**Introduction**

**The Concept of Genocide and its Definition**

Why study genocide? Why debate and discuss this challenging and difficult subject? There are a number of compelling reasons. Firstly, genocide is a crucial subject in global history. Not just in Europe, but right across the world, genocides have tainted human history and need to be understood. Secondly, it is not only history that we seek to comprehend, but in exploring the field of genocide studies, we touch a range of other subjects across the social sciences and humanities including, but not limited to, sociology, anthropology, psychology and political science. We encounter a whole host of complex and often vexed academic debates. Thirdly, it is important to treat this subject because of our concern for humanity and our sense of justice and morality. Genocide is associated with the darkest aspects of human nature. By studying it, we try to understand how and why people have engaged in atrocities and what this says about the human condition. Fourthly, we hope that our studies may make a difference. In getting to grips with this subject, we can consider how to prevent genocide in the future. Finally, our study changes us, and the way we view humanity as well. Studying genocide obliges us to confront difficult, distressing and uncomfortable issues. It is emotionally challenging, as well as academically engaging. A critical study of this subject can help us to comprehend and respond to many important aspects of our contemporary political and social life - including power, agency, conflict, human rights and responsibilities - and to gain compassion, wisdom and maybe even the inspiration to make a difference in the world, through our quest for understanding. For all these reasons, the study of genocide is significant.

An essential starting point for an analysis of the subject of genocide is a definition of the term itself. Sociologist Leo Kuper stated: ‘The word is new, the concept is ancient.’[[1]](#endnote-1) Indeed, the roots of genocide may be traced back from prehistory and antiquity through into the modern and contemporary eras. The phenomenon of genocide was, as Winston Churchill noted, ‘a crime without a name’. In seeking to define genocide, it is useful to begin with Raphael Lemkin (1900-59), a Polish-Jewish jurist, who first coined the term genocide as ‘the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group’.[[2]](#endnote-2) He believed that each and every nation had a purpose and a cultural contribution to make to humanity: ‘The diversity of nations, religious groups and races is essential to civilisation, because every one of these groups has a mission to fulfil and a contribution to make in terms of culture.’ Lemkin defended the group rights of peoples against extermination, but also, as he later put it in 1946, against the ‘crippling’ of a people as well, not simply mass murder.

Lemkin used the term genocide to encompass a global and long-standing historical phenomenon. Genocide is a neologism that puts together the Greek word ‘genos’ (race or tribe) with the Latin word ‘cide’ (killing). Lemkin defined a new norm and was a major protagonist in bringing about specific prescriptions for a change of behaviour in international relations. His campaign originated with his perception of a significant omission in international law before the Second World War. State sovereignty meant that individual states were at liberty to inflict violence upon members of their own populations, as other states would not intervene. Lemkin’s work led to the drafting of the United Nations Convention against genocide. In the aftermath of the Second World War, as the true horror of Nazi rule was revealed, the legitimacy of state sovereignty came into question. Lemkin campaigned tirelessly to bring about his norm against genocide, one that has now partly, though not entirely, displaced that of state sovereignty in these matters.

Lemkin’s chief concern was with ethnic and national groups. He was not primarily interested in cases in which political groups were the targets of destruction, because he was concerned with the devastation of ethnic groups and their cultures, which could not be resuscitated once destroyed. Lemkin emphasised that mass killing was only one part of the phenomenon of genocide, although clearly a very important part. He defined genocide as ‘the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group’, but added that: ‘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 is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group.’[[3]](#endnote-3)

In 1948, a legal definition of genocide came into being, with the promulgation of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.[[4]](#endnote-4) This defined genocide as: ‘Acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.’ According to the UN Convention, genocidal acts encompassed not only ‘killing members of the group’, but also ‘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’ and ‘forcibly transferring children of the group to another group’. Again, this definition is much broader than mass murder. In both Lemkin’s definition and that of the UN Convention, mass murder is just one aspect of genocidal policy. Both Lemkin and the UN Convention stress the obliteration of a group, ‘as such’, not necessarily the physical liquidation of its members.

What are the key features or characteristics of genocide? The conceptualisation of Gregory Stanton, Founding President of Genocide Watch, presents a useful starting point in this regard. He initially described genocide as a process that moves through ‘eight stages’. These are: classification, symbolisation, dehumanisation, organisation, polarisation, preparation, extermination and denial. The first stage, classification, is characterised by the distinction of people into different groups. This is a categorisation of ‘them and us’, based upon race, religion, nationality or ethnicity. The second stage, symbolisation, entails the naming of groups as ‘other’ and distinguishing them or marking them out from the rest of society. Symbols are often forced upon ‘enemy’ groups, such as the Yellow Star worn by European Jews under Nazi rule. The third stage is dehumanisation or the denial of the humanity of the target group. Its members are vilified as vermin, pests, diseases or even inanimate objects. The fourth stage is organisation. Genocide is always intentional, planned and orchestrated from above, often executed by military personnel or specially trained militias. Polarisation is the fifth stage of the genocide process. Groups in society are separated, for example, by the banning of marriage or social interaction. The enemy group is alienated and isolated. The sixth stage is preparation. This involves the physical separation of members of the enemy group and/or their forced deportation. This segregation, confinement or deportation to or from a particular area is a significant moment. The term ‘ethnic cleansing’ has been applied to this process. The seventh stage of the genocide process is mass killing or destruction of the group. The eighth and final stage in the process of genocide is denial. The perpetrators deny their crimes and try to hide the evidence. More recently, Stanton has incorporated two more stages into his initial framework, creating a ten-stage model as follows: classification, symbolisation, discrimination (the use of legal methods, or political power to deny the rights of a targeted group), dehumanisation, organisation, polarisation, preparation, persecution (identification and separation on grounds of religion or ethnicity), extermination and denial. However, it is significant to note that whilst this is a useful model, it is not intended to present the process of genocide as linear. It is important to understand that some stages may take place concurrently and that different stages continue to occur throughout the process of genocide.

**The development of the field of genocide studies**

Academic study of genocide began to evolve in the 1990s and has grown into a vast and complex multi-disciplinary field. Scholars have put forward a plethora of definitions of genocide. Historian Frank Chalk and sociologist Kurt Jonassohn have defined genocide as ‘a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrators’.[[5]](#endnote-5) The definition by political scientist, Barbara Harff, is quite similar, viewing genocide as ‘a particular form of state terror… mass murder premeditated by some power-wielding group linked with state power’.[[6]](#endnote-6) Other scholars concur in defining genocide as mass murder, rather than including non-lethal forms of persecution.

One particular point of vexed debate has centred upon how the Holocaust relates to genocide as a concept and an event. Many historians consider the Holocaust to be the definitive event of the twentieth century. Gunnar Heinsohn describes the Holocaust as ‘uniquely unique’.[[7]](#endnote-7) Initially, many Holocaust historians tended to argue against any comparison with the Holocaust, regarding this as a trivialisation of the tragedy experienced by European Jewry under National Socialism. Dirk Moses shows that the Holocaust has ‘come to be regarded at once as the prototypical genocide and as unique, singular, unparalleled, or unprecedented’.[[8]](#endnote-8) Many genocide scholars rejected such claims, arguing that they fail to take into account the uniqueness of other genocides. Henry Huttenbach argues the need to locate the Holocaust on the genocide spectrum.[[9]](#endnote-9) Other scholars have suggested that particular cases of genocide have been disregarded. For instance, Ward Churchill analyses the genocide of Native Americans and David Stannard argues that the mass murder of indigenous peoples in the New World was ‘unparalleled’ and paradigmatic.[[10]](#endnote-10)

Scholars across a range of academic disciplines - including historians, political scientists, sociologists, lawyers and anthropologists - have applied a breadth of scope to the discourse of genocide studies. This cross- and multi-disciplinary approach has led to the creation of a very vibrant and distinctive field of genocide studies. Comparative research has become increasingly popular over recent years and there have been a number of significant changes in the study of the subject. The Holocaust has come to be seen as a heuristic device to illuminate the processes of other genocides. It has been contextualised within broader processes of nation-building and empire-building over a longer period of time. The mass killings in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s necessitated a new approach to the study of modern genocide. There is no longer a need for establishing moral superiority and credentials, or for competitive hierarchies. It is more significant now for scholars to make points of comparison in a non-competitive way and to seek out similarities as well as differences between cases of genocide in order to try to understand it and to prevent its recurrence. David Moshman has presented a useful and convincing argument that: ‘Given that every genocide is unique, any prototype-based concept of genocide will distort one’s understanding of some genocides as it filters them through whatever genocide is taken as central and defining.’[[11]](#endnote-11) Christian Gerlach’s concept of ‘extremely violent societies’ and Benjamin Valentino’s argument that the important question is not whether a case of mass violence counts as genocide or not, but how we explain episodes of mass violence whatever their motivation, are salient too.[[12]](#endnote-12) In addition, part of the interpretative problem is that genocide is ‘more a legal term than a historical one’, as historian, Donald Bloxham has argued.[[13]](#endnote-13) He further explains that genocide is ‘a classic example of the past examined teleologically: a retrospective projection’.[[14]](#endnote-14) Furthermore, recent research has explored new areas, such as the relationship between economics and genocide; and the relationship between genocide and civil war.[[15]](#endnote-15) Debates on the social psychology of perpetrators, as well as considerations of the perspectives of victims and bystanders are also significant.[[16]](#endnote-16) In a recent book, political scientist, Michael Jasinski argues the case for ‘delving into the relationship between leaders and followers’.[[17]](#endnote-17) He applies social movement and leadership theories to illuminate leader-follower interaction and its place in genocide. Sociologist Damien Short has examined the relationship between genocide, ecocide and colonial settlement, shifting the paradigm of genocide studies. He argues that much of the field of genocide studies ‘has failed to appreciate the importance of culture and social death to the concept of genocide’ and offers an analysis of ‘ecocide as a method of genocide’.[[18]](#endnote-18) He contends that it is impossible to fully understand genocide ‘without a strong appreciation of a range of environmental factors and ecological issues such as anthropogenic climate change, land use and abuse, soil degradation, water contamination and shortages, biodiversity loss and habitat destruction’.[[19]](#endnote-19) Alex Alvarez also maintains that the challenges and changing circumstances brought about by environmental factors ‘will heighten the risk for the development of communal and ethnic violence, war, and genocide’.[[20]](#endnote-20) Historical examples show us that environmental and climactic factors can result in societal or state collapse, conflict and large-scale violence. Alvarez suggests that ‘climate change will facilitate the development of various structural, ideological, and psychological conditions that escalate the risk of large-scale organized violence’.[[21]](#endnote-21)

The controversies surrounding definitions of genocide, as well as the myriad scholarly perspectives and themes posed by the subject, inform the nature of this book. In addition, whilst the motives and actions of perpetrators often and rightly take up considerable scholarly attention, the perspective of victims is, of course, also highly significant in our understanding of genocide. To this end, short extracts from survivor accounts and testimonies are included throughout the book, in order to illustrate the nature of victims’ experiences and to give the victims of genocide their voice. It is worth noting here too that estimates of death tolls can vary quite considerably depending on the source one reads and these numbers can be highly contested. In this book, the figures used are those most widely concurred upon by experts in the field as accepted numbers or what seem to be reasonable estimates where we simply do not know actual death tolls for a variety of reasons, depending on the case.

**Outline**

This book is intended as a concise introduction to a complex field with a large and fast growing scholarly literature. It presents an accessible point of entry into the subject, introducing major debates and the current state of research. Readers and students may extend and deepen their knowledge through the sources indicated in the further reading at chapter ends. It is impossible in a book of this length to do more than choose a number of significant case study examples to illustrate the nature of genocide. These have been selected because they are largely regarded as paradigmatic cases and ones which students are most likely to encounter in their courses. This book aims to help the reader to gain a sense of how genocide developed in specific, significant case study examples. It has been difficult to select which cases to include and which to omit. There have been so many different episodes of mass murder and genocide across the globe that it is not possible to treat them all here. The omission from this book of, among others, the genocides in Indonesia and East Timor, Bangladesh, Burundi, Guatemala, Iraq and Ethiopia does not lessen their significance.

Chapter 1 of this book treats the subject of colonial genocides. The impact of European colonisation on peoples across the globe is sometimes described or defined as genocide. To be sure, there are significant links between colonialism and genocide. In particular, the depopulations especially of North and South American Native Indian populations and Aboriginal populations in Australia have been some of the most momentous in history. However, if genocide signifies a deliberate intention to eradicate a group of people, then these depopulations were not necessarily or definitively genocides. European colonisation certainly had a profound effect on indigenous populations of colonised territories, but was there in all cases the intention to destroy the group? This issue has divided experts. This chapter examines the links between colonialism and genocide. It begins with an examination of the European first contact with the New World and its implications for the native populations in North America, as well as Australia. It then moves on to consider the impact of more modern imperial expansion, in particular at the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century. It treats the colonial rule of Belgium in the Congo, as well as that of Germany in German South West Africa (Namibia). On the continent of Africa, the often-overlooked genocide of the Herero in Namibia, was the first genocide of the twentieth century. The case of the Herero shows very clearly that the degradation and dehumanisation of a people led to atrocities and genocidal acts against them. German officials and settlers in Namibia regarded the Herero and Nama peoples as subhuman and inferior. The extermination of the Herero on these grounds also gave justification to the perpetrators of the genocide - it was considered acceptable and even necessary to kill the Herero on grounds of their racial inferiority.

Chapter 2 examines the Armenian genocide undertaken by the Young Turk regime or Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) during the First World War. Until comparatively recently, this was also a much neglected genocide. In this case, we see the impact of an exclusivist ideology upon the victim group. The Armenians did not fit into the ‘new order’ envisaged by the Young Turks and hence they were massacred and annihilated. The ardently nationalist Young Turk movement came to abandon multinational ‘Ottomanism’ and to replace it with exclusive ‘Turkism’. It targeted the Armenians because of their linguistic, cultural and religious differences, believing that they had no place in Turkish society. The Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Turkish government in 1915 resulted in the death of an estimated 1 million civilians. Contemporary observers described the violence towards the Armenians as ‘a massacre like none other’ and ‘a massacre that changes the meaning of the word massacre’. This chapter analyses the causes and key characteristics of the Armenian genocide and examines the main historiographical debates pertaining to the subject.

In Chapters 3 and 4, we turn to the Nazi regime. Chapter 3 examines the history of the Holocaust or the *Shoah* (‘catastrophe’). The Holocaust or the ‘Final Solution’ was the Nazis’ attempt to wipe out European Jewry during the course of the Second World War. Largely through the use of mobile killing squads in the eastern arena of the war and death camps in Poland, some 6 million Jews perished at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators. The scale and the process of the mass killings were unprecedented. The death camp at Auschwitz has endured as the most powerful symbol of the Holocaust. This chapter analyses the steps leading up to the Holocaust as well as examining its main characteristics. The chapter takes into account the most up-to-date scholarship on the Holocaust. Among other salient issues, it highlights recent research on the opportunities that pillaging Jewish property presented for the Nazis, for ordinary Germans and for others. Being able to raid and plunder strengthened support for the regime. Encouraging local populations to pillage Jewish property in this way brought them into complicity with the regime and its persecution and genocide. This chapter analyses the key historiographical debates and recent advances in Holocaust research.

Chapter 4 examines the history of the Nazi genocide of the Sinti and Roma or the *Porrajmos* (‘devouring’). The ‘Gypsies’ (Sinti and Roma) remained forgotten victims of National Socialism for many decades. The Nazi perpetration of the genocide of the European ‘Gypsy’ population was not widely recognised until the 1980s. This chapter evaluates the evolution of Nazi policies towards the Sinti and Roma throughout the 1930s - discrimination, exclusion, segregation, sterilisation and medical experimentation - culminating in the *Porrajmos* during the war. The chapter also examines the relationship between the ‘Gypsies’ and German society. The German people’s longstanding distrust and dislike of the ‘Gypsies’ made it easier for the Nazi regime to implement its policies against them. The majority of the population took little interest in the plight of the ‘Gypsies’. Many were pleased that as undesirables, the ‘Gypsies’ were kept away from them. They viewed the persecution of the ‘Gypsies’ as a justified struggle against an antisocial and criminal element that did not fit into German society. There was virtually no empathy or compassion among the German people towards ‘Gypsy’ victims of Nazi policy. This sentiment was also replicated right across East-Central Europe, which made it much easier for the Nazi regime and its collaborators to carry out genocidal policies against the Roma in these areas. This chapter also analyses the reasons for which this genocide was long forgotten and not well studied or researched until comparatively recently.

Chapter 5 moves to a discussion of Cambodia under the Pol Pot regime between 1975 and 1979. It explores whether the massacres that took place under the Khmer Rouge can be more accurately described as genocide or politicide or both. It explains the ideology of this communist regime and the power and paranoia of its leader. Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge regime perpetrated mass killings against specifically targeted sections of the Cambodian population, including Buddhists and other religious and ethnic minorities. The Cambodian case is particularly interesting. The massacre of ethnic and religious groups by the Khmer Rouge leadership in Cambodia can be termed genocide. This chapter explains how not all scholars concur on this point. The Khmer Rouge regime, led by Pol Pot, instigated wholesale massacres of its people. These mass murders, which took the lives of one-quarter of the Cambodian population, were partly politically motivated, but certainly they were partly genocidal as well.

Moving to a critical decade in the history of genocide, the 1990s, Chapter 6 examines the genocidal violence in the former Yugoslavia, in particular in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Yugoslavia began to break up as Slovenia and then Croatia declared their independence in 1991. Serbia, the most powerful of the six Yugoslavian republics, had its own ambitions to achieve a ‘greater Serbia’ and was determined to prevent the secessions. Between 1991 and 1999, during the course of its break up into separate states, the former Yugoslavian federation saw widespread atrocities and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by all sides in a multi-sided conflict, involving Serbians, Croatians and Bosnians. The slow and passive responses from the international community acted as a green light for Serbia, in particular, to continue its ethnic cleansing campaign in order to achieve its nationalist aims. This chapter analyses these events and their outcome, as well as recent debates around the subject.

Chapter 7 focuses on the genocide in Rwanda. In April 1994, Rwanda witnessed the unleashing of the genocide of the Tutsi by the ruling Hutu-led government. The genocide was the culmination of the construction of differences and enmity between the Hutu and the Tutsi, which had begun in the colonial era and became exacerbated during a civil war between 1990 and 1994. The wife and closest advisers of President Habyarimana were directly responsible for planning the genocide. The *interahamwe* militias were in charge of the killings on the ground. They mobilised the majority of the Hutu to kill the Tutsi. Indeed, the scale of popular participation in the mass slaughter was one of the most extraordinary features of the Rwandan genocide. The Rwandan genocide claimed some 800,000 lives. It was met with international indifference and inaction. This chapter examines the causes and key characteristics of the Rwandan genocide, in addition to academic discourse and debate in relation to this event.

Whilst genocide was very much a phenomenon associated with the twentieth century, clearly we can see that not only did episodes of genocidal violence predate the twentieth century, but also that they have continued into the twenty-first century. Chapter 8 examines the Darfur genocide in Sudan, where the first genocide of the twenty-first century unfolded in a conflict that began in 2003. This arose from a long-standing struggle over land, between Arab pastoralists and settled African agriculturalists. The tensions between them had intensified as a result of drought and increasing desertification of the land. Arab pastoralists moved southwards from the arid, northern part of Darfur, into territories occupied by the Fur, Massalit and Zaghawa tribes. A series of violent clashes was exacerbated by the Khartoum government, which sided with the Arab pastoralists, supplying them with arms. In response, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), a rebel group, launched its own insurgency for the failure of the government to offer protection to these groups against Arab raiders. Khartoum responded with a savage campaign of ethnic cleansing that was intended to drive out the peoples of this region and to replace them with Arab settlers. The Sudanese government was responsible for the perpetration of atrocities against the local populations in Darfur. Arab militias, known as *Janjaweed* (men on horseback) terrorised the peoples of this region. Their actions were characterised by burning, rape, pillage and the mass murder of entire communities. This chapter considers the causes, the key features and the consequences of this genocide.

Chapter 9 treats a number of significant themes and selected issues that go beyond the individual case studies. In particular, it highlights four key areas of analysis and debate: genocide and gender; genocide prevention; genocide and justice; and memory and memorialisation. This does not mean that other aspects are unimportant – it simply reflects the nature of a short book and the need for a decision on what to include and what to omit. This chapter begins with a consideration of the theme of gender. Gender-based distinctions provide an important analytical tool in the discussion of genocide. Initially, there was some scepticism about the employment of gender as a lens for the study of genocide, with arguments suggesting that it trivialised the crime. However, by now gender has become an established aspect of study within the field of genocide studies. This section is followed by a discussion of the debates around the prediction and the prevention of genocide and analyses the R2P (Responsibility to Protect) initiative. The next part of the chapter deals with the subject of justice, examining some key examples of international justice including the Nuremberg Tribunal and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Finally, the chapter moves on to examine the issues of memory and memorialisation, which have been much debated.

The concluding chapter sums up the overall content of the book, reflecting on key issues and debates, as well as suggesting questions for further discussion and study. A greater knowledge and comprehension of the concept of genocide and its execution, as well as its implications, is significant to our perception of society and of humanity. We live in a world where violent societies and mass murder continue to exist. Genocide is not an unplanned, uncalculated phenomenon. It is instigated and carried out with deliberation, calculation and planning. It is not a random act. Education, knowledge and understanding may be a step in the direction of its prevention.

**Questions for further discussion**

1. What is genocide?
2. Why does genocide occur? What are the preconditions and what are the triggers?
3. Who are the perpetrators and what are their motives?
4. What are their justifications for their actions and their crimes?
5. Who are the victims?

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