

# Preface

## WHY STUDY GENOCIDE?

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“Why would you want to study *that*?”

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

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

Second, to study genocide is to study our historical inheritance. It is unfortunately the case that all stages of recorded human existence, and nearly all parts of the world, have known genocide at one time or another, often repeatedly. Furthermore, genocide may be as prevalent in the contemporary era as at any time in history. Inevitably, there is something depressing about the prevalence and repetition of genocide in world history: Will humanity ever change? But there is also interest and personal enlightenment to be gained by delving into the historical record, for which genocide serves as a point of entry. I well remember the period, two decades ago, that I devoted to voracious reading of the genocide studies literature and exploring the diverse themes this opened up to me. The accounts were grim – sometimes relentlessly so. Yet

they were also spellbinding, and they gave me a better grounding not only in world history but also in sociology, psychology, anthropology, and a handful of other disciplines.

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

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

Modern academic writing, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, is often riddled with jargon and pomposity. It would be pleasant to report that genocide studies is free of such baggage. It isn’t, but it is less burdened by it than most other fields. It seems this has to do with the experience of looking into the abyss and finding that the abyss looks back. One is forced to ponder one’s own human frailty and vulnerability; one is even pressed to confront one’s own capacity for hating others, for marginalizing them, for supporting their oppression and annihilation. These realizations aren’t pretty, but they are arguably necessary. And they can lead to humility – a rare quality in academia. I once described to a friend why the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) moved me so deeply: “It’s like he’s grabbing you by the arm and saying, ‘Look. We don’t have much time. There are important things we need to talk about.’” You sense the same in the genocide studies literature: that the issues are too vital, and time too limited, to beat around the bush. George Orwell famously described political speech – he could have been referring to some academic writing – as “a mass of words [that] falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details.”<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the majority of genocide scholars inhabit the literary equivalent of the tropics. I try to keep a residence there too.

Finally, some good news for the reader interested in understanding and confronting genocide: your studies and actions may make a difference. To study genocide is to study processes by which *hundreds of millions* of people met brutal ends. Yet there are many, many people throughout history who have bravely resisted the blind rush to hatred. They are the courageous and decent souls who gave refuge to hunted Jews or desperate Tutsis. They are the religious believers of many faiths who struggled against the tide of evil and spread instead a message of love, tolerance, and commonality. They are the nongovernmental organizations that warned against incipient genocides and carefully documented those they were unable to prevent. They are the leaders and common soldiers – American, British, Soviet, Vietnamese, Indian, Tanzanian, Rwandan, and others – who vanquished genocidal regimes in modern times.<sup>2</sup> And yes, they are the scholars and intellectuals who have honed our understanding of genocide while, at the same time, working outside the ivory tower to alleviate it. You will meet some of these individuals in this book. I hope their stories and actions will inspire you to believe that a future free of genocide and other crimes against humanity is possible.

But . . .

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

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

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

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

I encourage you – especially if you are just beginning your exploration of genocide – to be attentive to signs of personal stress. Talk about it with fellow students, colleagues, family, or friends. Dwell on the positive examples of bravery, rescue, and love for others that the study of genocide regularly brings to light (see especially Chapter 10). If necessary, seek counseling through the resources available on your campus or in your community.

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

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

## WHAT THIS BOOK TRIES TO DO, AND WHY

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

I argue that virtually all definable human groups – the ethnic, national, racial, and religious ones that anchor the legal definition of genocide, and others besides – have been victims of genocide and are vulnerable in specific contexts today. Equally, most human collectivities – even vulnerable and oppressed ones – have proven capable of inflicting genocide. This can be painful for genocide scholars to acknowledge. But it will be confronted head-on in this volume. Taboos and tender sensibilities take a back seat to *getting to grips with genocide* – to reduce the chances that mystification and wishful thinking will cloud recognition and thereby blunt effective opposition.

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

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

Part 3 explores social-scientific contributions to the study of genocide – from psychology to sociology, anthropology, political science/international relations, and gender studies. Throughout these chapters, my ambition is modest. I am a political scientist by profession and consider myself a somewhat-trained historian, sociologist, and gender scholar. In roaming these fields and beyond, I seek only to introduce readers to some relevant scholarly framings, and to convey something of the extraordinary, still burgeoning *interdisciplinarity* of genocide studies.

Part 4, “The future of genocide,” seeks to familiarize readers with contemporary debates over historical memory and genocide denial, as well as mechanisms of justice and redress. The final chapter, “Strategies of intervention and prevention,” invites readers to evaluate options for suppressing the scourge.

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

While I must depict particular genocides (and the contributions of entire academic disciplines) in very broad strokes, I have tried throughout to make space for individuals, whether as victims, survivors, rescuers, bystanders – and perpetrators. I hope this serves to counter some of the abstraction and depersonalization that is inevitable in a general survey. A list of relevant

Internet sources, along with links, teaching resources, and a “Filmography of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity,” can be found on the web page for this book at [www.genocidetext.net](http://www.genocidetext.net).<sup>10</sup>

## NOTE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

The third edition of this “comprehensive introduction” ended up being perhaps too comprehensive. It’s difficult to know, during manuscript preparation and with some 250 images scheduled for inclusion, just what the book will look like when it’s laid out by the production team. In this case, my newborn emerged as a 900-page behemoth, and I can only apologize to those of you who developed back problems from carting around the print version. I have tried to rein things in somewhat for this fourth edition. The design template has been adjusted to reduce inset margins and the blank space they left on the page. I have reduced the number of images (and eliminated the “photo essay”) while still, I hope, providing a visually informative and eye-catching array. The box texts and discursive footnotes are somewhat more selective than last time.

Following the principle “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,” I have left the core structure of *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* intact from previous editions. Instructors who kindly used the third edition in their classes will find that many sections are reproduced with relatively few alterations. However, arguments, sources, and political developments have been revisited and updated throughout, and a number of new box texts added or substituted (1.1, 6.1, 6.2, 11.1, 13.2). Note also that the former Box 5A on Chechnya has been condensed and integrated with the main Chapter 5 (Box 5.2), while the previous box text on Tibet has been paired with a newly written treatment of the Uyghurs in Box 5A.

Many of this book’s images are my own, including the cover photo. Others are gleaned from Wikimedia Commons, Flickr, national governments, and other sources of copyright-free illustrations. I am deeply grateful to the photographers who share their work in this way, as I do. Kudos also to those who scan, catalogue, and supply archival imagery at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Hoover Institution, and elsewhere. The publisher and I must renew our thanks to [www.WorldAtlas.com](http://www.WorldAtlas.com) for granting access to the excellent, reader-friendly maps used in the case study chapters. Where licensing fees were necessary, Routledge provided some helpful financial assistance. Thanks to those at various photo agencies who worked efficiently and courteously to make the necessary arrangements.

In a book of this attempted scope and detail, there are bound to be errors and oversights that have resisted my fact-checking and various outside proofreadings. For these stumbles, I accept full responsibility. But I also ask you to get in touch when you notice them. The publisher and I can make minor corrections to the digital edition quite rapidly, and to any new printings thereafter. Indeed, I welcome readers’ feedback of all kinds (well, most kinds). Write to me at [adam.jones@ubc.ca](mailto:adam.jones@ubc.ca).

# Acknowledgments

Routledge Publishers has been the home of most of my recent book publications, both sole-authored and edited. I am deeply grateful to Craig Fowlie, who proposed what became the first edition of *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction* over dinner in Durban, South Africa, in 2003. He has continued his unfailing support through to the present. For this edition, and in our joint work on the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity book series that I edit for Routledge, Rob Sorsby has been a constant source of encouragement, creative ideas, and mentoring. I am grateful also to Chris Mathews for work on the production side.

This book has its audience because educators around the world have adopted it for their courses on genocide studies. I have benefited from their supportive words and feedback, and it gives me no deeper pleasure in my intellectual life than to know that my work is contributing to the project of educating a new generation of students to an understanding of genocide and the international “epistemic community” that seeks to prevent future outbreaks of the scourge.

Considerable work on this new edition was carried out at the Mgrublian Institute for Human Rights at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California, on a William F. Podlich Fellowship. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Wendy Lower, holder of the John K. Roth chair in history at Claremont, for securing this opportunity; to Bill Podlich, for funding the fellowship; to Kirsti Zitar at the Magrublian Center, who did so much to make my semester there congenial; to Dean Heather Antecol; and to two excellent and energetic Claremont undergrads the Center sponsored to provide research assistance: Bhanu Cheepurupalli and Michelle Ramírez. They, along with my PhD student and research assistant, Félix Amoh-Siaw, will be credited at appropriate points in the text.

This book could not have been written without the nurture and guidance provided by my parents and my brother, Craig. My beloved father, David Jones, passed away in 2015, at the age

of 82. I miss him immensely, but I know his shaping influence will be with me for the rest of my days. Together with my mother, Jo, he proofread and commented on previous editions of this book, so he lives on in these pages. I can still count on Jo's eagle eye for this new edition – thanks as always, Mom. And thanks to close friends who are perennial sources of inspiration and solidarity: Hamish Telford, Fabiola Martínez Schlegel, Kat Lee, Sherry Priebe, Heather Kulak, Jessica Renée, and Rick Feingold. My political science colleagues at the University of British Columbia–Okanagan – a small and tightly knit group – have been unfailingly supportive; my special appreciation to Helen Yanacopulos and Jim Rochlin.

Dr. Griselda Ramírez Reyes shares the dedication of this work. Griselda is a pediatric neurosurgeon at the Siglo XXI Medical Center in Mexico City. I have stood literally at her elbow as she opened the head of a 3-week-old girl and extracted a cancerous tumor seemingly half the size of the infant's brain. I hope to open a few minds myself with this work, but I would not pretend the task compares. Throughout the preparation of new editions, Griselda has joined me on journeys to sites of genocide and war that resonated deeply with us – most memorably in Cambodia, Vietnam, Russia, Poland, Romania, Rwanda, Armenia, and indeed, Mexico. We celebrated our 20th year together as I was working on this edition; it is a great salve and pleasure to have her company and solidarity as I try to absorb these horrors and make some sense of them.

It must be said, in closing this preface, that the years since the last edition have been pre-occupying ones for anyone concerned about human rights, social justice, and indeed, the fate of our species. Donald Trump's election in 2016 capped an intense resurgence of xenophobic, ultranationalist, and racist movements worldwide. Possibly the most notable change in this book comes in the final chapter, where the previous section "Success stories?" has been excised completely. Many of the cases I had previously cited as at least qualified successes – the United States, the European Union, Rwanda, India – now seem to be wobbling as political and social models (US/EU), or mired in authoritarianism (Rwanda under President Paul Kagame), or promoting literally textbook tactics and ideologies of genocide (India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi). That's not happy news, and I haven't mentioned the Covid pandemic, the worsening climate crisis, and Ukraine, where missiles are raining on cities that I came to know and love during recent travels, while Vladimir Putin rattles nuclear sabers. The publisher and I selected this edition's cover image, of the Holodomor memorial in Kyiv, before the latest Russian invasion; but perhaps it acquires a deeper resonance from the events unfolding as I write.

Ukrainians' heroic resistance to Russian imperialism is inspiring, however, as is the visceral (though not universal) outrage at the invasion and solidarity with the population threatened. Other successes in confronting genocide and injustice have been apparent. Recent years have seen dramatic advances in terms of indigenous rights and recognition, and issues of civil rights and racial discrimination have rarely, if ever, been more prominent in the global discourse. Perhaps no UN peacekeepers, legal tribunals, or international celebrities are involved, but this is humanitarian intervention and genocide prevention nonetheless, building on far-reaching social, economic, and cultural changes that only rarely and briefly rise to the level of "news-worthy." We should acknowledge and cherish such advances, and do what we can to usher them into being.

Adam Jones  
Kelowna, BC  
June 2023

## NOTES

- 1 George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" (1946), in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), [www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/politics-and-the-english-language/](http://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/politics-and-the-english-language/).
- 2 The Second World War Allies against the Nazis and Japanese; Tanzanians against Idi Amin's Uganda in 1979; Vietnamese in Cambodia, also in 1979; Indians in Bangladesh in 1971; soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Front in 1994. See also Chapter 16.
- 3 Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 6.
- 4 Writing the first in-depth study of the Soviet "terror-famine" in Ukraine in 1932–1933 (see Chapter 5), Robert Conquest confronted only indirectly the "inhuman, unimaginable misery" of the famine, but he still found the task "so distressing that [I] sometimes hardly felt able to proceed." Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 10. Donald Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, who interviewed a hundred survivors of the Armenian genocide, wrote: "During this project our emotions have ranged from melancholy to anger, from feeling guilty about our own privileged status to being overwhelmed by the continuing suffering in our world." They described experiencing "a permanent loss of innocence about the human capacity for evil," as well as "a recognition of the need to combat such evil." Miller and Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 4. After an immersion in the archive of S-21 (Tuol Sleng), the Khmer Rouge killing center in Cambodia, David Chandler found that "the terror lurking inside it has pushed me around, blunted my skills, and eroded my self-assurance. The experience at times has been akin to drowning." Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 145. Brandon Hamber notes that "many of the staff" working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa experienced "nightmares, paranoia, emotional bluntness, physical problems (e.g., headaches, ulcers, exhaustion, etc.), high levels of anxiety, irritability and aggression, relationship difficulties, and substance abuse related problems." Hamber, "The Burdens of Truth," in David E. Lorey and William H. Beezley (eds.), *Genocide, Collective Violence, and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2002), p. 96.
- 5 Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America's Response* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2003), p. 278.
- 6 Lemkin, quoted in John Cooper, *Raphael Lemkin and the Struggle for the Genocide Convention* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 169.
- 7 Christian P. Scherrer, *Genocide and Crisis in Central Africa: Conflict Roots, Mass Violence, and Regional War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), pp. 1, 7.
- 8 Meaghen Gallagher, personal communication, October 11, 2009.
- 9 Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. v–vi.
- 10 Readers who are interested in the background to my engagement with genocide studies may consult my autobiographical essay, "Seized of Sorrow," which serves as the introduction to Adam Jones, *Sites of Genocide* (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 1–22.