

# Defining the Horrorific

READINGS ON GENOCIDE AND HOLOCAUST  
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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## Genocide

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Invoked with a frequency, familiarity, and reverence rarely associated with instruments of law, the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide has come to embody the conscience of humanity.

Its moral force is surely ironic. For the record of the Genocide Convention since its adoption has been notable above all for States' nearly wholesale failure to enforce its terms.

Although the treaty envisages (but does not require) the creation of an international court to punish genocide, forty-five years passed before the first international criminal tribunal was established. Its jurisdiction was limited to crimes, including genocide, committed in the former Yugoslavia since 1991. A similar, more circumscribed, tribunal was created for Rwanda one year later. It was not until September 2, 1998—a half-century after the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Genocide Convention—that the first verdict interpreting the convention was rendered by an international tribunal following a trial (one other defendant had previously pleaded guilty to genocide). On that day the Rwanda Tribunal found Jean-Paul Akayesu guilty on nine counts for his role in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

Nor did any State bring a case under the Genocide Convention to the World Court until 1993, and this was scarcely a milestone in international enforcement efforts. The case was brought by a State that had endured genocidal crimes—Bosnia-Herzegovina—against a State allegedly responsible—the former Yugoslavia—and not by other States determined to enforce the law of universal conscience on behalf of desperate victims beyond their borders.

To the contrary, when those same crimes were being committed—and gruesomely portrayed in the daily media—legal experts in the U.S. government were asked, in the words of a former State Department lawyer, “to perform legal gymnastics to avoid calling this genocide.” And as Rwandan Hutus slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Tutsis, the Clinton administration instructed its spokespeople not to describe what was happening as genocide lest this “inflame public calls for action,” according to the *New York Times*. Instead, the State Department and National Security Council reportedly drafted guidelines instructing government spokespeople to say that “acts of genocide may have occurred” in *Rwanda*.

Five decades of nonenforcement have left the Genocide Convention's core terms shrouded in considerable ambiguity, making it that much easier for recalcitrant politicians to equivocate. (Such equivocations nonetheless fly in the face of the convention, which requires States' parties not only to punish genocide—a measure that does demand legal certainty—but also to prevent and repress the crime—action that by its nature must not await the certain knowledge that genocide has occurred.)

The definition of genocide set forth in the Genocide Convention is authoritative and has been incorporated verbatim in the statutes of the Yugoslavia and Rwanda tribunals as well as that of a permanent International Criminal Court (ICC) that will be created after sixty states have ratified the statute adopted in Rome in July 1998. After affirming that genocide is a crime under international law whether committed in time of peace or war, the 1948 convention defines genocide as

“any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

In the 1948 convention, then, the crime of genocide has both a physical element—comprising certain enumerated acts, such as killing members of a racial group—and a mental element—those acts must have been committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group “as such.” In its verdict in the Akayesu case, the Rwanda Tribunal found that the systematic rape of Tutsi women in Taba Province constituted the genocidal act of “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the [targeted] group.”

In addition to the crime of genocide itself, the 1948 convention provides that the following acts shall be punishable: conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit genocide, and complicity in genocide.

What was left out of the convention is as important as what was included. Although earlier drafts of the convention listed political groups among those covered by the intent requirement, this category was omitted during final drafting stages. Too many governments, it seemed, would be vulnerable to the charge of genocide if deliberate destruction of political groups fell within the crime's compass.

Also excluded was the concept of cultural genocide—destroying a group through forcible assimilation into the dominant culture. The drafting history makes clear that the 1948 convention was meant to cover physical destruction of a people; the sole echo of efforts to include the notion of cultural extermination is the convention's reference to forcibly transferring chil-

In this and other respects the conventional definition of genocide is narrower than the conception of Polish scholar Raphael Lemkin, who first proposed at an international conference in 1933 that a treaty be created to make attacks on national, religious, and ethnic groups an international crime. Lemkin, who served in the U.S. War Department, fashioned the term genocide from the Greek word *genos*, meaning race or tribe, and the Latin term for killing, *cide*. (In his 1944 book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, Lemkin noted that the same idea could also come from the term *ethnocide*, consisting of the Greek word ‘*ethnos*’—nation—and the Latin word ‘*cide*.’”)

Although Lemkin's conception included the physical extermination of targeted groups, this was, in his view, only the most extreme technique of genocide:

By “genocide” we mean the destruction of an ethnic group ... Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups ...

Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and colonization of the area by the oppressor's own nationals.

Four years would pass before Lemkin's crime was recognized in an international treaty, but the legal foundation was laid during the 1945

Although the Nuremberg Charter did not use the term genocide, its definition of *crimes against humanity* overlapped significantly with Lemkin's conception of genocide. The term genocide was used in the indictment against major war criminals tried at Nuremberg, who were accused of having "conducted deliberate and systematic genocide, viz., the extermination of racial and national groups, against the civilian populations of certain occupied territories in order to destroy particular races and classes of people and national, racial or religious groups." Nuremberg prosecutors also invoked the term in their closing arguments, and it also appeared in the judgments of several U.S. military tribunals operating in Nuremberg.

Shortly after the trial of major war criminals at Nuremberg, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution affirming that genocide is a "crime under international law." In its preamble, the 1946 resolution termed genocide "a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings."

The comparatively narrow terms of the 1948 convention—in particular, its exclusion of political groups and its restrictive intent requirement—have enabled political leaders to raise doubts about whether probable genocides satisfy the convention's stringent criteria. Did the authors of the Anfal campaigns of 1988, in which at least fifty thousand Iraqi Kurds are estimated to have been massacred, intend to kill Kurds "as such" or, in the words of one leading scholar, was their aim to eliminate "the Kurdish movement as a political problem?" Did Serb perpetrators of *ethnic cleansing* in Bosnia intend to destroy Muslims and Croats "as such," or did they "merely" seek to establish homogeneous Serb control over coveted territory?

As these questions suggest, a key source of ambiguity is the meaning of the 1948 convention's intent requirement. Although the

drafting history is somewhat ambiguous, I believe that it is a mistake to treat the convention's use of the term intent as though it were synonymous with motive. That Serb perpetrators of ethnic cleansing may have slaughtered Muslims so that they could obtain control over territory does not negate their intent to destroy Muslims "as such" in order to achieve their ultimate goal.

The Genocide Convention imposes a general duty on States' parties "to prevent and to punish" genocide. Those charged with genocide are to be tried either in the State where the crime occurred or "by such international penal tribunal as may have jurisdiction with respect to those Contracting Parties which shall have accepted its jurisdiction." Although the convention does not mention a third possibility—prosecution in a third State—it is now well established that any State can assert jurisdiction over crimes of genocide, wherever the crimes occurred and whatever the nationality of the perpetrators and victims.

In addition to individual criminal responsibility for genocide, the convention also establishes State responsibility—that is, international legal responsibility of the State itself for breaching its obligations under the convention. Parties to the convention can bring a case before the International Court of Justice alleging that another State party is responsible for genocide. As noted above, the first case of this sort was brought against Yugoslavia by Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993 and is still pending.

Article 8 of the convention contemplates measures not only to punish genocide, but also to stop it in its tracks: "Any Contracting Party may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide or any of the other acts enumerated in article 3." States that are parties to the convention could, for example, seek Security Council

authorization to use military force to stop genocide being committed in another country.

Finally, although treaties themselves are binding only on States that are parties to the treaties, in a 1951 advisory opinion the International Court of Justice observed that the principles underlying the Genocide Convention are part of customary international law, which binds all states.

## GENOCIDE IN HISTORY

Although Lemkin implied that Nazi crimes were fundamentally different from any previously committed, Hitler's "Final Solution" was not the first campaign of extermination that would meet Lemkin's definition of genocide. The systematic extermination of Armenians by the Young Turks beginning in April 1915 was the first genocide in this century. Emboldened by the world's acquiescence in the slaughter of Armenians—over 1 million are estimated to have been put to death—Hitler is famously reported to have reassured doubters in his ranks by asking, "Who after all is today speaking of the Armenians?"

Among more recent episodes of wholesale slaughter, at least some scholars have concluded that the Turkish massacre of Kurds in the district of Dersim in 1937–1938, the massacre of Hutus by Tutsi perpetrators in Burundi in 1972, the Khmer Rouge campaign of extermination in the mid-1970s, and the 1988 Anfal campaign against Iraqi Kurds meet the legal definition of genocide.

Among these cases, perhaps none better illustrates the complexities of the 1948 convention's definition of genocide than the case of Cambodia. In view of the magnitude of the carnage there—1.5 million out of Cambodia's 7 million citizens are believed to have died as a result of Khmer Rouge policies—there has been a keen desire to affix the term genocide to their crimes. Since, however, both the perpetrators and the majority of victims were

Khmer, reaching this conclusion has required agile legal reasoning. Some scholars have invoked the concept of autogenocide, arguing that it is possible to satisfy the 1948 convention's definition even when the perpetrators sought to kill a substantial portion of their own ethnic/national group. Others, more conservatively, have conceded that the vast majority of victims were killed for reasons that may be broadly termed political, but note that certain minority groups, such as the Muslim Cham and Khmer Buddhists, were specially targeted for destruction and argue that at least the crimes against these groups were genocidal.

While some campaigns of extermination more clearly qualify as genocide than others—the Holocaust and the 1994 Rwandan genocide are instances—the truth is that plausible arguments can be raised with respect to most cases of possible genocide. In the absence of judicial resolution or political resolve, virtually any case of genocide can be questioned. The first defendant tried before the Rwanda Tribunal argued, for example, that the massacres in Rwanda were politically motivated, a gruesome manner of waging civil war. In response the tribunal concluded that, "alongside the conflict ... genocide was committed in Rwanda in 1994 against the Tutsi as a group." That the execution of this genocide "was probably facilitated by the conflict" did not negate the fact that genocide occurred.

The dearth of precedents enforcing the convention—a grim testament to the international community's failure of will—has for decades left experts able to do little more than argue knowledgeably about whether well-known candidates for the label "genocide" meet the legal definition. The ambiguities built into the Genocide Convention can finally be resolved only when States are willing to acknowledge forthrightly that genocide has occurred and to enforce the law of conscience.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Describe the system of labor put into place by Leopold to gather ivory and wild rubber. Was this a form of slavery?
2. How did Edmund Morel almost single-handedly convince the world that something terrible was happening in King Leopold's Congo Free State?
3. What was "the heart of darkness"?

The Congo people rebelled by ambushing army units, fleeing their villages to hide in the wilderness, and setting the rubber vine forests on fire. But Leopold's Force Publique crushed the rebellion. By 1905, the Force Publique had grown to a fearsome but poorly disciplined army of 16,000 African mercenary soldiers led by some 350 European officers. They burned villages, cut off the heads of uncooperative chiefs, and slaughtered the women and children of men refusing to collect rubber.

Force Publique officers sent their soldiers into the forest to find and kill rebels hiding there. To prove they had succeeded, soldiers were ordered to cut off and bring back the right hand of every rebel they killed. Often, however, soldiers cut off the hands of living persons, even children, to satisfy the quota set by their officers. This terror campaign succeeded in getting workers back to collecting rubber. As a result, Leopold's profits soared.

## "A SECRET SOCIETY OF MURDERERS"

Edmund Dene Morel was a young British shipping clerk. Periodically, his company sent him to the Belgian port of Antwerp to supervise the loading and unloading of ships. In the late 1890s, Morel made a horrifying discovery. He noticed that while the Congo Free State exported tons of raw rubber to Belgium, little was shipped back except guns and bullets. He guessed rightly that the many natives needed to collect the rubber were forced to do so at gunpoint. "I had stumbled upon a secret society of murderers with a king for a [partner]," he later wrote.

After reading reports written by missionaries about Congo atrocities, Morel quit his shipping job in 1901 and began a campaign to expose Leopold's Congo regime. Morel worked as a newspaper reporter, made speeches, and wrote books and pamphlets condemning the mistreatment of the Congo people. His relentless activity caused the British government

to send diplomat Roger Casement to the Congo Free State to investigate conditions there. Casement uncovered widespread evidence of hostage-taking, floggings, mutilation, forced labor, and outright murder.

Following the publication of his report in 1904, Casement joined Morel in organizing the Congo Reform Association, which resulted in the first major human rights movement of the 20th century. To expose Leopold's bloody Congo enterprise, Morel used photographs and slide shows picturing children whose hands had been cut off. Morel also expanded his movement to the United States where he met with President Theodore Roosevelt and enlisted the support of Booker T. Washington and Mark Twain.

Leopold struck back with a massive propaganda effort, which included lobbying both the British Parliament and U.S. Congress. But Morel's pleas for human rights in the Congo turned public opinion against the Belgian king.

Under pressure from Britain and the United States, Leopold turned over ownership of the Congo Free State to the Belgian government in 1908. But he demanded and received a huge cash payment and other benefits from Belgium for "his great sacrifices made for the Congo." Again, the Congo people had no say in their fate.

The Belgian government eliminated the worst abuses against the native people of the Congo. But the land along with its rubber and mineral resources remained firmly under European control. Belgium did little to improve the well-being of the people or to involve them in administering the colony.

Rich in copper, diamonds, oil, uranium, and other minerals, the Congo became an independent nation in 1960. In 1965, however, army leader Joseph Mobutu seized power. Like Leopold, Mobutu used his dictatorial powers to funnel the wealth of the Congo into his own pockets. Although Mobutu was finally overthrown in 1997, the future of self-rule in today's Democratic Republic of the Congo still remains uncertain.

King Leopold's Congo Free State was an economic, environmental, cultural, and human disaster for the Congo people. Historians estimate that 8–10 million persons perished from the violence, forced labor, and starvation caused by Leopold's lust for power and profits. When he died in 1909 at age 74, much of the world despised him. American poet Vachel Lindsay wrote this epitaph:

Listen to the yell of Leopold's ghost  
Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed host,  
Hear how the demons chuckle and yell  
Cutting his hands off, down in Hell.

## The Tribe Germany Wants to Forget

Regina Jere-Malanda,

*New African*, Associate Editor

According to reparation watchers, Germany has paid over DM90 billion to Israel since 1949 in voluntary reparations essentially in atonement for the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Yet the same Germany does not want to hear the name, Herero. It is a little known tribe in Namibia which was nearly wiped off the face of the earth by German colonial forces in the early 1900s. Historians say the first seeds of the Nazi holocaust were sown in Hereroland after the Germans had annihilated over 80% of the Hereros in a brutal attempt to take their land. As Namibia celebrates 10 years of independence this month, descendants of the Herero victims, after reading *New African's* reprint of Lord Anthony Gifford's legal basis for reparations, are going to court to seek justice and reparations from Germany. But, as Regina Jere-Malanda reports here, Germany is not at all happy with the Herero action.

The great general of the German troops, sends this letter to the Herero people. Hereros are no longer German subjects . . . All the Hereros must leave the land. If the people do not want this, then I will force them to do it with the great guns. Any Herero found within the German borders with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I shall no longer receive any women or children; I will drive them back to their people—otherwise I shall order shots to be fired at them . . . No male prisoner will be taken. I will shoot them. This is my decision for the Herero people.  
Signed:

The Great General of the Mighty Kaiser,  
Lt-Gen Lothar von Trotha.  
2nd October, 1904.

The powerful, great German Kaiser wants to grant clemency to those of the Hottentot [Nama] people who surrender themselves voluntarily. They will be presented with life. Only those who at the beginning of the rebellion have committed murder against whites or have commanded that

whites be murdered, have by law forfeited their lives. This I declare publicly and state further that of the few who have not been defeated, it will fare with them, just as it fared with the Hereros, who in their blindness also believed that they could make successful war against the powerful German Kaiser and the great German people.

I ask you, where are the Hereros today, where are their chiefs? Samuel Maherero, who at one time styled himself the ruler of thousands of children, has, hunted like a wild animal, fled across the English border. He has become as poor as the poorest field Herero and now owns nothing. Just so has it fared with the other Herero people, most of whom have lost their lives—some having died of hunger and thirst in the Sandfeld, some having been killed by German Reiters, some having been murdered by the Owambos.

No harm will befall the Hottentot people as soon as they voluntarily appear and turn over their weapons. You should come with a white cloth on a stick along with your entire household and nothing will happen to you. You will be given work and receive food until after the conclusion of the war when the great German Kaiser will present new rules governing the affairs of the protectorate. He who after this chooses not to make an application for mercy must emigrate, because where he allows himself to be seen in the German area, he will be shot until all are exterminated.

For the surrender of the murderous culprits, whether dead or alive, I offer the following rewards: for Hendrik Witboi, 5,000 marks; Sturmman, 3,000 marks; Cornelius, 3,000 marks; and all the remaining guilty leaders, 1,000 marks.

Signed:

Lt-Gen Lothar von Trotha,  
22 April 1905.

With these words, Germany's Lt-Gen von Trotha and his forces completed the savage extermination of almost the entire Herero tribe of Namibia (then called German South West Africa), leaving in its wake labour camps, sex slaves and wounds that have refused to heal.

Most historians now agree that the annihilation of the Hereros is actually "the first genocide of the 20th century." It is also now becoming increasingly clear that this merciless German undertaking in Namibia, sowed the first seeds from which Adolf Hitler plucked

ideas for his racial experiments against the Jews in the Nazi holocaust that came 40 years later.

Indeed, as Namibia celebrates 10 years of independence this month, this ugly blot in the country's troubled past would not just go away. Attempts by Germany to cajole everyone, including President Sam Nujoma's government in Namibia, into believing that this is a better-forgotten issue, have just not worked.

The descendants of the Herero survivors of this little known holocaust, are today reviving the issue with aroused vigour, demanding from the German government not only an apology for the atrocities that culminated in the 1904 butchery of their ancestors, but reparations as well.

They say if Germany can pay DM90bn to Israel in voluntary reparations in 50 years for the gas chambers in Auschwitz alone, and is still paying billions more to the Jewish people for the other crimes committed against the Jews and other slave labourers, it is only fair that the Hereros get a just recompense.

Elsewhere in Europe and America, banks, governments and others are owing up to their Nazi past, and are paying reparations or making restitution to the Jewish people.

Japan recently apologised for its brutal colonial rule in Korea and paid reparations to the "comfort women" (sex slaves) used by the Japanese troops in World War II.

But this atonement has so far passed the Hereros by.

## THE HISTORY

Although Germany joined the European colonial plunder of Africa quite late, it effected in record time one of the worst landmarks on the continent. The German presence in Africa began, effectively, in 1884 when it colonised Togo, Cameroon, Namibia and Tanzania. In Namibia, the German presence had actually started in the 1870s with the arrival of a handful of German missionaries.

But in January 1894, following the discovery of diamonds in Namibia, the German leader, Otto von Bismarck, sent Major Theodor Luetwein as his representative in the territory. Luetwein was "a professional officer with a classical education and a background in law, but had no experience in colonial matters and knew nothing about Africa."

Apparently, Bismarck sent him to Africa because he was a "level-headed and judicious man." However, it wasn't long before Luetwein showed his true colours.

First, he played the two main tribes in the country (the Herero and Nama) against each other, using the time-tested divide-and-rule tactics so loved by all the European colonialists. At one time the Herero even allied themselves with the Germans against the Nama (also known as Hottentots). This ploy paid Luetwein handsome dividends.

But soon both tribes realised what the man was really up to—they were losing their best land and cattle to the handful of German settlers in the territory.

Luetwein had, by this time, been carried away by the profits of his exploits in land grabbing. He started to arrange for more Germans to come in. But to do this he needed more land. And the best land, at the time, still belonged to the Herero.

So Luetwein decided to play tough. Ignoring the simmering discontent among the Herero against his betrayal and land grabbing antics, he went ahead and brought in boatloads of Germans. They, in turn, came along with guns, arrogance and coarse racism. And this is where the problems really started.

The Germans began to slowly push the Herero from their traditional land—at first, through persuasion and bribery. But by 1900, the Germans were going all out to grab Herero land with brazen insolence. Nothing, and no one, was there to restrain them.

By January 1904, the Herero had had enough! With barely any land and cattle left

for them, their chief Samuel Maherero led an armed rebellion. The target: the now ubiquitous German military post. At least, 123 Germans were killed at the beginning of the Herero uprising.

The Herero, like the Nama tribe, intensely disliked the Germans taking their land, and eroding their centuries-old rights to common pastures and water resources. Both tribes also resented the Germans introducing foreign laws and taxes.

When the Herero revolt started, the Nama chief Hendrik Witbooi even felt compelled to draw Luetwein's attention to the injustice being perpetrated by the Germans. He wrote to Luetwein thus:

The German himself ... is just what he described the other nations ... he makes no requests according to truth and justice and asks no permission of a chief. He introduces laws into the land [which] are entirely impossible, untenable, unbelievable, unbearable, unmerciful and unfeeling.

He punishes our people [in] Windhoek and has already beaten people to death for debt. It is not just and right to beat people to death for that. He flogs people in a shameful and cruel manner. We stupid and unintelligent people, for so he thinks us to be, we have never yet punished a human being in such a cruel and improper way. For, he stretches people on their backs and flogs them on the stomach and even between the legs, be they male or female. So, Your Honour can understand that no one can survive such a punishment.

What happened next is the dirty, brutal secret that the German government and strangely, also the Namibian government, want buried.

Back home in Berlin, the Herero uprising was very badly received by "the Mighty Kaiser," Wilhelm II. He chastised Luetwein for being "too soft," and so relieved him of his military command and made him the governor of the territory.

In Luetwein's place as commander-in-chief, the "Mighty Kaiser" sent a hard man called Lt-Gen Lothar von Trotha. He was an experienced, "extremely resolute" soldier,

renowned for his brutal involvement in the suppression of the Chinese Boxer Rebellion in 1900 in which the Chinese had risen up against what they saw as European/American attempts "to destroy traditional Chinese culture."

Trotha was also involved in the bloody suppression of African resistance to German colonial rule in German East Africa (today's Burundi, Rwanda and Tanzania).

So Trotha knew a thing or two about being brutal to Africans. In Namibia, he actually threw all caution to the wind. He disregarded commands and refused to take advice from his superiors in Berlin. He had a mission—not to quell the Herero uprising but to annihilate the tribe altogether and set an example to others intending to challenge the German occupation.

Trotha quickly came up with a battle plan that was simple but well calculated. It achieved the intended result in the quickest possible time.

With 10,000 heavily armed German men ready to obey his every word, Trotha began to shepherd the Herero north into the sandy Waterberg region. Here they were surrounded and attacked from three fronts—leaving only one possible escape route: into the Omaheke Desert (now called the Kalahari Desert). With nowhere else to run, and German guns pointing directly at them, the Herero had no choice but take to the desert.

Even then, Trotha would not leave them alone. He offered huge rewards to his men to pursue the fleeing, thirsty, hungry and unarmed Hereros deep into the desert. The Kalahari, thus, became the killing fields where the "first genocide of the 20th century" happened.

The German brutality didn't end there. They killed more Hereros by poisoning the few water holes in the desert, and forcing fathers and mothers perishing from thirst to share breast milk with their dying babies.

To complete the slaughter, Trotha erected guard posts along the 150-mile border of the Kalahari. Any Herero who tried to escape was mercilessly bayoneted to death.

## THE SURRENDER

Emaciated, diseased and left with no other choice, the Herero surrendered by September 1904. Chief Maherero had managed to flee into neighbouring Bechuanaland (now Botswana). By then over 80% of the Herero had been killed! But Trotha rejected their pleas of surrender. Instead, he issued the Vernichtungsfehl or extermination order: "...Within the German borders, every Herero, whether armed or unarmed, with or without cattle ... will be shot. I shall not accept anymore, men, women or children ..."

This dashed any hopes for mercy. The Herero men who tried to surrender were shot at sight, while the women and children were forced back into the desert.

To seal his mercilessness, Trotha wrote in his diary: "To accept women and children, most of whom are ill, is a serious danger to the [German] troops. And to feed them is an impossibility. I find it appropriate that the nation perishes instead of infecting our soldiers."

As expected, international condemnation of Trotha's carnage fell on deaf ears in Berlin. By the time a reluctant Kaiser Wilhelm II brought himself to condemn and withdraw Trotha's extermination order, the damage had already been done.

The few surviving Hereros were finally rounded up, forbidden to own land or keep cattle and became a reservoir of slave labour for the German settlers.

They were sent into labour camps where they were overworked and died of hunger and diseases such as typhoid and smallpox in scenes reminiscent of the Nazi concentration camps of the 1940s.

As their men died in the camps, thousands of Herero women were turned into sex slaves by the Germans. By now, less than 15,000 of an estimated 80,000 Herero population remained.

Not only did the Herero men in the labour camps suffer death, slavery and hunger,

Hitler's theories of racial purity of his Aryan race can be traced to these camps. It was here that the German geneticist, Eugene Fischer first came to do his racial medical experiments. He used the Herero and mulattos (the offspring of the German settlers and Herero women) as guinea pigs.

Fischer believed that there were genetic dangers arising from race mixing, and he came to the Namibian camps to find out how and why. A book he wrote about his findings, *The Principles of Human Heredity and Race Hygiene*, became one of Hitler's favourites. Fischer's warped racial ideas, thus, provided Hitler with a kind of scientific legitimacy to justify his Nazi terror.

Fischer later became chancellor of the University of Berlin, where he taught medicine to Nazi physicians. One of his prominent students was Josef Mengele, the notorious doctor who did weird genetic experiments on Jewish children at Auschwitz.

## ZERO RESPONSE

The Herero ordeal would be incomplete without mentioning that, soon after their defeat and extermination by the Germans, their tribal rivals, the Nama (Hottentots) led by Chief Hendrik Witboi, tried to mount a similar revolt against the Germans. But it was a short, sharp, shock for the Nama. The Germans routed them. Here, Trotha's hard-heartedness was again crudely exposed.

Today, the Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust are rightly being compensated and drawing worldwide support for their suffering. But for the Herero, despite their heart-rending ordeal, they have been denied a seat on the compensation bandwagon. The German government, despite acknowledging the country's dark past in Namibia, has flatly refused to apologise and compensate the Herero.

Visiting Namibia in 1998, the German president, Roman Herzog, acknowledged that

the Herero massacre was "a dark chapter in our bilateral relations." Yet he refused to apologise, saying "too much time has passed for a formal apology to the Hereros to make sense."

The nearest President Herzog came to an apology was to admit that Trotha "acted incorrectly" and that the killing of the Herero was "a burden on the conscience of every German." These were appeasing words all right, but they did not go far enough.

As a result, the Herero have recently sharpened the campaign for a proper apology and compensation from the German government. On 16 January this year, Professor Mburumba Kerina, a prominent Herero campaigner and secretary general of the Chief Hosea Kutako Foundation (the leading group highlighting the Herero plight), wrote to the British lawyer, Lord Anthony Gifford QC, asking him to take on their case.

Lord Gifford is an activist par excellence who has campaigned on behalf of oppressed people in many parts of Africa, including Mozambique, Angola and South Africa. He fully supports Africa's claim to reparations for the slave trade, and in 1993 published a detailed paper outlining the legal basis to this claim. *New African* printed the full version of his paper in our December 1999 and January 2000 issues.

Lord Gifford confirmed to *New African* that he had been asked by the Herero people to represent them, but said he had written back to them for further instructions.

In the letter to Lord Gifford, made available to *New African*, Prof Kerina wrote: "The Chief Hosea Kutako Foundation of the Herero Nation in Namibia has been mandated to explore the possibility of meeting with leaders and representatives of the German government to discuss reparations ... Unfortunately our efforts have ended in zero response."

Indeed, for years, the Herero leaders have pleaded with the German government to lend them an ear. In March 1999, the German foreign ministry wrote to Prof Kerina in response



to numerous requests from the Herero for a meeting to discuss the issue. Signed by Dr. Ludger Volmer, an official in the German foreign ministry, the letter said: "I very much regret to have to inform you that direct reparations to the Herero are not possible due to legal constraints. Rest however assured that the Federal Government would further, intensively, support your country and especially the Herero nation within the framework of its financial means."

The letter continued: "We are aware of our moral and especially our historical obligation towards Namibia and the Hereros. Therefore, the Federal Republic maintains a comprehensive and unusually intensive developmental co-operation with Namibia. Your country obtains the highest per capita financial development contributions of all recipient states from Germany. However, our developmental commitment must extend to all regions of Namibia. The Federal government strives to include more strongly, the Herero nation in the bilateral development co-operation in accordance with agreements with the Namibia government."

Prof Kerina, who has a German grandparent, has made it categorically clear that the Herero do not want cash. Their compensation request is very modest, he says. "All we want is a mini-Marshall plan," he has told the Germans.

But it appears that the Germans are dragging their feet over the Herero issue because of the land "problem" at the heart of the whole affair. What will happen to the 25,000 or so rich German settlers still occupying Herero land, if Germany apologises and makes restitution to the Hereros? Both the settlers and Germany fear that this might lead to the loss of land, and the thought terrifies them!

Professor Lora Wildenthal of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology even betters this argument: "There is fear that a payoff would invite multitudes of similar claims for colonial-era crimes. I do not think any colonial power will go anywhere near this," she told the U.S. paper, *Salt Lake Tribune*, in an interview.

To this day, German ranchers in Namibia who insist that there was no genocide in the country, still own millions of acres seized from the Herero over 90 years ago. In the meantime, it is not only the Herero, but also half of Namibia's 1.8 million population live on crowded, impoverished land.

The current paramount chief of the Hereros, Chief Kuima Riruako, is quite conciliatory on the land issue: "We want reparations to buy land and give it to people who need it ... We do not want to seize it the way they are doing it in Zimbabwe."

This time last year, Chief Riruako was talking about taking the Herero case to the International Court of Justice in The Hague (The Netherlands). "On the threshold of the new millennium," Chief Riruako said at the time, "the Hereros have decided to take Germany to the International Court of Justice for a decision regarding reparations. We also warn the Namibian government not to stand in our way as we explore this avenue to justice."

The relationship between the Herero and President Nujoma's government is quite frosty. The government is dominated by people from the Ovambo tribe. President Nujoma is an Ovambo himself. The Ovambos were lucky not to be touched by the Germans during their rule of terror. The Ovambos, again, happened to lead the liberation struggle in Namibia that led to independence in 1990 from South Africa.

But the majority of the Herero, it so happens, belongs to the opposition and are viewed as rivals by Nujoma's government. In addition, the government receives millions of deutsche marks in aid each year from the German government (about \$400m in direct aid since 1990). As a result, the Nujoma government does not want to rock the boat.

But Prof Kerina, who is a member of parliament himself, says the Herero will not be pushed around any longer. Not by Germany. Nor the Namibian government.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why are the Herero reviving the issue of German atrocities that culminated in the 1904 genocide?
2. Were General von Trotha's actions genocidal?

3. Describe the reparations issues raised in the Herero case.

## A History of Horror

### A REVIEW OF *LE SIÈCLE DES CAMPS*

Joel Kotek and Pierre Rigoulot

*Le Siècle des Camps*  
JC Lattes, 805 pages.

Contrary to what might be expected, the first recorded use of the expression "concentration camps" did not occur in either Germany or Russia. Nor, even, was the term originally English, as many also mistakenly believe. In fact, as far as it is possible to ascertain, the first person to speak of concentration camps or, more precisely, to speak of a policy of "*reconcentración*"—was Arsenio Martínez Campos, then the commander of the Spanish garrison in Cuba. The year was 1895, and Martínez Campos was fending off the latest in what seemed to be a never-ending series of local insurgencies. Looking for a permanent end to the Cuban independence struggle, he proposed, in a confidential letter to the Spanish government, to "reconcentrate" the civilian inhabitants of the rural districts into camps. Although he conceded that the policy might lead to "misery and famine," it would also, he explained, deprive the insurgents of food, shelter and support, thereby bringing the war to a more rapid conclusion.

Martínez Campos didn't manage to carry out the policy, but his successor did. Over the following two years, from 1896 to 1898, General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau forcibly removed many thousands of Cuban peasants from their homes. As

predicted, "misery and famine" ensued. Theoretically, the camps were meant to consist of suitably built dwellings, on fertile land, near sources of water. In practice, the Cuban peasants were thrown into "old shacks, abandoned houses, improvised shelters," wherever it happened to be convenient to throw them. Food was distributed irregularly. Typhus and dysentery spread rapidly. Young girls prostituted themselves for a bit of bread. As many as 200,000 *reconcentrados* may have died.

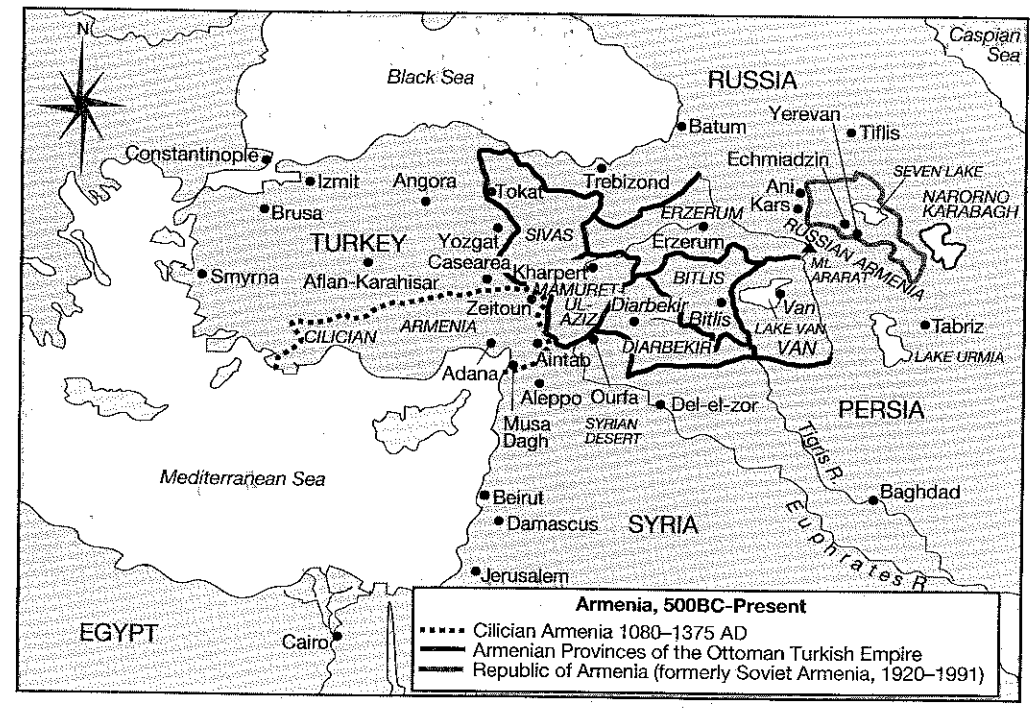
Indeed, one contemporary Cuban historian has described these first, Cuban camps as a "holocaust of gigantic proportions." Given the connotations of the word "holocaust," this is an inappropriate description. Nevertheless, there is a curious and rather surprising chain of connections between these first Cuban concentration camps, and the Nazi concentration camps which came into existence less than four decades later.

In fact, both the term and the idea spread and evolved rather quickly. By 1900, a mere two years after the Cuban camps were closed, the Spanish term *reconcentración* had already been translated into English and was used to describe a similar British project, initiated for similar reasons, during the Boer War in South

Genocide: On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust. His speech to the House of Representatives, "The United States Training on and Commemoration of the Armenian Genocide Resolution," offers suggestions for looking at this event and other instances of genocide.

# The Armenian Genocide: Context and Legacy

Rouben Adalian,  
Johns Hopkins University



Between 1915 and 1918 the Ottoman Empire, ruled by Muslim Turks, carried out a policy to eliminate its Christian Armenian minority. This genocide was preceded by a series of massacres in 1894-1896 and in 1909, and was followed by another series of massacres beginning in 1920. By 1922 Armenians had been eradicated from their historic homeland.

There are at least two ways of looking at the Armenian experience in the final days of the Ottoman Empire. Some scholars regard the series of wholesale killings from the 1890s to the 1920s as evidence of a continuity in the deteriorating status of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. They maintain that, once initiated, the policy of exposing the Armenians

to physical harm acquired its own momentum. Victimization escalated because it was not countermanded by prevailing outside pressure or attenuated by internal improvement and reconciliation. They argue that the process of alienation was embedded in the inequalities of the Ottoman system of government and that the massacres prepared the Ottoman society for genocide.

Other scholars point out that the brutalization of disaffected elements by despotic regimes is a practice seen across the world. The repressive measures these governments use have the limited function of controlling social change and maintaining the system. In this frame of reference, genocide is viewed as a radical alteration of the very nature of the state and society. These scholars emphasize the decisive character of the Armenian genocide and differentiate between the periodic exploitation and occasional terrorization of the Armenians and the finality of the deliberate policy to exterminate them and eliminate them from their homeland.

Like all empires, the Ottoman Empire was a multinational state. At one time it stretched from the gates of Vienna in the north to Mecca in the south. From the sixteenth century to its collapse following World War I, the Ottoman Empire included areas of historic Armenia. By the early part of the twentieth century, it was a much shrunken state confined mostly to the Middle East. Yet its rulers still governed over a heterogeneous society and maintained institutions that favored the Muslims, particularly those of Turkish background, and subordinated Christians and Jews as second-class citizens subject to a range of discriminatory laws and regulations imposed both by the state and its official religion, Islam.

The failure of the Ottoman system to prevent the further decline of the empire led to the overthrow of the government in 1908 by a group of reformists known as the Young Turks. Formally organized as the Committee of Union

and Progress, the Young Turks decided to Turkify the multiethnic Ottoman society in order to preserve the Ottoman state from further disintegration and to obstruct the national aspirations of the various minorities. Resistance to this measure convinced them that the Christians, and especially the Armenians, could not be assimilated. When World War I broke out in 1914, the Young Turks saw it as an opportunity to rid the country of its Armenian population. They also envisioned the simultaneous conquest of an empire in the east, incorporating Turkish-speaking peoples in Iran, Russia, and Central Asia.

The defeat of the Ottomans in World War I and the discrediting of the Committee of Union and Progress led to the rise of the Turkish Nationalists. Their objective was to found a new and independent Turkish state. The Nationalists distanced themselves from the Ottoman government and rejected virtually all its policies, with the exception of the policy toward the Armenians.

This essay focuses on three aspects of the Armenian genocide that have broader applicability to any study of genocide: (1) distinction between massacres and genocide; (2) use of technology in facilitating mass murder; and (3) the legacy of genocide.

## DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE MASSACRES AND THE GENOCIDE

From 1894 to 1896, Sultan Abdul-Hamid II carried out a series of massacres of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire. The worst of the massacres occurred in 1895, resulting in the death of thousands of civilians (estimates run from 100,000 to 300,000) and leaving tens of thousands destitute. Most of those killed were men. In many towns, the central marketplace and other Armenian-owned businesses were destroyed, usually by conflagration. The killings were done during the day and were witnessed by the general public.

From Rouben Adalian, "The Armenian Genocide: Context and Legacy," *Social Education: The Official Journal of the National Council for the Social Studies* (February 1991) 99-104. Reprinted by permission of NCSS.



This kind of organized and systematic brutalization of the Armenian population pointed to the coordinating hand of the central authorities. Widespread violence erupted in towns and cities hundreds of miles apart over a matter of weeks in a country devoid of mass media. At a time when the sultan ruled absolutely, the evidence strongly implicated the head of state.

### Intent of Massacres

The massacres were meant to undermine the growth of Armenian nationalism by frightening the Armenians with the terrible consequences of dissent. The furor of the state was directed at the behavior and the aspirations of the Armenians. The sultan was alarmed by the increasing activity of Armenian political groups and wanted to curb their growth before they gained any more influence by spreading ideas about civil rights and autonomy. Abdul-Hamid took no account, however, of the real variation in Armenian political outlook, which ranged from reformism and constitutionalism to separatism. He hoped to wipe away the Armenians' increasing sense of national awareness. He also continued to exclude the Armenians, as he did most of his other subjects, from having a role in their own government, whether individually or communally. The sultan, however did not contemplate depriving the Armenians of their existence as a people. Although there are similarities between Abdul-Hamid's policies and the measures taken by the Young Turks against the Armenians, there are also major distinctions.

### The 1915 Measures

The measures implemented in 1915 affected the entire Armenian population: men, women, and children. They included massacres and

deportations. As under the sultan, they targeted the able-bodied men for annihilation. The thousands of Armenian men conscripted into the Ottoman army were eliminated first. The rest of the adult population was then placed under arrest, taken out of town, and killed in remote locations.

The treatment of women was quite different. ... Countless Armenian women lost their lives in transit. Before their tragic deaths, many suffered unspeakable cruelties, most often in the form of sexual abuse. Many girls and younger women were seized from their families and taken as slave-brides.

During the time of the sultan, Armenians were often given the choice of converting to Islam in order to save themselves from massacre. However, during the genocide years, this choice was usually not available. Few were given the opportunity to accept Islam as a way of avoiding deportations. Most Armenians were deported. Some lives were spared during deportation by random selection of involuntary conversion through abduction, enslavement, or the adoption of kidnapped and orphaned children.

### The Cover of War

A second distinguishing feature of the genocide was the killing of the Armenians in places out of sight of the general population. The deportations made resistance or escape difficult. Most important, the removal of Armenians from their native towns was a necessary condition of maintaining as much secrecy about the genocide as possible. The Allies had warned the Ottoman government about taking arbitrary measures against the Christian minorities. The transfer of the Armenian population, therefore, was, in appearance, a more justifiable response in a time of war.

When the Ottomans entered World War I, they confined journalists to Istanbul, and since

the main communications system, the telegraph, was under government control, news from the interior was censored. Nonetheless, the deportations made news as soon as they occurred, but news of the massacres was delayed because they were done in desolate regions away from places of habitation. Basically, this provided cover for the ultimate objective of destroying the Armenian population. Inevitably the massacres followed the deportations.

### State of Confiscation of Armenian Goods and Property

A third feature of the genocide was the state confiscation of Armenian goods and property. Apart from the killing, the massacres of 1895 and 1909 involved the looting and burning of Armenian neighborhoods and businesses. The objective was to strike at the financial strength of the Armenian community which controlled a significant part of the Ottoman commerce. In 1915 the objective of the Young Turks was to plunder and confiscate all Armenian means of sustenance, thereby increasing the probability of extinction.

Unlike the looting associated with the massacres under Sultan Abdul-Hamid II, the assault against the Armenians in 1915 was marked by comparatively little property damage. Thus, the genocide effortlessly transferred the goods and assets—homes, farms, bank accounts, buildings, land, and personal wealth—of the Armenians to the Turks. Since the Young Turk Party controlled the government, the seizure of the property of the Armenians by the state placed local party chiefs in powerful positions as financial brokers. This measure escalated the incentive for government officials to proceed thoroughly with the deportation of the Armenians.

The Young Turks did not rely as much on mob violence as the sultan had. They implemented the genocide as another military

operation during wartime. The agencies of government were put to use, and where they did not exist, they were created. The Young Turk Party functionaries issued the instructions. The army and local gendarmerie carried out the deportations. An agency was organized to impound the properties of the Armenians and to redistribute the goods. "Butcher battalions" of convicts released from prisons were organized into killer units. The Young Turks tapped into the full capacity of the state to organize operations against all 2 million Armenian inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, and did it swiftly and effectively.

### THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR MASS KILLINGS

The Armenian genocide occurred at a time when the Ottoman Empire was undergoing a process of modernization. Apart from the new weapons of war, the telegraph and the railroad were being put to expanded use. Introduced in the second half of the nineteenth century, the networks of transport and communication reached the areas of heavy Armenian concentration by the early part of the twentieth century. Whereas the telephone system was largely confined to the capital city of Istanbul, telegraph lines extended throughout the empire. The rail system connected many of the largest towns in the Ottoman Empire, but it was less extensive than the rail networks in the European countries.

### The Telegraph

Coordination of the massacres during the reign of Abdul-Hamid II, and of the deportations under the Young Turks, was made possible by the telegraph. Of all the instruments of the state government, the telegraph dramatically increased the power of key decision-makers

over the rest of the population. The telegraph system allowed for the kind of centralization that heretofore was impossible.

During the 1895 massacres, the telegraph in the Ottoman Empire was a government service. It was managed by a separate ministry. Therefore, all the communicating during the massacres was done by the Ottoman government. During the genocide of 1915, the telegraph was controlled by the Minister of Interior, Talat, who was in charge of the government agencies that implemented the genocide. Talat began his government career as a telegrapher, and he had a telegraph machine installed in his office so that he could personally send messages across the Ottoman Empire. This gave Talat immediate connection, literally and technologically, with the enforcement of mass death. His ability to use the telegraph gave him unsurpassed access to subordinates and allowed him to circumvent other government officials and agencies in Istanbul. For the most part a telegram from Talat was sufficient authorization to proceed with the decimation of the Armenians.

Modern states rely on their bureaucracies in order to handle the paperwork involved in carrying out a policy affecting vast portions of their population. The same applies to the policy of genocide. The more modernized the state, the greater the mountain of paper generated. If not destroyed, a monumental record is left behind. In the case of the Armenians, it might be said that their genocide was carried out not so much bureaucratically as much as telegraphically, thus minimizing the record keeping and leaving behind a great deal of confusion about the degree of individual responsibility.

### The Trains

To expedite the transfer of Armenians living in proximity of the railways, orders were issued instructing regional authorities to transport

Armenian deportees by train. Instructions were explicit to the point of ordering the Armenians to be packed to the maximum capacity in the cattle cars which were used for their transport. The determination of the government to complete this task is demonstrated by the deportation of the Armenians in European Turkey who were ferried across the Sea of Marmara to Anatolia and then placed on trains for transport to Syria.

The removal of Armenians from Anatolia and historic Armenia was carried out mostly through forced caravan marches or by the use of trains. Although a large portion of the Armenians survived the horrific conditions of the packed cattle cars, they were not able to endure the Syrian desert where they were to die of hunger and thirst. In contrast, the majority of the Armenians in the caravans never reached the killing centers in the Syrian desert; many were murdered by raiding groups of bandits or died from exposure to the scorching days and cold nights. Most of those who were able to endure the "death marches" could not survive the starvation, exhaustion, or the epidemics that spread death in the concentration camps of the Syrian desert.

### LEGACY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

All too often the discussion of genocide centers on the numbers killed and fails to consider the wider implications of uprooting entire populations. Genocides are cataclysmic for those who survive because they carry the memory of suffering and the realization of the unmitigated disaster of genocide. Genocides often produce results and create conditions that make it impossible to recover anything tangible from the society that was destroyed, let alone permit the subsequent repair of that society. From this standpoint, it can be argued that the ultimate objective of genocide is a permanent alteration of the course of a people's history.

### Losing a Heritage

In a single year, 1915, the Armenians were robbed of their 3000-year-old heritage. The desecration of churches, the burning of libraries, the ruination of towns and villages—all erased an ancient civilization. With the disappearance of the Armenians from their homeland, most of the symbols of their culture—schools, monasteries, artistic monuments, historical sites—were destroyed by the Ottoman government. The Armenians saved only that which formed part of their collective memory. Their language, their songs, their poetry, and now their tragic destiny, remained as part of their culture.

### The Scattering of a People

Beyond the terrible loss of life (1,500,000), and the severing of the connection between the Armenian people and their historic homeland, the Armenian genocide also resulted in the dispersion of the survivors. Disallowed from resettling in their former homes, as well as stateless and penniless, Armenians moved to any country that afforded refuge. Within a matter of a few decades Armenians were dispersed to every continent on the globe. The largest Armenian community is now found in the United States.

By the expulsion of the Armenians from those areas of the Ottoman Empire that eventually came to constitute the modern state of Turkey, the reconfiguration of Armenia took a paradoxical course. Whereas the genocide resulted in the death of Armenian society in the former Ottoman Empire, the flight of many Armenians across the border into Russian territory resulted in compressing part of the surviving Armenian population into the smaller section of historic Armenia ruled by the Russians. Out of that region was created the present country of Armenia, the smallest of the republics of the USSR.

The contrast on the two sides of that frontier spotlights the chilling record of genocide. Three and half million Armenians live in Soviet Armenia. Not an Armenian can be found on the Turkish side of the border.

### The Absence of Justice and Protection in the Postwar Period

During the genocide, the leaders of the world were preoccupied with World War I. Some Armenians were rescued, some leaders decried what was happening, but the overall response was too little too late.

After the war, ample documentation of the genocide was made available and became the source of debate during postwar negotiations by the Allied Powers. It was during these negotiations for a peace treaty that the Western leaders had an opportunity to develop humanitarian policies and strategies that could have protected the Armenians from further persecution. Instead of creating conditions for the prevention of additional massacres, the Allies retreated to positions that only validated the success of ideological racialism. The failure at this juncture was catastrophic. Its consequences persist to this day.

With the defeat of their most important ally, Germany, the Ottomans signed an armistice, ending their fight with the Allies. The Committee of Union and Progress resigned from the government and in an effort to evade all culpability soon disbanded as a political organization. Although many of the Young Turk leaders, including Talat, had fled the country, the new Ottoman government in Istanbul tried them in absentia for organizing and carrying out the deportations and massacres. A verdict of guilty was handed down for virtually all of them, but the sentencing could not be carried out.

The Istanbul government was weak and was compromised by the fact that the capital was under Allied occupation. Soon it lost

the competence to govern the provinces, and finally capitulated in 1922 to the forces of Nationalist Turks who had formed a separate government based in Ankara. As for the sentences of the court against the Young Turk leaders, they were annulled. The criminals went free.

The postwar Ottoman government's policies toward the Armenians were largely benign. They desisted from further direct victimization, but rendered no assistance to the surviving Armenians to ease recovery from the consequences of their dislocation. Many Armenians returned to their former homes only to find them stripped of all furnishings, wrecked, or inhabited by new occupants. Their return also created resentment and new tensions between the Armenians, filled with anger at their mistreatment, and the Turks, who, because of their own great losses during the war, believed they had a right to keep the former properties of the Armenians. In the absence of the Ottoman government's intervention to assist the Armenians, this new hostility contributed to increasing popular support for the Nationalist movement.

### RISE OF THE TURKISH NATIONALISTS

The armistice signed between the Allies and the Ottomans did not result in the surrender of Turkish arms. On the contrary, it only encouraged the drive for Turkish independence from Allied interference. Organized in 1919 under the leadership of an army officer, named Mustafa Kemal, the Turkish Nationalist movement rejected the authority of the central government in Istanbul and sought to create an exclusively Turkish nation-state.

As the Kemalist armies brought more and more territory under their control, they also began to drive out the surviving remnants of the Armenian population. The Nationalist Turks did not resort to deportation as much as to measures designed to precipitate flight. In a number of towns with large concentrations of

Armenian refugees, massacres again took a toll in the thousands. With the spread of news that the Nationalist forces were resorting to massacre, Armenians selected two courses of action. In a few places some decided to resist, only to be annihilated. Most chose to abandon their homes once again, and this time for good.

The massacres staged by the Nationalist forces so soon after the genocide underscored the extreme vulnerability of the Armenians. Allied troops stationed in the Middle East did not attempt to save lives. Even if the Turkish Nationalist forces could not have been stopped militarily, the failure to intervene signified the abandonment of the Armenians by the rest of the world.

### Silence and Denial

For the Allies, their failure to protect the Armenians had been a major embarrassment, one worth forgetting. For the Turks, their secure resumption of sovereignty over Anatolia precluded any responsibility toward the Armenians in the form of reparations. All the preconditions were created for the cover-up of the Armenian genocide. The readiness of people on the whole to believe the position of legitimate governments meant that the suggestion that a genocide had occurred in the far reaches of Asia Minor would be made the object of historical revisionism and, soon enough, complete denial.

For almost fifty years, the Armenians virtually vanished from the consciousness of the world. Russian Armenia was Sovietized and made inaccessible. Diaspora Armenians were resigned to their fate. The silence of the world and the denials of the Turkish government only added to their ordeals.

The insecurities of life in diaspora further undermined the confidence of Armenians in their ability to hang on to some form of national existence. Constant dispersion, the threat of complete assimilation, and the humiliation of such total defeat and degradation contributed to their insecurities.

The abuse of their memory by denial was probably the most agonizing of their many tribulations. Memory, after all, was the last stronghold of the Armenian identity. The violation of this "sacred memory," as all survivors of the genocidal devastation come to enshrine the experience of traumatic death, has reverberated through Armenian society.

The persecution and later the abandonment of the Armenians left deep psychological scars among the survivors and their families. Sixty years after the genocide, a rage still simmered in the Armenian communities. Unexpectedly it exploded in a wave of terrorism. Clandestine Armenian groups, formed in the mid-1970s, sustained a campaign of political assassinations for a period of about ten years. They were responsible for killing at least two dozen Turkish diplomats.

Citing the Armenian genocide and Turkey's refusal to admit guilt as their justification, the terrorists were momentarily successful in obtaining publicity for their cause. They were unsuccessful in gaining broad-based support among Armenians or in wrenching any sort of admission from Turkey. Rather, the government of Turkey only increased the vehemence of its denial policy and embarked on a long-range plan to print and distribute a stream of publications questioning or disputing the occurrence of a genocide and distorting much of Armenian history.

### Seeking International Understanding for the Armenian Cause

During these years of great turmoil other Armenians sought a more reasonable course for obtaining international understanding of their cause for remembrance. In the United States, commemorative resolutions were introduced in the House of Representatives, and in the Senate as recently as February 1990. These resolutions hoped to obtain formal U.S. acknowledgment of the Armenian genocide. But,

the intervening decades had seen a close alliance develop between the United States and Turkey. The State Department opposed passage of these resolutions. The Turkish government imposed sanctions on U.S. businesses and military installations in Turkey. In the final analysis the resolutions failed to muster the votes necessary for adoption.

Terrence Des Pres observed: "When modern states make way for geopolitical power plays, they are not above removing everything—nations, cultures, homelands—in their path. Great powers regularly demolish other peoples' claims to dignity and place, and sometimes, as we know, the outcome is genocide." These words are important in establishing the context in which peoples, Armenians and others, seek congressional resolutions, and perform other commemorative acts. It is part of the continuing struggle to reclaim dignity. The reluctance of governments to recognize past crimes points to the basic lack of motivation in the international community to confront the consequences of genocide.

### Conclusion

It is helpful to distinguish between the attitudes and policies of the Ottoman imperial government, the Young Turks, and the Nationalist movement. The Ottoman government, based on the principle of sectarian inequality, tapped into the forces of class antagonism and promoted the superiority of the dominant group over a disaffected minority. It made rudimentary use of technology in the implementation of its more lethal policies.

The Young Turks, based on proto-totalitarianism and chauvinism, justified their policies on ideological grounds. They marshaled the organizational and technological resources of the state to inflict death and trauma with sudden impact. When the Young Turks deported the Armenians from Anatolia and Armenia to Syria, the result was more than simply

transferring part of the population from one area of the Ottoman Empire to another. The policy of exclusion placed Armenians outside the protection of the law. Yet, strangely, because they were still technically in the Ottoman Empire, there was the possibility of repatriation for the survivors given a change in government.

The Nationalists tapped the popular forces of Turkish society to fill the vacuum of power after World War I. Their policy vis-à-vis the Armenians was formulated on the basis of racial exclusivity. They made the decision that even the remaining Armenians were undesirable. Many unsuspecting Armenians returned home at the conclusion of the war in 1918. They had nowhere else to go. With the expulsion from Nationalist Turkey, an impenetrable political boundary finally descended between the Armenians and their former homes. The possibility of return was canceled.

Genocide contains the portents of the kind of destruction that can erase past and present. For the Armenian population of the former Ottoman Empire, it meant the loss of homeland and heritage, and a dispersion to the four corners of the earth. It also meant bearing the stigma of the statelessness.

At a time when global issues dominate the political agenda of most nations, the

Armenian genocide underlines the grave risks of overlooking the problems of small peoples. We cannot ignore the cumulative effect of allowing state after state to resort to the brutal resolution of disagreements with their ethnic minorities. That the world chose to forget the Armenian genocide is also evidence of a serious defect in the system of nation-states which needs to be rectified. In this respect, the continued effort to cover up the Armenian genocide may hold the most important lesson of all. With the passage of time, memory fades. Because of a campaign of denial, distortion, and cover-up, the seeds of doubt are planted, and the meaning of the past is questioned and its lessons for the present are lost.

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Describe the two ways of looking at the Armenian experience in the final days of the Ottoman Empire, according to Rouben Adalian.
2. What is the distinction between genocide and massacre?
3. How did technology facilitate mass murder?
4. Describe the short-term and long-term consequences for the Armenian people.
5. Characterize the Turkish state's position regarding the genocide.

## The Armenian Genocide and Patterns of Denial

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The admission of genocidal operations by the perpetrator government or its immediate successor is rare in modern times, unlike the boastful inscriptions of ancient tyrants. The post-World War II admission and acceptance of guilt by the West German government stand

out in stark contrast with all other cases in the twentieth century. But even in Germany, which made itself answerable for the guilt of the Nazi regime and engaged in various compensatory acts, thousands of implicated individuals claimed innocence or ignorance in the face of the incriminating evidence. Still, the post-war German governments, whether of free will, through coercion, or a combination of the two, extended reparations to the survivors, the families of the victims, and the state of Israel. Discussion of the moral and political implications of the Holocaust has now found a place in the educational curricula, literature, mass-media productions, and the scholarly forums of Germany.

No similarities exist in the Turkish response to the Armenian genocide. There has been neither candid admission nor willing investigation, neither reparation nor rehabilitation. On the contrary, state-sponsored attempts to suppress discussion of the Armenian genocide have reached unprecedented proportions. Presumably, the underlying cause for the Turkish attitude is political, for there still exists an aggrieved party, however disorganized and scattered, that demands some form of compensation. While many of the aggrieved would be satisfied with a simple Turkish admission of wrongdoing and the granting of dignity to the hundreds of thousands of victims by an end to efforts to erase the historical record, there are others who insist upon financial and even territorial restitution, thus adding to Turkish anxieties and attempts to obscure the past.

This political dimension at once raises the point that fundamental differences exist between the Armenian experience in World War I and the Jewish experience in World War II. Although comparative studies rightly draw parallels between the two tragedies, they cannot lose sight of the fact that the Armenians were still living in their historical homelands, had passed through cultural and political movements to the formulation of programs of

social, economic, and administrative reforms in the Ottoman Empire, and were perceived as an obstacle to the realization of the designs espoused by some members of the ruling Turkish Union and Progress party. This observation in no way diminishes responsibility for the genocide or mitigates its effects. In fact, to question whether or not genocide occurred only serves to cloud the issue. Rather, a more appropriate direction of investigation lies in the study of the causes for the genocide, its implementation and dimensions, its consequences, and its relevance today.

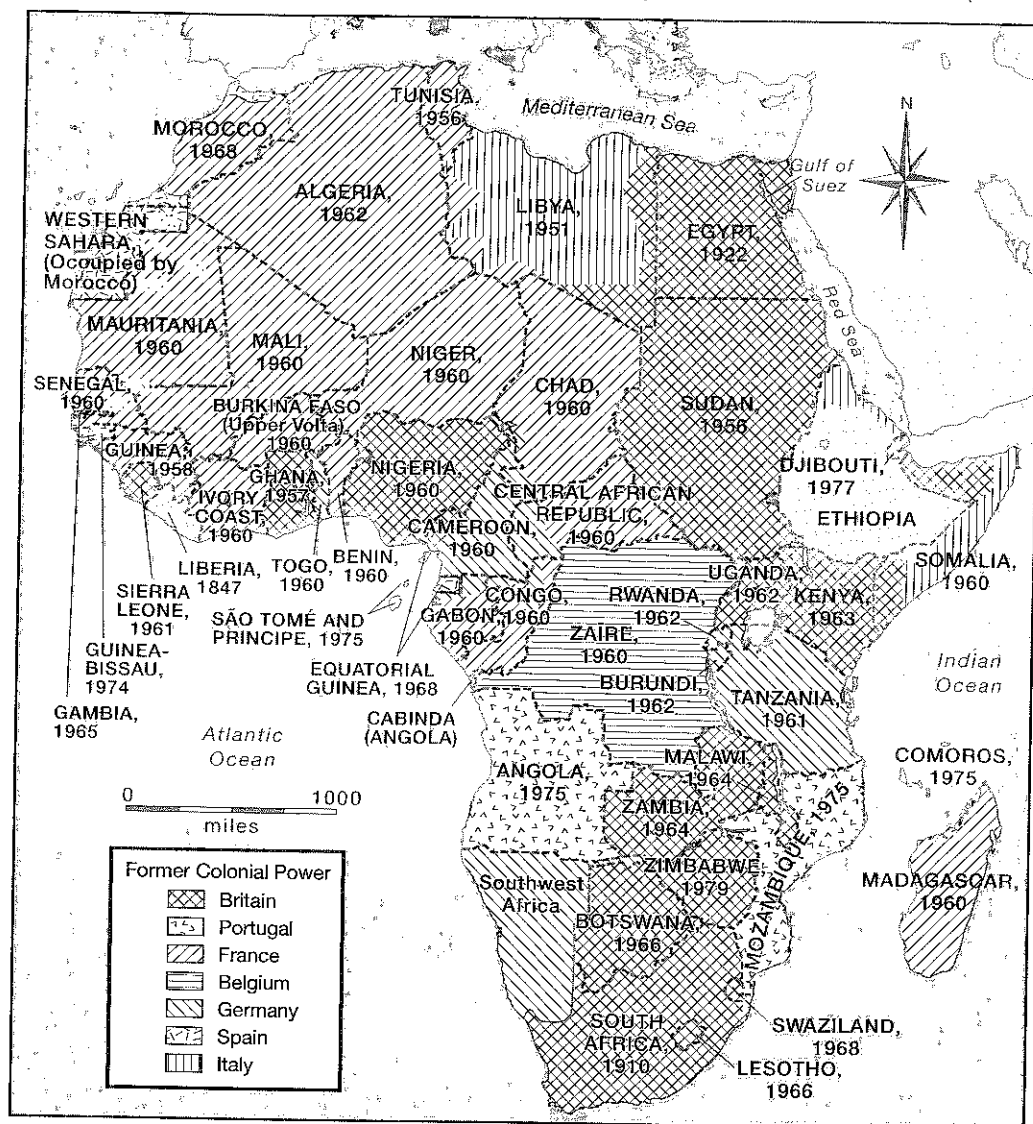
At the time of the deportations and massacres beginning in 1915, there was virtually universal condemnation of the act and of its perpetrators. The accounts of eyewitnesses and officials of many nationalities as well as the testimony of the survivors themselves were too detailed and corroborative to doubt the systematic nature of the operation. Being born into the targeted group was in and of itself sufficient to mark an individual for elimination. United States Ambassador Henry Morgenthau testified that the deportations to the Syrian and Mesopotamian deserts were unquestionably meant to annihilate the Armenian population:

The Central Government now announced its intention of gathering the two million or more Armenians living in the several sections of the empire and transporting them to this desolate and inhospitable region. Had they undertaken such a deportation in good faith it would have represented the height of cruelty and injustice. As a matter of fact, the Turks never had the slightest idea of reestablishing the Armenians in this new country. They knew that the great majority would never reach their destination and that those who did would either die of thirst and starvation, or be murdered by the wild Mohammedan desert tribes. The real purpose of the deportations was robbery and destruction; it really represented a new method of massacre. When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race; they understood this well, and, in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact.

# Rwanda—The Genocide

Mark Huband,

Cairo Correspondent for the Financial Times (London)



The term genocide is used widely and sometimes loosely, but what took place in Rwanda in April and May of 1994 was the third unquestionable

genocide of the twentieth century. As defined by the 1948 Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, it consists of

Mark Huband, "Rwanda—The Genocide," Roy Gutman and David Rieff, eds. From *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 312–15. Reprinted with permission.

certain acts "committed with an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group as such." In Rwanda, somewhere between 500,000 and 1 million Tutsis and moderate Hutus, who fit the convention's definition of a national group, were murdered.

The planning of this *genocide*, which was important legally because it established the clear intent of its architects to commit the crime, had become known to the United Nations well before it took place. The Rwandan government's effort in 1993 to carry out a census in which all Rwandans had to state their tribe had been followed by a slaughter of Tutsis in the northern part of the country. This would prove to be a macabre dress rehearsal for the genocide of 1994.

In the interim, the Rwandan president, Juvénal Habyarimana, signed a peace accord in Arusha, Tanzania, with the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) that was intended to end the country's four-year civil war. Whether President Habyarimana sincerely intended peace, or more likely, viewed it as a pause in which to finalize plans to exterminate the Tutsis, will probably never be answered conclusively. What is clear is that he was restructuring the Hutu-dominated national administration to put extremists in positions of authority—extremists whose main goal was to conspire to launch a final, genocidal strike against the hated Tutsi minority.

On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana flew back from Tanzania after a meeting on the peace process. As Habyarimana's plane attempted to land in the Rwandan capital, Kigali, it was shot down by extremist members of the president's own party. They were, in any case, quite ready to sacrifice him since they believed he had conceded too much to the RPF in the peace agreement, even if only temporarily.

Habyarimana's death served as the pretext to launch the genocide. Rwanda's national radio as well as a number of private stations relayed instructions to the death squads, the so-called Interahamwe (the name, in Kinyarwanda, means "those who fight together"), and ceaselessly urged

the killers to step up their slaughter. The Rwandan armed forces backed up the Interahamwe in those areas where the killers encountered resistance from Tutsi civilians. Prepositioned transport and fuel permitted the death squads to reach even the most isolated Tutsi communities.

Other genocides—the Turkish slaughter of the Armenians, the Nazi extermination of Europe's Jews and Gypsies—took place largely in secret. Rwanda was different. There was a United Nations peacekeeping force on the ground in Rwanda. Its members stood by and watched as the killings took place. The rest of the world watched on television as Rwanda exploded.

I recall a young woman pleading silently through the terror in her eyes as she was led to her death past French UN troops. The French were guarding foreign evacuees fleeing the Rwandan capital in an open truck, and a government militia had ordered the convoy to halt on a muddy road near the city's airport. The UN troops waited obediently, saying it was "not our mandate" to intervene. Beside them in a compound, two men were kneeling in silence as the militiamen crushed their heads with clubs, then cut their throats. The woman knelt beside them. Within less than a minute her head was all but severed. Then the convoy was allowed to move on.

The world's governments not only knew what was occurring but were complicit. Article 1 of the Genocide Convention binds its signatories to act to prevent as well as to punish genocide. The fact that the UN knew the genocide was being planned and, presumably, communicated this knowledge to member-States, and the fact that once the genocide began nothing was done, makes what took place in Rwanda in 1994 more than a crime. It was an event that shamed humanity.

It is clear by now that far from having been caught unawares, the great powers were intent on obscuring the reality of what was taking place in Rwanda. When the Security Council met, it was decided that the representative of Rwanda—of the government that was



committing the genocide—would be allowed to make a statement. For all practical purposes, the council's main concern appears to have been to debate for as long as possible the question of whether a genocide was taking place.

There were thousands of examples of the State's role. At the Nyarubuye Catholic Mission in eastern Rwanda, I happened upon Leoncia Mukandayambaje, a survivor, sitting outside her hut among the trees. She had fled there when the local mayor, Sylvestre Gacumbitsi, had given the local Tutsi population special passes to allow them to reach the large brick complex. After grouping them there, he arranged for two truckloads of murderers to be sent.

In school rooms, in cloisters, in corridors, and in doorways, the 2,620 victims covered the floor in a carpet of rotting death. Leoncia was saved by her baby daughter, whom she held close to her while the murderers hacked both with machetes. Her daughter's blood covered her. The murderers assumed both mother and child were dead.

By the time the UN Security Council had finally concluded what was plain from the start—that a genocide had indeed been taking place—it was too late to do anything for the people of Rwanda. To have admitted otherwise would have bound the parties to the Genocide Convention, among whom were all the permanent members of the Security Council, to intervene and bring the mass murder to a halt. The council, on May 26, did eventually find that a genocide was taking place. By that time, half a million had died. Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's acknowledgement was too little, too late.

He was still ahead of U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher. From the beginning of the slaughter, the U.S. government had prohibited its officials from using the term genocide. Finally, on June 10, Christopher relented, reluctantly and with bad grace. "If there is any particular magic in calling it genocide," he conceded, "I have no hesitancy in saying that."

There was magic, all right, in the sense that using the term would have bound the United States and other governments to act. By the time Christopher made his grudging concession to reality, it was too late, which may have been the idea all along.

The complicity of the so-called world community in the Rwandan genocide should not, of course, obscure the fact that the principal responsibility for the crime lies with its Rwandan architects. Apologists for the Rwandan authorities insisted at the time that the killings were unfortunate by-products of a renewal of the civil war. Later, Hutu extremists justified the killings as acts of self-defense against Tutsi aggression. Such arguments stood reality on its head. Almost all the victims in the spring of 1994 were killed as part of a government-inspired campaign of extermination, not as casualties of the subsequent fighting between the Rwandan Army and the RPF.

According to the provisions of the Genocide Convention, the government was guilty on all counts of the Convention's Article 3: genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public *incitement* to commit genocide, and complicity in genocide. Members of the government had used its administration to organize the slaughter and, equally grave, incited the Hutu civilian population to kill their Tutsi neighbors and even, for intermarriage was common in Rwanda, to kill Tutsi spouses and relatives.

After the slaughter was over, an international tribunal was established to bring the guilty to book, to try them under international humanitarian law and under the provisions of the Genocide Convention. Doubtless, such trials are better than nothing. At least, in the Rwandan case, there will not be total impunity. But trials are a poor substitute for prevention, and the one thing that is clear is that the Rwandan genocide could have been prevented had the outside world had the will to do so. The facts were plain. The legal basis for intervention was there. It was courage that was lacking.

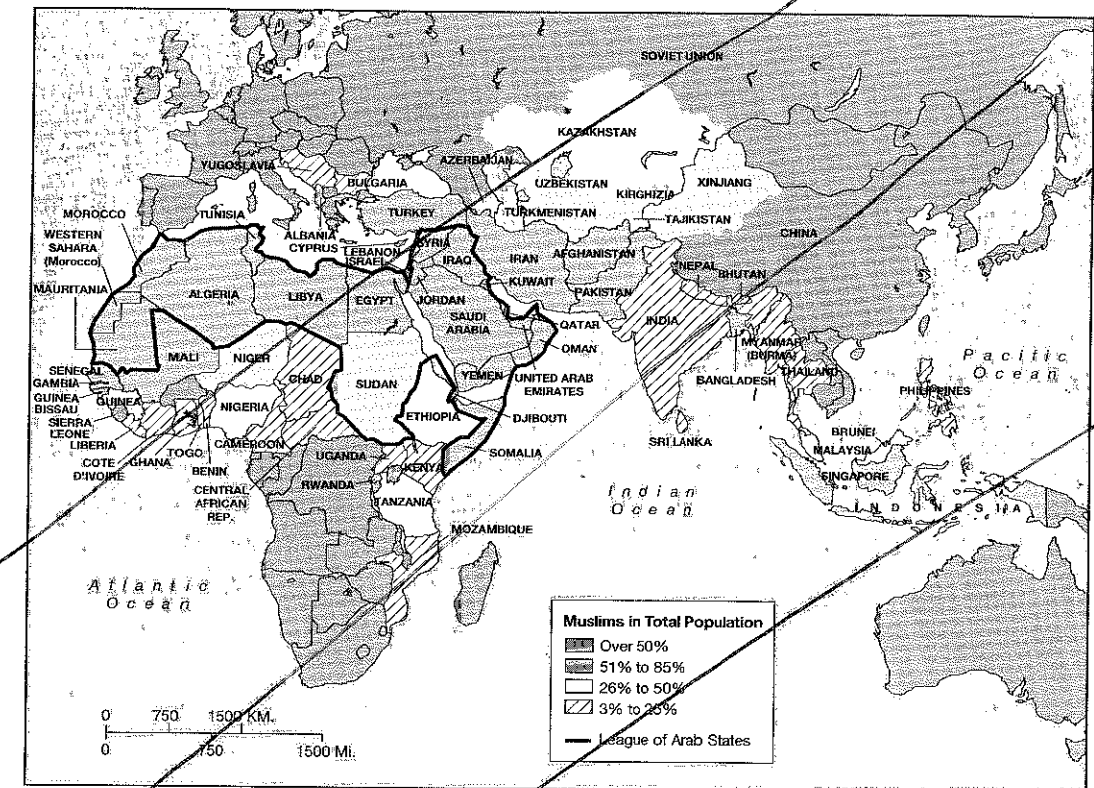
## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What was the pretext for launching the Rwandan genocide?
2. In what significant way was the Rwandan genocide different from the Armenian and Nazi atrocities?
3. Explain the irony of the world's governments obscuring the genocide.
4. Describe U.S. response to the genocide.

## Sudan—Civil War and Genocide

Francis M. Deng

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The great challenge for Christianity in the Sudan, especially in the southern part of the country, is closely linked to the civil war between Sudan's North and South. This war has raged intermittently since 1955, making it possibly the longest civil conflict in the world.

"Sudan—Civil War and Genocide," by Francis M. Deng from *Middle East Quarterly* Winter 2001, 8(1): 13–21. Reprinted by permission.

robbed the air of oxygen, thus asphyxiating them. Another version carried special darts, which ripped through flesh or pinned the victims to trees or the ground. Sometimes it is hard for the layman to discern any great difference between these weapons and, for instance, the chemical arms banned by international law and custom. Both have a terror component. The napalm and darts have since been taken out of the American CBU inventory—because of their bad image—but conventional-bomblet CBUs are still used, as in the 1991 Gulf war with Iraq.

And what about plain old rockets? Should all of them be banned, since they are frequently used as instruments of terror against civilians? The Khmer Rouge sent rockets shrieking into Phnom Penh throughout that five-year war. These were not precisely aimed munitions by any definition. They were crudely produced Chinese projectiles with a fan-shaped tail that whistled as it cut through the air overhead; you knew when it began its downward plummet because the whistling suddenly stopped. These rockets were launched from the city's environs, set off from hand-fashioned wooden platforms; there was no aiming at specific military targets—the effort was simply to get them to land somewhere, anywhere, in the refugee-packed city. And land they did—on markets, in school rooms, in backyards—spewing jagged metal and sliced limbs. The purpose was to demoralize the civilian population, and it worked.

An artillery piece can also be used as a weapon of terror against civilians. One afternoon in the summer of 1974, the Khmer Rouge trained a captured American-made 105 mm howitzer on Phnom Penh and fanned its muzzle across the city's southern edge. At first, as the shells fell in this half-moon arc, they ex-

ploded without result, but then the arc came to a colony of houses called Psar Deum Kor, and the death began. Fires started by the shells broke out and the houses were quickly in flames, whipped by high winds. Within a half hour, nearly two hundred people were dead and another two hundred wounded, virtually all civilians. The bodies were carted off on police pickup trucks. No military target was anywhere in the vicinity.

In the end—whether in Cambodia or any other killing field—there is nothing new either about the barbarity of people destroying people or, unfortunately, about its seeming inevitability in every age. One unchanging lesson is that war or genocide or crimes against humanity are states of violence that, where they exist, remove all breath from such notions as the law and civilized behavior.

Is it hopeless, then, to try to strengthen both the international law and its enforcement? No, never hopeless, not if you believe in the possibility of improvement, no matter how slight. Journalists are by blood and tradition committed to the belief, or at least to the tenet, of trying to keep bad things from getting any worse than they already are.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Because Khmers killed other Khmers, does what happened in Cambodia equal genocide? Is the term "autogenocide" appropriate?
2. How did Cold War ideology influence American reaction to the Khmer Rouge?
3. What role did "Brother Number One" play in genocide?
4. Who were the "new people"?
5. What happened to the Vietnamese community in Cambodia?

## Pol Pot

David Chandler,  
Georgetown University

- Born** May 19, 1925 in Prek Sbauv  
**1949** Studies left-wing politics in France  
**1953** Returns to Cambodia and joins Communist Party, which he leads a decade later  
**1975** Khmer Rouge is victor of civil war and occupies Phnom Penh; reign of terror kills 1.5 million in next four years  
**1979** Goes into hiding after Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia  
**1998** Dies April 15 in Cambodian jungle

On April 17, 1998, barely 500 meters inside Cambodia from Thailand, a frail, 73-year-old former dictator—known by his nom de guerre, Pol Pot—was cremated under a pile of rubbish and rubber tires. He had died two days earlier in a two-room hut, held prisoner by former colleagues who had accused him of betraying the revolutionary movement he had once led. It was an ignominious end for a man who inscribed a merciless agenda on the psyche of two generations of Cambodians.

Between 1975 and 1979, Pol Pot presided over a communist regime known as Democratic Kampuchea. His harsh, utopian policies, derived in part from Maoist China, drove an estimated 1.5 million Cambodians—or one in five—to their deaths from malnutrition, illness or overwork. At least 200,000 more were executed as enemies of the state. The ratio of deaths to population made the Cambodian revolution the most murderous in a century of revolutions.

There was rough justice in the closing months of Pol Pot's life, when he must have been fearful—as everyone in Democratic Kampuchea had been—that each day might be his last. Pol Pot had emerged on two recent occasions to talk to journalists. He spoke fondly of

his young daughter and fretfully about his health. Pressed to acknowledge responsibility for the past, he said, "I came to carry out the struggle, not to kill people. Even now, and you can look at me, am I a savage person?" Pol Pot had either evaded the question or missed the point. No one had died because of his villainous appearance. Instead, victims had been sacrificed in a ruthless campaign to refashion Cambodian society. In the 1980s, Pol Pot had told his followers that "mistakes" had been inevitable during his rule because, using a revealing simile, "We were like babies learning to walk."

Pol Pot's own childhood was cosseted and secure. He was born in 1925, when Cambodia was still a protectorate of France. His father was a prosperous landowner, with elite connections. His sister and a female cousin were dancers in the royal ballet in the capital, Phnom Penh, living comfortably under the king's protection. Saloth Sar, as he was called in those days, went to live with them when he was six years old. He attended a series of French-language schools. Only a few hundred other Cambodians enjoyed this privilege. His academic record was lackluster; he earned no high-school diploma. He seems to have been

relatively popular without making much of an impression. "His manner was straightforward, pleasant and very polite," a former classmate told me. "He thought a lot but said very little."

In 1949, because of his fluency in French and his political connections, Saloth Sar was given a scholarship to study radio-electricity in France. He lived in Paris for the next three years, neglecting his studies and spending much of his time, he told an interviewer later, reading "progressive books." In 1952 he joined the French Communist Party, drawn by its anti-colonial stance. Soon afterward, because he had failed to pass any examinations, his scholarship was revoked and he went home.

After Cambodia became independent in 1954, Saloth Sar led a double life, teaching in a private school in Phnom Penh while he worked in secret in a small, beleaguered communist movement. He enjoyed the conspiratorial rituals of underground politics and dreamed of seizing power. By 1963 he was in command of Cambodia's Communist Party. Fearful of the police, he fled the capital and sought refuge with a handful of colleagues at a Vietnamese military base, "Office 100," on the Vietnam-Cambodia border. For the next two years he chafed under humiliating Vietnamese protection.

In 1965 Saloth Sar was summoned to North Vietnam for consultations. Walking north along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, he took two months to reach Hanoi, where he was taken to task for his nationalist agenda. The general secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Le Duan, told him to subordinate Cambodia's interests to Vietnam's, to help Vietnam defeat the United States and to postpone armed struggle until the time was ripe.

Although bruised by these attacks, Saloth Sar said nothing to antagonize his patrons. Soon afterward, however, he travelled to China and was warmly welcomed by radical officials. Inspired by the early phases of the Cultural Revolution, Saloth Sar transferred his loyalties

to a new set of patrons and a more vibrant revolutionary model. The visit to China was a turning point in his career. Prudently, however, he said nothing to the Vietnamese about his change of heart. Back home, he established his headquarters in a remote, heavily wooded section of the country. For the next four years, with a group of like-minded colleagues, he polished his utopian ideas and nourished his hatreds.

His chance came in 1970 when Cambodia's ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, was overthrown in a pro-American coup. The Vietnamese communists swiftly allied themselves with the Khmer Rouge—as Sihanouk had dismissively labeled Pol Pot's group—against the new regime in Phnom Penh. The Vietnamese provided the rag-tag Khmer Rouge with arms and training. When they withdrew in 1972, Pol Pot felt betrayed. But by then, the Phnom Penh army had been badly battered and the Khmer Rouge had become a formidable guerrilla force.

The war ended in April 1975, when the Khmer Rouge occupied Phnom Penh. Most of the city's 2 million people, exhausted by years of violence, welcomed the invaders. They saw these silent, heavily armed young men as fellow Khmers, with whom a new society might be built. Their optimism was tragically misplaced. Within days, the Khmer Rouge drove them all into the countryside to become workers in agricultural communes. They also emptied Cambodia's other towns and abolished money, markets, schools, newspapers, religious practices and private property.

The Khmer Rouge spurned anyone with money or education. The revolution derived its energy, they believed, from the empowerment of the rural poor, from their recent victory and from what they thought was the intrinsic superiority of Cambodians to the hated Vietnamese. Pol Pot assumed that the Cambodian revolution would be swifter and more authentic than anything Vietnam could carry out. His Chinese

patrons, hostile to Vietnam, agreed. By mobilizing mass resentments, as Mao Zedong had done, Pol Pot inspired tens of thousands of Cambodians, especially teenagers and people in their early 20s, to join him in dismantling Cambodian society and liberating everyone from the past.

The methods he chose were naive, brutal and inept. In 1976 a hastily written Four Year Plan sought to triple the country's agricultural production within a year—without fertilizer, modern tools or material incentives. The plan paid no attention to Cambodian geography or common sense; the nation's farmers were prostrate after five years of civil war. Attempting to meet impossible quotas and frightened of reprisals, Khmer Rouge workers cut back the grain allotted for consumption. Tens of thousands of Cambodians starved to death. Thousands more collapsed from overwork and the almost total absence throughout the country of medical attention.

Pol Pot refused to accept responsibility for these disasters or to ameliorate rural conditions. Instead, he blamed "hidden enemies, burrowing from within" and set off a wholesale purge of the Communist Party. His paranoia, propping up his self-assurance, knew no bounds. In 1977 he made a state visit to China, which promised him military assistance against Vietnam and moral support for his radical agenda. Sporadic fighting between Cambodia and Vietnam flared up toward the end of the year, and full-scale war between the two countries broke out in 1978. Pol Pot declared that if every Cambodian soldier killed 30 Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge could win the war. He also asked China to send troops to help him. The Chinese refused. Trained as guerrillas, the Khmer Rouge were outmaneuvered and outgunned.

On Christmas Day 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia with more than 100,000 troops. The country cracked open like an egg. Pol Pot fled by helicopter to Thailand; when the in-

vaders entered Phnom Penh on January 7, the city was deserted. The Vietnamese established a puppet government composed largely of former cadres who had fled the Khmer Rouge reign of terror. Several of these men remain in power in Cambodia today.

Aside from brief forays to Bangkok and Beijing for medical treatment, Pol Pot spent the next 18 years in fortified encampments in the forests of Thailand and northern Cambodia, protected by Thai military forces and what remained of his guerrilla army. Throughout the 1980s, he conducted seminars for Khmer Rouge military leaders. He often mesmerized them with his sincerity, his low, melodious voice and his genteel charisma. To his disciples, there seemed to be no connection between this smooth-faced teacher and the violence of his past—except perhaps for his repeated emphasis on "enemies." In fact, Pol Pot's disconnection from reality seemed to many to be proof of his unworldliness, ardor and enlightenment.

Pol Pot remarried in the mid-'80s, after his first wife, a highly educated revolutionary he had married in 1956, succumbed to mental illness. In the mid-'90s, deprived of foreign support, the Cambodian communist movement gradually fell apart. In 1996, Pol Pot's brother-in-law, Ieng Sary, who had served as his foreign minister, defected. Thousands of Khmer Rouge followed suit. The remnants of the movement were commanded by a veteran military leader, Ta Mok, who arrested Pol Pot after the former dictator had ordered some of Ta Mok's subordinates killed.

Listening to a broadcast of the Cambodian service of the Voice of America on April 15, 1998, Pol Pot learned that Ta Mok planned to deliver him to the Americans for trial. Soon afterward, he told his wife that he felt faint. He lay down. By 10 p.m. he was dead, reportedly from heart failure, possibly from suicide. His death, like his life, left many questions unanswered.

Despite—or perhaps because of—his paranoia, ineptitude and distance from reality,

## CASE STUDIES: INDONESIA, EAST TIMOR, AND BANGLADESH

Pol Pot's place in history is assured, thanks largely to the damage he inflicted on his people. In the late 1970s, along with Mao Zedong, he enjoyed a moment of fame among those who felt, as he did, that the best way to change the world was to dismantle most of its social structure, violently and at once, regardless of the human cost. In his headlong rush toward independence and ideological perfection, Pol Pot was spurred by more experienced communist powers, eager to see if the Cambodian experiment, more radical than anything they had tried, might work.

When the extent of the disasters in Cambodia was known, Pol Pot survived in relative comfort and became a useful bit player in the cold war. When that conflict ended and Pol Pot

lost his capacity for harm, his former friends began to consider bringing him to justice. He cheated their half-hearted efforts by dying in his bed, leaving history as his only judge.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does David Chandler rank the Cambodian revolution in relation to others in the twentieth century?
2. What was the goal of Democratic Kampuchea?
3. Did Saloth Sar's background in any way indicate the direction his actions would take after 1970?
4. How did Pol Pot transform Cambodia?
5. What is Pol Pot's place in history, according to Chandler?
6. Can a single person commit genocide or be responsible for it?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Is autogenocide fundamentally different from the Holocaust?
2. Are the Soviet, Chinese, and Cambodian genocides fundamentally different from other genocides?
3. Compare the personalities of Joseph Stalin and Pol Pot.

### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Chandler, David P. *Brother Number One: A Political Biography of Pol Pot*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999.

Him, Chanrithy. *When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up under the Khmer Rouge*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

Kamm, Henry. *Cambodia: Report from a Stricken Land*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998.

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

Ung, Loung. *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000.

Noam Chomsky called attention to the Indonesian government's genocide against the people of East Timor and the U.S. government's complicity with the anti-Communist government of Indonesia, long before mainstream American media paid attention. Chomsky confronted administrations that projected intentional ignorance or disengagement from these matters. These cultivated public responses by the government obfuscate the dominant strategic goals of U.S. policy makers—while the fate of the civilian population was incidental. Robert Cribb places these events in the context of Indonesian political turmoil.

After strong U.S. support for Indonesian repression and killing in East Timor, Geoffrey Robinson concludes in *The New Killing Fields* that “the costs of such expediency will also be high for Americans and for the credibility of the U.S. government's war against terrorism.” The story of East Timor illustrates that there is a sound basis for the skepticism with which U.S. policy is viewed in much of the world—and that perhaps there is good reason to doubt the sincerity of America's professed opposition to the use of violence against civilians.

In a general way, Bangladesh's emergence as a nation in 1971 reflects the relationship between Indonesia and East Timor. Both areas, geographically separate, had to confront forces calling for independence. Bangladesh's independence would come at the cost of three million people dead, a quarter million women and girls raped, and millions of forced refugees. Gendercide Watch describes the grim struggle for independence in Bangladesh.

In the annals of American foreign policy in the latter half of the twentieth century, American reaction to genocide is curious, if not repugnant, according to Edward S. Herman. Nine days after East Timor declared its independence, for example, and just hours after U.S. President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger concluded a festive two-day visit with General Suharto on December 7, 1975, Indonesia invaded East Timor. U.S. support for Suharto's murderous regime continued, while reaction to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge took a different course.