

War as the Key to Unlocking Mass Murder

The Rwandan Genocide Revisited

ARTHUR N. GILBERT, PHD*

KRISTINA HOOK

Since the term *genocide* was coined in the 1940s to classify specific crimes committed with the intent to destroy the existence of a group of people, this field of study has emerged as one of the most diverse and perhaps even the most divisive in modern academe. In his classic study *Revolution and Genocide: On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust*, Robert Melson argues that war, revolution, and genocide are intertwined as revolutionary regimes concurrently turn outward to fight wars and inward to exterminate enemies in their midst.¹ Despite the influence of Melson's framework in this scholastic field, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen dissents, arguing that genocide has little to do with war. In his view, genocide originates in the minds of people, who are in turn affected by culture and ideology.² Such strong differences in opinion are of more than academic interest. Understanding genocide through the proper scholastic paradigm may aid in the prevention of future instances of mass murder. We have therefore identified Rwanda as an important test case for these two diverse hypotheses. Drawing from a wide range of influential scholars and historical information, this article seeks to place the Rwandan case study within the general debate on mass murder. By doing so, we are able to identify not only current trends

*An associate professor of international studies at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver, for many years, Arthur N. Gilbert teaches graduate courses on war and genocide. In addition to teaching and research, he collects and exhibits graphic art on the Holocaust produced by survivors and well-known artists who have memorialized it in etchings, lithographs, and woodcuts. His most recent illustrated article, "Etched in Memory: The Graphic Art of the Holocaust," is in the July 2013 issue of the *Journal of the Print World*.

Kristina Hook graduated as a valedictorian of the University of Florida with a BA in anthropology before earning her MA in international development at the University of Denver's Josef Korbel School of International Studies. She has published articles and presented papers at international conferences on topics including genocide and mass violence, postconflict reconstruction and coordination, humanitarian lessons learned, and methods of merging theory and practice in sustainable development programming. She is currently a 2013 US Presidential Management Fellows Program finalist.

in genocide scholarship but also some important gaps in present Rwanda-related research.

The Melson Hypothesis

We have recently marked the 20th anniversary of the publication of Melson's influential *Revolution and Genocide*. Moving away from theoretical concepts like totalitarianism, fascism, and communism, Melson, whose family members were Holocaust survivors, pointed genocide studies in new and fruitful directions by introducing a framework that concentrated on structural dynamics, allowing him to compare genocidal events—an important step because he could move beyond beliefs of Holocaust uniqueness, a path later taken by historians such as Steven T. Katz.³ Consequently, Melson was able to observe similarities more universal and less dependent on the specificities of the Western tradition. Away from Western Europe, a particularly vicious genocide had taken place in Cambodia, a place far removed from the previously suggested ethnic animosities, religious traditions, or historical political hostilities that had characterized theories of European-based mass violence.⁴ A broadening of the genocide text is obvious in the construction of his book, which begins with a comparison between the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide of 1915 and then morphs into thoughts on what Melson refers to as two illustrative and confirming cases of genocide: the Stalinist destruction of the Kulaks and the “autogenocide” in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. We have no doubt that if Melson were writing his book 20 years later, he would include references to the recently “discovered” genocide by Germany in Southwest Africa against the Herero people in the first decade of the twentieth century and, most importantly for our purposes, the Rwandan genocide, which took place only two years after the publication of Melson's book.

At the heart of his structural analysis is the linkage between revolution and war. Theoretically, the Melsonian viewpoint consists of a triad of revolution, war, and genocide. With bloodshed binding this destructive package together, it is dangerous to ignore the fact that the tentacles of violence make all three blood brothers. One important implication of this theory necessitates that praising either war or revolution as necessary and proper must take into account the potentiality of genocidal consequences. Melson spells out this repercussion clearly in both the introduction and four historical case studies. To include a more modern example, we might point to the widely reported instances of escalating violence against the Coptic Christian minority in Egypt following the Arab Revolution and suggest vigilant monitoring by fields ranging from human rights to international security.⁵

Returning again to Melson's conceptual framework, we see that the author begins by presenting four major points:

1. Revolutions created the conditions for genocidal movements to come to power.
2. Revolutions made possible the imposition of radical ideologies and new orders that legitimized genocide.
3. The social mobilization of low status or despised groups helped to make them targets of genocide.
4. Revolutions leading to wars facilitated the implementation of genocide as a policy of the state.⁶

For the purposes of this article, proposition four is most important since Melson claims that war is a facilitator of genocide in revolutionary states. To be clear, he is aware that not all revolutions cause genocide; rather, we are talking about tendencies often avoided. Nonetheless, this propensity for violence, which can snowball into mass killing, stems from the need for revolutionary regimes to legitimize themselves, often by creating categories of "insider" versus "outsider." Such a phenomenon is of course standard fare with regard to the process of state building as well as revolutionary regimes. For example, Marx brilliantly explores exclusionary nationalism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when both expulsion and murder are woven into the foundation of states like Great Britain, France, and Spain.⁷ R. I. Moore, who also adopts it as a major theme, contends that the creation of new states in Western Europe depended upon the exclusion of heretics, lepers, and Jews.⁸ Other scholastic efforts have sought to continue such chains of reasoning centuries later in Western Europe. However, whether the nations studied in such works can accurately be described as revolutionary in the post-French Revolution era remains problematic. Still, analyses of the French Revolution by scholars like François Furet expound upon the fear of an aristocratic plot among revolutionaries, indicating that many of the same purgative impulses that Melson would anticipate are at work in the process of state building.⁹

At this point in his analysis, Melson argues that "war itself . . . is intimately related to revolution," thus closing the revolution-war-genocide triangle.¹⁰ He asserts that

1. War gives rise to feelings of vulnerability and/or exultation. Such feelings engender or intensify the fear that the state's internal enemies, those that earlier have been labeled as the "enemies of the revolution," are part of an insidious plot with the regime's international foes to undo the revolution or even to destroy the state and the political community itself...
2. War increases the autonomy of the state from internal social forces, including public opinion and its moral constraints.

3. War closes off other policy options of dealing with internal “enemies,” such as expulsion, assimilation, or segregation.¹¹

Our analysis found point three of particular interest because it places genocide along a continuum of political behavior and in so doing makes it, in a very literal sense, the “final solution” when expulsion, assimilation, or segregation have failed. At this point, we suspect that Melson clearly is thinking of Holocaust debate between intentionalists and functionalists, the latter position viewing genocide as one of several possible options in the process of purging the state and eliminating the enemy within the borders. Here again we note that Melson is writing before the 1994 Rwandan genocide; therefore, his triad is not tested against this event.

The Goldhagen Paradigm

Daniel Goldhagen, another vastly influential figure in genocide research, also shares a family history of Holocaust survivors, a fact explored in his documentary film *Worse than War* (based on his book of the same name).¹² Despite this similarity, Goldhagen has travelled a very different intellectual path than Melson. For Goldhagen, the structuralist arguments of Melson miss the point. Instead, Goldhagen’s constant refrain becomes, “Mass murder begins in the minds of men.”¹³ Indeed, with his important but controversial book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, Goldhagen began his search for the genocidal impulse not in revolution and war but in culture and ideology.¹⁴ In his view, the energy and passion of ordinary German citizens were directed to the persecution and slaughter of Jews because these Germans had been nurtured in an ideology of eliminationist anti-Semitism. As the Jews became the symbol of evil, their murder was predicated less on domestic and international conditions and more on culture. We have neither the space nor time to deal with the long, angry debate over this thesis. Suffice it to say that it was certainly received with considerably less enthusiasm than Melson’s study of Holocaust events.

Goldhagen’s second major book, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfilled Duty of Repair*, also focuses almost exclusively on culture and ideology.¹⁵ Goldhagen now expands blame assigned to ordinary Germans to advance a perspective that views the Catholic Church as fomenting anti-Semitism throughout its history. Essentially, he creates a long-chain argument that transitions the space and time component of his previous work into a religious tradition which began during the Roman Empire—before Germany was a nation-state. In Goldhagen’s own words, the “Germaness” of anti-Semitism was embedded in a larger framework of Catholicism: “The Christian

age-old view of the Jews as authors of so much evil was naturally adopted by racist antisemites, most noticeably in Germany. Germaness was fused with Christianity, rendering Jewishness the nefarious Other, not just for Christendom but also for Germania.”¹⁶

Thus, in Goldhagen’s culturally and ideologically influenced paradigm, he attributes the murder of six million Jews to Catholicism, Christianity as a whole, and even the Gospels in the New Testament. Although not claiming that the Catholic Church was the sole purveyor of the Holocaust, Goldhagen nonetheless asserts that Christianity provided a cultural text for promoting anti-Semitism. Because he strongly believes that Christianity paved the way for the devaluing of the Jewish people and allowed for the creation of the nefarious Other, Goldhagen’s stance centers around a combination of religious ideology and cultural predilection in the perpetuation of the Holocaust.

As discussed above, Melson’s structural emphasis on a triad of war, revolution, and genocide is quite distinct from Goldhagen’s perspective. The tension between Goldhagen’s cultural and ideological approach and Melson’s structuralism reaches its apotheosis in Goldhagen’s book *Worse than War*:

Mass murder and elimination are also not the stepchildren of the euphoria of military victory. If vanquishing an opponent creates a sense of omnipotence and a desire (not previously existing) to annihilate entire populations, then all or certainly many more victors would annihilate their enemies. . . .

Our era’s differing landscapes of war and of mass murder belie the common belief that war itself causes annihilationist programs. War has provided the occasion for would-be mass murderers to finally act and has therefore been an *arena* for mass murder. But that is different from war itself producing it.¹⁷ (emphasis in original)

To establish his point, Goldhagen then turns to specific examples of genocide in the twentieth century in order to separate mass killing from war.¹⁸ For example, he writes that Stalin’s genocidal practices in the Soviet Union predated World War II and indeed abated during the war. Similarly, most of Mao’s mass killing in China transpired when he had total control of the country. Further, slaughter in Tibet took place during occupation and not war. Again, the Indonesians’ slaughter of their left-wing opponents in the mid-1960s occurred during peacetime, as did instances of mass violence and killing in Argentina, Chile, and Guatemala. Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, however, is Goldhagen’s first foray into Rwanda and neighboring Burundi. He explicitly writes that the “Tutsi slaughter of at least 100,000 Hutu in Burundi in 1972, and smaller numbers three other times, had nothing to do with war.”¹⁹ Such a statement would then view the Rwandan genocide, which forms the heart of this article, as not

precipitated by war but prompted by internal power relationships in a single country.

Having now discussed the important difference between the Melson and Goldhagen frameworks, we argue that the Rwandan genocide of 1994 serves as an important test case for disciples of each school of thought. Scholars have approached this now-infamous example of genocide from a variety of perspectives. Yet, as we gauge where genocide scholarship is moving in our time, we contend that a major question boils down to a comparison of Melson's and Goldhagen's divergent views. Is the horrific slaughter of an estimated 800,000–1,000,000 people over a three-month span due to war and revolution, or is it a result of the distinct history, ideology, and cultural features in this central African country? To answer this important question, we now delve into this nation's past, gauging whether notions of war and revolution are consistent with the historical reality of Rwanda.

The Rwandan Genocide and Revolution

If Melson had written his book after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, we believe he would have most likely treated conditions in this nation as revolutionary. Like that of any nation, Rwanda's history is extremely complex, and space constraints preclude a more thorough detailing of the myriad of significant events. In summary, however, we believe that the Rwandan genocide had its roots even in the origins of Rwandan independence, a fact to which we shortly return.

By the time of the genocide in 1994, Rwanda's population included three ethnic groups: Hutu (approximately 85 percent), Tutsi (14 percent), and Twa (1 percent).²⁰ Social, economic, and political pressures that had been building throughout the 1990s reached a breaking point on 6 April 1994 when an airplane carrying Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundian president Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down as it prepared to land in Kigali, Rwanda.²¹ This assassination is now considered the catalyst of the Rwandan genocide. Responsibility for the attack remains a subject of debate, with some pointing to the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and others blaming government-aligned Hutu extremists, claiming that they were trying to halt negotiations with the RPF.²²

A tidal wave of violence began immediately after this event, and Hutu extremists seized control of the government, slaying the more moderate political leaders who might have tempered the killing.²³ Both Tutsis and Hutus were murdered, but Tutsis bore the brunt of the violence as men, women, and children died in their homes or as they tried to flee. Although the number of people who par-

ticipated in and who fell victim to this 100-day period of mass murder is still disputed, the United Human Rights Council estimates that up to 800,000 were killed—almost three-quarters of the Tutsi population. The council also believes that as many as 200,000 people participated in the slaughter.²⁴

Melson does not offer a precise definition of genocide, but it appears self-evident that state breakdown over time in the case of the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust is broad enough to include the Rwanda case. In a telling comment, he argues that “a revolutionary regime needs to construct a new system of legitimation and to redefine the identity of the political community as the ‘people,’ the ‘nation,’ the ‘class,’ or the ‘race.’”²⁵ The period from independence to genocide in Rwanda was indeed characterized by such a struggle for legitimation and identity. Indeed, Scott Straus argues that historical periods of violence throughout Rwanda’s history exhibited the same (or at least similar) dynamics of violence that would later be at work during the genocide.²⁶ After describing such periods, he concludes that violence against Tutsi civilians transpired during periods characterized by looming political change, a destabilized nation, and volatile power politics—all factors that support the Melsonian hypothesis.

Historical periods supplied by Straus do support his conjectures.²⁷ The first period of violence occurred from 1957 to 1962, during the eve of Rwanda’s independence from its colonial authorities. At the time, four major political actors existed: (1) the Belgian colonial authorities, who had traditionally supported the Tutsi aristocracy but had capitulated to international pressure for reforms that benefited Hutus; (2) Tutsi traditionalists, who argued against ethnic boundaries and who sought to promote pan-Rwandan nationalism united against European colonial powers; (3) Hutu and Tutsi moderates, who sought gradual change through political compromise; and (4) a nascent Hutu counterelite, who denounced Hutu oppression by Tutsi authorities and saw Rwandan independence as an opportunity for an ethnic redistribution of power. In the wake of the Rwandan king’s sudden and mysterious death, a tense political environment materialized, consisting of impending decolonization, a swiftly deteriorating national relationship with Belgian authorities, and the formation of oppositional political parties. Thus, the coming of independence created political tensions and power uncertainties not unlike the collapse of the monarchy in Germany and the Ottoman Empire and the rise of a new, smaller Turkish state.

As political leaders, both Hutu and Tutsi, became the target of beatings, arrests, and torture, attacks also spread until violence was turned against Tutsi civilians, committed mainly by young Hutu men. The role of Belgium in this historical episode of violence remains significant. In its effort to quell violence, that country consolidated the political relevance of ethnicity by siding with the Hutu insur-

gency and even restructuring Rwanda's local administration along ethnic lines.²⁸ Consequently, the Rwandan revolution and impending independence not only created societal insecurity, upheaval, volatility, and political maneuvering in the face of imminent political change but also intensified forms of retaliation.

The second episode of historically significant violence took place in the immediate aftermath of the Rwandan revolution when two separate occurrences of massacres erupted, the first in 1962 and the second in 1963–64.²⁹ Scholars agree that these massacres, which involved the killing of men, women, and children, took place solely on the basis of categorical ethnicity—that is, the victims were killed simply because they were Tutsis.³⁰ Pertinent trends included a cause-and-effect relationship between retaliation and escalation as attacks by militant Tutsi exiles based outside Rwanda led to counterattacks against Tutsi civilians within Rwanda's borders.³¹ Additionally, it is notable that the 1963–64 massacre took place in the context of eroding power and political fragmentation within President Grégoire Kayibanda's regime. Similar to the dynamics of 1994, Straus explains that “here, as elsewhere, threatened authorities used violence to keep power when their power was most unsettled and at risk.”³²

We think it is important to note here that even though cursory examinations of these events have led some to place blame on notions along the lines of “ancient tribal hatred” or “entrenched ethnic animosity,” more careful appraisals of violent episodes in Rwanda's history, including Straus's assessment, appear to indicate that blaming conflicts solely on ethnicity is an insufficient explanation for the full range of dynamics present. The latter include eroding political power and the fragmentation of President Kayibanda's administration.³³ Additionally, in historical examples such as those mentioned above, topics of “categorical ethnicity” are addressed but, typically, only to indicate that a group was targeted due to its ethnic membership. Such statements do not point exclusively to using ethnicity as a motivating force for killing but as an identifier for who was killed.

The third period of historical violence, occurring in the year 1973, is no exception. Straus notes that during this time of strife and the purging of Tutsis from positions of power, government authorities were responding to feelings of political insecurity and employing violence as a means to wield power.³⁴ Again, ethnic conflict is only part of the story since political fragmentation within Rwanda was supplemented by the rise of militant Tutsi exiles based outside Rwanda in neighboring countries such as Uganda. Unlike the events of 1963, no Tutsi attack precipitated the violence in 1973, but speculation exists that unrest in Rwanda was driven by violence in neighboring Burundi, in which a rebellion led by Burundian Hutus resulted in military-led counterattack, killing 100,000–200,000 Hutu civilians.³⁵ We can therefore speculate that these massacres in turn stoked the fear

and insecurity in Rwanda that civil war and contentious political party rivalries had previously lit.

The last major historical period of violence began in 1990 and would eventually culminate in the 1994 genocide. One surprising feature of the immediate pregenocide phase in Rwanda is that prior to 1994, the country had been characterized by improvements in national infrastructure, economic growth, international support, diplomatic gains, and general political stability under the regime of President Habyarimana.³⁶ In fact, before the genocide, many considered Rwanda a model of political and economic consistency in an otherwise troubled East African region.³⁷ Therefore, it seems that politics rather than economic issues lay at the heart of the problem. In 1990 highly charged political change, fermenting since the 1980s when Rwanda's one-party political system ended, turned violent with an invasion by the Tutsi-led RPF rebel army on 1 October 1990.³⁸ Hard-liner ideology emerged as exemplified by Léon Mugesera, an ideologue belonging to President Habyarimana's political party, who painted a picture of Tutsis as foreigners in Rwanda and vowed that they should be sent to their real home in Ethiopia via the Nyabarongo River.³⁹ A case in point—note that exclusionary nationalism from Hutu radicals escalated as fear of Tutsi military power grew.

This cause-and-effect relationship suggests that the role of elites was of prime importance in touching off the mass killings in 1994. As students of the Rwandan genocide know, the role of leaders and ordinary people has been a major bone of contention since reports of the horror emerged during the 100 days of slaughter. The emphasis on elites in Rwanda owes a great deal to the work of Benjamin Valentino, who notes that they “saw the events of the early 1990s as a threat to the preservation of Hutu political and economic predominance more generally. They appear to have feared not only the loss of their personal privileges but a return to the system of Tutsi domination that had prevailed before 1959.”⁴⁰

Valentino later argues that Hutu radicals pointed to Burundi as an example of how a minority of Tutsis might rise up and murder Hutus, noting that the minority Tutsi community in Rwanda had a powerful ally in the RPF army in Uganda—a force that would be used to massacre the majority Hutus if it were not stopped.⁴¹ In his perspective, then, mass killing became politically useful to elites. The strategy of killing, therefore, was simply another policy tool in the hands of elites—an instrument used to achieve their prioritized political and/or ideological objectives. A deadly logic operates behind elite decision making, according to Valentino's model, for clearly a Tutsi victory would usher in a reversal of fortune, and surely the radical Hutu leaders would themselves be the first to die. Thus, the rhetoric of the radical Hutu leaders sought to wield terror in order to cement

Hutu political status and preserve the new status quo. Mugesera, the ideologue mentioned previously, insisted in a public speech, “Are we really waiting for them [Tutsis] to come and exterminate us? . . . I do not think we are going to allow them to shoot us!”⁴² With such rhetoric, Mugesera urges his audience to unite and crush any Tutsi infiltrators lest the Hutus be killed first: “Do not be afraid, know that anyone whose neck you do not cut is the one who will cut your neck.”⁴³ By doing so, he opens the door to painting genocide as self-preservation. Again, elite exclusionary nationalism looks similar to the process of state building in Europe in the sixteenth century when religious killing, fomented by parties attached to both the Catholic and Protestant denominations of the Christian faith, was the precursor of ethnic killing today.⁴⁴ As we return once more to Melson on the link between revolution and genocide, it is important to note that he stressed that not all revolutions cause genocide.⁴⁵ Instead, we are talking about increased possibility—not prediction—in the same sense that Jack Snyder discussed the increase in the probability of war as states transition to democracy. Here, he conjectures that electoral triumphalism emerges as states overturn oppressive regimes, in turn creating international violence as the power given to the euphoric majority can lead to genocidal violence.⁴⁶

The Rwanda Genocide and War

Turning next to Melson’s connection of genocide to war, we find this relationship more problematic for the case of Rwanda.⁴⁷ The early literature on the 1994 Rwandan genocide focused intensely on the internal maelstrom; consequently, some time passed before scholars placed the killing in a regional and, indeed, international context. The idea that war was a major variable in Rwanda emerged slowly and fitfully in the scholastic world as scholars have been able to conduct fieldwork in more peaceful times and have gathered information from both perpetrators and victims. Clearly, Goldhagen has more room to maneuver and make his case when war is factored into the genocide story.

In this short article, we cannot review all of the literature written in the almost 20-year period since the Rwandan genocide, but we have chosen to apply several important works that we feel are representative. One of the first and most influential writers on the Rwandan genocide, Gérard Prunier, focuses on history and geography, including the colonial effect on the definition of Hutu and Tutsi, the impact of land scarcity, and the effects of high population density. Most importantly, Prunier argues that there was no trace of violence between Hutus and Tutsis before the arrival of Europeans, which ushered in what can be considered a mythic past and an ethnic narrative that would ultimately result in genocide.⁴⁸

The international aspects of the Rwandan genocide center on the diaspora, as large numbers of Tutsis crossed national boundaries into neighboring countries, including Uganda.

Although later writers put more emphasis on war and genocide, Prunier firmly places the events of 1994 into a war text that begins with the October 1990 invasion of the RPF from Uganda.⁴⁹ After a discussion of the role of France and Great Britain in the dangerous situation, he turns to the deteriorating internal political situation, examining Rwandan tribal violence during 1994:

If tribes did not exist, they would have to be invented. In a world where illiteracy is still the rule, where most of the population has horizons which are limited to their parochial world, where ideologies are bizarre foreign gadgets reserved for intellectuals, solidarity is best understood in terms of close community. In turn, these positive (or negative) group feelings are manipulated by the elite in their struggles for controlling scarce and even shrinking financial, cultural and political resources.⁵⁰

According to such a perspective, then, the heart of the genocidal matter is the manipulation of a pliable population by elites in an overpopulated country where the RPF was the dominant Hutu concern. Elites were thus able to convince Hutu peasant masses that “they had no choice but to kill to protect themselves from an evil that was both facelessly abstract and embodied in the most ordinary person living next door.”⁵¹ Moreover, this internal dynamic was augmented by chaos in Burundi to the south, where the Tutsi army staged a mass killing of Hutus and where hundreds of thousands of refugees were fleeing over the southern Rwanda border for a safe haven from the Tutsi onslaught. Therefore, when President Habyarimana died in the airplane crash in 1994, fear of the Tutsi Other escalated. As Prunier states, “Killing had become an act of self-defence because evil incarnate was now threatening to destroy the peaceful agrarian democratic Hutu republic.”⁵² An invading RPF army from the north and an army of refugees from the south are an important part of the genocide story, but the emphasis of Prunier’s account remains primarily on internal dynamics.

Three years later, Philip Gourevitch published his enormously popular account.⁵³ Contributing much to the postgenocide story, Gourevitch adds little on the international political dimensions of the genocide. Instead he concentrates on internal dynamics, particularly the role played by extreme Hutu elites in promoting the uprising that snowballed into genocide.

In 2001 a pivotal book by Mahmood Mamdani pointed Rwanda research in new directions.⁵⁴ Unlike Gourevitch, Mamdani examines Hutu-Tutsi dynamics with particular reference to the creation of societal fear, a dynamic greatly affected by current events taking place in the nations that bordered Rwanda. Mamdani’s account of the early years of independence examines the unusual nature of the

diaspora that emerged during independence. This diaspora became primarily Tutsi, a result of the shift in power between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority. During the transition, this minority lost the political ascendancy given by the Belgian colonial rulers. Consequently, they began leaving Rwanda out of fear, becoming, as Mamdani puts it, “ethnic strangers everywhere.”⁵⁵ Given this pattern, it is not a large stretch to see the Tutsi as an equivalent of the wandering Jew. Stateless in Central Africa, lacking the prospect of return to their home nation, and at the mercy of other political entities and groups, the Tutsi exiles were—in every sense of the word—homeless. For many, Uganda became a second home as well as a safe haven for planning their return. “Next year in Kigali” became the equivalent of “next year in Jerusalem.”

In addition to Uganda, Tutsi refugees made their way to the Congo, Burundi, and Tanzania, a fact that created understandable fears of a fifth column within Rwanda itself. In this scenario, a commonplace one throughout history, the enemy without forms an alliance with the enemy within. As a result, fear of subversion and, indeed, destruction by this unholy alliance creates unbearable tension. Mamdani beautifully summarizes this possibility as he writes on the motivation for genocide:

This is why one needs to recognize that it was not greed—not even hatred—but *fear* which was the reason why the multitudes responded to the call of Hutu Power the closer the war came to home. Hutu Power extremists prevailed not because they promised farmers more land if they killed their Tutsi neighbors—which they did—but because they told farmers that the alternative would be to let RPF take their land and return it to the Tutsi who had been expropriated after 1959.⁵⁶ (emphasis in original)

A later comment from Mamdani reiterates this theme: “They think they have only the choice to kill or be killed.”⁵⁷ Thus, he believes that the genocide essentially boiled down to fear of a dramatically altered body of politics as Hutus felt threatened by the possibility of an outside invasion and/or the Tutsis’ perceived right to return. For Mamdani, neither scarce resources nor cultural variables (e.g., Rwanda’s “culture of obedience”) explain very much about this outburst of mass slaughter. To this author, the answer lies in war and the displacement of one in every seven people in the country—a factor that birthed the great Rwandan diaspora and concomitantly resulted in an ingathering of Hutus fleeing for their lives from Burundi. The collapse of the Rwandan army in the face of the RPF added to the violence, and paramilitary detachments simply joined in the killing. Prevailing logic appears to have emerged that if one could not defeat the enemy at the gates, at least one could defeat the enemy within. This notion would account for the public nature of the genocide. It also prompts Mamdani to claim that this is why institutions such as churches and participants such as hospital

workers, teachers, and even human rights workers facilitated the slaughter.⁵⁸ He writes that such entities, normally the providers of refuge, became the most enthusiastic purveyors of death. His answer to this puzzle becomes a variant of the healing/killing paradox that we often associate with the role of the Nazi doctors during the Holocaust. Although not every Rwandan researcher may agree with Mamdani's viewpoint here, he does write at length about the role of institutions such as the church in the genocide.⁵⁹ In the end, according to Mamdani, war and fear of a revolution that would turn their world upside down appear to have motivated those who perceived that they had the most to lose in the reshuffling of power in Rwanda as they utilized fear and enlisted killers to their cause.⁶⁰ Certainly, the Mamdani account of the genocide fits nicely into the more general framework of Melson.

More recent Rwandan studies feature much on-site research, including interviews conducted with survivors and, even more intriguingly, participants and bystanders. Among these, the previously mentioned work by Straus stands out. Like Mamdani, Straus begins his exploration with war:

Without a war in Rwanda, genocide would not have happened (by war, I mean the civil war that began on April 7, 1994, after the president was assassinated and which the hardliners were losing). War matters for several reasons. First, war provided the essentials for mass killing: security. . . . Second, war legitimized the killing. . . . Third, the war that took place during the genocide was intense and defensive. The war thus created a climate of acute uncertainty and insecurity.⁶¹

Straus then declares, "In short, war underpinned the logic of genocide, war legitimized killing, war empowered hardliners, and war led specialists in violence to engage the domestic political arena."⁶² Additionally, he firmly states that his research illustrates that this genocide was not about "ethnic prejudice, preexisting ethnic antipathy, manipulation from racist propaganda, or nationalist commitments."⁶³ In a claim reminiscent of Christopher Browning's famous work on the role of ordinary men as genocidal killers, Straus observes that "Rwanda's perpetrators were not especially mad, sadistic, hateful, poor, uneducated, ideologically committed, or young."⁶⁴ If he is correct, it also follows that scholars like Goldhagen who focus on ideologies and authoritarian regimes are incorrect in the case of Rwanda.

Straus's conclusions, like Browning's, are remarkably similar to the "banality of evil" argument advanced during the Adolf Eichmann trial by Hannah Arendt.⁶⁵ They also follow the work of genocide scholars like James Waller, who sees the potential for genocide in every person.⁶⁶ Straus's empirical studies also seem to confirm Ervin Staub's well-known book, which stresses the everyday nature of genocidal potential.⁶⁷ When Straus firmly rejects "preexisting ethnic animosity,

widespread prejudice, deeply held ideological beliefs, blind obedience, deprivation, or even greed,” he aligns himself with the writers mentioned above, who deny the significance of culture and long-chain historical arguments of the type that characterize the work of Goldhagen and many others.⁶⁸ For Straus, “the overwhelming majority of perpetrators in rural areas were ordinary men. They were fathers, husbands, and farmers who had average levels of education and who had no prior history of violence.”⁶⁹

In his final paragraph, Straus reflects on a query he is frequently asked regarding whether he believes that anyone is capable of committing genocide and whether it could happen anywhere. His answer is indirect, but he does hold that “a more accurate claim is that genocide tends to happen under particular conditions.”⁷⁰ For our purposes, one of these particular conditions would be war, and we contend that this possibility is bolstered by many of the authors previously addressed.

Lee Ann Fujii is another Rwandan author who follows Browning’s footprints.⁷¹ Her interview-based research also soundly rejects the ethnic-hatred arguments as the source of genocide in Rwanda although she places much less emphasis on war than Straus. Explicitly tying her work to Browning’s by applying his findings, she notes that he “explain[s] how the most ordinary . . . men became . . . killers . . . [by] point[ing] not to ideology, anti-Semitism, or obedience to authority, but to the obligation the men felt toward their fellow soldiers—their unwillingness to leave the ‘dirty work’ to others.”⁷²

Essentially, Fujii’s argument boils down to the notion that the need to belong to a group and to achieve a group-based identity will prompt a person to perform a wide range of behaviors, including mass murder.⁷³ Ranging then from Browning to Fujii, this perspective argues that from the Nazis in Poland to the Hutus in Rwanda, mass killing is about small-group dynamics—the need to belong to the group that you will sup with that night and then awaken with to another day of mass killing. For Fujii, not only does ethnic hatred recede into the background but also there is no attempt to validate or deny war as a variable, as is the case with Melson and Straus. Neither can one use her work to support Goldhagen, who appears in the bibliography but not in the index. We also found no real attempt here to raise or answer the question about the genocidal potential in everyone.

The Rwandan Genocide and Cultural Ideology

In the conclusion of his book, Straus approvingly quotes from Robert Jay Lifton’s *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, without any comment on Lifton’s critics: “The disturbing psychological truth [is] that par-

ticipation in mass murder need not require emotions as extreme or demonic as would seem appropriate for such a malignant project. . . . Ordinary people can commit demonic acts.”⁷⁴ However, as critics of Lifton have complained, interviewing perpetrators of heinous acts long after the events themselves (whether Holocaust or, in our case, the Rwanda genocide) inherently carries the types of risk that can bias the results. Michael Burleigh, an early critic of Lifton, argues that having “coffee and cakes” with ex-Nazi doctors long after World War II allows these doctors to adapt to the “new” Germany, rehearse their stories, and appear, as it were, to be ordinary doctors.⁷⁵ Similarly, Rwanda’s “génocidaires” were at a decreased likelihood of confessing a preexisting hatred of Tutsis to researchers who interviewed them years after the genocide. They were also less likely to admit or perhaps even realize the subtle ways that culturally indoctrinated visions of the “diabolical Tutsis” motivated killing. Hence, the fact that both Straus and Fujii came to conclusions that stressed nonideological factors is not in the least surprising. Again referencing Burleigh’s terminology, we find that this would be the Rwandan equivalent of having coffee and cakes with Rwandan killers in a present where admission of such hatred would be out of fashion. In this type of research, admissions of peer pressure, group dynamics, and the desire to be part of an in-group will trump admittance of ideology and never-ending hatred every time. Unlike Fujii, Straus at the very least looks beyond village dynamics to larger issues of war, revolution, violence, and genocide. In doing so, his work—along with that of Mamdani—seems to support the original Melson hypothesis and the triad of revolution, war, and genocide.

Yet, does this negate Goldhagen’s thesis that genocide begins in the minds of men and that war and revolution are less significant than the particularity of culture and ideology?⁷⁶ At such a stage, we cannot go that far despite the lack of current evidence from the Rwandan experience. Goldhagen is not alone in claiming that culture and context matter and that mass killing cannot be “universalized” into models of revolution and war. He has come under ferocious attack for planting German genocidal behavior into “eliminationist” anti-Semitism, which supposedly reached new heights in Germany, and for blaming the Catholic Church and religious texts for ideological attacks on Jews.⁷⁷ However, this author does have his supporters, including David Kertzer. Writing in response to the Catholic Church’s apologia *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*, which drew a sharp distinction between religious anti-Semitism and modern-era, race-based anti-Semitism, Kertzer nonetheless contends that the possible distinctions between racial and religious attitudes were less important than the ties that bound them together.⁷⁸ Important distinctions exist between Goldhagen and Kertzer, the former emphasizing a particularly virulent German form of eliminationist anti-

Semitism and the latter stressing anti-Semitism as a tool of the papacy against the threat of post-French Revolution modernism. However, both men agree with the aphorism that genocide begins in the minds of men as deleterious cultural imaging of the Jews opened the door to mid-twentieth-century genocide.

Similarly, the distinguished historian Isabel Hull, while rejecting eliminationist anti-Semitism as the text for genocide, has argued that German military culture encouraged and actualized mass killing of people deemed inferior in the first genocide of the twentieth century—the slaughter of the Herero and Nama people in southwest Africa (now Namibia) by German armies.⁷⁹ More recently, in David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen's devastating account of these same events, the authors claim that a particularly Germanic strain of colonial racism, held not only by colonial elites but also by ordinary German settlers, is more important than the behavior of a few evil men and, by implication, more important than revolution and war.⁸⁰

From such examples, which span Nazi Germany to the post-French Revolution Vatican to colonial Namibia, we see a common thread pointing to cultural and ideological factors as precipitating genocide.⁸¹ This common link presents a powerful argument that challenges the reduction of the Rwandan genocide to structural arguments which either include (à la Straus) or exclude (à la Fujii) war but collectively ascribe little importance to culture or ideology in the Rwandan mass killings of 1994. Here, as mentioned previously, we find a disconnect between the 1904 Namibian genocide and the 1994 Rwandan genocide since cultural ideology is assigned an important role in explaining the first but not the second. Such a disconnect is telling, and given the growing notion that cultural factors played a central role in the first African genocide of the twentieth century, we question why the Goldhagen paradigm has received only a cursory examination with reference to Rwanda.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite research that points to structural events like revolution and war as precipitating factors for mass murder, we cannot yet conclude that the final word has been written on the Rwandan genocide. We cannot reach such a verdict until innovative research methods are devised that can cut through the problematic elements of ground-level research, particularly the fact that most examinations of genocide are conducted years, if not decades, after the event occurs. Until the advent of pioneering methods that can explore modern genocides in a time-sensitive manner, we cannot properly counter Burleigh's coffee-and-cakes critique of interviewing génocidaires in a decontextualized environment. Answering such a

critique is a critical challenge for this field insofar as the genocide-prevention techniques reflect that practitioner's perspective of why genocides typically occur, most viewpoints tracing back either to structuralism or cultural ideology explanations. On the one hand, structuralists like Melson, who blame genocide on specific conditions or events, may advocate for structural responses to genocide, such as policy changes or definition modifications. For example, as the definition of national interest has expanded in the modern era to recognize the inherent danger of allowing unimpeded mass violence beyond one's national borders, the structuralist viewpoint calls for policy changes designed to ostracize or stop perpetrators of such violence as a component of a country's national interest.⁸² Other structural recommendations for preventing genocide single out "poverty and inequality, population growth and the 'youth bulge,' ethnic nationalism, and climate change as . . . [the chief] drivers of deadly violence."⁸³

Yet, Goldhagen warns that structural explanations of genocide have achieved a "near-consensual status."⁸⁴ Along with Goldhagen, we feel that such consensus could be dangerous because, as we have pointed out, it is hard to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that structural explanations—even compelling, evidence-backed explanations such as revolution and war—may always clarify why genocide occurs. If the concerns we have raised about the weaknesses of the data that supports the Melsonian hypothesis are true, then structural explanations for preventing future genocides may also break down. By placing the genocidal blame on culture and ideology, Goldhagen stresses the importance of what one believes. In contrast to structuralists, his emphasis on genocidal eliminationism as the greatest moral problem of our time compels him to eschew the idea of national interest as he argues that "invocations of the national interest . . . routinely facilitate mass murder by rationalizing a passive response."⁸⁵ Ignoring the critique that moral arguments break down in policy making, he further insists that such arguments can do the most practical good because one can more easily rally public opinion through an appeal to conscience—not to national interests.

In light of these considerations, weighing the evidence for either the Goldhagen or Melson hypothesis takes on new importance. It would seem that either side calls for far different, perhaps even incompatible, responses to preventing future genocides. Goldhagen's emphasis on extreme moralism is not without its own risks, including hyperbolic rhetoric and absolutist recommendations. Is eliminationist violence truly the greatest threat of our time, as Goldhagen claims? Further, how can one even test such a theory due to the serious research shortcoming of non-real-time data? The need for researcher security is understandable, but time lapses in genocide interviews pose a major challenge to gathering accurate data.

We strongly recommend that the development of innovative, real-time data-collection methods be prioritized for future genocide research. Interestingly, the advent of technology may hold intriguing implications for this field, and it may even shed light on the Goldhagen/Melson debate. The incorporation of new technology into human-rights research is growing. For example, organizations like Satellite Sentinel Project (SSP) combine satellite imagery, data-pattern imagery, and information from ground sources with the goal of deterring and documenting mass atrocities in Sudan.⁸⁶ SSP marks the first public effort to systematically analyze, monitor, and report threats to human security in near real time. We suggest that, given the right research framework, new information sources such as “crowdsourcing” software, social media, pioneering “big data” predictive analytic tools, or hate-speech databases may also hold fresh insights for the genocide field.

Social media, which refers to the creation and sharing of user-generated content in highly interactive virtual networks and platforms, is now being used in groundbreaking ways in the humanitarian-assistance and security fields.⁸⁷ For example, new research from the Harvard Medical School suggests that an accumulation of “tweets” from the social network Twitter may aid paramedics in pinpointing unanticipated health crises like the Boston Marathon bombings.⁸⁸ Consequently, these researchers suggest that tweets may further be useful in emergencies if they are integrated into statewide systems. Social media has also been used in humanitarian disasters for purposes ranging from disseminating information about such events in Southeast Asia to tracking the real-time distribution of food during the 2010 Pakistani floods.⁸⁹ The rise of social media has also resulted in free and open-source (i.e., updateable by users) software for data collection and visual mapping, most notably Ushahidi.⁹⁰ This software, created after the disputed Kenyan elections of 2007, collected eyewitness accounts of violence reported by e-mail and text messages, placing them in standardized Google Maps diagrams. Now expanded, Ushahidi allows local witnesses to submit reports via mobile phones or the Internet, concurrently creating a geospatial and real-time archive of events. This concept, referred to *crowdsourcing*, utilizes a combination of citizen journalism, social activism, and geospatial information for the purposes of violence prevention and public accountability.

Other emerging data sources include cutting-edge data-gathering technology such as that used by the State Department’s Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. Arguing that such technology saves physical and financial conflict costs, the bureau analyzes “‘large data sets’ as well as ‘civil society’ generated data—essentially the sum of patterns, human behaviors, electronic signals, [and] social media elements.”⁹¹ The fact that perpetrators of mass violence in develop-

ing nations lack Internet data availability and thus are not expected to cease genocide simply to send text messages or update their social media profiles represents a potential obstacle to incorporating these new data sources. However, such a situation can be resolved through cutting-edge information-gathering tools like Senturion, a “large data” predictive analysis instrument pioneered in conjunction with the National Defense University.⁹² Despite a lack of cyber-data availability in developing nations, such technology has been employed there by mining from economic sources, analyzing “what people are buying in stores, what cars they are driving, what kinds of phones are they using, refugee flows, the direction of their move, mobile use.”⁹³ Trends such as “where the business leaders gather, what they talk about, where are the religious leaders . . . sermons, political and religious statements, public meetings, [and] statements in commerce and business areas” have been gathered from previously explored, less-developed nations like Syria.⁹⁴ Given the research themes that emerged as we reviewed Rwandan genocide literature throughout this article, information on that country’s pregenocide period would have certainly been useful in testing the structuralist Melsonian hypothesis or in offering fresh evidence to the debate.

We feel that these sources, though not without their challenges and restrictions, are overripe with data for the traditional scholarly field of genocide research. Certain limitations to new cyber sources are anticipated, such as the disruption of technological networks during an outbreak of violence, the difficulty of accuracy verification, and the willful manipulation of information sources by third parties. Additionally, new sources of information may not necessarily support a particular genocide theory. “Hatebase,” a crowdsourced database of multilingual hate speech, endeavors to catalogue inflammatory words and phrases that may point to early stages of genocide.⁹⁵ Although this kind of database offers certain benefits, registering a new slur does not in itself indicate that the utterance was initiated by political elites in a revolutionary climate in the manner of Melson, nor does it indicate that this slur originated in ideologically influenced minds bent on genocide à la Goldhagen.

Despite the difficulty of devising ways to appropriately utilize these new sources of information for future genocide analyses, we feel that the potential for substantiating established genocide theories with new data pools is too important to ignore. In our case, access to such information certainly may have answered some of the concerns we raised about the accuracy of coffee-and-cake discussions with Rwandan *génocidaires* years after they committed acts of mass violence.⁹⁶ Although *génocidaires*, from Rwandan killers to Nazi doctors, might use the time following a genocide to justify their behavior to themselves and to interviewers, real-time genocide data could have offered an important check to their state-

ments. That is, crowdsourced information and hate speech posted to social media networks are date stamped and would have to be explained. It is our opinion that new information-gathering technologies, which can only hint at genocide dynamics, can complement—not compete with—the traditional research methods employed by scholars like Straus and Fujii. Incorporating these new sources of real-time data into genocide research in ethically responsible, well-framed methods may bring new dimensions of genocide motivation to light as real-time data stands unmoved despite the passage of time or the development of a guilty conscience.

The field of genocide research has benefited from Melson's structuralist and Goldhagen's ideological divide, which has prompted new heights of research that seek to support either theory. In this way, continuing and expanding the genocide debate by incorporating real-time data will provide new insights for traditional researchers. The challenge now lies in devising useful ways of incorporating massive amounts of data. Such an issue reinforces the notion that traditional scholarship, with its emphasis on analysis and scholastic debate, is vital even in the technological age. On this note, we recommend a pooling of resources from the field of genocide research and other spheres, such as information technology, not only to substantiate either Melson or Goldhagen but also to gain further insight into the motivating forces for genocide and, therefore, prevent future atrocities.

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