

# South African Springtime, Rwandan Winter

## Why April 1994 Illuminates the Limitations of Political Analysis in Predicting Genocide

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In *Worse than War: Genocide, Eliminationism, and the Ongoing Assault on Humanity*, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen salutes and honors Nelson Mandela as a shining light in genocide prevention.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, we are left with the thought that cloning Mandela would be the solution to so many examples of mass killing that the world would be a much healthier place to inhabit. Although Mandela is universally honored as the founding father of modern South Africa, the potentiality that his role may have prevented a South African genocide has received less attention. Goldhagen is determined to prove that eliminating bad leaders is the key to genocide prevention. He calls for something like a league of democratic states to intervene in genocidal situations and to stop them by resorting to economic sanctions, international legal action, and, finally, military intervention. In his view, since the United Nations was set up to address war and has failed miserably in preventing genocide—which, Goldhagen reminds, is worse than war—violence in the name of ending a genocide is both legitimate and possible in international politics.

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Yet, Goldhagen's praise of Mandela is interesting for what is *not* part of the transition from the apartheid state to a modern democracy—namely, genocide:

The conditions for a murderous onslaught by whites against blacks and then blacks against whites were there. The conventional wisdom about what produces genocides, focusing on structural conditions, conflict-ridden societies, enormous suffering, enormous hatred, or a previously suppressed and newly empowered majority's thirst for revenge, suggests a bloodbath or perhaps two reciprocal bloodbaths.<sup>2</sup>

Focusing on why there was “no substantial revenge, no eliminationist onslaught” becomes the question of utmost importance in this very long and passionate book.<sup>3</sup> Goldhagen argues that “the answer is as obvious as theories of structural causes are wrong: political leadership, and specifically the character, disposition, and foresight of the African National Congress' most critical leader, Nelson Mandela, who had no desire to undertake an eliminationist program.”<sup>4</sup> Here, comparisons with what happened in Rwanda take on important meaning for students of comparative genocide. Under Mandela, whites were neither demonized nor treated as subhuman; instead, a “truth and reconciliation” process was created whereby the confession of sins offered reentry into, in Peter Gay's felicitous term, the “party of humanity.”<sup>5</sup> This antigenocidaire explanation has special meaning for the horrific Rwandan winter that occurred at the same time Mandela was assuming power in South Africa.

Brief accounts of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and quasi-genocidal killing in previous years from the newly ascendant Hutu majority offer Goldhagen the opportunity to draw contrasts with the Mandela-led South Africa.<sup>6</sup> In Rwanda, the period saw a newly ascendant majority but not the oppression characteristic of apartheid. The Hutus resented the social, political, and economic exclusion for good reasons, but the clear and pervasive racial rules put into place in 1948 South Africa and beyond are not comparable to the nature of society in Rwanda. Once again Goldhagen concentrates on leadership, for mass murder became the preferred option only when “Hutu leaders decided that it should.”<sup>7</sup> In a chilling description of Hutu failed leadership, he argues, “From 1990 to 1993 on a sporadic and clearly preparatory scale with Hutu perpetrating at least seventeen trial massacres, and then in 1994, when the opportunity finally seemed propitious, [the genocide occurred] in the intended final comprehensive annihilationist scale.”<sup>8</sup>

In this deadly game of an eye for an eye, the Tutsis had been slaughtering Hutus in neighboring Burundi, thus creating a curious game of mutual killing in two adjoining countries until the final genocidal culmination in Rwanda. Goldhagen's leadership-based approach to the mass violence in South Africa and Rwanda leaves us with some fascinating thoughts about governance. Could a Mandela-like figure in Rwanda and/or Burundi have saved what may be a million souls who died in the three violent months in Rwanda? Is genocide prevention and elimination simply about the survival of good leaders in the nasty game of politics? Is the perpetration of genocide a function of the mystery of birth, which sometimes produces good leaders and sometimes very bad ones (e.g., “If Hitler

had died in childbirth . . . , etc.?). Where else can we turn to examine the differences between South Africa and Rwanda in the crucial year of 1994?

We must return to structural analysis to test Goldhagen's rejection of all explanations but Mandela-like leadership. The most often cited accounts of South Africa's non-genocidal springtime turn their attention to economics, political power-sharing agreements, international relations with special emphasis on sanctions and developments in states that border on South Africa, and important historical and ideological differences that formed each nation-state.

### Remembering Mandela's South Africa: The Personality X-Factor

Our exploration began by examining the role of power-sharing agreements in Rwanda and South Africa, drawing from Marisa Traniello's structural analysis of the role of the Arusha Peace Accords in 1994 Rwanda and the Interim Constitution Pact in 1994 South Africa in her interesting article "Power-Sharing: Lessons from South Africa and Rwanda."<sup>9</sup> Yet, as the title above indicates, our first foray into structuralist explanations for Rwanda's genocide and South Africa's relatively peaceful democratic transition yielded surprising results. In the end, even her structurally framed article emphasized personality and political leadership, a conclusion not so different than Goldhagen's decidedly non-structural reasoning.

We began by noting that Traniello's structural analysis of these two nations was important to the broader genocide canon for several reasons. The most important one is that with few exceptions, the field of genocide studies has been marked by an examination of historical cases that yielded roughly the same levels of genocidal violence, and from there narratives of causation have been extrapolated and proposed.<sup>10</sup> Although such methods were understandable as genocide studies developed as a discipline, Scott Straus rightly points out that in order for causal theories to be tested and refined, "a research design that primarily selects cases with the same outcome on the dependent variable will be profoundly limited."<sup>11</sup>

#### ***Power-Sharing Agreements in Rwanda and South Africa***

Given the above critique of the modern genocide canon, Traniello's selection of Rwanda and South Africa for her assessment of political power-sharing agreements can be complimented. After Traniello briefly reviews power-sharing literature, her analysis traces the very different directions that each nation took in 1994 despite the presence of power-sharing agreements in both Rwanda and South Africa. Intriguingly, South Africa and Rwanda share other surface similarities in addition to power-sharing peace agreements. For instance, both the Tutsi political leadership in Rwanda and the National Party in South Africa exemplified contexts in which dominant minority governments controlled sizable majorities. In 1994, Rwanda's population of 7 million people was composed of

three ethnic groups: Hutu (approximately 85 percent of the populace), Tutsi (14 percent), and Twa (1 percent).<sup>12</sup> During this period, South Africa's population was larger, numbering approximately 33 million people, broken into roughly 4 racial categories of "White," "Colored," "Indian," and "Black African."<sup>13</sup> Societal privileges, however, were split between whites and those who were not, with the white population also coincidentally composing 14 percent of South Africa's population. Each nation had also experienced political unrest over the course of the prior five decades, as exemplified by South Africa's township revolts and provincial civil war in the 1980s as well as Rwanda's Hutu Revolution in 1959, ethnic massacres in the early 1960s, coups in 1973, and civil conflict in 1990.<sup>14</sup>

### *Elites and Shares of the "Political Pie"*

In Traniello's view, however, the most important parallel in these two countries was that the violence potentiality resided in the intentions of political elites and their "share of the pie."<sup>15</sup> She additionally draws on a number of other scholars who examined not only whether power-sharing agreements were able to keep the peace in South Africa but also whether they could incentivize peace and bring parties to the table. Donald Horowitz, for example, found no evidence to support the latter.<sup>16</sup> Focusing exclusively on the relationships of political elites to political power (i.e., control of resources, land, and distributive power), Traniello does not address the relationship between the elites and their targeted victims. Her failure to do so contrasts Goldhagen's work, which combines the relationship between perpetrators to their political goals *and* the relationship between perpetrators and their intended victims. In Goldhagen's view, a driving political goal within the right sociopolitical context must combine with an ideological, eliminationist impulse to move decision making beyond the fantasy realm from wishful thinking to policy reality. In other words, Goldhagen focuses not only on a convenient political goal, as Traniello does, but also on achieving such a goal in relation to the victim: "Eradicating the enemy in one's midst or next door . . . living in a purified society free of social, cultural, and political human pollutants . . . radically refashioning society according to a promissory blueprint."<sup>17</sup> He contends, for example, that the presence of deeply entrenched anti-Semitism in Germany paved the way for genocidal policies to occur, noting that in order for people to comprehend such goals as committing genocide "as a real option, as a legitimate and practical political option, eliminationist possibilities must be part of politics' repertoire, which requires a real-world political context that permits and makes practical the act, and permits and makes practical the thinking."<sup>18</sup>

Goldhagen's emphasis on eliminationist impulses in cultural and ideological mindsets is illustrative of a wider school of thought in the modern genocide canon—one that focuses less on structural explanations for mass violence like war and conflict, noting instead that ideological paradigms are equally important as causal explanations of genocide.<sup>19</sup> His famous assertion that "genocide begins in the minds of men" is an obvious fit here.<sup>20</sup> However, many other scholars similarly link consideration of ideological world-

views with state-centric power considerations, discussing not only the political elites' desire for a piece of the political pie but also their internal visions for and of the nation they control as well as the ways they envision who the legitimate polity is.<sup>21</sup> This research theme includes ideological explanations such as utopian ideals, exclusionary themes, or racist dogma, which are linked to unstable, conflict-ridden environments. Consequently, they drive national mechanisms to extreme lengths, which can include either orchestrating genocide or conceding to groundswell support for it. As Jacques Sémelin notably asserts, this framework views ideology as the connective tissue that couples a state's ability to undertake mass murders with its readiness to do so. He calls ideology the "binding agent" that connects a population's worst fears, grandest hopes, and sense of self into a reactive posture that allows genocide to occur as people begin to view the world in the zero-sum logic of "kill or be killed."<sup>22</sup>

### *The Importance of Nonstructural Factors in Power-Sharing Agreements*

Despite the wealth of literature on motivating forces that may sway the political calculus, Traniello frames her analysis as dealing exclusively with structural factors—that is, power-sharing agreements and institutions—in explaining the Rwanda slaughter and the South African democratic transition.<sup>23</sup> Her analysis occasionally shifts toward other explanations (e.g., when she seems to acknowledge the presence of triggering events in the Rwandan genocide by mentioning unforeseen, uncontrollable events like the shooting down of Rwanda president Habyarimana's airplane); nevertheless, she urges that such events be compared to the institutions at work in her case studies, thereby positioning her argument—and her explanation of mass violence—as squarely concerned with structural explanations.<sup>24</sup> The one conspicuous exception to this almost absolute focus on structuralism is Traniello's concession of the role (or lack thereof) of leadership in these two nations. Interestingly, however, this one area of nonstructural concession seems to permeate and influence the structures that she examines at length. Even as she is guided by her major premise that power-sharing agreements shaped the respective success and failure of the 1993 Interim Constitution Pact and Arusha Peace Accords in preventing mass violence in South Africa and sparking it in Rwanda, she allows that South Africa was "led by a dream team of elites."<sup>25</sup>

In the end, then, even Traniello's structural analysis of institutions and power sharing begins to blend political constructions with societal conditions and the intangible factors of leadership—sociopolitical conditions that are not quite so different than what Goldhagen emphasized in his *Worse than War* analysis. Her major conclusion is that South Africa was successfully and peacefully able to transition from apartheid to democratic rule because the "necessary and favorable" conditions in which power-sharing agreements thrive were present in South Africa yet not in Rwanda. Specifically, Traniello argues that South Africa's strong, moderate leadership—including eventual Nobel Prize winners F. W. de Klerk and Mandela—were motivated by a common vision of a "bloodless unified state."<sup>26</sup> She notes other factors that helped each South African leader to

move toward middle ground and compromise, including the economic stagnation that endangered white prosperity and added pressure from the international community. However, Traniello does develop the idea that “both [South African] elites did possess true leadership qualities” and that their constituency support gave them “the will to accommodate” in order to reach the ultimate goal of a peaceful future.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, she writes, such factors allowed the consociational design of the 1993 Interim Constitution Pact not only to stabilize that state but also to prevent extraordinary levels of violence.

In Traniello’s assessment, the 1993 Interim Constitution Pact was meticulously designed to mitigate fears and to ensure that each party to the agreement believed it could secure its power and interests even in the face of a changing future and shifting racial dynamics, thereby incentivizing participation.<sup>28</sup> The emphasis here on easing elite apprehension of a loss of power, as well as mitigating broader societal fears, can be linked back to the classic genocide premises of Robert Melson. He asserts that as war gives rise to feelings of vulnerability, this in turn engenders concern that the state’s internal enemies are working to sabotage the nation or political community during this time of tumultuous upheaval. At this stage, the heightened tension and high stakes can push elites into viewing political competition as a zero-sum survival scenario; additionally, more common policy options of dealing with perceived enemies—such as expulsion, assimilation, or segregation—are closed off.<sup>29</sup> Other genocide scholars have also carefully considered the role of fear in sparking these extreme scenarios of violence, including Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, whose four-part typology of motives for genocidal violence prominently includes “creating terror” as one of the four major suggested incentives.<sup>30</sup> Daniel Chirof and Clark McCauley’s excellent work on the logic of mass killing expounds upon this motive by stating that fear was the foremost motivating force in diverse, historical mass political murders. The latter include the systematic fratricides that characterized the fifteenth century Ottoman Empire (and continued regularly until the seventeenth century), the sixteenth century ethnoreligious “cleansings” of 300,000 Moriscos in Spain, and the violent breakdown of Serbian-Croat relations in Yugoslavia during the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup>

After framing the 1993 Interim Constitution Pact as an overall success, Traniello notes the contrasting result of the Arusha Peace Accords in Rwanda.<sup>32</sup> She argues that the agreement, meant to bring lasting peace after the Rwandan internal conflict beginning in 1990, failed to prevent the 1994 genocide due to a combination of factors that again intersect squarely with issues of leadership, personality, and commonalities of purpose. Traniello summarizes the conclusion of her analysis on Rwanda by declaring that the “Rwanda power-sharing peace settlement . . . failed to mitigate violence because it lacked such necessary factors as committed leadership, a shared destiny and the will to accommodate. The Accords themselves led to the zero-sum scenario that South Africa avoided, thus contributing to conflict rather than mitigating it.”<sup>33</sup> Here we are again left with an interesting quandary: a thorough examination of Traniello’s arguments shows that her assessment is framed as a structural analysis of institutions in preventing or mitigating violence. Several of her major conclusions, though, appear to involve the role

of “intangibles”—that is, leadership, personality, vision, and the ability to build coalitions around messaging within one’s constituents, all factors backed by the decidedly unstructurally focused work of Goldhagen. One cannot help thinking of Richard Overy’s socially focused examination of the complicated relationship between leaders and their populations, which he demonstrates through a comparison of Stalin’s and Hitler’s regimes.<sup>34</sup> In a position not so dissimilar to Traniello’s findings, Overy asserts that neither Hitler nor Stalin maintained control over his large populations exclusively through terror. He also states that the leaders’ principles were widely popular at the time and backed by mass popular support—an important point since he maintains that at various junctures in their roles, each leader depended upon the cooperation of the people he ruled.

Consistent with Goldhagen’s conclusion and Overy’s emphasis on leadership, Traniello’s structural analysis of institutions in the end prompts an important question regarding the leadership engaging these institutions: did the peace agreements actually have any causal effect on preventing or exacerbating South African and Rwandan violence, *or* did the peace agreements merely illuminate the underlying leadership qualities and motivations in each nation? Given Traniello’s emphasis on the prevailing attitudes of Rwandan and South African political deal makers, her analysis raises the question of whether the individual differences of the two power-sharing peace agreements had any real, significant effects or whether the negotiating table simply served as the stage on which South African and Rwandan political elites acted out their predetermined course of action.<sup>35</sup> Would any institutional changes have improved the odds of Rwanda experiencing a peaceful shift in ethnopolitical power or, conversely, have shifted South African leaders to cling to power through any means necessary?

In South Africa, de Klerk and Mandela continued to support the peace agreements even as an estimated 14,000 politically motivated deaths (a significant number, yet a relatively small percentage of South Africa’s total population of 33 million at the time) occurred during the first 3 years of the peace agreement negotiations. The continuance of these high-level talks despite this initial wave of violence has been signaled as vitally important by other researchers since the leaders’ determination seemed to spread to other public arenas in South African social life.<sup>36</sup> The unity of the South African leaders contrasts sharply with the fractured, disorganized 1994 Rwandan government. Depicted as faltering, indecisive, and a captive in his own entourage, President Juvénal Habyarimana of the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development vacillated between the extremist and moderate factions of his party and undermined his own cabinet officials by vetoing commitments they had previously made.<sup>37</sup> Habyarimana also lacked the force of personality to persuade the Rwandan Patriotic Front to allow the extremist Commitment for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) to participate. His credibility was also undermined by his own words, including a 1992 speech in which he called the Arusha Accords mere “pieces of paper.”<sup>38</sup>

***“Shared Destinies” and the Question of Genocidal Intent***

In addition to highlighting the political importance of political unity, Traniello develops throughout her article the idea that Rwandan leadership suffered from the lack of a “shared destiny.”<sup>39</sup> Not only did President Habyarimana’s ruling party fail to foster a common sense of purpose among Arusha Accords participants, but also, even more extreme worldviews were evident in other participants as well, as exemplified in Traniello’s assertion that “it is obvious that with the [CDR extremist party] that there was no vision of co-existing.”<sup>40</sup> After the CDR’s exclusion from the negotiation process, the party was summarily shut out of political power and responded by acting as a spoiler to the Arusha Accords’ implementation stage. Even at the time, this dynamic was recognized as problematic, as epitomized by various versions of a colloquialism reported by multiple sources during this period: “It is better to have the CDR inside the tent than outside, threatening to burn it down.”<sup>41</sup> Excluded from the process, CDR leadership leveraged the Arusha Peace Accords process to build up their support through fear-mongering, including public statements asserting that “the extermination of the Tutsis would be the inevitable consequence . . . of the implementation of the Arusha accord.”<sup>42</sup> As additional moderates became disgruntled at the final versions of the Arusha Accords, the CDR was able to increase its recruiting pool.<sup>43</sup>

From a genocide studies perspective, Traniello’s section on the lack of a shared common future holds important implications in that it intriguingly links to an ongoing discussion in genocide literature—the ultimate intended purpose of genocidal violence.<sup>44</sup> Throughout her article, she describes political elites in each nation in terms of sharing a common vision (or not), a sense of mutual destiny (or not), and a willingness to accommodate (or not). In extolling the uniqueness of South African leadership, for example, she notes that “both de Klerk and Mandela were educated, carried *broad* and *deep* support among their constituents and shared the *common destiny* of a bloodless unified state” (emphasis in original).<sup>45</sup> Intriguingly, if Traniello’s assessment here is correct, such a dynamic might shed new light on whether South Africa was really at risk of genocidal violence in 1994 even as it underscores the fraught genocidal mind-sets already at work in Rwanda.

In Straus’s excellent article “‘Destroy Them to Save Us’: Theories of Genocide and the Logic of Political Violence,” his incisive summary of core features that characterize genocidal violence winnows down a modern preponderance of definitions to include two common traits among them all. The first is unqualified group selection—that is, entire people groups are targeted, in contrast to combatant- or rival-selected violence, whereby members of one group may be targeted but only those members who pose a credible or perceived threat. The other commonality that Straus culls from major genocide definitions is that the ultimate goal of violence is destruction, as distinguished from repression, harm, negative communication, or some other purpose. Genocidal violence is thus distinct from indiscriminate or individually selective violence or from violence whose desired outcome is something short of absolute group destruction. Straus’s important distinction



is most clearly seen in his discussion of violence used for a “communicative function” in war or terrorism:

For example, a significant number of scholars who study terrorist violence and violence against civilians in civil war argue that such violence has a “communicative” function. “Corpse messaging” in the context of a drug war is a vivid illustration. The violence is designed to deter and punish defection, to destabilize or weaken opponents, to goad opponents to engage in self-defeating strategies, and to attract attention (and recruits and money). By contrast, in genocide the violence is not generally communicative, but rather an end in itself. Communication is not the function of violence, but rather destruction is. In civil war, the general objective is to defeat, weaken, or compromise with an enemy as well as to control territory; violence is deployed to achieve those ends. In these scenarios, the ultimate vision of interaction is usually group submission, surrender, or negotiation—but there is a future of sharing territory. The logic of genocide differs. In genocide, negotiation, control, surrender, and submission are off the table. The perpetrating organization pursues group destruction as the best available strategy. Thus, a central question is when and why would alternative strategies, such as group submission, removal, or negotiation, be off the table? Why is group destruction the chosen option? The question is rarely asked in genocide studies, but it seems essential for the theoretical development of the field.<sup>46</sup>

Straus’s description of genocidal intent is therefore at odds with the one that Traniello’s article suggests for the 1994 South African context. If her premise that South African elites shared a common vision—one in which they could imagine the other party coexisting—is correct, then we are left with the potential conclusion that the 1994 threat of violence was elevated and severe in South Africa but that it was not ultimately the threat of *genocidal* violence. This potentiality that South Africa was not at risk for genocidal violence in April 1994 should be more fully examined because it holds repercussions for those such as Goldhagen who cite it in the context of genocidal explorations.<sup>47</sup> Could it be possible that Goldhagen is championing elite leadership as a genocidal deterrent in climates that, at their essence, are violent but not really at risk of genocide at all?

### Imaging South Africa without Mandela: A Return to Structural Analysis

Traniello’s analysis is useful, then, in prompting further questions to consider, but in the end, the relationship between leadership and structure remains inconclusive. That is because the emphasis remains on a very limited set of internal state structures without an examination of broader structural conditions that include economic and political angles and that position the context and its leadership, ideology, and state structure within the international community at the time. Only by expanding the analytic scope can one more robustly assess the possibilities of genocide and determine when its prevention in South Africa adds new dimensions to the question of great leaders and the structural world in which they find themselves.

For the sake of argument, let us return to April 1994 and imagine a world in which Nelson Mandela had abandoned South Africa and taken up residence in Kigali, Rwanda, in a position of power—but not total power. This exercise is not frivolous since it allows us to look more closely at how state structure, as well as South African and Rwandan relations with the outside world, either retarded or encouraged genocide. We will look at three important variables. First, we examine the vulnerabilities of both countries to the world economy (including the role of punitive sanctions). Second, we assess the changing nature of events along the borders and developments in neighboring states. Finally, we scrutinize how international developments sometimes far from the African continent affected the possibility of genocide in each nation.

### *Economic Issues*

As Nigel Worden and many other scholars have noted, South Africa was prone to international economic pressure, including sanctions, because of the nature of its economy and simply because it was well integrated into world economic activity in a very different way than Rwanda.<sup>48</sup> The existence of a large and powerful business class meant that the white minority rulers not only focused on race and political control but also on their collective purses. P. W. Botha's infamous and unrepentant 1985 response to tentative comments indicating an internal willingness to reform by then-foreign minister Pik Botha exemplifies this point. P. W. Botha's unabashed refusal to give in to international reforms or transition to majority reform marked a political crossing of the Rubicon. As Worden correctly argues,

The response was immediate. Loans granted by foreign banks in 1982 were now called in, with no facility for renewal. As a result the rand collapsed, and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange was temporarily closed. These events spurred South African business leaders on to the offensive. Within a month leading business directors were visiting the ANC [African National Congress, the party that eventually elected Mandela president] in Lusaka.<sup>49</sup>

In the end, white governance could not separate itself from the pressure of larger and more powerful states that could wreak economic havoc on both whites and blacks in the relatively advanced and complex economy of South Africa. That country was in the forefront of African economic development, but its very success also spelled both economic and political weakness. Apartheid could have financially ruined South Africa. Ultimately, businesses do not thrive in political climates wracked by uncertainty; thus, the economic crisis literally forced the National Party to reconsider apartheid for the sake of the economic bottom line. South Africa was not able to and could never attain anything like economic autarchy, which only the very strongest actors in the international political economy might do. On the other hand, Rwanda, with its less developed agricultural economy, could (and did) proceed on its genocidal path without any thought of economic consequences. Indeed, so far as we know, no books on the Rwanda genocide portray Hutu extremists or anyone else in the country worrying about the economic consequences of

genocide, which might have been the case if the Hutu leaders as well as others were going to suffer massive economic loss by their action. Hence, we see in South Africa and Rwanda two radically different economic environments, the first of which appears to have been much more vulnerable to international carrot-and-stick economic measures and the latter of which was not. We also see differing economic considerations on the part of potential genocidaires since no Hutu leader appeared to worry about his income, small business, or agricultural holdings when picking up his machete to slaughter his neighbors.

### ***Borders and Neighboring Countries***

Additionally, South Africa and Rwanda went through profoundly different experiences in the years leading up to 1994 with regard to bordering countries. In this short article, we cannot discuss the complexity of international relations close to home, but it is clear that what we might call the borderlands played a significant role in dimming the prospects for genocide in South Africa and encouraging them in Rwanda. Take for example the independence of Namibia in 1990, which both settled and eliminated conflict in German Southwest Africa. As Adrian Guelke has noted, events in Southwest Africa profoundly changed the dynamics of relations between the ANC and the National Party forever: “The Namibian settlement process led to the ANC losing its base camps in Angola. The ANC also faced virtually no prospect of re-establishing them elsewhere in southern Africa. . . . The ANC was left with no real option but to seek negotiations in good faith.”<sup>50</sup>

South Africa had been deeply involved in a war in Namibia, with the ANC as one of its opponents. In Angola, where Cuban and Angolan forces were engaged against South African–supported rebels, as Saul Dubow has correctly noted, the 1998 battle of Cuito Cuanavale weakened the government in Pretoria and revealed the vulnerability of South Africa with regard to its border conflicts.<sup>51</sup> Thus—and paradoxically—both the ANC and the white government of South Africa were wounded by borderland issues. In the end, both of the contesting parties were chastened by these events; consequently, space was created for finding a solution to the political strife at home. Therefore, losing abroad (but close to home) presented an opportunity for negotiations. Further, if we add international changes at the time in both Mozambique and Zimbabwe to the mix, we have a complex and fortuitous series of events in countries just to the north geographically, which ironically and unpredictably changed the structure of international relations in the region as well as the nature of politics and political opportunities. None of this means that Mandela and de Klerk were not important actors in the borderland dramas or that they should relinquish their Nobel Peace Prizes in the name of borderland structural adjustment. It does suggest, however, that focusing too much on the nature of leadership can cause as many distortions of the historical record as Goldhagen’s eloquent defense of great men like Mandela.

The Rwanda border paints a very different picture—sadly, one that made genocide likely with or without great or even average leaders. Our hypothetical planting of Mandela in Kigali would not have affected the radically different borderlands situation he would have faced. The episodic killings in both Rwanda and Burundi had driven large numbers of minority Hutus into bordering countries where they had formed military forces in conjunction with, or with the approval of, those neighboring states or what amounted to independent militias. Accordingly, Rwanda's government was surrounded not only by other countries that were relatively nonthreatening to their body politic but also by ex-Hutus who had once lived in the country and who were now on the border in Uganda, in Burundi, and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We are reminded of an interesting historical example that has relevance here and elsewhere. At the time of the horrific massacre of Protestants by Catholics in August 1572, referred to as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, the Catholics in Paris were well aware of and fearful of a Protestant army on the outskirts of the city. Therefore, part of the motivation for murdering all of the Huguenots on that hot and steamy night was fear generated by a "them or us" psychology, which has often tied fear of both invasion and subversion to rather nasty results. One east African example from Mahmood Mamdani's fine work on the Rwanda genocide will suffice. In Burundi, large numbers of Hutus had been killed (including many young students) by Tutsis, causing a flood of angry, displaced Hutus to flee over their northern border into Rwanda. In addition to the important factor of Tutsi armies in bordering Uganda, angry Hutus in the country added to the very flammable mix that helped ignite the genocidal conflagration in April 1994.<sup>52</sup> In his drive to eliminate structural variables as significant in genocidal events, Goldhagen simply ignores the subtle and no-so-subtle ways in which structure and personality act together in specific cases. Comparative analysis of South Africa and Rwanda reveals a much more complex and problematic picture. It is highly unlikely that either Mandela or any other great leader could have changed the circumstances of these conditions.

### ***International Perceptions and the Fall of the Berlin Wall***

In a recent book on the history and demise of apartheid, Saul Dubow examines internal South African politics in the context of major changes in international affairs that were occurring thousands of miles away. The international key to understanding begins in 1989. In Dubow's words, "The single most transforming event was the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the ensuing swift collapse of Communist rule in eastern Europe. At a stroke, a key factor underpinning National Party rule in South Africa . . . was removed."<sup>53</sup>

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the collapse of communism. It not only changed the domestic debate in South Africa by undercutting claims that the country might become communist but also destroyed the arguments of many conservative observers abroad that in the cruel world, realpolitik made apartheid the lesser of two evils, the other one being communism firmly established at the tip of the continent. Just

as Mikhail Gorbachev moved the Soviet Union away from its communist past to a more liberal and democratic state, so did de Klerk, in imitation of the Russian leader, opt for equally dramatic political and social change. Most importantly, the United States no longer had to fear Soviet conquest in confronting a racist state.

Although South Africa was dramatically influenced by the collapse of communism, it was a virtual nonevent in Rwanda. The Rwandan history of violence and outbreaks of mass killing had little or nothing to do with the Cold War; thus, there was no Berlin Wall chain reaction in the Hutu/Tutsi text to encourage reconciliation of ethnic differences. Because the Cold War was relatively unimportant in terms of territorial gain in Rwanda, its end did not provide any room for dispute settlement. However, the Rwanda genocide was not free of larger international events. For example, the reluctance of the Clinton administration to intervene in Rwanda was partly a function of its withdrawal from Somalia, where attempts to help in that war-torn country resulted in graphic American military deaths, as images of bodies publicly dragged through the streets of Mogadishu were transmitted around the world. Still, conflict in Rwanda remained relatively immune from Cold War politics, allowing genocide to occur beneath the radar.

It is also important to note that race-conscious activists in the United States turned their attention to color rather than ethnicity. They were strengthened in their drive to end the apartheid state by the collapse of communism, but their sympathies were not focused on black-on-black violence. In the United States, with its racially troubled past and, most importantly, its history of slavery, racial issues have always had high salience. Black ethnic violence could not and did not seem to register or resonate in the same way, and no coalition existed to build either pro-Hutu or pro-Tutsi coalitions in the United States or to sustain interest in events so foreign to the American experience. Our own past focused attention on South Africa in a manner that a potential genocide in Rwanda simply could not. Moving Nelson Mandela to Rwanda could not possibly affect historical memory and experience in any substantial way. Paradoxically, the long, terrible history of colonialism created a canvas of black-white relations that seems to have worked in favor of genocide prevention in South Africa. The story of black tribal violence had no resonance in the West and was not the core of its genocidal imagination or anticipation.

## Conclusion

We are not suggesting that great leaders and structural dynamics within states do not matter, and we are resolute in our refusal to condemn the issues we flagged in the work of Goldhagen and Traniello—and many others—who limit the complex factors that cause or prevent genocide to one or a few variables. Having said that, we do call for extending the parameters of structural analysis to the economic and political structures that exist independently of the political personalities in a nation and that reach far beyond the internal structures and institutions in place in that context. Doing so will allow us to ask a host of new questions about why genocide does and does not occur, and it may open new doors of inquiry on the actual level of risk. For example, if Traniello's summary

of the shared sense of destiny was accurate in 1994 South Africa, then this nonstructural factor would have comprised an important resiliency that subtly de-escalated the risk of genocidal intent as each of the parties in conflict never crossed the Rubicon into desiring the outright elimination of the rival group. The challenge for further genocide prevention strategies, then, is not only to identify such resiliencies but also to ensure that the implementation of atrocity-prevention strategies bolsters and does not unconsciously chip away at these positive “intangibles.”

Further, both Rwanda and South Africa were operating in radically different international environments, particularly with regard to international economic ties, borderland issues, and the impact of global political transitions on the place of these African nations in the ever-changing nature of international politics. International events like the fall of the Berlin Wall can influence the global order in ways that are traumatic for some countries but barely register in others. In this case, South Africa proved to be profoundly affected by the events, their fallout, and the shifting power dynamics of countries thousands of miles away, while Rwanda was not. The Soviet Union’s collapse was largely a nonevent for both Hutu genocidaires and their Tutsi victims, a small ripple in the international pool in which all nations swim. Conversely, for South Africa, the fall of communism constituted a tidal wave from which the nation emerged, never to be the same.

Finally, what more can we say about genocide prevention in light of this analysis? Certainly these conclusions are not meant to imply that genocide prevention policies that seek to improve the risks inherent in at-risk nations’ structures and institutions do not matter. We can still proclaim loudly and clearly, “Never again,” yet at the same time acknowledge that the unpredictability of international politics and events beyond the control of human action may shape “never again” in ways that both save and cost human life on a massive scale. “Never again” is a hope and a prayer, but international economic and political changes qualify those hopes and prayers in profound ways. By turning it into an axiom and a commandment, we will always be doomed to disappointment and perhaps even contribute to disillusionment in the field. Instead, we must remain clear-eyed in our recognition that the world system does not always follow the most carefully laid plans, and we must make the conscious decision to remain nimble in both our assessments and our response strategies.

## Notes

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2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, 296.

5. Peter Gay, *The Party of Humanity: Essays in the French Enlightenment* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971).

6. Goldhagen, *Worse than War*, 30, 67–74, 294–97.

7. Ibid., 76.

8. Ibid.

9. Marisa Traniello, "Power-Sharing: Lessons from South Africa and Rwanda," *International Public Policy Review* 3, no. 2 (March 2008): 28–43, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ippr/journal/downloads/vol3-2/Traniello.pdf>.

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11. Scott Straus, "Destroy Them to Save Us': Theories of Genocide and the Logic of Political Violence," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 4 (2012): 555, <http://users.polisci.wisc.edu/straus/Straus%20Destroy%20Them%20to%20Save%20Us%202012.pdf>.

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13. Traniello, "Power-Sharing," 30.

14. William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 143–262; and Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 175–200.

15. Traniello, "Power-Sharing."

16. Donald L. Horowitz, *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 18–38.

17. Goldhagen, *Worse than War*, 485.

18. Ibid.

19. See Robert Melson, *Revolution and Genocide: On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Straus, *Order of Genocide*.

20. Goldhagen, *Worse than War*, 485.

21. See Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide*, trans. Cynthia Shoch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); and Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia*, 1st American ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004).

22. Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy*, 22.

23. Traniello, "Power-Sharing."

24. Ibid., 30.

25. Ibid., 41.

26. Ibid., 35.

27. Ibid., 35, 38.
28. Ibid., 35.
29. Melson, *Revolution and Genocide*, 18–19.
30. Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 12–15.
31. Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley, *Why Not Kill Them All? The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 31–36.
32. Traniello, “Power-Sharing.”
33. Ibid., 29.
34. Overy, *Dictators*.
35. Traniello, “Power-Sharing.”
36. Timothy D. Sisk and Christoph Stefes, “Power Sharing as an Interim Step in Peace Building: Lessons from South Africa,” in *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*, ed. Philip C. Roeder and Donald Rothchild (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 293–318.
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39. Traniello, “Power-Sharing.”
40. Ibid., 39.
41. Stettenheim, “Arusha Accords,” 230.
42. Lindsay Scorgie, “Rwanda’s Arusha Accords: A Missed Opportunity,” *Undercurrent* 1, no. 1 (2004): 72, <http://dSPACE.africaportal.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/23742/1/Rwandas%20Arusha%20Accords%20A%20Missed%20Opportunity.pdf?1>.
43. Traniello, “Power-Sharing,” 39; and Scorgie, “Rwanda’s Arusha Accords,” 72.
44. Traniello, “Power-Sharing,” 29, 35–36, 38, 39, 41, 42.
45. Ibid., 35.
46. Straus, “Destroy Them to Save Us,” 554–55.
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52. Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 215–18.



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