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Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing and Nationalism

DANIELE CONVERSI

Genocide and nationalism share common etymological roots: genocide derives from the ancient Greek *genos* (stirp, race, kind, category, overlapping with class, tribe and people), subsequently leading to the Latin *gens*.[1] Nationalism comes from the Latin verb *nascor, nasci , natus sum* (to be born), later leading to the substantive *natio, nationis*. The suffix *-cide*, from the Latin *caedo, caedere, cecidi, caesus* (to cut (down) or kill), has been added onto the Greek root.[2] The world itself was coined in 1944 by the Polish-born US jurist Raphael Lemkin (1944: 19). A new term needed indeed to be minted as humanity emerged from a crime without historical antecedents, the Holocaust (Hebrew, *Shoah*). Since the combination of genocide and nationalism characterized the darkest era of human history and occurred during the past century, both are often associated with modernity and rapidly modernizing societies. Moreover, both relate to a third set of terms also describing common descent and membership in a single 'extended family': ethnicity, 'ethnie' and ethnic group. In its original Greek connotation, *ethnos* was already associated with the idea of shared descent and lineage.[3] The term 'ethnic cleansing' has various origins, but its contemporary popular usage is a verbatim translation of the Serbian *etnicko ciscenje*, which began to be used widely in the global media since the 1990s. Initially, it was a more 'benign' way to describe the same unspeakable event, genocide.

The exaltation of a dominant nation as superior to all others, particularly subaltern groups, inevitably leads to a series of discriminatory acts against competing nations, ranging from assimilation and marginalization to genocide. The role of central governments and the military appears to be crucial in most instances of genocide, together with media censorship and popular misinformation.

Since they developed often simultaneously, a crucial question arises: how intense is the relationship between nationalism and genocide? Nationalism is the doctrine that 'the rulers should belong to the same ethnic (that is, national) group as the ruled' (Gellner 1983: 1). The doctrine assumes that a ruler belonging to an alien nationality or ethnic group is illegitimate (Connor 2004). However, the inverse formula is a sure recipe for ethnic cleansing, forced assimilation, mass deportation and genocide: to claim that the inhabitants of a specific constituency must share the same ethnic lineage of its leaders is to give *carte blanche* to mass expulsion and the drastic re-drawing of

boundaries to suit the group's pedigree. Nationalism also holds that 'nation and political power should be congruent' (Gellner 1983: 1). This longing for congruence, or ethnopolitical purity, is the historical hallmark of most nationalist attempts to erase ethnic distinctiveness by homogenizing entire populations.

Nationalism was generally accompanied by assimilationism which, in turn, entailed an effort to absorb or eliminate cultural minorities. The very intolerant nature of the assimilationist modern state has created the preconditions for turning its unprecedented powers against hapless minorities (van den Berghe 1990, 1992). This was made easier by the fact that nationalist mobilizations were either ushered or accompanied by state militarism. Hence ethnopolitical, ideological and religious opposition was marginalized and reconceived within a 'discipline and punish' framework (Foucault 1991).

Probably, the earliest avatar of this tragic trend was the Armenian genocide (Melson 1996). Large pogroms had already occurred in 1894–96, when Westernizing nationalism emerged as an influential force, first in the Balkans, then among Turkish elites. But the 1914–16 mass extermination campaigns were unprecedented by any humanly acceptable and recognizable standard. This was a direct consequence of rapidly modernizing state structures emulating Western models and the ensuing collapse of empire (see also Mazower 1999, 2001; McCarthy 1996).[4] In other words, the Ottoman Empire was then living under the simultaneous impact of massive Westernization accompanied by territorial losses. Turkish nationalism developed amongst the returning diaspora, particularly refugees from the Balkans and Russia. These refugees often mimicked 'modernizing' nationalism, particularly in the latter case (Lieven 2000: 134).

Westernization materialized also in the form of victorious secessionist movements mobilizing their peoples behind ethnic banners and attacking the empire from within – although they were most often supported from abroad. Young Turk army officials fought against successful nationalist uprisings in the Balkans and ended up imitating them – while forging links with German and other Western nationalists. So the Young Turks movement was inspired by, and mimicked, its post-1789 Western archetypes. Paradoxically, the main victims of Turkey's secular and anti-Islamic nationalism were non-Muslim minorities which had previously enjoyed protection and prosperity under the more liberal 'consociational' laws of the Ottoman Empire (Mann 2005: 62, 114–19; Nimni 2005: 10, 79).

MODERNITY, GENOCIDE AND THE NATION-STATE

The twentieth century has been widely recognized as the century of nationalism and genocide. Most historians and social scientists are in concordance on this grim assessment of the past century (see Carmichael 2005; Hobsbawm 1995; Kuper 1981; Levene 2000, 2005b; Melson 1996; Shaw 2003): Never before has mass killing been carried out on such a vast scale and in such a short span of time.

Nationalism has become a truly 'global' political movement and the dominant ideology of modernity. From its European core, it has slowly shifted and mutated, adapting its chameleonic shape according to geography and history. Thus, the modern itinerary of genocide follows the trail of nationalism and Westernizing modernity.

The connection between Westernization, modernity, war and genocide has become relatively established in academia. These historical developments are strictly related to state formation in an age of militarized nationalism. Thus, many Holocaust scholars describe genocide as an entirely modern and Western event with its unprecedented systematicity and techno-bureaucratic dimension (Bauman 1989). The French historian Léon Poliakov (1974) argued that the Holocaust was legitimized as a triumph of Western civilization, the latter being conceived in terms of racial superiority against spurious Oriental, non-Western influences which could imperil civilization from within and lead to its fatal decadence. Genocide is therefore intensively related to European inter-state

rivalry, government expansion, imperialism and the state's intrusion into the private realm via the consolidation of central power. Patriotism and nationalism provided its ideological glue and emotional underpinning.

The correlation between nationalism and modernity largely depends on how the latter is defined. Whether we identify modernity entirely within the philosophical (Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment), the political (French Revolution), the economic (ascent of the bourgeoisie), the scientific (Darwinism) or the technological (Industrial Revolution) sphere, we can find each of them well represented within radical nationalism, particularly Nazism. The latter was indeed inconceivable without, or outside, modernity as intended in any of the above senses: it can be associated with the spread of Jacobin-inspired centralism and state idolatry, the protection of bourgeois interests, the diffusion of 'only-the-fittest-survive' logic, and, finally, massive industrialization.

This brings us to the role of the modern state and its bureaucratic-military machine. Basically, two trends have confronted each other in genocide studies: the 'strong-state' thesis (Rummel 1994, 2003; Harff 1986; Harff and Gurr 1988; Horowitz 1980) and the 'weak-state' thesis (Bloxham 2003; Mann 2005; Mommsen 1997). The former, often identified as the intentionalist explanation, argues that genocide is rooted in the absolute concentration of power into the hands of tiny elites. The latter, or functionalist explanation, diagnoses its emergence in the collapse of empire, state disintegration, political chaos and other forms of state 'weakness'. One view concentrates on the intention to kill, the other on the chain of circumstances as they unfold independently from full governmental control. The structure–agency debate remains in fact a substantial cleavage in the literature.

However, it should be noted that the two approaches are not incompatible. What matters is the subjective perception of weakness experienced by state elites, rather than any actual 'weakness' to be objectively measured. For instance, 'paranoid' leaders, such as Saddam Hussein, Stalin and the Young Turks, tended to radicalize their oppressive policies out of sheer fear of armed mutinies and defenestration. To engage rogue elements of the army and the party in mounting spirals of massacres and counter-massacres provided a vital 'safety valve' for the continuity and survival of these leaders. But even the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution could be seen as a sign of state weakness or paranoid leadership. Yet, the sheer power of the state's bureaucratic machine contributed to mass murder on an unprecedented scale, such as the Vendée massacre (1793–94). French historians have debated whether this can be defined as the first modern genocide or 'populicide' (Lebrun 1985). State power was indeed further emboldened by nationalist fervour at the very peak of its 'weakness', leading to the first *levée en masse* (August 1793). The impact of state-led nationalist terror on ordinary people was in fact devastating. Hence, it is not the state's alleged 'strength' or 'weakness' which matters, but the perception of personal threat experienced by state elites.

Yet, in all of the documented cases of genocide, the power of even the 'weakest' states was unmatched in comparison with the inadequate, futile means of self-defence available to isolated rural communities and other hapless targets of genocidal practices.

Although most interpretations of genocide tend to be modernist or state-centred, it is essential to look briefly at the major alternative explanation linking genocide to the overseas expansion of Western empires. Colonial genocides are therefore to be conceptually distinguished from modern genocides.[5]

ECOLOGICAL CATASTROPHE AND IMPERIALISM

Historically, genocide occurred in the wake of both imperial expansion and disintegration. Even before the conquest of the Americas, the fate of the indigenous Guanches of the 'Fortunate' Islands (present-day Canaries) anticipates a pattern of European expansion leading to cultural destruction, environmental collapse and physical extermination (Crosby 1986).

Pre-modern genocides are often linked to ecological disaster, rather than modern state-building and ideologies consciously aiming at the eradication of cultural differences. The worst instances occurred among settlers over which the imperial government had scarcely any control – and eventually lost control after they declared independence. Thus, the newly independent states emerging from the decolonization of the Spanish Empire pursued their genocidal campaign with even greater fervour.

Some areas, like southern Argentina, had been completely 'cleansed' of their indigenous elements, while others, like Chile, nearly succeeded in the same goal, bar for surviving exceptions like the Mapuches. Not by chance, these countries were situated at the antipodes of Europe, at the further reaches from Madrid. Likewise, the complete annihilation of Tasmania's aborigines could more easily take place in an area most removed from direct British rule. This interpretation has been advanced with particular sharpness by Michael Mann (2005: 70–110), who expands the modernist approach by incorporating the fate of Native Americans and other indigenous peoples. An important trend in genocide studies is now devoted to the study of what David Stannard (1992) has famously described as the 'American Holocaust' (see also Churchill 1997).

Mike Davis (2001) has observed how British rule was marked by cyclical regular 'holocausts', during which the settlers and the imperial core saw an opportunity to weaken the colonial peasantry and increase their dependence on empire.[6] This was the era of liberal dogmas justified by a blind belief in Adam Smith's (1723–90) 'invisible hand of the market' as a self-regulatory mechanism of supply and demand. We can therefore discern implications for contemporary globalizing trends, which Davis specifically links to environmental degradation and climate change.

It was not only expanding or pre-modern empires which spawned genocide. Downsizing semi-authoritarian states or contracting autocratic empires, such as the French in Algeria during the 1950s or the Ottoman in its death throws, occasionally display genocidal behaviour (Melson 1992, 1996). Before withdrawing from Kenya, Britain committed massive atrocities, establishing its own 'gulag' system to control the natives, ritually engaging in torture and mass murder of children, elderly, disabled, women and men alike (Elkins 2005). As late as 1968, the entire population of the 'British Indian Ocean Territory' of Diego Garcia in the Chagos Islands was secretly deported to leave space for a US air base (Curtis 2003: 414–30).

However, the end of empire can hardly compare with its opposite and competing development, the advent of the modern state. Even more than with erstwhile empires, the key legitimizing ideology of the new centralizing state was one of 'unlimited progress' and, in its totalitarian version, the promise of a new society and a 'new man'. This radical shift could only befall with modernity. Indeed, the more rapidly modernization was imposed, the more genocidal it tended to become, independently from its association with nationalism.

RAPID DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL CHANGE AND GENOCIDE

The obsession with industrial-economic development and Westernization has been a recurrent feature in most genocides. The concept of 'developmentalism' can be useful in this context: it can be defined as the ruling elites' attempts to enforce rapid modernization upon largely defenceless, disconnected, disorganized and mainly rural populations. The adjective 'developmentalist', with its ideological implications, should be distinguished from the more widespread term 'developmental', which may not refer to hastily implemented development, but to a variety of other possible applications. In most countries affected by developmentalism, peasants and workers have been systematically uprooted. The peak of the tragedy was of course reached under totalitarian regimes, which turned citizens and peasants into pliable 'masses' through their overwhelming state machines and justified this in the name of 'progress' and economic development. Extreme developmentalism, or the obsession with 'catching up' with the West irrespective of its human

costs, was already visible in the 'desperately modernizing' drive of the Russian military well before the Bolshevik revolution (Mann 2005: 99), as well as in the Ottoman Empire before its collapse (Mann 2005: 114–19).

In the twentieth century, Taylorism became a key influence as a method of maximizing industrial efficiency and serializing mass production. This was essential in shaping the Soviet Union's NEP (*New Economic Policy, 1921–1928*) since 1928. Lenin 'saw Taylorism's "scientific" methods as a means of discipline that could remould the worker and society along more controllable and regularized lines … Lenin encouraged the cult of Taylor and of another great American industrialist, Henry Ford, inventor of the egalitarian Model "T", which flourished throughout Russia at this time: even remote villagers knew the name of Henry Ford (some of them believed he was a sort of god who organized the work of Lenin and Trotsky)' (Figes 2002: 463). This cult for discipline and work became part of a wider militarization of society which reached its apex under Stalin. Some radical Taylorists envisaged indeed 'the mechanization of virtually every aspect of life in Soviet Russia, from methods of production to the thinking patterns of the common man' (Figes 2002: 463).

Taylorism's weight upon Hitler's plans was even more substantial:[7] Only recently, the mutual admiration between the *Führer* and Henry Ford has begun to attract scholarly attention (Baldwin 2003; Gray 2003; Silverstein 2002; Wallace 2003). By 1938, the more than 2000 km Autobahn network began to surpass in extension the United States' highway system, while Hitler's idea of a *Volkswagen* (car of the people) dated back as early as 1933, owing much to Ford's Model T. Henry Ford's extreme anti-semitic views also found a fertile reception in Hitler's Germany (Baldwin 2003). In fact, at least in its organizational and technological sphere, the US model was posited as the 'correct' path to progress throughout the world well before the Cold War (Shaw 1994: 11). The concept of 'developmental dictatorship' has been applied to the cases of Italy's fascism (Gregor 1979) and Spain's francoism (Saz 2004).

Further East, Stalin's attempt to compete with the West has often been interpreted in the light of his anti-Western rhetoric. However, the dictator and his entourage were avid devourers of cowboy movies and other US consumerist items (Sebag-Montefiore 2004: 167–9 and 262). As in Turkey's case, modernization was to be achieved by Westernizing terror. Rapid mass industrialization led to the annihilation of Russian and Ukrainian *kulaks* and peasants classes by either direct or indirect methods.

Stalin's extermination campaigns have produced a voluminous body of literature. Mao's Great Leap Forward (1959–62) led to similar results. Over China's long history, the worst ever mass famine was a direct consequence of Mao's top-down industrialization, costing between 20 and 40 million Chinese lives (Mann 2005: 15–16, 334, 336; Shaw 2003: 158, 166, 178). Mao's rapid development plan turned into the largest single case of mass death in the whole twentieth century (Becker 1997).[8] China's entire countryside was devastated as 'a direct and foreseeable consequence of Mao's attempt to subordinate the peasantry to his will. The Great Leap Forward was a policy of *do-it-yourself industrialisation* and agricultural change forced on the peasant class to destroy their traditional way of life' (Shaw 2003: 39, emphasis added). Shaw argues that similar forms of extreme developmentalism are still visible in China's current rush to 'modernize' (that is, Westernize) and its obsession with economic 'progress'. Many projects adopted by ruling elites in developing countries, such as Turkey and India, have led to massive human dislocations, for instance to clear space for the building of huge dams. Saddam Hussein annihilated the millennial culture and livelihood of the Marsh Arabs after drying out their wetland environment under a 15-year reign of terror in the region. Particularly affected are indigenous peoples in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Brazil, with the destruction of rainforests for commercial goals (Shaw 2003).

Even the one which, at least on the surface, appeared to be the least 'industrializing' of these regimes, that of the Parisian-born Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, promoted the goal of remaking a totally new society, completely detached from tradition and permeated

by a collectivist ethos dedicated to the total extirpation of all traces of religion (particularly Buddhism). The goal of the penal labour camps in which millions perished was rapid development. The agricultural surplus produced by forced collectivization was expected to generate the income needed for heavy industrialization by import–export (Chandler 1993, 1999). The term 'auto-genocide' (self-genocide) has hence been used to distinguish the extreme distortion of nationhood by dictators such as Pol Pot and Atatürk through a deep-reaching subversion of history. Exterminating one's own people and culture apparently do not contrast with the restoration of ancient monuments like Angkor Vat (the largest temple in the world).

The most problematic case was, of course, that of Kemal Atatürk (Mustafa Kemal Pasha), who could only conceive development as utter, remorseless and complete Westernization (Atabaki and Zürcher 2004). This led him to the extreme paroxysm of banning key elements of popular Turkish culture, such as the *fez* or *tarboosh*, a hat common to most Ottoman Mediterranean lands, which he replaced with Western, particularly British, hats and suits – to the great benefit of Western textile industries.[9] Rummel (1997: 233–6) calculates that 264,000 Greeks, 440,000 Armenians, as well as other minorities and countless Turks perished under his 'reign of terror'.

Another important factor pointing to the relationship between developmentalism and genocide is the use of new technology by disproportionately powerful state elites. With new technology, increasing channels of communication and the potency of weapons, the ability to kill large numbers of people in very short periods of time and with minimal planning can only become greater. Some authors like Bauman (1989) relate the modern capacity of destruction not only to technology, but to the rise of the post-Westphalian bureaucratic state.[10] Hannah Arendt (1958) has similarly related the Holocaust to the advent of modernity as massive human dislocation leading to the arbitrary removal of individuals from their localities, positions, jobs. For Arendt, this process resulted in the creation of an uprooted, highly manipulable mob which inevitably opened the gateway to totalitarianism.

In short, nearly all of the genocidal regimes in history obeyed to a strong *developmental* logic and Westernizing impetus. On the other hand, there is an area which finds scholars in even greater agreement: the relationship between war and genocide.

WAR AND GENOCIDE

War situations typically lead to states of emergency wrapped up in 'securitization' discourses. In these circumstances, even democratically elected governments can silence public opinion, not dissimilarly from authoritarian-born regimes. In times of war, patriotism can be invoked by both dictatorships and democracies to target internal 'enemies', terrorists, deviants, outsiders and 'security threats', hence proceeding to their elimination. War can be used as a cover to destroy opposition and engineer 'final solutions'. It is significant that the Holocaust's intensity increased as German borders expanded eastward. Its quantum leap occurred on non-German soil, in the newly occupied lands of an expansionist Third Reich.

The relationship between war and genocide has been explored particularly well by Melson and Shaw. Both argue that genocide is actually 'war carried out by other means'. For Melson (1992) it was the chaos brought by revolution, following war and empire meltdown which led to genocidal massacres. Genocides tend to occur in the midst of war, as in the Armenian case (1915–16). For Shaw (2003), genocide is a *form of war* directed against civilian populations, while the boundary between genocide and 'degenerate war' (aerial bombing, mass destruction of civilian populations as carried out by the Allies during World War II) is too thin to be firmly established.

In all cases, it is the state which can more easily harnesses patriotism in order to prop up political, economic and military elites (Horowitz 1980). The introduction of illiberal laws under the pretext of protecting 'national security' is a first indicator of radical centralization attempts

that may result in the persecution of minorities and their culture. Mann (2004) argues that the Nazis married extreme statism with extreme nationalism, hence Fascism can be defined as extreme 'nation-statism'.

Holocaust scholars have long debated whether the war was a triggering effect of the Shoah during Germany's eastward expansion. Some identify it as *the* major catalyst (Fettweis 2003). The same argument has been applied to the case of Turkey, where a 'cumulative radical-ization' effect has been diagnosed as the main trigger of the Armenian genocide (Bloxham 2003), although the root causes may be searched in the Young Turks' ideology. Other scholars have analysed the causality of war by comparing genocide across continents and timespans (Bartrop 2002).[11]

Civil wars, as conceptually distinguished from inter-state wars, can also lead to genocidal out-comes. In both instances the long-term devasta-tion inflicted on the civilian population tends to outlast various generations, even exceeding the numbers of people directly killed by war (Ghobarah et al. 2003). This was certainly the case of Russia's potentially genocidal war on Afghanistan and its daunting legacy of massive loss of human life and destruction of the local economy, mostly due to millions of land-mines.

FORMS OF GENOCIDE:

Fenton (2003: 8) remarks that 'one of the notable things about Yugoslavia is that the press (in English) always referred to *ethnic* conflict and *ethnic* cleansing. But conflicts in the United States which bear some similarities (without being full scale civil war) are described as *racial* conflict and *racial* segrega-tion' (see also Churchill 1997). He argues that different countries share different discourses, so in the United States 'the idiom of race is the mainstream one, elsewhere it is the idiom of ethnicity, to which one may eventually associ-ate the idiom of nationality' (see also Conversi 2004a, 2004c; Banton 2004).

Physical atrocities and murder are often seen as the key criteria for establishing genocide.

Alternative terms, such as 'cultural genocide', connote that wanton acts of cultural annihila-tion occur in the wake of, even independently from, genocide. On the other hand, cultural genocide may encompass a physical dimension of murder, like the elimination of the intellec-tuals and professional cadres. This took place under many Third World dictatorships, like Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Major Mengistu Haile Mariam's Ethiopia, General Abacha's Nigeria, and Turkey in the 1980's with the elimination of moderate Kurdish and Islamist leaders. Most important, cultural genocide is often car-ried out in tandem with physical genocide, and is hence an intrinsic part of it. Ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Croatia was supplemented by attacks on cultural heritage and symbols, the blowing up of churches, mosques and libraries, the forcible change of names, and various assimilationist policies (Carmichael 2002; Cigar 1995; Gallagher 2003). The term 'ethno-cide' has in the past been used as a replacement for cultural genocide (Palmer 1992; Smith 1991: 30–33), with the obvious risk of confus-ing ethnicity and culture.

Man-made environmental disaster has often resulted in actual genocide. Historians of empire have studied the destruction of both self-sustainable eco-systems and local economies (Crosby 1986; Davis 2001). The term 'ecocide' has been applied to a variety of man-made disasters leading to massive human loss, particularly in the former Soviet Union (Ehrlich 1971; Feshbach and Friendly 1993) and the United States (Churchill 1997, 2003). Finally, the devastation of home and habitat ('domicide' for Porteous and Smith 2001) acquires cogent meanings for its relationship with nationhood, given the ensuing destruction of security and community.

In other words, restricting the definition of genocide only to acts involving death fails to reflect real patterns of genocide. In Bosnia, for example, while concentration camps were used as genocidal tools, parallel 'acts' included systematic mass rape and the destruction of Croatian and Muslim cultural icons (that is, architecture, religious symbols, books) (Carmichael 2002; Gallagher 2003). These acts do not necessarily involve death, but constitute

an 'intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national/ethnic group'.[12] For instance, genocidal rape has served to traumatize and destroy the reproductive capacity of entire groups, while the offspring from such acts are seen as supplanting the group in its ethnic continuity.[13]

Another problem lies in the forms of mass killing subsumed under the heading 'genocide'. Shaw (2003: 35–7) has argued that, because the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was laid down by the victors of World War II, it was a curious *melange* of Stalinist and Allied self-apologies. The Convention's definition of genocide clearly circumscribed it to the deliberate destruction of entire groups. It drew a sharp line between genocide and other forms of mass killing or degenerate forms of war. It did not encompass the annihilation of civilians for strategic calculations, a practice followed by Anglo-American forces during World War II. Thus, Treblinka was genocide, but the annihilation of Hiroshima and Dresden were not to be classified as such. Moreover, a pro-Soviet bias was also present in the Convention's excision of any reference to the mass murder of class and ideological enemies, thus condoning Stalin's elimination of class and political opponents, like the *kulaks* (Shaw 2003).

For this purpose, the terms politicide and democide have posteriorly been introduced. 'Politicide' can be defined as the mass murder of political opponents on the part of a government because of their political beliefs and activities (Harff and Gurr 1988).[14] 'Democide' is instead the broader umbrella term used to describe 'the murder of any person or people by a government, including genocide, politicide, and mass murder' (Rummel 1997: 1–2, 1997: 36, 2003). In both instances, the state or government is the main perpetrator.

HOMOGENIZATION AND GENOCIDE

Most nationalist-led mass murders are directed against minorities which are fully integrated, un-differentiated and assimilated into the mainstream culture. The victims and targets are frequently indistinguishable, similar-looking groups, often sharing the same language, outlook and customs. The Tutsis in Rwanda, the Croats and Muslims in Bosnia and the Jews in Nazi Germany were fully integrated into their societies and assimilated into the mainstream culture of their time and place.

Why does genocide so often involve groups which are indistinguishable from the surrounding majority? Why do victims and perpetrators appears to be alike and identical to each other, sharing the same outlook – at least to the external observer? Probably one of the most important linkages is the one existing between homogeneity and genocide yet, this is a question still left largely unexplored (see Conversi 1999), although there is abundant literature inquiring into the linkages between genocide and state-led programmes of homogenization and assimilation.

Modern ethnically driven genocides do not normally occur in the incipient stages of homogenization or during colonial expansion, but rather during the final stages of the assimilation process, when inter-group differences and peculiar traits have all but disappeared, yet group consciousness persists. The main counter-case is the *Porrajmos* or Roma Holocaust (Burleigh and Wippermann 1991: 113–35; Hancock 1996; Huttenbach 1991): The Roma were typically seen as borderless, and hence as incompatible with the nationalist concept of an homogeneous, territorially bounded and self-contained nation-state. In general, it was a matter of 'border-making' and population control.[15]

In short, cultural differences are never in themselves a cause of genocide or any other forms of political murder (Conversi 1999). Modern genocides and inter-ethnic wars are rarely, if ever, directed against wholly differentiated groups. The opposite pattern can instead be discerned, with largely assimilated, un-hyphenated (yet self-conscious) *ethnies* providing the usual targets. In other words, genocide tends to take place more readily when groups share many characteristics. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, murdered King Duncan's son Donalbain preciently utters:

'There's daggers in men's smiles: the near in blood, The nearer bloody'.[16]

It is debatable whether we tend to sympathize with people who look visibly and openly 'other' from us. When the Yugoslav army attacked Slovenia and Croatia, perhaps the most 'Europeanized' of the Yugoslav republics, Europe did not come to their rescue (Ramet 1999, 2004). European imagination was certainly struck by the wanton destruction of treasured cities like Vukovar and, most of all, Dubrovnik. However, a compassionate sense of human solidarity was more widely felt when the victims of the plight became ordinary Kosovars (with all their baggage of differences, including dress and lineaments/traditions). Throughout Europe grassroots charity initiatives and other forms of mobilization spontaneously sprang up in their aid.

Two other possible factors should be explored, one active, the other passive. First, there may arise a sense of potential rivalry among 'similar' groups. This may lead to a series of active measures, even without radicalization. Secondly, we often find widespread ignorance about a nation's valuable cultural heritage, the latter easily leading to indifference. While active hatred is insufficient as a catalyst, much more determinant is the role of apathy and insensitivity. These often go along with conformism, obedience and widespread states of denial (Cohen 2001). The '*bystander*'s' role is hence a crucial angle through which to explore genocide.

This particularly affects global 'audiences' or spectators, as genocides can unfold due to international apathy and heedlessness (Power 2003). Indifference towards collective rights and dignity can feed the machine of mass destruction. Indeed, Hanna Arendt (1994) famously explained how the key element of genocide is not inter-ethnic hatred, as commonly assumed, but simple indifference towards fellow human beings. She described the perpetrators as ordinary, order-obeying citizens with unremarkable lives and no hint in their CV that one day they would later become mass murderers. In 1915 Antonio Gramsci (1980) wrote a few touching pages about Europe's fateful indifference to the Armenian genocide.

A similar argument about passive conformism as complicity can be applied to international diplomacy: it is hardly conceivable that the existence of the Nazi gas chambers was unknown by Western elites, despite Hitler's ruthless censorship attempts.[17] The fate of East Timor was deliberately kept secret by international media, because the Indonesian government was classified as a Cold War ally by the United States (Cribb 2001; Hitchéns 2001). Saddam Hussein's extermination of 100,000 Kurds in the Arbil/Anfal campaign (1988) could be safely ignored by the media when the Ba'athist regime was a key Western and Soviet ally in the war against revolutionary Iran (Makiya 1998). In all these cases, international public opinion was kept in the dark about ongoing events, often deliberately. On the other hand, the war in Bosnia has been defined as the first case of 'simultaneously broadcasted, 'instant' genocide (Baudrillard 1996; Cushman and Mestrovic 1996).

Passivity and indifference make up the 'raw material' of genocide. British initial appeasement of Hitler's Germany and Milosevic's Serbia was essential in safeguarding these regimes during their incipient destructive undertakings (Simms 1996, 2001). The French government and media massively concealed the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda (Uvin 1998). And the British media was being swamped with news from South Africa's first post-apartheid elections, just as genocide in Rwanda was unfolding.

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen how genocide and nationalism are clearly related, although most nationalist movements have never developed genocidal trends, while the worst forms of mass murder occurred under officially 'non-nationalist' (Socialist) totalitarian regimes.

During the Cold War, the two superpowers competed in support of genocidal regimes. Noam Chomsky (1993) argues that the crimes committed by the United States in places like Nicaragua, Guatemala and Indonesia have been of a genocidal nature.[18] If advanced

Western democracies can be held indirectly responsible for genocide, the United States and Britain may stand out as the most 'genocidal' international power players of the post-Cold War era, given their simultaneous record of direct backing of genocidal regimes (Curtis 2003, 2005; Hitchens 2001) and comfortable non-intervention when genocide was actually occurring (Cushman 1998, 2004; Gallagher 2003; Kent 2005; Melvern 2000; Power 2003; Simms 2001).[19] From a Native American perspective, the United States can be identified as the most genocidal state that has ever existed in human history (Churchill 1997, 2003).

Globalization provides a third, still unexplored, element in the triangular relationship including nationalism and genocide. Will globalization lead to new holocausts? Mark Davis (2001) argues that the twisted logic emanating from contemporary free market ideology is a replica of the unchallenged dogmas prevailing in the Victorian era. Then, the results were decades of economic sabotage culminating in the genocidal famines and the deaths of up to 32 million people in India, China and Brazil (1876–1900) under the impact of direct or indirect colonial rule. Davis skilfully relates this to the contemporary trend towards climate change (see also Levene 2004, 2005b).

Like nationalism, globalization is destroying whole lifestyles and communities, exerting unprecedented homogenizing pressures (Barber 1995; Chua 2003). However, not only is this occurring on a larger scale and at a quicker pace than ever before, but it is also accompanied by unprecedented ecological degradation and environmental disaster. A strong state endorsing a developmental ideology may be redundant nowadays, simply because neo-liberal development has taken an unrestrained course of its own. It would be tempting to extrapolate from this that the age of genocide is far from being left behind.

NOTES

1 In ancient Rome, *gens* (gen. *gentis*) referred to both tribe and clan and sometime translated as 'race' and 'nation', from *genus* (pl. *genera*), referring to 'race, stock,

kind'. The latter was cognate with the Greek *genos* ('race, kind') and *gonos* (birth, offspring, stock).

2 This was inferred from words such as 'homicide' (killing of a human being), and, more political, 'tyrannicide' (killing of a tyrant).

3 Classical authors used *ethnos* to refer to contiguous peoples, while the Oxford English Dictionary renders it as 'nation'. A fourth more malleable term, *phylon*, was also used to describe race, class, tribe or nation (Fenton 2003: 15–16). The concept of patriotism also shares family-like connotations, coming from the Latin *pater* (father, as in *patria*).

4 Although Justin McCarthy has produced excellent work on the fate of Muslim minorities in the Balkans, he is not a reliable source on Armenian genocide, to the point of being regarded as a 'genocide denier' by most Armenian scholars.

5 Palmer (1998) reformulates this distinction as one between 'societal' and 'state' genocides. Two other interpretations of genocide should be briefly considered here: The 'primordialist' one, shared by many nationalists who see genocides as recurring patterns of ever-lasting persecution. Many Armenian historians share this view. And the 'barbaric hordes' one, describing episodes of wanton destruction during barbarian invasions as genocidal acts, such as the occasional burning of entire villages and the massacres of harmless people. The most commonly adduced cases are Attila's Huns and the Mongols under Genghis Khan.

6 Mike Davis (2001) asks how British rulers could be so immune to the sufferings of the multitudes they ruled. One can find answers not simply in classical racism, but in the very supercilious aristocratic Victorian attitudes which characterized the upwardly mobile, rapidly enriching classes *vis-à-vis* Britain's sub-human *lumpenproletariat*. Paradoxically, it is this very *lumpenproletariat* which remains the unquestionable and loyal reservoir of manpower in times of war and colonial expansion through the British-specific ideology of imperial patriotism or 'missionary nationalism' (Kumar 2003).

7 Gottfried Feder's (1883–1941) cult of technocracy closely resembled Taylor's idea of a society ruled by engineers, as did Fritz Todt's (1891–1942) ideology of road building as key to German economic strength.

8 It should be pointed out that, although it is impossible to calculate the exact number of dead, Becker's estimate of 40 million victims might be slightly inflated.

9 There are parallels here with the Khmer Rouge's banning of all forms of traditional Cambodian music and dance and its replacement with military hymns, revolutionary chants and other form of radically Westernizing cultural manipulation, often inspired by China's even more devastating 'cultural revolution' (Shapiro-Phim 2002).

10 More recently, Bauman (2005) has extended this critique to neo-liberal globalization.

11 The 'cumulative' approach has also been applied to indigenous people: Madley's (2004) comparative study of 'frontier genocides' among Tasmanians (Australia), Yuki (California) and Herero (Namibia) has revealed common patterns developing in three phases: (1) invasion and destruction of the local economy; (2) aboriginal response

and retaliation; and (3) the settlers and the central government's slow drive towards 'final solutions' passing through several sub-phases such as deportation, mass incarceration, ecological destruction and 'domicide' (Porteous and Smith 2001).

12 Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1948, entry into force 12 January 1951, available at http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm. See also Cushman and Mestrovic (1996), Appendix 2, pp. 360–2.

13 The term 'gendercide' has appropriately been created, while new ones, such as 'homocaust' or 'queer-cide' have known mixed fortunes (Stein 2002).

14 Occasionally, 'politicide' has assumed different connotations. For instance, Baruch Kimmerling uses the term to indicate 'a process that has, as its ultimate goal, the dissolution of the Palestinian people's existence as a legitimate social, political, and economic entity' (Kimmerling 2003: 3).

15 Governments, especially authoritarian and totalitarian ones, are typically obsessed with controlling their populations in times of rapid social change. Nomadic peoples, reluctant to sedentarize, faced particular pressures in adapting to the extreme modernizing environment spearheaded by industrialization and state-building. Being particularly vulnerable, they also find it hard to organize their self-defence via pressure groups. Some of the most ruthless sedentarization programmes have been carried out under forms of extreme nationalism allied with 'developmental socialism'. In the case of Somalia, this led to a futile war with Ethiopia and to the final collapse of the Somali social structure. On the other hand, sedentarization programmes were mimicked by Ethiopia once 'developmental socialism' became the country's dominant ideology under Menghistu's dictatorship.

16 Macbeth (II. iii. 146–7). My thanks to Krishan Kumar from this perceptive insight.

17 Many US corporate leaders were certainly conscious of the fate of the Jews. We have already discussed Henry Ford's close relationship with Hitler. According to Black (2001), America's top corporation, IBM, directly supplied the Nazi regime with technical know-how in the full knowledge of its use.

18 For instance, he describes East Timor as a classic instance of imperialist genocide committed via the *interposta persona* of the US-backed Suharto regime (see also Jardine 2003).

19 The only approximate calculation of the combined casualties of both direct British military intervention and indirect support for democidal regimes is provided by Curtis (2005). He gives a very broad estimate of 8–13 million deaths. This includes Britain's support for Iraq's Ba'athist regime between 1963 and 1991, and, perhaps more disputably, the support for the Idi Amin (Uganda 1971) and Pinochet (Chile 1973) coups, but does not include the Tory government's less direct (that is, purely political, but not military) support for Milosevic between 1987 and 1997 (Gallagher 2003; Kent 2005; Simms 2001).

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