

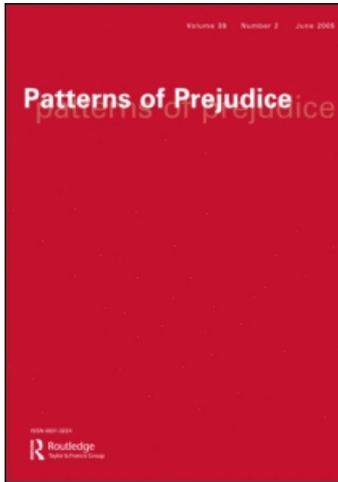
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## Patterns of Prejudice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713395163>

### Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the 'racial century': genocides of indigenous peoples and the Holocaust

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Online Publication Date: 01 October 2002

**To cite this Article** Moses, A. D.(2002)'Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the 'racial century': genocides of indigenous peoples and the Holocaust',Patterns of Prejudice,36:4,7 — 36

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/003132202128811538

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/003132202128811538>

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A. DIRK MOSES

## Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the 'racial century': genocides of indigenous peoples and the Holocaust

**ABSTRACT** Moses argues that the study of indigenous genocides and the Holocaust is marred by dogmatically held positions of rival scholarly communities, reflecting the genocidal traumas of the ethnic groups with which they are closely associated. In particular, those who study genocides of indigenous peoples in colonial contexts (and many others) object to the thesis of the Holocaust's 'uniqueness' or 'singularity' on the grounds that it overshadows 'lesser' or 'incomplete' indigenous genocides—if indeed they are considered genocides at all—that are considered marginal or even 'primitive', thereby reinforcing hegemonic Eurocentrism. They claim that the moral caché of indigenous survivors of colonialism is consequently diminished in comparison to that of Jews. Such scholars counter that genocide lies at the core of western civilization, and some extend its meaning to cover a wide variety of phenomena, thereby raising the issue of definition. These positions are reflected in the two schools of thought regarding genocide: liberals who emphasize intentionality and agency, and post-liberals who highlight impersonal structures and processes. The question almost raises itself: should the victim's point of view be authoritative in this regard, when different victim groups make incommensurable, indeed competing, claims? If we are to move beyond this unproductive intellectual and moral stalemate, rehearsing the now familiar arguments is insufficient. A critical perspective that transcends that of victims and perpetrators and their descendants is clearly necessary. Moses argues that laying bare the group traumas that block conceptual development and mutual recognition can aid in their being worked through, as well as in stimulating the critical reflection needed to rethink the relationship between the Holocaust and the indigenous genocides that preceded it. Such a perspective can transcend liberal and post-liberal positions if it links the colonial genocides of the 'racial century' (1850–1950) and the Holocaust to a single modernization process of accelerating violence related to nation-building that commenced in the European colonial periphery and culminated in the Holocaust.

**KEYWORDS** *colonialism, genocide, Holocaust, indigenous people, modernity, racial century*

The author is grateful to Adrian Carton, Robert Cribb, Ned Curthoys, John Docker, Nick Doumanis, Geoff Eley, Andrew Fitzmaurice, Max Friedman, Simone Gigliotti, Martin Jay, Mark Levene, Ben Kiernan, Amelia Klein, Konrad Kwiet, Geoffrey Brahm Levey, Ken Macnab, Lawrence McNamara, Sam Moyn, Glenda Sluga, Ulrich Speck, Dan Stone, Eric Weitz and Jürgen Zimmerer for encouragement, references and constructive criticisms of earlier drafts. They are neither responsible for the views expressed here nor, of course, for any errors. I also thank Delwyn Elizabeth for her able research assistance, which was funded by the University of Sydney.

*But even regarding History as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized—the question involuntarily arises—to what principle, to what aim, these enormous sacrifices have been offered?*<sup>1</sup>

Hegel was well aware of the terrible cost exacted by the march of civilization. Yet, precisely because the ‘History of the World is not the theatre of human happiness’, as he put it rather coyly, Hegel felt compelled to develop a philosophy of history that invested cosmic meaning in what otherwise would be an intolerable spectacle of pointless carnage.<sup>2</sup> He was thereby proposing a secular ‘theodicy’, a term coined by the German philosopher G. W. Leibniz in 1710 to mean ‘justification of God’.<sup>3</sup>

In 1940, at the beginning of a European catastrophe that would urgently re-pose the question of evil, the German-Jewish critic Walter Benjamin poured scorn on theodicies because they necessarily view the past through the eyes of its victors and retrospectively justify their actions and morality. Could the European civilization that produced colonial violence and the First World War be the greater good that redeemed the immeasurable suffering it caused? ‘There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism’, Benjamin wrote famously in his ‘Theses on the philosophy of history’.<sup>4</sup> Rather than continue the destruction wrought by such barbarism, he urged ‘anamnestic solidarity’ with its victims as a way of interrupting the supposedly ineluctable and necessary ‘progress’ of civilization.<sup>5</sup>

Benjamin’s plea for the primacy of the victims’ point of view has certainly been absorbed by the scholarly community that studies genocides. But Hegel, or at least theodicy, still commands a following, for the enquiry into the extermination of so-called native or indigenous peoples continues to be overshadowed by the nationalistic and totalitarian ‘cleansing’ programmes of the twentieth century, particularly the Holocaust. Mark Mazower suggests two reasons for this low priority:

I think there may have . . . been a widely-held unspoken assumption that the mass killing of African or American peoples was distant and in some senses an ‘inevitable’ part of progress while what was genuinely shocking was the attempt to

1 G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover 1956), 14.

2 Hegel, 26.

3 Zachary Braiterman incorrectly asserts that Leibniz coined the term ‘after an earthquake devastated Lisbon in 1755’, but Leibniz died in 1716!: Z. Braiterman, *(God) after Auschwitz* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1998), 19.

4 Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the philosophy of history’, in W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books 1969), 256. Michael Löwy, ‘Revolution against “progress”’: Walter Benjamin’s romantic anarchism’, *New Left Review*, no. 152, July–August 1985.

5 For an analysis of the concept of ‘anamnestic solidarity’ and its appropriation, see Max Pensky, ‘On the use and abuse of memory: Habermas, “anamnestic solidarity”, and the *Historikerstreit*’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1989, 351–81.

exterminate an entire people in Europe. This assumption may rest upon an implicit racism, or simply upon a failure of historical imagination.<sup>6</sup>

Another reason is the fact that the nation-states of 'the West', which are responsible for upholding human rights and the moral universalism on which they are based, profitted enormously from imperialism, and often owe their very existence to their projects of settlement. The genocides of indigenous peoples by colonial powers and settlers necessarily pose thorny questions today regarding the dark past or provenance of these societies.<sup>7</sup> Then there is the prosaic problem that very few scholars dispose over sufficient knowledge to make plausible comparisons and linkages between different genocidal episodes. The upshot is that the genocide of European peoples in the twentieth century strikes many American, Anglo-European and Israeli scholars as a more urgent research question than the genocide of non-Europeans by Europeans in the preceding centuries or by postcolonial states of their indigenous populations today.<sup>8</sup>

Underlying this asymmetry is the claim that the Holocaust is 'unique', 'unprecedented' or 'singular'. Its implications for the study of indigenous genocide are as significant as they are dire: that such 'lesser' or 'incomplete' genocides—if indeed they are considered genocides at all—are marginal or even 'primitive', thereby reinforcing hegemonic Eurocentrism,<sup>9</sup> and that the moral caché of the indigenous survivors of colonialism is less than that of Jews. Predictably, they are rejected by some scholars who counter that genocide lies at the core of western civilization,<sup>10</sup> and by others who extend its meaning to a wide variety of phenomena, for example, to a European interest in indigenous spirituality, birth control for African Americans, disease in Hawaii and the murder of street children in South American city slums.<sup>11</sup>

- 6 Mark Mazower, 'After Lemkin: genocide, the Holocaust and history', *Jewish Quarterly*, vol. 5, winter 1994, 5–8.
- 7 For useful surveys of issues surrounding genocide and indigenous peoples today, see Robert T. Hitchcock and Tara M. Twedt, 'Physical and cultural genocide of various indigenous peoples', in Samuel Totten, William S. Parsons and Israel W. Charny (eds), *Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Garland Press 1995), 483–514; Katherine Bischooping and Natalie Fingerhut, 'Border lines: indigenous peoples in genocide studies', *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1996, 481–506; John H. Bodley, *Victims of Progress* (Menlo Park, CA: Cummings 1975).
- 8 Ziauddin Sardar, Ashis Nandy and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Barbaric Others: A Manifesto on Western Racism* (London and Boulder, CO: Pluto Press 1993); Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, 'Exhibiting racism: cultural imperialism, genocide and representation', *Rethinking History*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1998, 349–58.
- 9 Scott L. Montgomery, 'What kind of memory? Reflections on images of the Holocaust', *Contention*, vol. 5, no. 1, autumn 1995, 101.
- 10 Native American scholar and activist Ward Churchill goes so far as to claim that the uniqueness argument is tantamount to the denial of indigenous genocides; indeed, that it is worse, because it dovetails with the exculpatory imperatives of colonial-national governments at the expense of their impotent indigenous minorities, and is purveyed by those with institutional power: *A Little Matter of Genocide* (San Francisco: City Lights Books 1997), 31–6, 50.
- 11 Bron Taylor, 'Earthen spirituality or cultural genocide? Radical environmentalism's appropriation of native spirituality', *Religion*, vol. 27, 1997, 183–215; Simone M. Caron, 'Birth control and the black community in the 1960s: genocide or power politics?', *Journal of Social*

'The coinage has been debased', observes Michael Ignatieff with exasperation: 'What remains is not a moral universal which binds us all together, but a loose slogan which drives us apart.'<sup>12</sup> Identity politics and academic enquiry are often conflated in polemical expressions of group trauma, and rancour sets the tone. The question almost raises itself: should the victim's point of view be authoritative in this field when different victim groups make incommensurable, indeed competing, claims?<sup>13</sup>

If we are to move beyond this unproductive intellectual and moral stalemate, rehearsing the now familiar arguments is insufficient.<sup>14</sup> A critical perspective that transcends that of victims (articulated by Benjamin) and perpetrators and their descendants (advanced by Hegel) is clearly necessary. Whether it can be done with sensitivity is a question I am not in a position to answer. One method has been undertaken by the anthropologist Michael Taussig. Turning to Benjamin for inspiration, he invokes the presentational strategy of montage to disrupt the normative status of the given order, placing stress not on 'facts and information in winning arguments . . . [but] . . . the less conscious image realm and in the dreamworld of the popular imagination'.<sup>15</sup> But what if the popular imagination is hopelessly divided about the identity of the 'real' victims of history or the hierarchy of their suffering?<sup>16</sup> In that case, an approach that lays bare the group traumas blocking conceptual development and mutual recognition can aid in their working through, as well as in stimulating the critical reflection needed to rethink the relationship between the Holocaust and the indigenous genocides that preceded it.<sup>17</sup>

### Trauma, the sacred and the profane

What is at stake in the 'uniqueness' question? In order to grasp its existential importance, it is necessary to appreciate that the events of the Holocaust were experienced by members of the victim group as a trauma of virtually metaphysical proportions, a defining rupture in personal and collective identity

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*History*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1998, 545–69; O. A. Bushnell, *The Gifts of Civilisation: Germs and Genocide in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1993); Nancy Scheper-Hughes, 'Small wars and invisible genocides', *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 43, no. 5, 1996, 889–900.

12 Michael Ignatieff, preface, in Simon Norfolk, *For Most of It I Have No Words* (London: Dewi Lewis 1998).

13 Arlene Stein, 'Whose memories? Whose victimhood? Contests for the Holocaust frame in recent social movement discourse', *Sociological Perspective*, vol. 4, no. 3, autumn 1998, 519–41.

14 The relevant arguments have been analysed thoroughly in two recent publications: Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, 'The politics of uniqueness: reflections on the recent polemical turn in Holocaust and genocide scholarship', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1999, 28–61; Alan S. Rosenbaum (ed.), *Is the Holocaust Unique?*, 2nd edn (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 2001).

15 Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1987), 368f.

16 Katherine Bischooping and Andrea Kalmin, 'Public opinion about comparisons to the Holocaust', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 4, winter 1999, 485.

17 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 2001).

with world-historical significance. Many Jews, especially the direct survivors, accordingly treat this genocide as sacred,<sup>18</sup> and it has become an important marker of collective Jewish identity,<sup>19</sup> notwithstanding considerable discomfort in that community with such a heteronomous determination.<sup>20</sup>

Emile Durkheim's theory of the sacred provides a useful tool for understanding this phenomenon. Group identity, he wrote, is constituted by a shared sense of the basic division of the world into two domains, the sacred and the profane. The former comprises objects and events that are loved, venerated or dreaded, and that are superior in dignity to the ordinary world of the profane. This division implies an obvious hierarchy: the sacred is special, and the profane is not. Without a shared sense of the sacred, group identity would dissolve. But preserving the sacred status of certain objects and events is not only a matter of communal survival; it is a response to suffering. For the cosmic order provided by the sacred–profane division endows the survivor of trauma with 'more force either to endure the trials of existence or to conquer them'.<sup>21</sup>

Durkheim's analysis also helps expose other aspects of the Holocaust's sacredness. He calls the group's most holy thing or object its 'totem', the sacred aura of which extends to two further domains: the sign or representation of the totem, and the members of the clan (Durkheim had in mind indigenous Australians) who comprise the core of the community.<sup>22</sup> On this account, the survivors themselves assume a sacred status, and it is no surprise that they also vigilantly guard representations of the Holocaust lest it be defiled or contaminated.<sup>23</sup> This endeavour is necessarily sectarian. Finally, the Holocaust is read as a negative cult, a *piaculum*, as Durkheim would have it: the commemoration of a calamity, that is, a trauma.<sup>24</sup> Utilizing the literature on trauma, the historian Dominick LaCapra has come to similar conclusions:

18 Adi Ophir, 'On sanctifying the Holocaust: an anti-theological treatise', *Tikkun*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1987, 61–7. Ophir calls it 'a new religion' with its own commandments: 'Thou shalt have no other holocaust'; 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or likeness'; 'Thou shalt not take the name in vain'; and 'Remember the day of the Holocaust to keep it holy, in memory of the destruction of the Jews of Europe'. Cf. Mark Levene, 'Is the Holocaust simply another example of genocide?', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1994, 6.

19 Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin 1999). For critical discussion, see Harold Kaplan, 'Americanizing the Holocaust', in John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell (eds), *Remembering for the Future*, vol. 1 (London: Palgrave 2001), 309–21; and Berel Lang, 'On Peter Novick's *The Holocaust in American Life*', *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2001, 149–58.

20 For a plea that the Holocaust not become 'the crucible of [Jewish] culture', see David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1984), 9. See also Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1994), 10, 13.

21 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press 1915), 52–4, 142, 240, 464.

22 *Ibid.*, 140, 150ff.

23 Witness the bitter protest of survivors against the New York exhibition, 'Mirroring evil: Nazi imagery/recent art', which opened on 17 March 2002. See Walter Reich, 'Appropriating the Holocaust', *New York Times*, 15 March 2002, A23.

24 Durkheim, 434ff.

Those traumatized by extreme events, as well as those empathizing with them, may resist working through because of what might almost be termed a fidelity to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it . . . Moreover . . . there has been an important tendency in modern culture and thought to convert trauma into the occasion for sublimity, to transvalue it into a test for the self or the group and an entry into the extraordinary . . . Even extremely destructive or disorienting events, such as the Holocaust or the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki may become occasions of negative sublimity or displaced sacralization. They may also give rise to what may be termed founding traumas—traumas that paradoxically become the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group rather than events that pose the problematic question of identity.<sup>25</sup>

Of course, contemporary Jewish individual and religious identity precedes the Holocaust and continues apart from it. Jewish identity is not automatically Holocaust-centric.<sup>26</sup> Yet, for some influential contributors to the field, the Holocaust does in fact possess this status, due perhaps to their catholic interest in the fate of all Jews, since all Jews, irrespective of religious or political hue, whether religious or secular, were potential victims of National Socialist designs. 'I admit that my personal starting point, my bias if you will', confesses the historian Yehuda Bauer, 'is formed by my overriding interest in the fate of the Jews'.<sup>27</sup> The Holocaust is the trauma that all Jews share and it functions thereby, George Steiner observes, as the cement binding post-Holocaust Jewry. The *Shoah* (a term he prefers to 'Holocaust' because of its connotation of sacrifice), he writes,

is the one and only bond which unites the Orthodox Jew and the atheist, the practising Jew and the total secularist, the people of Israel and the Diaspora, the Zionist and the anti-Zionist, the extreme conservative Jew . . . and the Jewish Trotskyite or Communist. Above all else, to be a Jew in the second half of this century is to be a survivor, and one who knows that his survival can again be put into question . . . We are, in certain respects, a traumatised, a crazed people. How could we not be? Especially where it is that trauma which keeps us from final dispersal.<sup>28</sup>

Elie Wiesel has made the logical connection between trauma, group identity and the insistence of uniqueness:

I always forbade myself to compare the Holocaust of European Judaism to events which are foreign to it. Auschwitz was something else. The Universe of concentration camps, by its dimensions and its design, lies outside, if not beyond, history. Its vocabulary belongs to it alone.<sup>29</sup>

25 LaCapra, 22–3.

26 Space does not permit considering the differences between Jewish identity in different countries.

27 Yehuda Bauer, 'A past that will not go away', in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck (eds), *The Holocaust and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1998), 20. To be sure, Bauer maintains, against theologians, that the Holocaust is 'meaningless', but it nonetheless remains for him a sacred event in the Durkheimian sense.

28 George Steiner, 'The long life of metaphor: an approach to "the Shoah"', *Encounter*, February 1987, 57.

29 Elie Wiesel, 'Now we know', in Richard Arens (ed.), *Genocide in Paraguay* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press 1976), 165. To be sure, in the Paraguayan genocide of the Aches,

Accordingly, he has expressed alarm that other victim groups are 'stealing the Holocaust from us . . . we need to regain our sense of sacredness'.<sup>30</sup> Renowned scholars such as Lucy Dawidowicz, Steven T. Katz and Bauer do not differ from Wiesel and survivors in this regard, even if they locate the Holocaust in history. Bauer himself has pointed out the traumatizing effect of the Holocaust on Israeli society, demonstrated, above all, by its instrumentalization by all sides in public debate for partisan political purposes.<sup>31</sup> And with characteristic forthrightness Katz insists on its centrality for Jewish identity:

To understand ourselves [as Jews] requires ineluctably that we come to some grasp of these events [the Holocaust] and our relation to them . . . Those who would enquire what it means to be a Jew today must ask not, or even pose primarily, vague and unformed questions about Jewish identity and the relation of Judaism and modernity and Judaism and secularity, but must rather articulate the much more precise and focused question through which all other dimensions of our post-Holocaust identity are refracted and defined: 'What does it mean to be a Jew after Auschwitz?' Auschwitz has become an inescapable *datum* for all Jewish accounts of the meaning and nature of covenantal relation and God's relation to man. Likewise, all substantial answers also need to be open and responsive to the subtleties of the dialectical alternation of the contemporary Jewish situation: that is, they must also give due weight to the 'miracle' which is the state of Israel. They must thoughtfully and sensitively enquire whether God is speaking to the 'survivors' through it, and if so how.<sup>32</sup>

Because Katz and Bauer locate the Holocaust at the centre of Jewish life, they are forced to insist on its uniqueness, for to do otherwise would undermine their personal identity and concept of collective Jewish existence.<sup>33</sup> The significance Katz and Bauer attach to the Holocaust cannot be sustained if it is 'merely' another case of the mass killing that punctuates human history, for the problem of evil—the mystery of undeserved suffering—cannot be faced without the sense of a cosmic meaning subtended by the division of the world into sacred and profane domains.<sup>34</sup>

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Wiesel recognizes the analogy: 'it is indeed a matter of a Final Solution: It simply aims at exterminating this tribe' (166).

30 Quoted in Robert G. L. Waite, 'The Holocaust and historical explanation', in Isidor Wallimann and Michael N. Dobkowski (eds), *Genocide and the Modern Age* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1987), 169. Cf. Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman, 'Why do we call the Holocaust "the Holocaust"?', *Modern Judaism*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1989, 197–211.

31 Yehuda Bauer, 'We are condemned to remember', *Jerusalem Post*, 19 April 2001. Bauer assumes the posture of the analyst.

32 Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* (New York and London: New York University Press 1983), 142f. and the chapter 'The "unique" intentionality of the Holocaust', 287–318. Cf. Yehuda Bauer, who makes the same point in 'The place of the Holocaust in contemporary history', *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 1, 1984, 224. Emil Fackenheim, 'Why the Holocaust is unique', *Judaism*, vol. 5, no. 4, autumn 2001, 438–47.

33 Durkheim, 427–33, 462–79. Conversely, Jews that do not put the Holocaust at the centre of Jewish identity presumably do not have to insist on its uniqueness.

34 This point is elaborated in A. Dirk Moses, 'Structure and agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and his critics', *History and Theory*, vol. 37, no. 2, 1998, 194–219. See also Braiterman.

Consequently, both men have devoted considerable energy to establishing the logical corollary of their implicit faith in the sacredness of the Holocaust, namely, the division of all genocide victims into the same two categories, sacred and profane.<sup>35</sup> Although they profess not to posit a hierarchy of victims or to claim that individual Jewish victims suffered more than non-Jewish ones, the burden of their argument nonetheless is that the Jewish victims of the Holocaust are sacred, and that those of other genocides are not, because only the Jews as a group were singled out for total extermination.<sup>36</sup> For this reason, Bauer dismisses David E. Stannard's claim of an 'American Holocaust' (that is, of the Native Americans) with the telling statement that it 'cannot be seen on a *par* with the Holocaust'.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, Bauer decries such equivalences as antisemitic. The temptation to 'submerge the specific Jewish tragedy in the general sea of suffering caused by the many atrocities committed by the Nazi regime', he fears, is in fact a 'worldwide phenomenon connected with dangers of anti-Semitism'.<sup>38</sup> Here-with, he acts out the two collective traumas of European Jewry: the suffering caused by more than a millennium of Christian anti-Judaism (including the Holocaust), and the 'second victimization' through the 'unspeakability' of the Holocaust in the immediate post-war years.<sup>39</sup> Now only the memory of the Jewish Holocaust can prevent the flourishing of the antisemitism that led to the catastrophe in the first place: 'A reversion back to "normalcy" regarding Jews requires the destruction of the Holocaust-caused attitude of sympathy'.<sup>40</sup> Understandable as this position is, it leaves Bauer open to the charge of Norman Finkelstein and denialists that he instrumentalizes the Holocaust to gain a moral advantage for Jews.<sup>41</sup>

Certainly, Bauer has made a career not only of policing the compound around the Holocaust, but also of regulating its meaning for Jewish self-understanding:

all these universalizing attempts [regarding the Holocaust] seem to me to be, on the Jewish side, efforts by their authors to escape their Jewishness. They are expressions

35 This observation is John M. Cuddihy's in 'The Holocaust: the latent issue in the uniqueness debate', in Philip F. Gallagher (ed.), *Christians, Jews and Other Worlds* (London and New York: University Press of America 1988), 62-79.

36 Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press 1994). See also Steven T. Katz, 'The Holocaust: a very particular racism', in Berenbaum and Peck (eds), 56-63, in which Katz takes pains to distinguish between the eugenic world-view that underlay Nazi policies towards all supposed racially inferior people from anti-Jewish racism.

37 Yehuda Bauer, 'Comparison of genocides', in Levon Chorbajian and George Shirinian (eds), *Studies in Contemporary Genocide* (New York: St Martin's Press 1999), 33, emphasis added.

38 Yehuda Bauer, 'Whose Holocaust?', in Jack Nusan Porter (ed.), *Genocide and Human Rights: A Global Anthology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America 1982), 35, 38, reprinted from *Midstream*, vol. 26, no. 9, November 1980.

39 Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Die Konkurrenz der Opfer: Genozid, Identität und Anerkennung*, trans. Thomas Laugstein (Lüneburg: Dietrich zu Klampen Verlag 2001). See also Gerd Korman, 'The Holocaust in American historical writing', *Societas*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1972, 251-70.

40 Bauer, 'Whose Holocaust?', 44.

41 Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry* (London and New York: Verso 1999).

of a deep-seated insecurity; these people feel more secure when they can say 'we are just like all the others'. The Holocaust should have proved to them that the Jews were, unfortunately, not like the others. Obviously it did not.<sup>42</sup>

The link between the ongoing maintenance of group identity and the sacredness of the Holocaust could hardly be made more explicitly than in this extraordinary statement.

Even Bauer's elucidation of the universal meaning of the Holocaust denies other victims of Nazi racial policies a place around its holy penumbra. The 'unique situation of Jewry in Western culture', he insists, meant that it alone was the object of fantasies of complete destruction; consequently, the specifically Jewish experience must be raised above all others in order to serve as a general warning for all minority groups, since they too could one day suffer a holocaust.<sup>43</sup> But this reasoning is muddled, because if the Jewish position in Europe was unique then the likelihood of another ethnic minority becoming the object of the same rhetoric of total extermination is more than highly improbable.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the logical conclusion of the argument that the less-than-total, non-Jewish, profane genocides are much more common is that they should be the focus of scholarly attention and public memory.

To be sure, Bauer has developed his position over the years, now characterizing the Holocaust as 'unprecedented' rather than 'unique', and pleading for a 'spectrum' of genocides, with the Holocaust at one end as the most extreme example of extermination. His sincere and generous advocacy on behalf of other victim groups is well known.<sup>45</sup> Yet, this concession to comparison does not alter significantly his consistently held belief since the 1970s that the differences between the Holocaust and other genocides outweigh any similarities, and that the Holocaust is thereby special (or sacred). He appears to confuse two, distinct tasks: on the one hand, reflecting specifically on the burden of history and identity for post-Holocaust Jewry; on the other, explaining generally how and why genocides occur. By collapsing the latter into the former, he ends up at times proffering identity politics in the name of disinterested scholarship.

Both in his and Katz's particular and universal rendering of the Holocaust, then, the centrality of Jewish victims must be foregrounded lest its meaning be traduced. In order to maintain the border between sacred and profane victims of genocide, they have to downplay the similarities between all victims of genocide by referring, somewhat ironically, to Hitler's own faith in the 'redemptive' act of killing all Jews, an unfortunate authority to which

42 Bauer, 'A past that will not go away', 17.

43 Ibid., 43; Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York: Franklin Watts 1982), 332.

44 See Dan Stone, *Constructing the Holocaust: Genocide and History* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, forthcoming). Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), ch. 3: 'Comparisons with other genocides'; and Yehuda Bauer, 'Plenary address', in Roth and Maxwell (eds), 21–4.

45 Bauer is an active member of the Elmau Initiative: An International Taskforce to Prevent Genocide.

to appeal.<sup>46</sup> The point of drawing attention to their strategies, however, is not to dispute the fact that the Holocaust can be distinguished from other genocides in important respects. It is to note in this field of enquiry that group trauma is acted out in truculently held intellectual positions whose articulators are prepared to climb out on very thin limbs to make their cases.

As might be expected, the uniqueness argument is a particular anathema to members of the victim groups it consigns to profane status.<sup>47</sup> Historians from these groups have responded in three ways. First, they question whether there was in fact a Nazi will for total extermination of Jews, thereby desanctifying Jewish victims.<sup>48</sup> Second, they claim that the Holocaust was a copy of the mass exterminations that had already taken place in the European colonies, thus claiming priority for such genocides. 'In fact, the holocaust of North American tribes was, in a way, even more destructive than that of the Jews', claims Russell Thornton provocatively, 'since many American Indian peoples became extinct'.<sup>49</sup> A third argument substitutes total regularity for absolute uniqueness: 'Queen Elizabeth, King Ferdinand, Queen Victoria, King Louis and so on were the "Adolf Hitler's" [*sic*] of their day', a collective of Canadian authors suppose. "'Auschwitz" was an everyday reality for many people across the world during the years of colonialism and the years that followed.'<sup>50</sup> The indignation stems from the fact that Native American deaths are considered 'unworthy' because they died at the hands of 'our very own [white] forebears', as Stannard notes: that is why there is no Holocaust Memorial for Native Americans or other victims.<sup>51</sup> This is a telling point, for most American public leaders and intellectuals are happy to pontificate about genocide in every country but their own.<sup>52</sup>

46 Cuddihy, 72.

47 It is also the object of attack by Jewish scholars. Ismar Schorsch warns that the insistence of uniqueness 'impedes genuine dialogue, because it introduces an extraneous, contentious issue that alienates political allies from among other victims of organized human depravity': 'The Holocaust and Jewish survival', *Midstream*, vol. 17, no. 1, January 1981, 39. Steven T. Katz attempts a refutation in his *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 39–42; David Biale critically reviews Katz and attacks the uniqueness thesis in *Tikkun*, vol. 10, no. 1, January–February 1995, 79–82. See also the differentiated discussion by Irving L. Horowitz, 'Genocide and the reconstruction of social theory', in Wallimann and Dobkowski (eds), 61–80.

48 Ian Hancock, 'Uniqueness as denial: the politics of genocide scholarship', in Rosenbaum (ed.), 163–208. Hancock is greatly irritated by Bauer's contention that Gypsies represented only a 'minor irritant' for the Nazis.

49 Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press 1987), xvi; M. Annette Jaimes, 'Sand Creek: the morning after', in M. Annette Jaimes (ed.), *The State of Native America* (Boston: South End Press 1992), 1–12; Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*; David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992), 255.

50 Antoon A. Leenaars *et al.*, 'Genocide and suicide among indigenous people: the North meets the South', *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1999, 338.

51 David E. Stannard, 'Preface', in Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, xviii. Here Stannard is influenced by the thesis of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky that the West divides victims of genocide and government oppression into two categories, worthy and unworthy, depending on its foreign policy agenda. See their *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books 1988), 37.

52 Symptomatic of this taboo is Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books 2002). She is scathing of the United States as an impotent

Because of this taboo, Stannard has to resort to making creative analogies with the Holocaust: if Jews who died as slave labourers or of disease in the camps rather than in the gas chambers were equally victims of the Holocaust, then Native Americans who died in analogous circumstances, that is, from 'natural causes', were similarly victims of the 'American Holocaust'.<sup>53</sup>

Such reasoning is not the innocent product of the ivory tower as the prolific Native American scholar and activist Ward Churchill makes clear with endearing candour when he proclaims the purpose of his scholarship to be 'unequivocally political'. His explicit aim is to invest American Indians with 'every ounce of moral authority we can get. My first purpose is, and always has been, to meet my responsibilities of helping deliver that to which my people is due.'<sup>54</sup> Here are echoes of Bauer's position, and not surprisingly Churchill goes on also to claim uniqueness for the suffering of his group: 'The American holocaust was and remains unparalleled, both in terms of its magnitude and the degree to which its goals were met, and in terms of the extent to which its ferocity was sustained over time by not one but several participating groups.'<sup>55</sup>

That such a claim cannot be dismissed out of hand, as writers like Katz are inclined, has been shown recently by David Moshman in a searching article entitled 'Conceptual constraints on thinking about genocide'. The problem with definitions of genocide so far, he argues, is that they have been based on prototypes: a paradigmatic genocide underlies the normative definition against which all others are measured. Hitherto, the prototype has been the Holocaust, especially in relation to the centrality of state intention. But such a choice is conceptually capricious, he thinks, and there is no reason why another genocide could not be prototypical.

Suppose, for example, that we construed the European conquest of the Americas as a singular and ultimate set of interrelated genocides. This mega-genocide . . . has been deliberately aimed at, and has succeeded in eliminating, hundreds of discrete cultures throughout the Americas. Moreover, it has for the most part been a consensus policy, pursued generation after generation by the governments of multiple colonial and emerging nations . . . The Holocaust, from this perspective, might be dismissed as relatively minor, having targeted only a handful of cultures and having ended after just a few years when the Nazi regime was defeated.<sup>56</sup>

Such a minimization of the Holocaust, Moshman adds, would be 'indefensible', but no less so than the 'routine genocide denials that result from taking

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bystander to genocides abroad, but does not consider the possibility that her country might be a co-perpetrator or that it was founded on genocide.

53 Stannard, *American Holocaust*, 255. By contrast, Gavriel Rosenfeld thinks that the uniqueness thesis is a defensive response to attempts by writers like Stannard to equate all genocides (Rosenfeld). There is insufficient space here to address this issue.

54 Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 11.

55 *Ibid.*, 4.

56 David Moshman, 'Conceptual constraints on thinking about genocide', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2001, 436.

the Holocaust as unique and/or prototypical'. The point, then, is to avoid one kind of mass death as prototypical.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, there are good reasons to regard the indigenous critiques, at least in certain modes, with caution, for they too seek to be prototypical and proffer a metaphysics of their own. Consider Lilian Friedberg's 'Dare to compare' and John C. Mohawk's *Utopian Legacies*. Both authors attribute the colonial and twentieth-century genocides to the essence of the western intellectual tradition, namely, the epistemological hubris according to which all things are knowable and possible, and in the name of whose 'master race' other cultures and peoples can be destroyed.<sup>58</sup> For Friedberg, the universal meaning of the Native American Holocaust is elucidated when it is placed next to the Jewish Holocaust, for only in this way can the incubus of western civilization be laid bare. 'If we are to divert the disaster [of human self-destruction], Mount Rushmore must be placed on a par with burning synagogues, whose fires can never be extinguished.'<sup>59</sup>

Clearly, the problem with Holocaust-indigenous genocide discourse is that it is structured as a zero-sum game. Where Bauer and Katz see equations with the Jewish Holocaust as antisemitic and as the occlusion of its world-historical meaning, Friedberg regards the resistance to precisely such analogies as anti-Native American and the enabling condition for the continuing rape of the world by the western spirit. The discourse is also remarkably static because each side dogmatically asserts the similarities or differences between cases for its own advantage without exploring the conceptual and historical relations between them. What is more, whether the similarities are more significant than the differences is ultimately a political and philosophical, rather than a historical, question and, as we have seen, the answers are driven by passionate, extra-historical considerations. Consequently, creative research questions about the processes that link the genocides of modernity are hindered by the mechanism that prompts each side to stress the specialness (or sacredness) of its respective genocide in the face of contrary assertions.

This game has no winner, unless the dreary spectacle of assertion and counter-assertion can pass for innovative scholarship. It is time for historians in the field to play by other rules, namely, those of the community of scholars dedicated to presenting arguments directed to and for the world at large, rather than primarily to and for an ethnic or political group. It is necessary also for them to dispense with the vocabulary of uniqueness they have all appropriated and abused. Uniqueness is not a useful category for historical research; it is a religious or metaphysical category, and should be left to theologians and philosophers to ponder for their respective reading

57 Ibid.

58 Lilian Friedberg, 'Dare to compare: Americanizing the Holocaust', *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2000, 353–80; John C. Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Lights Publishers 2000).

59 Friedberg, 373.

communities.<sup>60</sup> Where historians employ it, they stand in danger of relinquishing their critical role and assuming that of the prophet or sage who offers perspectives for group solidarity and self-assertion.

Indigenous scholars and their supporters may object that this entreaty sounds like yet another technology of western domination from which they can derive little benefit, because they need to cultivate group solidarity in the face of colonialist dissipation.<sup>61</sup> Yet, abandoning the communicative rationality inherent in the appeal to the putative universal reader risks relinquishing the very weapon with which to unmask exploitation and extermination. Moreover, an overarching moral consensus on the value of alterity is necessary to secure its existence, and this perforce entails appealing to standards of verification to which everyone can assent. To valorize difference implies the universalization of this particular good.<sup>62</sup> But what if most readers view colonial genocide through the lenses of the Holocaust and thereby discount it, as Churchill and others complain? Counter-claiming uniqueness or primacy of indigenous genocides may have raised the profile of the latter, but it can no longer advance the scholarly or political discussion. The categories and critical tools with which historians approach the subject need to be rethought.

### Rival theories of colonial genocide

How might we replace the current static relationship between Holocaust and preceding genocides with one that allows the reconstruction of the dynamic historical relations between them?<sup>63</sup> The place to start is with an examination of the contending theories of colonial/indigenous genocide. Broadly speaking, they fall into two camps. The first I call 'liberal' because it stresses the agency of the state as the intending genocidal subject. The second I call 'post-liberal' because it emphasizes the structural determinants of policy development as well as the social forces in civil society that precipitate mass death and disperse centralized exterminatory intention and agency. The former corresponds to the Holocaust paradigm, the latter to the alternative proposed by its indigenous and other critics. Somewhat confusingly, both approaches revolve around the Holocaust and both lay claim to the authority of Raphael Lemkin,

60 Philosophical reflections include: Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love, Truth and Justice* (London: Routledge 2000); Avishai Margalit and Gabriel Motzkin, 'The uniqueness of the Holocaust', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1996, 65–83. There is insufficient space here to consider Steven T. Katz's claims to have access to a 'phenomenological' reality in which the Holocaust is unique: *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, 51–64. Surprising is the little space he devotes to justify posing the question in the first place.

61 In the place of numerous references: Hayden White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1987), 80f.; and Jan Kociumbas, 'Introduction', in Jan Kociumbas (ed.), *Maps, Dreams, History: Race and Representation in Australian History* (Sydney: Department of History, University of Sydney 1998).

62 Thomas McCarthy, 'Doing the right thing in cross-cultural representation', *Ethics*, no. 3, 1992, 644. McCarthy calls the resulting ethic 'multicultural universalism'.

63 An admirable study that avoids playing the uniqueness game without diminishing the obvious importance of the Holocaust to modern European history is Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000).

the first theorist of genocide. Yet, the underlying issue is the definition of 'genocide' itself, because whether or not colonialism has an inner affinity with genocide depends on how one defines the term, conceptualizes exterminatory intention and locates the agent that can possess it.

*A liberal theory of colonial genocide*

Consistent with the uniqueness paradigm, liberal theorists insist that genocide, both as a concept and as formulated in the United Nations Convention of 1948, entails the eventual physical extermination or extinction of a people or ethnic group, and not cultural genocide, that is, the effacement of group identity without killing.<sup>64</sup> Or they distinguish between genocide (partial destruction of a group, physical or otherwise) and holocaust (intended complete physical destruction).<sup>65</sup> Although Bauer, for example, regards Lemkin's 1944 definition of genocide as muddled because it supposedly does not distinguish clearly between the two, he exemplifies the liberal position with its emphasis on premeditation as the key element of the crime.<sup>66</sup> Did not Lemkin himself deliver the formulation when he wrote that genocide is 'a synchronized attack' and 'a co-ordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of the essential foundations of life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves'?<sup>67</sup> On this reading, the agency of the perpetrator and its exterminatory *mens rea* is clearly identifiable. Genocide is established when an agent, in particular the modern state, can be determined to possess the requisite genocidal intention. This focus has a number of important consequences.

The first concerns the origin of intention, which is held to lie in the motives of the perpetrator. Liberals, who are mostly North American political scientists, are inclined to typologize genocides according to motive, distinguishing for example between 'developmental' or 'utilitarian' genocides of indigenous peoples and 'ideological' genocides of scapegoated or hostage groups.<sup>68</sup> According to one prominent liberal, Roger W. Smith, the motive in colonial situations is easy to identify, namely, 'greed': 'The basic proposition of utilitarian genocide is that some persons must die so that others can live well.'<sup>69</sup>

64 Pieter N. Drost, *Genocide* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff 1959); Pieter N. Drost, *The Crime of State: Penal Protection for Fundamental Freedoms of Persons and Peoples* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff 1959). Drost recommended that political groups should also be included in the definition.

65 Gaita; Andrew Markus, 'Genocide in Australia', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 25, 2001, 50–70.

66 Bauer, 'Whose Holocaust', 43f.

67 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Foundation 1944), xi, 79; Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1978), 35.

68 See the discussion of the various positions in Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr, 'Toward empirical theory of genocides and politicides', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 32, 1988, 359–71; Helen Fein, 'Scenarios of genocide and critical responses', in Israel Charny (ed.), *Towards the Understanding and Prevention of Genocide* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1984), 3–31.

69 Roger W. Smith, 'Human destructiveness and politics: the twentieth century as an age of genocide', in Wallimann and Dobkowski (eds), 25.

The second consequence is that liberals insist on the primary role of the state as the genocidal perpetrator.<sup>70</sup> As Frank Chalk argues, the United Nations Convention was aimed at states because only they have the power at once to commit and prevent genocide. So even when the actual killing of indigenous groups is carried out by ranchers or land speculators, the state is turning a blind eye and is therefore ultimately responsible. Because the state is conceived of in Rankean terms as an individual personality, genocide is held to issue from ideologies about it (like fascism) rather than a prior cause in civil society.<sup>71</sup> The phenomena scholars should study are therefore clear when Chalk reminds his readers: 'we must never forget that the great genocides of the past have been committed by [state] perpetrators who acted in the name of absolutist or utopian ideologies aimed at cleansing and purifying their worlds.'<sup>72</sup> Liberal theories of genocide are really theories of totalitarianism.

There are a number of problems with the liberal position. To begin with, its account of genocidal intentions is radically voluntarist and can only 'explain' why they develop with circular logic by referring to the intentions of the perpetrator. The liberal categorization of genocides simply names the different contexts in which genocides occur and comes to the solipsistic conclusion that perpetrators commit them because they want to. Such a perspective conceptually insulates the state from powerful social forces that push for the expulsion or extermination of native peoples on coveted land. The individualistic motive of 'greed' in indigenous genocides, for example, is left dangling in the air, a consequence of imagining the world in terms of atomistic agents somehow free from the tangled skein of relations that mediate state agency and make it the articulator, however oblique, of deeper social conflicts. The economic system and inter-state rivalry are ignored as salient factors.

Then there is the prioritization of the 'great genocides' of the twentieth century, based as they were on totalitarian ideologies. Who would gainsay their enormity, but the argument is hardly conclusive when seen in light of the fact that, as Katz himself admits, 'sheerly as a matter of quantity the Indian catastrophe [between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries] is unparalleled'.<sup>73</sup> Scholars from non-western backgrounds can point out that 'more people have been killed in the name of "development" this century [the twentieth] than have been killed by all the genocides put together, but we are still overwhelmingly reluctant to recognize "development" as another form of "genocide"'.<sup>74</sup>

70 Helen Fein, 'Genozid als Staatsverbrechen. Beispiele aus Rwanda und Bosnien', *Zeitschrift für Genozidforschungen*, vol. 1, 1999, 36–45; Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1990), 23.

71 The legacy of German historicism in the liberal mindset awaits its analyst. An excellent study of Rankeanism is Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, rev. edn (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press 1983).

72 Frank Chalk, 'Redefining genocide', in George J. Andreopolous (ed.), *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1994), 58ff.

73 Katz, *Holocaust in Historical Context*, 91. Cf. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of the Americas* (New York: HarperCollins 1985), 5.

74 Vinay Lal, 'Genocide, barbaric others, and the violence of categories', *American Historical Review*, vol. 103, October 1998, 1190.

Clearly, the emphasis on state intention and totalitarian ideology directs attention away from the social forces extant in all modernizing and colonizing societies that seek to sequester indigenous land and kill its owners if they are resisted. Implicitly, the liberal position deems the massive deaths on which European and North American societies are based as non-genocidal and therefore less worthy of scholarly attention.<sup>75</sup> They were but the unintended consequences of colonization. Where conscious extermination did occur, it issued from individual vice ('greed') rather than the structural imperatives or logics of the colonization process. The real enemy is the totalitarian drive to perfection, a deviant form of modernity resisted heroically by the West, itself largely innocent of the intended physical destruction of a people. The liberal position reveals itself thereby as a theodicy, justifying the suffering of indigenous peoples in the name of the western civilization that has been constructed on their land and graves. Here indeed are faithful disciples of Hegel.

The attendant conceptual blockage is evident in the liberal reaction to the foregrounding of non-state genocidal pressures that post-liberals stress. One of their number dismisses such thinking because it 'suggests the normalization of the genocidal process and the concomitant impossibility of devising preventive measures', an observation that both understands and misunderstands the post-liberal critique in equal measure.<sup>76</sup> Another is happy to concede that 'it was the hand-in-glove pressure of American settlers and the military might deployed by the government of the United States that destroyed large numbers of the American Indians', yet concludes astonishingly that this fact reveals nothing about 'the nature of American society'.<sup>77</sup> In the end, liberals offer no coherent account of why genocides take place in colonial situations. Either they deny the mass death that attends colonization is genocidal, or they ascribe extermination to contingencies like 'greed', a human vice hardly confined to colonial situations. Here we have a spectacular failure of what C. Wright Mills called 'the sociological imagination', that is, the complex interplay of structure and agency necessary to understand individuals, their inner life and action.<sup>78</sup> Does the post-liberal conception of genocide offer any more?

### *Post-liberal theories*

Where liberals legitimize western societies, post-liberals delegitimize them by essentially equating genocide and colonialism, thereby sullyng their liberal foundation myths.<sup>79</sup> And they do so by appealing also to the Holocaust and

75 Symptomatic is Kurt Glaser and Stefan T. Possony, *Victims of Politics: The State of Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press 1979).

76 George J. Andreopolous, 'Introduction: the calculus of genocide', in Andreopolous (ed.), 9.

77 Chalk, 'Redefining genocide', 56ff.

78 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press 1959), ch. 1.

79 On the importance of foundation myths, see A. Dirk Moses, 'Coming to terms with the past in comparative perspective: Germany and Australia', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 25, 2001, 91-115.

Lemkin's definition of genocide. For, while some statements in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* do indeed emphasize planning and premeditation, others cast the German policies in Eastern Europe as emphatically colonial. As Robert Davis and Mark Zannis, Ward Churchill and, most recently, Ann Curthoys and John Docker have stressed, Lemkin regarded the German project in these terms because it was the Nazis' sure intention to secure permanent biological superiority over the indigenous peoples (Slavic and Jewish) by settling ethnic Germans in their stead.<sup>80</sup>

Genocide has two phases [Lemkin wrote]: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the populations and the *colonization* of the area by the oppressors' own nationals.<sup>81</sup>

In elaborating his definition, Lemkin adumbrated the means by which such a destruction could take place, and mass murder was only one among them. Because genocide attacked 'nationhood', he included language restrictions on subject peoples, the abolition of their law courts and other such measures.<sup>82</sup> For this reason, post-liberals contend that the first formulation of the concept included cultural genocide in its core; that is to say, genocide did not necessitate mass murder or even eventual biological extirpation.<sup>83</sup> What is more, there is no qualitative difference between mass murder and cultural genocide, because the latter destroys the indigenous systems of meaning and ultimately the survivors' will to live, resulting ultimately in widespread death.<sup>84</sup>

All the more dismaying, post-liberals lament, was the incremental restriction of Lemkin's promising start in the immediate post-war years as Cold War politics conspired to produce the restrictive and anodyne UN Convention in 1948 with its requirement of explicit exterminatory intention, and the exclusion of cultural genocide as a crime and political groups as possible targets. In other words, the original post-liberal understanding of genocide was replaced by a liberal one for the benefit of nation-states, a limitation they instituted because they regularly utilize technologies of governance that post-liberals would define as genocidal. As Ward Churchill complains:

Arguably . . . the physical/cultural eradication of entire human groups, or their systematic reduction to whatever extents are deemed desirable by perpetrator

80 Robert Davis and Mark Zannis, *The Genocide Machine in Canada* (Montreal: Black Rose Books 1973), 12; Ann Curthoys and John Docker, 'Introduction—Genocide: definitions, questions, settler-colonies', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 25, 2001, 1–15.

81 Lemkin, 79, emphasis added.

82 *Ibid.*, 82–90.

83 Ward Churchill, 'Forbidding the "G-word": Holocaust denial as judicial doctrine in Canada', *Other Voices: The (e)Journal of Cultural Criticism*, vol. 2, no. 1, February 2000: [www.othervoices.org/2.1/churchill/denial.html](http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/churchill/denial.html) (as of 25 July 2002).

84 In terms of group survival, Davis and Zannis (180) argue that cultural genocide is more damaging than physical annihilation, because the survivors of the latter can garner more support than the deracinated remnants of assimilated indigenous groups.

societies, has increasingly become not only a mode by which racial, ethnic and religious conflicts are 'resolved', but a fundamental method employed by governments and attendant elites to attainment of political homogeneity, from adjustments at the micro level of their national economies to the tuning at the macro level of the international economy as a whole.<sup>85</sup>

Here he draws on the work of Davis and Zannis who argue that after 1945 traditional colonial terror was transformed into a 'genocide machine' as the nature of capitalist domination became less overtly racist, more attuned to American corporate imperatives, but above all driven by technological automation that issues in total wars, as in the Vietnam War. Accordingly, they can equate the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the culmination of the previous phase of colonial violence, characterized as it was by the imposition of genocidal terror on subject peoples to prevent their feared retaliation. The current post-war phase goes further in perpetrating an 'autogenocide' on the entire human race by creating a homogeneous western-world culture and thereby obliterating discrete ethnic and national groups.<sup>86</sup>

Here we are again with Mohawk's and Friedberg's attribution of exterminatory effects to western liberalism. But the originator of this link was Jean-Paul Sartre whose intervention in 1968 in the context of the Vietnam War is regarded by post-liberals as the breakthrough to the recovery of the original Lemkinian intention.<sup>87</sup> Sartre also distinguished between modes of colonial domination: until 1945, it always entailed cultural genocide because it 'cannot take place without the systematic elimination of the distinctive features of the native society', but physical annihilation was checked by the need for indigenous labour.<sup>88</sup> With the post-war anti-colonial struggles for national liberation, however, the mobilization of the entire subject populations made impossible the distinction between combatants and civilians, so the only way for colonial powers to respond to the inevitable guerrilla resistance was to annihilate part of the population in order to terrorize the rest, a policy he denounced as genocidal.<sup>89</sup>

Sartre concluded with the elliptical statement that highly industrialized and under-developed countries must perforce exist in 'a relationship of genocide expressed through racism', but it is unclear what he meant.<sup>90</sup> The tantalizing suggestion of an objective dimension to genocide that supersedes the subjective exterminatory intention was made explicit by Tony Barta in a much-discussed book chapter, 'Relations of genocide: land and lives in the colonization of Australia'.<sup>91</sup> Unlike Sartre, Barta is interested in explaining

85 Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 400.

86 Davis and Zannis, 30ff., 175ff.

87 Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 416.

88 Jean-Paul Sartre, 'On genocide', *New Left Review*, no. 48, 1968, 16. Cf. Davis and Zannis, 30.

89 Sartre, 17.

90 *Ibid.*, 24.

91 Tony Barta, 'Relations of genocide: land and lives in the colonization of Australia', in Wallimann and Dobkowski (eds), 237–52.

the 'genocidal outcomes' in colonial societies before the Second World War, and he finds in the concept of 'relations of genocide' a way of obviating the centrality of state policy and premeditation in the hegemonic liberal definition of the term. Indigenous deaths more often were the result of the unintended consequences of colonization (diseases, starvation, declining birth-rate), but should they therefore be excused as accidental? Barta refutes the inference thus:

Genocide, strictly, cannot be a crime of unintended consequences; we expect it to be acknowledged in consciousness. In real historical relationships, however, unintended consequences are legion, and it is from the consequences, as well as the often muddled consciousness, that we have to deduce the real nature of the relationship.<sup>92</sup>

He concludes that all Australians live in objective 'relations of genocide' with Aborigines, and that Australia was a 'genocidal society' because its original inhabitants were fated to die in enormous numbers by the pressure of settlement despite the eventual protective efforts of the state and philanthropists. A similar argument has been made recently by Alison Palmer, who shows how colonial genocides are often 'society-led' rather than 'state-led'.<sup>93</sup>

The Australian historians Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe have continued this line of thinking, proposing a new term altogether, 'indigenocide', which they distinguish from the Holocaust with its concerted, state-driven, bureaucratic and industrial killing. Although Lemkin does not appear in their footnotes, the concept has clear affinities with his definition:

'Indigenocide' is a means of analysing those circumstances where one, or more peoples, usually immigrants, deliberately set out to supplant a group or groups of other people whom as far as we know, represent the Indigenous, or Aboriginal peoples of the country that the immigrants usurp.<sup>94</sup>

It has five elements: the intentional invasion/colonization of land; the conquest of the indigenous peoples; the killing of them to the extent that they can barely reproduce themselves and come close to extinction; their classification as vermin by the invaders; and the attempted destruction of their religious systems. Indigenocide is consistent with the continued existence of indigenous peoples where they are classified as a separate caste.<sup>95</sup> Accordingly, not all imperialisms are genocidal. The British occupation of India, for example, was

92 *Ibid.*, 239.

93 Alison Palmer, *Colonial Genocide* (Adelaide: Crawford House 2000), 209. For Palmer, this distinction is more important than terms like 'colonial genocide'.

94 Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe, 'The massacre of Aboriginal history', *Overland*, no. 163, September 2001, 36.

95 *Ibid.*, 37. Some of these items, particularly the question of intention to destroy a group 'in part', are discussed and approved by the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia: see *Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstic* at [www.un.org/icty/krstic/TrialC1/judgement/index.htm](http://www.un.org/icty/krstic/TrialC1/judgement/index.htm) (as of 25 July 2002).

not a project of settlement, and the colonizers relied on the labour of the locals, which, as Sartre had noted earlier, was an impediment to physical genocide.<sup>96</sup>

What are we to make of these post-liberal theories? Their obvious virtue is to correct the liberal blindness regarding the non-state determinants of genocidal behaviour and policy development. They show that indigenous genocides were not merely the contingent outcome of aberrant settler violence, but inhered in the structure and logic of the colonial project.<sup>97</sup> The implications of Barta's case are especially striking, in particular his point that, while colonial Australia was a genocidal society rather than a genocidal state, Nazi Germany was a genocidal state but not a genocidal society. Here is food for thought that liberals have been reluctant to digest.<sup>98</sup> Yet, the post-liberal insights come at the cost of a certain blindness, namely, blurring an important distinction and proposing a static model that bypasses rather than confronts the problem of the exterminatory consciousness.

To begin with, is it really satisfactory to equate cultural genocide and physical extermination? Few deny that the former is 'horrible', as Zannis, Davis and Churchill insist, but this equation defies deeply held intuitions that probably precede the Holocaust, and I wonder whether it would command a majority. And is Lemkin really an authority for the inclusion of cultural genocide in the core definition of genocide? He explicitly rejected denationalization as a synonym for genocide because it did not connote biological destruction of a people.<sup>99</sup> His listing of cultural measures that destroyed a people are subtended by the intention to eradicate them biologically, not merely to deculturate them. What befell the Jews, he thought, ultimately awaited many Slavic peoples even if less totally; and sure enough the Germans did intend to starve tens of millions of Slavs to reduce the number of 'useless eaters' to make room for the colonization of ethnic Germans.<sup>100</sup> Bauer and Churchill both misread him on this point.<sup>101</sup> Of course, by insisting on cultural genocide as the core of genocide *per se*, the link to colonialism is much easier to establish, especially in relation to policies of assimilation after the conquest of indigenous resistance. It is open to question, also, whether by insisting on its equal status, post-liberals ignore the dynamic relations between cultural and physical genocide, namely, the potential for escalation from the one to the other when the former is successfully resisted, or the de-escalation to the former when indigenous have been 'pacified'.

96 Whether land or labour is the object of the colonial economy is obviously a key variable. For discussions, see Palmer; Patrick Wolfe, 'Land, labor, and difference: elementary structures of race', *American Historical Review*, vol. 106, no. 3, June 2001; Michael Freeman, 'Genocide, civilization and modernity', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1996, 207–23.

97 Cf. Patrick Wolfe, 'Nation and Miscegenation: discursive continuity in the post-Mabo era', *Social Analysis*, vol. 36, 1994, 93–152.

98 Frank Chalk, *Definitions of Genocide and Their Implications for Prediction and Prevention* (Montreal: Montreal Institute of Genocide Studies 1988), 10–12.

99 Lemkin, 80.

100 Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *National Socialist Extermination Policies* (New York: Berghahn Books 2000).

101 Cf. Alan Rosenberg, 'Was the Holocaust unique?', in Wallimann and Dobkowski (eds), 154ff.

Which leads to the static nature of most post-liberal theories. They either posit a checklist of features akin to the liberal love of typologies or, in their radical mode, make a straight equation between settler colonialism and the Holocaust based on the formal criteria of the common striving for living space based on the European sense of racial superiority.<sup>102</sup> Does the concurrence of such formal criteria prove the substantial similarity between the nineteenth-century colonization projects of western, liberal states and Nazi imperialism in Eastern Europe? One could object that the differences are also significant. The one was totalitarian, the other liberal enough that a Native American like Ward Churchill could eventually occupy an academic position at a state university of the perpetrator society (University of Colorado, Boulder). Here, too, the question of theodicy is apparent. The reluctance to advocate western civilization as the good that redeems indigenous suffering is understandable. In light of the knowledge about the fatal impact of colonization on indigenous peoples, who can now preach that gratitude is the appropriate response to the blessings of this civilization? But it is not necessary to commend this theodicy to insist that distinctions be made: Nazi universities did not hire the people it conquered and exterminated.

Ultimately, the post-liberals' account of *why* genocides occur to indigenous peoples is as unsatisfactory as the liberal one. It tends only to deal with the vexed question of intention by defining it away in terms of objective relationships in which no one may be responsible for the mass death.<sup>103</sup> Processes of colonization are denuded of conscious actors, which indicates as impoverished a sociological imagination as the one-sided liberal stress on agency. The fact is that genocide was not an inevitable consequence of European penetration, exploitation, occupation and settlement of the New World. Certainly always racist, colonial regimes could be discriminatory, slaveholding or apartheid-like in character without resorting to extermination.<sup>104</sup> And yet, sometimes it became a policy option. Post-liberals do not examine how occupation policies that are not initially murderous can radicalize or escalate in an exterminatory direction when they are resisted. If the logic of settler colonialism is to occupy and exploit the land (rather than indigenous labour), then it displays *genocidal moments* when the process is put under pressure and is in crisis.<sup>105</sup> In other words, colonialism needs to be viewed as a dynamic process. And, as Mark Levene has stressed, it must also be set in international context. The struggle to construct viable nation-states is an imperative that plays itself

102 Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*; Jaimes, 4ff.; Lal, 1188.

103 Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* (London: Sage 1990), 80. Fein's own proposal for the better specification of 'criminal acts and . . . standards for social policy to differentiate policies and strategies which protect and which destroy indigenous peoples' is vague and does not address the salient issues.

104 George M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1997).

105 I attempt to apply this approach to Australian colonialism in A. Dirk Moses, 'An antipodean genocide? The origin of the genocidal moment in the colonization of Australia', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2000, 89–106.

out on the violent frontier far away from the metropolitan capitals of Europe.<sup>106</sup> Sartre saw this potential in post-war genocides, but it is in the pre-war context that they are in fact most apparent. And this is when the so-called 'unintended consequences' of civilization were indulged by colonial and metropolitan elites.

### Towards a new theory of indigenous genocide and the Holocaust

It is too simple, then, to argue that colonialism is basically non-genocidal (the liberal view) or that it essentially is (the post-liberal view). But what of the philosophical argument that genocide is an 'essentially contested concept'? Like 'art', 'social justice' or 'the Christian life', it is necessarily open, persistently vague, and definable in various ways because no criteria exist by which to adjudge one definition as 'true', and no amount of discussion can settle the issue conclusively.<sup>107</sup> The conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas we have canvassed so far suggest that the concept is fated to exist without an ultimate determination of its meaning. Too much trauma has been caused, and too many individual and group emotions and political claims are invested in the term for it to be regarded as a purely heuristic device. And, after all, more than a strong whiff of criminality attends any policy or process associated with the term. But this does not entail intellectual defeat. If the positivism implicit in the vain search for a neutral definition is no longer sustainable on epistemological grounds, the challenge for historians and social scientists is to work through their often traumatic emotional investment in their own position and engage in two tasks: acknowledge the broad areas of consensus in the discussion; and try to imagine the genocides of modernity as part of a single process rather than merely in comparative (and competitive) terms. Let us address each in turn.

Despite the polemics, an implicit consensus exists regarding the relationship between structure and agency because the two can never be separated entirely. Structures cannot exist without their embodiment in human beings, a relationship recognized by Marx when he wrote: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please.'<sup>108</sup> If agency is indispensable, then the question of intention cannot be defined away, especially if one wants to retain the radically transgressive nature of genocide, a heinous crime in international law. Criminality cannot inhere in processes or structures, only in conscious agents. A 'criminal' or 'genocidal' process is a misnomer that draws attention away from the fact that usually some agent of mass killing or

106 Mark Levene, 'A dissenting voice: Or how current assumptions of deterring and preventing genocide may be looking at the problem through the wrong end of the telescope', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 5, 2003, forthcoming; Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Modern Age*, vol. 1, *The Coming of Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003, forthcoming).

107 William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, 3rd edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1993), 10–41. W. B. Gallie, 'Essentially contested concepts', in Max Black (ed.), *The Importance of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 1962), 121–46.

108 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers 1963), 15.

death can be identified and held responsible, even if posthumously.<sup>109</sup> Consequently, Leo Kuper's suggestion of an 'affinity' between colonialism and genocide is to be welcomed, but his coining of the term 'genocidal processes' to cover the non-deliberate causes of indigenous death—'massacres [!], appropriation of land, introduction of diseases, and arduous conditions of labor'—is misleading.<sup>110</sup>

For this reason, even post-liberals prize identifiable exterminatory intention as 'smoking gun' evidence of genocide. Churchill, for example, proposes a differentiated schema of genocides based on the extent of self-conscious exterminatory consciousness. Using the analogy of the United States murder law, he distinguishes between genocide 'in the first degree' (subjective murderous *mens rea*), 'in the second degree' (genocide not directly intended, but attendant to other criminal behaviour) and 'in the third degree' (in which the death results from reckless conduct).<sup>111</sup> This approach is not without precedent.<sup>112</sup> In nineteenth-century English law, persons were inferred to have intended the 'natural consequences' of their actions: if the results proscribed were reasonably foreseeable as a likely consequence of their actions, the presumption was that those accused had intended the result.<sup>113</sup> On this reading, the definition of intention is not limited to the subjectively intended result, and this is important for colonialism, in which the conscious agent is exceedingly difficult to pin down. Because colonial states did not exercise unlimited authority in their lands, ruled through 'mediating powers' and were supervised by distant, metropolitan governments in Europe, identifying the genocidal perpetrator is not straightforward.

Consider the case of the British in nineteenth-century Australia. The Colonial Office in London constantly warned the settlers—both the colonial governors and the pastoralists—not to exterminate the Aborigines. Yet, thousands of Aborigines were killed. The Aboriginal population declined drastically for a number of reasons, primarily disease, in all areas soon after contact with Europeans, but massacres were also prevalent. Was the catastrophic population decline genocidal? If we use a differentiated concept of intention, authorities in London cannot any more escape responsibility than the Australian-based governors and the direct perpetrators of the many massacres. For while they wrung their hands about frontier violence, they were unwilling to cease the colonization project despite the manifest consequences of

109 Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Colonialism and the Holocaust: towards an archaeology of genocide', in A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Genocide and Settler Society* (New York: Berghahn Books 2003, forthcoming).

110 Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1981), 45; Leo Kuper, 'Other selected cases of genocide and genocidal massacres: types of genocide', in Israel W. Charny (ed.), *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographical Review* (London, Mansell 1988), 156.

111 Ward Churchill, 'Genocide: toward a functional definition', *Alternatives*, vol. 11, 1986, 413. See also his discussion in *A Little Matter of Genocide*, 431ff. Chalk and Jonassohn, 118–20.

112 Alexander K. A. Greenawalt, 'Rethinking genocidal intent: the case for a knowledge-based interpretation', *Columbia Law Review*, December 1999, 2259–94.

113 Lord Diplock in the House of Lords: *R v. Lemon*, AC [1979] 617 at 636.

tribal extermination through violence and extinction by disease. In the 1830s the humanitarian liberals in the Colonial Office were acutely conscious of the struggle transpiring on the other side of the world, on which a Select Committee report in 1837 urged the British government to assume moral responsibility for the indigenous peoples of South Africa, the Australian colonies and North America, lest they 'ceased to exist'.<sup>114</sup> But the report made virtually no impact, and despite admonishing missives from London and occasional colonial compromises, the fatal pattern of events continued to unfold unchanged such that Colonial Office officials ultimately resigned themselves to the inevitable:

The causes and the consequences of this state of things are clear and irremediable [wrote one official], nor do I suppose that it is possible to discover any method by which the impending catastrophe, namely, the elimination of the Black Race, can be averted.<sup>115</sup>

The discourse of inevitability may be evidence for the proposition that colonialism was a process that no central agency controlled, and therefore that no one can be held responsible for its unfortunate consequences. After all, they regarded indigenous extinction as the regrettable aspect of the otherwise redeeming story of human progress, as biologists, anthropologists and naturalists were happy to assure them.<sup>116</sup> Certainly, colonialism in Australia, as elsewhere, could not be halted in the manner of flicking a light switch. The Colonial Office, for example, was only a small part of a massive state apparatus. But only a miserably attenuated concept of intention would absolve it in these circumstances. The rhetoric of inevitability also served to mask choices open to policymakers, choices they were not prepared to entertain because they fundamentally approved of the civilizing process in which they were engaged. The fact is that they did not take their own humanitarian convictions seriously enough to implement the radical measures necessary to prevent indigenous deaths, whether caused by massacre or disease, for it would entail relinquishing control of the land and jeopardizing the colonizing mission. Talk of inexorable extinction reflected a racist theodicy as much as governmental impotence. The disappearance of indigenous peoples from the face of the earth was a natural consequence of the (in)action of European elites, and

114 See the discussion of R. H. W. Reece, *Aborigines and Colonists* (Sydney: Sydney University Press 1974), 132ff.

115 *Ibid.*, 139; A. G. L. Shaw, 'British policy toward the Australian Aborigines, 1830-1850', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 25, 1992, 265-85; Henry Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain? The Question of Genocide in Australia's History* (Ringwood, Victoria: Viking Press 2001), ch. 6. See also Smith, 'Human destructiveness and politics', in Wallimann and Dobkowski (eds), 23.

116 Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 1997); Patrick Brantlinger, "'Dying races": rationalizing genocide in the nineteenth century', in Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh (eds), *The Decolonization of Imagination* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books 1995), 43-56.

they knew it on the frontier, in the colonial capital and back home at the imperial seat of power. Where genocide was not explicitly intended, then it was implicitly, in the sense of the silent condoning, sometimes agonized acceptance, of events held to be somehow 'inevitable'.<sup>117</sup>

*The racial century, c. 1850–1950*

Racial extinction, then, was a common notion in Europe long before the Holocaust.<sup>118</sup> But if claims of Australian or American holocausts are hyperbolic, is it possible nonetheless to relate colonial genocides to the mass exterminations of the twentieth century, in particular, to that of European Jewry?<sup>119</sup> It is, if they are linked as constituents of a *unified process*. The earliest attempt to conceptualize them as a totality is Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).<sup>120</sup> It is customary at conferences now to refer to her linkage of imperialism (to which she devotes a third of her book) and the Holocaust, but so far only promissory notes have been issued, although historians like Jürgen Zimmerer are on the case.<sup>121</sup> What is striking about Arendt's explanatory strategy is her mediation of structural and cultural methods. Eschewing the intuitive and popular approach of seeking the roots of fascism in German history alone, she thematized European history as a whole to lay bare the various crises caused by modernization. Central to her analysis is what she calls 'the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie', a concept fundamental both to imperialism and totalitarianism. 'Imperialism must be considered the first state in political rule of the bourgeoisie rather than the last stage of capitalism.'<sup>122</sup> Contrary to modernization theorists who regarded incomplete bourgeois revolutions as the misdevelopment that led to fascism, Arendt saw the gradual increase in political power of the rising middle class after the mid-nineteenth century as the key issue.<sup>123</sup> For this class sought to use politics to expedite its economic aims, namely, to transcend the limits of

117 On the concept of implied intention, see Palmer, 194, and Hugo Adam Bedau, 'Genocide in Vietnam', in Virginia Held, Sidney Morgenbesser and Thomas Nagel (eds), *Philosophy, Morality and International Affairs* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1974), 5–46.

118 Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate all the Brutes* (London: Granta Books 1996); Brantlinger.

119 Mark Levene, 'Why is the twentieth century the century of genocide', *Journal of World History*, no. 11, 2000, 305–36.

120 For fine appraisals of Arendt's work, see Ned Curthoys, 'The politics of Holocaust representation: the worldly typologies of Hannah Arendt', *Arena Journal*, vol. 16, 2001, 49–74; Steven E. Aschheim, *In Times of Crisis: Essays on European Culture, Germans, and Jews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 2001); and Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992).

121 Zimmerer, 'Colonialism and Nazi genocide'. See also his *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner: Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia*, 2nd edn (Münster and Hamburg: Lit Verlag 2002).

122 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd edn (London: George Allen and Unwin 1958), 138.

123 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press 1966); Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1968). See the fundamental critique of David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984).

the nation-state for the world-wide investment of its capital, and to cast the world in its own image.<sup>124</sup> She held this development to be disastrous for, as is well known, Arendt regarded the bourgeoisie as the agent of 'the social', the realm of material necessity, counterpoised to 'the political', which she prized as the space of collective decision-making that guaranteed human autonomy and freedom.<sup>125</sup> The odium of imperialism, then, inhered in the occlusion of the political realm by the social, with the consequence that the bourgeois political universe, exemplified and first articulated by Thomas Hobbes, began to infect politics: the world became Hobbesian as brutal competition and racist domination replaced citizenship.

But that is not all. Arendt implied that totalitarianism is a radicalized form of the 'moderate imperialism' whose unrelenting and limitless striving for world domination was always fettered by the nation-state before 1914.

National institutions resisted throughout the brutality and megalomania of imperialist aspirations, and bourgeois attempts to use the state and its instruments of violence for its own economic purposes were always only half successful. This changed when the German bourgeoisie staked everything on the Hitler movement and aspired to rule with the help of the mob.<sup>126</sup>

What Arendt is arguing bears closely on the previous discussion of theories of colonial genocide, for her vision of the modern pathology is that society (that is, the bourgeoisie) gradually takes over the state and uses it for social rather than political ends; indeed, that totalitarianism is the apogee of that process.<sup>127</sup> Clearly, liberal theorists of genocide and totalitarianism misunderstand Arendt if they invoke her as the authority for their propositions, as she is arguing that the totalitarian energy that produces the concentration camps emanates from the imperatives of the economic system. And yet, although there is an obvious post-liberal dimension to her account, she is interested in showing how this energy became embodied in ideology and state policies. What she achieves, then, is a sublation of liberal and post-liberal positions that incorporates the insights of both into a new perspective, the ideal methodological advance in the philosophy of the social sciences.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, the universal and particular are carefully negotiated. Rather than taking a 'special path' to modernity or standing apart *sui generis* from the other European powers, Germany is the exemplar of an experience they all underwent in varying degrees of intensity. It is the country where the process occurred most radically.<sup>129</sup>

124 Arendt, 125.

125 See Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998).

126 Arendt, 124.

127 *Ibid.*, 123.

128 Geoffrey Brahm Levey, 'Theory choice and the comparison of rival theoretical perspectives in political sociology', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, vol. 26, no. 1, March 1996, 26–60; John Gerring, *Social Science Methodology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001), 14–17.

129 Some commentators have accused Arendt—unfairly in my view—of thereby quarantining German intellectual traditions, to which she was in thrall, from fascism: Ernest Gellner,

There are good reasons today to revise central features of Arendt's account. Her talk of 'the mob' is anachronistic, her views on the Jewish question quixotic, the concept of totalitarianism is suspect, the section on imperialism is based on the superseded views of Hobson and Lenin, and the contention false that empires weakened nation-states.<sup>130</sup> But such superannuation is normal for a book written over fifty years ago. What is significant is Arendt's dazzling deployment of the full ensemble of modern sociological categories to track the emergence of modern extermination. What she produced was not a contribution to the stale debate between structure and agency, based as it is on an atomistic world-view in which causation and independent/dependent variables are supposed to explain this or that outcome. Nor did she write a conventional synthesis in which the narrative shows how 'one thing led to another'. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is a phenomenology of modernity in that same way that Ernst Nolte's *Three Faces of Fascism* traces the evolution of fascism in the context of endogenous dynamics in Europe since the Enlightenment.<sup>131</sup> Their point is not to identify a single causal variable, nor to expose static structures,<sup>132</sup> but to lay bare the radicalization of a system. By this method, the nation-state is not the 'sovereign ontological subject' of explanation,<sup>133</sup> yet neither is it discarded as an agent in the historical process in the manner of world systems theory.<sup>134</sup> Vertically distinctive national histories are only explicable in relation to the broader processes that a horizontally integrative history can better provide.<sup>135</sup> Scholars in genocide studies need to look carefully at methodological developments in world history.

What is required, then, is an account of European modernity that links nation-building, imperial competition and international and intra-national racial struggle to the ideologically driven catastrophes of the twentieth century. The proposition I should like to advance is that the hundred years roughly following 1850 can be conceptualized as the 'racial century' whose most basic feature was competition between rival projects of nation-building and 'people making' (that is, the fashioning of ethnically homogeneous populations domestically) that culminated in the Holocaust of European Jewry and other

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*Culture, Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987), 89ff.

130 Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin, *Reappraisals in British Imperial History* (London: Macmillan 1975), 1–21; David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2000), 14ff.

131 E. Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1965).

132 See the critique of structuralism by Michael Adas, 'Bringing ideas and agency back in', in Philip Pomper, Richard H. Elphick and Richard T. Vann (eds), *World History: Ideologies, Structures, and Identities* (Oxford: Blackwell 1998), 81–104.

133 Antoinette Burton, 'Who needs the nation: interrogating "British" history', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 10, no. 3, September 1997, 232.

134 Stuart Ward, 'Transcending the nation: a global imperial history', in Antoinette Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

135 Richard Fletcher, cited in *ibid.* For a recent, splendid example of such an approach, see Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (London and New York: Verso 2001).

racial minorities in the 1940s.<sup>136</sup> Such an approach links the genocides that occurred in the European colonies with the intra-European population politics of the inter-war and war years. The nation-states of Europe, including the Ottoman empire and subsequent Turkish nation-state, engaged in increasingly extreme measures of self-assertion abroad and ethnic 'purification' at home, as they were forced to compete for survival as viable powers, which were universally articulated in terms of a race whose fate it was the role of the state to secure. Moreover, it was the hundred years in which explicitly racial categories were the prime source of policy legitimation.

European history in this period was a *dynamic process* rather than a succession of events. Consequently, it is necessary to situate the racial violence on the imperial periphery, essential for the retention of European dominance in the nineteenth century, as part of the same flow of events that led to the eruption of violence in Europe in 1914 and again a quarter of a century later. In this way, the genocidal episodes of the 'racial century' are linked in a complex causal nexus of upwardly spiralling violence against real and imagined threats to the viability of marginal nation-states. With the adoption of the UN conventions on human rights and genocide in the late 1940s and the subsequent sea-change in public opinion regarding racial issues, the 'racial century' came to an end.

To be sure, genocides of indigenous peoples by Europeans began centuries earlier, and the exterminatory dimension of nation-building was evident in the Vendée conflagration during the French Revolution.<sup>137</sup> Obviously, such processes so central to European modernity have long histories, and ethnic politics are hardly new. Remarkable about the racial century, however, is the coincidence of Great Power projection into and penetration of the world and the degree of self-consciousness and self-justification about what they are doing. In other words, the mid-nineteenth century marks the beginning of the especially intense phase of competition between rival projects of nation-building and people-construction at home and abroad ('competitive self-mobilization') that initiated a dynamic of 'cumulative radicalisation', culminating in the 'European civil war' (Arno Mayer) of the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>138</sup>

This approach thereby avoids the twin danger of absolute difference and absolute similarity. The former treats genocides episodically and in isolation from one another, the latter places the blame for the catastrophes of the twentieth century at the feet of a monolithically conceived 'modernity' or

136 'The racial century' is the title of my current research project.

137 John Docker, *1492: Poetics of Diaspora* (London: Continuum 2001); Reynald Secher, *Le Génocide franco-français: La Vendée-Venge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1986). Cf. Arno Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2000).

138 Cf. Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, 'World history in a global age', *American Historical Review*, vol. 100, no. 4, October 1995, 1034–60; Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, 'Global violence and nationalizing wars in Eurasia and America: the geopolitics of war in the mid-nineteenth century', *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, vol. 38, no. 4, 1996, 619–57.

'civilization', which tends to collapse the distinctions between the Holocaust and the preceding genocides.<sup>139</sup> The task is to relate each genocide to others in a way that allows them to retain their distinctive features. The concept of a cumulative radicalization and metaphor of upward spiral permit such a linkage. What is striking about the Holocaust is that it was a project of racial cleansing and self-assertion that sought *consciously* to achieve for Germans what the imperial endeavours of rival European powers had achieved in a largely haphazard manner before the First World War: permanent security and well-being for the domestic population conceived as the citadel and bearer of a superior European culture.<sup>140</sup> The dispersion of agency and consciousness in the period of 'classical' colonialism is gathered up and located centrally in a totalitarian state, notwithstanding recent research about the importance of peripheral initiatives in the first phase of killing in 1941. Here was the most radical genocidal moment of the racial century, the culmination of the violence directed towards inner and outer enemies.

Why, then, did Germany produce the Holocaust? Tentatively, one can speculate that, as a latecomer to the nation-building and imperialism game, its elites were forced to imitate and improve the models of the established powers. In the struggle to be a viable Great Power, it was not surprising that the usual colonial ruthlessness was intensified. But it is unsatisfactory to revert solely to national modes of explanation. Expansionist and racist lobby groups existed in all European powers.<sup>141</sup> The analytical task is to explain why they gained more or less influence in different countries during the racial century, and here too the context of international competition and population politics is central. The radical right in Germany was only able to achieve a breakthrough—and then only electorally in 1930—in the wake of the national and demographic catastrophe of the First World War.<sup>142</sup> There were peacemakers on both sides in 1917, but they were thwarted by those on both sides who insisted on holding out for total victory.<sup>143</sup>

By linking colonial genocides and the Holocaust in this way, I hope to achieve two things: to convince the believers in theodicy that they are not on

139 Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1989); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1991). See the critical discussion in A. Dirk Moses, 'Modernity and the Holocaust', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 43, 1997, 441–5.

140 Richard Rubinstein, 'Afterword: genocide and civilization', in Wallimann and Dobkowski (eds), 288; Annegret Ehmann, 'From colonial racism to Nazi population policy: the role of the so-called Mischlinge', in Berenbaum and Peck (eds), 115–33; Tony Barta, 'Discourses of genocide in Germany and Australia: a linked history', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 25, 2001, 37–56; Zimmerer, 'Colonialism and Nazi genocide'; Eric Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2003, forthcoming).

141 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House 1987).

142 Geoff Eley, 'Conservatives and the radical nationalists in Germany', in Martin Blinkhorn (ed.), *Fascists and Conservatives* (London: Unwin Hyman 1990), 50–70.

143 Douglas Newton, *British Policy and the Weimar Republic, 1918–1919* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997).

the side of the angels; and to allow members of victim groups to situate their suffering, and that of others, in the sorry tale of European world domination. It would be idle to regard such contextualization as a consolation, but it may be the only way to work through trauma and thereby release the utopian potential that modernity promised, for the mutual recognition of common suffering is a powerful moral source for the solidarity needed to prevent future victims of progress.

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