

# Preface

## WHY STUDY GENOCIDE?

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“Why would you want to study *that*?”

If you spend time seriously investigating genocide, or even if you only leave this book lying in plain view, you will probably have to deal with this question. Underlying it is a tone of distaste and skepticism, perhaps tinged with suspicion. There may be a hint that you are guided by a morbid fixation on the worst of human horrors. How will you respond? Why, indeed, study genocide?

First and foremost, if you are concerned about peace, human rights, and justice, there is a sense that with genocide you are confronting the “Big One,” what Joseph Conrad called the “heart of darkness.” That can be deeply intimidating and disturbing. It can even make you feel trivial and powerless. But genocide is the *opposite* of trivial. Whatever energy and commitment you invest in understanding genocide will be directed towards comprehending and confronting one of humanity’s greatest scourges.

Second, to study genocide is to study our historical inheritance. It is unfortunately the case that all stages of recorded human existence, and nearly all parts of the world, have known genocide at one time or another, often repeatedly. Furthermore, genocide may be as prevalent in the contemporary era as at any time in history. Inevitably, there is something depressing about the prevalence and repetition of genocide in world history: Will humanity ever change? But there is also interest and personal enlightenment to be gained by delving into the historical record, for which genocide serves as a point of entry. I well remember the period, a decade ago, that I devoted

to voracious reading of the genocide studies literature, and exploring the diverse themes this opened up to me. The accounts were grim – sometimes relentlessly so. Yet they were also spellbinding, and they gave me a better grounding not only in world history, but also in sociology, psychology, anthropology, and a handful of other disciplines.

This points to a third reason to study genocide: it brings you into contact with some of the most interesting and exciting debates in the social sciences and humanities. To what extent should genocide be understood as reflecting epic social transformations such as modernity, the rise of the state, and globalization? How has warfare been transformed in recent times, and how are the wars of the present age linked to genocide? How does gender shape genocidal experiences and genocidal strategies? How is history “produced,” and what role do memories or denial of genocide play in that production? These are only a few of the themes to be examined in this book. I hope they will lead readers, as they have led me, towards an engagement with debates that have a wider, though not necessarily deeper, significance.

In writing this book, I stand on the shoulders of giants: the scholars without whose trail-blazing efforts my own work would be inconceivable. You may find their approach and humanity inspiring, as I do. One of my principal concerns is to provide an overview of the core genocide studies literature; thus each chapter and box-text is accompanied by recommendations for further study.

Modern academic writing, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, is often riddled with jargon and pomposity. It would be pleasant to report that genocide studies is free of such baggage. It isn't; but it is less burdened by it than most other fields. It seems this has to do with the experience of looking into the abyss, and finding that the abyss looks back. One is forced to ponder one's own human frailty and vulnerability; one is even pressed to confront one's own capacity for hating others, for marginalizing them, for supporting their oppression and annihilation. These realizations aren't pretty, but they are arguably necessary. And they can lead to humility – a rare quality in academia. I once described to a friend why the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) moved me so deeply: “It's like he's grabbing you by the arm and saying, ‘Look. We don't have much time. There are important things we need to talk about.’” You sense the same in the genocide-studies literature: that the issues are too vital, and time too limited, to beat around the bush. George Orwell famously described political speech – he could have been referring to some academic writing – as “a mass of words [that] falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details.”<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the majority of genocide scholars inhabit the literary equivalent of the tropics. I hope to take up residence there too.

Finally, some good news for the reader interested in understanding and confronting genocide: your studies and actions may make a difference. To study genocide is to study processes by which *hundreds of millions* of people met brutal ends. Yet there are many, many people throughout history who have bravely resisted the blind rush to hatred. They are the courageous and decent souls who gave refuge to hunted Jews or desperate Tutsis. They are the religious believers of many faiths who struggled against the tide of evil, and spread instead a message of love, tolerance, and commonality. They are the non-governmental organizations that warned against incipient

genocides and carefully documented those they were unable to prevent. They are the leaders and common soldiers – American, British, Soviet, Vietnamese, Indian, Tanzanian, Rwandan, and others – who vanquished genocidal regimes in modern times.<sup>2</sup> And yes, they are the scholars and intellectuals who have honed our understanding of genocide, while at the same time working outside the ivory tower to alleviate it. You will meet some of these individuals in this book. I hope their stories and actions will inspire you to believe that a future free of genocide and other crimes against humanity is possible.

*But . . .*

Studying genocide, and trying to prevent it, is not to be entered into lightly: as the French political scientist Jacques Sémelin asks, “Who is ever really prepared for the shock of tales of cruelty in all their naked horror?”<sup>3</sup> The psychological and emotional impact that genocide studies can have on the investigator has yet to be systematically studied. How many genocide students, scholars, and activists suffer, as do their counterparts in the human rights and social work fields?<sup>4</sup> How many experience depression, insomnia, and nightmares as a result of having immersed themselves in the most atrocious human conduct?

The trauma is especially intense for those who have actually witnessed genocide, or its direct consequences. During the Turkish genocide against Armenians (Chapter 4), the US Ambassador to Constantinople, Henry Morgenthau, received a stream of American missionaries who had managed to escape the killing zone. “For hours they would sit in my office with tears streaming down their faces,” Morgenthau recalled; many had been “broken in health” by what they had witnessed.<sup>5</sup> In 1948, the Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin, who learned when World War II ended that dozens of his family members had perished in the Holocaust (Chapter 6), wrote: “Genocide has taken the lives of my dear ones; the fight against genocide takes my health.”<sup>6</sup> My friend Christian Scherrer, who works at the Hiroshima Peace Institute, arrived in Rwanda in November 1994 as part of a United Nations investigation team, only a few months after the slaughter of perhaps a million people had ended (see Chapter 9). Rotting bodies were still strewn across the landscape. “For weeks,” Scherrer writes,

following directions given by witnesses, I carefully made my way, step by step, over farmland and grassland. Under my feet, often only half covered with earth, lay the remains of hundreds, indeed thousands . . . Many of those who came from outside shared the experience of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans of continuing, for months on end, or even longer, to grieve, to weep internally, and, night after night, to be unable to sleep longer than an hour or two.

Scherrer described the experience as “one of the most painful processes I have ever been through,” and the writing of his book, *Genocide and Crisis*, as “part of a personal process of grieving.” “Investigation into genocide,” he added, “is something that remains with one for life.”<sup>7</sup>

I encourage you – especially if you are just beginning your exploration of genocide – to be attentive to signs of personal stress. Talk about it with fellow students, colleagues, family, or friends. Dwell on the positive examples of bravery, rescue, and

love for others that the study of genocide regularly provides (see, e.g., pp. 402–12, Box 10.3). If necessary, seek counseling through the resources available on your campus or in your community.

It is also worth recalling that genocide scholars are far from alone as members of a profession that must confront suffering and mortality. Indeed, we are often privileged to maintain an arm's-length distance from those realities, unlike many other (often underappreciated and poorly recompensed) workers. The point was made to me by Meaghan Gallagher, an undergraduate student in Edmonton, Canada, who in October 2009 encountered the field of comparative genocide studies for the first time. She wrote,

Really, you chose a very interesting field of study, in my opinion. It might be dark, but it is something that people are so afraid to talk about, when it really needs to be brought into light . . . I guess it is just like anything. Nurses, police, emergency technicians, philanthropists, they all have to deal with some pretty tough things, but someone has to do it, right?<sup>8</sup>

## WHAT THIS BOOK TRIES TO DO, AND WHY

I see genocide as among history's defining features, overlapping a range of central historical processes: war, imperialism, state-building, and class struggle, from antiquity to the present. It is intimately linked to key institutions, in which state or broadly political authorities are often but not always principal actors, such as forced labor, military conscription, incarceration, and female infanticide.

I adopt a comparative approach that does not elevate particular genocides over others, except to the extent that scale and intensity warrant special attention. I argue that virtually all definable human groups – the ethnic, national, racial, and religious ones that anchor the legal definition of genocide, and others besides – have been victims of genocide, and are vulnerable in specific contexts today. Equally, most human collectivities – even vulnerable and oppressed ones – have proven capable of inflicting genocide. This can be painful for genocide scholars to acknowledge. But it will be confronted head-on in this volume. Taboos and tender sensibilities take a back seat to *getting to grips with genocide* – to reduce the chances that mystification and wishful thinking will cloud recognition, and thereby blunt effective opposition.

The first part of *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* seeks to ground readers in the basic historical and conceptual contexts of genocide. It explores the process by which Raphael Lemkin first named and defined the phenomenon, then mobilized a nascent United Nations to outlaw it. His story constitutes a vivid and inspiring portrait of an individual who had a significant, largely unsung impact on modern history. Examination of legal and scholarly definitions and debates may help readers to clarify their own thinking, and situate themselves in the discussion.

The case study section of the book (Part 2) is divided between longer case studies of genocide and capsule studies that complement the detailed treatments. I hope this structure will catalyze discussion and comparative analysis.

The first three chapters of Part 3 explore social-scientific contributions to the study of genocide – from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and political science/international relations. Let me indicate the scope and limitations of this analysis. I am a political scientist by training. As well as devoting a chapter to perspectives from this discipline, I incorporate its insights elsewhere in the text (notably in Chapter 2 on “State and Empire; War and Revolution,” and Chapter 16 on “Strategies of Intervention and Prevention”). Likewise, Chapter 14 on “Memory, Forgetting, and Denial” touches on a significant discussion among professional historians, while the analysis of “Justice, Truth, and Redress” (Chapter 15), as well as parts of Chapter 1 on “The Origins of Genocide,” explore relevant developments and debates in international law.

However, even if a synoptic examination of all these disciplines’ insights were possible, given space limitations, I would be unable to provide it. The proliferation of academic production, of schools and subschools, has effectively obliterated the “Renaissance” man or woman, who once moved with facility among varied fields of knowledge. Accordingly, throughout these chapters, my ambition is modest. I seek only to introduce readers to some useful scholarly framings, together with insights that I have found especially relevant and simulating.

This book at least engages with a field – genocide studies – that has been interdisciplinary from the start. The development of strict disciplinary boundaries is a modern invention, reflecting the growing scale and bureaucratization of academia. The barriers it establishes among disciplines are artificial. Political scientists draw on insights from history, sociology, and psychology, and their own work finds readers in those disciplines. Sociology and anthropology are closely related: the former developed as a study of the societies of the industrial West, while in the latter, Westerners studied “primitive” or preindustrial societies. Other linkages and points of interpenetration could be cited. The point is that consideration of a given theme under the rubric of a particular discipline may be arbitrary. To take just one example, “ethnicity” can be approached from sociological, anthropological, psychological, and political science perspectives. I discuss it principally in its sociological context, but would not wish to see it fixed there.

Part 4, “The Future of Genocide,” seeks to familiarize readers with contemporary debates over historical memory and genocide denial, as well as mechanisms of justice and redress. The final chapter, “Strategies of Intervention and Prevention,” allows readers to evaluate options for suppressing the scourge.

“How does one handle this subject?” wrote Terrence Des Pres in the Preface to *The Survivor*, his study of life in the Nazi concentration camps. His answer: “One doesn’t; not well, not finally. No degree of scope or care can equal the enormity of such events or suffice for the sorrow they encompass. Not to betray it is as much as I can hope for.”<sup>9</sup> His words resonate. In my heart, I know this book is an audacious enterprise, but I have tried to expand the limits of my empathy and, through wide reading, my interdisciplinary understanding. I have also benefited from the insights and corrections of other scholars and general readers, whose names appear in the acknowledgments.

While I must depict particular genocides (and the contributions of entire academic disciplines) in very broad strokes, I have tried throughout to find room for indi-

viduals, whether as victims, perpetrators, or rescuers. I hope this serves to counter some of the abstraction and depersonalization that is inevitable in a general survey. A list of relevant internet sources, along with links, teaching resources, and an extensive “Filmography of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity,” can be found on the Web page for this book at <http://www.genocidetext.net>.<sup>10</sup>

## NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The core structure of *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* remains unaltered from the first edition, and many sections are reproduced virtually intact. However, data, analysis, and references have all been updated, and content revised throughout. In the introductory chapter, I have added discussions of the concept of “destruction,” especially as it pertains to “cultural genocide” and the question of whether physical killing defines genocide. I still lean toward the killing-focused definition advanced in the first edition, but I want to do justice to this debate, particularly for readers who find my framing too limiting. I have included a box text on the “other -icides” of genocide, and another providing a lexicon of key modern genocides. I have added discussions of multiple and overlapping identities in genocide, as well as dynamism and contingency, and have reworked the section on genocidal intent.

Chapter 2, retitled “State and Empire; War and Revolution,” focuses more closely on genocide and nation-state formation and expansion, a central theme in some recent investigations (notably historian Mark Levene’s two-volume *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State*). The first case-study chapter, on “Genocides of Indigenous Peoples” (Chapter 3), has had the Guatemala micro-study extracted, considerably expanded, and redeployed as a supplementary case-study (Box 3a). The original box text, on the Chinese despoliation of Tibet, has been incorporated in somewhat condensed form into a revised Chapter 5, which has shifted from a study of “Stalin’s Terror” to a wider consideration of the two great communist tyrants of the twentieth century, Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong (including Mao’s targeting of Tibetans). It was at the urging of Israel Charny, former president of the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), that I first considered this dual approach. I thank Israel for the suggestion, and for the many lively discussions I have had with him over the years.

Chapter 4 has been reconfigured as “The Ottoman Destruction of Christian Minorities.” In its original form, it offered a straightforward study of the Armenian genocide, with some peripheral comments on the destruction of Assyrian, Greek, and Chaldean populations. Since that edition appeared, a successful campaign has been mounted – in which I have played a role – to expand our framing of the genocide of the 1910s and early 1920s to appreciate the diverse *genocides* (plural) inflicted upon the Christian minorities of Anatolia. My chapter thus includes more material on the Greek and Assyrian catastrophes, while still addressing in detail the Armenian genocide, which together with the Holocaust was so central to the emergence of the field of comparative genocide studies.

Elsewhere, the box-text (4a) on the Anfal Campaign against Iraqi Kurds in 1988 has been replaced by a study of more recent genocidal events in Iraq, following the

US-British invasion of 2003. The original Anfal treatment is still available on the book's website ([www.genocidetext.net](http://www.genocidetext.net)). I have also replaced two of the personal "stories" in the case-study chapters (Chapters 4 and 7) with fresh voices. Chapter 13, on gender, and Chapter 14, on "Memory, Forgetting, and Denial," have been significantly revised and expanded. Finally, in Chapter 16, I have included a long box-text on cases that might be considered "success stories" of coexistence and genocide prevention.

Other changes are more minor and incremental. The intention throughout has been to provide a comprehensive updating, revision, and sometimes rethinking. Readers' comments and feedback on the first edition were most helpful in preparing its successor. I especially thank the educators around the world who have adopted *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* as a core text for their undergraduate and graduate courses, and who shared with me their evaluations of how it works as a teaching tool. I welcome comments, criticisms, and suggestions for future editions: please write to me at [adam@genocidetext.net](mailto:adam@genocidetext.net).

## NOTES

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- 1 George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" (1946), in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974). Available on the Web at <http://www.resort.com/~prime8/Orwell/patee.html>.
- 2 The Second World War Allies against the Nazis and Japanese; Tanzanians against Idi Amin's Uganda; Vietnamese in Cambodia in 1979; Indians in Bangladesh in 1971; soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Front in 1994. See also Chapter 16.
- 3 Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 6.
- 4 Writing the first in-depth study of the Soviet "terror-famine" in Ukraine in 1932–33 (see Chapter 5), Robert Conquest confronted only indirectly the "inhuman, unimaginable misery" of the famine; but he still found the task "so distressing that [I] sometimes hardly felt able to proceed." Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 10. Donald Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, who interviewed a hundred survivors of the Armenian genocide, wrote: "During this project our emotions have ranged from melancholy to anger, from feeling guilty about our own privileged status to being overwhelmed by the continuing suffering in our world." They described experiencing "a permanent loss of innocence about the human capacity for evil," as well as "a recognition of the need to combat such evil." Miller and Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 4. After an immersion in the archive of S-21 (Tuol Sleng), the Khmer Rouge killing center in Cambodia, David Chandler found that "the terror lurking inside it has pushed me around, blunted my skills, and eroded my self-assurance. The experience at times has been akin to drowning." Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 145. Brandon Hamber notes that "many of the staff" working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa have experienced "nightmares, paranoia, emotional bluntness, physical problems (e.g. headaches, ulcers, exhaustion, etc.), high levels of anxiety, irritability and aggression, relationship difficulties and substance abuse related problems." Hamber, "The Burdens of Truth," in David E. Lorey and William H. Beezley, eds, *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington, DL: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002), p. 96.

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- 5 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 278.
  - 6 Lemkin, quoted in John Cooper, *Raphael Lemkin and the Struggle for the Genocide Convention* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 169.
  - 7 Christian P. Scherrer, *Genocide and Crisis in Central Africa: Conflict Roots, Mass Violence, and Regional War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), pp. 1, 7.
  - 8 Meaghen Gallagher, personal communication, October 11, 2009.
  - 9 Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. v–vi.
  - 10 Readers who are interested in the background to my engagement with genocide studies can consult the short essay, “Genocide: A Personal Journey,” at [http://www.genocidetext.net/personal\\_journey.htm](http://www.genocidetext.net/personal_journey.htm).

# Acknowledgments

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The bulk of the first edition of *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* was written while working as a researcher at the CIDE institute in Mexico City. My research assistant, Pamela Huerta, compiled comprehensive briefs for the Cambodia case study and the Tibet and Congo/Darfur materials. Her skill and enthusiasm were greatly appreciated.

Much of the first edition was written in 2004 during travels through Argentina's Córdoba province, and holed up in an apartment in vibrant Buenos Aires. My thanks to the Argentine friends who welcomed me, especially Julieta and Juan Pablo Ayala; to the hoteliers, and apartment agents who put me up along the way; and to the restaurant staff who kept me fueled with that awesome steak and *vino tinto*.

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What one could call "post-production" on the first edition took place at Yale University, where I was fortunate to obtain a two-year postdoctoral fellowship in

the Genocide Studies Program for 2005–07. I was honored by the opportunity to conduct research at one of the world’s leading universities, and am deeply grateful to Ben Kiernan, director of Yale’s Genocide Studies Program (GSP), for his interest in my work and support of it over the past few years. I also acknowledge with gratitude the financial assistance of Frederick J. Iseman, Esq., whose donation to the GSP substantially funded the post-doctoral fellowship that brought me to the program, and allowed me to finish work on *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* with access to the rich human and material resources at Yale. The Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale co-sponsored the fellowship, and provided me with a memorable teaching opportunity. Many thanks to its director Ian Shapiro, associate director Richard Kane, and the many wonderful academics, administrators, students, and guest speakers whom I encountered during my time in residence.

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Kenneth J. Campbell, Jo and David Jones, René Lemarchand, Benjamin Madley, and Nicholas Robins generously read the entire manuscript of the first edition. I benefited enormously from their feedback. Jo and David’s meticulous proofreading might have landed them in the dedication to this volume even if they weren’t my parents. As for Ben Madley, our weekly or biweekly lunches at Yale, when we went through his insightful comments on the manuscript, were simply the most stimulating and thought-provoking discussions I have ever had about genocide. As with Jo and David, there are few pages of this book that do not bear Ben’s stamp.

All three of these parties read much or all of the second edition as well, saving me – and sparing you – more soggy verbiage and outright errors than I care to recall. Bless them. Other scholars, professionals, and general readers who read and commented on various chapters of the first and second editions include: Jennifer Archer, Peter Balakian, Donald Bloxham, Peter Burns, David Gaunt, Thea Halo, Alex Hinton, Kal Holsti, Craig Jones, Ben Kiernan, Mark Levene, Evelin Lindner, Linda Melvern, Kathleen Morrow, A. Dirk Moses, Margaret Power, John Quigley, Victoria Sanford, Christian Scherrer, and Hannibal Travis. Although I have not always heeded these individuals’ suggestions, their perspectives have been crucial, and have rescued me from numerous mistakes and misinterpretations. I accept full responsibility for those that doubtless remain.

This second edition is much richer in images than the first, and I am grateful to the individuals who both contributed visual materials (as credited in the text) and helped me to arrange reprint rights when necessary. For the latter, thanks to Magnus Bergmar at the World’s Children’s Prize Foundation; Elisa Marquez at AP Photo;

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Dr. Griselda Ramírez Reyes shares the dedication of this work. Griselda is a pediatric neurosurgeon at the Siglo XXI medical center in Mexico City. I have stood literally at her elbow as she opened the head of a three-week-old girl, and extracted a cancerous tumor seemingly half the size of the infant's brain. (I hope to open a few minds myself with this work, but I would not pretend the task compares.) Since this book was first published, Griselda has accompanied me on journeys to a number of the sites that resonated with me as I prepared this new edition – among them Tuol Sleng, My Lai, the Plain of Jars, Ground Zero in New York City, Lidice, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and (on a more optimistic note) the cosmopolitan city of Kazan in Tatarstan, Russia. It is a huge salve and pleasure to have her company while I try to absorb this material and make some sense of it.

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