting against the Armenians.

What is striking in all these diverse instances is the degree to which *génocidaire* action was underpinned by fears of being seen as weak or falling behind, in an increasingly Western-dominated world order. Nor were the Western colonisers themselves immune from such neuroses. On the contrary, as racial science, alongside Social Darwinism, intruded into normative elite discourse, statist needs to prove strength were precisely played out in directives such as that of Kaiser Wilhelm II to crush the Herero. No advanced polity could be seen to be stymied, let alone defeated, by 'savages'. To do so was effectively to concede position to one's nearest metropolitan competitors in the race for supremacy. Compensatory narratives of long-standing racial or national superiority over other peoples were only valuable if they could be translated into a genuine *Wille zur Macht*. And if the other peoples were not only close to home but supposedly dangerous to boot, then it became all the more incumbent on state actors to take pre-emptive action against them.

Already as far back as the 1650s, the manner in which a post-Civil War, ideologically driven 'British' nation state launched a retributive war against its Irish periphery suggests how key ingredients for genocide might come together into a lethal matrix. Founded on a long-standing English monarchy yet radically new by dint of its lurch into military republicanism, the threat of sabotage to the untried Cromwellian regime by Irish-Catholic rebels allegedly working in cahoots with the (equally Catholic) French or Spanish was compounded by the charge that the Irish had already stabbed their English overlords in the back a decade earlier when thousands of Protestant settlers had been massacred. The notion that the state at its moment of truth was facing a diabolical enemy which had already attempted to treacherously contaminate, subvert and destroy the commonweal, was one which would be repeatedly regurgitated in later instances of genocide. Not only, moreover, did this justify sequestration of the victims' property and hence redistribution in favour of the state's societal supporters – an economic side to genocide which would reach its apotheosis in the Nazi and more general European fleecing of its Jews – but it also offered to the state the exculpation that it had no choice but to defend itself and *its* people. The fact that in the Irish sequence this amounted to a decision to deport all Catholics into a far-western corner of the island while handing over expropriated lands to a new

wave of English 'plantation' settlers, underscores how an integral element of a population could be literally cast out beyond the pale. But the historic Anglo perception of Ireland as a colony and the Irish as savages presents an ambiguity as to whether this episode really does mark the emergence of the modern, genocidal nation state. 'Resettlement', too, proved beyond the capacity of the Cromwellian polity, perhaps reminding us of the major resource issues involved in systematic programmes of ethnic cleansing. A century and a half on, however, the French Jacobin extirpation of the peasant revolt in the Vendée offers a more sharply defined example on the very cusp of modernity. Here was a state unequivocally committed in principle to the embrace of all its 'citizens' within its universe of obligation and according to the most grandiloquent enunciation of their human rights. Yet no sooner had an undisputed component of that population rejected its totalist agenda in favour of a more traditional self-understanding than it was damned, man, woman and child as a recidivist, subversive fifth-column, ripe for root-and-branch evisceration.

Genocides after the Holocaust

The destruction of the Vendée returns us to the dichotomy at the heart of the modern nation state and, hence, its proclivities to genocide. To belong, in other words to be accepted by and have conferred on oneself the rights of equal, national membership, has as its corollary the assumption that one will play by the state's rules. The Vendeans not only became the archetypal internal threat by their physical defiance of those rules, but in the process became reified by the state into a powerful enemy with foreign links, thereby confirming its collective separation as well as contumacy. The fear that others might follow suit was certainly part of the historic memory of the Vendée inscribed into Bolshevik, then Stalinist, justifications for their own exterminatory responses to communal insurrections, as it also was in Kemalist obliterations of Kurdish revolts. But then one might argue that it was the primary paradigm for a whole spate of genocidal counter-insurgencies, in all hemispheres, after 1945. The fact that not all of the more than fifty such assaults identified by Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr up to the mid-1990s – thus running at roughly one a year – were against self-professing ethnic or religious groups, led them to propose a further terminology of politicide.[15] In practice, however, as with the original Vendée,

15 Barbara Harff, 'Recognising genocides and politicides', in Helen Fein, ed., *Genocide Watch* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 27–41, and Barbara Harff

most post-1945 politicides were tantamount to genocide for similar reasons; the state having determined – almost always in crisis circumstances – that the only way to deal with the perceived group's irremediable 'otherness' was through physical annihilation.

More pointedly, one can read the worldwide incidence of such sustained, lethal assaults as largely a consequence of newly created elites in post-colonial polities attempting to create a unitary *national* coherence out of ethnographic mosaics of peoples, previously brought into a single embrace usually, though not exclusively, through Western colonialism. Some of the ensuing post-colonial tensions were caused by regimes allocating scarce jobs, land and other resources to the dominant ethnic group at the expense of others, or worse, treating their sometimes remote or distant regions as the basis for an internal colonisation. In extreme instances, the impact of discrimination or repression might lead to demands for outright secession, and, in turn, a crisis of state which the regime attempted to resolve through military mass murder. The case *par excellence* is West Pakistan's spectacularly retributive 1971 assault on the population of its eastern, culturally different Bengali half, in which no fewer than 300,000 and probably vastly more of the latter's population, many of them from the Hindu minority, were slaughtered.[16] Ironically in this instance, it failed to prevent the emergence of an independent Bangladesh. By contrast, twelve years earlier a localised Tibetan resistance to Chinese Maoist collectivisation precipitated if not a bid for independence by the formerly quasi-autonomous, ethnically cum religiously distinct Tibet, then certainly its perception as such by Beijing. With its accusations running thick and fast that the Tibetan religious-cum-political leader, the Dalai Lama, was in league with foreign powers, Tibet's incipient revolt was drowned and defeated in a sea of blood.

Again, the degree to which near-contemporary exterminatory violence visited on ethnic groups attempting to secede from, or resist, the encroachments of a more powerful political centre can be entirely differentiated from pre-modern episodes of this kind, is discussible. On the other hand, the sheer incidence of such events in the early decades of the post-colonial record might suggest the extraordinary pressures new Third World regimes were under to homogenise their societies into a unified whole as a precondition for

and Ted Robert Gurr, 'Toward empirical theory of genocides and politicides: identification and measurement of cases since 1945', *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (1988), 359–371.

16 See Geoffrey Robinson, 'State-sponsored violence and secessionist rebellions in Asia', in Bloxham and Moses, eds., *Oxford Handbook*, p. 468, for the wide estimates of numbers killed.

rapid integration into – or alternatively competition with – an international political economy. Pressure-cooker style developmental drives founded on notions of a 'survival of the *fastest*' might lead, as in the case of China's Great Leap Forward, to self-inflicted mass famine. In other instances, however, it could lead to the exacerbation of socio-economic and political inequalities between dominant and subaltern groups. Paradoxically, modernist state commitments to educational provision across society might also have amplified subaltern awareness of state discrimination against themselves, leading to an increasingly ethnicised mobilisation of political opposition. And so, too, to a wider recognition of a politics beyond immediate state boundaries from which opposition movements might draw inspiration, or even direct support.

In the overwrought psychological as well as geopolitical conditions of the Cold War the results could be fatal. The Guatemalan state attack on its Mayan highland communities, with its genocidal apotheosis in 1983, for instance, was in part about extirpating an alternative, grass-roots social system at variance with actually minority 'Ladino' hegemony. Yet equally it entailed fears of a Soviet or Cuban-backed communist intrusion spreading further into the western hemisphere. As a consequence, covert US backing for Central or South American junta proxies such as that of Guatemala's Ríos Montt also entailed a readiness to condone the military extirpation of often indigenous populations supporting or allegedly succouring communist insurgents. Given the global range of the bipolar struggle, US support for the Indonesian massacres in 1965 as perpetrated by Jakarta's military against anybody tainted with alleged communist (or indeed any form of) subversion, or again, in 1975, in support of the same Suharto regime in its sustained genocidal extrusion into a recently independent East Timor, followed a similar logic. But so too did Soviet behaviour in regions of the world where through the backing of newly installed 'revolutionary' regimes such as the Ethiopian Dergue from the mid-1970s or, closer to home, a communist-orientated Afghanistan, it was able to extend its influence. The consequent US versus Soviet struggles for position, albeit at first or second hand, in the Horn of Africa, or Central Asia, resulted in vast regional destabilisations. Whether ensuing death tolls were genocide, or tantamount to genocide coming out of targeted deportations or famine, or, there again, of populations being caught between insurgents and counter-insurgents in what amounted to free-fire zones, is not always easy to disentangle.

In 1974, a non-governmental war crimes tribunal argued that the nature of US warfare in Vietnam – the bipolar cockpit *par excellence* of the period – amounted to genocide. Whether this is correct or not, what can be said with

more certainty is that the US programme of covert mass bombing of formerly neutral Cambodia – as the Nixon regime attempted to stymie the flow of communist north Vietnamese troops and *matériel* by that route into US-backed south Vietnam – through the destruction it wrought, helped precipitate the victory of the Khmer Rouge, one of the late twentieth-century's indubitably genocidal regimes. Under the leadership of Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge sought to transform Cambodia by returning the country to an agriculturally based 'year zero', in order to galvanise an entirely state-directed 'Super-Great Leap Forward', thereby not simply emulating but surpassing the goals of its Chinese, Maoist patrons. Again, much of the mass death – an estimated 1.6 million out of possibly 8 million Khmer perished in the succeeding three and a half years of Pol Pot rule – was a consequence of the general terror and hardship enacted by a genuinely totalitarian regime against its whole population. But within Cambodia's killing fields a special place was reserved for specific ethnic or religious groups; Vietnamese, Muslim Chams, the entire cohort of Buddhist priests and nuns, not to say, in perhaps the most bizarre of all episodes, the population of the entire eastern region, who – though clearly ethnically Khmer – were fatally declared to be 'Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds'.[17]

The relentless, often lurid, certainly racialised violence of the Khmer Rouge, its attempt to isolate itself from the international political economy, while seeing anybody with outside connections or education as a tool of exactly that, has ensured an ongoing fascination with its brief, utterly paranoid, reign of terror. However, it should not close off awareness of the United State's equivocal relationship to it, given Khmer Rouge opposition to Soviet-backed Vietnam, or of wider Cold War calculations which ensured that other notably egregious regimes, Saddam Hussein's Iraq included, had something more than tacit Western support. As one consequence, Saddam's equally politicidal *and* genocidal 1987–1988 'Anfal' campaign against Iraqi Kurds, during his prolonged war with Iran, reminds us not only of the ongoing vulnerability of stateless transnational peoples, but also of the willingness of key signatories to the Genocide Convention to turn a blind eye to mass atrocities, including the March 1988 gas attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja.

17 Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 458, 3–4.

From the Cold War to the present and beyond

The collapse of the Soviet system in 1989–1990 and with it the emergence of a 'one-world' economy led by its neo-liberal, free-trading, metropolitan core, suggested not only the possibilities for more peaceful relationships between states but also notions that a truly international community would now use its power to liberate humanity from the 'odious scourge' of genocide.[18] The jury, however, must remain out on any such verdict. A spate of genocidal wars on the western and southern edges of the collapsed communist system suggested a recrudescence of the xenophobic agendas which had marred these same regions in the post-imperial struggles of the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, the part-Serb, part-Croat drive to dismember post-Yugoslav Bosnia and ethnically cleanse it of its major third Muslim component, focused international attention on just how quickly elements of populations could be mobilised against long-standing neighbours.

Even more was this demotic element evident in Rwanda, the late twentieth-century example of genocide *par excellence*. Television footage of Interahamwe militias butchering Tutsi men, women and children with machetes became the prevailing Western image of the 1994 killings. However, the degree to which outside forces pushed Rwanda to the brink were much less broadcast or, hence, understood. The build-up to genocide was in part precipitated by the military invasion of Rwanda from neighbouring Uganda by mostly second generation Tutsi refugees (the Rwandan Patriotic Front) whose parents were themselves survivors of an earlier spate of anti-Tutsi genocidal violence. More paradoxically, the way this invasion coincided with rather sudden post-Cold War pressures from the West on the one-party, but otherwise relatively stable (Hutu) regime to democratise, fuelled both elite and more grass-roots fears that foreign powers were conniving to tear up the post-colonial status quo in favour of a renewed – minority – Tutsi hegemony. Such fears were further fuelled by the massacres of mostly majority Hutus in an ethnically similar neighbour, Burundi, in the wake of its democratisation. In the event, British and US insistence on Rwandan power-sharing – the Arusha Accords – between the incumbent regime and the RPF pending national elections, arguably provided the final stimulus, pushing regime ultras, the so-called Hutu Power, towards unilateral action. What followed in the hundred days from their 6 April coup before the RPF militarily defeated them, was a wholesale attempt

18 From the Preamble to the UN Genocide Convention.

by Hutu Power to exterminate all Tutsi within their territorial reach, plus anybody else seeking to protect them, or defy the regime's writ. Out of a total Rwandan population of some 8 million, the death toll greatly exceeded 500,000.[19] If the speed and scale of this killing was remarkable, accomplished as it was in large part with the crudest of weaponry, what is also most remembered in the West is the glaring discrepancy between the internationally media-broadcast knowledge that a far-reaching genocide was taking place and the inability or unwillingness of the international community – repeated, ineffectual meetings of the UN Security Council notwithstanding – to stop it.

In the wake of Rwanda there were some concerted efforts towards a more proactive international *juridical* response to genocide. Under the sponsorship of the UN, ad hoc tribunals were set up to try crimes under international law, including genocide, committed in both former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In 1998 the Rome Statute paved the way for an independent International Criminal Court founded four years later at the Hague to put such efforts on a more permanent footing. At UN behest, the ICC began investigations in 2005 into charges of genocide allegedly committed by the Sudanese state in its Darfur province, proceeding thereafter to uniquely indict head of state, Omar al-Bashir, for such crimes. At the present time, however, no further action has been taken against him or his regime. In practice, the ICC writ is limited by its dependence on the political power of the hegemonic metropolitan states, and their determination to punish, let alone prevent, potential genocide is, and is likely to remain, secondary to other geopolitical considerations. In 1999, the NATO aerial assault on Serb forces in Kosovo, in response to the latter's mass ethnic cleansing of the region's Albanians, briefly suggested otherwise. But the NATO action was also consciously geared towards changing the balance of power in the region against Belgrade. By the same token, the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq had little or nothing to do with Saddam's history of human rights violations. Even then, it could not have been undertaken without a certainty of something near to impunity, including non-interference in US military action from other powerful international players, notably Russia and China. In short, the assumption that the United States (or West) will act as if it is the international community in cases of genocide is limited to violations of the Convention in either relatively weak states and/or where intervention could also be made to serve other Western interests.

19 Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 51–52, queries the standard 800,000 figure.

The likelihood of such intervention in instances where there have been knock-on consequences from genocide is even more remote. The massive destabilisation of the Democratic Republic of Congo to the present time began in significant part when the victorious RPF in Rwanda began pursuing the *génocidaires* who were among the mass of Hutu refugees who had fled across the Congolese border in 1994. The ensuing conflict became a pretext for a much wider set of interventions by other African states, the ulterior aim of which was to lay their hands on Congo's vast mineral and timber assets. The ensuing death toll for the decade from 1998, according to one authoritative report, from either direct violence or related societal breakdown, has been put at 5.4 million.[20] Yet despite this being the most severe and sustained zone of violence in the contemporary world, UN peace-keeping has been paltry in the extreme. As for Western concern as to the armed militias and armies controlling and terrorising Congo's resource-rich eastern provinces, this has been overwhelmingly subordinated to ensuring the uninterrupted supply of precious metals such as tantalum (coltan), essential to both civilian and military electronic communications, Everyman's mobile phone included.

The Congo tragedy may suggest the fragility of Lemkin's vision for combating and defeating genocide through international law when set against an increasingly complex range of underlying, structural stress factors. One aspect of the Rwanda genocide, for instance, which requires further exploration, is the degree to which rural population pressures combined with land scarcity and environmental degradation to produce a neo-Malthusian-style crisis.[21] Today's global human population of over 7 billion and rising poses the certainty of increased competition for diminishing land and water resources, especially between subsistence communities, making the world Rwanda writ large. What we have sought to stress about the modern historical causation of genocide has rather tended against seeing it as a product of local or traditional group conflict. On the contrary, we have posited that the primary, underlying driver is the 'developmentalism' of state elites as geared towards their state-society's 'catch up' with the hegemonic system leaders, thereby enabling them to stay afloat in a seemingly 'normative' but actually merciless globalised system. More than any other factor it has been such elite fears of

20 International Rescue Committee, *Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis* (New York: IRC, 2007).

21 See Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive* (London: Penguin, 2005), chapter 10, 'Malthus in Africa: Rwanda's genocide', for extrapolation of a wide range of research findings.

mostly domestic, communal entities – real or imagined – sabotaging that state-organising and determined trajectory which has been the *cantus firmus* of genocide. But as the exponential, developmentalist drives for economic growth have hit their environmental buffers, most obviously now evident through dangerous and accelerating climate change, a wider set of variables changing the contours of genocide are also that much greater.

An early indicator of this reconfiguration may be on offer by way of the experience of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh. Superficially, in the early 1980s, the Dhaka military regime's assault on CHT's indigenous hill tribes could be taken as a classic case of a culturally dominant (in this case Muslim) majority seeking to suffocate some very different ethnic minorities in their struggle for autonomy. The fact that behind the regime's determination to wipe out resistance were state imperatives to secure and then fully exploit CHT water, oil, gas, timber and other resources for rapid industrial development, could also be taken as par for an extremely violent course. However, the shift into genocidal mode had another ingredient, the – albeit inadvertent – massively Western aid agencies-supported project to shift millions of people from the environmentally degraded and increasingly flood-prone delta region into the sparsely populated hill country. Much of the subsequent violence involved not only military massacre but that committed by state-armed settlers too. That was then: a complete genocide of the hill tribes was only prevented by Bangladesh's shift from military to civilian democratic rule. Yet in the early decades of the twenty-first century the underlying and fundamental 'environmental overshoot' factors have not gone away but actually become much worse. For all its industrial, Dhaka-centred growth, the great majority of Bangladesh's vastly overpopulated polity remain very poor peasants in a delta region – much of which will be submerged as the effects of climate change take hold. It is accordingly not so difficult to imagine, sometime in the not so distant future, a 'last resort', but much more determined, state-led repeat of the 1980s scenario to 'secure' the CHT and whatever residual land and resources remain, not least when set against the certain knowledge that neighbouring countries, exemplified by India's construction of a 4,000 kilometre steel and concrete fence around Bangladesh, will deny mass refugee flows across their borders.

This South Asian example may offer in microcosm an insight into how nation states may respond as competition for already scarce resources is threatened and potentially overwhelmed by tens, if not hundreds of millions of environmentally displaced peoples on the move from flood and drought. Twentieth-century genocide was often too easily read as a consequence of

totalitarian or racist regimes acting in defiance of a liberal, implicitly pacific world order. Yet this is to ignore or side-step the violent, repeatedly genocidal origins of that order, as it is to forget that in-built into it have been drives to attain the unattainable on the one political hand, geared towards social and cultural conformity – the most common route to which has been ethnic homogeneity – and its necessary corollary, a vision of unlimited economic growth itself predicated on the need to survive and 'catch up' within a very unequal, hegemonic-determined system. The consequences of that unattainability are now presenting through the biospheric blow-back atttendant on anthropogenic climate change. As the biospheric crisis intensifies, we may expect nation states to embark on increasingly dystopian paths to buttress their own self-preservation. In addition to indigenous peoples, always the most vulnerable to attrition or annihilation in the face of normative development, we might anticipate that refugees and minorities will be the groups most in danger either from a societal backlash or from increasingly coercive, authoritarian states keen to displace the blame for their own failings onto the already marginalised. In conditions of general, sustained environmental emergency, we may particularly anticipate that *advanced* nation states will fight tooth and nail to ensure the inviolability of their borders, thus repudiating the chances of survival for those in a traditional world who would have sought flight across more porous political frontiers. Genocide was and remains a by-product of a wider systemic dysfunction. It may, in the upshot, also provide a window into our ability and willingness to change course towards paths of reconciliation between ourselves and nature, or to make one final leap over the precipice.

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