

*Introduction*

# Genocide and Anthropology

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There are blows in life so violent – I can't answer!  
Blows as if from the hatred of God; as if before them,  
the deep waters of everything lived through  
were backed up in the soul . . . I can't answer!

Not many; but they exist . . . They open dark ravines  
in the most ferocious face and in the most bull-like back.  
Perhaps they are the horses of that heathen Attila,  
Or the black riders sent to us by Death.

Cesar Vallejo, "The Black Riders"

Genocide is an act that has plagued human beings for centuries: the intentional destruction of a group because of who they are. The death toll almost defies belief. During the twentieth century alone, sixty million people were annihilated by genocidal regimes, the most notorious of which was Nazi Germany. Tens of millions more perished in earlier times, many of whom were characterized as "backward" or "savage" indigenous peoples and destroyed in the name of "progress."

Genocide is also an event that is difficult to understand, analyze, or write about: how can we comprehend or represent the most horrible of deeds?<sup>1</sup> Some have argued that analytical explanation, particularly by those who did not live through genocidal terror, is ultimately a futile exercise, one that inevitably falls short in its task of elucidation and may even mitigate the moral offense of the perpetrators. For many, prose and poetry, like the above poem by Cesar Vallejo, comes closest to capturing the essence of mass murder. Others prefer silence to dispassionate analysis.

A different moral imperative drives many scholars of genocide for, if we do not attempt an explanation, how can we prevent its recurrence in the future? While attempting to remain sensitive to the suffering of the victims and the difficulty of explaining the horrors they endured, many of these scholars, myself included,

believe that genocide remains a human behavior, albeit an extreme one, that can and must be explained to whatever extent is possible.

Finally, genocide is a term that confounds scholars, generating contentious debate over its very definition: what, exactly, should be called “genocide,” a word that evokes immediate moral outrage? The word has been applied to a wide range of events, including slavery, abortion, and the AIDS epidemic (see Fein 1990; Porter 1982). Terminological rigor is crucial, however, both for analytical clarity and to avoid diluting the meaning of the term. Moreover, the act of genocide has direct legal ramifications: it is a crime under international law.

I have grappled with all of these issues in my own research on the Cambodian genocide (1975–9). In April 1975, after a brutal civil war in which perhaps 600,000 people died, the Khmer Rouge, a group of Maoist-inspired communist rebels led by Pol Pot, seized power. They immediately set out to completely revamp Cambodian society, eliminating Buddhism and market exchange, undermining traditional patterns of familial solidarity, curtailing freedom of choice, movement, and speech, and rustivating the urban population. Everyone was required to work long hours on meager rations and to transform themselves into proper revolutionaries. Almost two million of Cambodia’s eight million inhabitants perished in the process from disease, overwork, and starvation or were executed outright: why? How can almost a quarter of a population perish in less than four years? What goes on in the minds of perpetrators when they kill another human being? What is the psychological toll on the victims and survivors?

My research has been driven by such questions. When attempting to answer them, I have sometimes stumbled upon the limits of analytic explanation. For example, how can one convey the suffering of Mum, a woman who began to weep as she described to me how the Khmer Rouge executed her husband and the families of all of her siblings because they had been high-ranking military officers? At such moments I return to Vallejo’s words. Nevertheless, I have found that analysis can help us to understand much about genocide. Thus, while it is impossible to convey fully Mum’s experience, we can understand many of the reasons why the Khmer Rouge wanted to kill high-ranking soldiers, police, government officials, and civilians associated with the previous regime (see Hinton 1998a, 1998b, 2000, forthcoming).

As an anthropologist, I have also been perplexed by the relative lack of previous research on genocide within the discipline. Anthropologists have been most vocal in defending indigenous peoples against the onslaught of modernity (e.g., Arens 1976; Bischooping and Fingerhut 1996; Bodley 1999; Diamond 1974; Hitchcock and Twedt 1997; Maybury-Lewis 1997; Taussig 1987), but enormous gaps remain. I have yet to find an anthropological article written on the Armenian genocide and, with a few exceptions, anthropologists remained silent about the Holocaust until the mid-1980s – over forty years after the fact.<sup>2</sup> The recent publication dates of the essays included in this volume reflect this bias.

Why have anthropologists failed to engage with the topic of genocide? As Helen Fein notes in her chapter, the anthropological neglect of this topic was shared by other social sciences, which seemed to have pushed genocide into the realm of speciality studies. Within anthropology, there may have been a hesitancy to tackle this issue because it threatened the concept of cultural relativity; how does one

suspend moral outrage in the wake of mass murder? Or, perhaps anthropologists shied away from politically volatile issues in the aftermath of their participation in World War II and the Vietnam War effort. The discipline also seems to have been predisposed to focus on small-scale societies while neglecting the large-scale political processes – including violence – that impacted upon them.

Whatever the reasons, anthropologists began to more actively study war and political violence in the 1980s (Ferguson 1989; Nagengast 1994), a trend that eventually contributed to a small body of work on genocide – particularly in the aftermath of Bosnia and Rwanda. As Part I of this book on “Conceptual Foundations” implicitly suggests, anthropologists have a great deal to contribute to the study of genocide. Within genocide studies, much work has focused on more macro-level processes, exploring how genocide is linked to historical, political, economic, and structural factors (see Kuper and Fein, this volume).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, journalists such as Philip Gourevitch (1998) and Misha Glenny (1996) have published powerful accounts of the origins and experience of genocide. Almost none of these studies, however, has examined the local and sociocultural dimensions of genocide, areas of anthropological expertise. It is precisely because anthropologists can link macro-level analysis to the local-level understandings which help give genocide pattern, impetus, and meaning that they stand to make a unique and crucial contribution to our understanding of genocide. This volume of previously published work, along with another book of original essays (Hinton 2002), is intended to lay the groundwork for this “anthropology of genocide.”<sup>4</sup>

### Genocide: Conceptual Foundations

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Article II, 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention

Before exploring some of the insights an anthropology of genocide can provide, I want to briefly examine the concept of genocide itself. The first four selections in Part I, the multidisciplinary “Conceptual Foundations” section, are explicitly concerned with the definition and meaning of the term. These pieces, along with excerpts from two books, Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and Zygmunt Bauman’s *Modernity and the Holocaust*, are seminal works in the interdisciplinary field of genocide studies. All are texts from various disciplines that anthropologists and other scholars grappling with the issue of genocide should consider.

The word “genocide” did not exist before the twentieth century; Raphaël Lemkin, a Polish jurist, coined the term to account for the atrocities Nazi Germany was committing. As Lemkin notes in the excerpted chapter from his ground-breaking

book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944), at the 1933 International Conference for the Unification of Penal Law he unsuccessfully argued for the creation of two new international laws – “crimes of barbarity” and “crimes of vandalism” – that would criminalize the destruction of national, religious, or racial groups. A decade later, in the wake of the horrors being perpetrated in Nazi Germany, Lemkin was referring to the intentional destruction of such groups as “genocide,” a term that combined the Greek root *genos* (race, tribe) with the Latin root *cide* (from *caedere*, to kill). In his selection in this volume, Lemkin methodically outlines a wide range of “genocidal techniques” used by the Nazis to attack the foundations of various “national entities.” When compared with the next selection in this volume, the text of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, one is struck by the extent to which Lemkin’s original conception of genocide was modified in just a few years.

In the excerpt from his book, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (1981), a seminal text that in some ways marks the emergence of the nascent field of genocide studies, Leo Kuper describes these transformations (see also Fein, this volume). Although the term “genocide” was sometimes invoked in the Nuremberg trials, Nazi war criminals were convicted under three main categories of international law: crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Meanwhile, Lemkin was lobbying at the United Nations for the criminalization of genocide, a law that, while overlapping somewhat with war crimes and crimes against humanity, would move beyond them by protecting social collectivities during times of peace. On December 11, 1946, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for legislation that would outlaw genocide, which it defined as the “denial of the right of existence of entire human groups . . . when racial, religious, political, and other groups have been destroyed, entirely or in part,” and encouraged its adoption as law.

When various UN committees began to discuss the wording of the UN Convention, however, a number of controversies ensued. Kuper notes five main issues that structured the debate. First, committee members disagreed over which groups should be protected. Led by the Soviet bloc, which may well have feared being indicted for its domestic treatment of political and class “enemies,” several representatives argued that the inclusion of more “mutable” group identities, such as political affiliation, would weaken the Convention because of the difficulty of defining membership. As a result, only “national, ethnical, racial or religious” groups were protected in the final version of the Genocide Convention. Second, problems arose over the issue of intent. For, if genocide involves the “intent to destroy” a group “as such,” then it becomes possible for perpetrators to dispute their culpability for the “inadvertent” destruction of domestic groups, particularly indigenous peoples. Thus, when Paraguay was accused of being complicit in the destruction of the Aché Indians in 1974, the government tried to refute the charge through a simple denial of intent (see Arens 1976).

Third, the representatives argued about the types of actions that should be characterized as “genocide.” Lemkin had originally proposed a very broad range of genocidal “techniques,” including the destruction of a group’s cultural way of life. Countries with a history of domestic and international colonization were particularly worried about being indicted on this charge, however, so “cultural genocide” was ultimately dropped from the Convention. (Drawing on another term proposed

by Lemkin, scholars now often refer to cultural genocide as “ethnocide.”) Fourth, committee members had to confront the problem of numbers. How can genocide be quantified? How many people have to be annihilated before massacre becomes genocide? The final version of the UN Convention did not provide answers to these questions, vaguely referring to the intent to destroy a group “in whole or in part.”

Finally, there is the problem of enforcement. While few countries have a problem indicting a genocidal regime that has fallen from power, most become very resistant to passing legislation that could compromise their sovereignty. As opposed to establishing an international tribunal with unrestricted powers of enforcement, the UN Convention ultimately left prosecution to the states themselves (see Article VI), creating a paradoxical situation in which regnant genocidal regimes would effectively be responsible for trying themselves. Nevertheless, it took the United States Congress almost forty years to overcome its fear of indictment and to ratify the Convention, which became international law in 1951 (see LeBlanc 1991). At a conference in Rome in July 1998, a UN Statute for the establishment of an international criminal court was passed by a vote of 120 to 7; the United States, fearing the indictment of US troops in foreign operations, joined Iran, Iraq, China, Libya, Algeria, and Sudan in opposing the Statute. Only two weeks before he left office in January 2001, President Clinton finally signed the treaty, though Senate confirmation remains in doubt.

Helen Fein’s selection in this volume, from *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* (1990), describes the evolution of the concept of genocide, laments the lack of academic research on the topic, outlines some of the key issues in the field of genocide studies, and proposes a new definition of genocide that a number of scholars now use. Specifically, Fein defines genocide as a “sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim.” This definition resolves at least some of the problems with the UN Convention through its inclusiveness (i.e., accounting for the destruction of political and socioeconomic groups) and the distinction between genocide and other forms of political violence (e.g., terrorism, war crimes, episodic massacres). Fein proposes a number of criteria for distinguishing genocide and suggests new directions for research on genocide in the social sciences.

From an anthropological perspective, the UN Convention definition is highly problematic because it privileges certain social categories – race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality – over others. While the marking of social difference is a human universal, the categories into which we parse the world are culturally constructed. Thus, as we move from place to place, we find people being classified in a myriad of ways, ranging from totemistic groups and castes to categories based on sexual orientation and alternative genders. Surely there is a need to take account of such emic social categories as opposed to simply assuming that the categories highly salient in “modern” societies are universal? The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda ran into just such a problem when it found that the terms “Hutu” and “Tutsi” could not easily be defined as a racial, ethnic, religious, or national group, the categories listed in the UN Convention; it ultimately concluded that emic distinctions could serve as the basis for prosecution (Magnarella 2002). Even the

idea of race, which so many people mistakenly reify as a biological given, is a social myth, created in the context of modernity to classify and to legitimate inequities perpetrated against newly discovered “others” (Gates 1986; Smedley 1999; Williams 1985). Accordingly, most anthropologists would probably favor a Fein-like definition that may encompass far more of the world’s categorical diversity.

Of course, this line of thinking could be extended to the concept of genocide itself, which also arose in a particular social and historical context and reflects Western liberal democratic ideals.<sup>5</sup> After all, the term did not exist prior to the 1930s and did not have a corresponding conceptual analog in many societies. Moreover, the international law against genocide protects “individuals” against the violation of their “human rights,” while paradoxically guarding the sovereignty of the nation-state. Like the notion of race, concepts of the “individual,” “human rights,” the “nation-state,” and “genocide” are all social constructs linked to the advent of modernity. While few anthropologists would argue that we should do away with the idea of genocide, many would argue for a critical pause before this concept is applied to atrocities committed in other times and places. What, exactly, did it mean to destroy certain groups in ancient Assyria versus a modern, non-European context like Pol Pot’s Cambodia? It is precisely through the understanding of such local categories – an anthropological area of expertise – that we may both better comprehend and work to prevent genocide.

Two other selections have been included in Part I. The first, excerpts from Hannah Arendt’s book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, initially published in 1963, raises a number of moral dilemmas about genocide. Arendt argues that Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi officer who coordinated the deportation of Jews to death camps, epitomized the “banality of evil.” As opposed to being a sadistic demon, Eichmann seemed all too normal, a thoughtless “cog” in a totalitarian bureaucracy that annihilated people. Eichmann obeyed German law and carried out the orders his superiors gave him, even though they facilitated the death of millions of Jews. Is such a person guilty? And, if so, on what basis? Arendt ultimately answers this question in the affirmative, though not before raising fundamental questions about moral philosophy, international law, totalitarianism, bureaucracy, and modernity itself – and making claims that generated enormous controversy.<sup>6</sup>

In the excerpt from his book, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1991), Zygmunt Bauman also considers the banality of evil, arguing that, far from being an aberrant throwback to a “premodern” state of “savagery” and “barbarism,” the Holocaust was very much the product of modernity – one of its necessary, though not sufficient, conditions. The Holocaust constituted a tragic coalescence of several aspects of modernity. With the emergence of Enlightenment ideals of equality and the uniform citizen, race became a new way of differentiating human beings. Science was enlisted in the effort to create a new hierarchy of the human and not fully human, on top of which the Aryan race stood predominant. Bauman distinguishes such racism (the thoroughly modern construction of a racial social order that may be modified and “improved” through social engineering) from two types of prejudice: “heterophobia” (general fear and anxiety about the unfamiliar) and “contestant enmity” (more specific group hostility toward threatening “others”).

Several other dimensions of modernity facilitated the Nazis’ racist ambitions. With the rise of the nation-state, power and the means of force are increasingly

centralized under state control. Science and technology make this power all the more lethal. To optimize “efficiency,” work tasks are increasingly specialized and divided, culminating in impersonal bureaucracies that substitute technical proficiency for moral responsibility. As the division of labor is specialized, each bureaucrat becomes another step removed from the task that is ultimately performed. Distantiation, in turn, facilitates dehumanization, as the human beings whose lives are affected by the task lose their distinctiveness, becoming objects often referred to in euphemistic language. In Nazi Germany, the result was a bureaucrat like Eichmann, who efficiently carried out his tasks, unconcerned about the dehumanized individuals he thereby helped annihilate. While bureaucracy is not inherently genocidal, Bauman argues, it has the potential to facilitate lethal projects of social engineering, particularly when other moral safeguards break down. This is precisely what happened in Nazi Germany, as religious leaders, politicians, and intellectuals stood by – or even applauded or helped out – while Hitler’s government annihilated Jews and other “contaminating” groups. Bauman recognizes that many Nazis were brutal anti-Semites. Anti-Semitism alone, however, cannot account for the modern character of the Holocaust.

### **Genocide, History, and Modernity**

Several anthropologists have considered the relationship between genocide, history, and (post)modernity. Like “genocide,” the term “modernity” is difficult to define, as illustrated by the number of prominent scholars who have attempted to analyze the character of modern society. Regardless of the differences, most would probably agree that modernity is linked to a set of interrelated processes (see Hall, Held, Hubert, and Thompson 1995): economic (the rise of capitalism and monetarized exchange), political (the emergence of the nation-state and secular forms of government), social (the decline of “traditional” hierarchies and allegiances and the rise of new class, race, and gender-based distinctions), and cultural (the privileging of a new set of secular ideas, many based on the Enlightenment’s faith in progress, science, and reason). Moreover, the very idea of “the modern” now carries the positive sense of something favorable, desirable, and improved (Williams 1985).

From an anthropological perspective, the association of modernity with improvement is problematic. This association has served as the basis of much ethnocentrism, as the linkage between the modern and “the West” implies the inferiority of the “traditional” others who are categorically opposed to it. In fact, as the excerpt from John Bodley’s (1999) *Victims of Progress* illustrates, this supposed inferiority has been used to legitimate genocide. Specifically, Bodley argues that the abuse and annihilation of indigenous peoples have been justified by one of the key metanarratives of modernity – the idea of “progress.” On the one hand, “progress” has been equated with Western technology, market exchange, and industrial “development.” These capitalist economies, however, are premised on a “culture of consumption” that promotes ever-expanding consumption and market growth. To increase their market base and pool of natural resources, governments have all too often sought to appropriate the lands of indigenous peoples, who usually have very different cultural assumptions and patterns of subsistence and, Bodley argues, frequently want to be

left alone. On the other hand, the physical and cultural destruction of these indigenous peoples has been legitimated in the name of “progress.” Government officials, scholars, and development agencies often ethnocentrically assert that they have a moral imperative to “civilize” these child-like “savages,” who would desire the wealth and material goods that “civilization” offers if they weren’t living in a state of ignorance. In some cases, the resulting death of indigenous peoples has been explained in terms of social Darwinism. Disastrously, somewhere between twenty-five to fifty million indigenous peoples have perished in the name of “progress” during this genocidal process.

As Bodley’s chapter points out, many people view modernity as an inevitable process of “development” through which “traditional” peoples are “civilized” and gain the benefits of “progress.” Anthropologists and other scholars, however, have emphasized that modernity does not result in a teleological outcome; it is a process that generates a variety of local forms, even within “the West.” “Traditional others” are not passive recipients of modernity but active meaning-making agents who, while operating within a set of structural constraints, nevertheless localize the global flow of ideas, technologies, and material goods associated with the modern world. To understand modernity in general, and how modernity is related to genocide in particular, scholars need to explore the complex interplay of culture and history within specific local contexts. The next two selections in this volume highlight this point.

If Bodley’s chapter illustrates the ways in which modernity has devastated indigenous peoples throughout the world, Michael Taussig’s (1984) essay, “Culture of Terror – Space of Death,” explores how these genocidal processes are articulated and transformed within a given time and place. Specifically, Taussig focuses on Roger Casement’s report about the horrible abuses that were being perpetrated by rubber traders against Indians living along the Putumayo river in Colombia at the turn of the twentieth century. Taussig argues that this “space of death” was pervaded by enormous fear and uncertainty, which was heightened by a disjointed mixing of Western and local images. It is precisely within such sites of what Taussig calls “epistemic murk” that terror takes on cultural forms, as both perpetrator and victim, colonizer and colonized, attempt to make sense of their encounter with this terrifying and mysterious “other” onto whom their fantasies are projected. For the rubber traders on the Putumayo, Taussig argues, Indians, whom they associated with the wild, savagery, ignorance, and cannibalism, were transformed into the very images they were supposed to signify through acts of terror, brutality, and violence: rites of degradation confirming the inhuman status of the Indians; the burning or inverted crucifixion of the “infidels”; the rape or sexual enslavement of the “lascivious” group’s women; the confinement of these inhabitants of “the wild” in cages and stockades; and the murder and dismemberment of “cannibalistic” savages. Through their depictions of such acts, even people like Casement ultimately affirmed the very cultural images that were patterning the violence.

In the selection from his book, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (1999), Eric Wolf explores the interrelationship of power and ideology in Nazi Germany. For Wolf, an understanding of ideology is not possible without a historical analysis, as new ideas are continually being forged out of preexisting cultural materials. During periods of crisis and upheaval, this process is often accentuated,



resulting in extreme ideological formations – characteristic of many revitalization movements – that underwrite structural power, or “the power manifest in relationship that not only operates within settings and domains but also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves” (Wolf 1999:5).<sup>7</sup> Like the Kwakiutl Indians of the Northwest Pacific Coast of North America and the Aztecs of pre-Hispanic Mexico (whom Wolf discusses in earlier chapters of his book), National Socialist Germany forged an ideology that legitimated the rule of the elite and the restructuring of society. In the wake of Germany’s defeat in World War I and the socio-economic upheaval that followed, the Nazis forged their ideology of racial purity out of a number of culturally resonant propositions, including the ideas of the German *volk* community, status and hierarchy, anti-Semitism, male honor, social Darwinism, and scientific notions of race. This ideology rationalized Nazi power, anti-Semitic policy, fascist political domination, and, ultimately, the creation of new social contexts in which mass murder could take place.

### **Manufacturing Difference and “Purification”**

To help make sense of and respond quickly to a diverse set of environmental inputs, the human mind has evolved to parse the complex world in which we live into categories (Allport 1979; Bruner 1957; Lévi-Strauss 1967; Maybury-Lewis and Alamagor 1989). This environment includes other human beings, whom we are strongly predisposed to sort, label, and typologize (Hirschfeld 1996). If cognitive psychologists have explored how such mental processing works, anthropologists have demonstrated that this capacity to distinguish difference has generated a vast array of forms across time and place, ranging from clans to races. Such culturally constructed groupings constitute a crucial part of human identity, as they provide a sense of meaning, solidarity, and belonging.

Group identities, however, are also premised on the existence of an “other” from which a “we” is distinguished, often in terms of an ethnocentric set of binary oppositions (for example, modern tropes of the “civilized” colonizer versus the “savage” colonized). The existence of these “others” provides a sort of moral glue that binds the members of a given social group together. Moreover, “others” may serve as objects of projection onto whom negative feelings and ideas may be transferred, thereby inflating one’s own sense of self-worth and moral superiority. Mary Douglas (1966) developed an important synthesis of such ideas, linking bodily symbolism to social structure. Just as dirt is “matter out of place,” she argued, so too are marginal beings portrayed as a chaotic and dangerous source of contamination that threatens the purity of the social order; group solidarity and cohesion, in turn, are affirmed through symbolic and physical acts of eliminating these contaminants. (Although Douglas did not apply her ideas to genocide, the relevance and importance of her work to the topic are highlighted by the fact that several of the authors in Part III directly draw upon her ideas.)

In genocide, the process of group differentiation and stigmatization is taken to the extreme, usually because of direct or indirect state policy. Here we find another link to modernity, as the homogenizing tendencies of the nation-state lead to an attempt to define citizens and non-citizens. An essentialist equation of people and place is

frequently made, sometimes through the type of association between race, language, and culture that Franz Boas (1982) attacked at the turn of the twentieth century. As the claims of the dominant group are naturalized in this manner, it is able to assert the “right” to forcibly remove or eliminate its “out-of-place” victims, sometimes through lethal projects of social engineering.

Anthropologists have a great deal to say about this aspect of the genocidal process. Because of their expertise on the local dimensions of social structure, anthropologists may both point out and critique the ways in which genocidal regimes “manufacture difference” by constructing essentialized categories of identity and belonging. More broadly, anthropologists may illustrate how genocidal regimes motivate their minions to kill by forging their ideologies of hate out of highly salient forms of cultural knowledge (e.g., Hinton forthcoming; Taylor 1999), including those linked to emotionally resonant notions of purity and contamination. The essays in Part III touch on these issues in various ways as they explore how genocidal regimes manufacture difference into us/them oppositions of the good and the bad, the pure and the impure.

For example, in his essay, “‘Ethnic Cleansing’: A Metaphor for our Time?,” Akbar Ahmed (1995) seeks to understand why ethnic cleansing, or the attempt to “purify” a given locale by expelling or eliminating a marked social group, has become so prevalent in recent years. While Ahmed provides a multicausal and wide-ranging answer to this question, he sees ethnic cleansing as intimately linked to late modernity, an era characterized by the undermining of the master tropes of modernity, the weakening of the nation-state, transnational flows of images and people, and a revival of the “traditional.” In the midst of the uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety often associated with these processes, many people become increasingly invested in communities and group identities, which afford them greater meaning and self-affirmation. Problems arise when, frequently in the midst of socioeconomic and political crises, these identities are essentialized and scapegoating begins. In late modernity, mass media may play a crucial role in this process by reifying group identity and fomenting what Ahmed calls a “minority complex.” As social problems mount, blame is cast upon the minority, who, in the extreme, becomes a “dirty” enemy that must be eliminated. Ahmed also critiques anthropologists for their failure to respond to episodes of ethnic cleansing and genocide, arguing that anthropological insights about the construction of ethnicity and other group identities are of direct relevance to our understanding of mass atrocities. Ahmed’s essay concludes with suggestions about how we might prevent ethnic cleansing, such as by encouraging group understanding, undertaking educational initiatives, and increasing the ability of organizations like the UN to respond to developing crises.

Robert Hayden’s (1996) essay, “Imagined Communities and Real Victims: Self-Determination and Ethnic Cleansing in Yugoslavia,” illustrates many of Ahmed’s themes through an examination of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. Arguing against primordialist explanations that explain such violence in terms of “age-old hatreds,” Hayden notes that, during the 1980s, the former Yugoslavia was characterized by increasing levels of ethnonationalist heterogeneity and interaction. Why, then, was ethnic cleansing taking place there just a few years later? To answer this question, Hayden draws on Douglas’ theory of purity and danger, asserting that the identity of given ethnonationalist groups was reimagined so as to render them an

impurity that had to be eliminated from the body politic. In particular, Hayden demonstrates how the constitutions of the successor republics in the former Yugoslavia “denaturalized” and justified the exclusion of minority groups by linking citizenship to essentialized cultural traits of the dominant group. This “bureaucratic ethnic cleansing” both provided a legal basis for and embodied a larger ideology of hate which, inflamed by state media, claimed that the purity of the new ethnic nation could only be insured by the forcible removal of this contaminating (minority) “human matter” from places where it did not belong. Ethnic cleansing, or the “forced unmixing” (by law, expulsion, or annihilation) of ethnonationalist groups who had previously coexisted, interacted, and intermarried in the former Yugoslavia, was the result.

Arjun Appadurai’s (1998) essay, “Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization,” draws together many of the ideas raised in earlier readings in Part III in attempting to understand the horrible forms of bodily violence that former ethnic neighbors sometimes perpetrate upon another. Like Ahmed, Appadurai maintains that ethnic conflict is linked to a sense of uncertainty and doubt in the wake of globalization in the late modern world. Like Hayden, Appadurai applies Douglas’ structural argument about the anxiety caused by category mixture to violent situations in which notions of belonging are being reimagined to exclude “impure” others. Like Taussig, Appadurai maintains that the “spaces of death” in which violence takes place often embody a cultural patterning. Specifically, Appadurai notes that, as global flows of people, ideas, and information have accelerated, people may experience enormous uncertainty about who they are and what they believe. During ethnic conflict, this uncertainty is often brought to the fore, as people are informed by the media and sociopolitical leaders that their former neighbors are now ethnic enemies. Appadurai suggests that the body becomes a theater in which such categorical uncertainty is, at least momentarily, overcome, when the bodies of former social intimates are transformed into the ethnic or political tokens for which they are supposed to stand. Grotesque acts of bodily violence are perpetrated during these “death-cycle rituals,” in which self and (enemy) other are marked, classified, and differentiated through mutilation, dismemberment, and death.

My own contribution to this volume (1998), “A Head for an Eye: Revenge in the Cambodian Genocide,” explores how genocidal regimes attempt to motivate their followers to annihilate such impure groups by manipulating preexisting forms of knowledge. Because perpetrators are not simply automatons who blindly carry out the ideological dictates of the state, genocidal regimes almost always blend the old with the new so that their lethal ideologies will be effective and make sense to people. Thus, genocidal regimes usually co-opt preexisting cultural knowledge, dressing it up in new ideological guises that maintain familiar and compelling resonances while legitimating new structures of domination and violence against victim groups. The Khmer Rouge model of disproportionate revenge provides an illustration of this point, as the Khmer Rouge revamped preexisting knowledge about disproportionate revenge in accordance with their Marxist-Leninist views of class resentment and contradiction to sanction the killing of “class enemies.” Drawing upon peasant anger about intensive US bombing, economic destabilization, and the disrespectful and exploitative way the rich treated the

poor, Khmer Rouge ideology gave this sentiment a focus (class struggle) and a target (the “enemy” living in the cities). This new Khmer Rouge model, which encouraged poor peasants to seek vengeance against the capitalist and reactionary classes that had traditionally oppressed them, was publicly instituted in Khmer Rouge speeches, radio broadcasts, political training, songs, slogans, and policy. Many perpetrators found this ideological model highly motivating and sought to annihilate their “impure” class enemies.

### **Coping and Understanding**

Within genocide studies, the majority of research has focused on understanding the genocidal process and seeking ways to prevent future genocides. With the exception of the Holocaust, much less attention has been focused on the aftermaths of genocide, both on how it affects perpetrators, victims, and their descendents and on the ways in which genocide is represented, portrayed, and explained in the media and the academy. While scholars make approximations of death tolls, the more indirect effects of genocide are almost incalculable, encompassing material devastation (e.g., the destruction of homes, property, and infrastructure; poverty, malnutrition, and starvation; economic collapse; minefields), human suffering (e.g., bodily injury; bereavement and intense grief; trauma; chronic fear; mental health problems; living with perpetrators; continued discrimination and structural violence), and social turmoil (e.g., dislocated populations; the loss or disappearance of family, friends, and relatives; the destruction of social institutions and networks; lingering hatreds). These effects are almost always mediated by the international response, including media portrayals, foreign aid, academic analyses, international stigma, criminal tribunals, transnational relief agencies, and a foreign military presence. As the essays in Part IV suggest, anthropologists, many of whom have lived with or worked in societies devastated by genocide, have a great deal to say about the aftermaths of genocide (see also Das, Kleinman, Lock, et al. 2001; Ebihara 1993; Green 1999; Hinton 2002; Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997; Malkki 1995; Manz 1988; Warren 1993).

Linda Green’s (1994) essay, “Fear as a Way of Life,” explores the effects that fear has had in Guatemalan society in the wake of genocide. While conducting fieldwork with the people of Xe’caj in the late 1980s, Green was struck by the chronic sense of fear and unease that pervaded and structured their lives. Fear had become a routinized part of social life in a myriad of ways. On the one hand, the villagers lived under constant threat from and surveillance by a nearby military outpost, civil patrols, and unknown neighbors who worked as the “ears” of the government. On the other hand, their fear was generated by more indirect factors, such as disappearing bodies, rumor, innuendo, ambiguous forms of speech, and pervasive mistrust. In this climate of fear, no one was ever completely sure that they were safe.

The people of Xe’caj responded in several ways. Silence, secrecy, and ambiguity provided a protective shield though, ironically, they also served to heighten the sense of fear and mistrust. Green claims that the body also became both a symbol of and a means for expressing their fear and trauma. Many of the Mayan widows with whom Green worked experienced a range of somatic symptoms, including headaches,

gastritis, ulcers, weakness, diarrhea, irritability, and sleeplessness. As opposed to diagnosing these symptoms as culturally bound syndromes associated with post-traumatic stress, Green argues that they must be understood in terms of the historical and social context in which they arose. For many of these Mayan women, somatic complaints served as a way of connecting with others, remembering painful events, expressing trauma and a sense of social fragmentation, and protesting the chronic fear, terror, and violence they have had to endure.

In his essay, "The Myth of Global Ethnic Conflict," John Bowen (1996) inveighs against a prevalent notion that such conflicts are the inevitable outcome of suppressed ancient hatreds, barely contained by the nation-state and always waiting to erupt. Drawing on a wide range of counter-examples, including the genocidal violence that took place in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Bowen argues that these "primordialist" explanations are premised upon three erroneous assumptions. First, far from being ancient and unchanging, ethnic identities are historically constructed, modern categories that change over time and are subject to manipulation by ethnonationalist ideologues. Second, primordialist explanations often assume that ethnic groups are prone to violence. Bowen notes that there is nothing inevitable about such conflicts; they usually involve a long period of preparation during which ethnonationalist leaders and state media relentlessly promote fear, hatred, and resentment of the ethnic other. The Rwandan conflict proceeded along these lines, as, over the course of several years, the ruling Hutu elite built up and trained the militias that were to do much of the killing and relentlessly broadcast its ideology of hate. When the genocide began, it did not irrationally "erupt" but proceeded in a fairly organized manner with direction from above. Finally, Bowen argues that, as opposed to constantly threatening sociopolitical stability, ethnic diversity does not increase the likelihood of political violence in any straightforward way. Instead, the probability of ethnic conflict is more directly related to economic conditions, government policy and leadership, and access to power. Rather than increasing our understanding of ethnic conflict, then, primordialist explanations oversimplify complex local realities and obviate intervention in such "inevitable," "ancient," and "irrational" struggles.

If Bowen points out some of the erroneous assumptions that underlie primordialist explanations of genocide and other forms of political violence, Liisa Malkki's (1996) essay, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," contends that problematic assumptions are also often made about "refugees." Specifically, Malkki contrasts local understandings of what it means to be a refugee with those of relief agencies, international organizations, and the media. Drawing on her fieldwork in Tanzania with Hutu refugees who fled the 1972 Burundi genocide, Malkki argues that, for such displaced persons, refugee status may be a crucial, positive aspect of identity. For these Hutus, being a refugee confers a moral identity bound up with certain myths of history that construct the Tutsis as cunning invaders who overthrew, oppressed, and killed the original Hutu and Twa inhabitants of the land. While in exile, the hardship of refugee life would purify and prepare these Hutus for a triumphant return to their homeland.

Refugee camp administrators in Tanzania, in contrast, tend to view refugees as "exemplary victims" who were in need of care because of their wounds and compromised judgment. Local history and politics, which are central to the identity of

Hutu refugees themselves, are left out of this view of the refugee as “universal humanitarian subject.” This trope of the refugee as humanitarian subject is often taken to an even further extreme by members of the international community. For these journalists, scholars, diplomats, and international organizations, refugees become exemplars of the universal sufferer, often depicted as anonymous and silent members of a “sea of humanity.” After discussing how these images were manifest in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, Malkki concludes by arguing for a “historicizing humanism” that acknowledges both the suffering and the history of such displaced peoples.

### **Toward an Anthropology of Genocide**

In his seminal work on the origins of genocide, Leo Kuper (1981) emphasized the importance of viewing genocide as a process and not as a uniform, teleological phenomenon. Like modernity, genocide is generated by a variety of factors and has diverse outcomes. One way to think about this process is through metaphors of priming and heat, what I have elsewhere called “genocidal priming” (Hinton 1997, 2002). To “prime” something is to “make [it] ready” for operation, as in preparing a gun to fire “by inserting a charge of gunpowder or a primer” or “pouring water into a pump or gasoline into a carburetor” (Morris 1976:1040). We might refer to each of the steps that lead to a “discharge” – such as adding gunpowder and cocking the trigger – as a “prime.”

Genocidal priming, then, refers to the process by which various primes coalesce, making genocide more or less likely, though by no means an inevitable outcome.<sup>8</sup> We might use a metaphor of heat to describe the extent of genocidal priming. Those situations in which a number of primes are operative in an intense form can be referred to as “hot”; in other “warm” or “cool” cases, the primes will be fewer and less extreme. Moreover, the degree of heat is never static, changing as domestic and international events unfold. Even in an extremely “hot” situation, genocide is by no means preordained. Such violence almost always involves some sort of “genocidal activation” – or a series of direct and indirect, more or less organized pushes from above – that begins to trigger the “charge” that has been primed. Sometimes this process of activation is precipitous, as in Rwanda or Indonesia; in other situations, such as Nazi Germany, Cambodia, and the former Yugoslavia, it is more gradual. Thus, in Rwanda, after a long process of priming, the activation process was quickly set in motion after President Habyarimana’s plane was shot down; well-organized and trained Hutu extremists, often getting their orders to kill over the radio, rapidly began to annihilate political moderates and Tutsis.

Discerning these primes and assessing the “heat” of a situation, then, is clearly of crucial importance both to understanding the origins of and preventing genocide. What are these primes? While each genocide has a distinct etiology, similarities exist in the process of genocidal priming. Kuper, for example, argues that most genocides are characterized by at least three key primes: deep structural divisions and an identifiable victim group; a legitimating ideology of hate; and a breakdown in moral restraints. Other scholars, building upon Kuper’s work, have identified other primes, such as socioeconomic upheaval, discriminatory political changes, and an apathetic response from the international community (see Charny 1999;

Fein 1990, 1992; Kuper 1985; Melson 1992; Smith 1987, 1999a). In particular, Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr (1998; see also Harff 1998) have identified a number of “accelerators” that may rapidly increase the “heat” in a situation, often initiating the type of escalating spiral of action and reaction that Gregory Bateson (1958, 1972) labeled “schizomogenesis.”

In my own work on Cambodia, the notion of priming has proven to be a useful way to think about the events that set the stage for genocide (see Hinton, this volume). The Khmer Rouge came to power after a period of extreme *socioeconomic upheaval*: the economy broke down in the wake of the Vietnam War; the United States intensively bombed parts of the Cambodian countryside, killing thousands, destroying homes, and inciting many youths to join the anti-government movement; foreign troops moved at will through strategic areas; Prince Sihanouk was overthrown in a coup headed by pro-US elements; and the country was rocked by a civil war in which up to 600,000 people died.

Upon taking power, the Khmer Rouge initiated a number of *structural changes* that radically altered Cambodian society. The DK regime evacuated the cities, disbanded the old government structure, banned Buddhism, undermined familial solidarity and attachment, created cooperatives in which economic production and consumption were collectivized, and abolished money, courts, market exchange, and formal education. Traditional hierarchies were inverted, as the young and the poor were elevated in status over the old and the wealthy. And individuals were reclassified into new categories, including the oppositions between “new people” (those who had supported or lived in government-controlled zones during the civil war) and “old people” (those who had lived in Khmer Rouge zones). In addition to establishing the basis for a new communist society, these structural changes had the more lethal effect of *undermining traditional prosocial norms and moral restraints* and institutionalizing *structural divisions* between the rich and the poor, the urbanites and the peasants, and counter-revolutionaries and revolutionaries. The latter were privileged over the former, whose destruction was legitimated by DK policy.

These lethal divisions were intensified by *effective ideological manipulation* that glorified violence and loyalty to the Party leadership. Everyone was either an “enemy” or a “comrade-friend.” Khmer Rouge ideology compared life in the new society to an army at war. “Battles” had to be fought on economic “fronts” and against internal “microbes” that had “burrowed from within” and threatened to subvert the revolution. Such enemies, often accused of being agents of the CIA, capitalists, or Vietnamese spies, were severely dehumanized. When orders arrived to root them out, the first community to fall under suspicion was the outgroup at the bottom of society – the “new people.” As the purges began, many Khmer Rouge cadre and soldiers also came to be regarded as “traitors” who were accused of failing to carry out their economic objectives, sabotaging the war effort against Vietnam, or planning to overthrow the Party Center. Regardless of whether his or her victim was a friend, a “new person,” a former DK official, or even a family member, the ideal new communist citizen would be able to “cut off his or her heart” from the enemy who was “not real Khmer.”

The Cambodian case illustrates how the process of priming may unfold, as a series of primes – in this case, socioeconomic upheaval, structural change, intensified structural divisions, diminished moral inhibitions, and an ideology of hate –

increased the “heat” and genocidal potential of the situation. Of course, events could have been different. Other regimes have come to power under similar circumstances and not committed genocidal atrocities.<sup>9</sup> Pol Pot and his associates “activated” the genocidal violence by “pushing” their ideology of hate and promoting lethal policies in specific, deadly ways.

If anthropologists are to make a significant contribution to our comprehension of genocide, then, we must explore this process of genocidal priming and activation, examining how it unfolds in both genocidal and non-genocidal situations. Concepts like “primes” and “accelerators,” however, are macro-level explanatory ideas that must be rooted to the complex local realities in which genocide takes place. Anthropologists can provide precisely this type of experience-near understanding. For, what do concepts like “structural division,” “socioeconomic upheaval,” and “ideologies of hate” mean to perpetrators, victims, and bystanders? In my own work on Cambodia, I have had to wrestle with this tension between emic and etic analysis. Thus, while the Khmer Rouge espoused an extreme ideology of hate, their political discourses blended the old and the new in ways that were both conducive and gave a cultural patterning to the violence (Hinton 1997, 2000, this volume). Macro-level analysis misses this key dimension of explanation when it ignores how the genocidal process is given shape, impetus, and meaning by local knowledge.

Anthropologists therefore have the potential to shed considerable light on genocide by exploring how the dynamics of mass violence are influenced by local understandings and sociocultural dynamics (e.g., cultural change, ritualized behavior, symbolism, revitalization movements, schismogenesis, the construction of identity, thick description, the localization of transnational flows of knowledge, intergroup boundary formation and social relations, conflict resolution, the interplay of structure/agency and power/knowledge, the cultural patterning of violence, and so forth). The essays in this volume, along with an incipient anthropological literature on genocide, illustrate some of the crucial and distinct ways in which anthropological insights can illuminate the genocidal process and its aftermath, ranging from the impact of modernity to the construction of difference to local strategies for coping with trauma and suffering. By drawing together a number of these seminal texts, this volume helps to lay a foundation for and point the way toward an “anthropology of genocide,” which is urgently needed as groups of people continue to be annihilated throughout the world.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Jane Huber and, especially, Nicole Cooley for their helpful comments and suggestions on this essay.

- 1 On the difficulty of representing violence and genocide, see Chandler (1999); Daniel (1996); Friedlander (1992); Scarry (1985).
- 2 Since the mid-1980s, anthropologists have begun to produce some research on the atrocities committed during the Holocaust (e.g., Arnold 1990, 1992; Ballinger 2000; Connor 1989; Conte and Essner 1995; Dumont 1986; Dundes 1984; R. Feldman 2000; Gajek 1990; Hinton 1998d; Jell-Bahlsen 1985; Lewin 1993; Lindholm 1990; Linke 1997, 1999; Schafft



1998, 1999; Stein 1993; Wolf 1999) and, more recently, in Bosnia (e.g., Bringa 1993, 1995; Denich 1994; Eller 1999; A. Feldman 1994; Halpern and Kideckel 2000; Hayden 1999, 2000). Even less material has been written on the genocides that have occurred in non-European countries like Biafra (Diamond 1970, 1974), Burundi (e.g., Malkki 1995), Cambodia (e.g., Ebihara 1990, 1993; Hinton 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 2000, forthcoming; Ledgerwood 2001; Marston 1994; Stanton 1993), Guatemala (e.g., Green 1999; Manz 1988; Nelson 1999; Warren 1998), and Rwanda (e.g., Eller 1999; Magnarella 2000; Mamdami 2001; Newbury 1995; Taylor 1999). See also chapters in recent edited volumes on political violence, such as Das, Kleinman, Lock, Ramphele, and Reynolds (2001); Das, Kleinman, Ramphele, and Reynolds (2000); Ferguson (in press); Ferguson and Whitehead (1992); Kleinman, Das, and Lock (1997); Nordstrom and Martin (1992); Nordstrom and Robben (1995); Robben and Suárez-Orozco (2000); Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998); Schmidt and Schroder (2001); Sluka (2000); Warren (1993). On the anthropological silence on the topic of genocide, see De Waal (1994); Fein (1990); Kuper (1981); Lewin (1992); Shiloh (1975).

- 3 For a review of scholarship in the field of genocide studies, see Charny (1988, 1991, 1994, 1999); Fein (1990); Krell and Sherman (1997); Kuper (1981, 1985). See also the journals *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* and the *Journal of Genocide Research* and a number of edited collections, such as Andreopoulos (1994); Brugnola, Fein, and Spierer (1999); Chalk and Jonassohn (1990); Charny (1984); Chirot and Seligmann (2001); Chorbajian and Shirinian (1999); Davies and Gurr (1998); Fein (1992); Freedman-Apsel and Fein (1992); Jongman (1996); Porter (1982); Riemer (2000); Rosenbaum (1996); Smith (1999b); Strozier and Flynn (1996); Totten, Parsons, and Charny (1997); Wallimann and Dobkowski (2000).
- 4 Because both of these volumes are intended to help establish this foundation for an anthropology of genocide, they share a common focus, cover some of the same cases, and at times have conceptual overlap. Nevertheless, the two books are meant to complement one another: they are structured in different ways, and, with one exception, include different authors with divergent theoretical and ethnographic orientations. This volume consists of previously published articles, begins with a “Conceptual Foundations” section of seminal, non-anthropological selections on genocide and includes a detailed bibliography of anthropological work on genocide and a list of websites on the topic. The other set of original essays illustrates the “cutting edge” of current anthropological research on the topic of genocide. As these contrasts suggest, I have structured the two volumes so that they will fit together well for use in courses on genocide and political violence.
- 5 See Asad’s (1997) essay on Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (on torture and cruelty) for an analog of how such an analysis of genocide might proceed.
- 6 E.g., Gershom Scholem’s (1990) response in “On Eichmann” (see also Bar-On 1990).
- 7 Wolf (1999:5) distinguishes structural power from three other types of power: potency or capability, coercive force, and organizational power.
- 8 Let me stress that, through the use of metaphors of priming and heat, I do not want to convey the image of genocide as a primordial conflict waiting to explode. In fact, I want to do exactly the opposite and emphasize that genocide is a *process* that emerges from a variety of factors, or “primes,” and that this always involves impetus and organization from above, what I call “genocidal activation.” For another use of metaphors of “heat” and “cold” to describe ethnonationalist violence in a manner that argues against primordialist explanations, see Appadurai (1996:164ff.).
- 9 On “hot” situations that have not developed into genocide, see Kuper (1981). See also Scott (1998) on how a specific cluster of primes – simplified administrative schemes, a high-modernist ideology, authoritarian power, and an incapacitated society – has led to social catastrophes, including genocide (e.g., the Stalinist campaign against the Kulaks). All of these elements were present in the Cambodian genocide.

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