

Why Is the Twentieth Century the Century of Genocide?

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It has become almost a platitude, a statistical one at that: 187 million is the figure, the now more or less accepted wisdom for the number of human beings killed as a result of political violence—Zbigniew Brzezinski uses the unlovely term megadeaths—in this, our bloody century.¹ More killing than at any other time in history. And yet at the end of the twentieth century its relentlessness, as it passes across the television screens of those of us seemingly blessed with immunity from its catastrophic reality and consequences, continues to daze and bewilder.

For the historian, him or herself inured to centuries if not millennia of mass atrocity, this picture of a special era of death and destruction invites, indeed demands further probing and analysis. Is “the Twentieth Century Book of the Dead” really so very different in scope or scale from previous ones?² It has been argued that the effects of the Taiping and other rebellions in China reduced its population from 410 million in 1850 to 350 million in 1873.³ In southern Africa a couple of decades earlier, the emergence of Shaka’s Zulu nation and the ensuing *Mfecane* or “great crushing” produced equally horrendous results relative to the population of the region. Go back a few centuries and

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes, The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London, 1994), p. 12.

² The title of the path-breaking work by Gil Eliot, *Twentieth Century Book of the Dead* (London, 1972).

³ John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution 1800–1985* (New York, 1986), p. 81.

the devastation that the Mongol conqueror Timur wrought to Central Asia, the Near East, and Northern India impelled modern historian Arnold Toynbee to note that this exterminatory span of twenty-four years (between 1379 and 1403) was comparable to the one hundred and twenty of the last five Assyrian kings.⁴

If this seems to be an argument, albeit a cynical one, for saying *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, the very use of the term genocide, as if we have in our current self-centered time suddenly stumbled upon a different order of things, is equally problematic. How do we find a *separate* niche for this exterminatory *modus operandi* when we are already familiar with the idea of massacre, civil war, revolution, man-made famine, total war, and indeed the potentiality for nuclear obliteration? The signposting of the scholars is, to say the least, contradictory. The international jurist Raphael Lemkin, who both coined the term "genocide" and was founding mover for its study, saw in it not so much modernity as a reversion or regression to past "barbarisms." If he perceived a difference in our century it was not in the destruction of peoples or nations per se but in the ability of international society, with international law as its right arm, to outlaw and ultimately prevent it. In spite of the catastrophe which overwhelmed his own family in the Holocaust, Lemkin was essentially optimistic about a modern global civilization founded on western enlightenment principles. The 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide is his great legacy.⁵

Yet, Kosovo notwithstanding, the Genocide Convention has been more honored in the breach than in the practice. A considerable stream of current empirical thought, moreover, would challenge Lemkin's basic premise. Zygmunt Bauman, for instance, has not only forcefully rejected the notion that the Holocaust represented some "irrational outflow of the not-yet-fully eradicated residues of pre-modern barbarity" but on the contrary "arose out of a genuinely rational concern . . . generated by a bureaucracy true to its form and purpose." For Bauman, this quintessential genocide was a product of a planned, scientifically informed, expert, efficiently managed, coordinated, and technically resourced society *like our own*. Indeed, just in case anyone was in doubt as to his meaning, he not only reiterated that the Holocaust was a legitimate resident in the house of modernity and could not be "at

⁴ Quoted in Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the 20th Century* (New Haven, 1981), p. 12.

⁵ For more on Lemkin's seminal role, see Kuper's introductory chapter to *Genocide*; Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, DC, 1944). For the text of the UN Convention, see Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide* (New Haven and London, 1990), pp. 44–49.

home in any other house” but that there was an “elective affinity” between it “and modern civilization.”⁶

If Bauman and Lemkin seem to offer very different perspectives on why this century might be considered the century of genocide, this article would submit that neither argument in itself offers a conclusive case. Implicitly, both have the added danger of being reduced to discussions about the *form* genocidal killing takes. The short hand for Bauman thus might read: “gas chambers”: systematized, routinized, industrialized conveyer belt killings; albeit with a grand vision at its end “of a better, and radically different, society.”⁷ There is something compelling in this theme. If gas chambers suggest a 1940’s state-of-the-art technology for the accomplishment of a *particular type* of mass murder, telegraphs and trains in the Ittihadist destruction of the Armenians or the provision of index registers of the Rwandese population as a basis for the selection of Tutsi and other victims in 1994 equally seem to point the finger at a type of social organization in which victims can be characterized as depersonalized freight or numbers and their perpetrators as pen pushers or technical operators who conveniently find themselves physically or psychologically “distanced” from the act of murder.

All well and good. Except that recent studies, such as Goldhagen on the Holocaust, or Prunier on Rwanda, provocatively remind us that much of it is not like that; that genocide, whether perpetrated by a technologically advanced society like Germany or a relatively undeveloped one like Rwanda, still requires the active mobilization of hundreds of thousands of their “ordinary” citizens to pull triggers or wield machetes; that this involves not a spatial removal but a direct confrontation between perpetrators and victims; and that in consequence genocide in action can be every bit as passionate, vicious, and messy as the massacres of the Peloponnesian or Punic wars.⁸ By a different route, we seem to be back with Lemkin’s barbarism. Except that neither the Romans nor Greeks saw themselves as barbarians but rather as the most advanced and sophisticated societies of their time. If then, as Michael Freeman would assert, the argument cannot be about modernity *per se* but only about *civilization* and if we were to pursue this train of thought further by tracing in the classical and pre-modern

⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 17, 89, 88.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁸ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners, Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London, 1996); Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis, History of a Genocide 1959–1994* (London, 1995).

record the capability of societies—despite their usually politically dif-fused and decentralized nature—to deport or exterminate whole pop-ulations, where is our case for a particular relationship between geno-cide and the twentieth century?⁹

This article would contend in response that *form* is not the primary issue whereas *framework* most definitely is. Or, to put it another way, we cannot begin to understand genocide without grappling with his-tory, by which is implied not only the historical context of each indi-vidual genocide which necessarily must tell us a special and unique story but rather the macrohistorical record, the broad and moving canvas in which we might chart and hopefully analyze the emergence and development of the current international system. Indeed, its first proposition is that the origins of something which we specifically call genocide, followed by the persistence and prevalence of this phenom-enon into the contemporary world, is intrinsically bound up with that emerging system and is indeed *an intrinsic and crucial part* of it. If this line of argument is correct then genocide cannot be simply cordoned off as an aberration which afflicts states which have become too ideo-logical, totalitarian, prone to revolution, to war, or internal conflicts which are the result of ethnic division and stratification. These may be significant features and important determinants of genocide. And they may tell us also something about why certain countries—Germany, Russia, China, Indonesia, Cambodia, Turkey, Rwanda, Burundi—have been particularly genocide prone. But none of these examples can be understood purely in domestic isolation. Nation states, notes Anthony Giddens, “only exist in systemic relations with other nation-states.”¹⁰ Yet the global system of nation states which we now take for granted has only come to full fruition in this last century. Genocide is thus not only a by-product of particular national trajectories as they attempt state building in order to operate within, circumvent, or possibly con-front that system, but a guide to and indeed cipher for its own dys-functional nature.

But why should this be? The answer, on one level, is closely enmeshed with what Marxist or neo-Marxist analysis would call “the dynamics of uneven historical development.”¹¹ Thus, the interna-

⁹ Michael Freeman, “Genocide, civilization and modernity,” *The British Journal of Soci-ology* 46 (1995): 207–23.

¹⁰ Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 4.

¹¹ Ron Aronson, “Societal madness: Impotence, power and genocide,” in *Toward the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Holocaust and Genocide*, ed. Israel W. Charny (Boulder and London, 1984), p. 136.

tional system was not created all of a piece but was primed and taken forward by a small coterie of western polities. Their economic and political ascendancy determined the system's ground rules and ensured that its expansion and development would be carried forward and regulated primarily in their own hegemonic interests. As a result, not only have "international relations been co-eval with the origins of the nation-state" but this process from its eighteenth-century origins was peculiarly dependent upon the fortunes of its leading players, most notably Britain, France, and the United States.¹² We do not ourselves have to be westerncentric to acknowledge this problematic reality or the essential thrust of Immanuel Wallerstein's developmental thesis in terms of a dominant western core surrounded by semi-peripheral and peripheral zones.¹³ Yet Wallerstein himself would be the first to acknowledge that this development was not naturally preordained, nor did it have to lead to the permanent ascendancy of specific states. Rather, it was the outcome of a long series of inter-European power struggles fought increasingly in a global arena, in which some proto-modern states, such as Spain, fell by the wayside while others, notably Prussia and Russia, came into frame as serious contenders for primacy. If all this had and continues to have something of a social Darwinian quality about it, nevertheless, "the *intersection* of capitalism, industrialism and the nation-state," which were the primary ingredients enabling western state supremacy in the first place, remain the enduring features of the system as globalized, while also ensuring the continuing hegemony of a somewhat broader but still relatively small group of states (with a number of key western institutions and corporations also now involved), even though the relative position of these may be quite different from that of the late eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.¹⁴

This relationship between genocide and an emerging international system demands further scrutiny. Was it, for instance, the avant-garde states who committed genocide in their drive for hegemony, or latter-day contenders? And whichever it was, where do we locate our first modern example? Aspects of the Iberian thrust to the Canaries, the Caribbean, and then the New World mainland are horribly suggestive, as are, in the Spanish and Portuguese domestic frames, the disgorging or forcible integration of Jews and Moriscos. Similar early modern trends are perhaps to be found in the destruction of Albigensians and

¹² Giddens, *Nation-State*, p. 4.

¹³ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge, 1979) and *The Modern World System*, 3 vols. (New York, 1974–88).

¹⁴ Giddens, *Nation-State*, p. 5.

Anabaptists en route to the consolidation of French and German state-religious unities and later still in the English or Anglo-Scottish campaigns to “clear” Catholic Irish and Gaelic Highlanders from their frontier hinterlands. The process could be said to have been carried forward in a still wider global frame with the British onslaught on the native peoples of Australasia, the American expulsions, subjugations, and massacres of their remaining unsubdued Indian nations, closely replicated in Latin American countries, notably Argentina, not to say in the Russian anti-Circassian drive to consolidate the Caucasus firmly within the Czarist empire.

Yet while the scale of these killings, particularly in the case of the sixteenth-century Americas, not only equals but arguably surpasses instances of twentieth-century mass murder, the specificity of “genocide” cannot be confirmed or denied from this litany. If the corelation-ship to the emerging system is the critical issue, a possibly more authentic first contender might be the 1793–94 revolutionary Jacobin onslaught on the Vendée region. Here we can observe a premeditated, systematic, if albeit geographically limited attempt at people-destruction closely linked to rapid nation-state building within the context of a much broader crisis of interstate relations. But if the Vendee is an important signpost for a type of mass murder which has become particularly prevalent and persistent in the twentieth century, its inclusion as a case study has to contend with objections that Frenchmen killing other Frenchmen cannot be “genocide.”¹⁵ Interestingly, this contrasts with a contention from an entirely different quarter which protests at any attempt to pick and choose between which mass killings are genocides and which are not.¹⁶ Even were we to put aside this perfectly understandable, ethically grounded restraint, the bewildering diversity of the situations that perpetrator and victim groups outlined so far confronts this writer, no less than others, with the obstinate question: what exactly is it that we are discussing?

“At the most fundamental level,” it has been asserted, “we presently lack even a coherent and viable description of the processes and circumstances implied by the term genocide.”¹⁷ And this despite enor-

¹⁵ Reynauld Secher, *Le genocide franco-français, La Vendée-Venge* (Paris, 1986) for the main source of this controversy.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Israel Charny’s ultra-inclusivist definition of genocide: “Unless clear-cut self-defense can be reasonably proven, whenever a large number of people are put to death by other people, it constitutes genocide,” in Israel W. Charny, ed., *Genocide, A Critical Bibliographical Review* (London, 1988), vol. 1, p. xiii.

¹⁷ Ward Churchill, “Genocide: Toward a functional definition,” *Alternatives* 11 (1986): 493.

mous and continuing efforts by sociologists and jurists to provide taxonomies and etiologies of the phenomenon not to say a legal framework for criminalizing it. Leo Kuper, doyen of its study, sounds almost despairing. There is, he says, “no single genocidal process” and, to boot, probably no basis for developing “a general theory of genocide.”¹⁸ Similarly, Helen Fein warns that “comparisons based on either the Holocaust or the Gulag Archipelago as a single archetype which assume there is one mechanically recurring script are bound to be misleading.”¹⁹ Fein is correct. Each genocide is different. The problem is knowing what falls within the rubric in the first place, her very reference to the Gulag being an interesting example of how potentially we might obscure rather than clarify our focus. Fein’s example also highlights a general tendency to conflate the act of “genocide” with “genocidal process,” of which there is a great deal more. The latter, involving all manner of draconian or coercive measures, ranging from the forcible assimilation of a group at one end of the spectrum through to physical murder at the other, does not have to culminate necessarily in a program of systematic people-annihilation, that is, “genocide.” Even then it is rarely sustained to an attempted completion. This is perhaps one reason why the Holocaust remains so central to our vision of what constitutes genocide, as if in Weberian terms we had found our “ideal” type. Nevertheless, this argument contends, in contradistinction to Kuper, that with appropriate terms of reference it is possible not only to discern a pattern of genocide which in some way is relatable to the unfolding of contemporary history but which also, at least in terms of academic study, can be viewed as having a coherent identity.

My approach revolves around the two obviously interlinked questions: “what is genocide” and “why does it occur”? The first might be answered in a preliminary sense by proposing that genocide is, as in Lemkin’s formulation, a type of state-organized modern warfare. But this statement requires elucidation. Though not all warfare in history has been conducted by states, the ability of a state to wage war is both a prime indicator of its power vis-à-vis other states and of its relationship to its domestic populace. Additionally, a recourse to war tells us much about the self-perception of a state leadership and of its willingness, ideologically motivated or otherwise, to pursue what it views as state’s interests or agendas by these means. Yet war, by definition, is a high-risk strategy, which, even where carefully prepared, can be com-

¹⁸ Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the 20th Century* (New Haven, 1981).

¹⁹ Helen Fein, “Genocide, A Sociological Perspective,” *Current Sociology* 38 (1990): 56.

prehensively demolished by contingent events. It also requires prodigious inputs of manpower, resources, and capital. If the war fails these may be lost in part or entirety to the great if not fatal detriment of the state. Alternatively, successful war may result in great material and psychological benefits. This may sound paradoxical with regard to genocide but is in fact as true for it as for the two other main types of state-organized modern war. Indeed, genocide often is conducted simultaneously or in parallel with them. Equally importantly, all three types have a common relationship to the nation state's place within the broader international system.

Type One warfare is between recognized and usually powerful sovereign states within the system. In the twentieth century the "totalization" of these interstate struggles, particularly in the way that, for instance during the Second World War, adversaries have indiscriminately targeted and murdered millions of the noncombatants of the opposing side, has led some writers not only to describe this type of warfare as "genocidal" but to discern similar psychological, technological, and political processes at work as those which inform genocide.²⁰ This, however, is to confuse the issue of moral repugnance with the observation of means and ends. The bombing of Dresden and Hiroshima, or for that matter the creation and active mobilization of nuclear arsenals capable of producing global annihilation, are arguably, no less "crimes against humanity" than Auschwitz or Treblinka. They also suggest the obsolescence of either traditionally grounded or more recently formulated codes of military conduct which are supposed to act as brakes on unlimited warfare between combatants. Nevertheless, in this type of war there remains, however residually, and even where one side demands the unconditional surrender of the other, a Clausewitzian notion that the struggle is fought between "legitimate" adversaries and that at the end of the day negotiation rather than extermination will determine the position of both victor and vanquished within the postwar world order.

The same is not true of the second type of warfare, however. This type is particularly characterized by circumstances in which a sovereign state, often a powerful one, acts against another state which it perceives to be "illegitimate." Usually the second state is much less powerful; one thinks of the British versus the Boer states at the turn of

²⁰ See, for example, Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Markusen, *The Genocidal Mentality: Nazi Holocaust and Nuclear Threat* (New York, 1990); Eric Markusen and David Kopf, *The Holocaust and Strategic Bombing, Genocide and Total War in the 20th Century* (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford 1995).

the century, Austria against Serbia in August 1914, Nazi Germany in its onslaught on Poland a global war later, or two decades later still, the United States versus North Vietnam. The Japanese post-1937 invasion of China, or the Nazi post-1941 invasion of the Soviet Union might also, arguably, be included in this list, even though the perceived illegitimate states in question were relatively powerful ones, or, at the other end of the “power” spectrum, the Nigerians vis-à-vis a briefly secessionist Biafra. The diversity of these examples warns us that too much can be made of their common features. Nevertheless, the nature of the Type Two warfare is characterized by the supposedly “legitimate” side dispensing in entirety with Geneva Convention-informed restraints on the grounds that the opposition are little more than “terrorists,” “saboteurs,” or “bandits” incapable of fighting conventional, “civilized” war. Worse, they are succored by a native population whose cultural and social level is beneath contempt. Racism invariably confirms this judgmental verdict. In the circumstances, all “necessary” measures for the liquidation of resistance are allowable: mass aerial bombardment, scorched earth, counterinsurgency, mass deportation, environmental devastation, as well as repeated retributive or disciplinary massacre without regard to the age or gender of victims. These features of indiscriminate warfare inevitably bear close resemblance to warfare Type Three which often (though not always) involves genocide. Interestingly, Type Two is also much closer to Type Three in terms of its justification, the “enemy” in its resistance and obdurate unwillingness to submit being perceived to threaten the integrity of the agenda, or indeed existence, of the “legitimate” state. It is, therefore, “they,” the adversary populace, by their misguided actions and belief systems, not to say their atrocities against “us,” who are accused of culpability and responsibility for the perpetrator’s “war of self-defense” which, as a result, has to be fought *à la outrance* and without mercy.

Type Two warfare becomes Type Three warfare when the enemy is no longer a perceived “illegitimate” state but a perceived “illegitimate” community within the territorial definition or imperial framework of the perpetrator state. Very unusually, as in the case of the Holocaust, this can be extended to embrace population groups within allied, vassal, or subject states. Strictly speaking, however, genocide is only a variant of Type Three, given that in many cases where a sovereign state assaults elements of its own subject population or citizenry it does so without resorting to *total* warfare against them. For instance, the British struggle against the Irish, while undoubtedly vicious and punctuated by atrocity at its crisis stage in 1919–21, never spilled over into mass people-killing. The French struggle against the Algerian inde-

pendence movement, in the 1950s and early '60s, teetered on its brink. The Nazi post-1939 occupation of Poland arguably went over it, not only in its extermination of the country's Jews and Roma, but in its response to Polish national resistance. At stake here is what Vahakn Dadrian has referred to as the issue of "preponderant access to overall resources of power."²¹ Whitehall may never have contemplated genocide against the Irish not only because of inherent institutional restraints and humanitarian sensibilities but because it was ultimately unwilling to commit major resources to the struggle. Having assessed that the enemy could not be defeated, it opted to find another, diplomatic strategy which would involve a degree of compromise and the avoidance of catastrophe. In other instances where the state is weak but possibly resistant to recognizing it, the ability to deliver genocide may be limited by lack of military or manpower capabilities and/or by the strength of the communal "enemy." The struggles in the southern Sudan, Iraqi Kurdistan, the Karen and other hill tribe regions of Burma, or the northern Tamil part of Sri Lanka, where the recognized government's monopoly of violence has been for much of the period of conflict far from absolute, and where in practice its administrative hold has been limited to the major towns as opposed to countryside, all provide contemporary illustration of this point.

Nevertheless, these examples are also highly relevant to the study of genocide inasmuch as they point to a sequence of events in which the states in question, increasingly frustrated by their inability to defeat these insurgencies, have lurched towards more radical all-embracing solutions culminating, as in some of these cases, in genocide. Thus I argue that "genocide occurs where a state, perceiving the integrity of its agenda to be threatened by an aggregate population—defined by the state in collective or communal terms—seeks to remedy the situation by the systematic, *en masse* physical elimination of that aggregate, *in toto*, or until it is no longer perceived to represent a threat."²² Yet clearly there is something perplexing, not to say bewildering, in this proposed state-communal equation. Genocide research is predicated on the proposition that whatever genocide is, it cannot be considered warfare in the normally understood sense between two armed combatants—however unequally matched they may be—but an entirely one-sided affair in which a group of absolute perpetrators

²¹ Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The structural-functional components of genocide" in *Victimology: A New Focus*, eds. Israel Drapkin and Emilio Viano (Lexington, MA, 1975), 4: 123.

²² Mark Levene, "Is the Holocaust simply another example of Genocide?" *Patterns of Prejudice* 28 (1994): 10.

apply instruments of terror, violence, and unremitting massacre against entirely defenseless, not to say *innocent* men, women, and children.²³ Thus, to ascribe threat from the people who are mass murdered appears not simply to define genocide as a two-sided dynamic relationship between a state and an element of its population but to potentially infer that the perpetrator's actions are both legitimate and justifiable. Indeed, where a state goes down this path it is invariably accompanied by the claim—as witness recent Serbian behavior with regard to Kosovo—that it is defending itself against an imminent danger to its national security, territorial integrity, or even sovereignty, while at the same time it is going to inordinate lengths not only to conceal the evidence for mass murder but to deny that it has killed anyone.

This discrepancy between an actual threat—where it exists at all—and what the perpetrator claims to be a threat is at the very heart of what one might call the genocide conundrum. Yet, paradoxically, this is the very reason that the perpetrator's claims cannot simply be dismissed out of hand but requires very careful examination and evaluation not only in the forensic sense of proving whether mass killing did or did not occur but equally importantly in providing a necessary insight into the perpetrator's mindset. The repeated tendency by perpetrators to conjure up or imagine enemies, or to make of real ones something much more terrifying and dangerous than they actually are, represents a clearly cultural and/or psychological dimension to the genocide phenomenon and one to which I will return later. But cracking the conundrum cannot be achieved in isolation. Indeed it may be that it can only be found in the intersection between this dark—and essentially unquantifiable—side of the human condition and the level of state and interstate relations where leaderships are assumed to behave rationally in the best interests of their polities and societies.

Yet there is already a second conundrum here. Those who do not commit genocide, or at least have not done so in a twentieth-century time scale, do not necessarily look askance or in horror on those who have. Take, for example, this statement by a British observer of the first authentic twentieth-century example committed—in 1904–05—by the Germans against the Herero and Nama people in South West Africa (Namibia): “There can be no doubt, I think, that the war has been of an almost unmixed benefit to the German colony. Two warlike races have been exterminated, wells have been sunk, new waterholes discovered, the country mapped and covered with telegraph

²³ See Chalk and Jonassohn's definition, in *History*, p. 23.

lines, and an enormous amount of capital has been laid out.”²⁴ The unmistakably upbeat tenor of this comment stands in marked contrast to the language of the United Nations Convention in which genocide is reviled as an “odious scourge.” In principle, of course, leading politicians stand shoulder to shoulder alongside human rights activists and religious leaders in their condemnation of what in the popular mind is considered the most heinous of crimes. In practice, however, they tend to be much more selective, not to say circumspect, before leveling the accusation. Nor is this simply a case of narrow state interest. At the highest, supposedly most moral level of international relations, Kuper asserts “that for all practical purposes” the United Nations defends the right of “the sovereign territorial state . . . as an integral part of its sovereignty . . . to commit genocide.”²⁵

There is, thus, clearly something quite schizophrenic about the international community’s response to genocide. On the one hand it treats it with repugnance and has a Convention, signed by a majority of its states, which seeks to outlaw it; pours opprobrium on those who commit it; is in the process of creating a permanent international tribunal to bring its perpetrators to book; and yet, at the same time, has powerful members who either look the other way, or condone or even actively support incidents of it. Time after time. Could it be then, that states that have not committed genocide within the last one hundred years nevertheless see in those that have too close a reflection of their former selves?

Some scholars, notably R. J. Rummel and Irving Louis Horowitz, have posited the argument that the avoidance of genocide in western societies lies in the strength of their civic institutions, the separation of their executive and legislative branches, and above all, in their democratic, liberal traditions.²⁶ Thus, societies which are tolerant, open, and democratic do not commit genocide. Yet these assumptions involve a remarkable historical and more contemporary sleight of hand. True, polities that before 1900 had already experienced prolonged periods of nation and state building, that were well advanced in their industrializing and infrastructural development, and that consequently felt rea-

²⁴ Quoted in Tilman Dederig, “A Certain Rigorous Treatment of all Parts of the Nation: The Annihilation of the Herero in German South West Africa, 1904,” in *The Massacre in History*, eds. Mark Levene and Penny Roberts (Oxford, 1999), p. 217.

²⁵ Kuper, *Genocide*, p. 161.

²⁶ Irving Louis Horowitz, *Taking Lives, Genocide and State Power* (Brunswick, NJ, 1980); R. J. Rummel, “Democide in Totalitarian States: Mortacracies and Megamurders,” in *The Widening Circle of Genocide*, ed. I. Charny, vol. 3 of *Genocide, A Critical Bibliographical Review* (New Brunswick and London, 1994), pp. 3–39.

sonably secure of their position within a wider geo-strategic context have been much less likely candidates, since then, for committing it. But in order to arrive at this happy condition, the leading modernizing states certainly did commit, at the very least, proto-genocides as well as a number of other practices, which under today's international rule book—created largely out of western Enlightenment thought and practice—would be considered dubious if not downright illegal. These included repeated recourse to war, conquest, and above all slavery. These practices, however, were crucial in providing these states with shortcuts to capital accumulation, which in turn fueled their technological cutting edge and industrial revolutions and which, by the mid-to late-nineteenth century, had assured for them an entirely hegemonic position around the globe. Not only was this the beginning of a new world order, but a “new world pecking order,” in which these states set the tune and everybody else was expected to dance to it.²⁷

This would suggest that the twentieth century practice of genocide has more in common with states which are new, or are heavily engaged in the process of state and nation building, or are redefining or reformulating themselves in order to operate more autonomously and effectively within an international system of nation states. Thus, polities which were latecomers to it, including potentially very powerful ones like Russia and Germany, finding themselves at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the frontrunners, had to consider how best they could make up lost ground. Willingly or unwillingly taking on board much of the leaders' administrative, military, and infrastructural aspects, superficially seemed the only way forward. The ensuing cultural, social, and institutional borrowings set in motion the most profound reformulation of economies and societies. One of the key dilemmas for such late nation states, however, was not simply the requirement to borrow from a culturally alien template but, once acknowledged as players within the system, how to keep up with it. Its regulators and supervisors—the leader states—demanded of new candidates an implicit undertaking that they would transform themselves into polities which would operate effectively and coherently according to its rules. But being fundamentally and dynamically fueled by capitalism—by its very nature a cutthroat business—no new state could afford to stand still and had, rather, to find ways and means of staying afloat within this dominant political economy. True, some states were able to do so by finding for

²⁷ The term is borrowed from Misha Glenny's BBC broadcast, “All Fall Down,” Radio 4, 31 March 1995.

themselves a secondary position under the economic or geo-political aegis of the leading nations, while a few, sometimes by dint of their geographic position, found for themselves a relatively comfortable niche by acting as trading intermediaries or entrepôts. Still other later arrivals, particularly postcolonial newcomers, were able to trade on their poverty and underdevelopment to become major recipients of Western aid. These, interestingly, included a number of states which were to commit genocide.

This deterministic explanatory framework clearly has its limits and limitations. To restate a list of *some* of the main genocide perpetrators of this century—Germany, Russia (the USSR), the Ottoman empire (later Turkey), Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi—is hardly an invitation to obvious communality. The range of this group in terms of wealth and power, not to say political and cultural background, represents a major disincentive while any attempt to suggest ideological proclivities or totalitarian systems as the connecting thread would either be stretching the point to the ridiculous or demanding comparison with other ideologically hard-line or authoritarian prone regimes who have not been notable offenders.

Moreover, where do we find the distinction between those modernizing states who have committed genocide and the generality of those who have not? To argue that all such polities have the potentiality is all well and good but would require us to offer explanation for specific instances essentially on the basis of circumstance. Undoubtedly, circumstance is a crucial factor. But is it sufficient? A final thrust of the deterministic approach might posit that what all our genocidal practitioner states share is a particularly acute anxiety about the wide and ever-increasing gap between themselves and the global leaders within the international system but in relationship to their special sense of a historic, or even mythic, tradition of premodern coherence, authority, or imperium, both in regard to their own societies and/or in a broader regional or continental arena. Thus, genocide states/societies have been the ones with the strongest and most persistent complexes about having been blocked off from a position within the international system which they believe, on past historic record, *ought* to be theirs; have been the ones most prone to support leaderships who articulated this anger and resentment; and, consequently, also have been the ones mostly likely to radicalize their domestic arrangements as well as foreign policies in ways that consciously contravened or challenged the system's "liberal," inclusivist ground rules.

This state of mind is perhaps best encapsulated in the poem, "Esnaf Destani," written by the famous Turkish nationalist, Ziya Gökalp soon

after a series of catastrophic Ottoman defeats in Tripolitania and the Balkan wars:

We were defeated because we were so backward.
 To take revenge, we shall adopt the enemy's science.
 We shall learn his skill, steal his methods.
 On progress we will set our heart.
 We shall skip five hundred years
 And not stand still.
 Little time is left.²⁸

The genocidal mentality, in other words, is closely linked with agendas aimed at accelerated or force-paced social and economic change in the interests of “catching up” or alternatively avoiding, or circumventing, the rules of the system leaders. If this gets us a little closer to the wellsprings of the genocide phenomenon, it still falls somewhat short of explaining why and how state/societal frustrations are unleashed on specific domestic populations. After all, the enemy in Gokälp’s message appears to be the West. As a result, rapid infrastructural overhaul and military industrialization should logically have geared Ottoman Turkey only toward Type One warfare as the route to break out from the system’s perceived straightjacket. And we might at this juncture also note that other states at various times have adopted this formula without obvious recourse to genocide. Wilhelmine Germany in its 1914 bid for “Weltmacht oder Niedergang”—world power or collapse—did not unleash its fury at this point against the Jews. Nor in my understanding of the term did Japan commit genocide a global war later when it attempted its own dramatic breakout, despite its repeated Type Two mass atrocities against the Chinese and other Asian peoples. Perhaps this is because since its early-seventeenth-century near-extirpation of its Christians, Japan contained no ethnic, religious, or social grouping who could fulfill an obvious role as inside “enemy.” Indeed, notwithstanding its now tiny and isolated northern Ainu population—subdued in much earlier times—Japan’s rather unusual national homogeneity makes its contemporary era perpetration of genocide unlikely.

The same, however, cannot be said of Ottoman Turkey at the time of Gokälp’s writing. Thus, if the specificity of genocide over and above a drive to rapid nation building is also bound up with the social and ethnic composition of a state’s population, at what point does this become toxic? The Ottoman Empire, for instance, was historically, on

²⁸ Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism, The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gokälp* (London, 1950), p. 79.

the whole, a rather successful multi-ethnic entity. Even with the emergence of modernity and, thanks to the events of 1789, the explosion of the French nation-state model onto the wider world, there was no particular reason why the Sublime Porte should not have been able to refashion its diverse ethnographic and religious elements along these lines into good Ottoman citizens. After all, there were no given blueprint or guidelines as to what constituted the nation. Even Gokälp's "imagined" Turkish community presumably did not exclude his half-Kurdish self. Indeed, the first eighteenth-century nation states, in France and the United States—to which Gokälp and other nationalist theoreticians would have looked for inspiration—were *in principle* both universalist and highly assimilationist, embracing people of different religious and ethnic origins under the rubric of citizenship. By a somewhat different route, a hybrid British "nation" also followed these contours. Inclusive citizenship thus became the recognized code for all nineteenth-century aspirants to sovereignty, followed, for instance, by post-1871 Germany with regard to its Jews (and Catholics), and for that matter—at least on paper—by an Ottoman state desirous of international recognition of its territorial integrity. Another late-nineteenth-century entrant into the nation-state system, Japan, as we have seen, was fortunate in starting out from a base line of people-homogeneity, while the post-1917 (countersystem) Soviet state proposed to circumvent the national issue, at least in part, by founding itself on internationalist principles which supposedly provided for a genuinely color-blind and all-embracing citizenship.

The major weakness with the early liberal universalist French and Anglo-Saxon models was that what they proclaimed and what they actually did in practice were quite at variance with one another, most blatantly when it came to their colonial black populations. When, thus, latter-day ideologues of the Gokälp ilk sought to scrutinize the source of western state advantage and to adapt the recipe for their own societies' benefit, what they most readily latched onto was not the modernizing impulses or technological innovation *per se* but the ability to mobilize a supposedly distinct national people—the *ethnos*—into a coherent and powerful unity. In retrospect, what is most interesting—and alarming—in Gokälp's poem is his emphasis on a thoroughly exclusive "we," that is, those "authentic" ethnic components of the Ottoman population which had supposedly in the past made the empire great and glorious and which consciously reassembled as a tool for national regeneration would return it to greatness once again.

Gokälp was hardly alone in his search for national *ur*-man. Across nineteenth-century Europe, leading scholars and academicians in the

new disciplines of history, archaeology, philology, and literature had already drawn the contours for the study of the remote “national” past, not only for its own sake but as an instrument by which to “mobilize change in the future.”²⁹ Even that most forceful nineteenth-century counterblast to the national thesis, namely Marxism, claimed to be able to construct the genuinely universal modern man—the prototype for *homo sovieticus*—on the basis of a scientific examination of man’s ascendance from his natural history. All these historical and prehistorical reinventions were not only highly selective but often utterly spurious. Nevertheless, this did not prevent them from becoming received wisdoms which, adopted and adapted by the elites or would-be elites of other “latecomer” states, would serve radical agendas. It is perhaps no coincidence, moreover, that the primary frontrunner and exemplar for these lines of enquiry should be that nineteenth-century latecomer state *par excellence*, Germany. Nor that it should be Germany again which would most strikingly appropriate new racial lines of thought in this national quest.

The flip side to these national and indeed antinational constructions, however, was that they all implicitly assumed the existence of population groupings which not only would not fit the prescribed model but which, in some critical sense, threatened to contaminate it. Again the crystallization of this tendency can be located in European, scientifically informed wisdoms from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, medical science’s “discovery” of death-dealing bacteria and bacilli not only coincided with mass epidemics in the new urban and metropolitan centers but also with new and obsessive Social Darwinian discourses about the “survival of the fittest.” Fears of communal weakness and febrility thus became associated with anxieties that “foreign bodies” operating *from within* the body-politic might undermine or contaminate the physical and mental health of the nation, leading in turn to further medically informed but supposedly value-free prognostications on how to protect or improve the national stock by eugenics or other programs of social engineering.

These fin-de-siècle anxieties were a common feature of the western or western-orientated world at large. But they arguably played or were to play more prominent roles among political elites in latecomer states who perceived their national weakness keenly and who sought radical policies to overcome or transcend their limitations. One tendency we have already noted with regard to these elites is the extreme lengths to which they have gone in order to achieve these goals. Another we

²⁹ Giddens, *Nation-State*, p. 12.

should note is the tendency to blame supposedly corrupting internal “foreign bodies” whenever these strategies go wrong. The two aspects, indeed, are intimately connected in the sense that by their very effort to attain what is usually unattainable such state strategies are likely to come unstuck, leading not only to increased frustration but with it the further rationalization that this must be the result of the insider enemy or enemies’ conscious sabotaging of the state’s heroic not to say Herculean efforts. Thus, genocide scenarios regularly crystallize in crisis situations in which a regime’s conscious effort at break out from its perceived fetters encounters obstacles which recall some previous failure, either of its own or that committed by a predecessor. The classic example, the Holocaust, whose full-scale implementation began during an early stage of the Nazis’ life and death struggle with the Soviet Union in 1941, makes no sense without reference back to the previous major crisis of German state and society in 1918–19, in which by popular consent, Jews *qua* Jews were held to be responsible. By the same token, the Stalinist drive against the “kulaks,” Ukrainian and other “ethnic” peasantries, from 1929 to 1933, has to be set against the crisis of revolution and civil war between 1917 and 1921; the Ittihadist extermination of the Armenians in 1915–16, against the repeated crises of Ottoman state from 1878 through the 1890s, culminating in the Balkan wars of 1912–13; the Indonesian military’s extermination of the countrywide communist movement (the PKI) in 1965 against the attempted PKI challenge to nationalist rule in 1948; the Rwandese “Hutu Power” extermination of the Tutsi in 1994 against the backdrop of counterrevolutionary efforts to destabilize and destroy the new postcolonial regime in the period 1959–64. Indeed, the only major example of genocide being perpetrated without notable prequel is the Cambodian Khmer Rouge destruction of ethnic and political groupings from 1975 through 1979, an example which nevertheless points to a quite extraordinary sequence of immediately preceding catastrophes as the grist added to the Khmer Rouge mill. Even with this example, however, what is here termed the perpetrators’ “Never Again” syndrome applies: the regime locating in some historic context a communal adversary, or adversaries, supposedly intent on the disruption or sabotage of its transformative-salvationist agenda.³⁰

An obvious conclusion one might wish to draw from this picture is that perpetrators of genocide are stridently ideological or authoritar-

³⁰ For more on this argument, see Mark Levene, “Connecting Threads: Rwanda, The Holocaust and The Pattern of Contemporary Genocide,” in *Genocide: Essays Towards Understanding, Early Warning and Prevention*, ed. Roger W. Smith (Williamsburg, 1999), pp. 27–64.

ian regimes more often than not led by unhinged, psychopathic dictators. Popular portrayals of Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein, or Pol Pot only reinforce the sense that their actions against “imagined” enemies are essentially symptoms of extreme paranoia, delusion, and projection. The very fact that in some instances, as for example in the case of the “kulaks,” the construction of a coherent and identifiable adversary took place in the heads of the Stalinist leadership and bore no relationship to social realities, only adds to the view that our subject is one primarily for clinical psychological investigation. Indeed, Nazi ranting and raving about Jewish world conspiracy as just cause for their actions would suggest that worst cases of genocidal behavior are not simply deeply irrational but completely mad.

The problem with this line of reasoning, however, is threefold. First, while the alleged “madness” of the above genocide instigators is not easily verifiable one way or the other, an extended list which might, for instance, include Atatürk, Mao, and Milosevic would be hardpressed to support the generality of this assumption.

Second, even where genocidal states are totalitarian and heavily policed, they are founded on a domestic support base—however limited or narrow that may be—which must itself at least in part be mobilized as accomplices in the perpetration of genocide. It must therefore follow that either this support base is itself suffering from similar delusions as its leaders, or alternatively believes that the leadership is acting rationally in the best interests of polity and people. In fact, the two positions are not necessarily irreconcilable. Norman Cohn provocatively demonstrated some thirty years ago the manner in which fantasies reminiscent of medieval times took strong hold of a significant proportion of post-1918 German society, including, indeed especially, amongst many highly educated and professional people, in the form of the notion that worldwide Jewry, despite its dispersal, minority status and history of persecution, was actually spearheading an international, even cosmic conspiracy to emasculate and ultimately wipe out not only the German people but all western civilization.³¹ Fears of sexual, cultural, and mental contamination, of the spread of disease, and the consequent debilitation of a healthy, virile *volk* by races of Jewish or gypsy antimen, it could be argued, did not so much have to be manufactured by the Nazis but simply echoed and then amplified as the visceral instincts of a *vox populi*. In this way, it could be further argued,

³¹ See Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide, The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London, 1967); *The Pursuit of the Millenium: Revolutionary millenarians and mystical anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London, 1970); *Europe's Inner Demons: An Inquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (New York, 1975).

state organized genocide is actually constructed not from the top down, but bottom-up from hate models provided by grass-roots societal phobias.

This is, of course, the well-known Goldhagen position in which genocide is plausible because it is deeply embedded within the cultural archetypes of a society. But Goldhagen does not conclude from his study of ordinary German participants in the Holocaust that they were anything other than normal, simply that they were impelled toward often sadistic killing of Jews by an eliminationist anti-Semitism. Undoubtedly, Goldhagen's thesis is important for the issue of comparative research in its implicit demand for further consideration of the genocidal interconnections as well as stepping stones between popular culture and state-building agendas. What is missing from Goldhagen is the context. Traditional anti-Semitism within large sections of the German population crystallized into something utterly toxic *only* during 1918–19, in other words in quite extraordinary circumstances of mass trauma and disorientation. This provides a third reason why blaming “mad” or “evil” regimes alone for genocide will not suffice if this fails to take heed of the circumstances in which those regimes arise.

It is surely no accident that the first great wave of contemporary genocides comes out of the actuality and aftermath of that great twentieth-century catastrophe and watershed, the First World War, in which *particular* states—the ones which collapsed, or were defeated, or were most obviously embittered by the war and postwar outcome—and not least by the post-1929 economic aftershock—were also the ones which increasingly discarded the received wisdoms of the liberal-capitalist system in favor of alternative “second” or “third” ways to progress and ultimate triumph. Ordinary people did not initiate the genocides which were sometimes consequent. But the manner of their response to these domestic convulsions, either in their enabling, or possibly in their inability to resist or put the brakes on new masters with their programs for a radical reshaping of society, were critical to these outcomes.

What thus emerges from the period 1914 to 1945 is a pattern of genocide, which is closely linked to the supercession or overthrow of discredited or bankrupt traditional regimes and their replacement by at least in part popularly legitimized radical ones with maximalist agendas for social and/or national regeneration. All these regimes were “revisionist” in the sense that they sought to challenge, circumvent, or transcend the terms of either the pre- or post-Versailles world order. And all, in their efforts to socially engineer a streamlined people-coherence, both for its own sake and also for this wider purpose, were

to greater or lesser degrees ready to reject or abandon former policies aimed at integrating or assimilating ethnic, religious, or social groupings which did not easily or obviously “fit” into the state’s organic conception of itself.

Bauman sees in these strivings, and most particularly in Nazism and Stalinism, “the most consistent, uninhibited expressions of the spirit of modernity.”³² In other words, a highly rational project. Yet when we look at the Nazi onslaught on the Roma, or, again under Nazi aegis, Romania’s extermination of its Bessarabian and Bukovinan Jewry, or Stalin’s genocidal deportations of Tatar, Chechen, and other minority peoples, or lesser known examples such as the Iraqi “Assyrian affair” of 1933, or almost coincidentally, Mussolini’s extirpation of the hill peoples of Cyrenaica, one cannot but be struck by their perpetrators’ *irrationality*. Their victims did not ultimately suffer genocide simply because they did not “fit” a regime’s perception of people-homogeneity. They suffered it because the finger was pointed at them as the group or groups accused of *actively* disrupting or polluting the state’s drive to transcend its limitations.

We are back with the massive or hyperinflated *imaginings* of the state, which another acute observer, Ron Aronson, has described as a “rupture with reality.”³³ However, Aronson does not propose that this has no relationship to modernity. On the contrary, what he argues is that in situations where modernity is harnessed as an instrument for the realization of impossible goals what you end up with is a dialectical set of tensions between power and impotence, reason and madness. In a critical sense the gargantuan nature of a regime’s agenda may indicate in advance the degree to which it has already lost touch with reality. But the actual attempt at implementation, “the realization of the unrealizable” as he calls it, is likely to result in a crisis in which, having boxed itself into a corner from which it is unable to retreat, the regime finds that its only recourse is in “reshaping what resists,” that is, massive violence.³⁴ Interestingly, Aronson suggests that it is not only in instances of genocide that this extreme and seemingly irrational behavior can occur. The United States, for instance, in its attempts to obliterate first much of North Korea in the early 1950s, and then North Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s, not to say the rest of Indochina, speaks volumes about the contradictions between an apparently all-powerful hegemon and the actuality of its inability to reorder the world in its own assured image. The discrepancy between

³² Bauman, *Modernity*, p. 93.

³³ Ronald Aronson, *The Dialectics of Disaster, A Preface to Hope* (London, 1983), p. 169.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 136.

hubris and humiliation does not have to be the prerogative of a recognized genocide state, nor necessarily taken out on a communal scapegoat. Attempted crisis resolution could as easily be in the form of an aggressive Type One warfare; Germany's 1914 attempted breakout from perceived encirclement, for instance, or Iraq's Type Two 1990 invasion of Kuwait or, as a latter day extension of either of these trajectories, the unleashing of nuclear weapons, a scenario—bar the somewhat different culminating sequence of World War Two—narrowly avoided to date.

What all these scenarios share in common is the state leaderships' conviction of the malevolence of forces "out there" that have conspired not only to frustrate the realization of their agenda but to harm and even possibly physically eradicate *their* own people. This does not rule out instances where these anxieties have some grain of truth in them. However, the most extraordinary examples of genocide are those notable for the complete absence of any concrete evidence to suggest that a communal group qua group has the intention, let alone ability, to carry through such a maleficence. The Nazi assertion that "the Jew is the German people's most dangerous enemy" perhaps represents the most thoroughgoing example confirming Aronson's rupture thesis.³⁵ But the statement made in the Serbian parliament in 1991 that "*the truth is* (my italics) that all non-Serb ethnic groups, especially the Croats, are at this very minute preparing the genocide of all Serbs" suggests that such projections are hardly exclusive to the era of Stalinism and fascism.³⁶

Indeed, the persistence and prevalence of genocide *since* the destruction of Nazism—running to an average of almost one case a year since 1945—must lead one to further ponder what motor continues to drive this seemingly irresistible lunacy?³⁷ The immediate aftermath of the Second World War, with its trials of German and Japanese war criminals at Nuremberg and Tokyo, the inauguration of the United Nations, and with it both its Charter on Human Rights and Genocide Convention, should have been crystal-clear signals from the international system leaders that its perpetration by newcomer states

³⁵ Quoted in Uriel Tal, "On the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide," *Yad Vashem Studies* 13 (1979): 7–52.

³⁶ Quoted in Paul Parin, "Open Wounds, Ethnopschoanalytical Reflections on the Wars in Former Yugoslavia," in *Mass Rape, The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Alexandra Stiglmayer (Lincoln and London, 1994), p. 50.

³⁷ See Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, "Toward Empirical Theory of Genocides and Politicides: Identification and Measurement of Cases since 1945," *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (1988): 359–71, and more recently their "Victims of the State: Genocides, Politicides and Group Repression from 1945 to 1995," in *Contemporary Genocides: Causes, Cases, Consequences*, ed. Albert J. Jongman (The Hague, 1996), pp. 33–58.

would not be tolerated. Yet, paradoxically, it was the willingness of these very same leaders *at this very same time* to acquiesce or condone, or even officially sponsor, former wartime allies such as the Czechs or the Poles in their sub-genocidal ethnic cleansings of millions of Germans and other unwanted peoples from their territories, not to say of the Soviet Union's continuance of its prewar reordering of communal populations primarily by mass deportation, which seemed to offer a quite different and hardly subliminal countermesssage. It was as if human rights were being put on a frozen pedestal of abstract principle for the foreseeable future in order to enable states created or recreated in a postwar context to get on with the creation of social conditions appropriate to their rapid modernization and consolidation. Indeed, the message seemed to be that it was *expected* that the practical achievement of these goals would involve ethnic standardization, the removal or dissipation of troublesome or difficult population groups, or those who, perhaps because of their "primitive" and "backward" cultures, were deemed obstacles in the path of progress.

These imperatives would suggest, *à la* Bauman, that genocide would be committed by new state leaderships for perfectly *rational* reasons, associated with their developmental blueprints to operate and compete within an increasingly integrated international political economy. The very fact that genocide, which in the interwar years was most associated with new or newly remodeled states in Europe and the Near East, became a global phenomenon in the post-1945 ebb of the European imperial or neo-imperial tide must give *some* credence to this line of thought. Superficially, for instance, the genocidal behavior of a number of South American and South Asian countries against tribal peoples, in their efforts to reach out, connect, and integrate rich forest and other extractive resources of geographically peripheral hinterlands for the benefit of their already advancing metropolitan economies, would suggest a wholly developmental logic. But even in these largely "off the map" instances of contemporary genocide, such logic has been rarely quite so one dimensional.

The name of the game in these instances has been that of former Bangladeshi President Zia's "develop or perish," in other words, the pursuit of crash courses in rapid modernization, whatever the consequences.³⁸ The fear of being left behind in the global race for position, or much worse, being forced back into a perpetual dependency, thus

³⁸ The rallying cry of President Zia of Bangladesh, in the late 1970s, coinciding with the onset of the genocidal onslaught on the Chittagong Hill Tracts. See Veena Kukreja, *Civil-Military Relations in South Asia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India*, (New Delhi and London, 1991), p. 164.

has always had in the contemporary era something of an air of desperation about it. That native peoples have particularly been the casualties in this process, however, has not been a case simply of their inhabiting territories designated for roads, mines, or hydroelectric dams. Rather, in the eyes of notably Brazilian, Indonesian, or Bangladeshi technocrats, it has been their failure to behave to some preconceived primitive, barbarous, and preferably passive type who, recognizing their allotted station in the great scheme of things, would consequently and conveniently fade away into oblivion as soon as the first bulldozers or transmigratory settlers appeared. On the contrary, the refusal of, for instance, the *jumma* in Bangladesh or Papuans in Irian Jaya (West Papua) to lie down and die quietly but instead organize and fashion themselves into modern “fourth world” identities in order to more effectively resist state encroachment, provides a potent clue both as to the intensification of the genocidal onslaughts upon them and the perpetrators’ repeated justification that behind them must be some other *more* organized outside force directing their sabotage of the state developmental agenda.

This notion that the targeted victim group are really the proxies, stooges, or agents of a much more malevolent but dissembled or hidden power intent on denying the state its *own*, self-directed mission towards unfettered independence and genuine integrity seemingly gravitates us back yet again toward an explanation for genocide in the much murkier waters of psychological mindsets where the perpetrator sees international conspiracies in everything. In the post-1945 world of Cold War–dominated international politics, such accusations have flown thick and fast with devastating results. Tagging whole populations as “communist” in the Indonesia of 1965, East Timor a decade later, or the Guatemala of the early 1980s provided state justification for genocide. But so too, in the Soviet Union, China, and Cambodia, did diverse branding as “cosmopolitan,” “Soviet revisionist,” or “stooge of US imperialism.” In the most extreme of these examples, the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, not only were specific ethnic minority populations of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Muslim Chams particularly vulnerable to such charges, but literally anyone who had the misfortune to have been living or seeking refuge in the US-backed government zone around Phnom Penh when it fell to the Khmer Rouge in April 1975. The ensuing division of society, into “true” Khmer who would enjoy the fruits of the country’s projected “super great leap forward” and “new” people slated for perpetual hard labor and probable death, was founded on the assumption that the latter, however fleetingly, were tainted by their association with western

imperialism. Even then, as the regime's closed utopian experiment ground to a halt and began disintegrating under the weight of the impossible tasks it had set itself, the list of "enemies" shifted and expanded further still to embrace anyone that the regime deemed foreign or inauthentic. Here, however, we come face to face with anxieties which go much deeper than any set in motion simply by Cold War ideologies. The historic enemy perceived to have denied the Khmer their rightful greatness were the neighboring Vietnamese. Communist Vietnam in 1978, of course, was supposed to be a fraternal ally. Yet in that year the genocidal trajectory of the Khmer Rouge reached both its apogee and nemesis when practically the whole population of its Eastern Zone were provided with blue scarves for their deportation and then extermination on the collective indictment that their Khmer bodies were occupied by "Vietnamese minds."³⁹

The episode of the blue scarves ought to throw doubt on arguments which treat genocidal victim groups as fixed entities as in some Linnaean system of plant and animal classification, instead of as the products—often entirely imaginary ones—of the perpetrators' assemblage of social reality. Lemkin's formulation of genocide based on *genos* (race) in this sense is a disservice to our well-rounded comprehension of the phenomenon. Certainly, Lemkin's focus on the destruction of the "biological structure" of a communal group was correct and appropriate inasmuch as a distinctiveness of genocide lies in the mass murder of women of all ages equally and without discrimination from the men who are their blood relatives and with the purpose of denying or seeking to deny their biological as well as social reproduction.⁴⁰ But how this group of people identifies itself, or whether it does so at all, in ethnic, religious, or political terms is immaterial to either a "genocidal process" of human rights abuse and persecution or the actuality of systematic liquidation. When it came to legalizing discrimination against Jews the Nazis' conceptualization of them as a "race" proved to have no empirical or juridical foundation. By the same token, Himmler's engagement of academics and special institutes to isolate the authentic Roma achieved nothing but contradictory messages. In the end, state perpetrators exterminate groups of people because they perceive them as a threat and find racial, ethnic, or social tags for them as convenient for this purpose.

³⁹ Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime, Race, Power and Genocide* (New Haven and London, 1996), p. 408.

⁴⁰ Lemkin, *Axis Rule*, p. 79. See Fein's definition in "Genocide, A Sociological Perspective," p. 24.

This, however, does not mean that a group need necessarily be a *tabula rasa* waiting to be victimized. What is important to know is what it is about “the group” that challenges or appears in the perpetrator state’s mind to challenge its authority, legitimacy, or integrity. The *jumma* in Bangladesh, Karen in Burma, Dinka and Nuer in southern Sudan, Kurds in Iraq, or Tutsi in Rwanda may not have objectively represented mortal dangers to their respective states, but the fact that significant elites of each have sought a more pluralistic framework of state, or an autonomy within it against the grain of centralist-minded agendas, may have been enough for them to be viewed as such. Add to this a historic association of these groups with former imperial rulers and one can begin to itemize common ingredients which might provide for a genocidal recipe. Of the Kurds in Saddam’s Iraq, Kanan Makiya specifically notes that they “suffered more than others not because they were Kurds, but because they resisted and fought back hard.”⁴¹ Not all Kurds, though. Some were considered “loyal” and fought on the Ba’athist side. In another significant case, that of the Tibetans in the Chinese onslaught of 1959, it was perhaps not only their bid to reassert their autonomy which represented a territorial challenge to the People’s Republic but a cultural one to its hegemonic and monolithic wisdom. In other words, the threat of a bad example. One can note many similar cases where a people have become a thorn in the side of a regime not so much for their “ethnic” or “national” characteristics but for what they socially or even morally represented, the idea, for instance, that power and resources might be shared between different communal groups or political tendencies; that society need not be homogenous but diverse and multicultural; or perhaps simply that there are other ways of looking at the world. George Steiner has spoken of the Jews in the context of Christianity and European civilization as the incarnation, “albeit wayward and unaware—of its own best hopes.” When Europe, in the shape of the Nazis, attempted to extirpate them, it was thus not only a form of “self-mutilation” but a “lunatic retribution” against the “inextinguishable carriers of the ideal.”⁴²

All this surely brings us back less to the victim groups and more to the nature of the driven regimes which commit genocide, what it is that impels them and, as a necessary corollary to that, what most frightens or haunts them. Our argument has rested on the proposition

⁴¹ Kanan Makiya, *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising and the Arab World* (London, 1993), p. 219.

⁴² George Steiner, *In Bluebird's Castle* (London, 1971), pp. 41–42.

that the drive to genocide is a function of states with a particularly marked or latent tendency to dispute the discrepancy between the way the world is and the way they think that it *ought* to be. The era of Cold War and of bipolar, including potentially nuclear-armed, struggle undoubtedly gave an added edge and intensity to the toxic potential inherent in this condition. “Enemies within” or “enemies of the people” were regularly conjured up by both hard-pressed communist regimes and their most vehement or geographically sensitive opponents in the “free world” camp as justification for the extirpation of ethnic or other elements in the population perceived to stand as obstacles to their monodirectional paths to progress. Competition between the superpowers, in their support or opposition to given states, also directly affected some of these outcomes. Supporting ethnic insurgencies, for instance, as the United States covertly did with regard to the Mimang Tsogdu in Tibet in the 1950s, or the Kurdish *pesh merga* in the 1970s, not only seemed to make tangible Chinese or Iraqi state fears that there *really* were international plots aimed at undermining them, but in so doing vastly increased the vulnerability of ordinary Tibetans and Kurds to genocide. Likewise, US geo-strategic obsessions as to the imminence of South East Asia’s collapse to communism, in the wake of Phnom Penh’s fall in 1975, provided one of the most stark examples of a state—Indonesia—being given the green light the following year to extirpate the *marxist*-led and newly liberated Portuguese colony of East Timor to the tune of one-third of its million-strong inhabitants.

Western backing for Indonesia’s advantage, of course, stands in marked contrast to the simultaneous, self-willed and utterly autarkic drive by the Khmer Rouge to overcome the limitations of Cambodia’s perceived febrility. Of all twentieth-century genocidal scenarios, that of late-1970s Cambodia in many respects demonstrates its nature in extreme crystallization. By clearing away everything deemed to be non-Cambodian debris the Khmer Rouge aimed to begin again, as it were, from scratch. In so doing they assumed that this would provide the necessary springboard from which Cambodia’s innate power would be dramatically unleashed, returning the country to its twelfth-century glory days in a matter of years. Yet if on one level this marks out the Khmer Rouge’s agenda as both peculiarly salvationist, not to say utopian, as well as unusually dependent on a narrow and unwavering set of ideological assumptions in order to arrive at this transcendent destination, there is a danger in reading too much into this perspective. Ideological Pol Pot and his followers certainly were. And good communists—in their own eyes—too. But ultimately what so desper-

ately impelled them was an intense Khmer patriotism which demanded *their* revitalization of an ancient not to say mythic Khmer state against the grain of an unjust, hostile, and bloody world. One might go further and say that what mattered most to the Khmer Rouge was less the ideology which would get them there and more a simple, brazen reassertion of *Wille zu Macht*.

We have seen something of the same functional pragmatism in more recent genocides. While Serbia's Milosevic and Croatia's Tudjman happily changed spots from communist to arch-nationalist on their roads to war and subgenocide in Bosnia and beyond, Rwandese Hutu leaders sought to defy regional pressure and international accords for power sharing with former Tutsi exiles by attempting to eliminate all perceived opponents. That this latter great end-of-the-century genocide came after the collapse of the Cold War and in an era in which, according to American guru Francis Fukuyama, the ideological alternatives to liberal capitalism had been comprehensively trashed on the slag heap of history, must surely give us pause.⁴³

Events in Kosovo surely confirm that contrary to Fukuyama there does remain one great ideological underpinning for genocide as strong now, at the onset of the twenty-first century as it was at the end of the nineteenth: nationalism. Indeed, one might posit that the emergence of new nation states out of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia in the wake of communist demise both there and more generally, represents the most marked reassertion of toxic tendencies in world historical development from the pre-1914 record. Kosovo should remind us that these tendencies never truly went away. Their continuity can perhaps be illustrated best by brief reference to a Serbian opinion-former and policymaker who had much to say on the Kosovo issue. Vaso Cubrilovic was one of the group of young terrorists, alongside Gavrilo Princip, who had planned the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. Unlike Princip, however, Cubrilovic survived the Great War to become a respected historian at the University of Belgrade, where he wrote policy papers for the Yugoslav government advocating, in effect, state terrorism to get rid of the country's Muslims and in particular, Kosovo's ethnic Albanians. He also regularly attended, in the 1930s, the Serbian Cultural Club in Belgrade, where quasi-scientific discussions, initiated by the government and the general staff office, reiterated this extirpatory theme. In one such paper for the Club, Cubrilovic regretted that there had not been a more systematic

⁴³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London, 1992).

removal of the “foreign element” as had been practiced in pre-1914 Serbian state building and concluded that the only solution to the Arnaut (Albanian) problem was to make them leave the country. “When it is possible for Germany to force tens of thousands of the Jews to emigrate, for Russia to transfer millions of people from one part of the continent to another, a world war will not break out just because of some hundreds of thousands of displaced Arnauts.”⁴⁴ At the end of the Second World War Cubrilovic reappeared as adviser to the Yugoslav communist regime, advocating in essence the same “Albanian” policy.

Of course one riposte to this illustration might be to argue that, in the light of the contemporary realities extolled by Fukuyama, today’s Cubrilovices are actually yesterday’s men peddling nationalisms that are a redundant irrelevance. Of the hundred most important economic units currently in the global political economy, only half of them are nation states; the others are transnational corporations (TNCs). Or to put it another way, of some 180 nation states in the world, 130 of them have smaller economies than the fifty largest TNCs.⁴⁵ Yet it is exactly in this rapid globalizing trajectory that we should be able to discern why the Cubrilovices and Milosevices of the world, rather than disappearing, will continue to have a following and why, consequently, genocide will in fact be *more* prevalent in the near future than it was fifty or a hundred years ago.

Nation states will not readily give up their power or their promise to the forces which drive the global economy, however inexorable those forces may appear to be. One might add that this may well continue to be particularly true for state regimes which because they are economically faltering may attempt to compensate by amplifying the national self-esteem message and conversely, the malevolence of the international system towards them. We forget at our peril that Rwanda (and Burundi) had a political coherence and sense of cohesive identity which long preceded the colonial era, perpetuated since then, albeit in fiercely competing Tutsi and Hutu narratives. Or that Milosevic’s bid to create a greater Serbia out of the carcass of Yugoslavia was predicated not only on a Serb self-perception of a special mission

⁴⁴ Quote from H. T. Norris, “Kosova and the Kosovans: Past, present and future as seen through Serb, Albanian and Muslim eyes,” in *The Changing Shape of the Balkans*, eds. F. W. Carter and H. T. Norris (Boulder and London, 1996), p. 15. For more on Cubrilovic, see also Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo, A Short History* (London and Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 284–85, 322–23.

⁴⁵ Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas* (London, 1996), p. 158.

dating back to the nineteenth century but even further back to some supposedly mythic Serb civilization from medieval times.

In both Rwandan and Serbian instances, war and genocide represented the crisis-response of state regimes to their inability to achieve their national agendas by other accepted means. They tore up the apparent rules of the international system and instead gambled on radical, high-risk shortcuts to a solution. Yet the great irony is that until 24 March 1999—the day of the opening of the Kosovo air campaign—so long as such efforts were contained within the territorial confines of the state's own sovereignty or had no noticeable impact beyond it, international anxiety about human rights violations or even genocide hardly translated into international censure, let alone action. In this sense, Cubrilovic's 1930's assessment of international inertia has remained accurate until almost the present day. And there is a simple reason for this: the nation state has remained sacrosanct, which is hardly surprising given that it is the basic building block of the global system.⁴⁶

As a result, nobody censured Democratic Kampuchea *for its genocides* despite the fact that by the late 1970s these were already quite well known and documented. Instead, the Western-led international community became incandescent with anger when it was invaded by its Vietnamese neighbor. Nor, while followers of Pol Pot continued to hold the Cambodian seat at the United Nations long after they had been ousted, did the international community complain when another genocidal state, Saddam's Iraq, attempted in 1988 in increasingly full public view, to liquidate its most troublesome Kurds in the notorious Anfal campaigns. However, it did respond when Saddam made the mistake of invading oil-rich Kuwait. It could thus be argued that the New World Order, which the US-led military campaign against Iraq supposedly heralded, is very much like the old when it comes to genocide. True, the Western allies set up a "safe haven" in Northern Iraq for millions of fleeing Kurds but only primarily because they more greatly feared the consequences for their NATO ally Turkey—with its own "troublesome" Kurdish population—should it have had to admit

⁴⁶ Thus, at the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly of the UN, in September 1979, Western and ASEAN delegates were successful in pointing out "that the United Nations charter is based on the principle of non-interference and that UN membership has never been granted or withheld on the basis of respect for human rights. If it were, a large proportion of the governments presently there would have to leave." Quoted in William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy, Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience* (London, 1984), p. 138.

the refugees. Fears of the impact of millions of displaced persons also played some role in the very belated postgenocide decisions of the “powers” to act with regard to Rwanda and Bosnia. In the latter case, Bosnia’s initially uncertain status as a sovereign state certainly did not help its plight anymore than the earlier case of East Timor, whose continued subjugation by Indonesia remained—until very recently—largely a subject of international acquiescence. The Kurdish safe haven withers on the vine; Tibet remains off the international agenda; the international community upholds Tudjman and Milosevic’s ethnic carve-up of Bosnia through the Dayton Accords. The message, it might appear, is rather clear. Despite international tribunals on Rwanda and Bosnia and the prospect of a permanent court to try crimes against humanity, including genocide, the leading states who constructed the international system and continue to be its prime movers have demonstrated not only an ability to live with states who commit genocide but even to applaud its successful consequences.

Is Western action over Kosovo, therefore, the herald of a new beginning? Or, even of a new era in which genocide will be finally expurgated from the human experience? Undoubtedly, the willingness of the international system leaders, through their military arm NATO, to respond *specifically* to gross human rights violations in another sovereign state does represent a remarkable and possibly quite unprecedented departure. But the fact that this happened under the auspices of today’s Great Powers rather than at the behest of the UN also recalls a more familiar pattern of *self-interested* international action in the past which, very far from being universally benign, was actually highly selective. If this pattern reasserts itself, the Western system leaders may act in the future to prevent or halt genocidal threats where they are sure of being able to do so with minimal military, political, or economic consequence to themselves—in other words against very weak states—but not against, for instance, Russia, China, or Turkey—all states with significant potential for genocide—where Western self-interest would dictate a strictly hands-off policy. Thus with the UN and other genuinely international institutions marginal to the real conduct of international affairs, Western powers will be able to pick and choose where they wish to intervene against actual or would-be genocidal perpetrators.

Yet even this sobering prediction in the light of post-Kosovo analysis and assessment may be too optimistic. Despite the euphoria in early June 1999, when Milosevic agreed to the new peace deal and removed his forces from Kosovo, the fact that this had been achieved less by

seventy-plus days of constant NATO bombing and more by a deal heavily reliant on the Russians suggests the strict limits upon Western willingness to pursue, let alone punish, those who commit genocide.

A final, ominous historical example. Back in 1923, at the treaty of Lausanne, Turkey, having smashed its way to modern nation-statehood out of the imperial hulk of the Ottoman Empire, was duly recognized and welcomed into the concert of nations by the great Western powers. En route to this goal, the Ittihadist and subsequent Kemalist regimes deported, massacred, or ethnically cleansed many more than two million Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, and Assyrians. There had been much Western outrage in earlier years, particularly about the genocidal fate of the Armenians, and even plans to try the perpetrators before an international court. But as Richard Hovannisian has noted of the Lausanne protocol: "The absolute Turkish triumph was reflected in the fact that in the final version . . . neither the word Armenia, nor the word Armenian, was to be found. It was as if the Armenian Question or the Armenian people themselves had ceased to exist."⁴⁷ In other words, Turkey's blatant repudiation of the "official" rules of the game in favor of a series of accelerated shortcuts—including genocide—toward statehood were ultimately conveniently ignored and even condoned by the treaty-makers of Lausanne. On the contrary, they reciprocated by entering into a series of long-term diplomatic, commercial, and ultimately military relations with Turkey. Talaat Pasha, prime mover in the 1915 destruction of the Armenians, said at the time: "I have the conviction that as long as a nation does the best for its own interests, and succeeds, the world admires it and thinks it moral."⁴⁸ Translated into the present the message might be to Saddam, Milosevic, and other would-be emulators: be bloody minded, batten down the hatches, and let Western self-interest do the rest.

⁴⁷ Richard G. Hovannisian, "Historical Dimensions of the Armenian Question, 1878–1923," in *Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, ed. R. G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ and London, 1986), p. 37.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Vahakn N. Dadrian, *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence and Oxford, 1995), p. 383.