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Guest Editorial: Critical Genocide and Atrocity Prevention Studies

The frustrations of a genocide scholar are many. Chief among them is what Keith Tester refers to as the “rage” of the “incapacitated” – the paradox of having too much knowledge of human suffering but finding our selves unable to do little more than shout, “something must be done!” Institutions have become the primary moral agents for responding to terrible events like genocide, Tester notes, adding “It is not just the world which has been wholly institutionalized; our imaginations and horizons for moral action have been institutionalized as well.” We seek to influence governments and other international actors to do something, and sometimes we even have suggestions as to what they should do. We also educate and raise awareness so that there might be public pressure that will spark the political will to act. But our action is always reliant on more powerful others to take on the challenge. And this displacement of agency allows us what Tester calls a “conceit of innocence,” as though our rage is enough to remove our guilt of living in a world that allows and enables genocide.

These frustrations are perhaps what led R.J. Rummel, an early contributor to the field of genocide studies and author of Death by Government, to pen a series of novels that imagine time-travelling, alternative-universe-hopping lovers who are set on a course to prevent the worst human atrocities. In the first book in the series, they seek to use their knowledge of genocide to create a peaceful world. But the actions they are willing to take to achieve this goal often leave them susceptible to Rummel’s broader message that power kills. The novel betrays both a longing for meaningful intervention and a pessimism about the human condition. It should come as no surprise that Rummel sought to work through his experience as a genocide scholar by imagining counterfactual histories of key atrocity events.

Even when we are not working through fictional media, scholars are nonetheless engaged in emplotting narratives of genocide and its prevention. We draw upon interpretive grids to make meaning – frames – and within these frames we include the information necessary to present a sensible picture of genocide and its possible prevention. In the editing work of frames-making, information is, of course, left out. Characters are presented as inhabiting clear roles. The mise-en-scène communicates the setting and the main line(s) of action. But beyond the frame, in what Alexander Hinton refers to as the “gutter,” one finds other perspectives and experiences that have been pushed out of sight.

For this special issue, we invited scholars working in the centers and peripheries of genocide studies to explore the gutters of prevention and to query what exists beyond our taken-for-granted frames. We prodded them to engage in acts of scholarly transgression, reclaim their “imagination and horizons,” interrogate the given categories and methods of the field, and let tensions multiply.

They have done so to different extents and different ways but always as part of open dialogue, first as part of a workshop, then in the process of peer review, and now in their iteration in this special issue and your reading of it. It is for this reason that, from the start, we were committed to publishing these essays in an open-access journal as opposed to one that lies behind a paywall or in an edited book.

2 Ibid., 7.
3 Ibid., 8.
5 Rummel, War & Democide.
8 Tester, Moral Culture, 7.
Indeed, the paywall is perhaps an interesting way to consider the discipline of prevention, which is not just predicated on a set of conventional frames but also organizational forms, funding streams, status markers, domains of “influence,” vernaculars, political and institutional power, and so forth – a “prevention paywall” if you will. Our intent as co-convenors of the workshop, co-editors of this special issue, and co-authors of this introduction is to step into the gutters of prevention and thereby help destabilize the frames undergirding this prevention paywall. It is an endeavor that requires openness and dialogue, not foreclose.

To this end, this brief introduction offers four ways in which the contributors have stepped into the gutters of prevention. We invite you to join us in our endeavor to rethink prevention, one that, as with Rummel’s time-travelers, requires a willingness to reconsider the taken-for-granted and envision new possibilities. If “capacity” refers to the ability to contain, it also suggests “intellectual power” and ability creating “a possibility.”9 One modest response to the rage of the incapacitated is to create such new possibilities by rethinking prevention.

Critique is Prevention

Critique is a first key pathway for this critical genocide studies and prevention. In the spirit of Derrida, who defended his work against critics who suggested deconstruction is an amoral practice unable to take a stand on key social issues, these contributors suggest that “critique is prevention.”

In the aftermath of the Paul de Man affair, when the literary scholar and practitioner of deconstruction was discovered to have been a past Nazi sympathizer, embezzler and bigamist, Derrida found not only his friendship with de Man, but his entire intellectual project called into question.10 The fact that deconstruction undercuts the Western tradition of reasoned decision-making was viewed to authorize the unprincipled actions of de Man. More seriously, it potentially placed Derrida among the camp of philosophers, such as Heidegger and Schmidt, perceived to be in sway to authoritarianism.11 By refusing to privilege modern practices of judgment and reason, deconstruction was accused of creating space for an authoritarian will to power to impose its own order.

In a presentation to the Cardozo Law School, which would become his essay “Force of Law,” Derrida offers a sophisticated apologia for deconstruction. The broader complexity of this essay is beyond the scope of this introduction; what is most pertinent to our discussion is how he presents the need for critical practices of deconstruction when contemplating justice as an “experience of the impossible.” Because justice is never final or fixed, since it represents an ideal horizon that is always “to come,” our efforts to achieve justice are simply calculations, or decisions, that attempt to approximate justice.

This is where the “force” of law comes into play, as particular calculations of an incalculable justice require the force of decision to assert them as universal law. Deconstruction, by offering a technique for interrogating the arbitrary and “mystical” force of such decisions, provides a means for keeping open aporias, or paradoxes, of justice so they are not facilely resolved.

For example, Derrida reflects on the aporia that we feel an urgency to act in the face of injustice while, at the same time, we require an infinite amount of information to act justly. Any response we make to a perceived injustice must be understood as a fallible, partial response. Deconstruction ensures that any such decision to act will be subject to critical interrogation.12

What is genocide prevention if not a form of decision-making in the name of justice? In order to imagine a possible intervention, researchers and policy-makers make multiple decisions, including assessing which signs and signals denote an oncoming crisis and which counter-measures will be

10 Matters were not helped by Derrida’s book *Mémoires: Pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1988), published shortly after de Man’s death, which many read as an exculpatory treatise that took too lightly de Man’s antisemitism. Given Derrida’s prior efforts to speak out against anti-Semitism, his delay in grappling critically with the de Man affair caused a certain amount of disappointment, and led to further questioning of the ethics of deconstruction.
most effective in preventing atrocity crimes. There is a need to act, and questioning the decisions that are made in a rush to prevent can seem impractical or even a distraction. But each act of prevention is a fallible calculation, necessitating rather than ruling out critique.

As cultural theorist Gayatri Spivak has argued with respect to the genocide of the Rohingya, there is also a need for impractical thinking in the face of genocide, since it is only through imaginative, impractical thinking that we can approach an understanding of our common humanity with a targeted Other like the Rohingya, while at the same time, granting them their own history.13

The contributors to this special issue call upon multiple critical theorists to argue for the practicality of a seemingly impractical critique. Andrew Woolford, Adam Muller, and Struan Sinclair reference Wendy Brown’s argument that critique is a means to prevent foreclosing the present and stultifying imagination, in addition to employing Deleuze and Guattari’s language of the molar and the molecular to critically assess predominant genocide prevention metaphors. Ernesto Verdeja conjures up the spirit of the Frankfurt School and its emancipatory project in contradistinction to allegedly value-free research. Alexander Hinton weaves Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida into his recounting of critical prevention stories that operate to unpack some of the baggage we bring with us to the study of genocide prevention. And Jobb Arnold gathers an eclectic theoretical crowd of Sara Ahmed, Glen Coulthard, and Claudia Card, among others, in his emphasis on fostering social vitality over simple prevention.

In each of these nods to well-known critical theorists, what we see is not rote application of fashionable theory. Nor is it simply name-dropping for purposes of demonstrating cultural capital. These theorists are not erected as part of a jargon-laden paywall meant to only allow the initiated into this issue. Instead, concepts and ideas are redeployed to bring the spirit of critique into genocide prevention studies. They are used to burst open familiar ways and patterns – that is, to be for a moment, as Spivak urges, impractical so that new possibilities of practical thinking open up within our field.

This is not to say that the research undertaken by those currently working on genocide prevention is not in its own way critical. Certainly, when decisions are made about how to predict, assess and respond to potential crises, critical tools are employed to assist in making a judgment. This can be done, for example, by assuming there exists a normal or stable state of social life, and measuring against this norm the destabilizing forces that portend a crisis.

Verdeja in this issue refers to this as the “teleology” of genocide prevention, which is often a western liberal-democratic norm. This norm becomes the criterion against which the crisis, and therefore need for prevention, is measured. The existence of such a norm allows for critical evaluation to the extent that societal stability is assessed against this norm, enabling for criticisms of those societies that fail to match the ideal.

This is not, however, the way we envision the idea that “critique is prevention.” While critical work, such as that performed in most genocide prevention studies, engages in judgment by evaluating a social situation against an expressed or unexpressed criterion, critique endeavors to interrogate all criteria. Our sacred truths, our heretofore unexamined positionality, and (gasp) maybe even Raphael Lemkin are exposed to questioning. Critique is prevention because, to return to Derrida, it challenges the force of genocide studies and genocide prevention.

The force of genocide prevention refers to more than the violence of military intervention, such as that carried out as a last resort under the Responsibility to Protect, as discussed by Daniel Feierstein in this special issue. Military violence, as Feierstein shows, begets further violence,14 and is too often distributed based on arbitrary (rather than just), self-interested criteria – such as when Libya is selected for intervention while Honduras is not. But even when genocide prevention does not reach the point of military intervention, it is still susceptible to performative contradiction when not accompanied by critique.

In other words, it answers perceived violence with a violence of its own. This is arguably a lesser violence, one that includes imposing meaning on complex situations, translating local

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14 See also Alan Kuperman, “Did the R2P Foster Violence in Libya?” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 13, no. 2 (2019), 38-57.
experiences into universal narratives, creating normative criteria for assessment based upon a Western cosmology, and disguising self-interest and geopolitical maneuvering as justice. But it is a violence, nonetheless, and one that threatens to undermine the ethos of genocide prevention, which, in general, seeks to make room for collective vitality and flourishing.

When genocide prevention comes under question, perhaps as a form of neocolonialism or geopolitics by other means, the ethos of genocide prevention is potentially compromised because collective persistence is subsumed under other interests. Critique prevents genocide prevention from ignoring its blind spots, becoming habituated to Western norms and reason, and failing to imagine possibilities beyond the current geopolitical arrangement. Critique can even lead us to question the basic axiological and categorical commitments that underpin the project of genocide prevention, leading us to ask, among other questions: What is a group? Where do its boundaries begin and end? What actions threaten its discussion? And which types of groups do we choose to protect and which do we ignore?

Pathways to a Critical Genocide Prevention Studies
This sort of critique opens space for new visions of prevention, ones the contributors explore in various ways even as this special issue offers only a sampling of the variety of interventions possible through a critical genocide prevention studies lens. In addition to and often in the spirit of critique, the essays that follow step into the gutters of prevention in various ways including by exploring: a) Genealogies of Prevention and Interdisciplinary Modularity; b) Scalar Interventions and Chronotopes of Genocide Prevention; c) The Practice and Performance of Critique; and d) Critical Epistemologies of Prevention.

There are other possibilities for critique as prevention, some still to emerge, as one would expect from a transgressive scholarly practice. Indeed, all of the papers presented here can and should be pushed to take their critical project further. We invite readers of this journal to engage and critique our work – in the open spirit of Roland Barthes’ “writerly” as opposed to the monologic authority of “the readerly” – as Hinton discusses in his contribution.

Genealogies of Prevention and Interdisciplinary Modularity
A starting point for the critique of genocide prevention is quite often an examination of how we got to the place we are at now. There is no one trajectory for understanding the development of genocide prevention as a distinct subfield of investigation within the genocide studies discipline. In this special issue, there are different, yet complementary genealogies of emergence. The genealogical method involves unearthing the development of things we take for granted, such as the logic of prevention, without assuming their naturalness or inevitability.15

In their paper, Woolford, Muller, and Sinclair examine the origin story of this journal and the rationale Israel Charny and Roger Smith provided for including the word “Prevention” in its title. They connect this idea of prevention, found also in Lemkin’s thought, to late modern “risk society,” when tools of prediction and actuarial science fostered the sense that global risks could be calculated, making intervention possible.

Verdeja emplots the rise of prevention slightly differently, situating it within a liberal orientation and accompanied by an emergent human rights regime designed to establish international rule of law. Feierstein, likewise, points to the growth of universal jurisdiction as a means of breaking through the impunity that comes with an entrenched sovereignty. But he also sees universal jurisdiction transformed into a global policing strategy as an “international criminal justice approach” takes hold.

As Hinton reminds us in his article, there are many stories we tell ourselves about genocide and prevention. This variance means there is also potential to use counter histories to emplot critical genocide prevention studies in a different manner. These counter-histories need not solely be studies of the emergence of genocide prevention. They can also focus on specific genealogical moments. In this vein, Kerry Whigham in his article examines the notion that some conflicts are “intractable” and how this language circumscribes the possibility of conflict transformation. Julia

Zulver, as well, questions the representation of women in the genocide prevention literature solely as peacemakers, and the consequences of this limiting role assignment. New stories can be told about genocide prevention in a manner that opens space for critical insight.

Genealogical interventions arise not only through discussions within the discipline, but also by broadening the field. Although genocide studies prides itself as a multidisciplinary field, research in this field has traditionally been informed by a relatively narrow range of disciplines, including political science, law, history, sociology, and psychology. There remain opportunities for engagement with other fields. This is what we mean by Interdisciplinary Modularity as a form of critical intervention. Through interdisciplinary bridging, expansion, or analogy, the habits and assumptions of genocide studies can shift and grow.

In this special issue, several authors adopt and adapt lessons from research in areas such as civil war studies, anthropology, ecology, and Indigenous studies to expand or re-orient the direction of genocide prevention studies. Along these lines, Arnold connects Card’s well-known work on social death with Antonovsky’s salutogenetic model of health and Ahmed’s work on emotions and affect. And through this assemblage of ideas, he brings to light the ways local actors promote social vitality and cohesion for their groups.

For Whigham, the dramaturgical approach of performance studies offers inspiration for thinking about how individuals enact scenarios that lead beyond intractable conflict. Zulver is influenced by research on women’s social movements to examine the diverse agency of women in situations of “high risk feminism.” Finally, Hinton pushes further past field boundaries, stirring mythology, comic books, translation, and archaeology into the interdisciplinary cauldron. Genealogy exposes contingencies in the development of genocide prevention as an area of study. Modularity takes this contingency as an invitation to further re-shape the field. Deprived of an unassailable foundation, genocide prevention studies can take on the multivocality Verdeja and Hinton promote in their articles drawing on varied levels of analysis, representational and literary strategies, conceptual schemes, and methodologies so as not to become ossified in its practice.

Scalar Interventions and Chronotopes of Genocide Prevention

As with Interdisciplinary modularity, scalar interventions are meant to reposition the study of genocide studies by suggesting genocide prevention cannot simply be measured at one scale. In this sense, the prevention research and scholarship needs to be multi-scalar -- or at least keep an eye on other scales. Andrew Woolford’s “mesh” model provides an illustration of how this can be done.16

Several contributors similarly point to the importance of micro-level scales for assessing the efficacy of genocide prevention, as can be seen in the articles by Whigham, Arnold, and Woolford, Muller, and Sinclair. Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Verdeja also give attention to local and regional variations in genocidal processes, but their interventions are more fully multi-scalar in that they call for genocide prevention studies to move beyond a fixation on state-level research. Zulver shares this concern, noting how women are often only considered as micro-level actors, rather than having roles to play at meso-, macro-, or even global levels.

In James Waller’s article, the scalar positioning is presented somewhat differently, conceived as placed either upstream, midstream, or downstream from the conflict. This metaphor suggests not only spatial proximity to conflict but also temporal proximity, since upstream represents the time and space before the event, midstream is within the moment of crisis, and downstream addresses its results. This configuration of time and space brings to mind Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope, the admixture of an always-entangled space and time, and its relevance to critical prevention.17

Too often, our attention is turned to either time or space. Though she does not use the term “chronotope,” Brehm’s examination of sub-regional patterns of genocide in Rwanda are an effective illustration of the chronotope and its amalgamation of space/time. Whereas state-level

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16 Andrew Woolford, This Benevolent Experiment: Indigenous Boarding Schools, Genocide, and Redress in Canada and the United States (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).
analyses spatialize and temporize the Rwanda genocide as a nation-wide phenomenon beginning in April 1994, chronotopic analysis illustrates the ebbs and flows of the genocide, as it sparks first in specific regions before heating up in others. Feierstein’s critical analysis of differential responses to mass violence also brings to mind the chronotope, as geopolitical and historical factors collide in determining where/when prevention is deemed to be needed (e.g., Libya) and where/when it is not (e.g., Yemen, Honduras, Turkey).

With time and space comes attention to movement, as consideration of the flows of genocide -- including its pace (fast or slow) -- brings awareness of pulsating, oscillating, and cyclical patterns of violence that trouble linear models of prevention (see Verdeja, Woolford, Muller, and Sinclair, and Waller). When the goal is to interrupt the process of genocide, the scale, chronotope, and flow of genocide are matters of great importance.

The Practice and Performance of Critique

Critique must not be directed solely outward. The target is not a set of scholars or practitioners who are branded “mainstream” or “conservative” or by some other label. When the practices of genocide prevention are subject to critique, these practices include not only those that are perceived to be most prevalent, but also our own. Such reflexivity is at the heart of critique. For this reason, critical scholars tend to offer tools or guidelines for improving critical practice, or through their writing, seek to perform alternative ways to engage with our subject matter.

Tools of critical practice can include deconstruction, decentering, frame-shifting, multiple perspective-taking, and exposure of blind spots, among other techniques. Many of these tools, and others, are on display in this special issue. Zulver decenters a seemingly gender-neutral prevention studies to create space to examine women’s agency, while at the same time troubling notions of women and women’s mobilization.

Woolford, Muller, and Sinclair discuss the tendency toward linear and molar representations in the genocide prevention and gesture toward a more rhizomatic and molecular understanding of prevention. And, in addition to suggesting that critical genocide prevention studies should be anti-teleological and multivalent, Verdeja also provides guidance as to how self-reflective and dialectical approaches are needed within this area of study.

Waller’s contribution to this volume also serves an important critical role. He challenges the critics to better communicate the complexity and urgency of genocide prevention to political actors. In this manner, his article also offers a performative example of the practice of critique. He illustrates how one must turn critique back upon oneself and consider the end goals of our endeavors.

In a different way, Feierstein and Hinton also exhibit performances of critique. In Feierstein’s provocation, the art of provocation is fully on display. Academics are often trained to hedge, balance, or even equivocate, the provocateur plays an important role in shaking us from our stupor. In Feierstein’s case, his provocation comes in the form of a discomforting exposé of the contradictions and limitations of preventative practice.

Hinton’s piece in itself is a performance of critique in the sense that the very act of writing is intended to overturn conventions of genocide prevention studies and academic scholarship more generally. It offers multivocality, juxtaposition, recursion, and contested meanings to break us free from the habits of our research and to alert us to how the cures we proffer may also carry poison within them. To encourage such reflexivity, he offers a “first lesson in critical prevention,” one encapsulated in a warning given in the opening line of his essay.

Critical epistemologies of prevention

The critical interventions all raise questions about how we know what we claim to know about genocide and its prevention. They also present opportunities to know genocide and prevention differently. With respect to the former, Feierstein challenges the data often used to support so-called humanitarian intervention. By alerting readers to rates of violence and displacement in nations not typically considered in need of intervention, he exposes the contingency of decisions to intervene under the responsibility to protect.
Whigham directs our gaze more toward local ways of knowing, and suggests that “flipping the script” can allow local actors to know their conflicts differently and overcome intractability. Likewise, Woolford, Muller, and Sinclair look to new technologies, such as virtual reality, to allow people to know their social world differently and thereby contribute to the prevention of further cultural destruction of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Critical epistemologies of genocide prevention are a means to disrupt or transgress the frame, to find our way to the gutter. As Hinton’s essay shows, we can carefully excavate the tools that enable and authorize our research and allow us to tell a story about genocide and its prevention. If critique is prevention it is also prevention against becoming too invested in our own professional expertise and the narratives of genocide and prevention we are empowered to create. By excavating our tools and permits, as Hinton shows, we become aware of our investments, the frames we construct, and some of what lies beyond them.

Critical prevention studies, and critical genocide studies, remain areas that are still in their infancy. However, understanding that critique is prevention compels us toward a different understanding of prevention: one that is ongoing, adaptable, relational, reflexive, fallible, and multi-perspectival. In this manner, critique transforms prevention into something more reflexive and consistently active.

Whereas prevention can suggest a surgical cut, a wound opened and closed to avert some greater threat, critique as prevention suggests something more persistent and dynamic. Like Arnold’s used of the salutogenetic model, it suggests an always “to come” health that can only be supported through attention to multiple factors.

Rather than a “responsibility to protect” it suggests what Harroway describes as “response-ability,” which is not a liberal obligation to act in a singular manner but rather a relational praxis of attention and response to the troubles we face. We enact response-ability not just through facts, but also recognition of the stories we tell—and by joining different stories together, we open up our frames of genocide prevention to the new possibilities demanded by the challenge of Tester’s rage of the incapacitated.

Andrew Woolford
Alexander Hinton

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Bibliography


One of humanity’s greatest achievements in the last century has been the creation of international courts of law to judge those responsible for state crimes such as genocide. These courts were originally a response to the wholesale destruction of European societies by the Nazis during World War II. The human rights conventions which proliferated in the post-war period attempted to create an effective universal jurisdiction to limit the punitive power of the state, especially where large numbers of the civilian population were involved.

The doctrine of universal jurisdiction grew out of the realization that certain state crimes destroyed the social fabric to such an extent that they were unlikely to be prosecuted in the territory where they had been committed. The only way of bringing the perpetrators to justice would be to start legal proceedings in international or regional courts or in the national courts of other countries. This, of course, was no easy task, but universal jurisdiction offered new hope to the victims of genocide and massacres by establishing that such crimes were no longer subject to amnesties or statutes of limitations.

The Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes Trials (1945–1948) were highly problematic and raised numerous valid questions. Only the defeated powers were put on trial and they were tried by military tribunals made up of judges from the nations that had won the Second World War. It was said that this was “Victor’s Justice” and that due process and several of the procedural rights of the accused were not respected. However, it spelt the end of impunity for at least some Nazi and Japanese leaders. It also encouraged oppressed peoples to demand justice for state crimes they had suffered and to persist in their demands for years to come.

Nevertheless, universal jurisdiction has been subject to different interpretations, depending on the role of international and regional institutions in the fight against impunity. Examples of conflicting interpretations are found in the rulings of the ad hoc International Criminal Tribunals on the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and Mixed Tribunals in the cases of East Timor, Cambodia and Sierra Leone. They are also found in the rulings of national courts (paradoxically less visible) in important cases like Bosnia-Herzegovina, Argentina, Chile, Bangladesh, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay, among other countries.

More disturbingly, the different attempts to prosecute and punish state crimes in International Tribunals have gradually evolved into a self-referential system that tends to invalidate or ignore national courts in favor of a new international criminal justice approach. Instead of complementing the work of national courts, these new international institutions have gradually transformed themselves into the main instruments for prosecuting human rights violations. This has happened despite their frequent ignorance of the history, language and culture of the countries concerned.

The result is an inefficient and self-perpetuating bureaucracy that has significantly altered the original intention behind universal jurisdiction. This inefficiency can be seen clearly in the International Criminal Court, which has only managed to convict two people in 16 years. The ICC is also criticized for focusing on African countries and not intervening in other important cases (e.g. Afghanistan, Colombia, Honduras, Iraq, Mexico, among many others).

However, the inefficiency of the ICC is less dangerous than the discourse of prevention that has developed parallel to it. Since the end of the Cold War, the concept of universal jurisdiction has shifted from prosecuting State crimes, which would otherwise go unpunished, to military intervention to “prevent” crimes before they are committed. The worst example was the United Nations attack on Libya in 2011 in response to reports of “possible” crimes against humanity — attacks for which the UN invoked the new international principle of “responsibility to protect” (R2P), approved in 2005. In fact, the attacks plunged Libya into anarchy, producing many more deaths than they were intended to prevent. Unfortunately, the clamor for “intervention” comes

1 See, for example, Luis Jiménez de Asúa, Tratado de Derecho penal, Tomo II (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1950). Also, Danilo Zolo, La justicia de los vencedores. De Nuremberg a Bagdad (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2007).
not only from diplomats, politicians and the mass media but — more alarmingly — from many genocide and human rights scholars and activists.

This paper critically evaluates the use of international laws designed to punish genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity as legitimations for military intervention to prevent disasters that have not yet occurred. In other words, it deals with the thorny issue of atrocity prevention. It argues that the legitimation of “pre-emptive” killing, far from defending human rights, has become yet another way to violate them. Indeed, the “responsibility to protect” is being used to ensure control of oil and gas resources and geopolitical enclaves where previous discourses (e.g. the Cold War and the War on Terror) have lost their efficacy. It contrasts levels of violence in hotspots around the world with calls to protect civilian populations, and shows that intervention does not reduce violence and often achieves the opposite effect.

Core Elements of the New Principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

The principle of “responsibility to protect” emerged from an international conference on issues of national sovereignty and the possibility of intervention. The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) met in September 2000 and produced its final report in 2001 with the title “The Responsibility to Protect”. The report analyzed three obligations: the responsibility to react, to prevent and to rebuild. But the fundamental issue, made clear through the name of the Commission itself, was the possibility of international “intervention” in cases of systematic human rights violations. The justification for suspending state sovereignty in such cases was the failure of the international community to prevent genocide in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995) and Rwanda (1994).

From then onward, the principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) became the focus of dozens of organizations and think tanks, such as the Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, the Global Center for R2P, the Asia-Pacific Center for R2P or the Canadian Center for the Responsibility to Protect. It is worth to point out that many of these organizations are subsidized by the American Department of State, the Australian and Canadian governments, or the foundations of private companies with interests in intervention or subsequent “reconstruction” in overseas countries.

Soon after the report appeared, the principle was adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2005. Three years later, in 2008, the General Secretary appointed a UN Special Adviser on Responsibility to Protect. Thanks to agreements, diplomatic pressure or an inability to foresee the consequences, the principle of R2P was still supported — or at least not opposed — by the majority of UN member states in 2015. It is true that there has been occasional dissent, such as the Brazilian government’s criticism of intervention in Libya and its proposal to establish a “Responsibility while Protecting” (in view of the damage produced by the intervention forces themselves). However, only a handful of States have regularly protested, including — most significantly — Belarus, Cuba, India, Russia, Sudan, Syria and Venezuela.

The 2005 UN document transformed the original principles (prevent, react and rebuild) into three pillars. *Pillar I* affirms that States carry the primary responsibility to protect their populations (whether nationals or not) from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing; *Pillar II* says that the international community (including the UN, regional organizations, governments, and civil society) is committed to helping States acquire the capacity to fulfill their primary responsibility of protecting their population from mass atrocities; *Pillar III* follows with the commitment that, when a State is manifestly failing to protect its population from mass atrocities, or is perpetrating the atrocities itself, then the international community must take timely and decisive action to prevent and halt genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.

With one or two exceptions, such as the intervention in Kenya between 2008 and 2013, the reality, however, is that the first and second pillars have not been implemented. Instead, the
regulatory authority’s main aim has been to suspend national sovereignty and the prohibition against the use of force in cases where “atrocity crimes” are being (or are likely to be) committed. This being so, it is necessary to establish who determines the seriousness of such crimes — or the potential seriousness of possible future crimes — in different parts of the world. Above all, it is necessary to check whether justifications for R2P are, in fact, borne out in practice.

Critical Analysis of Military Intervention (the Last Resort of R2P)
The two main criteria for military intervention under the responsibility to protect (Pillar 3) are:

1) Military Intervention is necessary in societies with a high risk of violent death among civilians; and
2) Military intervention is necessary to reduce levels of violence against civilians.

These are the only justifications for violating State Sovereignty.

To decide whether these criteria have been met, the first step is to identify those conflicts with the largest numbers of victims and the highest civilian casualty ratios. Obviously, numbers can never explain the whole picture. Numbers have to be interpreted. Moreover, even when estimates are based on reliable sources, these figures are still estimates. We normally speak of a range of estimates rather than a fixed and precise number. However, with these provisos in mind, the different estimates give us at least a starting point from which to interpret the data.

The preliminary data presented in this paper shows an astonishing mismatch between the countries in which the R2P principle has been applied through military intervention and the most violent countries in terms of civilian casualties. Figure 1 shows the ten most important conflicts in terms of number of casualties during the last 10 years and Figure 2 shows the first ten conflicts in terms of civilian casualty ratios. What is clear from both is that some countries are clearly excluded from the R2P discourse. This may be due to lack of interest among the self-appointed protectors or to their alliances with the perpetrators. That is very clear in Sri Lanka (5th in number of casualties and 2nd in civilian casualty ratios), Pakistan (4th in number of casualties) or Israel (10th in civilian casualty ratios) — although Israel is at least present in the media. Finally, we should not forget Yemen, which has received very little attention despite the number of victims (7th in number of casualties and 8th in civilian casualty ratios).

The second step in deciding whether interventions have been justified is to see whether they have reduced levels of violence against civilians. In fact, what we find in those cases present in UN or mass media discourses is that most deaths occurred after the military intervention. This was so in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, for example. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show civilian casualties before and after the international military interventions. In the case of Libya, intervention occurred directly under the R2P principle; in the cases of Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, similar arguments were used (preventing civilian casualties) even though intervention was not supported by the UN but was conducted unilaterally by the US and/or NATO.

Kenya. The intervention to overthrow former Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbabgo is much more controversial. This occurred shortly after Gbabgo decided to create a Central Bank that would allow the Ivory Coast to have its own currency and free itself from the monetary dependence of other former French colonies in the region, whose currency remains under French control. This initiative is similar to that which Khadaffi attempted shortly before the same principle of intervention was applied against him. Although currently on trial the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Gbabgo’s removal from power by an opposition force with strong French support is still questioned by many organizations. Debatably, it constitutes another example of the use of the “responsibility to protect” principle as an excuse to violate national sovereignty for economic gain. This is not to deny the human rights violations committed by both Khadaffi and Gbabgo. But these are no different from others that occurred, for example, in Gabon or Equatorial Guinea, which have not evoked the same indignation, denunciations or “interventions.” I am grateful to Kerry Whigham for the information on the implementation of R2P principles in the cases of Kenya and Ivory Coast and for pointing out the need to include them. I am also grateful to Cruz Melchor Eya Nchama for the information on Cote D’Ivoire. Critical references to Lybia and Cote D’Ivoire can also be found in Jean Ping, Éclipse sur l’Afrique, Fallait-il tuer Kadhafi? (Paris: Michalon, 2014) and Yash Tandon, Le Commerce, c’est la guerre, (Geneva: Cetim, 2015).
Figure 1: Victims of Armed Conflict 2007-2016, organized by total number

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>38500</td>
<td>69086</td>
<td>57529</td>
<td>46643</td>
<td>44303</td>
<td>257026</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6341</td>
<td>6864</td>
<td>7405</td>
<td>7719</td>
<td>8056</td>
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<td>17980</td>
<td>96381</td>
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<td>2217</td>
<td>2200</td>
<td>1043</td>
<td>1144</td>
<td>1072</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>12149</td>
<td>10138</td>
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<td>3537</td>
<td>6864</td>
<td>6052</td>
<td>2863</td>
<td>3018</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>3136</td>
<td>2077</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>30857</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1529</td>
<td>1481</td>
<td>2151</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>1104</td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>16375</td>
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<tr>
<td>7) Yemen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>1140</td>
<td>2330</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>1660</td>
<td>6700</td>
<td>2426</td>
<td>15128</td>
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<tr>
<td>8) Nigeria</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>405</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>1629</td>
<td>3811</td>
<td>4493</td>
<td>2430</td>
<td>13903</td>
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<tr>
<td>9) Sudan</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>1054</td>
<td>1404</td>
<td>1411</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>1264</td>
<td>1314</td>
<td>9099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Congo</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>1531</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>7707</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Victims of Armed Conflict 2007-2016, organized by victim/total population rate

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Average Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Syria</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0,046</td>
<td>1,885</td>
<td>3,488</td>
<td>2,996</td>
<td>2,490</td>
<td>2,404</td>
<td>2,662</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Sri Lanka</td>
<td>0,126</td>
<td>0,414</td>
<td>0,506</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0,349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Afghanistan</td>
<td>0,259</td>
<td>0,203</td>
<td>0,226</td>
<td>0,238</td>
<td>0,249</td>
<td>0,251</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0,052</td>
<td>0,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Libya</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0,312</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0,052</td>
<td>0,044</td>
<td>0,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Somalia</td>
<td>0,143</td>
<td>0,134</td>
<td>0,126</td>
<td>0,178</td>
<td>0,156</td>
<td>0,204</td>
<td>0,068</td>
<td>0,082</td>
<td>0,084</td>
<td>0,134</td>
<td>0,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Iraq</td>
<td>0,078</td>
<td>0,076</td>
<td>0,035</td>
<td>0,037</td>
<td>0,034</td>
<td>0,019</td>
<td>0,056</td>
<td>0,347</td>
<td>0,281</td>
<td>0,242</td>
<td>0,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) South Sudan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0,021</td>
<td>0,025</td>
<td>0,083</td>
<td>0,145</td>
<td>0,041</td>
<td>0,058</td>
<td>0,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Yemen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0,001</td>
<td>0,004</td>
<td>0,007</td>
<td>0,047</td>
<td>0,094</td>
<td>0,023</td>
<td>0,063</td>
<td>0,249</td>
<td>0,088</td>
<td>0,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Ukraine</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0,097</td>
<td>0,029</td>
<td>0,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Israel</td>
<td>0,040</td>
<td>0,094</td>
<td>0,094</td>
<td>0,004</td>
<td>0,007</td>
<td>0,008</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0,210</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0,065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Author production. World Bank, “Database International Development,” accessed September 22, 2019, http://databank.bancomundial.org/data/source/world-development-indicators/preview/or. Last Updated: 07/25/2018. Indicator Name: Battle-related deaths (number of people). Definition: Battle-related deaths are deaths in battle-related conflicts between warring parties in the conflict dyad (two conflict units that are parties to a conflict). Typically, battle-related deaths occur in warfare involving the armed forces of the warring parties. This includes traditional battlefield fighting, guerrilla activities, and all kinds of bombardments of military units, cities, and villages, etc. The targets are usually the military itself and its installations or state institutions and state representatives, but there is often substantial collateral damage in the form of civilians being killed in crossfire, in indiscriminate bombings, etc. All deaths—military as well as civilian—incurred in such situations, are counted as battle-related deaths. Alternate source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program, http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/.

5 Sources are similar to Figure 1. When information is not available for a given year, the rate is estimated only for the years in which there was reliable information.
The figures are very clear. But if we widen the focus from casualties in military conflicts to the total number of civilian casualties or violence in a society, including all kinds of violent death, the results are even more striking. Figures 3 and 4 show the top ten countries with the highest Intentional Homicide Rate. Most countries among the top ten are totally excluded from discussions about mass violence (Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, the USA, Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador, and Jamaica). Moreover, the list includes three of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, the body which selects countries for military intervention. South Africa has played a significant role in the development of transitional justice but is one of the most violent countries in the world. It seems that the “reconciliation” without justice proposed by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is not the recipe South African representatives and many NGOs, journalists and scholars are trying to sell to the international community. Brazil’s number one position in total number of deaths could be a fundamental variable for understanding the rise of a new fascism in Brazil and Bolsonaro’s victory in the October 2018 presidential election.

Figure 3: Intentional Homicide 2007-2016, organized by total numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNODC Name</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Brazil</td>
<td>44.625</td>
<td>45.885</td>
<td>44.518</td>
<td>43.272</td>
<td>48.084</td>
<td>53.054</td>
<td>54.163</td>
<td>57.091</td>
<td>58.459</td>
<td>61.283</td>
<td>510.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) India</td>
<td>45.362</td>
<td>45.999</td>
<td>45.824</td>
<td>46.460</td>
<td>47.640</td>
<td>47.478</td>
<td>45.878</td>
<td>47.356</td>
<td>44.385</td>
<td>42.678</td>
<td>459.060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A third way to calculate civilian casualties in conflicts is by examining the number of refugees. Again, we find the same situation as before: large numbers of refugees do not necessarily trigger military interventions, as is shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6. And where the two coincide, the number of refugees increases after the intervention and not before.

---

Figure 4: Intentional Homicide 2007-2016, organized by rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Average Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Honduras</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>66.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) El Salvador</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>105.4</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>64.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Venezuela</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>51.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Jamaica</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>47.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Lesotho</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>6) Guatemala</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>36.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) South Africa</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>32.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Colombia</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>27.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>9) Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>28.3</td>
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<td>29.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32.35</td>
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<td>23.4</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>25.52</td>
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Figure 5: Refugees 2007-2016, organized by average numbers

<table>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3) Iraq</td>
<td>2.309.245</td>
<td>1.903.519</td>
<td>1.785.212</td>
<td>1.683.579</td>
<td>1.428.308</td>
<td>746.206</td>
<td>401.466</td>
<td>369.954</td>
<td>264.094</td>
<td>316.030</td>
<td>1.120.761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Somalia</td>
<td>457.356</td>
<td>561.155</td>
<td>678.309</td>
<td>770.154</td>
<td>1.077.048</td>
<td>1.136.719</td>
<td>1.121.770</td>
<td>1.106.434</td>
<td>1.123.156</td>
<td>1.012.323</td>
<td>904.442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) South Sudan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>87.009</td>
<td>114.470</td>
<td>616.211</td>
<td>778.718</td>
<td>1.436.719</td>
<td>606.625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Sudan</td>
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<td>419.248</td>
<td>368.195</td>
<td>387.288</td>
<td>500.014</td>
<td>568.943</td>
<td>648.942</td>
<td>665.967</td>
<td>627.087</td>
<td>650.640</td>
<td>535.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Sri Lanka</td>
<td>134.952</td>
<td>137.752</td>
<td>145.721</td>
<td>141.074</td>
<td>136.617</td>
<td>132.731</td>
<td>123.084</td>
<td>122.010</td>
<td>121.443</td>
<td>117.479</td>
<td>131.286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Turkey</td>
<td>221.939</td>
<td>214.378</td>
<td>146.387</td>
<td>146.794</td>
<td>139.779</td>
<td>135.372</td>
<td>66.575</td>
<td>63.892</td>
<td>59.558</td>
<td>57.925</td>
<td>125.260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

7 United States Virgin Islands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Belize, and Bahamas were excluded from the top ten because they have a population fewer than 400,000 inhabitants. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Intentional Homicide victims, counts, and rates per 100,000 population,” accessed September 22, 2019, [https://dataunodc.un.org/crime/intentional-homicide-victims](https://dataunodc.un.org/crime/intentional-homicide-victims).

Myanmar, Colombia, Sri Lanka and Turkey are never mentioned in discussions on R2P and military interventions, even if they are among the top ten in one or more of the figures mentioned above.

The Consequences of Military Interventions
The second main criterion for military intervention under the R2P — that it reduces violence against civilians — has clearly not been met. In fact, the figures show exactly the opposite. Violence has grown to catastrophic levels precisely after such interventions where they were not found to be critical before the interventions on any of the indicators. Some civilian casualties occurred during the interventions themselves but most happened as countries descended into social and political chaos after the interventions. This was the case in Iraq in 2003 although it is true that the intervention was carried out by NATO forces without the authorization of the UN. In fact, the number of civilian casualties in both Iraq and Libya was not very high before the interventions; the threat of victimization was much greater than the reality of destruction. In both countries the number of casualties, intentional homicides, refugees and internally displaced persons increased dramatically after the military interventions.

The first military intervention carried out under the R2P principle was in Libya in March 2011. This is one of the most interesting cases, precisely because it was the first case that “followed the book”. Civilian casualties before the intervention have been estimated at between 233 (Human Rights Watch) — the lowest and probably the most reliable figure — and 2,000 (World Health Organization). The Coalition against War Criminals places the number at 519. Nevertheless, even if we accept the highest estimate, Libya did not rank among the top ten for civilian casualties in 2011 (see figures above).

So, a fundamental question would be why the UN decided to intervene in Libya and not in Sri Lanka or Sudan, for example, which had higher numbers of casualties, intentional homicides, refugees and internally displaced persons at the time of the intervention. This question becomes all the more urgent if we consider that the NATO airstrike campaign in Libya in 2011 caused more than 1,100 civilian casualties and the total number of civilian casualties for the whole year was estimated by the Libyan National Transitional Council at around 30,000. Amnesty International estimates around 350,000 internally displaced people from the beginning of the intervention in

* Ibid. Total population was taken from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.
March 2011 to the end of 2016. The number of victims of armed conflict in 2016 — the last year with certified information — was 1,727, a level similar to the five previous years following the intervention.

In short, it is clear that the military intervention did not guarantee civilian protection under the R2P principle. On the contrary, it clearly did more harm than good, and caused anything between five and thirty times as many civilian casualties as existed before the decision to intervene. Exactly the same thing happened after the NATO military intervention in Iraq in 2003, which was supposed to prevent the use of chemical weapons that never were found.

Other Elements Explaining Military Interventions
If the main criteria for military intervention are not being met, why do countries continue to insist on them? The most common critical response to this question is that violence against civilians is used as an excuse to occupy regions with oil and gas reserves. This idea seems plausible in view of increasing international confrontations and competition for resources and Figures 7 & 8 show a clear correlation between major oil and gas reserves and military intervention. Even if correlation is not explanation, at least it gives us a less contradictory possibility than the failed call to “prevent civilian casualties”.

Figure 7: International Top Ten Oil Reserves, 2016

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<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>(BBL)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>VENEZUELA</td>
<td>300,900,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SAUDI ARABIA</td>
<td>266,500,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CANADA</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>IRAN</td>
<td>158,400,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>IRAQ</td>
<td>142,500,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>KUWAIT</td>
<td>101,500,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>UNITED ARAB EMIRATES</td>
<td>97,800,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>RUSSIA</td>
<td>80,000,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>LIBYA</td>
<td>48,360,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>NIGERIA</td>
<td>37,060,000,000</td>
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10 Definition: Crude oil - proved reserves is the stock of proved reserves of crude oil in barrels (bbl). Proved reserves are those quantities of petroleum which, by analysis of geological and engineering data, can be estimated with a high degree of confidence to be commercially recoverable from a given date forward, from known reservoirs and under current economic conditions. CIA, The World Factbook, accessed September 22, 2019, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2244rank.html. The data was updated on 01/01/2017.
The most striking examples are Venezuela and Iran, where interventions are constantly proposed by different US government statements, mass media and even scholarly works. Both cases lie far below the top ten in any of the figures cited. The only exception is the homicide rate in Venezuela, which has escalated dramatically over the last few years, but is still lower than Honduras or El Salvador, where no intervention has been requested. Unlike Venezuela, Honduras has a dictatorial government, which came to power after a coup d’état in which hundreds of opposition members and journalists were killed by the security forces. Honduras finally made the news at the end of 2018. A caravan of refugees and migrants from Honduras and Guatemala numbering around five thousand walked across Mexico in an attempt to reach the US border, where President Trump promised to deploy US security forces to stop them.

On the other hand, Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world and eighth largest gas reserves. Intervention could guarantee control of these resources as happened previously in Iraq and Libya. Similarly, Iran currently holds the fourth largest oil reserves in the world and second largest gas reserves. This is not to deny Iran’s controversial nuclear project but simply to place it within a broader context.

If we look at the top ten countries with energy resources, we can see that their territories are controlled directly by the main superpowers (US, Russia, China). The US controls Saudi Arabia and the Emirates through puppet regimes, while Russia does the same in Turkmenistan and other former Soviet republics. But the superpowers also control resources through military interventions in the name of R2P (Libya) or with other humanitarian excuses (Iraq). At the same time, R2P concerns are clearly ignored in countries with no resources, even if — like Sri Lanka, Honduras or Myanmar — they are in the top ten of civilian casualties or refugees.

The Challenge of Critical Thinking
The current situation regarding genocide prevention is very worrying. On the one hand, the media attempts to stir up our emotions with images of civilian casualties, whether dozens of people

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<td>2</td>
<td>IRAN</td>
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<td>QATAR</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>UNITED STATES</td>
<td>8,714,000,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SAUDI ARABIA</td>
<td>8,602,000,000,000</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>TURKMENISTAN</td>
<td>7,504,000,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>UNITED ARAB EMIRATES</td>
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<td>VENEZUELA</td>
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<td>NIGERIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>CHINA</td>
<td>5,194,000,000,000</td>
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11 Definition: Natural gas - proved reserves compares the stock of proved reserves of natural gas in cubic meters (cu m). CIA, The World Factbook, accessed September 22, 2019, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2253rank.html. The data was updated on 01/01/2017, with the exception of the USA, with data updated on 1/1/2016.

have been killed or just a few. No one asks why these images are shown instead of others, why these civilian casualties deserve our attention while other victims (usually more numerous, as we have shown above) are totally ignored. After an intense period of focusing on a particular group of victims, the call starts: we have the duty to intervene. And a chorus of politicians and journalists start voicing their calls: “How long are we going to stand by? We have to stop the violence! Time for intervention is now!” Almost no one asks why that particular territory is the focus of the mass media, diplomats or scholars: why Libya and not Honduras, why Iraq, Iran or Venezuela instead of Yemen, Sri Lanka, Myanmar or Mexico. It is left to the victims of Honduras, Yemen or Mexico to voice the call for intervention. But their attempts to gain the attention are nearly always unsuccessful.

Once a country’s oil and gas resources are firmly under the control of “peacekeeping” forces, that country quietly disappears from the mass media and political and academic agendas even though, more often than not, the number of casualties continues to grow rapidly. And here is the truly amazing part: no-one stops to evaluate if anything has changed. No one cares about the victims after the intervention, neither the media nor academia. No one talks anymore about post-intervention Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya. A new case grabs everyone’s attention. Now it is the turn of Venezuela and Iran. It is never the turn of Myanmar, Honduras, Yemen or Mexico. Sudan is also there waiting in the wings and maybe one day… one-day intervention will come.

If that last sentence sounded facetious, it is because the general public (and academia as a part of it) has seemingly been reduced to the role of children asking for their parents to “do something” (where parents would be the P5 members at the UNSC). There is no critical analysis, no checking of information, no attempt to think outside the box. We are lost in a terrible cycle of distortion and manipulation and our main complaint seems to be the one expected from us by the hegemonic media: why are the parents (UNSC) not intervening more in those countries where the mass media wants them to act?

Samantha Power’s A Problem from Hell is the best example of this kind of discourse: genocide as the result of our non-intervention.13 Strategically ignoring whole regions of the world (the whole of Latin America, the whole of Southeast Asia and Indonesia, among others), Power suggests that the main reason for genocide is a lack of US military intervention. Unlike Power’s counter-factual assumptions: “if we had intervened...” this paper has tried to illuminate those counterfactuals with real facts: neither UN nor US military interventions happened in the places with the highest civilian casualties. Neither UN nor US military interventions have reduced civilian casualties but rather have increased them.

Finally, it is worth remembering the number of deaths caused by direct or indirect US interventions in Latin America, many of them resulting in genocide and other mass atrocities. Direct interventions include the failed invasion of Cuba (1959), the invasion of the Dominican Republic (1963), attacks on Nicaragua in alliance with the “contras” (from 1979 to the early 1990s), and the invasion of Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989). Indirect interventions include the instigation and support of coups in Guatemala (1954), Paraguay (1954), Haiti (1957), Brazil (1964), Bolivia (1964, 1971 and 1980), Argentina (1966 and 1976), Uruguay (1973), Chile (1973) and the backing of civilian killings under democratic governments in Honduras, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico. The final death toll is difficult to estimate due to insufficient research, but direct interventions produced at

Human Rights? What a Good Idea!

least 20,000 civilian victims — although the figures for Nicaragua, one of the less studied cases, are clearly underestimated. In contrast, indirect interventions produced over 300,000 victims (without counting Colombia and Mexico, which could double the total number).

Instead of Conclusions, Some Provocations
Over the last decades, Genocide Studies has entered what postmodernists would call a “comfort zone.” With fellowships and support from governments or NGOs, we have developed a very comfortable environment in which the knowledge we produce about genocide prevention is neither critical nor useful. We have become trapped by assumptions we have never checked against reality and many of us have chosen to work inside the circle of those assumptions: genocide and mass violence are horrible acts committed by horrible people; we cannot stand by and do nothing; we have the responsibility to protect civilian populations and that responsibility takes the form, as a last resort, of military intervention.

Often it seems that our main — indeed our only — concern regarding genocide prevention is to analyze why our parents (the UNSC) are not willing to put an end to the “bad guys” who are annoying the “good people.” There is a lack of analysis about how cases are chosen, the consequences of intervention; what happens in countries after intervention; or what other variables (like oil and gas resources, among many others) could explain the willingness of some countries to disregard the national sovereignty of others. In the last ten years, no article published in either the Journal of Genocide Research or the Journal of Genocide Studies and Prevention has asked these questions. At both the 2017 IAGS and 2018 INOGS Conferences, more than 15% of the papers presented dealt with “Genocide Prevention” or “Responsibility to Protect.” No paper was presented questioning these notions.

It is time to wake up. We are not children and the UNSC are not our parents. The world is not composed of bad people killing civilians and good people at the UNSC who should be persuaded to intervene. On the contrary, the world is complex and different political actors have different interests. Just as genocide and mass violence have been a very effective technology of power in the past, human rights discourse is now being used to justify neo-colonial interventions and control strategic resources.

As scholars our responsibility is to help, if possible, by calling things by their proper names. The purpose of academic work is to produce and analyze data but — most important — to permanently question our assumptions and “common sense” understandings of the world. Without such critical thinking, Genocide Studies and Prevention will be reduced to a timid voice in the hegemonic chorus.

Bibliography


Learning from High Risk Feminism: Emergent Lessons about Women’s Agency in Conflict Contexts

Julia Margaret Zulver
University of Oxford
Oxford, United Kingdom

If preventative visits and fact-finding missions to areas of potential conflict were to routinely include gender expertise and consultation with women’s organizations, systematic and usable information could be collected and analyzed. Only then could “gender perspectives” be turned into concrete early warning indicators...

“What can we do in the context of a peace deal that is neither lasting nor stable?” asks a leader of a women’s organization based in northern Colombia in an interview in August 2018, “Where is the justice?” This narrative is not uncommon among members of women’s organizations (and indeed non-gendered social movements) in so-called post-conflict Colombia. Despite the formal cessation of hostilities with the FARC, violence continues between criminal groups, other armed rebel groups, dissident FARC members, international drug cartels, and even the armed forces. This violence has direct and targeted impacts on those who mobilize for peace and safety in their communities; in 2017, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights registered 441 attacks and 121 murders of social leaders, including human rights defenders and social and community leaders. The interviewee above belongs to a women’s organization that has received both collective and individual threats in recent months; one leader is being followed, others have received threatening pamphlets sent via messaging applications, still others have received phone calls telling them to stop their community activism.

The interviewee’s question above went unanswered during the interview, but her meaning was clear: we will continue to fight, to struggle. Practically, this means that despite the threats, she and her compañeras will continue to: (1) fortify a shared identity as displaced women of the conflict, (2) strengthen community ties (bonding and bridging social capital), (3) creatively present the validity of their justice claims to various institutions (legal framing techniques), and (4) highlight their grievances through public protests (acts of certification). These are the actions that she and her organization have implemented in varying contexts of conflict and violence since they began in 1998. Indeed, these four strategies are the component parts of High Risk Feminism, a framework...

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2 Here, the interviewee is referring to the formal title of the Peace Accords (Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera, Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace).


4 Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, a Marxist-Leninist rebel group that was at war with the Colombian government for 52 years, until a peace deal was reached in 2016.


7 Julia Zulver, “Building the City of Women: Creating a Site of Feminist Resistance in a Conflict Zone,” Gender, Place, and Culture 24, no. 10 (2017), 1498–1516.
designed to showcase the “various forms of agency that women adopt, create, modify, and employ to counteract fragility in their daily lives.”

I developed the concept of High Risk Feminism (hereafter, HRF) in previous research based in Colombia and El Salvador to allow scholars to understand women’s mobilization in contexts of what Sandvik frames as the ‘gender of violent pluralism.’ As will be discussed below, she highlights the need to: “make sense of women political activists as survivors and actors, where experiences of violence and loss shape strategies and tactics in the present.” Indeed, when it comes to studies about conflict and violence, much of the literature about women still resorts to a narrative that paints women as victims. Within studies of transitional justice, Baines points to and then challenges the line of thinking in which “the ‘ideal victim’… is a person without agency, and the perpetrator, an individual whose unbounded agency must be disciplined and brought under control.”

If there is deviation from the victim narrative, women are framed in their maternal capacity as being able to take care of others and/or build and restore social fabric in communities in the aftermath of violence. While this may be an accurate assessment in many cases, it does not allow these women agency in terms of the strategies they employ to protect themselves and rebuild their lives, both in contexts of continuing violence, and also in the uncertain times of post-conflict eras.

Furthermore, when it comes to genocide and atrocity crime prevention research, this gendered essentialism continues. While scholars increasingly focus on the gendered elements of genocide, these are not often holistically discussed in the prevention literature. There is a tendency to fall into a gendered binary, whereby prevention is a masculine activity, while peacebuilding is represented as more maternal and feminine. This problematic division highlights a worrying pattern both in the literature and in practice. Indeed, even the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda has been accused of “[perpetuating] a protectionist narrative” by failing to better enable or support “women’s participation in peace and security processes.” Dianne Otto goes one step further, arguing that the Security Council continues to rely on the “gendered paradigm that men fight wars in order to protect women (and children), and that women are naturally predisposed to peace.”

This article will challenge the trend of gendered essentialism and read genocide and atrocity crimes “from the bottom up”, as suggested by Elisa von Joeden-Forgey (whose work is an exception

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10 Ibid.
13 An idea often promoted through the use and misuse of Sara Ruddick’s seminal text, Maternal Thinking. In the preface to the second edition of her book, she is careful to reiterate that she does not think that women or mothers are inherently “peaceful”, but rather that their actions and efforts could be used as a resource for peace. See Sara Ruddick, Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Carol Cohn, “‘Maternal Thinking’ and the Concept of ‘Vulnerability’ in Security Paradigms, Policies, and Practices,” Journal of International Political Theory 10, no. 1 (2013), 46-69.
to the above trend). She suggests: by including nuanced gender-sensitive research, we will better understand atrocity and thus inform early warning and prevention strategies.16

Even when gender is taken into account in genocide prevention research, there is something uncomfortable about how analysis instrumentalizes the reason women and their experiences should be taken into account.17 For example, Matveeva reflects on a report released by International Alert: “the rationale behind introducing gender into early warning rests upon the argument that the use of a gender-lens enriches early warning analysis and allows for more appropriate response options.”18 While at face value this is not necessarily problematic, she continues, it is based on three hypotheses that place women in “micro-level events” as opposed to “macro-level conflict” and that seek to hone in on the potential of “women… as actors for peace.”19 Like Matveeva, I question if “the reality is… as straightforward.”20 My contention is slightly different from hers, however: I question the implication that women’s supposedly peaceful nature makes them well suited to on-the-ground prevention efforts.

To bring this conversation about agency and gender analysis back to critical genocide studies, we can turn to Alex Hinton, who tells us that “critical genocide studies takes place in the gutter,” the space between frames, or the gap to be filled,21 and that we need to unpack and decenter the assumptions of the field. This can be read alongside the work of Oliver Kaplan, which unpacks assumptions regarding agency and civilian resistance in Colombia: “civilians are not necessarily passive or powerless. They are actors with agency whose ability to respond to dangers of conflict derives from social cooperation.”22 He continues, “social cohesion affords civilians greater chances to overcome fear, break ‘laws of silence’ … and implement collective strategies for protection.”23

This article overlays a gendered lens on these assertions. It highlights that women do not always exclusively mobilize for others, nor do they fit neatly within circumscribed categories of victims, nor peacebuilders. Rather, they have the ability to develop and refine a contextually relevant style of feminist agency that allows them to navigate and make sense of the violence to which they are exposed, even during times of high risk. Given my own regional focus, the present article will largely focus on literature and case studies from Latin America. Despite this, the article will expand beyond case studies to draw out some of the emergent lessons about women’s (particularly) feminist agency in conflict contexts more broadly.24 This article is not prescriptive but rather, descriptive; describing the ways in which women choose to protect themselves allows us important insight into local forms of protection, agency from below.

The article will proceed as follows: (1) it will examine the outdated ways in which women and conflict are studied and highlight why these are not universally applicable; (2) it will highlight lessons of HRF for genocide prevention; (3) and it will underscore the importance of recognizing and studying women’s agency in conflict situations, with particular attention to the intersectional complexity of agency. It will then speak to how the lessons learned from HRF have the potential to

17 To be clear, embracing a gendered approach to genocide prevention and analysis is not the same as engaging with women as actors. The former looks at power dynamics between gender, including masculinities, and how these influence genocide and atrocity crimes. This difference is well-documented in Carpenter, Beyond ‘Gendercide’. It is further outlined by Kimberly Theidon, who critiques the trend whereby “adding gender is policy-speak for ‘adding women,’” Kimberly Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia,” Human Rights Quarterly 31, no. 1 (2009), 4.
19 Ibid., 18.
20 Ibid., 20.
23 Ibid., 9.
24 Women’s agency is not necessarily the same as feminist agency. Indeed, as Kreft notes, “women’s organizations do not need to embrace an explicitly feminist platform in order to challenge… patriarchal culture, and the issues around which women mobilize, and the way in which these are articulated may differ.” Anne-Kathrin Kreft, “Responding to Sexual Violence: Women’s Mobilization in War,” Journal of Peace Research 56, no. 2 (2019), 223.
inform intervention and policy, particularly in terms of women’s resilience and agency.

**Outdated Ways of Studying Women’s Activism and Conflict:**

The literature is clear that women and girls suffer conflict and atrocity differentially. This is not news. Cockburn, for example, posits that war and conflict impact women differently than men, and that visions of security must also bear this in mind if lasting peace is to be secured. Boesten and Wilding note a “consensus in feminist literature about the continuum of gender based violence: the idea that violence against women may take different forms and be of a different scale during periods of conflicts.” In the Colombian conflict, for example, there is literature that shows that massacres at Bahía Portete and El Salado and the paramilitary control of communities in Bajo Putumayo involved the murder and torture of women in order to destroy the communities’ social fabric. Furthermore, there is growing research that also asks which women experience conflict differently from other women; this intersectional focus will be further discussed below.

In recent years, importantly, the literature has moved away from a black and white victim-perpetrator binary. Despite this, there is still a tendency to instrumentalize the roles that women can and do play in conflict and post-conflict settings, even in the context of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (discussed below). Scholars and practitioners might assess women in their capacities (i.e. their ability to protect their children), or their ability to be peacebuilders (i.e. their ability to re-weave social fabric). Sometimes, if women transgress these gender boundaries, we focus on them as revolutionaries or guerrillas.

Before detailing some of the established ways that we think about and represent women who resist their violent surroundings to engage in some sort of collective action, it is first important to unpack the category of “women’s organization” itself. For the purposes of this article, and my research in general, I speak about women’s groups, women’s organizations, or HRF organizations to refer to local, non-political, non-professional groupings of women. I use the word local (or grassroots) to differentiate these groups from national or regional, more professionalized projects (like Sisma Mujer or the Ruta Pacífica in Colombia). The constituent members came together in solidarity as a direct result of their conditions as survivors of the violence of the conflict; they also share an ongoing condition of vulnerability to further (and sometimes retributive) acts of violence. Below, I will discuss inter-group tensions and differences in order to highlight that despite creating collective identity to allow for grassroots resistance, the women who engage in HRF do not represent a homogenous bloc. Despite this: “a critical genocide studies might help us understand how a wide variety of identities, including non-Western ones, crystallize… in a variety of genocidal situations.”

**Mobilizing as Mothers:**

In Latin America, the natural place to begin studying women who resist conflict is with the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, the heroic image of mothers in politics. During the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983), a cross-class group of mothers engaged in peaceful protest to find their children who had been disappeared by the state. They marched around the statue at the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, calling on the military junta to give them information about their children. They did so despite the great personal risk this implied: the dictatorship was notoriously violent against anyone who dared dissent. Moreover, they had personal knowledge of the violence they risked because of what had happened to their children.

Navarro explains that the women were able to engage in collective action against the repressive state because they created a new political opportunity by mobilizing from their social location as

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32 For more on the tensions between professionalized feminist groups and grassroots women’s organizations in Colombia, see Donna Murdock, *When Women Have Wings: Feminism and Development in Medellín, Colombia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).


mothers. That is, acting as mothers allowed the women to “achieve new identities and roles.” Elshtain, for example, theorizes about the transformations that these mothers underwent as a function of their mobilization. She says that in fact, it was their mobilization – the act of coming together in the first place – that gave them the ability to manage their emotions and generate change through action. By talking about human rights, they were:

Afforded… a framework within which to canalize their grief – to make it do political work. And those Mothers who seemed to me to be coping best were those who had been able to transcend somewhat the vortex of personal devastation and make common cause, through human rights efforts, with their fellow Argentines and human rights activists internationally.

More than just a “sorority bound by loss” the Mothers became a force to be reckoned with, by using their disobedience to transform their roles as mothers (supposedly powerless and weak) into a strategic strength that could confront a brutal dictatorship.

It is clear that the Mothers perceived themselves as less likely to face repression than fathers, for example, would. Despite this, it is important to highlight that they did not think they were safe; they were keenly aware of what the regime was capable of doing because of their losses (their children). They knew that they had a certain cultural legitimacy to mobilize as mothers looking for their children but also recognized that the regime would not necessarily avoid repressing them, as was evidenced by the disappearance of three of the founders and the French nuns.

There are many parallels to be drawn between the case of the Madres in Argentina and the Madres de Soacha in a marginalized neighborhood of Bogotá, Colombia. This case refers to the mothers of sons who were part of the “false positive” scandal between 2002-2010. In seeking guarantees of truth, justice, reparation, and non-repetition for the disappearance, torture, and murder of their sons, these mothers developed a unique form of transformational political agency that they continue to express in their struggle against ongoing impunity and corruption. Moving beyond Latin America, parallel dynamics developed during Egypt’s Arab Spring, where “women activists used their identities as mothers to negotiate with and contest the barriers to their participation presented by patriarchal elements of society and the state.”

Women as Peacebuilders

This assumption of inherent maternal-ness further leads us to another stream of thinking: women as peacebuilders. To be clear, this article does not seek to negate the robust information that recognizes the unique role that women can play in post-conflict situations. Rather, it seeks to problematize the assumptions that are perhaps not always questioned when framing women in

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36 Jaquette, Conclusion, 225.
38 Ibid., 141.
40 This was a phenomenon whereby innocent civilian boys and young men were killed and dressed up to look like rebel soldiers in order to inflate official figures of how many FARC soldiers had been killed by the army. Officers who carried out the executions were rewarded with promotions and time off. For more, see Joe Parkin Daniels, “Colombian Army Killed Thousands More Civilians than Reported, Study Claims,” The Guardian, May 8, 2018, accessed November 21, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/08/colombia-false-positives-scandal-casualties-higher-thought-study; Omar Rojas and Fabián Benavides, Ejecuciones Extrajudiciales En Colombia, 2002-2010: Obediencia Ciega En Campos de Batalla Ficticios (Bogotá: Universidad Santo Tomás, 2017).
their unique ability to heal and rebuild communities. One clear example comes from the UNSC Resolution 1366 which notes that the Security Council:

_**Reiterates** its recognition of the role of women in conflict prevention and **requests** the Secretary-General to give greater attention to gender perspectives in the implementation of peacekeeping and peace-building mandates as well as in conflict prevention efforts._43

Multiple international resolutions, including the 1995 Beijing Platform for the Action, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and the nine subsequent “Women, Peace and Security” (WPS) resolutions passed by the UN Security Council, include commitments to promoting women’s agency in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.44 These resolutions seek to: “involve women in conflict prevention, to protect them during and after conflicts, and to secure their full participation in post-conflict reconstruction.”45 The UN Security Council has called on member countries to pay more attention to the role of women’s leadership, to support women’s engagement in decision-making, and to focus on women’s empowerment in peacebuilding. Despite this, many barriers to peace in women’s lives remain, as outlined by Berry and Rana who note that:

> While formal peacebuilding interventions play an important role as scaffolding for grassroots peacebuilding work, these efforts will be insufficient insofar as they fail to center the informal, emotional, embodied, and creative ways that women pursue peace in their daily lives.46

Indeed, in her gendered continuum of violence, Moser articulates the idea that assessments of the impacts of violence on a country and its society’s capital can provide insight into the true cost of violence.47 In situations of high levels of violence, she outlines that the relationship between violence and social capital is highly complex: “violence can erode productive social capital when it reduces trust and cooperation within formal and informal social organizations that are critical for a society to function.”48 In communities where residents describe their lack of trust in terms of “lack of social fabric,”49 women’s groups have the potential to forge new networks that have the dual purpose of producing a private good (the benefits of support and kinship gained by individual membership) and a public good (rebuilding trust in state institutions, which may eventually serve to lessen structural violence that results, in the first place, in contexts of high violence).

Molyneux highlights that social capital50 has entered policy dates in a diverse network of fields, including development and community regeneration. She further notes that women frequently engage in collective survival strategies51 and that their efforts have “been essential in conflict and post-conflict situations where by working on common agendas, women have helped to heal deeply divided communities as well as to participate in the difficult task of post-conflict reconstruction.”52 In her chapter she highlights, however, that when women work together they still occupy gendered social spaces that are located within unequal power relations.

She discusses, for example, women’s groups in Northern Ireland that became active in peace

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45 Ibid.

46 Berry and Rana, _What Prevents Peace?_

47 Moser, _Gendered Continuum of Violence_, 41.

48 Ibid., 44.

49 Ibid., 159.


51 Ibid., 2.

52 Ibid., 3.
movements out of concern for their families. Indeed, solidarity around domestic concerns “can be the basis for an informal citizenship that relocates women’s domestic concerns and activities from the isolation of the family into public spaces and public life.”53 Women who originally mobilized around practical interests (including their family’s needs) might go through a transformative process, which leads them to question and contest strategic interests (like gender inequality more broadly).54

Importantly, though, she discusses the problems that arise when policies begin to rely on women’s organizations and their voluntary work (i.e. their ability to create social capital), including their instrumentalism (i.e. they become a substitute for appropriate government action).55 Secondly, she notes, grassroots organizations can be captured or co-opted by those looking to take advantage of women’s participation for their own political gains. Thirdly, women can become overloaded by the kind or quantity of work that women are asked to do by NGOs or state-run programs. In these situations, the needs of the women themselves are not considered.56

What is instrumentalizing about this narrative is the perpetuation of the notion that women are inherently ‘peaceful’. For example, Restrepo’s study on Colombian women explores the ways in which some victims overcome their victimhood, emerging as leaders in peacebuilding, despite the significant risks associated with the ongoing violence.57 It is not difficult to agree with her assessment that “against all odds, these unsung [women victim] leaders have proven to be powerful agents of change.”58 What is not always the case, however, is her framing of women leaders as “capable of healing, empowering, and even reconciling broader society.”59 This echoes what Mwaûra and Schmeidl note about the Horn of Africa, where “early warning and preventative activities can be made more effective by using untapped potential for women (leaders), women’s networks, and women’s organizations as actors for peace.”60

To once more reiterate, in this article I do not wish to deny the real and positive outcomes that can result from including women in peace processes and peacebuilding efforts. Furthermore, I do not wish to discount the measured and tangible outcomes that can result from women’s unique ability to build social capital in both violent and post-conflict societies. Rather, I wish to echo Jacquette, who questions whether women can be “citizens if they always act in the interest of others.”61

Importantly, Sahla Aroussi presents a feminist critique of the stereotypical associations of women and peacefulness that are so often included in the literature, suggesting that these are mythical and linked to maternal ideologies and sociological and biological traits.62 Goetz and Jenkins further review the literature that demonstrates that a “pacifist/maternalist – as opposed to equality-based – justification for participation depoliticizes women’s agency.”63 These authors suggest that we tend to focus on women as nurturing peacebuilders (or mobilizing on behalf of others), and that this does not allow the necessary space to understand where women’s agency fits within this narrative.

The HRF framework offers this space, allowing an analysis of the motivations with which women justify their mobilization. These are not necessarily related to the wider landscape of

53 Ibid., 5.
54 Molyneux, Mobilisation without Emancipation?
56 Ibid., 7.
57 Elvira Maria Restrepo, “Leaders against All Odds: Women Victims of Conflict in Colombia,” Palgrave Communications 2, no. 16014 (2016).
58 Ibid., 1.
59 Ibid.
61 Jaquette, Conclusion, 255.
63 Goetz and Jenkins, Agency and Accountability, 215.
healing society more broadly. It is important to see women’s mobilization as an act of resistance to protect themselves, and not necessarily in the interest of others. While Restrepo aims to change the narrative of women as needy, helpless victims by painting them as potential peacebuilders, this article suggests that a further step can be taken; women can overcome victimhood and claim a feminist agency to resist the specific violences they face. This is a specifically feminist project, not necessarily predicated on the greater good of peacebuilding.

New Focus: Emergent Lessons about High Risk Feminism:
In her 2018 article, Sandvik offers an important critique on existing studies of violent pluralism (as included in Arias and Goldstein’s concept of violent democracies). She notes that gender-neutral analyses fall short when explaining the ways in which violent pluralism impacts the relationships between political organizing and gendered violence. She suggests that gendered violence can be an obstacle to organizing, that women’s political organizing can be a response to gendered violence, or that political organizing is a cause of further gender-based violence. This article focuses on the second assertion: mobilization as a response to violence. There are many ways in which women (for Sandvik, internally displaced women in the case of the Colombian conflict) engage in political organizing; this mobilization, she highlights, “should be scrutinized for what it can tell us about how collective feminist political subjectivities are construed through gender violence as a mobilizing factor.” Anne-Kathrin Kreft’s work adds to this discussion by theorizing that women mobilize in response to the collective threat that sexual violence during times of civil war poses to them as women, eventually leading to a situation where: “women mobilize in response to this violence and around a broader range of women’s issues with the goal of transforming sociopolitical conditions.”

High Risk Feminism is a framework that emerged from my research in El Salvador and Colombia, which answered the questions: why and how do women mobilize in contexts of high violence and insecurity? These questions are predicated on the assumption that when violence is rife, and when acting collectively necessarily implies exposing oneself to even more violence, that women would choose to protect themselves by keeping a low profile. As the following sections will show, however, certain women in both El Salvador and Colombia are visible and present in the streets, making demands about gender justice more broadly. The “how” of the above-posed question can be answered using the HRF framework. In some situations, women living in highly violent contexts take to the streets, courts, institutions of the state, social networks, and neighborhoods. Their collective action takes the form of feminist resistance to gendered violence. In these situations (domains of losses), women organize their mobilization around four pillars: building collective identity, generating (bonding and bridging) social capital, employing legal framing, and engaging in acts of certification.

This article will now outline the main emergent lessons that we can take away from the HRF framework. These lessons have implications in terms of the way that we both study women in conflict settings, but also about the ways in which policies and interventions can best serve these marginalized populations. Finally, as these studies take place “in the gutter” – Hinton’s space between frames – they serve to challenge the assumptions genocide and atrocity crime studies and prevention.

Women Do Mobilize in High Risk Settings
The first lesson of HRF is that it allows us to see that women do mobilize in high-risk settings, despite the potential for ongoing violence and retribution that this might imply. In other research, I

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65 Sandvik, Gendering Violent Pluralism, 3.
66 Kreft, Responding to Sexual Violence: Women’s Mobilization in War.
Learning from High Risk Feminism

detail the four component parts of HRF, mentioned above; a full discussion of how women choose to exercise their feminist agency (i.e. the pillars of HRF) is not within the remit of the present article. What is important to underscore, though, is that High Risk Feminism is a local response to conflict dynamics, a grassroots brand of agency from below. In such a climate, we might expect women – often portrayed as weaker or more vulnerable members of society – to shy away from activities that augment their exposure to risk. These women transgress traditional gender barriers and thus expose themselves to the additional risks of high violence, (including targeting by actors for sexualized and violent forms of punishment). Not only are such women resisting violence, their activism focuses on the pursuit of gender justice, as well as challenging patriarchal culture more generally.

According to classical social movement theorists, though, people would not choose to participate in social movements if there is risk involved in doing so. This is the common-sense explanation: people will not engage in activities that expose them to personal danger because this is irrational. In order for action to be justifiable, the participant would have to have the expectation of a positive and measurable outcome to outweigh the cost of action. Risking death or likely personal injury, therefore, defies the logic of collective action. Loveman’s 1998 study on human rights defenders mobilizing in the Southern Cone despite authoritarian repression further seeks to answer why people engage in high-risk action. She asks:

If risk or cost is calculated as a high probability of “death,” while benefit is calculated at a minimal probability of “maintenance of honor” or “respect for human rights,” how is this “ratio” to be assessed in the grammar of rational calculation in order to predict the outcome? If the likely result of action is death, rational choice models would predict inaction, unless they determine ex post facto, with reference to the individual’s behavior, that the first order preference is a certain “value” that requires such a sacrifice. This, of course, is tautological.

The point of the present article is not to detail the multiple social movement theories that inform HRF’s understanding of why women mobilize as feminists in high-risk settings. Rather, it is to point out that empirical research points convincingly to the fact that women do mobilize, despite the risks that doing so entails.

Beyond simply acting collectively, what is surprising (as Sandvik notes) is that we rarely talk about the agency that women build because of the violence(s) to which they were/are exposed. Indeed, some women mobilize for the first time because of their exposure to conflict dynamics. This was the case with women in the aftermath of genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia, as violence forced them engage in new social roles tied to everyday life, leading them to then form and participate in organizations to support everyday needs, and then leading to participation in formal and informal politics. These particular groups did not necessarily choose to mobilize before – around inequality or lack of education or land rights (in Colombia, for example) – but were spurred into

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70 Zulver, High Risk Feminism in Colombia.
74 For a full explanation, see Chapter 2 of Zulver, HRF in Colombia.
76 To be clear, I am not implying that women’s mobilization (including feminist mobilization) in Colombia is a recent phenomenon, nor that it only arises in situations of high risk. For an overview of Colombian women mobilizing for
action precisely because of their exposure to violence. In my research, I found that being thrust into situations whereby it became apparent that mobilization was a good way to protect themselves (whether or not this protection is real or psychosocial, as will be discussed presently), women were given the incentives to mobilize, despite the ongoing and augmented risk of violent retribution. We know that there is something unique about this mobilization.

Indeed, (drawing on social movement theory) McAdam notes that “the mobilization dynamics of high-risk movements are likely to be qualitatively different from those of low-risk movements.”77 Moreover, studies have shown that severe repression may actually stimulate collective action, instead of causing demobilization.78 HRF goes beyond this notion, to posit that conditions of high risk can lead to the creation of a feminist identity that catalyzes mobilization.

In reviewing the ways in which we study and understand women who mobilize or operate in conflict settings (above), we have not encountered explanations that adequately explain why women might act collectively as feminists despite the associated risks of doing so. In high-risk conditions, previously safe spaces for women (like the home, for example) become unsafe.79 It is here that women are making the decision to (re)claim their access to safety. In doing so, their encounters of, and experiences with violence – themselves deeply gendered – mean that this mobilization necessarily involves challenging entrenched gendered power dynamics. Fundamentally, then, participating in a mobilization under these circumstances is a feminist act.

This identity is strengthened through participation in mobilization; recursive repertoires entrench a feminist identity for a feminist mobilization. That women’s behavior transgresses traditional gender boundaries (particularly in machista Latin America) makes it feminist. Such transgression augments the existing risks of mobilizing in the first place, as opposing actors seek to repress women’s transformational aspirations. Furthermore, the pursuit of gender justice puts a target on organization members’ heads, as their strategies that denounce perpetrators of violence create a challenge to the status quo of violence.80 Importantly, these women are not mobilizing for others (necessarily), but rather, for themselves.

It is important, again, however, not to flatten the categories of “woman” or “feminist.” The women of AFROMUPAZ in Bogotá, for example, have a complicated relationship with the term feminism, which for them refers to a formalized or institutionalized – and largely white, Western – project to which they do not ascribe. Rather, they celebrate feminism in “cuerpo y cara de mujer” (with a woman’s body and face), a category that is deeply tied up with Afro-Colombian racial identity.81 The Colectiva Matamba in Bogotá contends with inter-group differences regarding feminism, as outlined by an interviewee:

77 Thus, while HRF does exist on a spectrum, it is not appropriate to necessarily speak of “low risk feminism” as a point of comparison. McAdam, 1986, in Loveman, High Risk Collective Action, 487.
78 Loveman, High-Risk Collective Action. For an in-depth discussion of how exactly women make the decision to join HRF organizations, despite the risks this entails, see Chapter 2 of Zulver, HRF in Colombia.
79 Indeed, this opens up an interesting discussion about violence in the “public” vs. “private” sphere. Is intimate partner violence (IPV) included in a definition of high risk? In the Colombian case, being expelled from one’s home (displaced) naturally involves a blending of public and private domains. Hume’s study on El Salvador argues that violence against women lies on the knife’s edge between public and private and adds says that women’s experiences are often invalidated by wider society for violating a system of ‘patriarchal privacy.’ Mo Hume, The Politics of Violence: Gender, Conflict, and Community in El Salvador (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). In the present case studies, high risk (as defined below) is a subjective category that lies in participants’ understandings of how particular actions will expose them to violent reprisals. It is not beyond the realm of possibilities that augmented rates of IPV might influence a woman’s perception of the risk she is undertaking by engaging in collective action. Indeed, further research on the linkages between public and private violence and subsequent assessments of risk would be illuminating for future studies on HRF. For a comprehensive study on perceived agency vs. passivity, see Mo Hume and Polly Wilding, “Beyond Agency and Passivity: Situating a Gendered Articulation of Urban Violence in Brazil and El Salvador,” Urban Studies (2019), 1–18.
...“There are some members of the Colectiva who don’t call themselves feminists...this is because we have had lots of struggles with white feminists in the past. They only defend what they consider women's rights....” “Feminism is a political movement that fights for social equality...but when Black women have never [properly] been understood as women, I can’t buy into this understanding.”

These differences do not necessarily impede women’s ability to form a collective identity that permits collective action. Indeed, collective identity formation in the face of threats is one of the take-away lessons of HRF. With that said, it is important to unpack what feminism means and how it interacts with intersectional identities in order to avoid falling into the same reductionist trap that I critique in this article.

This leads me to reflect on the work of Levitt and Merry, who examine “how ideas and strategies generated by human rights and global feminist movements are vernacularized to fit particularly historical and social contexts.” They interrogate the trends to focus on “top down” cultural transfer, and instead call for a focus on how global rights packages need to be vernacularized for local cultural repertoires. This seems fitting when discussing atrocity crime and genocide prevention; both critical studies and practical efforts should be able to unpack the intersectional nuances related to local context, identity, experience, and agency. These themes are compelling discussed by Mertens and Myrttinen in their article on SGBV policy and programming in the DR Congo. They examine how the humanitarian sector, by placing primary attention on conflict-related rape of women and girls as opposed to other, more nuanced forms of gender-based violence, “wittingly or unwittingly [reproduces] heteronormative and neo-liberal understandings of what a ’proper’ individual and family should look like...” and how this reproduction is not necessarily congruent with the “lived realities of the affected communities in question.”

Women Develop Sophisticated and Nuanced Senses of Agency, Resilience, and Purpose

HRF goes beyond the simple assertion that some women mobilize in high-risk contexts (when we might not expect them to do so). It is a feminist strategy of resistance that offers women the ability to reconstruct (intersectional) identities and create an empowering sense of agency during seemingly out of control circumstances.

In an article that reflects on measurements of women’s empowerment, Kabeer offers a nuanced definition of agency. This definition is multidimensional:

Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation, and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their sense of agency, or ‘the power within’...it refers to people’s capacity to define their own life-choices and to pursue the own goals, even in the face of opposition from others.

It allows us to understand that the conflict-affected context in which women operate is constrained by myriad (gendered) power dynamics. These dynamics victimize women and make them feel powerless. Moreover, they shape their ability to make choices. Joining a HRF organization amplifies the range of choices that women are able to make. Not only does participation in an HRF organization highlight that “the pain of one is the pain of all”, but women victims of the conflict

83 Peggy Levitt and Sally Merry, “Vernacularization on the Ground: Local Uses of Global Women’s Rights in Peru, China, India, and the United States,” Global Networks 9, no. 4 (2009), 443.
are able to find (real and/or perceived) safety in community. There are both material and non-material (psychosocial) benefits to joining, and ultimately these become more important in the victim’s life—and indeed to her identity—than does avoiding the augmented risks that come with mobilizing. HRF organizations allow women to individually and collectively develop resilience.

Indeed, when Bridget Conley-Zilkic asks “who is the subject of atrocities prevention?” she draws on the concept of resilience and cites Pain and Levine when she notes: “the term can be used to describe the ability of a community or individual to alternatively avoid collapse, recover, or adapt.” In order to gain more insight into this resilience, Pain and Levine continue, we must “focus on reducing people’s vulnerability and enhancing their agency” within a context whereby people’s choices and actions are constrained by inequality and exclusion.

Here, however, it is important to put some meat on the bones of concepts like “resilience.” As Elisa von Joeden-Forgey notes: “Because gender operates in ways that are often unspoken, gender research requires that we interpret the nature of the forces and processes we study through myriad means that go well beyond the language of the actors involved.” She suggests that gender research allows us to read genocide from the bottom up, which is a valuable contribution to genocide prevention efforts. HRF can add to this conversation by studying the agency that some women themselves develop during and after experiences of trauma. In assessing how women choose to be the protagonists in their own futures, we can extrapolate on the most effective ways to support these efforts. Given the dynamics of war and conflict, most of the women with whom I have conducted fieldwork have felt, and continue to feel, systematically ignored by the state. They further feel that their differential needs have not been considered by either the state or aid agencies.

For example, in Sueño de Vida Digna, a report about the history of the Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas, Guerrero (the leader of the organization) writes about the ways in which aid provided by the Catholic Church was ignorant to the specific needs of women (especially those who had suffered sexual violence). For example, the Church did not provide aid that related to women’s sexual and reproductive health (including condoms or sanitary products). In a zone where women were highly vulnerable to sexual abuse, she notes that the Church judged and stigmatized women who had become pregnant: “From that moment on, we decided to manage our own humanitarian aid, whose meaning would be re-defined by [the very women it was intended to reach].

HRF organizing develops a strong sense of collective identity focused around survivorship, self-dependence, autonomy, and agency. It is about identity, about taking control of seemingly out of control circumstances to create—essentially from nothing—an agency that was taken away from them during periods of violence and displacement. HRF offers a lens through which to see the independent strategies that women in high-risk contexts have adopted. Indeed, when women felt the most isolated and the most abandoned—times in which their specific gendered needs were not considered by either the state or aid agencies—they decided to come together in the pursuit of

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90 Pain and Levine, Livelihoods and Resilience, 10.

91 von Joeden-Forgey, Gender and the Future, 96.

92 Ibid., 95.


95 Ibid., 85.
gender justice.

Recognizing What Women Want:
As mentioned above, women suffer conflicts differentially. When violence is widespread and gendered, women are left in situations that are different from those of men. For example, in the Colombian case, Meertens notes:

The armed conflict has had a considerable and disproportionate impact on women, as they suffer specific risks and confront specific vulnerability because of their gender. Examples include: forced displacement in conditions of marital abandonment or widowhood (leading to an increasing number of women-headed households in displaced populations in cities); gender-based violence and especially sexual violence by armed actors as a weapon of war; the imposition of patriarchal models of social control by local power holders; and the historical lack of recognition of women’s rights that has facilitated their dispossession and violent seizure of their land.96

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96 Meertens, Forced Displacement, 154.
Beyond this, however, and given the protracted nature of the conflict and its legacies (Nordstrom’s “tomorrows of violence”), individual women can feel helpless, abandoned by the state. We saw this in the section above; one of the outcomes of longstanding feelings of abandonment by the state led to women developing an identity and a sense of agency that is both autonomous and independent.

The development of this agency, identity, and purpose, however, means that women also have formulated demands. They have spent decades fighting for their basic needs and for gender justice, despite the exposure to violence that this has involved. As such, HRF organizations foster a “no research about us without us” ethos. Molyneux recognizes that “one lesson that can be drawn from the experience of working with women’s organization is that the question of ownership is central.” She notes that it is not effective to impose external programs, projects, and goals: “the question of the “ownership” of projects and goals as well as participants’ identification with the values of the project are all critical to its success.”

McEvoy and McConnachie warn us against co-opting women’s agency during transitional justice processes. They discuss dynamics in which “transitional justice entrepreneurs” speak on behalf of victims and seek to represent victims without problematizing the power relations at play. This falls into traps outlined by Spivak in which the subaltern is not able to speak or represent herself. Importantly, interlocutors run the risk of “re-silencing victims, negating their potential agency, and reproducing a sense of powerlessness.” Beyond re-silencing, there is also a risk in post-conflict situations of revictimizing survivors.

Broadly speaking, then, this section has shown that women who mobilize – including in non-professionalized, grassroots ways – do know what they want. They have years of operating in dire circumstances, and through this experience have developed sophisticated, nuanced senses of agency and resilience. As such, any interventions or policies need to respect this history. Indeed, Sandvik and Lemaitre ask: “who gathers evidence on humanitarian crises? What counts as evidence? How is evidence used?” Their article outlines a study whereby a group of women was able to develop its own research data and use this to advance its own agenda in its interactions with donor bodies and the government; “beneficiaries of humanitarian aid can, and do, use participatory research to advance their own ends in the legal and political spaces created around humanitarian crisis.” Studies like this highlight that: “beneficiaries’ priorities and agency in the production of data on humanitarian crises are in need of further study.”

Informing Intervention: Resilience and Women’s Agency

The above three points – (1) that women do mobilize despite (and because of) violent contexts, (2) that women have developed sophisticated and nuanced identities based on their autonomous agency, and (3) that women know what they want in both ongoing and post-conflict situations – are salient lessons that have policy and intervention repercussions. The take-away lessons are examined in this final section.

98 Molyneux, Women’s Grass-Roots Organisations, 8.
99 Ibid.
102 McEvoy and McConnachie, Victims and Transitional Justice.
103 The specificities of what they want naturally differ by context and circumstance.
105 Ibid., 36.
106 Ibid., 46.
As mentioned, Pain and Levine examine the concept of ‘resilience’ and the hope that ‘resilience-building’ can “help bridge the persistent and much-criticized divide between emergency response and development assistance.”\(^{107}\) They note that much of these discussions take place within humanitarian circles, in crisis- and disaster-prone areas. Their paper argues, however, that instead of focusing on building resilience, conceptual coherence will be more available if humanitarian debates focus on reducing vulnerability and enhancing agency. They continue: “while resilience has value as an organizing concept or mobilizing metaphor, analytically it has rather less traction unless the discussion can move to one of understanding agency and the capacity of people to act.”\(^{108}\)

There is compelling evidence that shows that this agency exists independently of outside intervention. Women like those I worked with in Colombia have historically demonstrated their ability to act collectively in the absence of resources or support. As such, when it comes to organizations and actors who do want to intervene, such interventions should be framed within a relationship of alliance. Women have already laid the groundwork and put in the effort – instead of reinventing the wheel, agencies and actors should recognize the organizations’ autonomy and find creative approaches to being allies rather than co-opting them or attempting to represent their struggles and their demands. Figure 1 represents a mural designed and painted by a women’s organization, the Alianza de Mujeres Tejedoras de Vida, in Bajo Putumayo, Colombia. Here, they remember their dead, and they highlight their resilience with a text that reads: “They pulled out our fruits, they cut our branches, they burned our trunks, but they were not able to kill our roots.” The women continue to be threatened with violence and death by illegal armed actors in the region because of their community activism. Preliminary research in November 2018, however, points to a relationship that suggests the organization is able to effectively “vernacularize” and claim agency and autonomy over the values packages promoted by the international organizations who sponsor it (for example, the UNHRC).\(^{109}\)

\(^{107}\) Pain and Levine, Livelihoods and Resilience.

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{109}\) Zulver, Women Weaving Life.
Pain and Levine conclude their article by noting that a focus on people’s agency (“their ability to make their own choices”) will allow policymakers to design policies and interventions that “reduce as far as possible the degree to which people live in ‘dependent security’, and the degree to which they can be helped to have greater ‘autonomous security.’” Indeed, they continue, “this would also ensure that policy and interventions are properly grounded in the lives of the people affected by crises, and in the their wider political-economy context.”

Accordingly, groups that promote women’s rights should “be a particular focus of assistance efforts.”

What, then, can the emergent lessons of HRF offer to genocide and atrocity crime prevention? In order to assess this question, I am drawn to reflect on a new initiative led by the Canadian government. In 2017, the government of Justin Trudeau announced Canada’s new Feminist International Assistance Policy. This policy claims that “Canadians are safer and more prosperous when more of the world shares our values. Those values include feminism and the promotion of the rights of women and girls.” Canada’s feminist approach to international assistance “has committed to support that which is human-rights based, strategic and focused, transformative and activist, and evidence-based and accountable.” The country’s efforts specifically make the commitment to employ evidence-based decision-making through better data collection and evaluation of gender equality, which includes a $150 million investment (over five years) into policy research, data collection, and evaluation.

Starr and Mitchell, themselves Canadian researchers of sexual violence in Ethiopia, ask what better data collection and evaluation of gender equality might mean “in the context of an explicitly feminist international assistance policy.” Their article concludes with a hopeful outlook: “[Canada’s] feminist assistance policy has an excellent chance of doing something right … if the idea of advocacy for the local through participatory approaches with women (rather than about women) is supported financially and in spirit.”

As a feminist Canadian researcher myself, I too share their enthusiasm. As a note of caution: adding women’s voices or listening to women should not be considered policy panaceas. Indeed, these should also not be considered synonymous to full gender analysis of the dynamics of violence (including a focus on masculinities). The Feminist International Assistance Policy may be the opportunity to move away from models of intervention and development that seek to “add women and stir” and instead actually seek to untangle the nuances and specificities of women’s agency in

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110 Pain and Levine, Livelihoods and Resilience.
112 Ibid., 49.
114 Ibid.
117 Ibid., 108.
118 Ibid., 115. Announced its new “feminist international assistance policy” towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
119 Ibid.
120 Theidon, Reconstructing Masculinities; Theidon, 1325+17=?
conflict settings. As Albright and Cohen suggest, finding effective ways to support women and the “integral role” they play in civil society may in fact serve to mitigate the risks of conflict.121

What’s more, as Starr and Mitchell point out, Canada is not the only country that is taking steps toward including gender inequality more substantially within its international assistance programs. The United Kingdom has a new Special Envoy for Gender Equality, Sweden has a new policy framework for development that includes global gender inequality, Norway has an Action Plan for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy, and Australia has a Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy.122 Given this host of opportunities to involve women, to recognize their agency and their needs, and to support them in building safer worlds for themselves, I hope that there is indeed reason to be optimistic about a future in which women’s grassroots and local approaches to gender justice are adequately bolstered and supported by international allies.

Conclusion
As mentioned above, HRF is not a prescriptive framework. It is further not the goal of this article to outline a replicable, step-by-step plan under which women will decide to build and fortify a uniquely feminist style of agency. Rather, it offers us a chance to reflect on how, in the actual or perceived absence of any other source of aid, certain women choose to make their own decisions and take care of themselves, despite the ongoing risks to which this exposes them. This has repercussions that relate to genocide and atrocity crime prevention; listening to women’s experiences of violence and focusing on grounded responses to this same violence might provide insight about how to engage in preventative practice. In turn, this will move us away from gendered essentialism that relegates women to the instrumentalizing role of peacebuilders.

Sandvik notes: “there can and should be many theories on the gender of violent pluralism.”123 High Risk Feminism is one of these theories; it presents a new lens through which to study women’s mobilization and agency. Instead of viewing women solely as victims of the conflict, or through their capacity to act as mothers (or on behalf of others), the framework allows for a nuanced reading of women as survivors, activists, and *luchadoras* (fighters) in contexts of high risk. This is an example of resilience and also of agency-building. It fulfills the imperative outlined by Pain and Levine to focus on interventions that are grounded in every day realities, and expands on Levitt and Merry’s call to avoid “top down” focuses on cultural (values packages) transfer.

The value of HRF, then, is that it considers not only *that* mobilization can take place in high-risk contexts and improves the life of women, but also why and how such mobilization can take place. Prevention interventions and programs – for example, like the Canadian International Feminist Assistance Policy – do not need to reinvent the wheel but can rather offer *support* to strategies that have been developed and established throughout years of struggle.

Indeed, my research in Colombia and El Salvador shows that in the absence of support, women autonomously organized themselves into collectives that provide both material and non-material benefits that give purpose and meaning to daily life. These organizations further provide a sense of agency; the ability (or the perceived ability) to overcome the “tomorrows of violence” provides hope for a better future. This feminist resistance moves beyond national peacebuilding projects and contributes, at the grassroots level, to a larger gender justice project that calls for the undoing of historic and engrained patterns of inequality.

While my research focuses on Latin America, there are plenty of conflict situations that could potentially benefit from research that searches for local, feminist responses to (gender) violence and conflict. Bearing in mind the HRF framework, scholars and policymakers could dedicate time to identifying islands of feminist agency in high-risk contexts where we might not expect mobilization for gender justice. A quick scan of newspaper headlines shows us that women are taking matters into their own hands and seeking autonomous – and I would argue, feminist –

121 Albright and Cohen, *Preventing Genocide*.
122 Starr and Mitchell, *Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy*.
security in the context of ongoing violence. From women’s only villages in Kenya where women go to escape sexual violence,\textsuperscript{124} to tents that offer feminist education in women friendly spaces in insurgent destroyed towns in the Philippines,\textsuperscript{125} to a City of Women in a northern Colombian conflict zone,\textsuperscript{126} we can see myriad examples where women are creating spaces in which to learn about their rights and to generate a collective feminist identity. These spaces offer reprieve from spaces where gendered violence is pervasive and ubiquitous. Accordingly, frameworks like HRF add to a larger conversation about how to include marginalized, silenced, or forgotten voices into debates about prevention, inclusion, and justice.

Violence, atrocity crimes, and genocide present ongoing challenges to many women’s everyday lives. If there is the possibility to translate academic research on HRF mobilization into action that modifies the intensity of the “tomorrows of violence”, it is imperative that it be undertaken. Leaving the lessons of resistance, resilience, and agency on paper would be doing a disservice to those women who have suffered – and resisted – during and in the aftermath of violent conflict.

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Scenarios of Intractability: Reframing Intractable Conflict and Its Transformation

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Reframing Intractable Conflict

In the fields of atrocity and conflict prevention, certain cases continually serve as counterpoints for those advocating for the potential of bringing an end to cycles of violence. They are the cases where the divides among relevant groups seem particularly engrained, where the possibility for true peace (and not only the absence of violence) seems specifically unlikely. Some refer to these cases as deeply divided societies, but more often, particularly in the conflict prevention literature, they are referred to as intractable conflicts. In these cases, societies are divided into specific identity groups, which serve as predominant organizing features in their lives and their senses of belonging. Each group tends to have its own distinct understanding of the past, which serves as a foundation for continued division. These understandings of the past are also used to legitimate continued acts of physical, institutional, economic, and social violence.

Although each has its own particularities, there are similarities present across the cases. I argue, however, that by referring to these cases as “intractable conflicts,” their intractability becomes somehow naturalized, appearing as an essential and immutable quality of these conflicts. In other words, the very way that the field describes and understands these specific instances of conflict is already foreclosing options for engagement and prevention, just as it is serving to obscure interventions that may have already emerged from within these conflicts that can transform the way they play out. Moreover, the language of intractability is frequently used to justify outside intervention, often in the form of trained and supposedly disinterested parties from the conflict resolution/mediation field, reinforcing a notion that the answers to transforming conflict come from without, not from within a society.

To change the way one conceives of such conflict, I advocate turning to the analytical tools of performance studies, a field based on the idea that our lives are often guided by certain scripts—predetermined behaviors that play out at all levels of society, from daily interactions with individuals to the policies initiated within the halls of government. Within these scripts, we all play certain roles. Certain actions are acceptable for each role, while others seem “out of character.” Furthermore, history and our interpretations of it have a significant impact on these scripts. What has occurred in the past shapes what seems possible and desirable in the present and future. The past, in other words, also performs. That is, it does things.

Nowhere is this multi-level performance more evident than in post-atrocity societies, where the past is one characterized by large-scale, systematic violence against certain identity groups. And within this pool of societies that are, in some way, post-atrocity or post-conflict, there exists a smaller subset of societies in which conflict based on identity seems especially dogged and prolonged, and the hope for social cohesion and an end to identity-based discord seems particularly unlikely.

This article applies a performance studies lens to illuminate the various ways that scenarios and historical narratives inform understandings of the present and influence visions of the future in post-atrocity societies. In particular, I focus on cases of so-called intractable conflicts. Daniel Bar-Tal writes that intractable conflicts “are characterized as being protracted, irreconcilable, violent, of a zero-sum nature, total, and central, with the parties involved having an interest in

1 Arend Lijphart, “Typologies of Democratic Systems,” Comparative Political Studies 1 (April 1968), 3–44; Eric Nordlinger, Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1972); Adrian Guelke, Politics in Deeply Divided Societies (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012).


Scenarios of Intractability

their continuation.” According to Louis Kriesberg, intractable conflicts exhibit four features: 1) they persist over long periods of time, including multiple generations; 2) they have, at some point, involved physical violence; 3) members from all associated groups perceive the conflict as irresolvable; and 4) these conflicts require the investment of massive financial, physical, mental, emotional, and psychological resources on the part of all those involved. It is not difficult to call to mind the cases that fit this bill: Israel/Palestine; Northern Ireland; Bosnia-Herzegovina; Kosovo; Cyprus; and, in many ways, the relationship between indigenous communities and settler colonial states. The intention of this article is not to describe in detail any one of these specific cases—as their complexity renders such a task impossible in this article. It will include, however, examples from some of these cases to illustrate what is ultimately a conceptual project of reframing the way the field thinks about intractability. Rather than adding to an already long list of “best practices” for responding to cases of intractability, this article asks to widen the lens through which those studying and seeking to intervene view these situations. As such, this article does not intend to provide concrete steps for conflict and atrocity prevention, but instead to redirect prevention efforts toward supporting interventions from within these societies that are already succeeding at re-writing the scripts that allow “intractable conflicts” to continue.

Before proceeding, it is important to delineate how and why I am eliding atrocity prevention and conflict prevention—two fields that are often perceived as separate, particularly by their practitioners. Traditionally, atrocity prevention is understood as necessary in the midst of large-scale violence, while conflict prevention comes before and after that violence to address the underlying, structural issues that can lead or have led to mass atrocities. If one views atrocity prevention, however, not only as intervention at the height of crisis, but the actual attempt to prevent such crisis from occurring at all, then it inherently also involves addressing the structural factors that could lead to atrocity violence. In many cases, those underlying factors are related to the identity-based divisions one finds in seemingly intractable scenarios. As such, in this article I speak about conflict prevention and atrocity prevention as two sides of the same coin, given that it is difficult to name any so-called “intractable conflict” that has not experienced mass atrocity at some point.

Just a few synonyms that pop up from a Google search of “intractable” include “unmanageable,” “out of control,” and “impossible to cope with.” This attitude of “impossibility” tinges not only external attempts to moderate intergroup conflict in these cases, but also limits the potential that those living within these societies see as solutions for these “out of control” situations. Because of this, I suggest in this article that, rather than conceptualizing these conflicts as somehow essentially intractable, it is more useful to perceive them as embodied enactments of scenarios of intractability, which I define below.

In this article, I argue that scenarios of intractability exhibit several specific characteristics, each of which increases the perception that identity-based divisions are an insurmountable and natural reality within their societal context. These characteristics are deeply ingrained because they have been essentialized through a long history of discursive and embodied actions that further division among groups, rather than offering opportunities for social cohesion and the dissipation of violent conflict. Furthermore, these divisions are often reinforced rather than mitigated through external conflict resolution and atrocity prevention efforts. I begin by defining scenarios of intractability and outlining their characteristics, focusing on the ways in which past conflict continues to present itself in the present and shape visions of the future. By recognizing these common characteristics, actors within scenarios of intractability can modify their own performances by engaging in what I call mitigating interventions—embodied or discursive actions emerging from within a given society that rewrite the script and push the scenario toward an alternative ending. This article outlines some potential mitigating interventions that have emerged within scenarios of intractability to

demonstrate how these interventions can transform the way these conflicts play out, mitigating the risk factors associated with mass atrocity violence in the process. Additionally, echoing the call of scholars like Bridget Moix to “turn atrocity prevention inside-out,” it calls for a reframing of atrocity prevention and conflict prevention/resolution/transformation as phenomena that can and perhaps should emerge from within these scenarios of intractability, rather than from external actors.

**Scenarios of Intractability**

I take the term scenario, as it is herein conceived, from performance studies scholar Diana Taylor, who defines a scenario as “a paradigmatic setup that relies on supposedly live participants, structured around a schematic plot, with an intended (though adaptable) end.” They exist, she continues, as “culturally specific imaginaries—sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution—activated with more or less theatricality.” Scenarios include discourse and are impacted by, for instance, historical narratives—that is, interpretations of the past presented through the written or spoken word. Analyzing these cases of conflict as scenarios rather than only narratives, however, allows us to attend to the spoken and unspoken, the discursive and the embodied, ways in which identity-based division plays out in cases of so-called intractable conflict. Herein lies a central contribution of performance studies to genocide studies: it forces us to understand genocide and violence more broadly as an embodied phenomenon, which is certainly enacted through words and narratives, but also through daily social interactions, public policy, the organization of public space, and the flow of capital. Richard Schechner, one of the founders of the field, describes performance as “restored behavior,” or the embodied actions that are played and replayed in our lives, whether they be in the context of a theatrical production or one’s daily routine. These embodied actions or interactions take place within the context of a scenario, and depending on that scenario, each action can take on a different valence. Understanding the rules of the scenarios playing out within deeply divided societies both offers a new lens for comprehending these conflicts and opens up opportunities for “flipping the script,” thereby creating alternative pathways that might break out of these scenarios that get performed and reperformed in more or less similar ways on a daily basis.

I posit, then, that a *scenario of intractability* is one in which the “script” of identity-based division and conflict has become so central to daily interactions and discourse, as well as social, political, and economic structures, that it is perceived as natural, immutable, and irreversible. In scenarios of intractability, division among identity groups is so deeply ingrained that it has become part of what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as *habitus*—the structures and presuppositions within a society that underly all actions and discourse, but which are so taken for granted that they are assumed to be natural and inalterable, even if they are, in fact, not. Habitus shapes what is perceived to be possible. This sense of conflict as habitus is supported in certain of the conflict resolution literature. For instance, Howard Gadlin writes, “When caught up in an intractable conflict, […] it often appears as if it is the conflict directing the disputants rather than the other way around.”

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9 Ibid.
10 In some ways, scenarios are related to the concept of another scholar frequently evoked in Performance Studies, Erving Goffman (1959, 1986). His theory of social “frames” in the “presentation of self in everyday life” begins to describe this phenomenon. Frames, however, describe more the context in which actions take place. Scenario thinking provides a lens for looking at the context, actors, actions, and histories all at once.
deeply divided societies as existing within a “force field” that exacerbates and reproduces internal divisions. This force field metaphor connotes both the insular, self-perpetuating nature of these scenarios, but perhaps also alludes to the difficulty of external intervention. The force field of these deep divisions makes it more challenging for disinterested actors both to enter into the scenario and to provide the tools for resolving the divisions. In scenarios of intractability, the habitus is such that identity divisions among groups are perceived as not only essential, but also as the source of an unbridgeable gulf. Furthermore, the source of conflict between these groups is understood both as historical–having some former precedent that justifies the conflict–and as irreversible–extending far into the future, without much hope for resolution.

The great hope of seeing cases of intractable conflict instead as scenarios of intractability is that participants within these scenarios can begin to understand the underlying scripts that surround them, as well as the roles that they are asked to play in reinforcing those scripts. By making obvious the components that go into creating scenarios of intractability, their constructed nature becomes more evident. As a result, it presents participants with opportunities to “flip the script”—to reject the roles that habitus would have them play and introduce new dialogue and embodied actions into these scenarios that can lead to alternative endings. Importantly, these new interventions could emerge from within the “force field” of the scenario, rather than relying solely on interventions from without, in the form of the external mediation tactics or preventive diplomacy efforts that are often advocated. In many ways, thinking about intractable conflicts as scenarios of intractability echoes a call by some scholars to move to a more systems-based understanding of these cases. Such an approach understands these conflicts “as dynamic, complex systems,” or, as Coleman puts it, “living entities made up of a variety of interdependent and interactive elements, nested within other, interestingly complex entities.” A complex, systems-based approach to these cases, then, allows interested parties “to stop approaching conflicts as problems that need to be fixed […] and instead think of them as systems with underlying dynamics that need to shift.”

From this perspective, a scenario paradigm aligns in many ways with a systems paradigm in that it captures the vast complexity of actors, institutions, and practices that contribute to social division. This systems approach to conflict resolution, however, has until now been developed by scholars from fields like economics, political science, biology, and other fields that rely largely on quantitative methodologies. A performance studies approach via scenario thinking expands the focus from quantifiably measurable data sets to the qualitative analysis of embodied practices, historical narratives, and daily social interaction as key components in understanding and shifting the dynamics that underly division. Those working within a systems paradigm are also still susceptible to the notion that the key to conflict resolution comes from without. For instance, Gadlin, citing Coleman, asserts that “people in intractable conflicts are often trapped in those conflicts and need help to get free.” Thinking in terms of scenarios of intractability, on the other hand, opens the door to explore what mitigating interventions are already taking place within the scenario itself. The question then becomes not what can be done from the outside to “fix” the problems of another society, but rather how those mitigating interventions can be supported and amplified to lead to more lasting change created from within.

Before delving into the ways scenarios of intractability can and have been mitigated, I begin by highlighting four characteristics that can be found across these scenarios that increase the risk

14 Guelke, Politics in Deeply Divided Societies.
17 Jones, Wars Without End, 149.
18 Quoted in Gadlin, Rethinking Intractability, 103.
19 Jones, Wars Without End, 150.
20 Jones, Wars Without End.
21 Gadlin, Rethinking Intractability, 110.
for identity-based violence, providing cursory examples from specific cases to illustrate these characteristics. These illustrations are admittedly oversimplified and brief. They are intended merely as a means of illuminating the theoretical underpinnings of the article, rather than providing an in-depth case study of any one instance of a scenario of intractability.

**Competitive Victimhood**

First, scenarios of intractability are supported by an underlying logic of us-them thinking—a necessary precondition for identity-based violence. Scenarios of intractability enhance us-them divisions, allowing each group involved to depict the in-group as victims and the out-group as victimizers. This feature of scenarios of intractability pushes all groups involved to focus on the assignment of blame/responsibility, rather than attempting to forge a new path forward in which opposing groups can co-exist. As such, scenarios of intractability encourage what Noor, Brown, and Prentice refer to as a *subjective evaluation of past violence*.

Each group involved chooses to view the violence only from its own perspective. When a group has perpetrated violence, subjective evaluation encourages them to justify that violence either as a defense against an existential threat from the other group or as somehow righteously motivated. When it comes to victimization, subjective evaluation pushes groups to see only their own suffering, rather than how other groups may have also suffered, albeit in different ways.

Another result of this characteristic of scenarios of intractability is the fostering of *competitive victimhood*. Noor et al. write:

> This concept refers to each group’s effort to claim that *it has suffered more than the out-group*. Moreover, this competition over the *quantity* of suffering also implies some dispute over the *illegitimacy* of suffering. That is, “not only have we suffered more than you, but it is decidedly unfair that we have.”

Competitive victimhood (CV) keeps division going, as it serves as an undergirding source of enduring conflict, even in periods in which physical violence has ceded. Noor et al. write that CV directly contributes “to conflicts’ continuation, escalation, and the impediment of potential resolutions.” As groups seek to underscore their own suffering, framing it as either the only true example or, at the very least, the worst example of suffering, CV prevents the development of empathy, which many argue to be an essential component of reconciliation or, at the very least, the prevention of future violence.

Competitive victimhood can be found in most, if not all, of the scenarios of intractability listed at the beginning of this article, but one of the most obvious examples of this first characteristic of scenarios of intractability comes from Israel/Palestine. In this scenario, both Jewish Israelis and Palestinians cast themselves in the role of victims who have suffered and continue to suffer at the hands of the other group. To varying degrees, members from both sides have been responsible for the perpetration of violence, but each frames their use of violence as defensive and necessary, while explaining the other group’s use of violence as excessive and as an existential threat. Furthermore,

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23 Noor et al., *Prospects for Intergroup Reconciliation; Noor et al., Precursors and Mediators*.


both groups have historical experiences of trauma—the Holocaust for Jewish Israelis and the Naqba for Palestinians—that continue to frame their understandings of the present and serve as a source of competitive victimhood. This appeal to victimhood on both sides increases at least partly due to what Pilecki and Hammack describe as the empowering potential that comes from victim status. They write that, in their study, victimhood narratives “allowed Palestinians to explain their low status within the conflict by framing it as a product of Jewish Israeli aggression.” Likewise, they write that Jewish Israeli participants used a similar narrative “to reestablish moral status while also engendering sympathy and understanding for Jewish Israeli actions.” For both sides, then, victim status is used to establish a position of power and justification, rather than to assert some self-deprecatory or self-defeating feeling at the heart of the in-group’s identity.

Mutually Exclusive Historical Narratives

Second, in scenarios of intractability, historical narratives—that is, the stories each group tells itself about its past and uses to justify its actions in the present—rest on a claim of mutual exclusivity. The narratives of each group do not allow for disagreement, contention, or alternative perspectives. Most important, they do not allow for the existence of the out-group’s narrative or understanding of the past. The very presence of the out-group’s narrative is perceived not only as an attack on the in-group, but as an existential threat to the in-group’s existence. Social psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal, one of the foremost experts on intractable conflicts, writes that historical narratives within cases of intractable conflict “do not intend to provide an objective history of the past, but tell about the past as it is functional to the society’s present existence, especially given its confrontation with the rival society.” He continues, “Thus, they create a socially constructed narrative that has some basis in actual events but is biased, selective, and distorted in ways that meet the society’s present needs.” I would only add that, although these narratives are subjective and selective, they present themselves as objective and total, hence their mutual exclusivity.

In his essay “Public Memory in Place and Time,” philosopher Edward S. Casey lays out a four-part typology of memory. Individual memory describes the recollections that an individual has about events she has experienced directly. Social memory is his designation for “memory held in common by those who are affiliated either by kinship ties, by geographical proximity in neighborhoods, cities, and other regions, or by engagement in a common project”—that is, by members of a given identity group. Collective memory occurs when “different persons, not necessarily known to each other at all, nevertheless recall the same event” —that is, when an event exceeds the frame of any one identity group, creating new opportunities for “plural remembering.” The final category, public memory, emerges when these group memories bring people together in the public sphere. Public memory occurs through shared practices of memorialization and commemoration, which create new collectives, at least in the moment of togetherness.

Elsewhere, I write about the political potential that exists through public memory—the power and agency that can emerge through groups of people, once isolated, coming together around experiences of the past. Historical narratives in scenarios of intractability do not allow for the


28 Pilecki and Hammack, “‘Victims’ Versus ‘Righteous Victims’” 823.

29 Ibid.


31 Ibid.


33 Ibid., 21.

34 Ibid., 23.

35 Ibid.

36 Kerry Whigham, “Performing Prevention: Civil Society, Performance Studies, and the Role of Public Activism in Genocide Prevention,” in Reconstructing Atrocity Prevention, eds. Sheri P. Rosenberg, Tibi Galis, and Alex Zucker
breaking down of walls and divisions necessary for public memory to emerge. In fact, they do not even allow for collective memory, because they fail to acknowledge the realities and emotions of any group other than the in-group. Historical narratives in these scenarios belong only to the realm of social memory. They exist within the framework of one identity community. At the same time, however, these narratives claim to be collective, public, and authoritative. They do not make space for alternative understandings of the past.

In the United States, for instance, historical violence against Indigenous communities is viewed completely differently by the US government and the Indigenous communities themselves. Although most Indigenous communities understand colonialism and the historical and continuing dispossession of their land as an act of genocide, the US government (like many other settler colonial governments) prefers to see such violence and dispossession as a reality of the past that is unfortunate but is no longer up for debate in contemporary political discourse. There has been little real conversation regarding land restitution in the United States, nor is there likely to be in the future. Furthermore, the US government depicts Indigenous communities that make claims for land restitution as unrealistic and unreasonable. There is no room for the co-existence of these two narratives in the discussion.

Past Violence as Justification for Present and Future Violence

Third, in scenarios of intractability, actors recall past conflicts as a continual justification for action—including discrimination, violation of human rights, and violent conflict—in the present. I have already presented that one of the key features of scenarios of intractability is that they frame the in-group as victims of the out-group. Through this third feature, the in-group frames itself not only as victims, but as what Pilecki and Hammack refer to as righteous victims. That is, in scenarios of intractability, the in-group frames itself as the protagonist and justifies its use of violence and discrimination based on a right to self-defense and self-preservation. Within these scenarios, the in-group sees itself as under an existential threat from the out-group(s). Under these conditions, their use of violence is presented as righteous, while the victimization of the out-group is equally justified, given that, were it not for the in-group’s actions, the out-group would surely attack and eliminate the in-group.

A prime example of this behavior comes from Serbia during the civil wars that subsumed the Balkans in the 1990s. In the years preceding this conflict—and indeed still today—leaders from Serbia and Republika Srpska constantly evoked the 1389 Battle of Kosovo in public speeches and discourse. During this historic battle, Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and his forces faced the invading Ottoman Empire in battle and ultimately lost (though the Ottomans faced losses, as well). Today, Serb nationals evoke this historic battle as a means of justifying violence against Bosnian Muslims, who, in this narrative, are framed as the invading Ottomans. Similarly, Serb nationalists also speak of the ultranationalist Croatian Ustasha and their actions against Serbs during World War II. The Ustasha, which was aligned with the Nazis, persecuted not only Jewish people, but also Serbs within Croatian territory. Ethnic Serbs faced genocidal violence at the hands of the Ustasha during the 1940s. Today, Serb nationalists use the memory of this violence to justify violence and discrimination against ethnic Croats.

Both these instances are examples of what Vamik Volkan calls time collapse, through which “the interpretations, fantasies and feelings about a past shared trauma commingle with those pertaining to a current situation.” Volkan points out that, in cases of time collapse, subjects may be very well able to understand intellectually that an historic event is not connected to the present moment, but the emotional tie between the past and present remains completely real. I would go even further to say that, in fact, public memory itself is an example of time collapse, through which actors tie the past with the present. Time collapse itself, then, is not always bad. Rather, it is how this collapse of time justifies division and violence where the true problems lie.


37 Pilecki and Hammack, Victims’ Versus ‘Righteous Victims’.

A Divided Future

Finally, scenarios of intractability paint a picture in which the only positive future is one without the out-group. Whether the out-group is annihilated or simply removed from the territory, these scenarios leave no room for a heterogenous society within which the in-group and out-group can peacefully co-exist. They do not only depict the in-group as justified and righteous; they depict the out-group as unreasonable, underhanded, and dangerous. Because of this, conversation and consensus do not appear as viable options. Furthermore, through framing the only viable future in this way, scenarios of intractability reinforce their own perpetuation. By default, the scenario must continually be replayed until this vision of the future without the out-group comes into being.

In all the scenarios of intractability I have enumerated earlier in this article, the stop-gap measure that has been implemented to deal with the reality that a significant portion of all groups cannot envision a peaceful future with the out-group in it has been territorial separation, as evidenced through, for example, the partitioning of the Gaza Strip and West Bank in Israel/Palestine; the separation of Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods in Northern Ireland; the “Balkanization” of former Yugoslavia and the stark segregation of most cities and towns across Bosnia-Herzegovina based on ethnic identity; and the demarcation of reservations for Native American populations in the United States. Even if these territorial divisions serve to dispel some (though certainly not all) violent conflict, they are completely unsustainable, as they allow for and even encourage identity divisions to continue. Even more, these territorial divisions promote the replaying of the scenarios of intractability that underly these divisions and that have contributed to violence in the past, putting these societies at continued risk for violent conflict in the present and future.

Underlying this entire reality is a dehumanizing impulse that categorizes the outgroup as immoral and, therefore, not worthy of the same rights and recognitions as the in-group. Ultimately, it is impossible to imagine a liberal democracy, free of violent conflict, that is not based at its core on the idea that every human has basic rights that are inherent to her humanity. Concomitantly, a democratic system must be based on the belief that all are equal before the law. According to Ernesto Verdeja, this basic form of mutual respect lies at the heart of bringing an end to scenarios of intractability. He writes: “Respect is not reserved for exceptional circumstances or for exceptional people; rather, it follows from recognizing others as having inherent rather than instrumental moral worth by virtue of being persons.” Without nurturing an understanding that all human beings have not only moral worth, but an array of internationally agreed-upon rights that come along with their very humanity, it will be impossible to bring an end to scenarios of intractability like those discussed here.

To reiterate, scenarios of intractability are self-perpetuating scripts that shape embodied actions, discourse, and social interactions, increasing division among groups and keeping alive the tensions that can lead to further violence in the future. They are characterized by four qualities. Scenarios of intractability: 1) promote us-them thinking and competitive victimhood; 2) foreclose the possibility for alternative interpretations of the past; 3) recall the past to justify discrimination and/or outright violence; and 4) offer no option for coexistence in the future. Through the enactment of these characteristics, scenarios of intractability keep the affective force behind violent conflict alive, pushing participants within these scenarios to re-perform these conflicts at all social levels and on a daily basis. That is to say, these scenarios increase or sustain the risk factors that make mass atrocity violence more probable.42 When actors within these scenarios begin to recognize the

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39 By liberal democracy, I intend to highlight a system of government characterized by equal protection under the law within which the citizenry is governed by their own will. Just as with international human rights as a whole, this system of governance is admittedly aspirational and normative in nature, even if this platonc ideal does not or has not existed in reality.


41 Ibid., 30.

way they play out, however, there exists the opportunity to “flip the script,” offering mitigating interventions that can potentially lead to alternative, more positive endings.

**Mitigating Interventions, or “Flipping the Script”**

Mitigating interventions are embodied actions performed by participants within a scenario that divert it toward unexpected ends. In the cases of scenarios of intractability, mitigating interventions disrupt the four characteristics of scenarios I detail above. Rather than stoking the flames of identity-based division and, thus, heightening the risks associated with mass atrocity violence, mitigating interventions open the door for connection and cohesion across differences. In the process, they can help reduce some of the risk factors most commonly associated with mass atrocity violence, and consequently serve as a preventive force.

Currently there are numerous risk assessment models, all of which use quantitative and/or qualitative data to evaluate the risk that a society will fall victim to genocide or mass atrocity violence. The first was developed by Helen Fein over 25 years ago, and it has since been followed with models developed by Barbara Harff, Benjamin Goldsmith et al., the United Nations, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and James Waller. Each of these models asserts that certain factors, when present, make identity-based violence or mass killing more likely (though not certain). Scenarios of intractability are particularly dangerous because they increase or maintain certain of the risk factors identified by these models, and thus make the recurrence of mass atrocity violence more likely. It is for this reason that one can consider the transformation of conflict in the scenarios as part and parcel with long-term atrocity prevention.

Traditionally, measuring the ability of any initiative or intervention to prevent genocide or mass atrocity violence has been a difficult task. Many believe that, in order to prove an intervention prevented mass violence, one would first have to prove that mass violence was inevitable and would have occurred were it not for a specific intervention. Of course, this standard of proof is too high, as proving a non-event is an impossibility. Instead, we must refocus our standards for evaluating preventive impact. There is large-scale agreement on the risk factors that often precede mass atrocity violence, and risk assessment models offer quantitative data as evidence that these factors are, in fact, predictive. These risk factors fall into a number of categories that impact a wide array of aspects of socio-political life, including factors related to governance, economic conditions, conflict history, and social fragmentation. Given the consensus that has developed around many of these risk factors, I assert that we can evaluate the preventive potential of any intervention by assessing its capacity to reduce any one of the risk factors associated with mass atrocity violence.

Scenario thinking helps to explain how these risk factors manifest through words and practice in social and political life. When participants within scenarios of intractability recognize these tropes, their constructed nature becomes evident, and participants can perform mitigating interventions that take the scenario in unexpected directions that can reduce, rather than reproduce, some of these risk factors. Recognizing these unexpected moments may be key in finding the successful means for emerging from the constantly looping cycle of intractability.

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44 Harff, *No Lessons Learned*.
45 Goldsmith et al., *Forecasting the Onset of Genocide and Politicide*.
48 Waller, *Confronting Evil*.
49 Whigham, *Remembering to Prevent*.
50 Waller, *Confronting Evil*.
Thus far in this article I have explored some of the ways in which scenarios of intractability increase or sustain the risk factors associated with atrocity violence. I now turn to how mitigating interventions can decrease these risk factors and open opportunities for breaking the loop inherent to scenarios of intractability. Scenarios of intractability produce discourses and practices of division that sustain the risk factors for mass violence, but mitigating interventions, to which I now turn, are performative in the way that, through their enactment, they diminish certain risk factors, making mass atrocity violence less likely.

Recognizing and Acknowledging

First, whereas scenarios of intractability promote us-them thinking that highlights the divisions among groups and encourages competitive victimhood, mitigating interventions can foster empathy for the suffering of others as a key aspirational value. Typically, in scenarios of intractability, members of the in-group are resistant to acknowledge any responsibility for the violence perpetrated by their group, instead focusing on the suffering they themselves have experienced. This unwillingness to acknowledge the suffering of others sustains several risk factors associated with mass atrocity crimes. For instance, Waller’s risk assessment model\(^51\) points out two indicators of risk, in particular, that are strengthened by an unwillingness to engage with the suffering of others. First, denial of others’ suffering strengthens identity-based social divisions, given that denial and competitive victimhood only fortifies in-group/out-group distinctions. Second, it can also cultivate what Waller calls a “legacy of vengeance or group grievance,” whereby the group whose suffering goes unacknowledged finds it impossible to make inroads into new relationships with the outgroup because resentment toward that group is too high.

Mitigating interventions start from a basis of mutual respect, that is, as Verdeja puts it, “the reciprocal recognition of the moral worth and dignity of others.”\(^52\) Mutual respect is, at its core, empathic, because it supposes that all individuals, regardless of their identity, are subject to the same rights and responsibilities, and when those rights are violated for one group, it is an affront to all groups. Rather than starting from a place of competitive victimhood, mitigating interventions acknowledge the suffering of others. Importantly, this does not necessarily mean that groups deny their own suffering—only that they permit that other groups have also suffered.

Acknowledgment of the suffering of others is often a key opening step in improving relations among conflicting groups and breaking the cycle of scenarios of intractability. Lack of acknowledgment of all groups’ experiences can lead to a social imbalance that inhibits peacebuilding efforts and encourages social fragmentation and vengeful feelings. Acknowledgment of the suffering of others coincides with a recognition of the out-group as moral agents who have had their rights violated.\(^53\) As Elazar Barkan puts it, “The road to reconciliation begins with acknowledgment.”\(^54\) This recognition of the other group’s pain, however, requires some level of empathy, and empathy is never a given in these situations. One study conducted by Cehajić and Brown finds that “lack of empathy and perspective taking” is one of the key factors that prevents groups from acknowledging their own misdeeds in the aftermath of violent conflict.\(^55\) Too often, it is difficult to develop empathy for the out-group because high levels of social fragmentation prevent the in-group from ever being in contact with out-group members. As a result, many in-group members hear only the divisive rhetoric of intractability repeated back to them in an echo

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51 Ibid.

52 Verdeja, Unchopping a Tree, 3.


chamber. One method of generating empathy is through facilitating intergroup contact. Cehajić and Brown write, “Exposing perpetrators to the stories of survivors may facilitate perspective taking and, hence, empathy. In turn, this might increase psychological readiness to acknowledge the in-group’s morally objectionable behavior.” Contact theory has also generated critiques, however, which argue that intergroup contact often occurs in non-optimal conditions and over too short a period of time to have a lasting impact. One recent study finds that, in fact, contact may do very little to eliminate prejudice (discriminatory thoughts) toward others, but can do quite well at mitigating the enactment of those prejudices through discriminatory behavior.

Aside from these issues relating to contact and empathy, the process of recognition must also be reciprocal for it to open the paths to reconciliation. The in-group may make the step of acknowledging the out-group’s suffering, but this recognition must be met with a recognition in turn. In many scenarios of intractability, violence has been perpetrated by both sides. This said, the violence perpetrated or experienced by each side may not have been equal. Indeed, in some scenarios of intractability, the levels of violence are so imbalanced that it is difficult and, indeed, insensitive to even speak of equality of responsibility in any way. Because of this, it is important to point out that the reciprocal recognition I advocate is not one that promotes full-out forgiveness with no accountability. Rather, it is a recognition of each group’s moral worth. Furthermore, it is a recognition that, should some form of accountability be necessary, this accountability will take place through the avenues of democratic institutions and the rule of law. Recognition, then, does not necessarily mean full recognition of what the out-group wants recognized. Instead, it is a requirement that each group recognizes the other’s humanity, their rights, and their equality before the law.

An example of a mitigating intervention based on the precepts of recognition comes from the state of Maine in the United States. In 2012, five chiefs from the Wabanaki nation and the governor of Maine signed a mandate officially instituting the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC was established in response to decades of abuse, during which Indigenous children from the Wabanaki people were taken from their families and placed in the state child welfare system. The result was decades of forced assimilation to non-Indigenous culture and the concomitant destruction of Native culture and community. According to the Commission’s mandate, its goals were “to uncover and acknowledge the truth, create opportunities to heal and learn from that truth, and collaborate to operate the best child welfare system possible for Wabanaki children.” Over the course of three years, the five commissioners, which included both Native and non-Native individuals, collected testimony and gathered information on the abuses experienced by the Wabanaki. Their findings were published in a final report in 2015. For

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57 Cehajić and Brown, Not in My Name, 206.


centuries, the relationship between Native nations and the United States government has played out as a scenario of intractability, characterized by all the four elements detailed earlier in this article. The Maine Wabanaki TRC is the first in US history in which a state government and a Native community agreed to come together to investigate the crimes that occurred. As such, it served as a powerful mitigating intervention that disrupted the traditional script of the scenario of intractability, principally through the act of recognition and acknowledgment of the Wabanaki’s experience and the state’s role in that experience.

Allowing for Alternative Perspectives

According to the UN’s Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes one risk indicator of atrocity violence is the presence of “ideologies based on the supremacy of a certain identity or on extremist versions of identity,” and one way these supremacist ideologies are enacted in scenarios of intractability is through mutually exclusive historical narratives that do not allow room for alternative interpretations of the past. To counter the mutual exclusivity that characterizes scenarios of intractability, mitigating interventions open space for alternative understandings of the past to exist in parallel. These other versions of the past are not understood as an existential threat, but are instead indicators of an open public sphere, in which differences can be debated without leading to violent conflict. This statement requires several important caveats. Allowing alternative understandings of the past does not mean acknowledging the factuality of assertions that are empirically untrue. Nor does it mean that actors on either side should not try to influence, contest, and alter the historical narrative of the other side. Rather, what mitigating interventions can do is reshape the terms of the debate.

The goal for which all sides in scenarios of intractability should work is not one in which conflict disappears, but one in which violent conflict and the threat of such violence is eliminated. Mitigating interventions are not necessarily directed at eliminating conflict itself but allowing for differing perspectives to co-exist. The distinctions between these opposing narratives or perspectives—which are often important distinctions, especially from the subject position of each group—are negotiated in the public sphere through democratic discourse and healthy, agonistic debate. This reframing of conflict underscores that discord, in and of itself, is not a risk factor; rather, disagreement is dangerous when it is perceived as existentially threatening, and therefore worthy of response through physical violence. One of the most compelling recent arguments for this agonistic perspective of conflict in scenarios of intractability comes from Sarah Maddison. She writes, “Conflict is an essential democratic dynamic that may enable political actors to contest unjust situations, suggesting that there may need to be more rather than less conflict in order for political goals to be achieved.” In all cases, it is not the existence of conflict itself that is the problem, but the kind of conflict. In response, Maddison argues for a model of political agonism, which is a mode of understanding and managing conflict as a reality that is constitutive of democracies and constructive in building more resilient societies, as long as that conflict remains civil and plays out within the realms of democratic institutions. Maddison writes that “the primary task of democracy is to convert antagonism into agonism and enemies into adversaries.” Mitigating interventions, then, are ones that reframe the out-group not as an existential enemy, but as a contentious partner in constructing a democratic society together. As any multi-party political system in the world demonstrates, this is not always an easy process. All sides can still have completely different ideas about what occurred in the past, what their new society should look like, or how a collective future can be achieved. What is important, however, is that these disagreements play out in an open public sphere in which all groups have a seat at the table, and mitigating interventions allow that different views of the past do not foreclose interactions in the present.

As I mentioned, however, the need for mitigating interventions that allow for alternative understandings of the past to exist in parallel does not mean that empirical facts should be thrown

64 Ibid., 53.
out the window. For instance, there is no room in a democratic society to allow for genocide denial as a viable alternative perspective of the past. It is not based on factual truth, and it only serves to create division, as well as to devalue and dehumanize victims. As Verdeja puts it, truth telling in the aftermath of mass violence is both a right (of the victims) and a duty (to the victims).65 That said, Verdeja also contends that successful reconciliatory efforts should acknowledge three different aspects of truth. First, there is factual truth, which is understood and produced through investigations of evidence relating to acts of violence. Factual truth “is concerned with empirically ascertainable events and actions, as well as the concomitant rules and procedures of verification that these require.”66 Phenomenological truth, on the other hand, describes the subjective and felt truth that is experienced and understood by individuals who have lived through large-scale violence. Finally, narrative truth describes how these other two components of truth get combined with current social and political realities to shape the stories we tell each other about the past. In scenarios of intractability, where perspectives and worldviews are typically understood as mutually exclusive and existentially threatened, to consider the reality that the out-group also has a phenomenological truth that, even if it may not be factually true, is no less true to them, subjectively speaking, is in and of itself a mitigating intervention. By granting the possibility that the out-group has a view of the world that, at least from its own perspective, is valid and truthful, a participant within the scenario of intractability derails a central characteristic that keeps the scenario on track. Recognizing this phenomenological truth also corresponds with the sort of recognition I mention above—a form of acknowledging the out-group’s humanity, making them more willing and more likely to take a seat at the table to begin the difficult work of transforming enemies into adversaries.

An example of a mitigating intervention that literally and figuratively acknowledges that multiple truths can exist in parallel comes from Israel-Palestine. In 2001, in the midst of the Second Intifada, the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East (PRIME) brought together Palestinian and Israeli teachers to create a textbook that told the story of Israel-Palestine’s most contentious historical moments from the perspective of both Jewish Israelis and Arab Palestinians. The teachers worked to craft the narratives, which recognized the factual, phenomenological, and narrative truths of both sides. These narratives were then placed side-by-side in a textbook so that, for instance, as the left side of the page talks about the “War of Independence,” the right side of the page discusses “The Catastrophe [An-Nakbeh].” The teachers then began to use the book in their classrooms, and for many of their students, it was the first time they were exposed to the out-group’s understanding of the past.67 The mitigating intervention of this textbook thus disrupted one of the key characteristics of scenarios of intractability by showing that the narratives can, in fact, exist in parallel without necessarily taking away from identity of the in-group.

**Directing Negative Emotions to Positive Ends**

The UN’s Framework also describes the “politicization of past grievances, tensions, or impunity” as a key risk indicator for atrocity crimes.68 Although the violent past is typically understood as a painful one, mitigating interventions are those that work against the tendency for scenarios of intractability to politicize that pain, transforming it into vengeance or revenge fantasies. It is without question that victims and people who have suffered during periods of mass violence have the right to feel pain—and feel it fully. I say this to emphasize that cultivating a culture that allows for antagonistic groups to move forward and build a society together is not synonymous with either a lack of memory or a lack of justice. Too often a rhetoric of “moving forward” or “moving on” is taken up by the groups who are responsible for causing the gravest amounts of suffering during periods of violence. Because of this, “moving forward” is typically a euphemism for two things: denialism and impunity. Both only play into and perpetuate scenarios of intractability,
and neither should be cultivated or encouraged if what a society wants is actually to move forward together.

Elsewhere, I offer a strong critique not only of these calls to forget the past, but even of their realizability. Although it may be easier for former perpetrators and bystanders to forget the violence that occurred, victims inevitably have a much harder time forgetting. Furthermore, as Verdeja and Mihaela Mihai rightly note, given that victims are the ones whose rights were violated, any newly established state has the responsibility to ensure that those victims are doubly recognized: assured that their rights will be respected by the new regime and that the rule of law is re-established, so that other’s rights are not similarly violated. The rule of law, of course, cannot be fully established if those who perpetrated crimes are not brought to justice. Therefore, a state that claims to have reinstated the rule of law but has not developed any mechanisms for accountability is speaking out of both sides of its mouth.

This focus on the rule of law and democratic institution building is an essential aspect of the mitigating interventions that will truly transform scenarios of intractability to bring about a future in which more violence is not always on the horizon. This does not mean that negative emotions do not and should not exist in the context of post-atrocity societies on all sides of a conflict, but, as Mihai elucidates, that these emotions should be siphoned into appropriate avenues of redress—those that reinforce democratic institutions and the rule of law. Mihai points out that, in post-atrocity contexts, two negative emotions tend to present themselves: resentment, or the negative feeling that stems from having experienced an injustice, and indignation, or the negative feeling that stems from witnessing an injustice done to others. In many cases, these feelings of resentment and indignation fuel a public discourse that justifies vengeance. One clear example Mihai gives is the show-trial and execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution in Romania. Another example can be seen in the historical narratives of post-civil war Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the ways that Serbs cite the Battle of Kosovo as a means of stoking feelings of resentment that can then be used to justify violence.

Mihai accurately points out that not only is it a futile task to try to eliminate these emotions in a post-atrocity context, but ignoring these emotions also ignores the opportunities that they present. Post-atrocity regimes can take advantage of these emotions to build democratic institutions and model the sorts of civic behavior that can lead to the reduction of risk factors for further atrocity violence. Rather than allowing resentment to fuel vengeful acts that deny the human rights and moral value of perpetrators—acts that only reinforce the script of the scenario of intractability—democratic regimes can direct these emotions to support the rule of law. Through democratic judicial proceedings and the establishment of public policy that protects the rights of all individuals, these institutions model what Mihai calls “democratic appropriateness,” meaning they acknowledge and offer redress for the injustices experienced by an individual or group without violating the human rights of another individual or group. This approach also recognizes that the resentment expressed by perpetrators who are brought to justice within a democratic framework is not, in fact, democratically appropriate—an understanding that is equally important to model within a post-atrocity context. Mitigating interventions of this sort acknowledge the legitimate injustices that have been experienced while at the same time ensuring these injustices are answered within a system that protects the human rights of all individuals.

It is admittedly more difficult to find examples of negative emotions being directed toward measures of justice and accountability in the midst of scenarios of intractability, but there is at least

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69 Whigham, Remembering to Prevent.
70 Verdeja, Unchopping a Tree.
72 Verdeja, Unchopping a Tree.
73 Mihai, Negative Emotions.
74 Ibid., 69.
75 Ibid., 77.
one clear example where these negative emotions have been siphoned into democratic institution-building, even as tensions remained high and the scripts of the scenario of intractability continued to perform itself. The Good Friday Agreement, which brought an end to decades of physical violence and fighting in Northern Ireland, was principally an instrument for the creation of several democratic institutions meant to maintain peaceful relations, transforming violent conflict taking place on the streets into political conflict taking place within the halls of government. Within Northern Ireland, it established the Northern Ireland Assembly, which operates on a model of cross-community voting, where both unionists and Irish nationalists must agree on measures to make them law, along with the Northern Ireland Executive, which operates on a basis of power-sharing among conflicting groups. The Agreement also established democratic mechanisms for maintaining relations with both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Admittedly, the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland and the subsequent accords did not emerge solely from within Northern Irish society but were also the result of external intervention. Furthermore, to argue that the institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement have led to a complete rewriting of the scenarios of intractability that still play out in Northern Ireland today is sadly overly optimistic, especially at the time of this writing, when the government of Northern Ireland is in a state of collapse, and as the potential of Brexit threatens to reignite violence in the region. It is also probable that the consociational peace agreement is at least partly responsible for institutionalizing the identity-based divisions at the root of the conflict—not a small caveat, to say the least. Twenty years after the passage of the agreements, however, conflicting groups have certainly succeeded at diminishing violent conflict, and have thus disrupted these scenarios in an important way.

**Rewriting the “Ending”**

Finally, scenarios of intractability always presume certain endings—endings in which one group succeeds and one group ceases to be, if not on an existential level, then at least within the daily lives and socio-political interactions of the other group. In scenarios of intractability, the future is bright only in as much as the out-group is not a part of it. In these scenarios, mitigating interventions propose alternative endings. Rather than depicting the success of one group and the elimination of another, they underscore shared values and common goals, presenting a future where all groups can co-exist.

One clear way of reshaping social relationships in these cases where public discourse paints a picture of a forever-divided future is through the creation of new, superordinate identities that override the identity markers that divide groups. Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, and Nadler, for instance, write that “encouraging members of conflicting groups to think about themselves as members of a common superordinate group, for example, to recategorize themselves as Americans instead of as Blacks and Whites, can reduce negative attitudes and biases toward out-group members.”

Forming superordinate identities can create solidarity across difference, providing new “roles” for those living within scenarios of intractability to assume.

An example of the power of superordinate identities comes from Tuzla, a Bosnian city that largely avoided the inter-ethnic conflict that had subsumed Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990s, even as Bosnian Serb forces laid siege to the city and bombed it repeatedly. Throughout the conflict, this diverse city eschewed interethnic tensions by reinforcing their “Tuzlan” identity. According to Marshall Wallace, locals saw their identity as Tuzlans as being characterized by multiculturalism and an openness to difference. This identity based on multiculturalism and acceptance was reinforced through everyday practices. Residents of Tuzla attended and celebrated the religious holidays of all religious groups within the city, for instance. When Bosnian Serb bombs destroyed an Orthodox church in Tuzla, the city’s mayor rallied citizens from all groups to participate in its reconstruction. The mayor also formed an orchestra during the war, and this musical group began composing new patriotic songs based on themes of togetherness and plurality. These new songs became a rallying cry for Tuzlans—a new repertoire that shunned ethno-nationalism for a citizenship

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76 Noor et al., *When Suffering Begets Suffering*, 363.
based on inclusivity. During the height of inter-ethnic conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the people of Tuzla rallied behind their shared identity, creating a new scenario based on overcoming collective hardship. As such, they were able to stave off the internecine conflicts that consumed the rest of the country.77

Importantly, however, emphasis on superordinate identities is not always the answer, and can even have negative effects. Stressing superordinate identities where subordinate identities constitute a salient part of the identity and daily interactions of individuals can lead individuals to emphasize and focus on the minor differences between groups.78 Because of this risk, Dovidio, Gaertner, and Saguy, offer two alternatives.79 First, individuals can focus on maintaining both super- and subordinate identities through a model where some common identity is acknowledged, but difference and pluralism is also celebrated within that model. Here, one can call to mind the common practice of hyphenated identities in the US American context. The researchers find, however, that this dual identity model only works in contexts where pluralism is a value that is celebrated. As such, within scenarios of intractability, this formation may not be easy to enact. The second possibility, however, is one that is reflected in basic social identity theory, as well.80 Rather than re-writing or imposing superordinate identities, groups can be brought together by having them work on common exercises or activities. By focusing on shared goals rather than trying to rewrite the saliency of identity, groups can come together across difference, while still maintaining the identity markers that are so important to them. A recent study by Scacco and Warren supports this idea. By bringing together Christian and Muslim participants to participate in a multi-week computer training workshop in a divided city in Central Nigeria, the researchers found that participants working with non-in-group partners demonstrated a marked decrease in discriminatory behavior toward the out-group (though there was no decrease in prejudicial beliefs).81 Importantly, identity was never explicitly addressed during the workshop; the participants were only working together toward the goal of learning how to use a computer. This option of transforming conflict by refocusing attention away from identity and toward a shared outward goal seems particularly apt in the case of scenarios of intractability. Rather than trying to rewrite identities, mitigating interventions can call for people from all identity groups to come together in the common project of building a society in which all their rights are respected and valued. This assertion is also supported by recent research that finds intractability to be more likely mitigated in situations where collectivist, rather than individualist, orientations are reinforced.82

The people of Tuzla coming together to rebuild the bombed church is one example of such a mitigating intervention taking place at a social scale. The cross-community voting and power-sharing agreements of the Good Friday Agreements are an example of it taking place at a national, political level. A third example of this comes from South Africa, where, for over four decades of Apartheid, South Africans lived within a scenario of intractability that favored white South Africans over Black, Coloured, and Asian South Africans. One mitigating intervention initiated by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and propagated by Nelson Mandela upon the return of democracy

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79 Dovidio, et al., Another View of ‘We’.


81 Scacco and Warren, Can Social Contact Reduce Prejudice and Discrimination?

was their characterization of South Africa as a “rainbow nation.” The metaphor of the rainbow helped these leaders initiate a specific political project, in which people of all colors contributed to the beauty of the nation, but the true beauty came from their coming together. Many have argued, of course, that the rainbow imagery also served to cover up the legacies of violence that it sought to overcome, and there is great truth in this assertion. Nevertheless, the idea of a rainbow nation, along with its manifestation in a government structure that incorporated all races—when, in fact, it may have been possible for Mandela to form a government that excluded minority whites—served as a mitigating intervention that performed against the scenario of intractability that had been playing out for decades.

Conclusion
Labeling conflicts as intractable implies that this intractability is somehow an essential characteristic of the conflict itself. As such, there is a strong risk that the denomination serves to limit the scope of possible remedies that exist for transforming the conflict away from one characterized by violence and toward one facilitated through democratic institutions, the rule of law, and a healthy debate in an open public sphere. Participants within these scenarios replay the scripts of conflict that have been written and played out in the past. With each repetition, alternative endings seem less imaginable. The entire habitus of a society is shaped in relationship to conflict, and the realm of possibility becomes so constricted that any other way of being and feeling seems impossible. On the other hand, thinking in terms of scenarios of intractability recognizes that one central source for the continuing nature of the conflict is that division among groups has become, in many senses, a force of habit. Scenario thinking allows—indeed, forces—us to think beyond spoken discourse in understanding how conflict functions and reproduces itself. The spoken word and narratives certainly play a huge role in constructing scenarios of intractability, but so too do all other elements within a society, including geographical and/or architectural divisions, geopolitical realities, rituals and social practices, customs and traditions, and public policy initiatives. Indeed, a comprehensive strategy for preventing mass violence requires that we attend to all of these aspects that contribute to division.

Within the context of a scenario of intractability, mitigating interventions are actions by participants within the scenario that first highlight its constructed nature, thus making it appear less essentialized, and then offer alternative ways of being, thinking, and behaving within the scenario. Importantly, these mitigating interventions often come from within, rather than as a result of external intervention. As such, it may be better to conceive of them as intraventions. Enacting such mitigating intraventions is not easy, because one of the central aspects of a scenario of intractability is the way in which it makes such interventions feel either impossible or insufficient. Furthermore, for those of us working in conflict and atrocity prevention, it requires that we recognize that real, systemic prevention is much more about supporting domestic initiatives, rather than coming in from without with a bundle of recipes and best practices that “need to be” enacted. Additionally, in many of the scenarios of intractability I have discussed here, state actors and politicians are often working directly against the mitigation of risk because they benefit politically from keeping conflict and division alive. Because of this, it is often (unfairly) civil society that must be the first sector to offer these alternative examples of what undoing intractability may look like. The only hope for their actions to spread upward from the grassroots is through the contagious effect that public action can take. And it is here, in supporting and sustaining this growth, where the efforts of international actors can be much better exercised. For a scenario of intractability to be rewritten fully, these alternative scripts must be embraced by individuals and groups at all levels of society, across sectors and across group identities. It is only then that a totally new scenario can emerge—one based not on division and violent conflict, but on creating a pluralistic society with a vibrant public sphere together.

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In the early hours of August 3, 2014, ISIL militants swept across the Sinjar region of northern Iraq, which is home to the majority of the world’s Yazidi people. The next day, the Emir of the Yazidi pled for world leaders to intervene as ISIL kidnapped children and systematically massacred civilians. The entire male population of the village of Khocho was executed, while the Yazidi residents of another village were presented with an ultimatum: convert or be killed.1

Numerous scholars have called this violence genocide,2 and the International Association of Genocide Scholars deemed it a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.3 Multiple early warning models of genocide, however, did not warn policymakers about these events. Iraq was not on the Atrocity Forecasting Project’s list of 10 countries at risk of genocide between 2011 and 2015,4 nor was it in the top 10 countries Harff and Gurr predicted as at risk.5

Although there are several reasons behind this oversight, it is clear that early warning models are not designed to alert policymakers about genocides committed by non-state actors. Instead, these models typically evaluate whether genocide is likely to occur within a state; and they rely upon theories that were generated to explain state-led genocide and accompanying data measured at the state level. Such models and the theories undergirding them may consequently underperform in situations where violence was not committed by a state but rather by a non-state actor.

As the genocide committed by ISIL illustrates, state-centric assumptions that inform genocide prevention endeavors do not apply to every genocide. In line with this premise, this article argues that genocide forecasting efforts must move beyond the state-centricity that has characterized the field to date. It begins by addressing why predominant theories and corresponding genocide prevention efforts have largely focused on states. After describing the limits of a state-centric approach, I suggest three major avenues that will refine and complement the current state-centric paradigm that guides genocide prediction endeavors. These include 1) theorizing and analyzing non-state actors who commit genocide, 2) engaging in conflict-centered approaches, and 3) addressing the onset and triggers of genocide within subnational spaces. The article concludes with a discussion of how theory and research incorporating these proposals could ultimately contribute to more robust genocide prevention efforts.

State-Centric Approaches to Genocide Prediction
A long line of scholarship on genocide has established that the state—broadly defined in this article as an internationally recognized government and the territory it governs7—is integral

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6 Although some people differentiate between early warning and forecasting models, I use both interchangeably to refer to efforts to predict the future occurrence of genocide.
7 According to Max Weber, a state has the legitimate monopoly of the use of physical force in a given territory (see Max Weber, Politics as a Vocation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965) for more). Although non-state organizations like ISIL exercise force within a territory and can even perform some of a state’s duties, I refer in this article to internationally recognized states that have garnered at least some legitimacy.
to understanding the onset of genocide. Though the international legal definition of genocide does not restrict genocidal violence to state-led action, many genocides that occurred over the last century were committed by states, and others were undertaken with tacit state involvement. Moreover, states have historically used genocide as a form of repression.

Researchers concerned with predicting genocide have accordingly focused on the state-level conditions that influence the possibility genocide could occur within a country. Some of this research has specifically addressed the government itself. For instance, comparative historical scholarship, like Rummel’s Death by Government, has emphasized how the type of government influences the likelihood of genocide. As the state also includes the territory that a government controls, many other case studies have addressed additional country-level factors, such as a state’s capacity across its territory.

Such case studies were integral to the quantitative research that emerged during the 1990s and early 2000s as the cornerstone of genocide forecasting efforts. Generally, these models analyze country-level data and find that genocide is more likely in states with political upheaval, autocratic governments, exclusionary ideologies, contention regarding the ethnicity of those in power, state-led discrimination, and a prior history of genocide. Scholars have further refined these state-level factors—often in pursuit of informing genocide prediction efforts—over the past decade. Much of this work has identified the forms of upheaval that are most likely to influence genocide, such as assassinations, riots, and other crises—all measured at the state level. Other scholarship has specified a two-step model of the onset of genocide. For instance, Goldsmith and co-authors estimate as a predictor in models of the likelihood of genocide. Straus and Valentino likewise

8 Empires were certainly core to understanding genocide during colonialism, though I restrict this article to more recent genocides given my emphasis on early-warning and forecasting efforts tied to genocide prevention.

9 Some scholarship does not disaggregate the state into its constituent parts, though the state is not monolithic and consists of numerous actors. Additional work should further disaggregate the state itself. For instance, Kim found that revolutionary leaders were more likely to commit mass killing, see Nam Kyu Kim, “Revolutionary Leaders and Mass Killing,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 62, no. 2 (2018), 289.


12 Far too many case studies have examined the causes of genocide to summarize here. I instead focus on quantitative models, as these models directly inform early warning systems and genocide prevention efforts.


14 State-led discrimination was not included in the 2003 model but rather was added upon a later iteration in 2012.


17 Others have examined mass killings, which do not necessarily target a particular group. As noted in more detail below, I draw upon literature on mass killings due to the overlap between mass killing and genocide.


19 This model also included several novel predictors, such as the proportion of a country’s population in the army and whether the country was in an election period.

20 Valentino analyzed the triggers of 32 state-sponsored mass killings and concluded that anti-government protests, strikes, coups, and initial major attacks by rebels were among the most common triggers (see Benjamin Valentino, “Triggers of Mass Killing,” Report on a Research Project for the Political Instability Task Force (Hanover: Dartmouth College, February 2016), 1). In a similar vein, Straus examined the triggers of 18 atrocity events, finding that threats to the political elite—such as battlefield advances, assassinations, coups, or protests—are among the most prominent triggers of mass atrocity (see Scott Straus, “Triggers of Mass Atrocities,” Politics and Governance 3, no. 3 (2015), 5). Some
each contribute to two-step models by examining triggers, or the events and processes that more immediately precede the onset of genocide, such as major attacks by rebels.

All of the aforementioned studies have examined genocide by analyzing state-level factors. This approach has been guided both by theories of genocide as well as by available data, as most major data collection efforts catalogue state level factors (e.g., Gross Domestic Product). In turn, the state-centric approach in scholarship directly influences genocide prediction efforts, which draw upon this research to create forecasting systems. For instance, the Political Instability Task Force (PITF) analyzes a dataset of country-years to produce a list of countries for policymakers to monitor. The University of Sydney’s Atrocity Forecasting Project also generates lists of states at risk of genocide; GenocideWatch, Harff and Gurr’s website, and many other atrocity forecasting undertakings assess risk at the state level as well. Put simply, when researchers and policymakers think about the risk of genocide, they tend to consider whether genocide could occur within a given state.

To be clear, these endeavors are not misguided, as the state is vital to understanding the onset of genocide. Government officials and their armies have initiated most genocides that occurred during the 20th and 21st centuries. Factors related to the state, such as the type of government or state capacity, can certainly influence the likelihood of genocide; and interventions in genocide—such as economic sanctions and military sanctions—typically target the state.

Genocide research and related prediction efforts nonetheless run the risk of placing undue emphasis on the state. Multiple genocide scholars have previously pointed out the state-centricity that has continued to dominate genocide studies. This article extends their critiques by exploring how state-centricity has affected forecasting efforts with a specific focus on suggesting how to transcend this state-centricity in favor of better genocide prediction. As noted in the introduction, limiting early warning models to violence committed by the state disregards the fact that non-state actors can and do commit genocide. Predicting the onset of genocide at the state-level also eclipses other meaningful ways to examine genocide, such as at the conflict-level since there can be multiple conflicts with a state at any given time. Furthermore, although the state is a meaningful concept in international relations, genocide often occurs in only part of a state or unfolds differently in separate regions. For instance, the genocide in Sudan that began in 2003 was limited to the Darfur region. Even in instances where genocide envelopes an entire country, the violence often begins earlier in certain parts of the country, though early warning efforts rarely focus on subnational spaces.

Thus, as a complement to state-centric approaches to genocide prediction, this article suggests three core ways in which genocide prediction efforts should expand beyond the state, both in theory and in research on genocide onset, which is key for genocide forecasting. These three paths include 1) addressing genocide committed by non-state actors, 2) taking conflicts as the unit of analysis and analyzing how characteristics of a conflict influence the onset of genocide, and 3) examining the onset and triggers of genocide at subnational levels, such as within communities. For each, I incorporate interdisciplinary scholarship that has focused on genocide, defined as actions taken with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a social group. I also integrate research on
mass killings and other atrocities given the similarities across these forms of violence and use the respective authors’ terms (e.g., mass atrocity, mass killing, civilian targeting) when referencing their findings. To be certain, genocide studies has sometimes been siloed such that relevant research on related types of violence—such as civil wars or terrorism—is not considered alongside the study of genocide. A critical engagement with genocide prevention involves breaking down disciplinary barriers in favor of a more holistic view of the study of violence.

Each of the subsequent sections also includes specific suggestions for future research that should in turn inform forecasting—research that should be informed by a multitude of methods. Quantitative, large-N models are often necessary to establish more general patterns in social processes. In fact, the early warning and risk assessment models reviewed by Verdeja in this special issue rely almost exclusively on quantitative analyses. The numbers employed in such models are powerful, but they are also reductive, erase lived experiences, and privilege violence that is easily quantified. Analyses of general patterns should consequently be complemented with rich, contextualized information. As such, I provide suggestions for how researchers can leverage the benefits of diverse methods when analyzing non-state actors, conflicts, and subnational spaces.

**Non-State Actors**

The violence undertaken by insurgent groups, terror organizations, militias, and other non-state actors can equal or even surpass that committed by states. Some of this violence straddles the line between intentional and unintentional targeting and has consequently been framed as collateral damage by researchers. Other non-state violence against civilians is undoubtedly intentional, and as ISIL’s violence against the Yazidi makes clear, this violence can take the form of genocide.

ISIL is not the first non-state actor to commit genocide. Indeed, the Political Instability Task Force database includes a genocide in 1964 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, noting in its explanation that “rebels massacre(d) counter-revolutionaries, including educated Congolese, missionaries, and other Europeans.” The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has likewise arguably committed genocide by targeting the Acholi people in Northern Uganda.

In each of these instances, a non-state actor instigated the genocide, commonly in spaces where the state lacked capacity. In this sense, they differ from the non-state actors that work alongside other actors (like states) that initiate genocide, though these non-state actors do often attempt to act like states themselves. They levy taxes, take territory, and wield an army in pursuit of creating their own state despite lack of international recognition. It stands to reason that such groups would have the capacity to initiate and commit genocides—a capacity that is no longer limited to states.

Genocide researchers should consequently theorize why non-state actors initiate genocide and examine the conditions under which they do (and do not). These theories, in turn, can inform research on the onset of genocide at the group-level. Before addressing existing theories and data that could inform these efforts, however, it is important to recognize that non-state actors are heterogeneous—something that is often masked by framing all of these groups as non-state actors simply in reference to states. Indeed, militias, rebel groups, terror organizations, and other non-state actors vary widely in terms of their degree of organization, size, scope, membership, and aims, among other factors. Given these distinctions and a lack of scholarly agreement about how to classify non-state actors, I use the term “non-state actor” to refer generally to any or all of these groups.

With this caveat in mind, efforts to theorize and analyze genocides committed by non-state actors may be informed by scholarship that examines why non-state actors engage in widespread, systematic targeting of civilians. Much like research on genocide, this work has addressed why non-state actors target civilians by theorizing strategic reasons behind their actions as well as assessing the situations in which non-state actors do and do not harm civilians. Although there may be important differences to uncover between genocidal violence and other forms of systematic violence against civilians, this scholarship suggests that genocide initiated by non-state actors may

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[31] Benjamin A. Valentino, “Why We Kill: The Political Science of Political Violence Against Civilians,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, no. 1 (2014), 93; this violence can also be driven by non-strategic factors, like greed (see Weinstein) or retaliation (see Gould).
be linked to characteristics of the non-state actor, the non-state actor’s relationships, or the broader structural context.

Turning first to the group characteristics, non-state actors’ violence against civilians has been linked to the internal structure of the group, including an amorphous organizational structure and a leadership deficit. Group capacity may likewise matter, with comparatively weaker groups found to be more likely to engage in violence against civilians. A group’s ideology may also influence civilian targeting, and scholarship on terror organizations has found that religious and ethno-nationalist ideologies can be particularly deadly. Indeed, the violence committed by ISIL was motivated by a particular ideological worldview, not unlike the genocides committed by the Khmer Rouge or Nazi Germany.

The non-state actors’ relationships with other actors—most notably, civilians and governments—may also affect whether they turn to genocide. With regard to relationships with civilians, non-state actors may target civilians who appear supportive of their enemies. As Schwartz and Straus suggest, such violence may be genocidal when the non-state actor views civilians as unwinnable and consequently seeks to eradicate them. Non-state actors may also engage in violence against civilians due to their relationships with governments. For instance, non-state actors that benefit from state support may be more likely to commit genocide, since states often use rebel groups to commit violence and since many non-state organizations, such as terror organizations, depend on financial support from states. Of course, non-state actors frequently commit genocidal violence alongside or on behalf of another actor, as scholarship on the Janjaweed in Darfur or Arkan’s Tigers in Bosnia has illustrated.

Here, I focus on non-state actor initiated violence rather than these and other cases where the non-state actor carries out violence initially begun by others, but I recognize the line between state and non-state is often blurred and that ties between actors may change over time.

Finally, studies of the onset of genocide committed by non-state actors may benefit from the existing scholarship that focuses on state-level, structural factors that influence the onset of genocide. Put simply, these groups do not operate in a vacuum, and other dynamics—such as the type of government in the state (or states) in which they operate, the presence of a civil war, or the number of other non-state actors operating within a defined space—may play a role. Wood

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38 Non-state actors may also target civilians to coerce them into providing support or withholding support for another actor (see Azam and Hoeffler, Kalyvas and Kocher), though this may be less likely to coincide with genocidal aims.

39 Idean Salehyan, “The Delegation of War to Rebel Organizations,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 54, no. 3 (2010), 493-515; Non-state violence against civilians can also be part of a coercive strategy to inflict costs on governments and harm political adversaries. Rebel or terror groups may also resort to violence against civilians when they are too weak to challenge government military forces directly (see Lisa Hultman, “Battle Losses and Rebel Violence: Raising the Costs for Fighting,” Terrorism and Political Violence 19, no 2 (2007), 205). These motivations may appear incompatible with genocide, though the choice of whom to target and the forms of destruction may still be genocidal in nature. Additionally, the presence of one motivation—in this case, targeting the government—does not mean that motivations cannot be multifaceted and cannot also involve the intent to destroy a group.


41 Relatedly, there would also be value in modeling when governments use militias to carry out their violence.

42 Wood, Rebel Capability, 601.
illuminates that civilians are more likely to be victimized when a weak insurgent group faces a strong government, for instance, while Loyle finds that mass atrocities committed by non-state actors occur in contexts where states also commit mass atrocities.

Researchers should consequently take non-state actors as the unit of analysis, and forecasting efforts could consider the various factors that make certain non-state actors more likely to commit genocide. These analyses could also take a two-step approach that couples structural factors with the triggers of genocide committed by non-state actors. For instance, in an ongoing project, several colleagues and I have been conducting in-depth case studies of the catalysts of mass killings committed by non-state actors in Africa. Our process tracing addresses why Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) members killed hundreds of civilians in December 2008, and they find that this sharp uptick in LRA violence against civilians came two weeks after the announcement of Operation Lightning Thunder, a joint military operation targeting the LRA. Aligning with this, and based on 26 other case studies, we argue that opposition military advances are the most prominent triggers of mass killings committed by non-state actors. This, in turn, suggests that threat may be a particularly important trigger of violence committed by non-state actors.

Numerous datasets exist to aid researchers in assessing the group characteristics, relational factors, and structural factors that may influence the onset of genocide committed by non-state actors. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)’s Armed Conflict Dataset contains valuable information about violence committed by non-state actors, while the Non-State Actor Dataset includes characteristics of groups that are in UCDP’s data. The Non-State Armed Groups Dataset (NAGS) and the Dangerous Companions Project encompass important information about state support given to non-state armed groups as well as group characteristics, such as ideology. Finally, some non-state actors’ links to states can be found in the Pro-Government Militia (PGM) database.

These datasets are admittedly limited to established non-state actors. Militias and other groups that are in their infancy or are more loosely organized are consequently not included, underscoring the importance of employing case studies of non-state actors alongside endeavors that rely upon quantitative datasets. Even with established actors, such as ISIL, quantitative modeling should be paired with in-depth analyses of processes and contexts in efforts to test and build theory, as well as in efforts to predict the onset of genocidal violence by non-state actors.

Conflicts
Societal upheaval is typically seen as a predictor of genocide. In fact, several studies have found that conflict, especially civil war, is the strongest predictor of genocide. Yet, while state-centric theories and models of genocide often include a measure of conflict, they often do not address differences between multiple conflicts within the same state. For instance, most datasets cite two different civil wars occurring in Ethiopia in 1976, though only one of these conflicts also involved genocide. According to the PITF database, a year after the civil war began in 1975, “army, internal security units, and civilian defense squads massacre(d) political and military elites, workers, students, bureaucrats, and others thought to oppose the revolutionary regime.” However, when this genocide began, the Eritrean-Ethiopian war of independence was also taking place. This civil war was separatist in nature, though it did not involve genocide.

State-level factors cannot account for why one of these civil wars involved genocide while the other did not, but in-depth comparative case studies of the two conflicts likely can. Additionally, quantitative or comparative qualitative analyses of the onset of genocides in certain conflicts could shed light on the types of conflicts that may lead to genocide, either as the conflicts are ongoing or in their aftermath. Researchers should consequently devote additional attention to the conflict-

43 Loyle, Understanding Nonstate Actor Behavior, 16.
44 Mihai Croicu and Ralph Sundberg, UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset Codebook. Version 5.0 (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2016).
45 Harff, No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust?
46 Krain, State-Sponsored Mass Murder; Nyseth Brehm, Re-examining Risk Factors, but see Williams.
47 PITF, State Failure Problem Set (full citation available from the author).
related factors that influence the onset of genocide, and genocide prevention models should address when conflicts lead to genocide, and, equally importantly, when they do not. In such analyses, characteristics of the conflicts—rather than the countries—should be prioritized. These characteristics include but are not limited to the type of conflict, who is involved, aspects of the violence itself, and, for genocides that begin after a conflict ends, how the conflict came to a close.

Perhaps most notably, mass killing of civilians is more likely during certain types of conflicts. Valentino, Puth, and Blach-Lindsay argue that mass killing is more prominent in conflicts where guerrilla armies oppose governments. Yet, Krcmaric finds the exact opposite, arguing that mass killing is more probable during conventional wars than during guerrilla wars. Scholars could test these competing hypotheses for the case of genocide, which in turn may shed light on such divergent findings. Additionally, scholars could examine whether other types of conflicts, such as ethno-nationalist conflicts, are more likely to include genocide.

Closely aligned with this, researchers could assess whether the changing nature of war influences the onset of genocide. Walter suggests that there have been three recent waves of civil wars: one that began around 1951 and ended with the Cold War, a second that began around 1992, and a third that began with the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. She argues that each of these periods is distinguished by civil wars with distinct attributes, focusing largely on ideological aims. As such, scholars could examine whether the characteristics of the third wave of wars are particularly relevant to understanding the onset of genocide in the 21st century.

Beyond the type of conflict, the actors involved may also influence whether genocide is likely to occur during or after a conflict. For instance, the group characteristics of non-state actors involved in the conflict—such as their motivating ideology or their structure—may play a role. Factors indicative of threat to the state may be particularly important; perhaps conflicts involving larger non-state actors or non-state actors that garner widespread public support are more likely to involve genocide. The historical legacies of who is involved in the conflict may likewise shape the possibility of genocide, as these legacies may inform perceptions of threat as well as perceptions of support for various actors. Furthermore, the internationalization of conflict, including financial support from external parties, may also matter. Gleditsch illustrates, for example, that many civil wars are transnational in terms of actors and resources; and scholars could examine how foreign support during conflict—in terms of who provides such support and the level of support—influences the likelihood that conflict leads to genocide.

Aspects of the violence itself should also be addressed. Researchers could assess whether the intensity of violence influences the onset of genocide. The geographic distribution of violence may similarly prove influential, as governments or non-state actors may be more likely to engage in genocide when conflicts threaten spaces they value, such as locations rich with natural resources or of other geo-political importance. Furthermore, researchers could examine the length of time between the onset of conflict and genocide, addressing why some conflicts immediately involve genocide while others lead to genocide years after the conflict began or, in some cases, after the conflict ended.

Finally, distinct factors may affect the genocides that begin after a conflict ends. Uzonyi artfully shows that civil wars with a clear victor are more likely to see their winning party engage in genocide than conflicts that end through other means, such as negotiations. Aspects of negotiations may also impact the likelihood of genocide. For example, many scholars suggest the Arusha

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48 Thankfully, several scholars have begun this process, though genocide prevention efforts have yet to incorporate their findings or to model onset of genocide at the conflict-level.


53 Uzonyi, Civil War Victory, 366.
Accords influenced the onset of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and the aspects of peace treaties that lead to genocide could be informed by scholarship on peace treaties and conflict recurrence more broadly.

To be certain, distinguishing between civil wars and genocides can be analytically tricky, and this difficulty is compounded by the fact that genocide is a political, contested concept. For instance, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia deemed the 1995 massacre at Srebrenica that occurred during the Bosnian civil war as genocide. Others label additional aspects of the civil war that unfolded in different parts of the country, like the violence in the Northwest region of Prijevor, as genocide as well. Such disagreements must be kept in mind, but scholarly arguments regarding the nature of violence may also influence the creation of better tools to measure forms of violence that are deeply intertwined and unfold simultaneously.

Thus, to analyze whether and why certain conflicts lead to genocide — including the type of conflict, who is involved, aspects of the violence itself, and how the conflict ended — researchers could draw upon the impressive databases that have documented global conflicts to date. Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) has created numerous datasets that track various forms of armed conflict, often in collaboration with the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). The Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPV) Dataset likewise documents large-scale violence, while UCDP also introduced a conflict termination dataset that contains information about how conflicts come to an end.

Once again, conflict-centered endeavors should likewise rely on case-based analyses that privilege local knowledge and context. For example, my own preliminary qualitative comparative analyses suggest that separatist conflicts are much more likely to lead to genocide than other forms of conflicts. Much more could be done to trace the events that unfolded in conflicts that did involve or lead to genocide alongside those that did not, however, in order to better understand the processes that are associated with the onset of genocide.

Subnational Spaces

Lastly, although genocides are typically accorded a country-level onset date, violence can begin at various times within each country or, conceivably, across countries (such as on both sides of a border). In order to predict the onset of genocide with more precision, researchers must understand why violence starts in specific locations. While state-level factors such as a state-led exclusionary ideology or threat to a government may inform why genocide occurs within a state, they cannot fully explain why violence begins at a particular location, as these factors provide no information pertaining to spaces below the state-level. In fact, extending these factors to subnational units would neglect the fact that those committing the violence are, like all social actors, subject to the influence of their immediate social surroundings—surroundings that vary widely.

As Figure 1 illustrates, although the 1994 genocide in Rwanda began almost immediately after the president’s plane was shot down on the night of April 6, violence started earlier in some places of the country. McDoom suggests that elite competition for control and ethnic segregation influenced this variation in onset, while Straus finds that violence began earlier in areas with lower unemployment rates. Focusing on the spread of information, Nyseth Brehm suggests that Radio RTLM (a hate-speech radio) coverage is also associated with earlier onset.

Though the studies cited in the prior paragraph employ quantitative analyses to assess the factors associated with subnational onset of genocide, case studies of subnational spaces are also informative. For instance, the large area in southwestern Rwanda with the latest onset was known

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as Butare. Butare was a former prefecture (a region somewhat akin to a state) and was the only one of Rwanda’s prefectures led by a Tutsi prefect (a position somewhat akin to a governor). When the genocide began, the prefect tried to resist the violence. Although genocide was unfolding in most parts of the country, the prefect met with Butare’s local leaders and encouraged them to prevent violence and help others. On April 17, however, Rwanda’s interim government removed the prefect from his position. Violence in Butare began almost immediately afterward, illustrating the importance of leaders in influencing subnational onset.

Figure 1. Commune Onset of Genocide in 1994 Rwanda

Being able to pinpoint where genocide will begin with more precision than the state-level could have many benefits for genocide prevention efforts, and theories about where genocide starts could be guided by scholarship on localized civil conflict and crime. Specifically, recent analyses of civil and ethnic violence have documented how subnational dynamics influence where and when violence occurs. For instance, Buhaug and colleagues found that the onset of civil conflict was more likely in subnational spaces marked by low economic growth and capacity, while Fjelde and Uexkull argue that climate variability heightens subnational conflict. Furthermore, Buhaug and Rød examined disaggregated data across Africa and found that separatist conflicts were more likely to occur in sparsely populated regions near borders and comparatively far from capital cities.

60 Allison Des Forges, Leave None the Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009), 209.
61 Violence had already begun in the commune of Nyakizu, however.
66 Clionadh Raleigh and Håvard Hegre, “Population Size, Concentration, and Civil War: A Geographically Disaggregated Analysis,” Political Geography 28, no. 4 (2009), 224-238; this does not mean that state-level factors, such as type of
Combining insights from numerous studies, Rustad and co-authors\(^{67}\) propose a subnational conflict risk indicator based on population, socioeconomic status, conflict history, ethno-political exclusion, geographic location within a country, and neighboring conflicts in other subnational administrative units.\(^{68}\) Such factors may likewise inform the subnational risk of genocide. Furthermore, the subnational levels or forms of civil conflict themselves may also influence where genocide unfolds and the timing of this violence.

Studies of the subnational onset of genocide could likewise draw inspiration from theories of criminology. The notion that crime unfolds differently in distinct places has long been a hallmark of criminological inquiry. In fact, criminologists have found there are hot spots in crime, or subnational areas that consistently experience comparatively more violent crime. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, for example, three percent of neighborhoods were responsible for 50 percent of crimes in 1986.\(^{69}\) Hot spots likewise exist on a worldwide scale, and recent research has also found hot spots may be linked to riots.\(^{70}\) Data on hot spots may be useful for predicting where genocide begins, and at a minimum, scholars should address whether there are certain hot spots of genocidal violence as well.

Ecological studies of crime have also pointed toward many other structural factors (such as employment levels, community cohesion, and signs of social and physical disorder) that could influence the onset of violence at various subnational levels. Such data may be particularly useful in predicting the onset of violence that is largely undertaken by civilians, as was the case in Rwanda. Indeed, Nyseth Brehm\(^{71}\) illustrates that characteristics of communities, like marriage rates, informed levels of in violence in Rwanda. These factors may also be relevant for understanding the onset of genocide.

Finally, triggers could also be analyzed at subnational levels. The triggers of genocide have thus far been conceptualized at the state-level, but in much the same way, these events and processes likely occur in localized spaces. Are there subnational triggers, and do they differ from those typically accorded on a national level? For instance, the trigger of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda was the president’s plane crash, but there may have been more proximate, localized triggers in the communities depicted in Figure 1.

Data that could be used in studies of subnational onset and triggers are increasingly available. Most datasets of civil war include disaggregated conflict data (for instance, see the Armed Conflict Location Event Dataset Project, or ACLED), and many datasets are beginning to geo-reference events, such as protests or riots (e.g., the Social Conflict in Africa Database). National censuses worldwide often include indicators of population, employment, and ethnicity and are typically available through IPUMS International. Furthermore, a 2017 issue of *American Behavioral Scientist* considered how to measure state capacity in subnational spaces, while many environmental indicators—such as rainfall and average temperatures—can easily be mapped onto subnational spaces using GIS programs.

That said, researchers should not be restricted by the pre-set, subnational boundaries that dictate the information available in quantitative datasets, such as census tracts and other administrative areas. Though these data can be useful, subnational administrative units and their boundaries are often created through political processes and may not hold meaning for their residents. Fieldwork could shed light on how people living within these areas view their communities and whether and how such communities map onto administrative boundaries, which in turn may dictate which subnational level to consider.

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\(^{67}\) Rustad et al., *All Conflict is Local*.  
\(^{68}\) The latter two are given less weight in the index.  
Implications for Genocide Prediction and Prevention

This article has argued that state-centricity has characterized genocide forecasting and that, in order to pursue more accurate genocide prediction endeavors, researchers should look beyond the state. I have proposed three major paths for doing so, including 1) theorizing and analyzing non-state actors who commit genocide, 2) engaging in conflict-centered approaches, and 3) addressing the onset and triggers of genocide within subnational spaces. Researchers examining these three areas should employ a multitude of methods, and they should draw insights from interdisciplinary scholarship on varying forms of violence, such as civilian targeting and mass killing.

Additionally, although I have addressed each of the three avenues in isolation, researchers and practitioners involved in genocide prevention efforts should examine them concurrently when possible. Moving from findings documented in research to forecasting future events is hardly an easy task, and others have identified some of its pitfalls.72 Though some of these drawbacks are tied to specific quantitative modeling decisions that are difficult to overcome (as all research methods have some drawbacks), in-depth knowledge about cases can help transcend some of the other pitfalls of forecasting genocide. For instance, large-N forecasting endeavors of non-state actors, conflicts, and subnational spaces can identify actors, conflicts, and spaces that may be at risk of genocide. These general analyses capture general patterns and trends, however, and are unable to consider rich, case-specific information. Consequently, these analyses should be complemented by situational and context-driven analyses of non-state actors, conflicts, and subnational spaces in order to refine risk assessments based on localized knowledge.

In the case of ISIL’s genocide against the Yazidi that was briefly covered at the outset of this article, a dataset of armed actors likely would have enabled analysis of how ISIL’s ideology, relationships, and broader situation may have influenced the group’s likelihood of committing genocide. Such analyses could have been combined with process tracing that would have identified reasons behind ISIL’s declaration of a caliphate a month prior to the genocide, which coincides with their escalation in violence and may have triggered the violence that occurred in August 2014. Analyses of the civil war that began in Iraq earlier that year may have likewise yielded important information linked to the type of violence that was unfolding. Furthermore, as the genocide targeting Yazidi was geographically concentrated, researchers could have been assessing whether certain parts of the country were more likely to experience violence. Of course, hindsight is clearly at play with this example, but the important point is that more refined information that transcends the state will aid prediction efforts.

To be certain, the three avenues proposed in this article are not exhaustive. There are many other factors that researchers should consider when analyzing the onset of genocide and, relatedly, assessing its risk. For instance, researchers could focus on groups that may be at risk of genocide. The Minorities at Risk Project contains information on groups that have suffered from discrimination, though grounded analyses would likewise be necessary given the socially constructed nature of groups.73 Case studies tracking group characteristics as well as the actions that have harmed groups may also wield important information. For instance, although the genocide against the Rohingya arguably began recently, Myanmar’s government has discriminated against Rohingya people for decades.

Furthermore, as researchers focus on a particular phenomenon within a bounded period of time and space—such as a conflict, subnational region, or perhaps a group—they must remain cognizant of other factors at play, such as the involvement of international actors. To be sure, scholars of globalization have long suggested that the local and the global do not exist on their own.74 For instance, Goodale75 argues that researchers often uncritically employ the notion of a

74 Doreen Massey, A Global Sense of Place (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1-2.
local, a national, and an international level without recognition that no location is fully detached from national and international processes. Though the use of levels can be useful for thinking about a complex world, researchers should nonetheless continue to recognize the multiplicity of processes at play in any given context.

Taken together, genocide prediction and related prevention endeavors are still quite new. Researchers can contribute to these paramount efforts by continually striving to better understand why genocide occurs. This starts by examining the onset of genocide, and analyses looking beyond the state to non-state actors, conflicts, and subnational spaces yield much promise.

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Whitmore, Todd David. “Genocide or Just Another ‘Casualty of War’? The Implications of the Memo Attributed to President Yoweri K. Museveni of Uganda.” *Practical Matters* 3 (2010), 1-49.


In the inaugural issue of the official journal of the International Association of Genocide Studies (IAGS), *Genocide Studies and Prevention* (GSP), then-IAGS president Israel Charny and Chair of the GSP Academic Advisory Board Roger Smith make a spirited argument for inclusion of the word “prevention” in the journal’s title:

We recognize that the promise of genocide prevention explicit in our title is very ambitious. How do we prevent genocide from happening? No single step will change the world, but we believe that through careful research and reasoned argument, governments and policy makers can be persuaded to expand their concept of national interest to include the prevention of genocide. We further believe that for governments and policy makers to have the political will to enforce the international laws and conventions on genocide through intervention and prevention, they must be held accountable by their informed constituencies. It is through education and awareness that people are made to understand their responsibility to hold their governments accountable in this regard.

While awareness is a first step to the prevention of genocide, cognitive awareness is not enough. In our ever-shrinking world, where there is ever-increasing competition for land and the basic resources for life, the conditions for violent conflict are ever greater. We feel that the key failure of human society has been the failure to adopt life itself as the central value of all human decision making.\(^1\)

In this statement, the authors understand the challenges of prevention to be profound and deeply intersectional. Notwithstanding this complexity, however, they nevertheless decided to place the cause of prevention at the heart of the academic mission of the journal, thereby contributing to structuring our field around this aim.

*Genocide Studies and Prevention* was birthed in the afterglow of an Enlightenment conception of rational, fully participatory and responsible governance, resting on the presumption that, if world leaders could be convinced by reasoned argument or else feared disapproval from an informed citizenry, the political will to prevent genocide (understood as a man-made and so malleable phenomenon) might become more deeply rooted and blossom. Charny and Smith did not restrict their understanding of prevention to its salience only for members of certain groups, or even solely for those currently under threat of rapidly intensifying and deadly physical destruction. Indeed, their reference elsewhere in their introductory essay to “less visible” but ongoing genocides against Indigenous peoples is testament to the breadth of their conception.\(^2\) However, through the promise they make, and the way that they make it, certain concessions may be detected that are indebted to a specific logic of prevention, one that hasn’t always had welcome consequences for how we understand this term today.

\(^1\) Israel W. Charny and Roger W. Smith, “Why GSP?” *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 1, no. 2 (2006), i.

\(^2\) Ibid.
In this paper, we seek to unsettle the reigning logic of prevention and foster the critical study of genocide prevention by proposing an everyday ethos of genocide prevention, one targeting not just rational thinking but also habituated practices. To foster such a quotidian prevention ethos, we believe it necessary to multiply the points of prevention. We illustrate what we have in mind briefly with reference to our project *Embodying Empathy*, a virtual Indian Residential School that offers an immersive, empathy-inducing introduction to the cultural destruction wrought through one of the more conspicuous and devastating processes forcing the assimilation of Canada’s Indigenous population. Before discussing *Embodying Empathy*, the next two sections set the stage by articulating the reigning logic of prevention, followed by an examination of how cultural techniques of genocidal destruction have been excluded from this logic. This is followed by critical interrogation of the dominant metaphors used to represent prevention to lay the groundwork for proposing an everyday ethos of prevention that can be inculcated through projects such as *Embodying Empathy*.

**Risk, Culture, and Prevention**

Risk is foundational to the field of genocide studies. Raphael Lemkin’s original understanding of genocide as a concept is founded on his realization that historically the law was silent on the risks confronted by human groups as cultural collectivities facing purposive destruction. More generally, Lemkin argued that the future of humanity was secured and enhanced by our global diversity and pluralism, which he also believed to be at risk from the phenomenon of group destruction. Through the efforts of Lemkin and others, genocide prevention, understood broadly as a determined effort to minimize the risk of genocide, was enshrined in one of our field’s founding documents, the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948. Hereafter UNGC).

The notion that risks to collectivities can be identified, mitigated, and prevented emerged from an evolving way of thinking that became increasingly prominent and prevalent in the 20th Century. The turn to risk and prevention thinking is therefore not novel to genocide studies. Genocide studies emerged during the late stages of the “risk society,” the period sometimes also referred to as late modernity in which the tools of science and technology, and the powers of human reason, were seen as keys to a better-managed and less risky modern world. No longer were disasters merely to be endured when they happened; instead, tools were designed to overcome the pervasive uncertainties of disaster prediction, which in turn led to the creation of new prophylactic measures that could guide intervention when potentially disastrous risks were detected. The practice of genocide assessment and prevention thus was broadly compatible with modernity’s essential rationalism. This practice promises to grasp group destruction in such a manner that it is made specifiable (through the production of operational definitions) and actionable (in so far as, once specified, it becomes amenable to epistemic and pragmatic organization in ways that allow for strategic, rationally-grounded interventions).

The contemporary promise of genocide prevention, risk assessment and early warning is built upon a specific way of thinking about genocide that tends to be less inclusive than the approach envisioned by Charny and Smith. For the most part, the logic of genocide prevention builds off the UNGC and therefore inherits its underlying prejudices. This is particularly evident when it comes

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to the issue of cultural techniques of destruction. Risks to the group as a cultural entity are rarely considered by those operating under the logic of prevention.9

Culture is fundamental to the continued existence of groups, since culture is part of what helps them preserve group-sustaining relations.10 Culture is thus both the product and constitutive component of group relations. Some definitions of cultural genocide treat culture as a static set of practices and ways of being that need to be preserved as part of the store of the particular group’s traditions rather than a collectively negotiated aspect of group life.11 In contrast, James Clifford presents culture as a “deeply compromised” notion that has too often been used to place firm boundaries around what is in truth a complex set of relationships.12 Culture, for Clifford, is a dynamic grouping of values, practices, and behaviors that are never wholly legible but always in interaction with historical processes of “appropriation, compromise, subversion, masking, invention, and revival.”13 Culture, in brief, shifts and moves as our relationships unfold. Prevention of cultural genocide therefore involves protecting a set of relations that allow groups to form and re-form as they develop and adapt to changing circumstances.14 This raises a vexing question for genocide scholars: How do you protect something that is dynamic and changing? Moreover, because culture is a site of contest and debate, a further question arises: How do you protect something that is itself beset by internal divisions? Yet, at the same time, cultural relations are those through which a group establishes its identity, produces meaning for its members, and ensures its preservation into the future. Violence against these relations can therefore compromise the continued existence of a group in a manner similar to physical and biological violence, as captured in Claudia Card’s notion of “social death,” which articulates the deep ontological distress caused through destruction of relations that are fundamental to our social vitality.15 Such violence against culture is purposeful and seeks to expunge society of the targeted culture and is therefore different from other processes of inter-group cultural sharing and hybridity.

The tendency of the logic of prevention to ignore cultural destruction stems from the formative process giving rise to the genocide concept in international law. Of particular, concern is the excision of the concept of cultural genocide from the UNGC.16 When discussing the question of cultural genocide, some delegates to the UN’s General Assembly found ridiculous the idea that their nations might have been complicit in the destruction of cultural groups through acts they felt to be part of normal procedures intended to yield civilization and moral uplift. Evolutionary standards for assessing the value of groups were still present at this time, and Lemkin was hesitant

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10 For a robust overview of the origins and historical development of the culture concept, including a discussion of the main contemporary schools of thought on what culture is and how it works, see the introduction to Adam Muller’s collection Concepts of Culture: Art, Politics, and Society (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005).

11 For example, Beardsley defines ethnocide as the “[…] intent to extinguish, utterly or in substantial part, a culture. Among such ethnocidal acts are the deprivations of opportunity to use a language, practice a religion, create art in customary ways, maintain basic social institutions, preserve memories and traditions, and work in cooperation toward social goals.” Quoted in Leo Kuper, Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 31. See also Paul Clastres, “On Ethnocide,” Art & Text 28 (1988), 51-58.


13 Ibid., 338.


to suggest that sovereign nations did not have some right to try to integrate subject peoples. In this vein, Mr. Petran, the representative from Sweden, noted that

The acts which, according to article III [on cultural genocide], would constitute cultural genocide might be far less serious than those specified in article II; for instance, in the case of measures of educational policy, it might be difficult to estimate their scope in relation to the cultural position of a minority. The question could arise whether, for example, the fact that Sweden had converted the Lapps to Christianity might not lay her open to the accusation that she had committed an act of cultural genocide.17

The thought that colonial powers could be impugned for their efforts to transform allegedly “backward” Indigenous peoples struck the delegates as outrageous, so barely worth consideration that they did not hesitate to bring up their “civilizational” efforts in condemning the article on cultural genocide. Mr. Leif Egeland from South Africa likewise raised the specter of cannibalism, noting there is “danger latent in the provisions of article III where primitive or backward groups were concerned. No one could, for example, approve the inclusion in the convention of provisions for the protection of such customs as cannibalism.”18

Other representatives argued that: a) physical and cultural genocide were too different to combine under the same law; b) cultural genocide was covered by other legal protections (such as those concerning minority rights to be included in the UN Declaration of Human Rights that was being negotiated at the same time); and c) the article on cultural genocide was too vague to be of any legal practicality. Danish representative Per Federspiel raised two of these objections in his remarks: “it would show a lack of logic and of a sense of proportion to include in the same convention both mass murders in gas chambers and the closing of libraries.”19 Some nations such as Egypt and China opposed these arguments, pointing to the destructiveness of forced conversions and other assaults on the cultural life of the group, but to no avail: in the Sixth Committee, 25 nations voted in favor of excluding cultural genocide from the UNGC versus 16 against and 4 abstentions.20

The memory of the Holocaust as an event of mass physical destruction, rather than primarily cultural and physical destruction, contributed to the removal of techniques of cultural genocide from the UNGC. In their efforts to reduce the law of genocide to whatever could be deemed justiciable, the Holocaust was mobilized as a frame of reference and used to narrow the concept to emphasize very nearly only its physical manifestation. As can be seen in Federspiel’s comments, to compare mass murders with closed libraries was to dilute and distort the genocide concept beyond reason. As Alexander Hinton notes, the argument of “dilution” has continued to perform a gate-keeping function, limiting what reasonable accusations might be made concerning acts of attempted group destruction.21 However, these arguments against dilution often served simply to cover over the self-interest of the participating nations, who wanted to protect themselves from genocide accusation as processes of decolonization were taking place around the globe.

In short, practices of cultural genocide were removed from the UNGC for a variety of reasons, from the pragmatic to the nakedly prejudicial. On the latter score, one cannot deny that some delegates to the General Assembly believed quite simply that some cultures were worthier of protection than others. They raised concerns about the protection of “backward” languages and

18 Ibid., 1513. Article III on cultural genocide was eventually excised from the UNGC, although it was still present as late as the Ad Hoc Committee on Genocide’s 1948 draft. In this version, Article III reads: “In this Convention genocide also means any deliberate act committed with the intent to destroy the language, religion or culture of a national, racial or religious group on grounds of national or racial origin or religious belief such as: 1. Prohibiting the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group; 2. Destroying, or preventing the use of, libraries, museums, schools, historical monuments, places of worship or other cultural institutions and objects of groups,” as quoted in Morsink, *Cultural Genocide*, 1023.
19 Ibid., 1508.
20 Ibid., 1518.
religions. Overconfidence in Western superiority and attendant Eurocentric biases thus worked their way into the conceptual architecture of the UNGC.

Accordingly, the logic of prevention can also be seen to operate as a “logic of elimination.” Just as the logic of elimination, as identified by Patrick Wolfe, works to erase Indigenous presence upon the land while naturalizing non-Indigenous settlement, the logic of prevention turns our gaze away from the many means of elimination (e.g., forced assimilation, removal, linguistic and political destruction), thereby allowing us to imagine North America as a space not needing prevention. Indigenous groups, and the centrality of culture to the ongoingness of these groups, are defined out of the scope of genocide and so out of the scope of prevention, facilitating the perpetuation of a settler colonial logic of elimination by legal and other means.

The Logic of Prevention
The colonial logic of prevention manifests in the way that culture is discussed and treated in the mainstream literature on genocide prevention, risk assessment and early warning. Therein, for the most part, culture receives little mention. Some reports discuss the creation of a “culture of prevention” or a “culture of peace,” and warnings are sometimes given about regions where there is a culture of obedience or authoritarianism, thus making certain kinds of culture serve as potential warning signs or precursors to genocide, but little is said of the actual cultures threatened by genocide. A review of some illustrative examples is thus in order.

The report of the Genocide Prevention Task Force, Preventing Genocide: A Blueprint for U.S. Policymakers, co-chaired by Madeleine K. Albright and William S. Cohen (2008), is an example of the blind spots inherited from the UNGC that are sustained in the logic of prevention. In this report, culture is problematized in the form of the reigning institutional culture in the United States, which is seen as being one that favours reactive rather than preventative practices. This is a key focus of the report, since the task force was established with the purpose to “identify practical steps to enhance the capacity of the U.S. government to prevent and respond to genocide and mass atrocities.” Of course, in giving such advice, the report also needs to touch on how to identify when prevention is warranted. Here, the report seeks to sidestep messy entanglements inherent in the question “What is genocide?” by focusing instead on “genocide and mass atrocities” that target victims “because of their membership as members of a group.” Despite this self-professed open approach, it is clear that the report is only concerned with instances of physical destruction. Cultural destruction may be something implicitly noted in references to the sort of “fine-grained” analysis the authors feel is necessary to effective and efficient early warning and risk assessment, though it does not receive specific attention per se.

It is further clear in the report that culture may play a role in the lead-up to genocide. For example, a culture of impunity that follows prior mass atrocities is noted as a possible precursor to an occurrence of genocide. Likewise, the risk factor of “state-led discrimination” can be read

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25 Ibid., x.
26 Ibid., xxii.
27 Ibid., 18.
28 Ibid., 46.
as potentially including assaults on group culture, although again this is not explicitly stated.\textsuperscript{29} In large part, the report’s preventative lens does not focus on assaults against the cultural life of targeted groups, and so fails to do enough to acknowledge cultural destruction as in itself a technique of genocide.

Since reports such as that of the Genocide Prevention Task Force piggyback on the existing early warning, risk assessment and prevention literature, it is necessary to look and see how it, too, operates using a similar logic of prevention that overlooks the genocidal force of cultural destruction. In this scholarly literature, one sees a narrowing lens that relegates assaults against culture largely to the sidelines.\textsuperscript{30} The logic of prevention thereby remains ironically consistent with the logic of elimination, despite the former’s commitment to forestalling genocide.

Though anthropologists such as Hinton have brought to genocide studies an enhanced understanding of the cultural conditions characteristic of particular regions (Cambodia) and their relationship to genocidal processes, scholars approaching genocide prevention from a social scientific perspective frequently exhibit little regard for the role of culture in both the perpetration and resolution of genocide.\textsuperscript{31} Barbara Harff, whose pioneering work on genocide prevention has set the stage for subsequent authors working on quantitative aspects of the field, re-works the UNGC when she seeks to operationalize a concept of genocide and politicide for her research.\textsuperscript{32} In so doing, she criticizes the UNGC for including “mental harm” as a form of genocide in Article II(b), arguing that “it encompasses a vast array of instances of psychological and cultural harm done to groups that have lost their cohesion and identity, but not their lives.”\textsuperscript{33} She offers no comment on Article II(e) on the transfer of children from one group to another. Cultural destruction is simply defined out of her equations.

If cultural destruction is not an outcome that such scholars consider to merit prevention, does it at least appear in their work as a potential warning sign? Not so much. The analytical emphasis in this kind of scholarship focuses on macro-level factors such as state policy, histories of previous conflict, racial and ethnic cleavages, and underlying economic conditions. Harff does note factors such as “exclusionary ideologies,”\textsuperscript{34} but these are registered more because of their capacity to prime perpetrators toward physical genocidal action, rather than as assaults against the integrity and continuity of targeted groups.

More examples could be provided, but the point is straightforward: constructed within a legal regime that stacks the deck against general recognition of the genocidal significance of colonial assaults on Indigenous cultures, the logic of prevention offers no solace and provides no potential means of salvation to those facing cultural forms of group destruction. The same logic that resulted in the removal of cultural genocide from the UNGC is operative in the decision-making featured in both policy-oriented and scholarly interventions on questions of prevention. Within these domains, cultural destruction is often seen as too messy, qualitatively different, or of too little importance to require mention. These rationales draw upon liberal European ontological and epistemological

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 25.


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 58.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 62.
assumptions that place individuals and their physical existence at the centre of group life. And they downplay or otherwise ignore the cultural relations that constitute groups and contribute to their ongoingness. Moreover, it is their fit with the law, and how they come to be known through European legal practices that determines the relevance of the criteria whereby we are meant to become able to determine when and where there is a potential genocide to be prevented. How groups experience and understand their own potential destruction, especially where it resides outside a European knowledge/experiential framework, simply matters less.

**Binaries, Clusters, Events, Circle, Line, Intensities**

Beyond the neglect of culture in scholarly and policy literature on genocide prevention, we contend there is a structural problem in the logic of prevention that locks it in patterns of modernist and categorical thinking insensitive to the everyday intimacies of genocide. In brief, the logic of prevention is represented through a variety of (often mathematical) metaphors that presuppose a neat and rational world. Because our ultimate concern in this paper is with representation, we will focus in what follows on how these metaphors of risk and prevention are typically visualized in genocide studies.

Most prevalent among the early metaphors are those of the binary and the line. Genocidal processes emerge either in one nation state or another—there is little regard for the indeterminate zones that exist between the nations of the world. Instances of genocide might happen to cluster in specific regions, but these spaces are distinctly segregated and carved so as to reflect a specific geospatial conceptualization of the world, one that reinforces the idea of sovereign space. It is therefore the nation that remains the primary unit for the logic of prevention, no matter how contested that Westphalian framework might happen to be by those who live under its imposed (and in some important sense arbitrary) order.

Within this national space, a particular trait or risk factor is usually understood to be either present or absent. For example, it might be asked: Has the country experienced a previous instance of genocide or mass violence? Yes or no. Is there evidence of an exclusionary ideology? Yes or no. Responses may be coded into multi-modal rather than bi-modal responses, but the basic parameters remain ones of a presence or an absence, the binarized logic of a finite machine state (either on or off, present or absent).

The metaphor of the circle is also sometimes introduced with a view to capturing the notion that previous violence increases the risk of future violence. This metaphor contributes to perceptions of the cyclical nature of mass violence, in other words the idea that violent history repeats itself unless intervention occurs. Such circles are often drawn between temporally and geographically isolated events, in a back-handed way contributing to the idea of genocide as a distinct point in time marked by definite boundaries. Accordingly, the circle of genocide may be seen to be nothing more than another kind of line connecting events, with risks of heating up or cooling off viewed as depending upon a number of identifiable (and shared) factors.

Such linearity is most obvious in stage models for predicting and preventing genocide. Under their logic, (pre)genocide begins slowly and increases in intensity until it blooms into full-fledged genocide. This development may be rendered metaphorically as either a straight line or a tree branching off in different (binary) directions, the exact structure of which will depend on a variety of yes/no or if/then-type decisions. If one can define/track/observe a potential direction to a sequence of events, then the logic of prevention holds that we can try to staunch the flow of genocidal actions.

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What these kinds of linear and teleological models gain in parsimony and practicality, however, they often lose in explanatory and predictive subtlety. Some practitioners of genocide risk assessment and prediction rightly acknowledge that their models only provide access to certain types of genocide, and in particular are less successful in identifying and making sense of the pulsating and mutating relations and processes responsible for slow genocides characteristic of settler-colonial genocide. Consequently if we are serious about addressing the varieties of genocidal processes and threats, it is necessary to open up the logic of prevention to new metaphors, to the promise of prevention at a molecular rather than a molar level, and so multiply what we propose referring to as the everyday ethos of prevention.

The Open World, The Story World: Genocide’s Molecular Flows

It is not our contention that certain forms of genocidal destruction are undetectable and actionable at a broader, molar level. Indeed we accept that some kinds of genocide can be recognized on a broad surface with the aid of metaphors of lines, binaries, circles, events, and intensities. Molar calculations of prevention, as calculations based on the analysis of generalized phenomena, are sometimes successful in approximating and distilling genocidal probabilities. They assist us in envisioning the surfaces of genocidal phenomena, especially when such surfaces are unmistakably drenched in blood. In such circumstances, the linear, tree-model, might effectively allow us to emplot the course of a genocide from root to branch, opening spaces for preventative actions (although in assessments of efficacy it is sometimes worth remembering that one can never be sure that an act that did not happen was in fact prevented). So, then we accept that models drawing on a conventional stock of otherwise limited and limiting metaphors can sometimes create narrative structures about genocidal progressions that open up possibilities for more and less preventatively successful actions on the ground and political interventions in accordance with the reigning (formal and informal) rules of the prevailing geopolitical order.

But even in cases of seemingly clear-cut, readily observable genocides it is also worth remembering that operations take place at a molecular or microphysical level, and acknowledging that complexities are often lost, distorted, or ignored through the distillation processes required for emplotment. To provide one example, conventional prevention models do not deal with genocidal intimacies, the everyday and molecular flows of and between relationships that make attempted group destruction possible. Genocide occurs both to and through relationships. These relationships are not ordinarily captured by macro-level data and the work that is done to smooth the edges and constitute the conceptual boundaries of the violent phenomena under study. However, it is precisely in our everyday relations with one another that group destruction is made thinkable, habituated, innovated, and, in general, practiced. Identifying and intervening in...
destructive relations requires more than identifying the general circulation of a genocidal ideology or exclusionary policies and practices – it requires thick description of the everyday forms of social engagement and friction that make a genocide possible.

If one accepts the existence and power of genocide’s quotidian and affective dimensions, then it is not a great leap to argue that it is within everyday structures, feelings, and interactions that we also can locate a space of prevention. We feel this is particularly evident in cases of ongoing settler colonial relations of destruction that persist in threatening Indigenous ways of being and becoming. One such egregious case, that of Canadian Indian Residential Schools (IRS), serves as a particularly vivid example of how genocidal intimacies were deployed for the purposes of group destruction, predominantly through cultural means. Between the 1880s, until the last school closed in 1996, Canada’s IRS served to remove upward of 150,000 Indigenous children from their families and communities, in the process deliberately replacing the intimacy characteristic of the Indigenous world with the twin terror-intimacies of physical and sexual abuse, supplemented by the promised future intimacy (never to be fully realized) derived from assimilation. Through the push of punishment and the pull of inclusion, Indigenous cultures were forcibly relegated to a bygone and backward past, a displacement making it possible for the settler colonial Canadian state to claim sovereignty over and within Indigenous nations.

The complex topography – distributed across multiple times, spaces and cultures – of the IRS example does not easily map onto the measures of risk and prevention identified in the mainstream genocide prevention literature. However, it does have the potential to be signaled and unsettled through forms of the educational work that Charny and Smith correctly identify in “Why GSP?” as a component of prevention. Their mistake, however, involves limiting their conception of “education” to a notion of cognitive awareness of the sort that is always susceptible to the distancing and indifference-making patterns of the modern world, alongside a moral education that prioritizes the value of life. In their (liberal-educational) model, cognitive and moral awareness holds the promise of straightforwardly resulting in transformative action through the creation of reasonable and ethical citizens who demand that their political representatives intervene to halt or otherwise address genocidal circumstances. The process is, they assume, largely rational, and it operates through appropriately molar political channels to bring about the cessation of violence and an end to human suffering. Unfortunately, Charny and Smith do not critique these channels and their normative outcomes and tactics (e.g., sanctions and military intervention). Most problematically from our perspective, this model remains at the molar level and does not efficiently either take into account or recommend strategies suitable for preventing molecular genocidal violence.

We argue that one important way to educate and work both to prevent and redress genocide molecularly is through artistic renderings of genocidal experiences. Through artworks it becomes possible not only to deploy cognitive-educational tools conducive to an ethos of prevention in the individual, but also to cultivate empathetic and unsettling responses in secondary witnesses. This is not of course to suggest that artworks are the only or even the main expressive vehicle through which empathy can be cultivated; indeed works of history and biography, both creative and expressive enterprises in their way, can also yield similar results. But the latter genres tend to engage empathy when they are the most “expressive,” by which we mean they work to illuminate or interpellate states of mind and feelings that reveal the more intimate and contingent aspects


44 Woolford, This Benevolent Experiment.

45 Charny and Smith, Why GSP?, i.
of lived experiences – e.g. the highly subjective and potentially “relatable” ways that people make sense of what is happening to them, particularly in so far as we are concerned at times of constraint and distress. Following scholar and therapist Mitchell Kossak, we believe that creative artworks facilitate “attunement” with the world, both by modelling what attunement looks like and by demonstrating the consequences and costs of “misattunement.” In becoming attuned to the world – by learning to understand and accept the world’s inhabitants, folkways, and risks – empathy plays a central role by creating opportunities for learning from the world as others see and understand it. Creative or expressive representations, by drawing our attention (in, say, works of fiction) to variations in the way we negotiate our lived realities, and by revealing how these variations have come to mean something to the artists producing the representations of them, invite us to think differently and, often, to care. When we do, when we respond positively to the invitation to enter others’ lives that artworks extend to us, we facilitate, without in any way overdetermining, the emergence of empathetic connections and the expectation that we need to care. Notwithstanding the work of scholars like Paul Bloom and others who are overtly suspicious of any claim that empathy might possibly contribute to the refinement of our moral sensibility and ethical comportment, we remain convinced that empathy has a role to play in allowing us to enter into the lives of others in ways that, under certain circumstances, contribute to narrowing the distance between “Us” and “Them,” and through this narrowing aid in fostering a way of being in the world more finely attuned to the harms inherent in genocidal intimacies and hospitable to the demands of genocide prevention and repair. The argument over the moral and practical utility of empathy is a large one that generally exceeds the scope of this writing. It is acknowledged here only by way of admitting that there remains some controversy over about what tools are best suited to the work of genocide prevention at the molecular level (empathy, Bloom’s “rational compassion,” etc.).

For our part, we are exploring possible answers to this question through the production and implementation of a uniquely twenty-first-century prototype of genocide education and prevention practice that we are calling a “virtual storyworld.” In this wholly digital domain, interactions are less scripted and open to multi-focal and multi-dimensional experiences. Though the story at the heart of the digital world has been designed to elicit affective and empathetic responses through the production of evocative sounds, moods, colors, and perspectives, it also makes possible unique interactions and experiences that can be incorporated into the individual’s personal storehouse of moral and other dispositions. The storyworld thus holds the promise of being able to familiarize an individual, through seemingly everyday (and so molecular) interactions, with both the ethic and practice of caring. In this way the storyworld promises to give those experiencing it access to an everyday experience of genocide prevention through the recalibration of human relations.

**Embodying Empathy**

The Embodying Empathy project is led by a group of residential school Survivors with whom we researchers have been working for several years now to design, build and test a virtual Indian Residential School (vIRS). Using an Oculus Rift headset and other leading-edge technologies, our project has constructed a dynamically interactive and immersive IRS storyworld, a virtual reality-based environment that provides carefully-rendered IRS interior and exterior spaces, photographs and Survivor narratives for users to experience, interact with, and transform in various ordinary (and sometimes troublingly intimate) settings. Survivor-led representations of their experiences are thereby made available to a great variety of end users, including other Survivors, intergenerational Survivors, non-Indigenous Canadians, recent immigrants and others. Through the spaces, images and testimony contained within the storyworld, as well as through its introductory and closing

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monologues, users are connected not only to the attempted destruction of Indigenous groups via forced assimilation but also to a multi-vocal experience of the continuing (and profoundly damaging) reverberations of Canadian settler colonialism today.

The vIRS has been built carefully by adhering to unsettling and decolonizing research principles, such as those found in the OCAP protocol (ownership, control, access, and possession) formulated by Canada’s Assembly of First Nations originally to guide “non-extractive” scientific research on Indigenous people and communities. We have also made use of administrative and engagement procedures defined by relational accountability, whereby the role of the researcher is understood to be not simply to extract knowledge from research subjects but rather to form responsible and ongoing relations with those who possess a grounded expertise in the matters being inquired into.\(^{49}\) Accordingly, the Embodying Empathy project is owned, controlled, and led by a Survivor Governing Council, who have overseen all levels of the project from methodology design, to ethics, to the build and design of the vIRS itself.\(^{50}\)

We understand the impact of the vIRS to constitute a form of everyday prevention in light of Domenic LaCapra’s (1999) distinction, borrowed from Freud, between “acting-out” and “working-through.” According to La Capra, “Acting-out is related to repetition, and even the repetition-compulsion – the tendency to repeat something compulsively.” Those acting out consequently “have a tendency to relive the past, to relive the present as if they were still fully in the past, with no distance from it.”\(^{51}\) For them, the past intrudes into the present in ways that crucially overdetermine the latter’s meanings and significance. Acting-out in this context would involve little more than a simple performance of the past – a reliving and return of a trauma that has formerly been repressed, but in a somewhat attenuated form. To simply act-out a residential school experience in a context such as the vIRS would be to make it available to those immersed in the virtual storyworld in a way that simply reaffirms or leaves intact their preexisting beliefs about residential schools. Such an experience would be neither morally nor politically transformative, and would be of extremely limited educational value. In contrast, a virtual world such Embodying Empathy that is designed to encourage empathic unsettlement – a term LaCapra uses to designate that which “poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit”\(^{52}\) – would open up a space of mourning within which it becomes possible to call the present into question by working-through differences and disjunctions made available via one’s virtual encounter with the past. LaCapra notes that

> Mourning involves a different inflection of performativity: a relation to the past that involves recognizing its difference from the present – simultaneously remembering and taking leave of or actively forgetting it, thereby allowing for a critical judgment and a reinvestment in life, notably social and civic life with its demands, responsibilities, and norms requiring respectful recognition and consideration for others.\(^{53}\)

By participating in mourning conceived as an act of empathic unsettlement, secondary witnesses embedded in the vIRS are not facilely engaging in “the dubious appropriation of the


\(^{50}\) We address these methodological concerns in other publications: see, for example, Adam Muller, Struan Sinclair and Andrew Woolford, “Digitizing Trauma: Embodying Empathy in a Reconstructed Canadian Indian Residential School,” in *Worlds of Trauma: Canadian and German Perspectives*, ed. Wolfgang Kloos (Münster and New York: Waxman, 2018).


\(^{52}\) Ibid., 41-42.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 70.
status of the victim,” or otherwise reliving the past to make it cohere with the present. Instead, they oscillate between past and present so as both to come closer to the experience of others and to upset or unsettle themselves in/and the here and now. For LaCapra, “It is dubious to identify with the victim to the point of making oneself a surrogate victim who has a right to the victim’s voice or subject position. The role of empathy and empathic unsettlement in the attentive secondary witness does not entail this identity; it involves a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other’s position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other’s place.” Through Embodying Empathy we have worked to create an experience for users that neither completely disconnects their present from the past nor merely replicates the past in their present. Instead, we have worked to have the vIRS produce emotions and affiliations conducive to empathetic unsettlement, and through the experience of this unsettling an empathetically enriched and cognitively enhanced appreciation of the traumatic experiences of social and moral solidarity and betrayal marking the lives of Indigenous residential schoolchildren.

Empathic unsettlement nudges us toward ethical behavior, since it puts a confrontation with the past in the service of reworking relationships today. It is a sufficiently experientially rich and morally worthwhile goal to pursue, but building it into a virtual storyworld presented all of us working on Embodying Empathy with a host of challenges. Our strategic use of inherently unbounded, multivocal and narratively rich virtual space-time has allowed for the production of serial counter-memories that now co-exist within the vIRS. Because of their (sometimes contradictory) co-presence, these countermemories forestall possible harmonizing narratives marshaled not just by the state but by members of a wide range of advocacy groups in order to promote generically untroubled (and therefore static and unresponsive) forms of reconciliation and redress. The immersive environment we have co-created demands complex forms of engagement with Survivor experiences, as they are expressed in their own words, within a haunted yet immediate and viscerally lifelike space composed from Survivor memories.

The Embodying Empathy storyworld is not an open world in the fashion of some contemporary (especially multi-player) video games. Instead it is an environment in which users are directed along a specific narrative path that leaves directional and other choices up to the user, but that in strategic (though subtle) ways overdetermines their exposure to the storyworld’s traumatic content. The everyday terrors of forced assimilation, including aspects of colonial intimacy, are present in every glance. As part of an experiment in virtual embodiment, users are immersed in and in contact with the virtual world through the agency of the 360-degree visual and auditory perspectives provided by an Oculus Rift headset. This level of embodiment is intended to increase users’ exposure to colonial intimacies as they confront objects and experiences in the storyworld: the Lacombe’s ladder that contrasts the assimilative path to heaven with the Indigenous road to hell; the clerical shadows that haunt the chapel and dormitories; on the ride to the residential school in a van in which the seat is too large and distance from the driver is expressionistically magnified; in the intimate, searching text fragments that appear on a bathroom mirror in the girl’s dormitory, covered over with cardboard to guard against vanity, and the pages of a missal on display in the dark, isolated furnace room. These experiences recruit users into a kind of muted trauma that is intended to upset and unsettle – not by subjecting them to immediate pain or distress, but rather by requiring them to rethink their relations with Indigenous others who underwent such violence, as well as with the state that thought it acceptable to use these institutional techniques to forcibly transform (and thereby destroy) entire peoples. The Embodying Empathy vIRS had been created to inspire a change in its users’ everyday relationality, and through this alteration contribute to the quotidian practice of genocide prevention.

Initial Findings
Our purpose in this paper is primarily conceptual; however, it is worth reporting on some of the early but suggestive findings from our lab-based study and public exhibition of the vIRS. In an initial qualitative study, carried out alongside a more ambitious psychological investigation...
that in the near future will provide quantitative data on the empathy-generating capacity of the vIRS.\textsuperscript{56} Twenty University students were introduced to the vIRS through a 15-minute tour of its space followed by a one-hour, semi-structured lifeworld interview. The lifeworld interview is not intended to measure a specific phenomenon, or individual reactions to it. Instead, this interview strategy seeks to develop rapport with the research participant in order to examine how this individual makes sense of their experiences.\textsuperscript{57} Research participants ranged in age from 19 to 40, with the majority being in the 19-22 age range. Most (65\%) identified as male, which is unusual for a sample drawn from the pool of first-year Psychology students at the University of Manitoba, who predominantly identify as female. Many suggested they were drawn to participate in the study because they enjoy video games or had a curiosity about virtual reality, and saw their participation as providing an opportunity to try it out. Most of our group were Canadian citizens, though we also interviewed a handful (five) who were either landed immigrants or international students. No one in our sample identified as an Indigenous person.

All participants had learned about Canadian residential schools in either their high school or university classes. All were familiar with Survivor retellings of their experiences, and had either read this testimony in textual form (e.g., memoir) or heard it recounted in documentary films. Even so, every one of our participants felt this testimony was enhanced in some fashion when situated within the virtually reconstructed residential school. While many felt they gained new knowledge of residential schools through their experience of virtual immersion, this was not what they cited as the primary takeaway from their engagement with the vIRS. Instead, they remained most alive to how their feelings of sadness,\textsuperscript{58} unease,\textsuperscript{59} anger,\textsuperscript{60} loneliness,\textsuperscript{61} and other emotions were intensified by the experience of being in the location where the harm occurred. One participant reported: “I definitely felt like I was there” and how the vIRS allowed her to “… take more, give more meaning to it. …It helps you understand more, in a sense.”\textsuperscript{62} Another noted that “it definitely made me feel more like I was a part of what they were actually saying when I was in the actual place they were describing.”\textsuperscript{63} Moreover, their sense of intimate connection to the Survivors was heightened since they felt closer to their experiences of isolation, injustice, and abandonment.

When asked what empathy meant to them, most students were able to articulate a sense of the concept, though never in a textbook or clinical manner. They described empathy, in general, as the experience of “being in the shoes of another,”\textsuperscript{64} “connecting with them,”\textsuperscript{65} “helping someone,”\textsuperscript{66} or “to feel what another person is going through.”\textsuperscript{67} All but one felt their empathy toward Survivors, however they understood the term, was increased through their experience of the vIRS. They explained that this was the case because of the “eeriness”\textsuperscript{68} or the palpable “loneliness”\textsuperscript{69} of the vIRS. Their recall of the Survivor testimony they heard was also very good, demonstrating that the

\textsuperscript{56} Early quantitative results from a partnered study of approximately 160 participants are also promising in terms of the effectiveness of the vIRS. When compared to the no intervention control condition, the vIRS had a positive effect in terms of enhanced empathy, perceptions of ongoing suffering due to residential schools, feelings of political solidarity with Survivors, the number of expressed intentions to act, and low levels of distress. These findings are still under analysis and will be published separately by Katherine Starzyk’s social psychology lab research team.

\textsuperscript{57} See Steiner Kvale and Svend Brinkman, InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009).

\textsuperscript{58} Participant 5, 10, 11.

\textsuperscript{59} Participant 4, 10.

\textsuperscript{60} Participant 6.

\textsuperscript{61} Participant 17, 20.

\textsuperscript{62} Participant 3.

\textsuperscript{63} Participant 4.

\textsuperscript{64} Participants 1, 2, 4, 10.

\textsuperscript{65} Participant 3.

\textsuperscript{66} Participant 14.

\textsuperscript{67} Participant 6, 11, 18.

\textsuperscript{68} Participants 2, 4, 8, 20.

\textsuperscript{69} Participant 8.
Survivor experiences had in some sense sunk in and “stuck,” at least for the moment. Interestingly, the one participant who did not feel he had experienced empathy also self-identified as an avid video game player. For this person, the experience of the vIRS was less emotionally powerful because he adopted strategies he used when playing tense action or horror video games so as to avoid feeling distress or unwanted surprise.70

Aside from this one individual, other participants expressed their sense of connection to Survivors and a desire to communicate their concern to these individuals. Some wanted to know whether or not the Survivors are “okay now.”71 Others wanted to “congratulate them” or express respect for their “bravery” or “strength”72 for surviving such a horrifying milieu. Connecting this to their day-to-day lives, these participants felt less able to address the broader national project of “reconciliation” and suggested instead how they hoped to live in a way that respected the cultures and ways of being of Canadian Indigenous peoples: “I will go and do, like, a little research and find out more about them;”73 “I just want to listen to them talking for more about their experience.”74

We have also exhibited the vIRS at four local high schools. For ethics reasons, we have not collected data in these settings and can only speak anecdotally to the students’ reactions. For the high school pop-up exhibitions, students first listen to members of the Embodying Empathy Survivor Governing Council recount their residential school experiences before visiting the vIRS in groups of two. Some students have noted how seeing the space helps make the Survivors’ testimony more vivid, and we have at times heard audible gasps from the young people as they navigate the various spaces comprising the virtual storyworld. However, this is also the one setting where Indigenous students have visited the vIRS, and their reactions have ranged from feeling too close to the experiences depicted and needing to exit the storyworld immediately because of resurfacing trauma, to feeling the vIRS “sugar coats” Survivors’ experiences because we are unable to include graphic representations of sexual and physical violence when presenting the storyworld to younger students.

These findings are preliminary but suggest that the affective space of the vIRS is a context in which study participants heightened their emotional connection to residential school Survivors. Participants did not pretend that they had experienced what Survivors had experienced, or that they could somehow act out life in a residential school and in so doing achieve a full understanding of that life. Rather, the data suggests that participants were thoughtfully encouraged by the vIRS to work through many of the harms of residential schooling. Several asked that in future iterations of the storyworld we include more representations of hardship, particularly of the sexual and physical abuse that was a common feature of residential schools.75 Altogether study participants gave us reason to continue believing that empathic unsettlement can serve as a means of molecular prevention, the latter deriving from participants’ reflection on how they could embody greater respect for and recognition of distinct Indigenous cultures. Through empathic acts of role-taking, emotional connection, and expression of ongoing concern for Survivors, the participants in this study are displaying an initial experience of behavioral change through their engagement with the Embodying Empathy storyworld.76 The question remains as to how long this behavioral change lasts after they depart from the storyworld; nonetheless, it suggests the vIRS holds some promise for instilling an everyday ethic of prevention.

Conclusion: Multiplying Prevention

In recent years, greater emphasis has been placed on the scientific aspects of genocide risk assessment and prevention. The persistence and immediacy of genocide, not to mention the

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70 Participant 13.
71 Participant 14.
72 Participant 5, 10, 11.
73 Participant 2
74 Participant 5.
75 Participant 11.
devastating experience of witnessing the suffering it entails, has the obvious consequence of driving us toward similarly immediate responses. In the face of such suffering, critique as an explanatory and moral-political project can seem untimely, irrelevant, or inappropriate. It is not for lack of solidarity with suffering others that we engage here in the critique of prevention. We follow Wendy Brown and view critique as resisting the closing-in of the present upon us, rejecting its inevitability, and providing us with the means to imagine it differently. More precisely, critiquing how the prevention concept is used in a specific time and place is not an act of indifference; it is a sincere effort to broaden our horizons of understanding, and with them the possibilities of justice and redress. As a complex problem, or maybe better as a complex of problems, prevention should not be rushed into, pragmatically, conceptually, or otherwise.

In our view, the rush to prevention speaks for a deeper (and in many ways understandable) desire for immediate action as well as a realpolitik that wages the battle against genocide at a molar level. Prior to critique of the sort we aim to offer here, prevention makes itself available to recognize and address only certain types of genocide identifiable through surface acts of recognition. A truly critical approach to genocide prevention needs to look to multiplying prevention through the proliferation of everyday resistance to genocidal practices and logics. Embodying Empathy, which may be more familiarly conceived of as a project revolving around concerns with genocide representation, can, we believe, also operate to initiate and sustain everyday forms of genocide prevention, designed to counter habits and practices conducive to the destruction of group life. In particular, it potentially awakens users to the cultural destruction wrought through the genocidal intimacies of the residential school, providing an embodied experience directed toward shifting users’ future beliefs and practices away from the ongoing destructiveness of Canadian settler colonialism.

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In its evolving delineation from the senior field of Holocaust studies, the interdisciplinary field of genocide studies has seen a remarkable growth in the past 25 years. We have seen the professionalization of the field through the emergence of two organizations, the International Association of Genocide Scholars in 1994 and the International Network of Genocide Scholars in 2005. Each organization gave birth to new scholarly journals for the field and the corresponding growth of scholarship has led to an impressive robustness of interdisciplinary work reflected in the compilation of comprehensive textbooks and handbooks, myriad edited volumes, and a seemingly endless array of workshops, seminars, and conferences. On-line encyclopedias, discussion groups, blog sites, and curricular initiatives in secondary and higher education reveal the extent to which both scholars and educated laypeople continue to wrestle with the concept, and, more importantly, the reality of genocidal violence.

Genocide studies remains, however, a young and, at times, fractious discipline, in search of theoretical and conceptual maturity – often acutely reflected in the self-imposed tension between scholarship and activism. For too long, there remained an “ivory tower” lens in our field that upheld the former and, too often, looked down with suspicion, or even derision, upon the latter. This has been challenged, however, with the emergence of new generations of teacher-scholars in the field – coming from more diverse disciplinary, age, gender, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds – who have pushed us to redefine “engagement.” Increasingly, activism has come to be seen as a necessary complement to scholarship. To divorce the two, cheapens both. There can be a synergy between scholarship and activism in which each is nurtured and informed by the other.

This is just one transition that has pushed us to reframe the field in which we work. It also, however, pushes us to bring a critical lens to other long-held disciplinary assumptions. As Alex Laban Hinton first argued in 2012, “the time is right to engage in critical reflections about the state of the field.”1 Referring to this exercise as “critical genocide studies,” Hinton called for a “critical thinking about the field of genocide studies itself, exploring our presuppositions, decentering our biases, and throwing light on blind spots in the hope of further enriching this dynamic field.”2

In that spirit, this article expands those critical reflections to the work of genocide and atrocity prevention. Of particular focus in this piece is the communication of the logic of atrocity prevention to State actors. As genocide studies has developed as a field, we also have become more insular; professionalizing how we operate in such a way that it has pulled us away from those very venues in which we should be applying our work. From the sure footing of the outside, we often criticize State actors, particularly policymakers, for their impotent actions in the face of escalating risks or, even, genocidal violence. But we seldom speak with them or push ourselves to find ways to bridge what we know with how they work. Scholars and State actors occupy separate intellectual and institutional universes, to the impoverishment of both communities. Recognizing that reality, this paper will examine how genocide studies scholars might be more productive and influential voices in deliberations on atrocity prevention, particularly in engagement with State actors.

Since its inaugural seminar in 2008, I have had the privilege to be involved with the work of the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR), an international NGO devoted to atrocity prevention through education, training, and technical assistance to State actors.3 The motivation for that work was not that State actors are the only actors in atrocity prevention; rather, it was that atrocity prevention education, training, and technical assistance was virtually nonexistent for State actors. In the life of the organization, for which I now serve as Director of Academic Programs, we have trained more than 5,000 State actors (government officials, diplomats, parliamentarians, and

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2 Ibid.
security sector personnel) from over 85 countries around the world. My unique bank of experiences drawn from this frontline engagement with atrocity prevention training for State actors has shaped much of my thinking in this paper.

In early July 2018, Hikmet Karcic, an author and genocide researcher from Sarajevo, received unsettling news from the European Parliament (EP). His exhibit commemorating the 23rd anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, agreed for over a year to be hosted by the EP, was turned away for displaying “too many skulls and bones.” Publicly, the EP worried that the exhibit, focusing on the stages leading to genocide, would potentially jeopardize Bosnia-Herzegovina’s path to Euro Atlantic integration. In truth, it was personal political calculations on the part of some EP members – including requests to remove photos of war criminals such as Slobodan Milosevic, Radovan Karadzic, and Ratko Mladic – that led to the cancellation of the exhibit.

The denial of genocide, at Srebrenica and elsewhere during the Yugoslav Wars of 1992-1995, is widespread in Republika Srpska and Serbia. In those regions, war criminals are embraced by their communities as national heroes. For the EP to cancel this exhibit, however, shows the degree to which the broader political establishment and society in Europe is not ready to come to terms with the reality of the worst atrocities committed on its soil since the Holocaust. In the words of Bosnian journalist Mirnes Kovac: “With today’s triumphalism along with the European Parliament members’ mitigation of the genocide when they rejected the exhibit’s content, the world is, in fact, encountering the most brutal lesson from Srebrenica, from Bosnia and it’s short and clear: ‘Genocide is worth it’.”

“Genocide is worth it.” Kovac’s statement is not a test of a scholar’s right to free speech. Neither is it an inexcusable defense of an indefensible position, as Bruce Gilley tried to do in 2017 by arguing for “the case for colonialism” on the spectacularly misguided basis that colonialism was “beneficial” for the colonized and that the recolonization of former colonies by Western powers was worthy of consideration. Rather, this statement – “genocide is worth it” – is a disquieting, but resonant, reality on two levels.

First, genocide is worth it because, in the minds of its perpetrators, it is sound political and social strategy. We see its ubiquity throughout human history because, in short, it works more often than not. It works to marginalize or remove political opposition, to reshape the social strata of society, to privilege certain identities while disenfranchising others, to transfigure the geography of lived spaces, to separate families as the ultimate expression of state power. Indigenous communities around the world, for instance, have been marginalized by genocidal violence, most often a consequence of settler colonialism, to the point that majority groups see them as “were” rather than “are;” extinct rather than existing. Violence in the former Yugoslavia has transfigured the geography of lived space to such a degree that perpetrators have resolved what they perceived as the problem of identity plurality by being able to draw territorial and social boundaries that exclude the “other.” So, when genocide works, either as political oppression or social engineering, it transforms political and social relationships for generations. Genocide is worth it, again from the “rational actor” perspectives of those who perpetrate it, because it, more often than not, works to achieve their exterminatory or exclusionary aims.

Second, genocide is worth it because not only does it often work, but the chances of punishment for those who orchestrate and carry it out are, if existent, relatively inconsequential. Impunity is the rule rather than the exemption. A recent documentary, for instance, states that more than 800,000 SS soldiers survived the war. While several thousand were prosecuted for war crimes, only 124 were convicted.

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5 Ibid.

6 Originally published as Bruce Gilley, “The Case for Colonialism,” Third World Quarterly (2017), the piece has since been withdrawn due to “serious and credible threats of personal violence” to the journal editor.

disconcerting, even as they are empowering for would-be perpetrators. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) indicated 161 individuals, of whom 90 were convicted, at an estimated cost of $2.3 billion USD. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) indicted 93 individuals, of whom 62 were convicted, at an estimated cost of more than $2 billion USD. For the beleaguered International Criminal Court (ICC), its 16 years of operation have seen the indictment of only 41 individuals, of whom 8 have been convicted, at an estimated cost of more than $1 billion USD.8 The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, after 12 years in operation and an estimated cost of $300 million USD, just recently convicted the second and third of only nine Khmer Rouge leaders who have been indicted.9 Clearly, genocide overwhelms justice and the lesson learned by would-be perpetrators, as I have found in my interviews with alleged and convicted perpetrators over the years, is that genocide is a benefit worth pursuing because the risk of punishment is inconsequentially small – particularly for the rank-and-file killers who are at the frontlines of the destruction.10

“Genocide is worth it.” The fact that this truth is unsettling does not make it any less true. Educated folk had truth in esteem. We value truth and aspire to it. That does not mean, however, that every truth we face will make us feel good about our world or ourselves. I argue that this is one of those truths. And yet, still, we find its truth so outlandish, and so unsettling, that it is seldom addressed seriously. In October 2017, for instance, Reuben Rose-Redwood sent a hoax proposal to 13 academic journal editors with the following pitch: “There is a longstanding orthodoxy that only emphasizes the negative dimensions of genocide and ethnic cleansing, ignoring the fact that there may also be benefits — however controversial — associated with these political practices, and that, in some cases, the benefits may even outweigh the costs.”11 His use of an “outrageous” proposal to test the ethical standards in the editorial decision-making process is telling in that, to his mind, he selected a proposition with which any right-thinking person would be immediately appalled and would find no defensible reason to engage with intellectually.

Whatever degree of offensiveness, or perceived cold-hearted calculation, we find in this cost-benefit analysis, however, is irrelevant to its truthfulness and how well it reflects reality. The truth is that perpetrators, in a very practical and utilitarian sense, do weigh the costs and benefits of committing atrocities and that, in not a few cases, they proceed with the commission of atrocities precisely because the benefits outweigh the costs. This recognition pushes us to think more broadly about how we communicate the logic of atrocity prevention. We cannot comfortably restrict the logic of atrocity prevention to the persistent, but misguided, belief that its moral urgency – the preservation of human rights and life – is what must be communicated and that, if communicated effectively, would-be bad actors will refrain from the commission of atrocities. Until we recognize that genocide is perceived as worth it to the people who perpetrate it, however morally repugnant we may find it, our “best practices” of atrocity prevention will continue to fall short.

The restricted logic of atrocity prevention as grounded in moral urgency is particularly misguided, even reckless, when thrown into the bureaucratic structures of State actors. Moral urgency does not fall within the purview of how most State actors self-define “national interests.” As such, appealing to it will be particularly ineffectual, as we have seen time after time. State actors are embedded in bureaucratic structures where rigidity overrides creativity and decision-making occurs with a glacial pace. Bureaucratic structures seldom leave room for moral agency, let alone moral urgency. So, for atrocity prevention to be communicated most effectively to State actors,
we must move beyond simple moral urgency and find other ways in which their agency can be mobilized.

This paper argues that, in building the capacity and agency of State actors, we must broaden the logic of atrocity prevention to most effectively promote the prevention of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. That broadening of logic is built on three interrelated tasks that represent best practices of engagement with State actors: (a) recognizing the reality of atrocity prevention as a multilayered approach running throughout the pre-, mid-, and post-conflict cycle, (b) understanding atrocity prevention as a cost-benefit exercise, different from, but overlapping with, conflict prevention and (c) identifying the specific features of bureaucratic information processing that too often lead political will away from atrocity prevention.

**Atrocity prevention is a multilayered approach running throughout the pre-, mid-, and post-conflict cycle.**

When atrocity prevention is narrowly understood as crisis management or humanitarian intervention, it is reduced to self-interested actions that often accelerate the rate of mass violence as well as reinforce global hierarchies built on colonial and post-colonial structures. Effective atrocity prevention requires a re-imagining of that logic to recognize a continuum of strategies that include preventing atrocities from ever taking place (upstream prevention), preventing further atrocities once they have begun (midstream prevention), and preventing future atrocities once a society embarks on rebuilding after mass violence (downstream prevention). Central is the notion that prevention does not end when the violence begins. As Gareth Evans argues: “‘Prevention’ language can reasonably be applied at all stages of the conflict cycle.”

Let’s contextualize this continuum of prevention strategies in an analogy. Imagine you are standing beside a river and see someone caught in the current and struggling for their life. You jump in and manage to pull the victim ashore. Just as you catch your breath, however, another person in distress comes downstream…followed by another and another and another. Rather than remaining downstream and exhausting yourself on the rescue of individuals already in distress, you travel upstream to find the source of the problem. You may discover a hole in a bridge or perhaps of a lack of a protective fence on a cliff. You have changed, though, the calculus of what prevention means – rather than expending your resources and energy on rescuing people in crisis, you can now try to stop the crisis at its source. Saving victims in crisis and fixing the source of the crisis are both forms of prevention – as is helping victims the moment they fall into the river rather than waiting until they have been swept downstream – each simply occur at different stages of the process of prevention. Clearly, focusing prevention efforts at the source of the crisis, before it happens, is more efficient and less costly than managing the consequences of the crisis once it has occurred. You may not stop all of the people from falling into the river, at least not right away, but – by addressing the root cause – you have decreased risk and there will be far fewer people to rescue downstream.

Following a population-based health model where the aim is the prevention of the disease of genocide and other mass atrocities, we can think of three stages in a continuum of prevention strategies – primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary prevention is *upstream prevention*; fixing the hole in the bridge or constructing a protective barrier to prevent people from falling into the river. Upstream prevention is the “before” analysis of the longer-term governance, historical, economic, and societal factors that leave a country at risk for genocide and other mass atrocities and the inoculation avenues open to mitigating those risk factors. Like genocide itself, upstream prevention is a process, not an event. It is a long-term strategy of building underlying structures of societal and state durability related to governance, the interpretation of conflict history, economic conditions, and social cohesion. Upstream genocide prevention is built on sustained efforts to increase the

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12 See Daniel Feierstein’s related paper in this special issue.


capacity and resilience of societies to inoculate themselves against the risk of mass atrocity. These are long-sighted measures – often underappreciated or even unrecognized because they have led to a non-event – intended to minimize the necessity for midstream crisis management or reactive measures.

Upstream prevention strategies are universal; that is, they can – and should – be applied broadly for a population regardless of their current state of risk. While many developed states think of atrocity prevention as a foreign policy issue, it also should be recognized as a domestic concern as no state is immune to the risk of genocide. Upstream strategies for atrocity prevention also can be selectively applied to populations who have been identified in some ways as being at heightened risk for genocide. For their most durable and sustainable effectiveness, however, it is important that upstream strategies for atrocity prevention come from within a society rather than being imposed from without. Localized community-based initiatives that are highly responsive to the unique internal dynamics of the society are crucial in building a state’s resilience, reducing its susceptibility to genocide and, ultimately, reinforcing a state’s sovereignty. In addition, increased “emphasis should be placed on building the capacity of non-state actors, including traditional and religious institutions, to identify and monitor risk factors preceding mass atrocity crimes.”

The work of my colleagues at AIPR, for instance, has intersected with the birth of national mechanisms for the prevention of genocide and other atrocity crimes in Mexico, the US, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Argentina, and Paraguay. As just one example from this list, Tanzania’s National Committee for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination (TNC), established in February 2012, was the first of its kind in the Great Lakes Region, site of some of Africa’s most intractable and violent conflicts. Housed within Tanzania’s Ministry of Constitutional and Legal Affairs, this committee includes a broad-based national membership drawn from government, civil society, and faith-based organizations. In addition to several AIPR-led training seminars to build the capacity of the committee, the group has developed collaborative ties with a range of other international partners, including the UN’s Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Since its inception, the TNC has had a remarkable impact throughout Tanzania, leading Peace Forum workshops, bringing diverse religious leaders together to brainstorm strategies for the promotion of social cohesion, establishing Joint Peace Committees in regions throughout the country, and conducting periodic risk assessments of conflict-prone areas in Tanzania and its neighboring countries.

Secondary prevention is **midstream prevention**; the rescue of victims just as they hit the water but before they are swept further downstream. Midstream prevention “during” the crisis captures the immediate, real-time response efforts – political, economic, legal, and military – that are direct crisis management tactics to slow, limit, or halt the mass violence. The mistaken belief that, short of full-scale coercive military intervention, little or nothing can be done to respond to an ongoing genocide is a failure of preventive creativity. We have a diverse and wide-ranging set of preventive response tools that can be applied in myriad creative ways to a broad spectrum of actors and interests. To believe otherwise is willful neglect.

Even when we are aware of the tools in the preventive toolbox, however, we still need to articulate better principles for how they are used. “Future work should emphasize the interactions between the various tools that slow or stop the killing, so as to better understand how best to

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deploy ‘all the means at our disposal.’” As Alan Kuperman warns, a poorly-conceived and poorly-implemented response to genocide can create a “moral hazard” that increases the very human suffering that it intends to alleviate. Certainly, used in isolation, any one of the preventive response tools is unlikely to slow, limit, or stop genocide violence. Employed, though, in conjunction with other tools, and as part of larger overall framework conditioned on the principle of “do no harm,” the strategic application of several of these preventive response tools can go a long way toward mitigating genocidal conflict and protecting civilians.

Finally, tertiary prevention is downstream prevention; the hopeful resuscitation of victims who were swept away because upstream or midstream prevention failed. Downstream prevention refers to the “after” efforts to foster resilience by dealing with the acute long-term consequences of mass violence through pursuits of justice, truth, and memory to help stabilize, heal, and rehabilitate a post-genocide society. Verbitsky, a prominent Argentine journalist best known for reporting the confessions of Francisco Scilingo, a retired naval officer who admitted to throwing live prisoners out of airplanes and into the sea on the so-called “flights of death,” said: “People always ask, ‘Why reopen wounds that have closed?’ Because they were badly closed. First you have to cure the infection, or they will reopen themselves.” Societal wounds that reopen after genocide leave a society at considerable risk. This is why, from a downstream prevention standpoint, it is vital to focus on social repair – “closing the wounds” – after genocide.

Complementary pursuits of justice, truth, and memory can be important mechanisms of social repair in a post-atrocity society. They are paths that cleave a trail to societal reconstruction. While States carry the primary responsibility for such repair, the international community (including international and regional organizations, neighbors, states, private companies and businesses, and civil society) has a responsibility to assist States in building the capacity to carry out that repair. It also is important to note that no one transitional justice mechanism can address the myriad problems facing a post-genocide society. “The large number of victims, inadequate legal systems, and traumatized societies require countries to adopt multiple transitional justice mechanisms.” No single mechanism of transitional justice – be it rooted in justice, truth, or memory – is as impactful on its own as when combined with the others.

We should not create an artificial distinction between these stages of prevention strategies, boundary them in mutually exclusive boxes, nor suggest an overly simplistic sequential approach to the protection of populations. Mass atrocities are often more cyclical than linear. So upstream, midstream, and downstream prevention efforts work in an interconnected and synergistic, rather than isolated, fashion. I also do not mean to imply a strict temporal process; most conflicts are an intricate tangle of pre, mid- and post-conflict at any one time. As a result, the defining element of an upstream preventive approach, for example, is not “when” it takes place but rather that it seeks to address the underlying causes of conflict. “In theory, interventions to prevent conflict upstream can be undertaken at any point during the conflict cycle, even at the same time as measures to address the symptoms of conflict are also being carried out.” In short, these stages of prevention, and the measures involved in each, are complexly linked and state responsibility, buttressed by international assistance for capacity building, is threaded throughout all three stages of the continuum.

By broadening the logic of atrocity prevention to a continuum of prevention strategies, rather than artificially isolating prevention as simply a reaction to crisis, we also broaden the range of actors who play roles in prevention. These actors include domestic non-state actors (civil society, traditional and religious institutions, education, localized community-based initiatives, etc.), state actors, multilateral regional organizations that oblige member states to surrender a measure of state sovereignty for the sake of collective goals, and international actors working through internationally-recognized organizations.

**Atrocity prevention as a cost-benefit exercise, different from, but overlapping with, conflict prevention.**

In atrocity prevention, the measures used and those targeted by a particular strategy, as well as the objectives and type of engagement, may be narrower than the measures deemed suitable for more general conflict prevention. Where a conflict prevention strategy might consider the use of amnesty for perpetrators, for instance, such a strategy for mass atrocity prevention would compromise criminal accountability in an unacceptable way. In yet other ways, atrocity prevention strategies may be broader, including, for example, physical protection for vulnerable groups, a tool rarely associated with conflict prevention. In some cases, the exact same prevention tools might have decidedly different targets or objectives when tailored to the context of atrocity or conflict prevention. In atrocity prevention, for example, sanctions may be used coercively to target specific actors we are seeking to dissuade from committing atrocities. In the case of conflict prevention, the same tool could be directed cooperatively at several actors we are seeking to bring together in a consensual peace agreement.

In many ways, though, the preventive implications for conflict and atrocity are markedly interconnected; many of the actions taken to prevent the former will necessarily reduce the occurrence of the latter. Just as the number of drowning incidents is likely to increase as more people head to the water on a hot day, the number of atrocities will increase as more conflicts emerge globally. So, understanding the general sources of conflict, and how they may be mitigated, will go a long way towards helping us at least indirectly prevent, or reduce the number of, atrocities. As Alex Bellamy argues, “there can be no meaningful and effective agenda for the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities that does not incorporate the prevention of armed conflict and the measures commonly associated with it.” In short, the prevention of conflict should be a core element of any atrocity prevention strategy.

Atrocity prevention reduces four types of costs – human, instability, economic, and diplomatic. Atrocity prevention is primarily focused on reducing human costs through the protection and preservation of human life and security. Even the most restrictive of definitions estimates that at least 60 million men, women, and children were victims of genocide and mass killing in the past century alone. On the upper end, political scientist Rudolph Rummel argues that close to 170 million civilians were done to death in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the first two decades of the twenty-first century have brought little light to the darkness as a variety of international watch lists suggest that close to 20 countries are currently “at risk” for genocide. Even for those who survive, genocide is a collective trauma, a redefining destruction that shatters their assumptive world and transforms societies for generations.

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24 Claudia Diaz, personal communication, February 9, 2015.
27 Ibid., 2.
In addition, atrocity prevention reduces *instability costs* by contributing to national peace and stability in fragile countries, as well as promoting regional and international peace and stability. As the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) report argued, “these days, good international citizenship is a matter of national self-interest. With the world as close and interdependent as it now is, and with crises in ‘faraway countries of which we know little’ as capable as they now are of generating major problems elsewhere (with refugee outflows, health pandemics, terrorism, narcotics trafficking, organized crime and the like), it is strongly arguable that it is in every country’s interest to contribute cooperatively to the resolution of such problems, quite apart from the humanitarian imperative to do so.”

Atrocity prevention also reduces *economic costs* as prevention is much less costly than intervening to stop genocide or rebuilding in the aftermath of a mass destruction that has destroyed the development trajectory of a state or region. That is, the strategies available to us for upstream prevention are much less costly, in an economic sense, than the available strategies for midstream prevention once atrocity has broken out or, even more so, for downstream prevention for rebuilding after the atrocities are over. In a world where the global economic impact of violence was $14.76 trillion in 2017 alone, the economic costs potentially addressed by effective atrocity prevention are no small issue.

Finally, atrocity prevention reduces *diplomatic costs* as it reinforces state sovereignty by limiting the more intrusive and invasive forms of response, from other States or international actors, that may be required to halt atrocity crimes. The violation of state sovereignty by the use of military force for nonconsensual coercive intervention carries with it significant costs. To the civilians it is meant to protect, military intervention can inflame hostilities and put them at greater risk by further destabilizing the state in which they reside. To a perpetrator regime it is meant to defeat, military intervention can raise sympathy among bystander nations and lead perpetrators to blame the victims for the costs they are now suffering. To an international order predicated on state sovereignty, military intervention can undermine that “last defense against the rules of an unequal world” and raise the abusive threat of powerful states meddling in the affairs of those less powerful.

**Atrocity prevention is impeded by bureaucratic information processing that too often leads political will in a non-preventive direction.** As mentioned earlier, State actors are embedded in bureaucratic structures where rigidity overrides creativity and decision-making occurs with a glacial pace. While there are certainly cultural variations in how bureaucracies function, a common thread is that many become self-sustaining institutions in which substantive gaps between information received and action taken become a natural consequence of risk-adverse hierarchical structures often build on cautious prudence. These realities become particularly problematic when State actors, often with too little support and too few resources, are being asked to use their agency to respond to escalating situations of violent conflict.

In 1997, Alexander George and Jane Holl first identified the “warning-response” gap in a Carnegie Commission report on preventing deadly conflict. “If events such as in Bosnia, Kuwait, and Rwanda,” they asked, “are known (and increasingly knowable, given the rapidly contracting nature of global interactions), why are they not prevented?” Rather than a lack of timely or accurate early warning, George and Holl posited a systematic warning-response gap as the key

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factor in understanding policy delay or paralysis in the face of deadly conflict. They cited six reasons, related to decision makers’ information processing, for this warning-response gap:

- the relatively low stakes perceived to be at risk for a given state’s vital national interests;
- the uncertainty and interpretive ambiguity of knowing which trouble spots are likely to explode and when;
- the lack of theories and models to assess and predict the significance of early warning indicators;
- the dread of “false triggers,” or a “cry wolf” phenomenon, that may register preventive actions as premature or unnecessary;
- the impracticality of responding with preventive actions given the large number of low-level crises and the ever-growing limitation of resources; and
- the fear of a “slippery slope” engagement in a potentially intractable problem.\(^35\)

Similarly, the Albright and Cohen report admits: “Warnings always entail a degree of uncertainty, and human beings naturally resist paying certain costs today, even if small, to protect against uncertain future costs; this is true of bureaucracies all the more so. Add to this the incentives for political leaders to focus on short-term costs and benefits, and the tendency for bureaucracies to resist risky action, and it should not surprise us that it is difficult to generate support for preventive action.”\(^36\) Indeed, with such a list of compelling barriers to preventive action, the surprise is not that we have a warning-response gap; rather, the surprise is that the gap between warning and response is ever bridged.

Since George and Holl’s 1997 piece, the field of genocide studies has made great strides in developing theories and models of early warning as well as unpacking the accelerators and triggers that cause trouble spots to explode. Still, however, four of their other reasons (low stakes, “false triggers,” impracticality, and “slippery slope”) for the warning-response gap remain relevant. For many, this warning-response gap can best be bridged by making sure that “early warning is not simply the sharing of information about an impending crisis, let alone the wail of a siren announcing the imminence of such a crisis. Early warning goes beyond the collection and sharing of information to include both analysis of that information and the formulation of appropriate strategic choices given the analysis.”\(^37\) That is, the impact of early warning can be heightened by also offering appropriate response strategies to the at-risk situation, rather than simply warning that an at-risk situation is getting worse. As Annika Bjorkdahl suggests, political will and capability can be strengthened by presenting “decision makers with a clear policy alternative which identifies the tools and strategies relevant to the main objective of the preventive effort.”\(^38\) So, in essence, bridging the warning-response gap, rather than being thought of as “where there is a will, there is a way,” might be best framed as “where there is a way, there is a will.”\(^39\)

As Christoph Meyer et al. emphasize, however, just adding policy or action recommendations to early warning does not close the warning-response gap, even when early warning is regionalized or localized “by directly involving those who will have to carry the brunt of the consequences should a conflict escalate.”\(^40\) It can be more helpful, they argue, to approach early warning as a nuanced and graduated persuasive process – rather than an informational, educational, or alerting activity with a simple binary outcome of action or no action. Drawing on an extensive body of social scientific literature, they distinguish between five distinct stages of persuasion – reception,
attention, acceptance, prioritization, and the decision to mobilize. When applied to early warning, warning can fail to elicit response – for various reasons – at each stage. For instance, even if a decision maker has received an early warning, attended to it, and accepted its veracity, they still may be unconvinced that the pending crisis is a greater priority than other current or future crises pressing for their attention. So, in this case, low prioritization of the early warning becomes a barrier to preventive response. Recasting the warning-response problem as a special case of persuasive discourse can go a long way toward understanding how early warning is best communicated at each stage of the communication process. In so doing, we increase our gap-bridging chances “to raise a given recipient’s awareness about a potential threat to a valued good or interest to enhance her ability to take preventive or mitigating action.”

Thinking of early warning as a persuasive process also opens us up to the different vectors of preventive persuasion that can impact reception, attention, acceptance, prioritization, and the decision to mobilize. For instance, much attention has been drawn to the use of Facebook as a tool of perpetration in Burma. For the past several years, Myanmar military personnel used Facebook to wage a systematic campaign targeting the country’s Muslim-majority Rohingya minority group. Human rights groups blamed this propaganda for inciting violence against the Rohingya, acts which a recent UN fact-finding mission labeled as “genocide.” Far less attention, however, has been given to the use of social media as a tool of atrocity prevention. While, in theory, most agree there is a preventive power in social media to inform and shape decision-making processes, relatively little empirical work has been devoted to analyzing exactly how such tools can be used in a preventive capacity.

Crucial to this persuasive process, by whatever medium through which it is communicated, is the collective mobilization of political will. The oft-stated notion that “nations don’t have friends, nations have interests” reminds us of the importance of prioritizing how responding to genocide is in our best interests. Unfortunately, baser political and strategic interests too often override humanitarian concerns. As Meyer et al. argue, the calculus underlying political will “is not ‘do we care about x,’ but ‘how much do we care about x in comparison to y and z.’” Often, what State actors care most about is the well-being of their own citizens rather than the protection of civilians from atrocity in other countries. Juan Mendez states: “I have no doubt that the greatest contributing factor to humankind’s inability to protect vulnerable populations from slaughter is the absence of political will to act on the part of leaders that do have the solution at their disposal.” In reality, though, the issue is not an absence of political will; rather, the issue is political will displaced elsewhere and the subsequent need for a reshaping of how we interpret “national interests” and international obligations.

Finally, particularly in the context of working with State actors, we must acknowledge the seismic changes in contemporary political landscapes that exacerbate the challenges we face in broadening the logic of atrocity prevention. The notion that countries should privilege democracy over all else is no longer unquestioned and support for autocratic alternatives continues to rise. In the words of Michael Abramowitz, president of Freedom House: “Democracy is in crisis. The values it embodies—particularly the right to choose leaders in free and fair elections, freedom of the press, and the rule of law—are under assault and in retreat globally.” These comments regarding a global democratic recession coincide with a 2018 report indicating that democracy was

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41 Ibid., 567.
43 For a recent review of the state of the field, see the special issue Colette Mazzucelli and Anna Visvizi “Information and Communications Technologies in Mass Atrocities Research and Response,” special issue, Genocide Studies and Prevention 11, no. 1 (2017).
45 Project for a UN Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS), Standing for Change in Peacekeeping Operations (New York: Global Action to Prevent War, 2009), 44.
on the retreat and authoritarianism on the rise in more than 96 of the UN’s 193 member states. Concomitant with the above is a rise in violation of basic freedoms worldwide. For instance, the CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report found that, in 2017, the space for civil society – including the core civic freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression – had become closed, repressed, or obstructed in 109 countries. Similarly, Freedom in the World 2018, the latest in a series of annual reports by Freedom House, found that – for the twelfth year in a row – freedom around the world is declining. Over the period since the 12-year global slide began in 2006, 113 countries have seen a net decline, and only 62 have experienced a net improvement.

We also are seeing an increasingly divided world in terms of peace and security. The well-respected Global Peace Index, issued annually by London’s Institute for Economics and Peace, found that global peacefulness has deteriorated by 2.14 percent in the decade since 2008, with 52 percent of countries recording a deterioration, while 48 percent improved. The thirteenth annual Fragile States Index (FSI), published by The Fund for Peace, is an assessment of 178 countries based on twelve social, economic, and political indicators that quantifies pressures experienced by countries, and thus their susceptibility to instability. FSI 2017 found that factionalization and group grievance were fueling a rise in instability across the globe, including in a number of developed countries. In the words of executive director J.J. Messner: “When you see the most fragile countries continuing to worsen and the most stable countries continuing to improve over time, it suggests fragility begets fragility and stability begets stability.”

To these warning signs can be added a number of potent international and local drivers of conflict that raise additional concern for our future. These intersecting drivers of conflict include economic fragility, mismanagement of natural resources and tensions over equality of access to them, population growth, transnational organized crime, climate change, and the proliferation of violent non-state actors. These intersecting drivers of conflict do not respect state borders.

Taken collectively, all of these factors suggest a tenuously uncertain future, foreshadowed in the echoes of an increasingly violent present. Indeed, it seems that our words of “never again” most often translate into actions leading to “again and again,” “ever again,” and “here we go again.” On our worst of days, our commitment to atrocity can be compromised by a diminishing will, a problem fatigue, or a selfish isolationism. On our best of days, however, we realize that, as Gareth Evans said in a 2012 lecture at Central European University, “genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity were not one else’s business, but everyone’s business.”

In the field of atrocity prevention, State actors are but one actor with one set of tools. There are many actors with many tools and part of the challenge in working with State actors is to help them understand how to most effectively work with other diverse non-state actors – including academics, civil society, traditional and religious leaders, educational leaders, and localized community-based initiatives. While they do not always share common interests or utilize the tools for common purposes, the many actors can be mobilized to create the political will necessary to prevent genocide and mass atrocity. As Evans writes:

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48 Ibid.
54 Central European University, “Gareth Evans speaks about R2P at CEU’s School of Public Policy – snapshots,” (remarks, Budapest, November 9, 2012), accessed July 1, 2015, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=ym68BzUGZ8Q>.
Political will is capable of creation and subject to change: its presence or absence is not a given... It has to be painfully and laboriously constructed, case by case, context by context. And all of us have a role in this respect... It is also a matter of bottom-up mobilization: making the voices of ordinary concerned citizens heard in the corridors of power, using all the resources and physical and moral energy of civil society organizations all round the world to force the attention of policymakers on what needs to be done, by whom, and when.55

Juan Mendez concurs with the importance of bottom-up mobilization in which political will “is constructed over time by the force of public opinion that can shame leaders out of their complacency and into effective action.”56

In sum, atrocity prevention is an achievable goal, but it requires each of us to take seriously our global civic responsibilities in whatever role and in whatever place we find ourselves. While perpetrators will still, too often, make a utilitarian calculation that “genocide is worth it,” the world that we have made is not the one for which we must settle. The field of atrocity prevention must remain steadfastly committed to building bridges with State actors and broadening the logic of prevention in such a way as to recognize the multilayered approaches to prevention, understand prevention as a cost-benefit exercise, and identify the bureaucratic features of information processing that too often result in leading political will away from atrocity prevention.

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55 Evans, The Responsibility to Protect, 224.
56 Project for a UN Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS), Standing for Change in Peacekeeping Operations, 44.


Critical genocide studies has emerged as an important strand of scholarship devoted to interrogating the core assumptions of the field of genocide studies. Drawing on the intellectual traditions of Frankfurt School critical theory as well as deconstruction, among other approaches, this scholarship has provocatively explored various methodological limitations in current research, including biases in case selection, problems with the comparative case method, definitional debates, and reductive formulations of perpetrator motivations, among other issues. Informed by critical genocide studies, this article sketches a critical approach to modern atrocity prevention. Although contemporary atrocity prevention has made significant advances, I lay out several areas where a critical approach can be applied fruitfully. The paper puts forth a critical approach to prevention that is self-reflective, dialectical, multivalent, and anti-teleological.

Part I provides a brief overview of contemporary prevention theory, which I identify as rooted within a broadly liberal normative orientation. Part II elaborates the four elements of the proposed critical approach toward prevention. Part III uses the critical lens to examine several important assumptions in current atrocity prevention.

Two preliminary points of clarification follow. First, a caveat. We should not be seeking to prevent genocide per se, which is insufficiently wide to capture the scope of significant human rights violations that any prevention theory should encompass. Genocide prevention implies that the object of prevention is one specific kind of collective harm, the intentional destruction of groups as such, when in fact the field of critical genocide studies is concerned with a range of widespread collective violence. The focus, I contend, should be on the prevention of large-scale and severe harms against civilians. A somewhat more inclusive formulation is “atrocity crimes,” “mass atrocities,” or just “atrocities,” which include the crimes of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, as well as ethnic cleansing.

In reality, the prevention community often uses the terms genocide and atrocities interchangeably but normally means the latter. Here, I use the term atrocities, though it makes sense to maintain the term critical genocide studies as our starting point, if only to highlight the intellectual origins of critical approaches within genocide research that seek to expand and problematize scholarly inquiry.

Second, a point about the article’s focus: I examine atrocity prevention, which has been shaped and enriched by genocide studies scholarship but also other scholarly fields and practitioner communities. Examining only prevention in the narrower orbit of genocide studies literature misses many of these developments, and in any case atrocity prevention is now sufficiently well developed and sophisticated to warrant critical investigation on its own. In this article, prevention means those strategies, policies, and practices directed toward anticipating and arresting the onset of atrocities prior to their occurrence or reoccurrence. The appropriate range of strategies, policies

In addition to various scholarly sources and government, intergovernmental organizations and NGO reports and studies noted in these footnotes, this paper is partly based on 38 semi-structured interviews with prevention practitioners for an ongoing project, “The Scholar-Practitioner Nexus in Atrocity Prevention,” which examines current challenges in prevention work and areas where scholarly research can assist the prevention community. Quotations from respondents are cited as “Nexus Project” below. I also draw on occasional work consulting with the United States government, foreign governments, and various human rights organizations.


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and practices requires a broader historical and geographical horizon than is typically found in current atrocity prevention.

Part I
Modern atrocities prevention largely espouses a liberal normative orientation. This includes a commitment to liberal values such as human equality, freedom and democratic accountability; support for the human rights regime found in the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights and institutionalized through a rule of law system enacted by various international treaties, conventions, laws, and norms; acceptance of an international community composed of sovereign states and formalized in the UN and various regional organizations; and, a global governance architecture that curtails use of violent force through procedures for adjudicating and solving conflicts between countries. This set of claims is liberal in its emphasis on core civil and political rights and the rule of law, and insofar as it is meant to be binding on all nations. It remains the dominant orientation of prominent global human rights organizations and actors.

Contemporary atrocity prevention has evolved within this liberal orientation, becoming increasingly professionalized and sophisticated over the past two and a half decades. Although its origins can be traced at least to the end of World War II and the moral shock of the Holocaust, contemporary prevention theorizing and practice emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War and the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides. The establishment in 1994 of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, tasked with addressing “the looming threats to world peace of intergroup violence” and developing “new ideas for the prevention and resolution of deadly conflict,” helped center attention on the protection of civilians in a new way. In 2001 the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty released its report, The Responsibility to Protect, as an answer to Secretary General Kofi Annan’s call to renew UN efforts to stop mass atrocities. That report reformulated the relationship between national sovereignty and human rights through the responsibility to protect (R2P) norm, and provided a rearticulation of the legal, political and moral justifications for more robust prevention and intervention strategies. The UN General Assembly’s subsequent endorsement of a revised version of R2P has entrenched the norm, if imperfectly, in international politics. Additionally, the establishment in 2004 and subsequent expansion of the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has helped secure the place of atrocity prevention in the highest reaches of the human rights firmament.

Contemporary international atrocity prevention now benefits from a confluence of factors: the marked expansion of the UN’s peacebuilding portfolio; the spread of human rights in global political discourse; the development of advanced graduate programs in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, humanitarianism and related fields; a professionalized international human rights community; private and foundation funding sources for prevention; and, a rise in the number of foreign ministries in the global north that advocate human rights in their work. Current prevention work consists of extensive cross-fertilization between scholarship and practice, and a substantial amount of research is driven by concrete policy questions or challenges. Much of this is characterized by policy work that emphasizes not only conflict termination and resolution but also the promotion of individual human rights, the rule of law, liberal democracy, and a market economy.

The Atrocity Prevention Lens
As the Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention has noted, there at least four reasons for adopting an atrocity prevention lens as distinct from conflict prevention, the latter of which

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7 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty The Responsibility to Protect (Ottawa: ICISS, 2001); United Nations General Assembly, 2005 World Summit Outcome, A/RES/60/1 (October 24, 2005), para. 138-140.
largely addresses violent conflict between armed actors. First, mass atrocities may occur outside of regular armed conflict or continue once a ceasefire has been concluded. Although atrocities outside of armed violence comprise a minority of situations, they are still sufficiently common to warrant the development of atrocity prevention strategies distinct from traditional conflict resolution. Second, mass atrocities are by definition crimes, and thus always illegal. The same normative condemnation does not hold for all conflicts, where the legality of the use of violent force is sanctioned and controlled (in principle, if not in practice) by international law. Third, prevention does not stop when the killings start, even if the scope of action is severely limited; there may be opportunities to reduce civilian suffering and provide assistance, even if armed conflict is ongoing. Fourth, preventing atrocities entails developing forecasting tools and violence escalation models that do not necessarily track directly with forecasting armed conflict. Governments may repress civilian populations without facing any armed resistance, and thus mainstream conflict prevention theories are not easily applicable.11

Given these justifications for a focus on atrocities as distinct from armed conflict, what are the primary elements of modern liberal atrocity prevention? Although specific terminology and conceptualization may differ, contemporary atrocity prevention has settled on a relatively stable set of practices. Current prevention is typically divided into two general areas, structural and operational. The former focuses on the long-term prevention of harms, such as by conducting risk assessments, promoting liberal democracy, addressing profound economic and political inequalities, fostering the rule of law, encouraging integration into the global capitalist economy, and supporting human welfare and development, among other strategies. Operational prevention concerns situations where atrocities are occurring or likely to do so. Strategies may include early warning monitoring, diplomatic pressure on leaders, peace negotiations, economic sanctions, humanitarian assistance for vulnerable populations, and at its extreme, military intervention. A third area concerns preventing the recurrence of atrocities, and it is largely the purview of transitional justice, political reconciliation, and long-term societal peacebuilding. Within each area,

9 Conflict prevention includes a broad range of incentives and threats, such as trade and economic enticements, political recognition, economic sanctions, military coercion, and threats of legal prosecution, to get parties to the negotiating table and agree to stop fighting. A common formulation of armed conflict in this work posits a bell-shaped cycle with distinct stages. Although the details differ across cases, the basic stages are well established: absence of conflict; latency; emergence; escalation; stalemate; de-escalation; resolution; and, peacebuilding. The conflict cycle model has the benefit of parsimony and clarity, and because of this it has proven remarkably durable. It has been employed extensively to make sense of myriad post-World War II conflicts through the present with the aim of identifying the various points where de-escalation and even conflict resolution may be possible. I. William Zartman and Alvaro de Soto, Timing Mediation Initiatives (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010); Louis Kriesberg and Bruce Dayton, Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).


13 Some scholars also identify a distinct domain of systemic prevention, concerned with transnational factors of violence, though in practice this is largely focused on terrorism, arms sales, and international crime. See Adam Lupel and Ernesto Verdeja, Responding to Genocide, 7.

14 James Waller refers to upstream and midstream prevention strategies to capture this distinction, with downstream referring to “post” violence situations. Waller, Confronting Evil, 135-210.
the set of available strategies may be more or less coercive to incentivize changes in behavior, and not all strategies will be employed. Over twenty years of research and practice have helped hone and fine-tune them, and the available mix illustrates the development and maturation of prevention thinking.

We now have better understandings of the short and midterm drivers of violence, greater knowledge of the primary indicators of onset, and awareness of the importance of supporting “upstream” prevention efforts. Nevertheless, the dominant atrocity prevention lens contains a number of limitations which have practical consequences. These limitations require critical scrutiny, and include: the displacement of global and regional contextualization in favor of the nation-state as the object of analysis and treatment; the overlap between prevention and securitization; limited conceptualizations of violence; the emphasis on expert knowledge above concrete, embedded, localized and historical knowledge; and, highly selective engagement with civil society and local actors. I explore each of these clusters of limitations in more detail below. First, however, I sketch a critical approach to prevention, which helps provide the conceptual framework for the subsequent discussion.

Part II
The critical approach presented in this section is meant as a perspective by which to assess current atrocity prevention thinking and strategies. Although there are many valuable points in current atrocity prevention work, adopting a critical perspective highlights certain lacuna as well as ways forward.

The points I make below are critical in two ways: first, in the narrow sense that they are informed by the work of the intellectual tradition of Critical Theory and the scholars of the Frankfurt School. Although these thinkers did not write extensively on international politics, their commitment to emancipatory, historically grounded social theory that is firmly rooted in empirical research provides an important analytical orientation for prevention. They distinguished themselves from approaches based on abstract moral philosophy (which tends to posit ahistorical, universal values, such as “natural rights”), as well as reductive social scientific methods that treat empirical facts as “given” while ignoring interpretive questions or the particular perspectival limitations and biases of the observer. A foundational text remains Max Horkheimer’s 1937 essay, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” which lays out three important markers of this approach. For Horkheimer, a critical theory is normatively committed to human emancipation, and thus rejects as untenable the fact-value distinctions dominant in the social sciences; it adopts a wide range of social scientific methods combined with philosophical critique (in other words, it is rooted in social theory, not idealist philosophy); and, it is tasked with showing how transformational change can occur. It is therefore not merely aspirational, as is common in some leftist utopian political thought. Indeed, genocide scholars have already adopted such a critical perspective in their work.

The points below are critical in a second, wider sense: they amount to a perspective that is explicitly normative, dialectical, and attuned to how power relations shape social analysis and practice while also hiding their contradictions and tensions.

In line with these general claims, I propose a critical genocide studies approach to prevention that is self-reflective, dialectical, multivalent, and anti-teleological. Below I present what this means.

16 An excellent discussion of these various strategies is found in James Waller, Confronting Evil.
19 I draw on the Frankfurt School’s social theory because it makes these points sharply. However, my general points are broadly compatible with a host of other critical theories that share many of the same attributes. See Razmig Keucheyan, The Left Hemisphere: Mapping Critical Theory Today (London: Verso, 2013).
Self-reflective: Self-reflectivity involves adopting a theoretical stance where the researcher remains aware, and interrogates, her own positionality. This means several things. First, and rather obviously, this entails recognizing that there is no value-neutral analytical position, say for assessing the causes of violence or the means of prevention. In other words, it rejects an unexamined neutrality still dominant in many areas of the social sciences. As a first step it means examining how the methods one employs – whether qualitative, quantitative, interpretive or various mixed approaches – and their various assumptions shape the perception of a research question, design and execution. Of course, neutrality of that kind is hardly the problem for liberal prevention scholars or practitioners – they do not hesitate in condemning genocidaires and war criminals, and are instead quite explicit about their normative commitments. But self-reflectivity is important in a second sense: it consists of questioning the prima facie authority of the human rights expert (scholar, diplomat, activist, etc.) who may make a claim to grasp the problem of violence and the appropriate response (e.g., by providing the “theory” of genocide, the “theory” of prevention), and who is thus authorized to determine what a society in crisis needs. To be self-reflective is to confront how any analysis of violence, and the prevention plan that follows, always includes a set of normative claims and assumptions that cannot be theorized away or held at bay. Given these constitutive biases in interpretation, the researcher should be committed to critiquing both the presuppositions of theories as well as the status of the expert speaker – and this holds for critiquing one’s own positionality as expert in addressing these issues. This does not mean a rejection tout court of expertise or accumulated knowledge based on sound research – far from it. Rather, a critical, self-reflective perspective invites cultivating epistemic humility: if we remain wary of comprehensive, ‘scientific’ understandings of violence, and thus the seduction of speaking for all, we are enjoined to take much more seriously the claims, knowledge and authority – the practical agency – of local prevention actors. Self-reflection demands an openness to those claims, and thus authority, of multiple agents, as well as engagement with the disruptions and uncomfortable truths that this may entail.20

Dialectical: This involves several components. First, the prioritization of relational analyses of concepts and phenomena, rather than treating them in isolation of one another. A dialectical approach posits that concepts are defined and shaped in relation to one another, and thus it is these relations, and subsequent changes to relations, that require special attention. A dialectical approach, in other words, historicizes concept formation and theoretical claims. Thus, it is skeptical toward the reductive reification of concepts as 1) comprehensive explanatory factors (e.g., ethnic war, ideology, etc.), 2) identity categories (e.g., Hutu v. Tutsi, moderate Hutu, spoilers, bystanders, etc.), and 3) outcomes (e.g., successful prevention, stability, reintegration, peace, reconciliation, etc.). Naturally, any social theory of change, including one about violence and peace, must employ concepts to understand otherwise highly complex and oftentimes confusing social and political processes. Concepts allow us to make sense of complicated dynamics and shifting contexts and they structure our analyses. However, a tendency toward conceptual reification in prevention work risks producing analyses that posit as true what in fact are parsimonious proxies for reality. A dialectical approach also helps highlight hidden tensions and exclusions in analysis and practice. It can challenge, for example, otherwise sharp, categorical distinctions between “political” violence and common crime, and help us understand how violence can be displaced from one social domain to another, such as how previously political violence may become routinized quotidian violence after a peace accord is signed and security personnel join criminal enterprises.21 We miss these displacements if we only employ discrete analytical categories of violence and fail to assess their dialectical relationships to each other.

Multivalent: A critical prevention approach is multivalent. It resists efforts to maintain prevention to one level of analysis, be it the so-called “international community,” national elites, or domestic governance institutions, and instead it takes as its starting point the interconnection

of multiple analytical levels: global, regional, national and subnational. Framed this way, we can examine a host of questions important to prevention: How are violence dynamics at different levels linked theoretically and empirically? Under what conditions are national or subnational conflict dynamics exacerbated by broader global and regional structural factors, reinforce one another, or follow some other interactive pattern? To what extent, and how, do shifts in global structures of power and “different world-historical contexts produce different patterns or extents of genocide”? By identifying such linkages and causal processes, we may be able to locate new prevention actors, tools and strategies.

Anti-teleological: Lastly, a critical approach does not assume a certain patterned unfolding or endpoint of social processes. Critical genocide studies scholars have rightly critiqued the dominant modernization theories that equate societal advancement with the spread of liberal democracy, free markets and Enlightenment values, for downplaying histories of genocide and slavery on which Western progress was built - what Hegel called the slaughter bench of history. The conceit of developing sophisticated and teleological theories of historical change is occasionally reproduced in prevention work at smaller scales, where paradigmatic “conflict cycle” models lay out the natural ebbs and flows of collective violence. This does not hold, for example, for the genocidal violence against indigenous peoples in colonial settler democracies, nor does it obtain in many other cases around the world, such as in parts of sub-Saharan Africa or the Middle East. A critical approach remains skeptical of generalized teleological claims that rest on selective empirical observation, such as claims that violent conflicts have built-in cycles of escalation and de-escalation or that political reconciliation is achievable through the application of certain sequential strategies. It is equally skeptical of the existence and application of universal ‘lessons learned’ that can be taken from one context and applied, with minimal alteration, to substantially different contexts, or even in the same location but over different historical periods.

A common thread throughout this discussion is the foregrounding of how values, power, and knowledge are intimately linked. Values such as peace, justice and human rights are always constituted by power relations, and are at least partly given legitimacy through the knowledge claims of actors holding a certain status in an epistemic community, such as scholars, government leaders, and expert practitioners from the global north. Ultimately, a critical approach is oriented toward interrogating and deconstructing these complex connections between values, power and knowledge.

Part III
Given the four elements presented above, several critical tasks for prevention follow. This section identifies a few issue areas that are central to a critical genocide studies approach to prevention. This list is not meant to be exhaustive. In some cases, a critical approach encourages a shift in our analytical perspective to focus on the ways in which several dominant assumptions hide important global power relations and trends that can exacerbate violence. In other cases, the points below concern deepening or extending claims that are already found in dominant prevention work – such as privileging the importance of civil society actors – but doing so in ways that may have transformative effects. If we continue to use the language of a prevention lens, we are asking, what is in focus, and what remains blurred?

22 Shaw, Genocide and International Relations, 8.
Global and Regional Contextualization
Prevention must extend its use of global and regional analyses. Shaw underscores the importance of “complex structural analysis of the local and regional contexts of genocidal violence together with their insertion into global power relations” as a key starting point of prevention thinking. He has convincingly argued that the sites of genocidal violence have moved across regions of the world according to historical shifts in global power arrangements caused by colonialism, the collapse of empires, and the Cold War. Prevention today requires greater focus on, and mitigation of, these large processes of violence displacement by developing and enhancing tools that limit the military, political and economic overreach of powerful countries. The tendency in prevention practice of treating countries as discrete, isolated cases risks reproducing a focus on the (very real and violent) symptoms of regional stresses, fragility and collapse at the expense of examining their larger structural causes and enablers. This does not mean focusing exclusively on global factors. Instead, it requires examining systematically the ways in which these factors overwhelm regional, national and local sources of resilience. Two points follow for prevention purposes:

First, explore how contemporary global political dynamics structure and drive regional and local violence, including the roles of “wars against terrorism,” struggles among powerful states and alliances over spheres of influence across Asia, Europe, Latin America, north Africa and the Middle East, and global economic and environmental/climactic pressures that weaken already fragile states in the global south.

Ameliorative prevention programs typical of the liberal approach seek to contain national outbreaks of genocide or mass killings, but often only superficially acknowledge and then ‘bracket out’ how regional and global power politics can cause or exacerbate localized violence. Instead, the critique of global power politics should be at the center of atrocity prevention. Atrocity prevention should directly challenge, for instance, US, Russian, and Chinese foreign policies that serve as drivers of political violence in different regions, as well as interrogate how the United Nations and regional governance organizations may legitimize the interests of powerful states in a gambit to secure their short-term support. Prevention also requires more attention to problems of uneven global economic integration that can weaken domestic institutions, and how environmental destabilization can exacerbate local sources of violent conflict where governance institutions remain weak. At its core, this involves critiquing, and reimagining, what is meant by that empty signifier, “international community,” that occasionally functions to legitimize violence and the unequal distribution of global power. As one Nigerian civil society activist pointed out,

The Europeans, and especially the Americans, talk about the terrible violence of African [jihadi] groups, but don’t ask, ‘how did our own actions in Libya worsen these problems? How are our own counterterrorism programs across the region encouraging state repression and harming civil society?’ You can’t really bring this up. They acknowledge it, say yes, yes, and then move on and talk about problems in your own country and what you should do about it.

Second, more attention is needed on how, and under what conditions, violence crosses national borders. Atrocities are not kept within neat political boundaries. Violence often follows a contagion effect, spreading to neighboring areas and destabilizing them. The practitioner community is well aware of this, of course, but cross-national analyses often still privilege one country and involve assessments of international and transnational dynamics to the extent that those dynamics affect the primary country. Further research is required for understanding how these violence dynamics influence one another, and thus what additional prevention strategies are necessary but may be ignored. Greater attention to regions of violence, and not only country cases, can aid this. Some of this is already happening: The United States Institute of Peace’s project examining Africa’s Lake

27 Respondent 30, Nexus Project.
Chad region—rather than Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon individually or dyadically—is providing greater insights into how different vectors of violence require different strategies for prevention and peacebuilding, while new research projects analyzing violence in the African Great Lakes region have helped develop cross-border monitoring and prevention. Nevertheless, these types of studies remain in the minority, thus reinforcing the tendency to see country cases as the default level of analysis.

Securitization

Atrocity response is shaped by state interests. Political leaders frequently adopt a national security litmus test to assess the feasibility, and thus value, of prevention in terms of whether it advances certain core national interests—wealth, power, credibility, and ultimately security—rather than in terms of some moral compunction to reduce human suffering elsewhere. This approach, of course, is still with us today: the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) periodic “Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community” is one of the most succinct formulations of prevention available from a national security perspective. A public summary of the findings of seventeen intelligence agencies, the 2018 report for instance states that its charge is to provide intelligence needed to “protect American lives and America’s interests anywhere in the world.” It is in this context that “violent—even regime threatening—instability and mass atrocities” are presented as a danger to core US interests, and thus any prevention work should be carried out with the aim of advancing, or at least protecting, those interests.

The national security approach has always been explicit in tying the reduction of human suffering abroad to promoting core national interests. What requires greater parsing is how since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the liberal approach to atrocity prevention has become somewhat bifurcated, with one strand becoming heavily influenced by security discourse, motivations and objectives. A substantial number of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) still engage in practical and policy-focused atrocity prevention rooted in liberal norms, but prevention has also been at least partly redefined and instrumentalized elsewhere as an aspect of national security. Securitization is especially evident in peacebuilding discussions about the Middle East and North Africa, where the “resurgence of the state-centric security agenda” has “appropriated peacebuilding,” including prevention, though it is not limited only to this region. The result is a narrowing of what qualifies as peacebuilding, and its conflation with political stabilization and conflict management.

The tensions between these two strands of liberal prevention efforts show no signs of abating. An example of this narrowing between security and liberal arguments is found in an influential genocide prevention report from the Obama era. After noting how genocide is “horrific” and a “direct assault on universal human values,” Madeline Albright and William Cohen’s Preventing...
Genocide states categorically that, “[g]enocide and mass atrocities also threaten core US national interests.” They go on:

[Genocide and mass atrocities] feed on and fuel other threats in weak and corrupt states, with dangerous spillover effects that know no boundaries. If the United States does not engage in preventing these crimes, we inevitably bear greater costs – in feeding millions of refugees and trying to manage long lasting crises. In addition, US credibility and leadership are compromised when we fail to work with international partners to prevent genocide and mass atrocities.36

Preventing Genocide justifies prevention (and intervention) on both humanitarian and national security grounds. The more recent disturbing trend in some democracies, including in the United States, toward authoritarian populism and xenophobic, racist politics has shifted prevention justifications further away from humanitarianism toward national security and counter-terrorism.37 A task of critical prevention work is to interrogate this discursive displacement, which equates securitization and peacebuilding (including prevention), and examine in detail its practical consequences. For instance, what are the specific security imperatives that frame powerful states’ selection of atrocity cases and prevention interests? What are the functional consequences of these choices – that is to say, which cases are left out, and why? How are liberal norms and discourse appropriated to advance security interests and neutralize radical critiques of state power?

There are also a set of subnational institutional questions around securitization. Governments are not monolithic, and various government agencies may be at odds with one another in approaching prevention and human rights advocacy.38 One conflict analyst in the US government remarked,

The people in State [Department], CIA and Defense [Department], to take just a few examples, have somewhat different understandings of threats, and thus different priorities. The CIA and Defense have comparatively narrow understandings of US foreign policy objectives. State works much more closely with foreign civil society organizations and the UN, but this puts them in occasional tension with others in our own government. And, the instructions mid-level State folks receive from the top often conflict with their own best judgment, especially these days… So, there can be a lot of turf wars, but that also means that there’s a lot of different opinions on what national security means and the relative weight that should be given to human rights abroad. There isn’t just one perspective that everyone has.39

Given these internal differences, a number of questions follow: how do various government agencies understand their prevention portfolios? Who resolves disagreements between competing prevention priorities, and using what criteria? What are the formal and informal bureaucratic mechanisms for resolving disputes, and what is kept and what is lost? How can human rights protection norms be insulated from problematic securitization pressures in policy formulation and execution?

Broaden the Scope of Violence
Mass killings and fleeing civilians still drive high-level political attention and thus international prevention priorities. This short-term, reactive approach is certainly a result of media framing, popular pressure, and the limited attention of decision-makers, but it is not only this; there is

36 Albright and Cohen, Preventing Genocide, xv.
37 An example is how the US government has changed the substance of programs around “countering violent extremism,” a term that under the administration of Barack Obama referred to a wide set of potential threats, whether left or right, secular or religious. In the Donald Trump administration, it now focuses on Islamic terrorism; analysis of rightwing terrorism and racism, including within the United States, has largely been relegated to the background. Respondent 2, Nexus Project.
39 Respondent 13, Nexus Project.
also a deeper theoretical myopia that contributes directly to this problem. Adopting a dialectical
sensitivity to our fundamental concepts encourages us to interrogate dominant formulations of
atrocities and expand the types of harms requiring attention from the prevention community.  

One consequence of a dialectical approach is greater scrutiny of dominant theoretical
formulations of core concepts and their problematic practical consequences. Benjamin Meiches,
for example, has persuasively critiqued the “hegemonic” understanding of genocide – which
emphasizes mass killings above other forms of violence, relatively static collective identity
categories, and an excessively narrow understanding of intentionality – for foreclosing discussions
about what types of violence demand condemnation and what groups of people deserve protection.
For him, the hegemonic understanding “is thus the effort to normalize and depoliticize destructive
processes that do not fit with dominant perceptions about identity, violence, and history.”  
In essence, the danger is that prominent formulations of our basic concepts (such as genocide) may in
turn minimize the importance of other forms of violence.

For instance, current atrocity prevention work pays little attention to structural violence, those
deeply entrenched and systemic harms against vulnerable populations that are reproduced over
time. This kind of violence is structural because it is woven into a society’s economic, political
and social relations, reaffirmed through formal policies and informal practices, and legitimized
by the norms and values of the broader culture. Structural violence normally appears as a form of
social anomie, where groups live precarious lives marked by high rates of poverty, unemployment,
malnutrition, poor mental health, displacement, emotional and physical insecurity, high mortality
rates, and weakened social bonds. It is routinized and thus naturalized – treated as a part of the
given, if lamentable, state of affairs – making it difficult to pinpoint a specific set of responsible
agents, even if its consequences are dire and even genocidal. One human rights analyst in the
European Union noted,

Look, we [prevention practitioners] all know that there are a number of long-term, structural
causes to mass atrocities, but in fact we largely focus on actual outbreaks of violence – the
killings, ethnic cleansing, torture, and the like. It is hard to tie in questions of poverty and
long-term discrimination into prevention, except in the most general ways… We don’t have
the resources to do so, but we also frankly don’t always prioritize it. Think of how at the
[UN] Security Council they really started talking about the Rohingya once the killings and
forced displacements got worse.  

And yet it is also precisely its routinization that makes it invisible, except for occasional,
episodic moments when the state employs more explicit violence – killings, torture, disappearances
– to reinforce structures of exclusion and marginalization. Structural violence often occurs over a
much longer time period. This is most apparent in the treatment of indigenous populations in
settler societies, where the process of genocidal attrition occurs over a period spanning decades or
centuries and in some instances continues to this day. Crucially, structural violence can also result
in more recent instances of genocide, insofar as the basic conditions of social life are destroyed over
time and the collective identity of the group disappears.

A critical approach, then, requires examining how our dominant concepts of violence
systematically erase certain kinds of harms and experiences, and it also necessitates foregrounding

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44 Respondent 17, Nexus Project.
45 Woolford, This Benevolent Experiment; Powell, Barbaric Civilization.
severe structural violence. It means prioritizing the structural prevention dimension of current practice by devoting greater attention to how systemic and long-term processes of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness and cultural imperialism, to use Iris Marion Young’s terms,\textsuperscript{46} are linked to the various forms of direct violence that dominate the attention of the prevention community. It also means moving beyond thinking of these harms merely as precursors to atrocities and instead seeing them as significant on their own, requiring immediate attention.

**Expert opinions, epistemic orthodoxies**

Contemporary prevention places a high premium on expert knowledge and technical mastery. The depth of expertise is indeed substantial, and as discussed earlier, now consists of sophisticated bodies of knowledge. But the accumulation of this knowledge has come with certain challenges. The prevention community’s professionalization and, at its most influential levels in the global north, separation from or selective engagement with local and regional practitioners around the world, has reinforced an epistemological orthodoxy that occasionally privileges “lessons learned” approaches, understood as generalized tools from a kit of classifications, procedures and strategies that can be applied to widely disparate contexts. These lessons learned in turn generate a fair amount of uniformity in recommended policy solutions and delivery systems.\textsuperscript{47}

Professionalism has also led to the creation of a class of prevention practitioners who have a great deal of practical mastery of generic prevention tools. This reinforces the general discounting of local knowledge and actors in conflict zones in favor of applying general lessons learned from other contexts. The result is the production of expert epistemic communities that remain rarefied and isolated from local peacebuilders and prevention practitioners. In its more extreme variants, it produces a disturbing cycle: problems are identified in the global south, they are analyzed, diagnosed and codified as new doxa in the global north, and finally, experts from the north recommend treatments to be applied on the south.

The lessons learned problem is not only about types of knowledge, but also tensions generated in the field. In writing about peacebuilding more generally, Severine Autesserre refers to a “bubble,” or isolated world of practitioners in conflict zones, as “peaceland,” a place with its “own time, space and economics,” where “expatriates’ social habits, standard security procedures, and habitual approaches to collecting information in violence... strongly impact the effectiveness of intervention efforts.”\textsuperscript{48} As one Sierra Leonean peace activist told me,

> The experts who come from New York and Europe often have little understanding of the local conflicts here. They don’t go into the villages, don’t travel around the country, don’t speak any of the local languages. But they know what the problem is and how to fix it, because maybe they spent time in East Timor, or Guatemala, or maybe Rwanda. They talk to one another and then they leave, and don’t return until there is another crisis.\textsuperscript{49}

Too strong a focus on technical mastery, unreflective application of lessons from other contexts, and little time in the field minimize reliance on contextual knowledge and local peace builders, with detrimental results.

It is important to be clear here: the problem is not expert knowledge or the generation and use of guidelines and lessons, \textit{as such}. Nor is this a criticism of particular research methods. Our understandings of how to improve prevention efforts should be based on rigorous research using a


\textsuperscript{49} Respondent 24, Nexus Project.
broad range of social scientific methods, including qualitative, quantitative and interpretive. These types of research must be informed – and in turn shaped – by practical findings in the field. The problem, rather, develops when certain bodies of knowledge becomes a new orthodoxy, reinforced by the creation of largely closed communities of experts, and remain insulated from critique, contestation, refinement and even transformation from local expertise and practice.

Civil Society
A critical approach underscores the importance of civil society as a crucial space for advancing prevention. The term has a long and complex history, but for our purposes civil society refers to a space of social relations “autonomous from the state where groups and movements create new alliances, further their interests and views, and engage with one another to shape public and elite opinion with the aim of influencing state policy and public discourse.”50 It is the social space, in other words, where the articulation of inclusive, nonviolent values can be advanced, and it is composed of a wide range of groups.51 Obviously, not all civil society groups or movements support inclusivity or human rights. The term “civil society” is analytical, not explicitly normative, as groups may spearhead persecution and otherwise legitimize violence. Myanmar’s Ma Ba Tha Buddhist extremist organization has encouraged terrorizing Rohingya civilians, a sobering example of the dangerous side of civil society.52 This phenomenon of violent civil society groups is well known, and has rightly received plenty of attention from prevention practitioners.

A more systemic problem, however, is the split in the prevention community between, on the one hand, influential international actors who have limited and selective engagement with local civil society groups, and on the other, smaller prevention groups that may have stronger connections to local peacebuilders but lack the ability to influence high-level prevention policy. Too often, international actors give domestic civil society groups only pro-forma support, with insufficient engagement with groups as partners and leaders in prevention. Only a small fraction of local civil society organizations may succeed in establishing linkages with powerful foreign prevention actors, whether donors, intergovernmental organizations, the UN, other states, or prominent NGOs. The most successful civil society groups in the global south have comparatively more social capital: they have members who speak English or French, can navigate the cultural norms of Westerners, and are capable of formulating their own goals and needs in terms of the criteria and expectations provided by Western donors, governments and aid agencies. A multivalent approach, however, encourages greater effort to bring in more activist and local civil society and social movement organizations into prevention, both in terms of assisting them with resources and training, and also in enabling them to lead efforts according to their own set of priorities and understandings of local conflict dynamics.53 Without this, the doxa of the expert risks being reproduced uncritically. A civil society activist from eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo said,

Groups like ours, which are small and organic [from the community]. do a great deal of peace work on the ground, including around public health, support for women and girls, and conflict resolution. We also have informal connections to other organizations around the [provinces of the] Kivus and even in neighboring countries. There are many alliances like this, but we remain invisible to the UN and big donors because we are seen as too small and we have difficulty getting their attention. Also, sometimes we are most critical of the

51 For instance, it may include community and traditional groups, faith-based organizations, various professional organizations, human rights advocacy groups, and informal networks and social movements, among others.
government security forces, and this can cause problems for outsiders who see Kinshasa as a partner.54

Civil society groups can be important sources of prevention and restraint in a variety of ways, and the prevention community needs to cultivate and encourage this more extensively. Their contributions are varied, and may include protecting vulnerable populations, monitoring and reporting abuses, advocating human rights, nondiscrimination and peaceful coexistence in ways that are culturally rooted and resonant beyond formal legal norms or government policies, creating solidarity movements by building and extending networks of like-minded organizations, and, pressuring political leaders to change policies.55 More contentiously, some groups may advance peacebuilding by openly critiquing and resisting narratives that emphasize difference and dehumanization of vulnerable populations, identifying and condemning discriminatory practices by the government or others, shaming perpetrators and supporters of violence, and pressuring bystanders to be actively engaged in defending rights.

This list of contributions is well supported by empirical research.56 However, it still falls largely within a liberal paradigm typical of mainstream prevention work, anchored in standard political and civil rights and secured by advancing values such as tolerance and respect for the rule of law. All of this, of course, is important. But a critical perspective significantly expands the role for civil society. Civil society groups are well positioned, for instance, to engage in much more uncomfortable, but often necessary, public debate examining how a country’s founding principles of self-rule and governance, as well as its origin myths and ‘settled’ histories, may be implicated in the sustained exclusion and oppression of minority groups from the past through the present. This can entail contesting dominant understandings of collective identity in deeply divided societies, challenging conceptions of political reconciliation that reproduce the values and self-understandings of majority groups, and opening a space for reimagining what a just shared future may look like. For instance, in indigenous communities in settler colonial democracies like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, contesting the very terms of national membership – who are ‘we, the people’ – raises profound issue about the limitations of modern configurations of sovereignty. To mark collective identity and the terms of reconciliation as politically off limits because of its possible disruptions risks perpetuating the symbolic violence and erasure that is a constitutive part of collective harms.57

A critical approach to civil society underscores the need to include radical peaceful social movements that often remain marginalized, resisted or otherwise ignored by mainstream prevention actors because of what they have to say and how they say it.58 Such an engagement goes well beyond short- and mid-term causes of atrocities and draws attention to the narratives and values that legitimize continued domination of vulnerable peoples.

54 Respondent 11, Nexus Project.
Conclusion
Practitioners and scholars have made enormous advances in understanding the warning signs of impending atrocities, the primary causes of mass violence, and the appropriate combination of responses. The maturation of the prevention field over the past two decades is indeed impressive. However, as this article has discussed, there are several areas where a critical approach can contribute to ongoing prevention work. These include problematizing the “bracketing” of global and regional contextualization that results in treating the nation-state as an analytical monad, examining the problem of securitization and connections to state power, pushing for an expansion of the kinds of violence under the purview of prevention, identifying the consequences of privileging expert knowledge, and noting the limitations of global north engagements with local actors.

In essence, the critical approach presses several questions: prevention for whom (who is designated a worthy victim, who is not), prevention of what (what harms are worthy of response, what forms of life qualify for protection), and why prevention (whose interests and voices determine which cases meet the threshold of response)? In answering these questions, we get a better sense of the selective nature of the when, where and how of actual prevention efforts.

In some situations, a critical approach involves deepening efforts that are already in place, or at least acknowledged as important, even if they are pursued only in the breach. In others, the approach laid out here encourages a more radical change in prevention work, calling on rethinking – and contesting – the boundaries of what is the appropriate scope of prevention by asking what is left out. Given ongoing violence across many regions of the world, this work is all the more urgent.

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Bibliography


The First Lesson in Prevention

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Critique
Warning
“There’s a Medusa in the room!”

Pig in a Poke
In prevention, we tell many tales. Most are tragic, stories of victims and their suffering and woe. But we seek out heroes, some tragic, some fortunate and a bit more bland. Lemkin is one. And then there are the resisters, rescuers, saviors, and saints.

Caveat emptor, it’s said. “Let the buyer beware.” So, too, the genocide scholar and preventer. Pig in a Poke! Are we tricking ourselves with our preventer stories, our hero and victim narratives? And how do we know?

Critical Prevention Studies provides one tool, the offering of this essay. But critique makes many people uneasy, especially those inclined to normative quest. “Too critical” some complain. “Negative!” Others pin the ultimate slight with a roll of the eyes: “Ivory Tower” musings. For some critique is Medusa-like, petrifying moral action. And perhaps it can be. But it’s also possible the prevention quester is already on a petrified path, only partly seeing.

For the purposes of this essay, I refer to critique – and critical prevention studies by extension – as a methodology involving discernment, ambiguation, centering, genealogy, openness, recursivity, and a look at the unsaid. Analysis if you will – but in the etymological sense of an unloosening. Denaturalization. Contextualization. Multivocality. And dare I say it? A bit of deconstruction.

Reread what I’ve written. Pig in a poke. The critical difference is already there.1 It was present in the first sentence. It’s manifest in the writing style. You just need to read between the lines.

I’m going to tell you some critical prevention stories though they lack clear heroes, focus on blind spots and flaws. Some even involve me. We’ll travel to ancient Greece, Norway, and Cambodia.

Go ahead. Read some more. Medusa is waiting. Turn the page. I dare you.

Medusa’s Head
I promised Medusa. She was already lurking, but here’s her tale. There are different versions, old (Hesiod and Ovid) and new (Bulfinch and Hamilton). And today her story is recounted on YouTube shorts and in comic book form.

Of course, she serves as a second act, the foil to Perseus’s blade, as illustrated by the frequent framing of the retellings that have titles like “PERSEUS: The Hunt for Medusa’s Head.”2 “Could a monster whose gaze turns men to stone be the death of the son of Zeus?” one graphic narrative headlines. Another highlights: “Perseus . . . the hero is ordered to slay a hideous monster named Medusa, whose gaze turns men into solid stone. How can Perseus fight an enemy he can’t even look at? He will need the wisdom and weapons of the gods to prevail.”3

There, in a nutshell, is the gist of the story in its popular form: the hero Perseus succeeds in his perilous quest to slay the monster Medusa. While varying in some of the details, the popular narrative follows a similar form. Here’s a summary taken from two graphic narratives aimed at

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2 Paul D. Storrie, and Thomas Yeates, Perseus: The Hunt for Medusa’s Head (Minneapolis: Graphic Universe, 2008), 8.

teenagers. The treacherous King Polydectes sends heroic Perseus to do the impossible: to bring him the head of Medusa, whose hair of snakes and hideous gaze petrifies anyone who looks at her.

Perseus is helped by Athena, who bestows upon him gifts of the gods to aid in his quest: a magic sword, winged sandals, a helmet of invisibility, and a magic bag in which to place Medusa’s head. Athena also gives him her shield. “Look only at her reflection in this shield,” Athena advises Perseus, “and you will be safe.” She tells him that he can learn the whereabouts of Medusa’s lair from the three Grey Witch sisters, who share an eye to see and tooth to eat.

After Perseus forces the Grey Witches to reveal Medusa’s location by stealing their eye, Perseus travels to her lair, a place of ancient ruins where Medusa lives with her two Gorgon sisters. The dark compound is filled with petrified soldiers who had sought to kill Medusa. Looking into his reflective shield, Perseus succeeds in locating Medusa and cutting off her head, which he quickly puts into his magic bag and flees, barely escaping Medusa’s irate sisters.

While passing through Ethiopia on his way home, Perseus sees Princess Andromeda, who is being sacrificed to appease Poseidon and prevent one of his sea monsters from wreaking havoc upon the kingdom of Andromeda’s family. Perseus slays the sea monster and asks to marry Andromeda as his reward, a request that is granted. At the wedding, Andromeda’s former suitor appears with an armed guard, which Perseus defeats by pulling Medusa’s head out of the bag and petrifying them.

Upon returning home, Perseus does the same to King Polydectes and his guard when Polydectes tries to force Perseus’s mother, Danaë, to become his wife. Perseus pays homage to Athena and gives her Medusa’s head, which Athena mounts on her shield to terrify her enemies. The myth ends with Perseus fulfilling a prophecy that his mother’s father, King Acrisius, would be killed by his grandson. In response, Acrisius had cast Danaë and the infant Perseus into the sea, where they were protected by Perseus’s father, Zeus, who facilitated their rescue by Polydectes’ brother. In the end, Perseus inadvertently kills his grandfather with an errant throw at an Olympic event.

Frame

“Medusa!” you may be asking. “What does this have to do with prevention?” But remember my first warning and the first lesson in prevention: “There’s a Medusa in the Room!” Then I cautioned, “Pig in a Poke!”

Before I turn to my next story – and yes, it connects to Medusa as well – let me switch to a more expository frame. And indeed, “the frame” is a good place to start. Graphic narratives, in part due to the success of Maus, have increasingly been acknowledged for their literary qualities – as opposed to being “mere” commercial art, comics, cartoons, or “the funnies” – including the genre’s similarity to poetry through its use of juxtaposition, visual image, materiality, and underlying grammatical structure (panel, text, and image).

As I have suggested elsewhere, graphic narratives provide an entrée into critical genocide studies and, by extension, critical prevention studies. One way graphic narratives do so is through their compositional structure of sequential panels separated by borders called “gutters.”

If this compositional style offers many ways to undertake critique, ranging from considerations of space and time (through the layout and visual structures that enable analysis of linear, emplotted moments and places), the gutter-frame structure highlights the process of foregrounding (whatever is highlighted in the panel) and backgrounding (through the ever-present gap between the frames suggesting erasure).

In other words, even as they assert given articulations, such as the popularized Perseus and Medusa myth summarized above, graphic narratives structurally and visually suggest the erasure

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4 Storrie and Yeates, Perseus, 8.
that inevitably accompanies them. Graphic narrative form, in other words, demands that we always ask what has been edited out, existing now only as a trace in the visually present gutters bordering the frames.

In *Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer*, I have argued that this dynamic of (framing) articulation and the redaction that ensues – and “the redactic” potential for what has been edited out to dehisce – is part of the banality of everyday thought (a reworking of Arendt’s idea of “the banality of evil”) even as it may be mobilized by “thick frames of power” in contexts ranging from the torture chamber to international law.

What does this discussion tell us about the myth of Perseus? It suggests the first lesson of critical prevention: always look for the “Medusa in the room,” a haunting and uncanny presence, often only glimpsed from traces, which needs to be critically discerned. And indeed, the myth’s emphasis on the gaze is suggestive in this regard: the eye of the Grey witches, prophecy, the helmet of invisibility, and, of course, Medusa’s petrifying gaze.

In both of the graphic narratives about Perseus and Medusa that I drew upon, eyes are also highlighted in the panels and the petrifying power of Medusa’s head is signified by glowing light emanating from her eyes. This motif of the seen and the unseen – a worthy trope of critical prevention studies – is a key current in the myth of Medusa and one the graphic form is able to underscore in visual ways prose usually cannot.

To conclude this first story, I want to turn to erasure and the gutter. What is the Medusa in the room in the myth of Perseus? Medusa provides a guiding clue. We have a hero and a monster whose monstrosity (her past petrifying violence) legitimates violence against her (her decapitation): Violence at Time (V1) (her past monstrous and petrifying acts) legitimates Violence at Time 2 (V2) (Perseus cutting off her head).

A host of questions are backgrounded, including Medusa’s past. Where is she from? Why is she mortal while her Gorgon sisters are not? Why does she have the power of petrification? One of the graphic narratives completely ignores such questions, which otherwise disrupt the hero narrative. *Perseus and Medusa: A Graphic Novel* provides a passing reference to Medusa’s more complicated past, when a young Perseus asks Dictys, Polydectes brother, to recount the story of Medusa.

“A long time ago, there was a beautiful woman named Medusa,” Dictys begins. Poseidon fell in love with her and they “met secretly” in Athena’s temple. Because Medusa bragged that she was more beautiful than even Athena, Athena “punished Medusa for her vanity,” turning Medusa’s “silken hair into slithering serpents . . . soft hands into crooked claws . . . [and] perfect white teeth [into] sharp, jagged fangs.” Each transformation is depicted in a panel colored in stone grey. “Now,” Dictys concludes, “Medusa is so hideous that any man who looks upon her is instantly turned to stone.” “Do you think anyone will ever slay Medusa?” young Perseus then asks, suggesting both a glimpse of his future and the implicit moral righteousness of her being slain.

Once again, to maintain the hero narrative, Medusa’s past is depicted in a manner that suggests her future evil by highlighting her immorality (sexual transgression and vanity). But a trace of something more dehisces for a moment: Medusa was originally human and beautiful and had a past intertwined with Athena. In other mythic renderings, which don’t fit the Perseus hero / Medusa monster binary, Medusa is said to have been raped by Poseidon in the temple of Athena, who punished Medusa for the defilement by making her hideous.

And indeed, the interrelationship of gender, sex, and violence is a key theme backgrounded in the myth – not just Medusa’s past, but Danaë’s past (sexual relations with Zeus) and present (King Polydectes attempts to force Danaë to marry him) as well as Andromeda being married to Perseus as a reward for his heroics. More broadly, the sexual potency of women, both coveted and feared,  

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is depicted in scenes such as Danaë’s being locked away from men to prevent her from having the son destined to kill Acrisius, Andromeda’s sacrifice to Poseidon, Danaë’s inability to ward off Polydectes’s advances without Perseus as her protector, and the danger of the Grey Witches, Gorgons, and, of course, Medusa herself.

Once discerned through critique (an unpacking of frames and exploration of the gutters and the unsaid), Medusa becomes a much more complicated character. And indeed, she has figured in a myriad of critical discussions.11 For the purposes of this essay, I want to highlight how a methodology of critique may be applied not just to narratives like the story of Perseus and Medusa, but to other domains including the narratives that undergird work in critical genocide and prevention studies. I will reapproach this point from a different direction – though one still related to Medusa and the first lesson in prevention – in my next story and second section of this essay.

Before doing so, however, I want to note how critique complicates the perpetrator-victim binary and legitimation of violence. If the popularized myth portrays a simplified sequence of violence (V1 [legitimating] → V2),12 the more complicated mythic strands suggest a much longer and morally fraught cycle of violence: V1 (Medusa’s rape) → V2 (Athena’s curse) → V3 (Medusa’s petrifying violence) → V4 (Perseus cutting off her head) → V5 & V6 (Perseus using Medusa’s head to petrify Andromeda’s suitor and King Polydectes and their guards) → V7 (Medusa’s head being mounted on Athena’s shield and used for violence even as Medusa’s violent power is symbolically domesticated).

Medusa, then, raises questions about how we represent and analyze violence, how our accounts dehistoricize, decontextualize, and even dehumanize others, the gaps in our analyses, the haunting and uncanny conceptual spaces we fear, our tacit assumptions about gendered violence and the legitimation of violence including mass murder (Perseus’s killing of not just Andromeda’s suitor and Polydectes but their entire guards), and questions about the intersection of violence, law, responsibility, and legitimacy.

To analyze something involves an unloosening, an endeavor that may be undertaken through the method of critique that always bears in mind questions of gaze and the first lesson in (critical) prevention: “There’s a Medusa in the room!” I end with another warning: Medusa appears in my next story, set in Norway, even if she remains unnamed. I’ll give you a hint: pig in a poke, Medusa’s head in the bag.

Interlude
Evaluation
Time to change the tone. I’m worried about what reviewers will say (but also that I’ll continue to stray from the well-trodden path to prevention). “Post-modern junk.” “Boring.” “I read Why Did The Kill? What happened?!” “Frivolous and foolhardy.” “A waste of pen and ink and my time.” “Too many clichés!” “Nothing to do with prevention.” “Can’t write.” “And I thought Man or Monster? was odd! At least it had an explanatory ending.” “Passé.” “Number One . . . on the top ten list of why I no longer read anthropology.” “Retitle The Hinton Facade.” “Fell asleep while reading.” “What’s the point?”

Archeology (aka “The Critical Preventer’s Methodological Guide to Finding the Medusa in the Room”) In early September 2018, I attend “The UN Genocide Convention at 70 Conference,” conference hosted by HL-SENGERET, a Norwegian research center and museum that plays a role in Norway somewhat similar to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem. Established in part as a response to economic losses suffered by Norwegian Jews during Nazi occupation, HL-SENGERET is located in Villa Grande, where an infamous Nazi collaborator resided.

At the end of two packed days of papers and discussions focused on the politics of mass atrocity prevention on the 70th anniversary of the UN Genocide Convention, our hosts take us to

12 V1 → V2 stands for Violence (V) at Time 1 standing in relation to (in this case by legitimating and leading to) Violence at Time 2.
the nearby museum featuring “the world’s best-preserved Viking Ships” excavated from Viking
tombs in the Oslo Fjord.\(^{13}\)

Besides the ships, there are wooden carts, animal head sculptures, and ornate sleighs from
burial mounds. A film, “The Vikings Alive” depicts how the artifacts may have gotten here. A
ship sets sail, a battle ensues. There is a return home, shovels hitting the ground, burial of the
dead. As I sit on a bench watching the show, projected onto the walls of the museum, I nod to a
colleague and ask, “What do you think? Genocide?” A shrug. Uncertainty. Vikings are not part of
the genocide studies canon, which is temporally inflected by the destruction of the European Jews
even if the purview of the field has broadened over the past decade, as illustrated by publication
trends, including content in the Journal of Genocide Research and Genocide Studies and Prevention (see
also Woolford, Muller, and Sinclair, this issue).

Each of the three large Viking ships displayed has a turn-of-the-twentieth-century story of
discovery. And excavation. The most ornate ship on display, the Oseberg, was discovered in 1903
by a farmer, who notified a prominent archaeologist, Gabriel Gustafson.\(^{14}\) Gustafson cordoned off
and secured the site before undertaking a three-month dig with a team that likely used tools such
as trowels, shovels, sifting screens, and measuring devices. Like the Vikings, burrowers of the
ground.

A photo of Gustafson shows him standing at the base of the hollow his team had created. If the
collection took just months, the longer-term process of restoring and preserving the artifacts took
many years, eventually becoming a primary exhibition at The Viking Ship Museum.

The Dig

Here we arrive at a first signpost – part of “The Critical Preventer’s Methodological Guide for
Finding the Medusa in the Room” – for critical prevention studies. Perhaps it is the biggest signpost.
Maybe even the only one that needs discussion. “The dig.” And this signpost has a flashing light,
a warning to which we can return again and again.

For prevention, like all of our pursuits, involves excavation, fingers sifting earth and sand,
an exploration of ruins in the hope of avoiding genocidal ruin. Ruin, from the Latin *ruere*, “to
fall,” suggesting collapse, decline, and catastrophe.\(^ {15}\) What came before now. Ruins like the secret
location of Medusa’s lair. Ruins offering traces of the past that provide clues to the present and
what might come next – if only we further hone our excavatory skills. One paradox of atrocity
prevention is that, like Klee’s angel of history, it looks at a past, both distant and proximate, to
envision a future that can’t be fully seen.

Excavation

Like other fields, genocide studies and prevention research is predicated on “the dig.” Excavation.\(^ {16}\)
To excavate is to “make (a hole or channel) by digging” such as by “carefully removing earth from
(an area) in order to find buried remains.” The Latin root of the term, *excavare*, means to “hollow out.”\(^ {17}\)

This notion of “hollowing” resonates with ideas of articulation and redaction as well as the
graphic narrative “grammar” of gutters and frames.\(^ {18}\) Our excavatory assemblage – mediated by
structures of power and associated ways of ordering and classifying reality – are predicated on
hollowing, a set of erasures, gaps, redactions, and backgroundings. These excavatory hollows are

\(^{13}\) What follows on The Viking Museum is based on its website. Museum of Cultural History, “The Viking Ship Museum,”

\(^{14}\) What follows on Gustafson draws both on Museum of Cultural History, “The Viking Ship Museum - Oseburg,”
oseberg-found.html and World Archaeology, “Gustafson at Oseberg,” Current World Archaeology 52 (March 30, 2012),


\(^{16}\) This paragraph and broader discussion on excavation draws on and extends Hinton, Wonder Woman. See also Hinton,
University Press, 2018).


visually manifest in “the gutter” – the aforementioned frame construction of graphic narratives, which have an ostensible narrative flow undercut and ruptured by a grid of crosscutting frames that simultaneously question assumptions about meaning, time, and space.19

The Hollows of Prevention. Here we find a second warning in critical prevention studies: beware the excavator who believes s/he can use the past to prognosticate the future. Pig in a Poke. Medusa’s Head in the Bag. Along these lines, perhaps we need a rethinking of the often-cited George Santayana saying – “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” – in which it is put in conversation with Adorno’s warning, “There can be no poetry after Auschwitz.” Atrocity prevention treads the gap between these two oft-cited sayings about genocide even as it flails at a related imperative, “Never Again.” The Hollows are the spectre of our excavations, the source of hauntings from the ruins, the grounds of this guide for finding the Medusa in the room, a Sisyphean task.

Authorization
Excavation is an enterprise, a “hollowing” endeavor undertaken with an end.20 And, like all projects, this enterprise requires authorization for the “hollowing out” to unfold. There is, on the one hand, the “permit” that legitimates the endeavor, an approval or sanction linked to structures of power (including “academic authorization”). But there is also “authorization” in the sense of that which gives “authority,” such as the set of conceptual principles that legitimate the study, including the way the excavation is undertaken.

Gustafson could not embark without permission to conduct a dig at a particular time and place or status within structures of power, such as his institutional position as an archeologist. This authority was signified by his ability to cordon off and guard his site as well as by accoutrements (outfit and equipment) and practices, including performative expertise.

Tools
A dig also requires techniques, tools, and practices. If they symbolize authorization, these tools, techniques, and practices – let’s refer to them together as “tools” – condition the endeavor, both enabling and constraining how the excavation unfolds and what is found. These tools are deployed as part of a larger methodology. Gustafson was, of course, trained as an archaeologist and used archeological tools to excavate the ruins of the Oseberg, reclaim the ship and other objects as artifacts, and reconstruct a Viking past imagined in “The Vikings Alive” film that plays three times an hour at The Viking Ship Museum.

Fire
Excavations also require illumination, the “fire” of light that enables artifacts to be discovered. Gustafson, for example, likely used lanterns in the Oseberg dig. If light reveals, it also occludes, a partial illumination that foregrounds particular places while creating shadows and leaving other areas in darkness.

Excavations are lit by many fires. Here are a few. There is the fire of our concepts and theories, which direct our analytical gaze. A second is the fire of our passions, the motivations that drive us, push us to excavate. Yes, those motives are bound up with structure. Professional ambition. Honor. Shame. But there are also those that are personal. Including our fetishes. About that I will have more to say. Then there’s the fire of the archive, a fever, the validating stamp of authorization. Impression.21

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21 The “drive” of the “author” may be passionate (propelled not just by “the fire” of libidinal or fetishistic desire, but more broadly by intensely felt emotions and even the passion to understand) or structural, such as the “fever” that emerges from the instability of authorization since it requires replication and a doubling that is never identical to the original (Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression.” *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995), 9- 63; see also Johnson, *The
We don’t know a great deal about the fires that drove Gustafson, though he left diaries, his own ruins, a Gustafson archive, traces for excavation. The fire of this essay turns in a different direction, toward prevention, so I’ll leave his diaries aside. But we know his excavation earned him a degree of fame. A moment. Spotlight.

Assemblage

“The dig” is a moment of glory – Indiana Jones, Laura Croft, people like Gustafson, too. Another black and white photo shows him looking dapper on the Oseberg dig: jacket and bow tie combined with knee-high mud boots and a hat, brim curled. He has an air of confidence and erudition, poise and aplomb.

Dig and display. It seems easy. And indeed, Gustafson’s team sifted the soil for not even four months. But that was just the beginning of the story. He labored for twenty years to piece together the ship and the artifacts he had found. He was able to use 90 percent of the ship’s original timber. This phase took place out of site, a process painstaking and tedious at times. His assemblage of artifacts now stands at the Viking Ship Museum: ruins excavated (by Oseberg), reassembled into a new set of ruins (The Viking Ship Museum), now excavated one more by the ink of my pen, the glance of your eye.

The archaeologist excavates the earth and objects it preserves with authorization, methods, tools, fire, and assemblage to produce such artifacts. This essay is the artifact of my excavation of prevention. My atrocity crimes “Viking Ship,” part of the ruins of this special edited collection.

You are the reader of these textual ruins, undertaking your own excavation. A text read and reread. Roland Barthes called it “the writerly,” the polyphony of texts distinguished from the singular authoritative voice of “the readerly,” a “definitive” monologue. Excavation is writerly, though many assume it is readerly, the discovered truth presented at “the museum.” It’s a point to which I will return.

I have not forgotten my promise of more signposts to guide an archaeology of prevention. No pig in the poke. Medusa’s head is out of the bag. Do you see my method, my tools, my lantern? My permit is printed at the top of the first page. This is my assemblage. Go back and make your own. Let Medusa be your guide.

Pharmakon

Word

Pill. A capsule. Compressed medicine. The magic bullet. But also bitter, difficult to swallow. That’s why some people are referred to as “a pill.” Pills often need to be sweetened and coated. “Sugar the pill,” it’s said. Regardless, the pill is meant to be swallowed whole.


Let’s look at the source. Dispensation. Pharmacy, “a place where medicinal drugs are prepared or sold.” It’s also a science, as in the ancient Greek pharmakeia, “the practice of a druggist,” from pharmakon, “drug.” Though things are a bit more complicated. For the Greeks, pharmakon meant both “remedy” and “poison.” The idea of a “poison pill” gets at the idea.

Pharmakon. Poison and cure. Like Medusa’s blood. Like this essay. Like prevention. Here, then, is another signpost in our guide to critical prevention. Genocide as Pharmakon. Prevention as cure, prevention as poison. The Prevention Pill.


This idea, I know, is itself a bitter pill to swallow, particularly given that we just celebrated the 70th anniversary of the UN Genocide Convention, an occasion that marked a University of Manitoba workshop that gave rise to this special issue.

To sugar the pill, so to speak, let me tell some more stories even if, like the Perseus-Medusa myth and the recounting of the conference in Norway, they are critical prevention narratives. The first, like the Perseus myth, has ancient origins. The second is another of my own.

So let’s turn to our next story, Plato’s *Phaedrus*, to learn more.

*Thoth and Thamus*

Thoth thought he had it made. He had good stuff! Or at least he thought he did.

In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Socrates recounts how this God traveled to Thebes to appear before the King of Gods, Thamus. Thoth had invented remarkable things, not just numbers and calculation, but writing (and dice and draughts, too). “Writing,” Thoth enticed his king, will “make the Egyptians wiser and improve their memories.”

Poor Thoth. The king shot him down. The fact is, he told Thoth, “this invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it because they will not need to exercise their memories, being able to rely on what is written.” Moreover, the King added, Thoth would be “equipping your pupils with only a semblance of [wisdom], not with truth.” Thoth’s invention of writing was not “a remedy” (*pharmakon*) for memory, but a poison instead.

*Pharmakon*. Poison and cure. In ancient Greek, the term had an umbrella of meanings (e.g., medicine, recipe, drugs, philter), but perhaps most centrally this idea of something both remedial and harmful. Like a pill.

Now on to our second narrative, set in a completely different time and place: November 16, 2018, on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

I was there for this one.

*Genocide Justice*

Gravel spits on the underbelly of our van as we turn the corner into the dirt parking lot of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, the ECCC, or Khmer Rouge Tribunal as everyone calls it.

The browned landscape is lit by saffron, rows of robed monks and elderly nuns dressed in white. The monks will sit in the front row of the court’s public gallery as the decision in Case 002.2, which includes the charge of genocide against the two most senior surviving leaders of the Khmer Rouge, is read later in the morning.

The 500-seat courtroom is filled with a wide range of “stakeholders”: VIPs, including diplomats and government officials, blue-shirted students, civil parties, villagers, journalists, and a handful of academics like me.

Just before the curtain rises, a Cambodian Public Affairs officer provides a brief sketch of the case in which the two most senior living Khmer Rouge, “Brother Number Two” Nuon Chea and Head of State Khieu Samphan, are being tried for atrocity crimes committed during Democratic Kampuchea (April 17, 1975 to January 6, 1979).

“Oh, and it will take about an hour and forty minutes to read the verdict,” the court officer finishes. I hear a few moans.

Then the curtain opens. The parties are in place.

*Better late than never.*

These words, well-worn like the elderly defendants, came to mind as I gaze at Nuon Chea (92) and Khieu Samphan (87). Many feared they would die unjudged.

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Two years before, I sat in the witness stand and watched as Nuon Chea sought to deflect blame and deny responsibility for a campaign of terror and mass murder that resulted in the death of almost a quarter of Cambodia’s 8 million inhabitants from 1975-1979.

What about the American bombings? He chided me after I had testified for three and a half days on the charge of genocide. And didn’t Vietnam want to swallow Cambodia?

The verdict would put an end to those arguments. Yes, the U.S. carpet-bombing of Cambodia constitutes a war crime. Yes, Vietnam meddled in Cambodian affairs and sought to topple the Khmer Rouge regime. And of course Cambodia was caught in geopolitical crosshairs. But one and only one group deserves the primary blame in the end: the Khmer Rouge leaders who made the decisions.

The judgment makes this clear in legal monotone. For almost two hours, the court’s President, Non Nil, reads a summary of the verdict. He barely looks up as he methodically details the crimes: mass relocations, brutal work camps, an extensive security system and prison network, forced marriage, and the targeting of Buddhist monks as well as Cambodia’s ethnic Chams and Vietnamese.

By the time President Non Nil finishes, Nuon Chea has been excused to listen to the proceedings in a holding cell. Both defendants are in poor health and may die any day.

When the final disposition is delivered at the end, Khieu Samphan is asked to stand in the dock. He has to be supported by two guards, one of whom hoists him up by the back of his trousers, as Non Nil declares the pair’s life sentence for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crimes of crimes, genocide.


Convention

These two stories, distant in time and place, are easily set into conversation. Indeed, they connect genocide, justice, and prevention with the idea of pharmakon in interesting ways. Given that this special issue began with a 70th Anniversary workshop, let’s start with convention. (Genocide) convention as poison, (genocide) convention as cure.

Convention is etymologically related to the word “convene” and its Latin cognate, convenire, means to “assemble, agree, fit,” or more simply “to come” (venire) “together” (con). To convene.

Assemblage. Parts brought together in a meeting or activity. 28

Along these lines, convention may refer to “a large meeting” such as a political convention or “an agreement between states” that codifies “a way in which something is usually done” or “socially acceptable behavior.”

And there we have it: convention as it’s criminal to commit genocide. The December 9, 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Lemkin’s Convention. Our convention. Genocide studies convention, genocide assemblage, convention codified in written word.

Written word. This takes us back to Phaedrus and pharmakon. It also speaks to convention. For King Thamus worried precisely about such written codification, an intended auxiliary that was a diminishment, a crutch both salve and source of sickness.

Despite the legends of renown and glory, the exhortations of “it’s the best we have,” we remain afflicted by genocide fetish. Excessive fixation on a part (ignoring the whole), attribution of magical powers, object of excessive desire, overcommitment. A charm, to revisit the French source (fetiche), the product of sorcery.

The story of Lemkin provides a related example of genocide. The hero of the genocide convention myth. The First Preventer. Lemkin fetish. Convention fetish. The elixir of prevention cure. And now, most recently, R2P fetish.
I grant you Convention as cure. I sip from that elixir, too. But I warn you it is also poison. Some of the poison is easy to see, acknowledged begrudgingly or, more often, in passing, with a wave of the hand. Political groups provide an obvious example.

And there it was at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. “Genocide” flashed the headlines after the verdict. “Khmer Rouge leaders found guilty of genocide” splashed The Guardian. “Khmer Rouge’s Slaughter in Cambodia is Ruled a Genocide,” proclaimed The New York Times.

While literally accurate, the headlines, the written word, offered a truncated truth, diminishing a more complex reality – Thamus’s point. For starters, what was legally a partial and somewhat roundabout conviction for genocide – against two ethnic minorities (Muslim Chams and ethnic Vietnamese) – had become something quite different, the all-encompassing headliner of “genocide.”

We all know the story of how political and “other groups” were excised during UN deliberations as the Convention was being promulgated. Usually it’s referenced, if at all, with a quick “too bad, but the Convention is what we have.” A point well-taken. Better than nothing, like the ECCC genocide verdict.

But it’s still a poisoned point, not solely cure. First and foremost, there is the prioritization of certain protected groups and not others – not just political but economic, social, and so forth. And it’s not just the glaring gap left by exclusion of political groups. Left-handed people beware; so, too, should those who are transgender (or any gender for that matter) – and many other identity groups. And then there’s the erasure of cultural genocide.

There still more poison. We have the arbitration of Convention, a normative order applied. It’s sticky with politics through and through. The examples are legion, gatekeeping debates about what’s “authentic” genocide. I’ll give a quick example: race and slavery in the U.S. (which Lemkin deemed not genocide) or apartheid in South Africa (Leo Kuper’s “not quite” case).

By what criteria? Who decides? What are the positive and negative effects of such convention? And what does it mean to crown “the crimes of crimes,” making other sorts of horrible violence seem tepid in comparison.

The drips and drabs of much settler colonialism violence (see Arnold and Woolford, Muller, and Sinclair, this issue), including that in the United States where I reside, provides an example and in many ways remains on-going. It turns us away from structural violence and the ways in which power reveals, obscures, and erases (see also Feierstein, this issue). Genocide Convention signals a temporality – a discrete beginning and end – and particular modalities of violence that obscure these other sorts of violence. Thoth’s vice; Thamus’s warning.

The notion of atrocity crimes provides some mitigation, though genocide still reigns supreme. And atrocity crimes wear a crown of their own, imposing another triumvirate hierarchy with a lesser fourth part, ethnic cleansing.

I could go on. But you get the point. The UN Genocide Convention – and convention more broadly – as poison and cure.

Before we leave the topic of convention, I leave you with one last inflection. Thoth, the god of numbers and writing, is also a “god of articulation” to again reference a notion I discuss in Man or Monster? He advocates a rendering of experience and understanding in remembered written form: spelling something out, if you will. But the act of articulation always involves redaction as Thamus’s comments suggest. The poison, I would add, remains in what Man or Monster? refers to as the redactic, the suppressed excess that haunts the articulation, sometime suddenly dehiscing in moments of the uncanny.

Remember my initial warning and our first lesson: “There’s a Medusa in the room!” On that I’ll have a little more to say. But meanwhile, let’s look for her elsewhere. Indeed, Medusa haunts the ECCC courtroom. So, too, do the spirits of the dead.

Justice

Justice. Another modality of genocide prevention. Another elixir of promise. It’s said to combat impunity, contribute to democratization, advance the rule of law, and deliver peace, security, reconciliation, and healing. Justice as fetish, a sorcerous conjuring.

But also justice as poison, something that can never be fully delivered and that inevitably falls short in proportion to the fetishistic intensity of its projected cure. Justice as transitional justice
throws this even more into relief, with the boatload of promised goals that are part of what The Justice Facade refers to as the “transitional justice imaginary,” replete with utopian, teleological, globalizing, democratizing, and progressivist aspirations and assumptions.

The ECCC provides an illustration with its motto, “moving forward through justice,” and official proclamations that the court will contribute to Cambodia’s “justice and national reconciliation, stability, peace and security.” Such aspirations mask a profoundly political process that involved Cold War strategy and domestic and international concerns.

The court was a compromise formation from the start, structured with a hybridity and mass of contradictions that would have made that fan of the pharmakon, Derrida, nod knowingly. Indeed, Derrida’s peer, ECCC defense lawyer Jacques Verges – who pioneered the legal strategy of “disruption,” or undercutting the legitimacy of a trial in the court of public opinion – did smile mischievously as he deployed this strategy at the ECCC, launching early salvos in what would be a litany of defense complaints.

The defense lawyers have had cause to complain, as Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan’s lawyers did (yet again) immediately after the Case 002.2 verdict. The process has been a slog, the court’s name partly stained by the allegations. Political interference. Corruption. Unfair rulings. Truncated jurisdiction. And a legal process sometimes unsound. Nuon Chea’s defense lawyer called the court a farce, mere victor’s justice. And the KRT’s justice is indeed a partial one. Many people hoped for more.

After a dozen years and over $300 million spent, the court convicted just three people. The international community wanted a dozen arrests or more. The Cambodian government insisted on just five. Two of the accused died, unjudged.

The hybrid court is based in Cambodia. The government holds most of the cards and can pull the plug at any time. It’s widely expected that they have already done so and that the November 2018 genocide conviction was the court’s last hurrah, the final act in what many people refer to as “the show.”

There’s more. The laundry list of court problems is long. One of the biggest elephants in the room is superpower culpability.

As Nuon Chea noted, the U.S. carpet-bombed the Cambodian countryside during the Vietnam War, dropping more tonnage than it dropped during World War II.

China, in turn, provided the Khmer Rouge with support, aid, and arms. Western powers did the same with resistance factions to help fuel a civil war that continued long after the Khmer Rouge were deposed in early January 1979.

Superpowers don’t want this dirty laundry aired. So when, after years of geopolitical dithering, they finally allowed the ECCC to be set up, they limited its jurisdiction to only include the time Khmer Rouge were in power.

Defense lawyers have repeatedly highlighted the hypocrisy. Their contention that the ECCC should have dealt with superpower crimes has merit.

So too do defense arguments that is impossible for the ECCC to reveal a fuller truth and discern the causes of violence when only a snapshot of history is brought into view. The extensive problems have led some to ask if the trials have been worth the effort and question whether justice can ultimately be served.

Genocide Justice as remedy, justice as poison.

Prevention in Translation
Pharmakon is a tricky word. Remedy, recipe, and cure. But also drug, philter, and, of course poison.

So, too, is Thoth: God of wisdom, records, the moon, and much more. Thoth and his pharmakon are pesky, an irritant, hard to pin down. Like convention, the problem of “prevention in translation” is usually swept under the rug.

Let’s go back to the ECCC, the verdict read in Khmer, translated into English, then from English to French. Thamus would not be pleased with these secondary and tertiary renderings. Nor, indeed, should we.
Take the very notion of “justice.” What, exactly, does it mean? We have our dictionary definitions: “The administration of law or of legal processes; juridical proceedings” or, more generally, “maintenance of legal, social, or moral principles by the exercise of authority or power,” an idea linked to its etymological connections to “just,” or “what is morally right.”

Justice, like pharmakon, encompasses a loose conglomerate of terms, including legal process, “just desserts” given, righteousness, and a hint of the Sublime.

When artist, S-21 survivor, and Cambodian civil party Vann Nath was asked in court what he wanted from the trial of Duch, the commandant of the torture and extermination center where he was imprisoned, Vann Nath replied, “What I want . . . it’s . . .” He paused. Then motioning in the air, he continued, “[it’s] something that can’t be seen. It’s justice for those who died. For this justice, I am relying on this Chamber. But in my heart, I’m not certain what this justice is.” He glanced up at the judges. “It is only when this court is over that we may know the answer to the question: justice, what is it? I’m not certain. What is justice? In my heart I hope that it’s something that will be an outcome resulting from the actions of Your Honors, of this court.”

Vann Nath’s comments raise a question that should be at the heart of considerations of international justice prevention: what, exactly, is justice? And how is a Judeo-Christian legal concept understood in a predominantly Buddhist context like Cambodia? Indeed, this is something I thought about when I saw the saffron-robbed monks observing the Case 002.2 verdict from the front row of the public gallery.

If, in The Justice Facade I discuss the transitional justice imaginary, I argue that these projections mask what is really taking place on the ground. Katherine Sikkink’s notion of “the justice cascade,” a foil upon which my title partly plays, highlights this point, suggesting a relatively seamless process of “remedy” and “cure” – a global “cascade” of accountability and transitional justice. The waters, however, are muddy and what lies beneath the veneer of the water’s surface are rich ecosystems of cultural complexity and lived experience.

In Cambodia, Buddhism is central to understandings of “justice.” Indeed, the Khmer gloss, yutethoa, is formed in part from the key Buddhist principle of dhamma, a term that, like justice and pharamkon, has a wide range of referents.

For many Cambodian villagers who survived DK, then, the tribunal is linked to Buddhism in different ways. Some view the tribunal as ultimately unnecessary since those who sin get their “just desserts” through reincarnation, as their past (bad) actions condition their future. Others view the tribunal itself as an instantiation of this karmic process.

For many Cambodian survivors, especially rural villagers who are largely unfamiliar with formal legal justice, the tribunal’s key purpose relates to transactions with the spirits of the (DK) dead, the haunting presence of those not yet reborn. They often perform a Buddhist ritual (bangsokol) in which “justice” is transferred, though monks, to the dead in order to calm the spirits and facilitate their rebirth, thereby rebalancing the social world, an ideal reflect both in terms of everyday health (to feel “easy”) and Buddhist being (with its emphasis on equanimity).

Here we return to Thamus’s warning. The act of translating concepts like “justice” involves reduction and change. In the context of transitional justice, then, the proclaimed “cure” (delivering justice) is also poison, a “remedy” that redacts, erases, decontextualizes, and misrepresents everyday experience, practice, and understandings (see also Zulver, this issue).

But the translations of prevention go far beyond justice, encompassing domains such as peacebuilding (UNTAC), human rights (via Buddhist idioms), democratization, and so forth. Sadly, the issue of translation -- and related questions about lived experience and practice -- is often ignored in the corresponding literatures, especially prevention studies. Medusa lurks, haunting our words.

Genocide as Pharmakon: Endings that are Beginnings
Genocide prevention, in all its modalities, is often depicted as a straight-forward good, a shared

33 Day 35, 55-56; Khmer 45.
cause in need of little critical reflection since it is an obvious life-and-death imperative.

As this essay this has shown, the situation is less straightforward, since prevention – and I have discussed what are sometimes referred to as “upstream” (legal promulgation of Convention) and “downstream” (international justice) mechanisms – is pharmakon, a remedy that is also part poison, sometimes dangerously so.

I have provided a few examples. There are many more. Thoth, for example, is also the god of numbers. Like the written word, numbers are articulations that foreground and background, redacting aspects of reality even as they are fetishized – numbers fetish! – as “hard” data. Thamus’s warning is relevant here as well.\(^34\)

Earlier I spoke of not just prevention, but genocide as pharmakon. And indeed, this notion could be applied to genocide more broadly. Here are a few last brief inflections, considered through the second story, the ECCC verdict.

Nuon Chea, genocidaire, claims to be a hero. Or at least he contends that, like his comrades, he acted for noble purposes: the alleviation of oppression and poverty, the creation of a society free from imperialist and class-based domination, the collapse of the distinction between the rich and the poor. His defense was to deflect blame, casting it on others, particularly the U.S. and Vietnam and their lackeys. In his rendering, he was a tragic hero, largely misunderstood and scapegoated – a pharmakon defense.

Here is a perhaps controversial inflection of genocide as pharmakon: the notion that genocide can be committed in the name of the good.\(^35\) This idea grates on the ear, tears at our sense of morality. But, sadly, as much research has shown, there is a moral logic to genocide, as mass murder is legitimated as “remedy” (as is the genocide preventer’s destruction of the genocidaire), a targeting cure to sociopolitical woes. It is, of course, a poisonous “cure” since the groups were demonized as impure and targeted for elimination.

More broadly, drawing on scholars like Stiegler,\(^36\) we might consider technology -- like the written word -- as pharmakon: an exteriorization that has the potential to transform humanity. Pharmakon as technology converges with pharmakon as recipe in the notion of social engineering: a “plan” or design to transform (a poisoned) society into a new (cured) state. Of course, the cure (social engineering) for the poison (the flawed society) is itself not just a cure but poison – genocide. Genocide as pharmakon.

Genocide, technology, and pharmakon intersect in other ways, perhaps most famously in Zyklon B and industrialized mass murder but also in new modalities like social media that provide both remedy (a source of grassroots atrocity crime alerts of the sort that became famous in Aleppo) and poison (Facebook used for incitement in Myanmar).

What else does Nuon Chea’s pharmakon defense suggest about genocide? He raises the issue of the scapegoat, pharmakos, part of the semiotic family of pharmakon. Ironically, Nuon Chea claims to be a scapegoat. And perhaps in a limited sense he is: someone targeted by law as a symbolic offering of justice for a broad range of crimes committed by a wide range of actors – even if he was a ringleader.

Now we’re back to prevention as poison and cure in its juridical manifestations. So let’s refocus on genocidal process. Even as Nuon Chea claimed to be a scapegoat, he scapegoated others (the U.S. and Vietnam) to cast off (legal) blame. But this scapegoating indirectly implicated him, since the DK regime used precisely the same “recipe” to rid their society of its perceived source of woes.

A laundry list of “poisonous” groups – depicted as linked directly or indirectly to the U.S. and Vietnam – were targeted for “cure,” what Khmer Rouge discourse sometimes referred to as

\(^34\) For critiques of the fetishization of quantitative approaches, see, for example, Brehm and Woolford, Muller, and Sinclair, this issue, as well as Sally Engle Merry, “Measuring the World: Indicators, Human Rights, and Global Governance,” Current Anthropology 52, Supplement 3 (2011), S83-S95. On “upstream” and “downstream” prevention, see Waller, this issue.

\(^35\) On this point, see also Waller, this issue and James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). On how such rhetorics permeated Khmer Rouge ideology, see Hinton, Man or Monster?

being “swept up” and “cleaned” (*boas somat*). It’s not just pharmacists who dispense “medicinal remedies”: so, too, do genocidaires. Both are pharmakoi to return to the conceptual fulcrum of this essay section.

As the aforementioned euphemisms suggest, genocide as pharmakon is often manifest in discourses of purity and contamination and related binaries. And as highlighted in Derrida’s reading and the very idea of pharmakon, *Phaedrus* foregrounds such binaries, including Thamus and Thoth’s dialogue about speech versus writing. Derrida, of course, highlights pharmakon because it illustrates the slippage and implosion of such binary distinctions – just as they collapse in the genocidaire’s attempt to parse good and evil identities, since human beings, like the term pharmakon, contain contradictory qualities that are impossible to contain in reductive categorical definitions.

Genocide as pharmakon. Dispensation. Arrangement and Order. A “recipe” for genocide.

*Medusa’s Blood*

We’ve reached the end of these critical prevention studies meanderings, the back and forth this textual flow. We began and now end with Medusa even as she’s been with us the entire time. She haunts my words and your reading. She is the preventer’s ghost and double -- as well as the critical preventer’s guide.

So, I urge you, always bear in mind the first lesson of prevention: “there’s a Medusa in the room.” It is one that has a doppelgänger, its critical prevention “last lesson” twin.37 Take a look. See what you can discern.

In their different ways, both lessons teach that, as we begin our “digs” and render our articulations, we redact, foregrounding and backgrounding, pushing complexities out of sight – like the multiple dimensions of the story of Medusa condensed into a mythic moment of Perseus’ heroics and glory.

Medusa can also, of course, be read through the notion of pharmakon. Medusa as scapegoat. Medusa as gender transgressor. Medusa as poison (petrification) and cure (her powers weaponized), qualities manifest in her very blood. Medusa as embodying a host of binary oppositions that collapse in her polysemie, like pharmakon in Derrida’s rendering.

This polysemie is a key point at which myth and critique meet, both demanding an “unloosening” (to reinvoke to the etymology of “analysis”) and openness that enables us to see what has been pushed out of sight, the ground of rethinking.

At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that the word “critical” has two key inflections related to its Greek root, *krinein*, which suggest both one who discerns and one who judges. This is a fraught role since discernment may be used in a “judgemental” sense to make normative claims. Indeed, the Khmer Rouge contended that the “science” of Marxist-Leninism had made them all-knowing and thereby legitimated their project of social engineering. We know how that tragedy ended.

In this regard, myth and critique themselves stand in an interesting critical relation. Critique decenters myths that have been flattened into shallow narratives (like the redacted versions of the Medusa myth or the “culture industry” the Frankfurt school unpacked). Myth, in turn, decenters critique that bulldozes complexity in an attempt to “reveal” the truth in a singular manner (like a singular reading of myth and other cultural forms through a Marxist lens or the sorts of claims to truth made by the Khmer Rouge).

In this regard, we might even speak of a mythological grammar of critique, one that, through its polysemie, multivocality, contextualization, openness, ambiguity, reflexivity, and use of juxtaposition and drama, challenges such “judgmental” critique.38 Used together in such a manner,

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38 I would like to thank one of the peer reviewers for suggesting I expand on this aspect of the relationship between myth and critique. On myth, narrative, and critique, see Peter Fitzpatrick, The Myth of Modern Law (New York: Routledge, 2002); George Pavlich, “Dissociative Grammar of Constitutional Critique?,” in Genres of Critique: Law, Aesthetics
each providing a reflexive check on the other, myth and critique constitute a powerful tool for critical inquiry, including the critical preventer’s “digs.”

This point has haunted us since you read the first line of this essay. Pig in a poke, I warned you, the “critical difference” was already there. And so I conclude by returning to this essay’s beginning discussion of Medusa to underscore the point that the critical preventer’s endeavor is a recursive one and indeed has failed if it seems to have reached a fixed end.

We saw how Medusa and her myths speak to the study of perpetrators, since she is at once victim and perpetrator, violated and violent, human and Gorgon monster – collapsing our neat victim-perpetrator binaries and related dehistoricizations (multiple acts of violence before and after “the event”), hero myths (Perseus the hero, also a perpetrator), depoliticizations (remember Poseidon, King Polydectes, and Athena’s machinations and curse), and justice facades (Medea “brought to justice” even as she is a victim to multiple crimes).

For critical preventers, Medusa serves as a warning and reminder: be careful not to become inflated by the glories of convention and heroic prevention. Look for pharmakon, the flip side of the coin. For we, too, run our own epistemological pharmacies. We’re prevention pharmakoi, dispensers of poison and cure.

And so, even as we celebrate prevention’s halting successes and moments like the the 70th anniversary of the UN Genocide Convention that began this special issue, we must bear in mind that they are haunted occasions and therefore that the critical preventer must always remember…

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*The First Lesson in Prevention*

Medusa in the room is us is Me

There


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Bibliography


Salutogenesis and the Prevention of Social Death: Cross-Cultural Lessons from Genocide-Impacted Rwandans and Indigenous Youth in Canada

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Introduction: Social Death and the Health of Group Life

This paper sets out to explore community-based insights into genocide prevention by comparatively examining strategies for group survival developed in communities of Canadian-Indigenous youth and Rwandan student genocide survivors. Of course there are many profound differences in the circumstances that led to these genocides. The Rwanda genocide of 1994 occurred during a civil war and was ended by an absolute victory won by military forces that went on to form the current government – the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). The colonial genocide of Indigenous Peoples on the Canadian Prairies unfolded in a different way. This comparative research is focused on psycho-social responses among genocide impacted youth. In particular, I am interested in the preventative capacity of communities to employ emergent and adaptive practices that foster resilience and allow healthy forms of group life to displace the pre-conditions of genocide.

This work engages with philosopher Claudia Card’s conception of social death which initiated what James Snow has described as a “radical shift in conceptualizing genocide” and an important step toward overcoming the “…fissure between the theorizing of genocide and the marginalized voices of witnesses and survivors of genocides.” Card describes social death as the “…utter loss of freedom and control over one’s vital interests [which] can be trans-generational and thus survive one’s death. Before death, genocide victims are ordinarily deprived of control over vital trans-generational interests and more immediate vital interests.” This paper draws on periods of ethnographic research with the Association des Etudiants et Éleves Rescapés Du Genocide (AERG), as well as with a group of community leaders from an Urban Indigenous Village in Winnipeg, Canada. This research highlights the voices of Rwandans and Indigenous Peoples of Canada who have survived genocides and are organizing locally to address and transform the genocidal potentialities of social death they continue to confront on a daily basis.

This paper flips the narrative of genocidal victimization and instead calls attention to insurgent and transitional practices that are generating emotionally charged inter-generational vitality. A key theme explored in the following section is how fighting social death requires promoting the social conditions that give rise to healthy forms of group life. Practices that promote a thriving group life are considered to be salutogenic – a term deriving from a combination of the latin salus (health) and the greek genesis (origin). In the latter sections, salutogenic dynamics are identified in the practices of cultural adaptation among young people who have been impacted by genocide in both Rwanda and Canada. This approach to genocide prevention promotes what social death

1 In the Rwandan case study, names, places, and some information has been changed to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of research participants.

https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.13.3.1682
assails: social vitality. For Card, “Social vitality exists through relationships, contemporary and intergenerational, that create an identity that gives meaning to a life.” Social death isn’t as much about killing as it is about the “major loss of social vitality,” that in turn destroys positive identities and can result in “a serious loss of meaning for one’s existence.” Card’s approach to understanding genocide “takes the focus off individual choice, individual goals, individual careers, and body counts, and puts it on relationships that create community and set the context that gives meaning to choices and goals.”

Such careful attention to the multiple-levels of intersecting-processes and perspectives has also been central to the development of colonial genocide scholarship. For instance, as Andrew Woolford observes, it has been “a disservice to force Aboriginal experiences of ecological destruction into a framework that acknowledges only the subsistence value of land to a group,” when what is critically at stake in genocide is also the ontological destruction of the very essence of group life.

Building on these and other micro-level analyses, this paper unpacks the theoretical underpinnings of salutogenic approaches that can be applied to thinking about genocide prevention efforts. These theoretical interventions largely underscore already existing community-based solutions that have demonstrated the capacity to prevent genocide and secure the foundations of group life on their own terms. The Canadian and Rwandan contexts differ tremendously and it is not my intention to compare suffering but rather to call attention to the ways that both communities have found ways to survive on their own term. Not only are these powerful examples of psychosocial resilience, they are strategic approaches to counter-acting social death. As Almedom and colleagues describe,

Psychosocial resilience encompasses a dynamic multidimensional set of personal capabilities as well as social and material assets/resources that individuals, families, and communities mobilize to mentally and emotionally embrace “turbulent” change and transformation while maintaining routine functioning without loss of identity, integrity, or core purpose in life that defines them as who they are individually as well as collectively.

The latter part of this paper incorporates first-hand accounts from Rwandan and Canadian genocide survivors. The struggles described by community members exemplify the ongoing contest between the forces of social death and those of group life. In both the Rwandan and Canadian contexts, social alignments based on mutual aid, chosen kinship, and collective ritual are all important features of genocide prevention. These three powerful community-level genocide prevention strategies mobilize a framework that takes into account key findings from research that has focused on local-level sensibilities of coherence as a basis for resilience.

Stimulating Salutogenic Displacement of Social Death

As a branch of “positive psychology” salutogenesis, like much genocide scholarship, builds on insights from survivors of the Holocaust. Victor Frankl perceived that,

“Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man – his courage and hope, or lack of them – and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect.”

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8 Card, Social death, 63.
9 Ibid., 74.
What Frankl knew from his own experiences he expressed by paraphrasing Nietzsche’s famous aphorism “he who knows the ‘why’ for his existence … will be able to bear almost any ‘how.’” Frankl developed and applied the insights he gained from his experiences in the Nazi concentration camps through his “meaning centered” approach to clinical psychotherapy called “Logotherapy.” Antonovsky, in contrast, pursued a more systematic approach to public health among genocide survivors. Antonovsky grounded these research questions in the day-to-day practices of Jewish Holocaust survivors living in Israel, who had been able to thrive in spite of, and in some cases because of, their experiences. These early studies of human health responses to trauma helped pave the way for what is now a significant body of evidence documenting salutary and transformative experiences among survivors of violence sometimes referred to as “post-traumatic-growth.”

Promoting salutogenesis can be understood as a process of essentially reverse engineering the “utter loss of freedom and control over one’s vital interests” characteristic of social death. Social death takes hold when the conditions needed for healthful group life are undermined by fear, uncertainty and despair. Conversely, for Antonovsky “the origins of health are to be found in a sense of coherence.” An individual’s sense of coherence according to Antonovsky refers to a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured and predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement.

This three-part sense of coherence construct has been used as the basis for a quantitative 28-item “sense of coherence scale” as well as a shorter 13-item version. This approach understands human health as a “dynamic-steady state” that exists on a spectrum of ease to dis-ease. There are three sub-components to Antonovsky’s coherence model that reflect key domains associated with salutogenesis: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. Cross-cultural findings using sense of coherence measures have been influential in the fields of global health, establishing that these three dimensions of coherence are valid indicators of durable forms as social vitality and long-term resilience. Recognizing that hope, healing and transformation can and do co-occur on a spectrum that includes despair, violence and uncertainty is itself an important step toward preventing genocide.

Orienting the Micro-Foundations of Genocide Prevention
In the introductory essay to the extensive reader on genocide scholarship Jens Meierhenrich describes the “emphasis on the micro-foundations of genocidal violence” as being of the “utmost importance for second-generation scholars of comparative genocide.” While Meierhenrich’s review does not
include examples from the salutogenesis literature, the sense of coherence approach offers insights into the mobilizing orientation behind political violence as well as the psychological capacity to resist and overcome these oppressive and destructive forces.23

Antonovsky’s early work on the origins of health after genocide took place at a historical moment when the intensification of settler colonial processes in Israel were ramping up systemic displacement, exclusion, and violence against Palestinians in the occupied territories.24 For Antonovsky, the health of the Israeli state seems necessarily embodied in the shared coherence of individual Israeli settlers. In the preface to his landmark 1979 study “Health, Stress and Coping,” Antonovsky describes his friend, colleague and Israeli settler, Abraham David Katz, as someone, who “more than anyone I’ve ever known, embodied what I later came to call the sense of coherence. Unhappily,” Antonovsky continues, “David Katz… was killed at the Suez Canal in the Yom Kippur War.”25 Katz demonstrates that someone’s personal coherence does not prevent them from fighting and killing in war, and suggests it likely helped align and cohere groups of Israeli soldiers who understood themselves as fighting to secure the conditions of collective survival for their people. Local-level violence is always mediated by the ways that groups of people comprehend situations, manage collective responses, and make meaning when they feel that their survival is pitted against that of another ethnic, religious, or political group.

The relevance of engaging genocide prevention at the level of community coherence is highlighted in Lee Ann Fujii’s study of the neighborly dynamics of genocide in Rwanda. In order to understand public violence Fujii calls attention to the ways that complex social interactions are mediated by relationships that can either facilitate or prevent instances of direct violence and killing. As Fujii describes it,

Genocide as a process becomes a temporal and spatial unfolding of ambiguous actions, shifting contexts, and actors with multiple contradictory motives ... Viewing actors dynamically allows us to probe a broad range of people’s behaviour during the genocide, with its attendant contradictions, ambiguities, without the need to box actors into the standard categories of ‘victim,’ ‘perpetrator,’ ‘bystander’ or ‘rescuer.’26

Community relationships can create, maintain, or prevent locally relevant “alternative pathways to violence” from forming.27 When seeking to prevent genocide it is important to become sensitive to the ways that meanings shapeshift across local contexts, creating shared understandings and mutually intelligible feelings. In other words, it is essential to account for the fact that in addition to cognitive understanding, meaning is also felt.

In the decades since Antonovsky’s original work, salutogenic research has expanded greatly with increased attention to both the gender and affective dynamics of day-to-day life. Eritrean-born, Oxford-educated biological anthropologist Astier Almedom has contributed immensely to the study of salutogenesis. In particular, Almedom’s work calls much needed attention to the ways that gender and affect are involved at all levels of community crisis response including activities of genocide prevention.28 Almedom’s work extends and deepens Antonovsky’s model by incorporating qualitative analysis including attention to the role of women and emotional labor

25 Antonovsky, Health, Stress, and Coping.
27 Ibid., 188.
in orienting and sustaining local-level sensibilities of coherence. Almedom’s work marks a shift to a sensibilities of coherence model that incorporates analyses of the powerful affective energies generated in the face of existential threats.

The importance of feelings is certainly not a new domain of knowledge, as Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million points out “academia repetitively produces gatekeepers” that prevent Indigenous women “entry into important social discourses because we feel our histories as well as think them.” For Million “A felt analysis is one that creates a context for a more complex telling.” In recent instances of colonial genocide against Indigenous Peoples, Millon notes that it wasn’t until First Nation’s men and women shared their personal testimony of sexual and other forms of abuse that Canada was put under “an international spotlight for genocidal child abuse spanning a century.” New sensibilities of coherence emerged thanks to “Native women’s personal narratives that explored the racialized, gendered, and sexual nature of their colonization.” As these narratives circulated throughout Canada they brought untold histories and unheard voices to the surface in ways that “transformed the debilitating force of an old social control, shame, into a social change agent in their generation.”

Similarly, complex types of mobilized affective dynamics have been part of reorienting the social emotional dynamics connected to the Rwandan genocide. For many Rwandans, local sensibilities of coherence are encoded in parables and allegory. As Rwandan-Canadian Psychiatrist Deogratias Bagalyshia describes,

> Rwandan tradition provides a set of popular beliefs and practices to which the people of Rwanda often turn in difficult situations and times of great distress... The proverb creates a bridge between emotions, feelings or states of mind suffered at difficult moments, and the appropriate attitude prescribed by Rwandan tradition, to surmount the difficulties caused by this trying situation.

These culturally embedded expressions are part of the community-level sensibilities of coherence in both Canada and Rwanda. These ways-of-knowing the world also inform the relationships that give form to the affinities and aversions that exist in regional networks. Preventing genocide requires incorporating emotionally and culturally coherent analyses that attend to the ways that perceived threats are likely to evolve during periods of social uncertainty. Turning to the field of Cultural Studies provides some useful ways of conceptualizing and exploring how analyzing affective dynamics of these local conditions can inform critical genocide prevention.

**Emergent Prevention and the Structure of Feeling**

The work of cultural theorist Raymond Williams is helpful in seeing how feelings are involved in constituting the foundations of group-life. Feelings give shape to latent patterns of social behavior before they are fully manifest. These preconditions exist as emergent culture. For Williams, “What matters finally in understanding emergent culture ... is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice. Indeed, it depends crucially on finding new forms of adaptation of form.”

This is a critical insight for genocide prevention. The preconditions of overlap with the preconditions for its prevention; both involve profound “adaptations of form” which give rise to shared identities and challenge relations of power. Embedded local actors are sensitive to these conditions of “pre-emergence” in ways that enable them to respond to subtle contingencies

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29 John Parker, et al., *Hope Is the Engine of Life.*
31 Ibid., 54.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
that would be missed by outsiders. Such sensitivity is a necessary part of both identifying and working toward displacing the immediate conditions of social-death. When the preconditions for salutogenesis are undermined this creates the conditions for uncertainty that can create regional power vacuums and lead to for escalatory spirals of conflict. Power vacuums also undermine the spirit of local resistance, making it more possible for genocidal-orders to emerge and allowing the conditions of social death to spread unabated. Accounting for these qualitative tipping-points requires sensitivity to the relative stability and affective intensity of constantly evolving life-and-death scenarios.

The potentialities of day-to-day life change with the rising and falling of affect. Affect refers to life’s emotional energies set in motion publicly and in ways that either increase or decrease individual and collective capacities for action. Williams’ critical insight for genocide prevention is that “what we have to observe is in effect a pre-emergence, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence;” we must, says Williams “explore the concept of structures of feeling.”

When ontological destruction is occurring, political issues are immediately seen for what they are: matters of life and death. As AIDS activist and social movement scholar Deborah Gould writes, “emotion incites, shapes, and is generated by practices of meaning-making.” Gould describes the shared identities that are forged amidst such existential struggle as “affective ontologies” given shape by the mobile affective energies that infuse and inform daily ways-of-being-in-the-world. Naming and responding to things that can kill can be a powerful way to clarify and amplify local sensibilities of coherence. Putting emotionally charged discourses into local circulation can influence collective behavior by creating social alignments in response to collective threats. As emotionally “sticky” tropes circulate through conflicted spaces they stick to people who relate to the manner of expression given to shared feelings often presented as politicized tropes, giving them greater currency, and more exclusionary weight, among identity-based communities. These affective economies are important to mobilizing exclusionary practices, polarizing groups, and intensifying local-level antagonisms.

These dynamics are significantly amplified through social media channels. As defense analyst John Arquilla notes, there has been a paradigmatic shift in the relative power of networks and nations across the globe – a shift that has important implications for genocide prevention. The power of networks creates new potential for approaches to genocide prevention that engage the dynamics of transformational mass participation. Enabled and amplified through digital communications technologies, networked social alignments can create new pathways to action. Affective coherence is critical to both orienting and activating small groups either on to, or off of pathways that lead to genocidal violence. This requires understanding the emotional attachments that align individuals with a perceived collective.

Sara Ahmed writes that,

Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective ... emotions work by sticking figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence).

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38 Ibid., 127.
39 Ibid., 13.
44 Ahmed, Affective Economies, 119.
Approaching genocide prevention through a sensibilities of coherence lens can help identify local thresholds of violence that exist along un-fixed affective edges in ways that can inform how more spatially fixed local boundaries are understood. Such increased nuance helps to account for the ambiguity and ambivalence that can characterize conflicts where ethno-religious political divisions alternate back and forth between being more-or-less fluid or frozen identity groupings. Finding points of shared understanding and felt solidarity can create a basis for shifting the affective valence in an entire community. Strategies of prevention based on affective alignment may also enhance survival opportunities for community members when navigating complex and shifting local conflict conditions including the threat-multiplying effects of climate change.

The Rwandan and Indigenous-Canadian communities case studies examined in the following sections demonstrate cross-cultural practices that illustrate elements of both emergent culture and affective mobilization. First hand descriptions from genocide survivors provide an indication of how these community groups have oriented their own local organizing toward both preventing and surviving genocidal conditions. Finding ways of leveraging the affective force needed to displace the dynamics of social death represents an ongoing challenge and opportunity for genocide prevention studies.

Family, Villages, and the Salutogenic Quality of Kinship

Few levels of analysis more directly indicate the health or illness of regional group life than the day-to-day conditions of life for children. The extensive intergenerational trauma and broken social bonds related to genocide have destroyed many biological families in both Rwanda and among Indigenous communities in Canada. The deadly long-term consequence of colonial policy starkly illustrates Card’s insight, already cited, that “genocide victims are ordinarily deprived of control over vital trans-generational interests and more immediate vital interests.”

The central place of children in-group life is clearly indicated in Article 2 of the Genocide Convention outlining the different ways that group life is targeted through acts aimed at children. In both Rwanda and Canada attacks on children and culturally important kinship networks were foundational to the character of the genocidal assaults on group life. Indigenous youth in Canada became dislocated from their land-based ways of life, kinship relations and cultural teachings as a result of settler colonialism. The Indian Residential School system and subsequent versions of Canadian child welfare policy epitomize the colonial focus on assimilating or eradicating Indigenous group life generationally. In Rwanda, webs of community and familial relations that were once a source of help became a deadly hindrance when the intensity of full-blown genocidal killing took hold of the hills.

The research literature on the psychosocial impacts of war and genocide on children has understandably been focused on the pathogenic outcomes that these horrific processes have on children’s lives and the long-term impacts on their future chances in life. However, in her 2005 review of the resilience literature Almedom notes that “anthropological insight into children’s


49 United Nations, *General Assembly Resolution 260, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, December 9, 1948 (UN Doc. A/RES/260(III)), article 2. This article explains as follows:

Article 2:
(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
experiences cautions against the (pathogenic) ‘universalist’ and ‘apocalypse’ models, respectively, of childhood and war.” As an alternative, Almedom advocates for greater inclusion of “combined models of risk and resilience involving narrative approaches” which contribute to “building children’s sense of coherence, self-efficacy, and resilience.” Such community practices have the capacity to displace social death and cultural destruction with Indigenous-led ways of being-in-the-world that promote what Cindy Blackstock describes as “cultural perpetuity.”

Community-Led Organizing in Winnipeg’s Urban Indigenous Village

The prairie city of Winnipeg, Canada has a population of 800,000 people including a large Indigenous community. Indeed, Winnipeg has the largest urban Indigenous population of any city in Canada, with over 90,000 Peoples from Cree, Ojibwe, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Dené, Inuit, and Red River Métis backgrounds. For many Indigenous youth living in Winnipeg their conditions of day-to-day survival are deeply entangled in systems connected to the ongoing traumas of colonization and in particular, the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) system.

Policies of territorial dispossession, apprehension, and transfer of Indigenous children, and the criminalization of traditional land-based spirituality were all efforts intended to inflict “conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.” These genocidal realities remain embedded in neo-colonial government institutions that McCallum and Perry describe as “structures of indifference.” Indeed, trans-generational transmission of trauma associated with dispossession from traditional territories, destruction of language and culture, and child apprehensions all continue to contribute to poor Indigenous health. Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called “upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies.” Indeed, the presence of negative “social determinants of health” including high levels of incarceration, rampant suicide, and exposure to disproportionate levels of violence all converge to support the thesis that social death continues to be a genocidal threat to Indigenous peoples.

The bleak fact is that twenty-years after the last IRS closed the Canadian child welfare system had more Indigenous youth in care than at the height of IRS operations. Indigenous youth make up nearly 90 percent of youth in state foster care. This translates into more than ten thousand Indigenous young people who have been removed from their homes and separated from their families. These youth “in care” are case-managed as wards of the Canadian state, living in arrangements that vary widely, although some of the broadest pathways available lead directly to

50 Almedom, All paths, 259.
51 Ibid., 260.
54 McCallum and Perry, Structures of Indifference


This situation regarding Indigenous youth in care has become recognized by all parties involved as untenable. While governments continue to flounder, community-leaders are advocating responses that can be understood as re-establishing local sensibilities of coherence. In Winnipeg, “The Village” has become a common referent, which encompasses a variety of local solutions to a plethora of community-specific problems. The Village does the work of creating salutogenic conditions for the youth, and in so doing, directs vital energy away from the domains of social death, and toward the aims of life

It’s the Village’s role to take care of the children … If we want to change what’s happening with children that’s going to have to come from us. So that means we have to help our neighbors. That means we have to help our relatives. That means we get to work on being good parents, good uncles, good aunties. But not just for our family but also for the people who live beside us, and for our whole community.\footnote{Champagne, discussion, December 12, 2015.}

Michael Redhead Champagne is an Indigenous organizer and advocate who started an anti-violence initiative Meet Me at the Bell Tower in 2011. Having grown up in Winnipeg, Champagne is acutely aware of day-to-day experiences of street violence, racialized policing, child apprehensions, sexual exploitation, suicide, and addictions that exist within his community.\footnote{Aboriginal Youth Opportunities, “Opportunities,” accessed January 10, 2019, https://www.ayomovement.com/} Champagne is an advocate of Winnipeg’s urban Indigenous-led, “Village.” “The Village,” as it is referred to locally, is a network of urban Indigenous people and their allies living in and around Winnipeg. The concept builds on existing Indigenous culture and includes strengthening local knowledge through the revival of kinship networks, clan systems, and Indigenous languages.\footnote{Kino-nda-niimi Collective, ed., The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2014).} Taken together, these local practices create capacity for community healing, and cultural perpetuity. The aims of the Village can be understood as preventing social death by fostering salutogenic relationships held together by locally relevant sensibilities of coherence.

Working with other groups within The Village has enabled networked responses through which communities can influence the conditions that impact on their own well being. These networks amplify community capacities; when people come together for events like Meet Me at the Bell Tower, they become part of

creating safe spaces for people to share their opinions and their perspectives and their lessons. It’s an opportunity for citizens to see their power. And because it’s not often attended to – and it’s never operated on by elected officials – the community gets to see what we as citizens can do when we organize ourselves … It enriches our community.\footnote{Champagne, discussion, December 12, 2015.}

Youth raised in the child welfare system in Manitoba are more likely to experience gang related violence and to become ensnared in the sex trafficking industry.\footnote{Elizabeth Comack, et al., “Indians Wear Red”: Colonialism, Resistance, and Aboriginal Street Gangs (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2013); Robert Chirmas, “Modern Day Slavery and the Sex Industry: Raising the Voices of Survivors and Collaborators While Confronting Sex Trafficking and Exploitation in Manitoba, Canada” (Ph.D. diss., University of Manitoba, 2017), accessed January 2, 2019, https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/bitstream/handle/1993/32586/CHRISMAS, Robert PHD THESIS.pdf?sequence=45.} These factors have also been identified as contributing to the genocidal phenomena of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The Canadian national commission that was struck to investigate the circumstances surrounding these disappearances and deaths found that these outcomes were part of the ongoing
genocide against Indigenous Peoples.\textsuperscript{65} Genocide prevention in such contexts requires direct forms of community-led intervention.

Champagne grew up in the child welfare system and has become a leading voice calling for community-led responses to the government’s child welfare policy by mobilizing his community to become the village that children need.

The Village has to engage with every single level of government. The Village is critical in building up people’s institutional knowledge to know and understand which jurisdiction, which level of government is required to implement which solution… So what that does is it forces the grassroots community to examine: what is the role [of] these different jurisdictional bodies, or these governments in the solutions that we are beginning to implement right now because we’re not waiting. I don’t have faith in the government-led process. I don’t really have faith in the government, period. We’ve got to save ourselves.\textsuperscript{66}

Winnipeg’s “Village” exercises forms of digital sovereignty through its extensive communications network, a strong social media presence, and the use of internet memes in re-articulating dimensions of culture and identity.\textsuperscript{67} This enables information sharing, maintaining connections, live streaming difficult encounters, coordinating resources, and mobilizing collective actions.\textsuperscript{68} As Champagne puts it, “The advantage of the Village is its fluidity.”\textsuperscript{69}

Village sensibilities of coherence help to cohere relationships that exist both online and offline. This has generated a network of “topological relations,” a development also noted in the anthropological observation that villages have moved past being “bounded units” and are now seen as topological “places enmeshed within amorphous realities significantly characterized by the circulation of people, goods, images, and ideas not moored to any single place.”\textsuperscript{70} In Winnipeg social media channels have created many opportunities for urban Indigenous youth to reconnect with local land-based ceremonies and cultural teachings. These topological connections have been significant in the rise of Winnipeg’s Village and have created what Shields and colleagues describe as new ecologies of affect.\textsuperscript{71} These changing relational dynamics are transforming the preconditions of genocide and salutogenic growth.

\textbf{New Families: Chosen Kinship and Mutual Aid Among Rwandan Student Genocide Survivors}

Ten years after the 1994 genocide approximately 17 percent of Rwandan youth under the age 18 were orphans.\textsuperscript{72} The reasons for the children becoming orphaned include “the 1994 genocide, later massacres, imprisonment of adults accused of genocide and HIV/AIDS.”\textsuperscript{73} In total, it is estimated that there are between 65,000 and 227,500 \textit{Youth-Headed Households} (YHH) in Rwanda.\textsuperscript{74} Research into the day-to-day conditions of over 690 Rwandan orphans indicated that 52 percent felt their relatives took advantage of them. Even more indicated they did not trust their relatives to look out


\textsuperscript{66} Champagne, discussion, December 12, 2015.


\textsuperscript{68} The issue of surveillance and the role of the internet in contemporary genocide is an important and related issue that goes beyond the scope of this paper. For a relevant discussion of some of the implications of “total information awareness” see, Bernard E Harcourt, \textit{The Counterrevolution: How Our Government Went to War against Its Own Citizens} (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

\textsuperscript{69} Champagne, discussion, December 12, 2015.


\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 220.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 221.
for their best interests and 57 percent believed that the community would rather hurt them than help them.75

Based on these and other findings from youth-headed households in Rwanda, Thurman and colleagues suggest that community supports outside of biological family are central to recovery after genocide. “Taken together, these data suggest that family-centered interventions may not be ideal in this setting, thus interventions targeting villages are recommended.”76 While the authors of this study are referring to more traditional Rwandan villages, the foregoing discussion of emergent, topological Indigenous Villages in Canada indicates that there are emergent potentials to be explored further in Rwanda.

In Rwanda, like everywhere else in the world, “children and youth need a sense of belonging to their communities – to neighbors, family and friends who comprise the network of care, protection and identity in their lives. Social connection and emotional support are critical for survival.”77 Some similar manifestations of the inter-generational trauma that has plagued Indigenous communities in Canada can also be seen among Rwandan youth. Many young people witnessed and experienced violence, were displaced from their homes and lost multiple family and friends. Additional complexities exist in family relationships since it is estimated that over twenty thousand children were born of rapes inflicted upon women during the 1994 genocide.78

The Association des Etudiants et Éleves Rescapés du Genocide (AERG) is a community of genocide survivors organized based on a “New Family” kinship model which provides a powerfully unifying sensibility of coherence. AERG functions as an emergent organization that is understood by New Family members to be an important way for survivors to ensure their survival and shape their futures – as well as the future of Rwanda – in positive ways.79 This orientation is particularly significant when considering the self-reported size of AERG’s national network. As described on the AERG official Rwandan website, “AERG is represented nationally at 41 Universities and institutes of higher learning and 484 secondary schools in Rwanda, with a total country-wide membership of 43,398.”80

AERG’s New Families operate semi-autonomously in their day-to-day affairs while remaining connected through an overarching national body and numerous levels of state-involved bureaucracy.81 At the local level New Families are comprised of small groups of between ten to fifteen male and female student survivors. Each New Family appoints a “mother” and “father” figure from their peer group with the rest of the group maintaining sibling-like relations. New Family parents help to mediate internal disputes and take care of the administrative work needed to facilitate the practical interface between family groups at the regional and national-level organizations.82

Each AERG family is made up of three types of members: 1). An effective member who is a survivor 2). An adhérent member who is a student but not a survivor, one who is sympathetic and wants to support AERG, 3). A member of honor, such as a university professor, a business person, or someone who is influential in the society. Someone to whom the organization can turn to for advice and moral support. “Outside these three categories, we have a sage, someone well-respected, members of the family can seek advice from for a member’s better future. The person is called parrain [godfather] or marrainne [godmother].”83

75 Ibid., 226.
76 Ibid., 227.
77 Ibid.
79 Arnold, A Psychological Investigation.
81 Because of issues concerning anonymity I have changed the names of the Rwandan included in this paper.
82 Evidently, the new family structure replicates heteronormative versions in its structure. The importance such heteronormative arrangement for state-management is discussed in Mark Rifkin, When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
In addition to having survived the 1994 genocide many AERG members also grew-up in youth-headed households. As students, AERG members represent a relatively elite group of young people. They have faced difficult life circumstances, but in AERG they have found new sensibilities of coherence which provide the salutogenic supports needed to pursue their education. Many Rwandan youth do not have these opportunities, and in many communities of marginalized youth, the conditions of social death associated with trauma, addictions, stigma, and loneliness are pervasive.84 Youth trying to manage parent-less households are put under enormous pressure to fill in the gaps left by biological families and traditional community-cultural connections. AERG emphasizes the importance of individuals fulfilling their responsibilities to their chosen families, communities, and country. In turn, the collective helps create safe spaces where individual AERG members can process their trauma.

New Families perpetuate salutogenic conditions insofar as they understand individual healing to be part of broader socially transformative processes that will eventually enhance the wellbeing of their entire group. In their organizational structure, AERG shares certain features with other community organizations formed by genocide survivors. In particular, among communities of Holocaust survivors in 1970s Israel, “Individual sense of coherence mattered less in the communal context” where shared supports that “protected the collective” were present.85 Among the day-to-day activities that typify New Family relations are acts of material mutual aid – such as sharing school supplies, or pooling funds – paired with ongoing emotional support. As one interviewee indicated, “If we see someone is worried because he doesn’t have something, we tell him he doesn’t have to feel bad for missing something, you can approach another member of the family and they help you.”86

The sensibilities of coherence that are anchored to these chosen kinship networks also provide a grounded basis for outreach work. AERG members work with local elementary schools mentoring younger children and encouraging youth to work toward preventing genocide and building a collective future. In this sense, AERG mobilizes the affect connected to their genocidal experiences in ways that contribute to creating the conditions of pre-emergence for future generations following them. In ways that echo the work of Indigenous women described by Million, AERG surfaces their private feelings publicly to transform what could be a “debilitating force” of shame and social death “into a social change agent in their generation.”87 New Families help youth to feel a sense of belonging based on trusting friendships and reliable networks that promote life and defend against social death. As one AERG interviewee put it,

We created the families so we can know each other well, and if one of us has problems, we can see how we can help them. There are some who live alone. When that person joins the family, he feels that he’s not alone, he has someone else, another family.

In these families we have a father and a mother – the way it was before. We try to create these families so that we can feel we have parents, even though they are the same age, they are the big person, they take care of us. Some of us have parents who are widowers, they are left with nothing, they can’t help their children – so these families try to do what they would be doing for their children.88

Chosen family structures in Rwanda have created spaces connected by relational webs based on individual experiences of trauma and oriented toward promoting peace and health among communities. After leaving the New Family formation at the end of their university studies, AERG

87 Million, Felt Theory, 54.
members are able to re-integrate into communities and in so doing help disseminate elements of these salutogenic sensibilities of coherence. As a result, networks of interconnected New Families have contributed to the local conditions needed for healthy cultural adaptations to occur. These chosen families are altering the pre-emergent cultural conditions in Rwanda by generating significant networked-capacity for decentralized genocide prevention. AERG’s New Family model is well suited to both combating forms of social death among its members, and also assembling webs of security that are adapted to survival in the volatile Great Lakes region where state-level relations and the alignment of regional military factions can change rapidly. 89

Ritualizing Emergent Community

Of the three dimensions that characterize local sensibilities of coherence (comprehensibility, meaningfulness, and manageability) the struggle to re-establish deeply embedded cultural meaning is perhaps the most profound undertaking within these community groups. AERG members invest significant emotional energy into supporting other members of their New Families to pursue personal and public healing. These practices help to repair the ontological ruptures that the genocide has caused at all levels of society. The role of New Families is powerfully performed during ritualized mourning and burials for loved ones. Locating and burying the remains of loved ones killed in the genocide is a major issue in Rwanda where the connection to ancestor spirits is of great personal and cultural importance. 90 An AERG member described a burial ritual for a member of a New Family who had lost biological family in the genocide whose remains had never been recovered.

Recently a family member wanted his family buried officially, so we had to go there and help him with everything. Which means we helped in everything – at work, at home and with things that required money, and so the burial took place. So we sat with him after the burial, lit some fire, and even the neighbors could see that he had a family and they could join, and everything was cool. He lost a lot of his family members, but we don’t know where they were buried, so we were there to bury people but they were not there. So we all sat together and talked about a lot of things, and all the neighbors joined in and we talked until the morning – and everyone could see that he had a family with him. 91

Such publicly visible rituals are extremely important in rebuilding the bonds of community that genocides always target. Additionally, these public performances signal to others that these individuals are not marginal, or easily victimized, because their new families have their backs. The place-based and embodied nature of these practices highlight the profoundly emotional experience of mourning, as well as the affective power of mourning performed publicly. 92

Traditional ceremonies and other rituals are also central to Winnipeg’s urban Indigenous Village. 93 Ritual gatherings integrate traditional Indigenous teachings and medicines such as sage and sweet grass in public spaces where communities are struggling with direct violence and social death. These ritualized spaces have become safe and accessible points of connection for people trying learn about their Indigenous culture and the legacies of colonialism. Local rituals help develop salutogenic sensibilities of coherence. Creating shared understandings, building relationships, connecting Indigenous youth to cultural teachings, and language skills are all important pre-requisites for community emergence. Champagne describes with detail his attention

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to the affective preconditions that enable people to connect with The Villages shared orientation and begin to feel part of a collective sensibility of coherence. The emotional intelligence of leaders like Champagne has been a key factor in the success of one of Winnipeg’s longest running, independent, Indigenous-led community gatherings Meet Me at the Bell Tower.

Our style, our flavoring, our strategy, and our culture at Meet Me at the Bell Tower… has always been to create an environment before you deliver information. We have to create an environment where people are smiling, people are laughing, people feel good. Medicines are important for that. The children are important for that. They always set the tone right. Like having the smudge, having the drums, having the kids at the front end of everything we do at the Bell Tower.

These ritualized community gatherings mobilize affective energies and transmit inter-generational knowledge needed for deeper and more sustainable forms social organization. Breaking colonial cycles and helping to re-align communities along clan-based teachings has become a transformative strategy. Winnipeg’s Indigenous Village Model demonstrates how emergent organizing can help create pathways with alternative outcomes to the colonial present haunted by the “constant specter of Indigenous death.”

Villages are a basic unit for enacting modes of local governance that are in keeping with – not in opposition to – underpinning Indigenous ontologies. Again Champagne is succinct in his assessment. “I don’t think the way Western institutions or Western culture raised people is conducive to responsibility-based leadership. And the Clan System is all about responsibility-based leadership.”

**Conclusion: Social Death is Incompatible with Salutogenesis**

Communities of genocide-impacted youth in both Canada and Rwanda continue to be leaders when it comes to community genocide prevention that displaces the conditions of social death and promotes forms of salutogenesis. These community groups have also been able to influence national level discourses in significant ways. In Rwanda, the state’s dominant role in narrating collective memories continues to “shape notions of culpability and future possibilities for social change.”

Brehm and Fox suggest that these state-level historical narratives have provided individuals with “a new lens to evaluate their nation’s post-genocide progress,” including shifting blame from individuals to institutions, especially those outside of Rwanda. While the historical narratives in both Rwanda and in Canada may well be shifting, these ideologically laden structures remain implicated in the production of social death either through processes of exclusion or indifference even as they do important work toward reconciliation.

By focusing on the specific ways that local sensibilities of coherence mesh with the conditions of social death, this paper shifted the emphasis from state-level narratives to community practices that generate, promote, and sustain good health and social vitality. These local insights suggest that genocide prevention must increasingly work to identify and engage with the affective edges that serve as thresholds for local violence when they are still “in effect a pre-emergence.” The prevention of social death requires a high level of contextual attunement to local economies of affect as well as sustained attentiveness and accountability to the ways that people’s day-to-day

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94 Here Champagne is referring to traditional Indigenous medicines, primarily sage, sweet grass, cedar and tobacco.
95 Champagne, discussion, December 12, 2015.
96 Fuji, *Killing* 188; McCallum and Perry, *Structures of indifference*, 145.
98 Champagne, discussion, December 12, 2015.
100 Ibid., 128.
102 Williams, *Marxism*, 12.
realities intersect with, and are impacted by, the conditions of social death. Members of Rwanda’s local AERG network and Winnipeg’s urban Indigenous Village, and countless other groups like them, are working to prevent genocide through contextually specific cultural adaptations that provide coherent ways for them to improve their own lives and the lives of their chosen families.

Genocide impacted communities in both Rwanda and Canada are still at risk because of unresolved genocidal preconditions that have been able to persist primarily due to state-level systemic contradictions. Locally however, community practices based on the principles of mutual aid, networked kinship, and grounded ritual are all emergent elements of, and coherent strategies for, creating healthy and sustainable futures that embrace the rich complexities and potentialities that are the essence of life.

Acknowledgements
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Hitler’s Atrocities against Allied PoWs: War Crimes of the Third Reich
Philip D. Chinnery
Yorkshire, Pen & Sword Military, 2018
327 Pages; Price: £25 Hardcover

Reviewed by Timothy Heck
King’s College, London

The Nuremberg trials following World War II brought to light the extensive crimes committed by the German National Socialist regime against civilian and military populations. German violations of the Geneva Prisoner-of-War Convention of 1929 were revealed to be commonplace during the war. Currently, the British Government’s official position is that German violations of the Geneva Convention were spontaneous events. Philip D. Chinnery, in *Hitler’s Atrocities against Allied PoWs: War Crimes of the Third Reich*, attempts to prove they were indeed centrally authorized by Berlin. This is not Chinnery’s first work on prisoners of war. He has also authored two books on Allied prisoners of war during World War II and another on Chinese and North Korean-perpetrated war crimes during the Korean War (1950-3). While the events recounted are emotionally fraught and no doubt war crimes, the book suffers from a variety of structural and research deficiencies which makes the book of limited value to academics and impedes its ability to accomplish its objective.

German atrocities against British and Commonwealth prisoners are the work’s central focus. Chinnery was previously the historian and chairman of the National Ex-Prisoner of War Association. As he states in his introduction, “this book has been written to help set the record straight and to try to educate those in the government who should know better.” Specifically, those who should know better are the British politicians who denied an appeal for monetary compensation to survivors of German prisoner of war camps. By contrast, former prisoners of the Japanese were awarded compensation by those same politicians Chinnery seeks to persuade.

The individualized effort in recounting the fate and tale of British POWs is impactful. The victims are not nameless but rather are revealed to be individuals. Whether massacre survivors, escapees, or downed aviators, Chinnery presents these men as men of honor and individuals against whom the moral repugnance of the German military was visited.

The book is organized into sixteen chapters, plus an appendix, glossary and index. The chapters are largely arranged chronologically. Several chapters are thematic, including a chapter on atrocities against Soviet prisoners of war, the murders of downed airmen, and life in the prisoner of war camps. The appendix consists of two transcriptions of British War Office documents regarding punishment of German war criminals.

The book starts with Germany’s invasion of Poland. Several massacres in Poland are covered, including the Soviet-perpetrated Katyn Forest Massacre. Oddly, the book does not explicitly state in the text that the Soviets executed these Polish prisoners. Readers will find that listed under an unsourced photograph at the end of the chapter. This chapter also includes a section on how the German government treated its own citizens found guilty of small acts of kindness to the Polish prisoners turned laborers in the Reich.

The book’s British focus begins in Chapter Two where Chinnery lays out several massacres and executions of surrendered British prisoners by German units and individuals. The next few chapters are also focused on British and Commonwealth prisoners taken in North Africa, the

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1 Phillip D. Chinnery, *Hitler’s Atrocities against Allied PoWs: War Crimes of the Third Reich* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2018), ix.
Mediterranean, and Italy. The book’s longest chapter is dedicated to the commandos executed as a result of the infamous Kommandobefehl (“Commando Order”). When coupled with the twenty-nine pages later dedicated to the deaths of Special Air Service men, the risks faced by captured special operations forces become readily apparent. The book then examines executed airmen, POW camp life, and atrocities committed at D-Day, Arnhem, and during the Battle of the Bulge. Chinnery concludes by looking at the incomplete postwar efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice. Like other chapters, it is largely on British efforts.

Only one chapter, a mere seventeen pages in length, is dedicated to atrocities against Soviet prisoners of war. In the Soviet east, the German Army’s “complicity in...ideological warfare is well-established, particularly at the higher levels.”2 Given the extensive mortality rates among Soviet POWs, estimated between sixty and eighty percent, this chapter should have received further expansion.3 The German atrocities on the Eastern Front are not unknown nor unavailable for reference. This chapter’s scholarship is cursory, largely relying on the recollections of one British witness. While Chinnery briefly mentions the fate of Jewish Soviet prisoners of war, he does not access texts like Shneyer’s Pariahs Among Pariahs: Soviet-Jewish POWs in German Captivity, 1941–1945.4 For example, there are no discussions of the Uman pit (Stalag 329) where tens of thousands of Soviet POWs died or of DULAG-205 at Stalingrad.5 Additionally, the writing is rife with gross generalizations that detract from the book’s value. Soviet POWs are presented as a faceless mass. As an example, Chinnery compares the British and Soviet prison camps as follows.

The most noticeable difference between the Russian camp and the British Stalags was a total lack of discipline among the Russians and another difference between the British and Russian camps was the smell. Apparently the Russian idea of personal cleanliness was clearly different to that in the West when he notes that the other inmates were dark, swarthy-looking men from the east….6

Similarly, in a brief section on postwar Soviet justice, the fate of the soldiers of the German 6th Army after its capitulation at Stalingrad is callously referred to as how “German other ranks also paid for their sins.”7 While there is no doubt the 6th Army committed war crimes during their operations, this post facto judgment of all members of the command is inappropriate in a scholarly work.

The book succeeds in bringing to light some of the atrocities committed against prisoners of war by the German military during World War II. This said, it has three major flaws. First, as discussed above, there is a distinct lack of balance between atrocities committed on the Eastern Front and those against the Western Allies. Secondly, it suffers from a lack of scholarly grounding. While many of the chapters reference research files at the National Archives at Kew, the referencing is done by section rather than inline with the text. The result is anyone seeking to verify Chinnery’s sources will have a difficult time replicating the work. Furthermore, there are almost no references to the existing scholarship already done on the subject. Instead of presenting a focused synthesis, the result is a work that seems largely anecdotal in nature. Thirdly, for a book which seeks to persuade the reader of government-wide complicity in the mistreatment of prisoners, the work lacks a strong legal grounding. While Lord Russell of Liverpool, the Deputy Judge Advocate, British Army of the Rhine, is referenced in the book’s introduction and conclusions, the lack of other legal sources and findings is an oversight which weakens the argument that the events recounted were not isolated incidents. This absence makes it difficult for the reader to draw the dots between the actions of individuals or units and their political and military leadership in the

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2 Jeff Rutherford and Adrian E. Wettstein, The German Army on the Eastern Front: An Inner View of the Ostheer’s Experiences of War (Barnsely, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2018), 201.
6 Chinnery, Hitler’s Atrocities against Allied PoWs, 92-93.
7 Ibid., 102.
absence of documented orders.

_Hitler’s Atrocities Against Allied PoWs_ cannot be regarded as an academic study of the fate awaiting captured Allied servicemen and women. Its narrow focus, socio-political goal, and limited engagement with the historiography prevent it from serving as more than a survey text or springboard. Rather, the book’s value is largely an emotional one. Chinnery attempts to tie the individual fates to a larger argument that the German armed forces and their security force compatriots were systematically responsible for the abuses described in the book. While the individual cases are compelling and some, like the executions that took place under the _Kommandobefehl_, have a clear connection to explicit policies, the book does not succeed in linking its other examples to a larger line of reasoning.
Book Review: *Phenomena of Power: Authority, Domination, and Violence*

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*Phenomena of Power: Authority, Domination, and Violence*  
Heinrich Popitz  
New York, Columbia University Press, 2017  
240 Pages; Price: $60.00 Cloth

Reviewed by Kerri J. Malloy  
Humboldt State University

German sociologist Heinrich Popitz whose work is included in the “national sociological literary canon” of Germany delves into the nature, issues, and forms of power in *Phenomena of Power: Authority, Domination, and Violence.* Initially published in 1986, in German as *Phänomene der Macht,* he seeks to identify the historical premises of power that informs the presumptions of society’s understanding of power. In this publication, Popitz draws on lectures from over thirty years of teaching, reflections on previously published papers to expand on his work *Prozesse der Machtbildung* (Process of Power Formation) and provide additional chapters for this second edition.

Popitz work consists of eight chapters separated into two parts focusing on the forms of enforcement and stabilization of power. To assist the reader a chapter addressing the general conceptual framework to contextualize the analysis that follows is provided. In part one, violence, a threat to authority and the use of technical action to solidify the hold on power are analyzed as forms of the enforcement of power. In part two, Popitz describes and analyzes the processes by which power is consolidated by a few to dominate others and its institutionalization in support of the perpetuation of violence.

Chapter one serves as a primer to the monograph and provides a general framework to use as a reference for analyzing the phenomena of power. Popitz positions power as an essential “element of the human condition, fundamentally affecting the very essence of human sociability.” Using a historical lens Popitz frames the problematization of power as a human fashioned reality that influences the structure of society. Power ubiquitously forms a transparent layer that society sees through and translates the centralized structures and institutions of everyday life. By exercising power at the upper levels of social hierarchy, limitations are placed on the freedoms of individuals in the lower strata. The ability of individuals to assert power based on their positionality in society is explored in the context of anthropological understandings of the power of asserting oneself against external forces. In asserting oneself, an individual is demonstrating the primacy of their power through action. The instrumentalization of power is the mobilization of punishment and rewards for oneself and others. Identifying alternatives to punishment and reward that influences the behavior of others to form the basis for authoritarian power. Power can be modified to the situation increasing and decreasing the freedoms of individuals directly and indirectly within the constraints of societal structures.

Part I examines the forms of enforcement starting with violence, the role of threats, and exploring the need for authority. Chapter two focuses on violence as a means of the enforcement of power through the infliction of harm. Those that exert violence are subjecting others to a consequence that is outside of their control. The vulnerability to violence, the anxiety, and fear that accompany it, is not something that can be ignored and is ever present in an individual’s consciousness. The ultimate manifestation of violence is killing which according to Popitz shows

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2 Ibid., 1.
3 Ibid., 9.
that “all violence has its own termination.”\(^4\) In chapter three, Popitz provides a detailed analysis of instrumental power, threatening and being threatened. Actions of individuals can be guided by the generation of fear through threats of the infliction of harm, whether it be physical, economic, or emotional. Being the subject of a threat or threatening behavior shapes the consciousness with which an individual determines how to react to a given situation in the presence of what is perceived as an authority figure. Building on the connection between fear and authority, Chapters four and five explore the nature of societal and individual bonds to authority. Authoritative power grows from the relationship between those who can achieve recognition, shape the perspectives, and whose acknowledgment provides the sense of self to others.\(^5\) Popitz argues, “authority is a form of superiority that, when it becomes reciprocal, can be converted into a relationship of a particular nature,” in which the approval of the authority figure becomes the motivating factor for individuals.\(^6\) In chapter six Popitz brings together the preceding chapters to demonstrate how violence, threats, and authority can be employed to modify societal structures to produce actions.

Part II focuses on the process and institutionalization of the formations of power. Chapter 7 considers the question of “How does it happen that a few gain power over many?” in ways that are obvious and expected.\(^7\) Using the examples of power formation on a ship, prisoner’s camp and in a boarding school, Popitz demonstrates how the capacity for organization, exclusive power, and the process by which orders are recognized provide legitimacy to those who seize power. In chapter eight, he examines the institutionalization of power in the context of the factors of its formation. Depersonalization, formalization, and integration increase as power becomes institutionalized providing stability necessary for growth and legitimacy. As power becomes increasingly centralized and routinized, its institutionalization becomes the norm within the societal structure.

*Phenomena of Power* lends itself for use by faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and others who have an interest in the relationship between how society understands, complies with, challenges and institutionalizes power. For the layperson who has an interest and a general understanding of the nature and dynamics of power, this work offers an accessible means to develop further knowledge of the subject.

\(^4\) Ibid., 32.  
\(^5\) Ibid., 93.  
\(^6\) Ibid., 111.  
\(^7\) Ibid., 131.
In his 2012 article, “Critical Genocide Studies,” Alexander Laban Hinton wrote, “As the outlines of the field [of genocide studies] emerge more clearly, the time is right to engage in critical reflections about the state of the field, or what might be called critical genocide studies. The goal is not to be critical in a negative sense but to consider, even as a canon becomes ensconced, what is said and unsaid, who has voice and who is silenced, and how such questions may be linked to issues of power and knowledge.”1

In his significant text, *The Politics of Annihilation: A Genealogy of Genocide*, Benjamin Meiches answers this call with a novel approach to analyzing the ways in which ideas, concepts, and understandings about what genocide is and how it is to be prevented have become entrenched politically and intellectually. At the center of this analysis is what Meiches refers to throughout his text as the hegemonic understanding of genocide. For Meiches the hegemonic understanding of genocide is formed by the “dominant series of assumptions and practices” that exist as part of a belief that “genocide is a self-evident concept…supported by strong presumptions about meaning, language, and law.”2 Furthermore, the hegemonic understanding is not limited to a single definition of the concept of genocide, but rather “a form of discursive practice within the politics of genocide, which operates as if the concept of genocide may be defined by more or less objective criteria, has stable political implications, and can be used to set up a static taxonomy or hierarchy for governing mass atrocities.”3

Using what Michel Foucault describes as *genealogy*, Meiches set out to evaluate the process by which the concept of genocide has become intelligible as such in the present. *The Politics of Annihilation* is divided into two main parts, “The Concept and Its Power” and “The Politics of Genocide.” In the first part, Meiches explores the different components of the concept of genocide—including groups, mereology (or the part/whole distinction), destruction, and desire—as they have developed, evolved, interacted, and become generally accepted. Meiches writes that it is through the interactions of these components across time that “render the concept intelligible, meaningful, and actionable in global politics.”4 As Meiches demonstrates in the four chapters that make up the first part of his text, it is also through interactions with the four components of the concept of genocide in politics and law that a hegemonic understanding of genocide has emerged, one that synonymizes genocide with mass killing when perpetrated through direct physical violence against ethno-religious groups.

As Meiches articulates, this is problematic because it is exclusionary; it places groups and identities that do not conform to those protected outside the possibility of genocide, while also restricting genocide to mean only one type of violence and its variants. Relatedly, it also produces a

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 32.
positive feedback loop in which the hegemonic understanding of genocide is constantly reproduced and, therefore, perpetuated. As Meiches argues, by excluding some groups from the Genocide Convention’s protection and reifying nationality, ethnicity, race, and religion as the substantial categories of group life in global politics, the Genocide Convention “constitutes them as standards for the expression of threatened identity. These standards generate powerful incentives for groups to represent themselves (or be represented) within these terms.”

In the second part of his book, Meiches’ connects the politics of genocide, the “multiplicity of discourses, contestations, language games, ruminations, affective and rhetorical strategies, maneuvers, and dissimulations surrounding the concept of genocide,” to genocide as politics, “a mode of political practice or activity that employs a variety of forms of mass violence to target and destroy groups.” In the final three chapters of The Politics of Annihilation, Meiches sets out to evaluate the role of the hegemonic understanding of genocide in the creation of international institutions, international law, and genocide scholarship, which themselves seek to “fix great power politics, norms, institutions, or media sources to align the concept of genocide with the expectations of the performative power declarations that genocide ought to possess.”

Meiches successfully addresses the ways in which the hegemonic understanding of genocide regulates what are viewed as credible and accurate invocations of genocide, which has a productive effect on imagined responses to genocide. Conversely, as Meiches argues, by regulating when genocide may be invoked, the hegemonic understanding “reifies political domination by excluding a priori many claims regarding the intelligibility of destructive processes.” Furthermore, the appearance of genocide serves as evidence of a need to reformulate the international system in a manner that is more “attuned to the types of harms envisioned by the hegemonic understanding.”

In other words, the hegemonic understanding of genocide, involving the mass killing of members of a (legally) protected group, necessitates the emergence of new mechanisms of political control to obstruct occurrences of genocide, including through engagement in armed conflict. As Meiches notes, the reconceptualization of war as a method of humanitarianism “marks a significant break from the prevailing definition of armed conflict by situating the actors, relations, and ethics in new domains.” Perhaps worryingly, depending on the audience, this new form of humanitarian governance, writes Meiches, dislocates localized efforts at genocide prevention while legitimizing the development of new techniques of “humanitarian” violence.

The role of power relations in the development and maintenance of what Meiches refers to as the hegemonic understanding of genocide recalls for me David Luban’s “Just War and Human Rights.” Published in 1980, Luban argues that some states lose their legitimacy and, therefore, their sovereignty, when they violate the rights of their citizens. Meanwhile, states that retain their legitimacy hold the moral authority to decide when other states have lost their legitimacy and to intervene on behalf of the persecuted population. Luban’s article contributes neatly to the hegemonic understanding of genocide by excluding some forms of violence, those more likely to be associated historically or presently with settler and imperial western states, while focusing his attention on violence of the dictatorship as that which may be justly responded to with war by legitimate, i.e. western, states. The hegemonic understanding sits as a foundation to a framework that attaches genocide to a particular meaning, not exactly wholly static, but also not malleable in the way that Lemkin intended. The possibility of genocide is limited to the hegemonic understanding and it is from this understanding that the political possibility for prevention of genocide is generated. The hegemonic understanding of genocide is then constantly reproduced and perpetuated by participation of various actors in international institutions, legal forums, and elements of genocide scholarship that were themselves created out of the hegemonic understanding of genocide.

5 Ibid., 59.
6 Ibid., 9.
7 Ibid., 173.
8 Ibid., 174.
9 Ibid., 175.
The value of Meiches’ research is extensive. It offers significant evidence in support of many of the emerging critiques of the field of genocide studies. Like the dominance of Holocaust studies before, the hegemonic understanding of genocide is stifling. It is a dictatorial and exclusionary concept, as such it denies space for evolution, imagination, and possibility. In response to Meiches’ work, one might question whether there is anything wrong, per se, with a hegemonic concept of genocide. After all, hegemonies do not materialize out of thin air and a hegemonic understanding creates necessary boundaries that differentiate genocide on one side and something else, whether crimes of war or crimes against humanity and other forms of persecution on the other. However, as Meiches’ thoroughly delineates, the hegemonic understanding of genocide is problematic—a consequence of the “politics of genocide.” It gives inalterable and supposedly objective meaning to a concept that is fluid by nature and malleable by necessity.

Meiches also inspires reflective and introspective thinking. Genocide scholars ought to read this book because it is not possible to do so without questioning our assumptions about the meaning of genocide—what is included in one’s understanding and what is excluded—and what this means in relation to the prevention of genocide—which cases warrant recognition and reaction. Furthermore, Meiches’ book will motivate its readers to consider the ways in which we contribute to the maintenance of a hegemonic understanding of genocide. Even those of us who seek to challenge its hegemony may find that we inadvertently and unconsciously reinforce elements of its dominance simply by approaching the subject of genocide through culturally embedded biases that we are often aware of and, much to our vexation, have unintentionally internalized. In this regard, Meiches has ably contributed to the field of (critical) genocide studies in ways that extend beyond the singular uniqueness of his text. Indeed, it is fair to expect that The Politics of Annihilation will inspire and inform the works of scholars yet to come.
This collection of essays by academics and activists provides the first survey of truth and reconciliation processes that have taken place in the region comprising Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Melanesia. Its primary aim is to document and share their experience of truth and reconciliation, offering a framework that juxtaposes the different approaches based not only on geography but also on the idea that human rights atrocities are driven by “clashing historical narratives.”

Underlying this framework is the argument that truth-seeking processes can be leveraged to resolve root causes of conflicts. Truth-seeking is not viewed from an institutional or legal lens. Rather, truth-seeking and reconciliation are captured as an interactive and historical process that gradually weaves unofficial narratives with official ones. Poetry and song feature prominently in this text to demonstrate how this process can occur outside of formal, time-bound governmental processes to address injustice.

The book asserts that truth-seeking processes hinge on civil society’s ability to disseminate knowledge between institutions and the populace as well as between different countries and truth commissions. As such, the volume connects the lessons learned in this region to efforts towards truth and reconciliation with indigenous people in Canada, where the book was published. Many of the authors participated directly in the truth-seeking processes they analyze, which highlights these civil society dynamics.

The discussion is organized by nation and is further divided into sections on different conflicts. It begins with essays on truth and reconciliation in Timor-Leste in response to the atrocities that many have characterized as genocide. The study of Timor-Leste is followed by analysis of an array of truth-seeking efforts in different parts of Indonesia that progress chronologically from 1965 as well as from national to local responses. The section on the Solomon Islands expands on the topic of truth-seeking and reconciliation in conflicts characterized by ethnic tensions. The final case study looks at the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The book devotes the greatest number of essays to Timor-Leste, which sets the foundations for the rest of the book. The analysis of the truth commission final report dissemination process is relevant for anyone with an interest in institutional legacies or historical memory of genocide. Other key themes emerge in this section, including the role of the church in truth-seeking; linkages between international economy, conflict and truth; and the secretive forms that narrative and reconciliation can take even after the throes of conflict subside. These themes reach their most eloquent expression in later sections of the book.

The ingenuity at play in the region is best described in the chapter by Lia Kent and Rizki Affiat on Aceh’s Commission for Truth and Reconciliation. They analyze the benefits and limitations of the world’s first permanent truth and reconciliation commission, which has no temporal limit on its investigations. Their essay also traces how the Timor-Leste experience influenced truth-seeking in Aceh, while capturing Aceh’s unique aspects. In this regard, their consideration of how

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2 Webster, Flowers in the Wall, 46.
the devastating tsunami in Aceh in 2004 influenced truth-seeking is significant, since it coincided with post-conflict assistance. This essay illustrates how truth-seeking unfolds episodically due to political, economic, cultural, and environmental factors.

The chapter devoted to the translated diary of an executed Indonesian political prisoner (Gatot Lestario) in 1965 is an example of the powerful contrasts in the volume between official and unofficial truths. Lestario’s testimony in print for a global audience is the book’s evidence of a state’s inability to fully control truth-seeking, in either time or space.

The strengths of this book are its lyrical style and inter-disciplinary analysis. It is accessible to a broad audience. However, for transitional justice practitioners or specialists, the lack of discussion of holistic justice is striking.³ The book relies on responding to the South African model, and at times employs the dated dichotomy of retributive and restorative justice.⁴ Because there is a siloed concentration on truth commissions, tones of romanticism towards truth-telling occasionally surface in the book.

This reverence for truth-telling is not necessarily misplaced. It helps lead to new and interesting questions about how truth commissions can embrace indigenous forms of truth-telling and begin to consider the environment as a victim/participant. It also challenges us as scholars to consider methods of analysis that are less forensic and more empathetic.

Overall, this book fills a gap in scholarship. Previously these truth-seeking processes in the region were usually studied in isolation. Now there is a credible reference for comparative analysis and practice.

³ Since 2010 the United Nations and many civil society organizations have pursued a policy of holistic justice, or a comprehensive approach. This policy requires a combination of responses to human rights atrocities that are not limited to either restorative or retributive approaches. This holistic approach was in many instances piloted in Timor-Leste, with simultaneous trials and multiple truth commissions. For further reference see, United Nations, Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice (March 2010).

⁴ Webster, Flowers in the Wall, 5-6. On pages 26-27 another chapter references a critique of the dichotomy, but it does not continue to a substantive discussion of how it applied in the region.
Book Review Forum Rejoinder: Anthropology, Critique, and Justice in Translation

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Man or Monster?: The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer
Alexander Laban Hinton
360 Pages; Price: $28.95 Paperback

The Justice Facade: Trials of Transition in Cambodia
Alexander Laban Hinton
Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018
304 Pages; Price: $32.95 Paperback

Doppelgänger. I begin with a confession. The Justice Facade is Man or Monster?’s double. Companion volumes. They stand alone, but each haunts the other. Sabah Carrim and Timothy Williams are ideal reviewers in this regard, each having written thoughtful reviews of Man or Monster?, the first-born of these fraternal twins. Not surprisingly, their reviews directly and indirectly point to the parentage, anthropology and critique manifest in critical genocide and transitional justice studies form.

Carrim and Williams are both political scientists who have done research on the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. But Carrim (law, human rights, and creative writing) and Williams (transitional justice and perpetrator studies) also have sub-disciplinary foci and areas of expertise that lead them to highlight key themes of The Justice Facade and its relation to Man or Monster? in different ways.

Both, for example, note the emphasis on critique. Carrim does so in her first sentence through literary allusion, quoting the novelist Louis Ferdinand Céline, who states “Everything that’s important goes on in the darkness.” This quote indeed speaks to a key aim of both projects: unpacking taken-for-granted assumptions and common-sense knowledge and looking at what has thereby been occluded.

Man or Monster? takes up these issues in terms of the notions of articulation, redaction, the redactic, dehiscence, thick frames of power, and the banality of everyday thought. The Justice Facade, in turn, invokes these conceptual ideas but inflects them through the idea of the transitional justice imaginary and related metaphor of the justice facade.

And indeed, returning to Carrim’s invocation of Céline, we might say that both projects argue for the important of looking at “the darkness” masked by the facade of presumption and the thick frames of power, ranging from the torture chamber to transitional justice.

1 Professor Hinton’s rejoinder to the book reviews by Carrim and Williams should have been published in the same issue as part of a book review forum in 13(2) of the journal. We apologize for the editorial delay and present his complete rejoinder in this issue.


delineates this transitional justice imaginary in detail, highlighting its key assumptions, aspects, and obfuscations.

Williams likewise notes The Justice Facade’s focus on critique, locating the book within a larger “critical turn” in human rights and transitional justice—and I would add peace and conflict studies and critical genocide and prevention studies. He also notes the connection to power, an issue explored in detail in both books through, for example, discussion of the “thick frames of power” (Man or Monster?) and a “discursively-informed phenomenological transitional justice” and the masking and obfuscating effects of the transitional justice imaginary and facade (The Justice Facade).

What, exactly, is being masked? This point is suggested from the start by each book’s cover image. The cover of Man or Monster? highlights articulation and redaction with a defaced photo of Duch, the commandant of S-21 prison, which is graffitied in Khmer and English vernaculars, opaque to non-speakers, which diverge in critical ways.

Likewise, The Justice Facade’s cover features the not yet complete “modern” ECCC court, a project under construction. The blue skies rise above, suggesting aspiration for a higher, even utopian, purpose. Behind the court “facade” stands a hardly noticeable building featuring “traditional” Khmer architectural style hinting at something “local” that is obscured. Likewise, a line of Buddhist “nuns,” dressed in white, stand in front of the court, also barely distinguishable yet also suggestive in this regard.

Here we segue to the second background strand of the companion volumes’ parentage, anthropology. Again, Carrim and Williams discuss this issue in different ways. Williams points to my anthropological approach directly, while also noting in passing that The Justice Facade argues for a discursively-informed phenomenological approach to transitional justice. This phenomenological approach is one area that perhaps could have been taken up in more detail by these two fine reviews and one that inflects more broadly.

And indeed, The Justice Facade directly critiques of universalizing approaches that often dominate not just transitional justice but human rights, development studies, genocide studies, peace and conflict studies, and a range of related and normatively tinged disciplines. As Williams notes, the direct critique of Sikkink’s notion of “the justice cascade” is one way the book does this. But The Justice Facade does so in other ways large and small, building up a broad case that the transitional justice imaginary obfuscates and misdirects us in many ways, not just in obscuring the centrality of Buddhism to how many Cambodians experience and understand transitional justice but also how power and interests are involved and influence the court. Carrim and Williams touch on temporality -- ranging from teleological assumptions to the jurisdiction of the court, which delimits and narrows “the truth” -- as an illustration of this point.

Both reviewers also highlight other ways in which The Justice Facade (with many of echoes of Man or Monster? starting with its graffitied cover) offers not just a critique of transitional justice but

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4 Hinton, Critical Genocide Studies, 4-15.
an argument for and illustration of how transitional justice and international law could benefit from being anthropologically and ethnographically informed and more experience-near. Otherwise, transitional justice risks remaining suspended in the transitional justice imaginary, a point made at the onset in the *The Justice Facade*’s framing preface.

A phenomenological approach, *The Justice Facade* argues, offers much in this regard. On the one hand, it provides a theoretical and conceptual means of escaping lingering transitional justice dilemmas such as essentialism, the local-global binary, and “thin” models of “localization.” To step behind the transitional justice facade, Carrim and Williams both note, we must take account of the intertwined discourses and enactments of transitional justice in contexts ranging from the court itself to rural villages where the mediating influence of Buddhism is extremely important.

Both reviewers point out that the volume raises important issues regarding this process of vernacularization.7 And indeed, the title I almost chose for this book is “Justice in Translation.” It is only through an understanding of everyday experience, understandings, and practice, *The Justice Facade* contends, that we can begin to answer the question with which the book begins: “What is the point of holding international tribunals in places like Cambodia.”

To close, I want to raise one last issue: writing. *The Justice Facade* and especially *Man or Monster?* seek to offer both critique and insight through literary strategies—an issue I have discussed in detail in a 2018 *Journal of Genocide Research* book forum review on *Man or Monster?.8*

This use of literary strategies is most evident in *The Justice Facade*’s Preface, which immediately foregrounds the transitional justice imaginary through a story. The book later uses life-history, narrative structure, and person-centered accounts that decenter the explanatory and directive prose that often dominates our discipline. Indeed, both *The Justice Facade* and *Man or Monster?* use literary strategies to subvert the teleology that often seeps into our hyper-directed exposition. Carrim, who is also a novelist, is keenly aware of such strategies.

So perhaps it is appropriate to conclude with thanks to Carrim and Williams for their thoughtful review essays and the ways they point out how *The Justice Facade*, in indirect conversation with its *Man or Monster?* doppelgänger, explores what is lost “in the darkness.” This endeavor, as Carrim highlights, is at the heart of both books and, I would add, a critical genocide (and transitional justice) studies.

**Acknowledgements**

I’d like to thank Sabbah Carrim and Timothy Williams for their thoughtful reviews and the book editors of *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, JoAnn DiGeorgio-Lutz and Brian Kritz, for putting together this book forum. I’d also like to thank Nicole Cooley for her comments on my essay.

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7 For a broader discussion of vernacularization, see Petty Levitt and Sally Merry, “Vernacularization on the Ground: Local Uses of Global Women’s Rights in Peru, China, India and the United States,” *Global Networks* 9, no. 4 (2009), 44-161.

8 See also my rejoinder to the forum reviews, which also sought to use literary strategies: Alexander Laban Hinton, “Postscript – Man or Monster?” *Journal of Genocide Research* 20, no. 1 (2018), 181-192. This aspect of these companion volumes has also been discussed in detail by other book reviewers, such as: Catherine Bolton, “Book Review: Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rogue Torturer,” *American Anthropologist*, 120, no. 1 (2018), 176-177; and Rachel Hughes, “Book Review: Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer,” *Law & Society Review*, 52, no. 2 (2018), 543-546.
Film Review: Radical Evil

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Das radikal Böse (Radical Evil)
Director: Stefan Ruzowitzky
Germany/Austria, 2013

Reviewed by Raya Morag
The Hebrew University

Radical Evil,¹ Stefan Ruzowitzky’s documentary film, begins with a motto by Holocaust survivor and author Primo Levi: “Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.”² This motto portends the film’s unique representation of the major enigma of the twentieth century, that of the ordinary man who becomes a monstrous perpetrator.

Ruzowitzky, the director (and scriptwriter), a member of the third generation (his grandfather was a Nazi), uses three audial sources to reflect on the enigma of the ordinary man, which is the subject of his film: original quotes taken from the diaries and letters of the Nazi death squads, the Einsatzgruppen, who shot some two million Jewish civilians in Eastern Europe during World War II; (excerpts from) Head of the SS Heinrich Himmler’s Posen speech from early October 1943, given in Nazi-occupied Poland before officials of the Nazi party;³ and interviews with psychiatrists; historians; genocide experts; and ninety-three-year-old Benjamin Ferencz, one of the chief prosecutors at the Nuremberg trials.

The Einsatzgruppen quotes are read by well-known German actors (such as Devid Striesow (The Counterfeiters, and Downfall⁴), Alexander Fehling (Inglorious Basterds and Labyrinth of Lies⁵), and Volker Bruch (The Baader Meinhof Complex and The Reader⁶), whose voices are familiar to German, Austrian, as well as global spectators. In contrast, non-familiar actors reenact the death squads’ lives and deadly acts: watching Nazi propaganda films, vomiting after the first massacre, shaving before the next day of executions begins, and taking pictures together. Their anonymity, symbolizing the faceless Nazi masses, stands in contrast to the familiar voices of the actors who speak “in their place.” I suggest that the perpetrator’s voice, attached to and based on the enigma, and in contrast to the victim’s, is “replaceable” because it symbolizes the non-integrity of the voice’s owner, his denial. Immersed in denial, the perpetrator’s disembodied, replaceable voice is not the expression of the speaker’s inner essence, a guarantee of the Truth. Thus, it signifies an immanent split between truth and its utterance, the voice being the (failed) mediator. The “exchanged” voice becomes that which radically undermines the possibility of self-expression and self-presence, insofar as it reveals the rupture at the core of the perpetrator’ subjectivity. The actors’ voices invest the quotes from the diaries and letters with a dramatization that makes them alive but, due to the self-reflexive irony of their immediate identification as cinematic celebs, paradoxically also keep the horror at a distance. Most importantly, I suggest that it is this uncanny combination of the familiar sound with

¹ Winner of the Avner Shalev Yad Vashem Chairman’s Award at the Jerusalem International Film Festival, 2014.
² The quote is taken from Primo Levi, Reawakening (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 228.
³ The recordings are the first known documents in which a high-ranking German member of the Nazi government speaks of the ongoing extermination of the Jews in extermination camps. They demonstrate that the German government planned and carried out the Holocaust.
⁴ Stephan Ruzowitzky, The Counterfeiters (Die Fälscher), (Austria/Germany: Studio Babelsberg, 2007); Oliver Hirschbiegel, Downfall (Der Untergang), (Germany/Austria/Italy: Constantin Film, 2004).
⁵ Quentin Tarantino, Inglorious Basterds (Germany/USA: Universal Pictures, 2009); Giulio Ricciarelli, Labyrinth of Lies (Im Labyrinth des Schweigens), (Germany: Claussen+ Wöbbe+Putz Filmproduktion, 2014).
⁶ Uli Edel, The Baader Meinhof Complex (Der Baader Meinhof Komplex), (Germany/France/Czech Republic: Constantin Film, 2008); Stephen Daldry, The Reader (USA/Germany: Mirage Enterprises, 2008).

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the unfamiliar image, the gap between body and voice, deed and reflection, that calls for the spectators’ recognition.

The second audial source, the unmistakable recorded voice of Himmler, is intertwined within the Einsatzgruppen accounts and thus assists in enhancing the sensation of authenticity. The third audial source, interviews with renowned researchers (such as the Harvard psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton, the author Christopher R. Browning, and the priest Patrick Desbois7) who attest to the major insights achieved in research during the last seventy-three years, have an accumulating effect. Thus, when the film represents the results of prominent psychological experiments (of Solomon Asch, Stanley Milgram, and Philip Zimbardo) directed at the topic, the camera is located above the experiments, which are presented through minimal graphic means. Providing a high angle gaze, the camera once again raises the question of proximity and distance from Evil and from past events. Ruzowitzky uses a split screen such that a line of boots is juxtaposed with a close-up on the face of one of the soldiers, thus raising both Holocaust iconography and reflexively reflecting on it, while calling for the spectators’ awareness of the pervasiveness of these images. Benjamin Ferencz closes this complex discussion by emphasizing that out of the 3,000 soldiers of the death squads, only twenty-four were put on trial (due to lack of seats at court). Fourteen of them were sentenced to death, but the verdict was carried out in only four cases. All the others served various periods in prison and were released in 1958. According to Ferencz, the court failed in this mission.

In its unique cinematic language, I suggest, Radical Evil adheres to Dominick LaCapra’s suggestion that there is a
tendency to restrict explanations to two broad, binaristically opposed options: (1) the role of industrialized mass murder, bureaucracy, the machinery of destruction, “desk murder,” the banality of evil, and the behavior of ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances and (2) the role of perpetrators as anti-Semitic, cruel, sadistic, gleeful monsters. Moreover, the second option may be criticized solely predominantly in terms of the first.8

This is done by juxtaposing these options mainly through the various uses of sound. In this, though the film does not include a victim’s testimony and thus its presentation of the Holocaust trauma is indirect and non-emotional, its multi-layered presentation of the perpetrator’s figure and symbolic and real voice demands the spectators’ ethical response to the immanent tensions and paradoxes embodied in this enigma. The overall interpretation that arises from the film’s connection between the perpetrators’ audial accounts and the outcomes of the experiments marks the major achievement of this film. When members of the third generation in Germany read the accounts of the Einsatzgruppen they undoubtedly position themselves in their place, symbolically embodying their voice. However, Ruzowitzky’s cinematic language addresses global spectators as well, constantly reminded them that as the catastrophic events that have taken place during the first two decades of the twenty-first century prove, this irresolvable enigma should still haunt each and every one of us.

Title of the Film: Das radikal Böse (Radical Evil); Director: Stefan Ruzowitzky; Producers: Kurt Otterbacher, Wolfgang Richter; Screenplay: Stefan Ruzowitzky; Cinematography: Benedict Neuenfels; Film Editor: Barbara Gies; Sound Designer: Tatjana Jakob; Cast: Devid Striesow, Alexander Fehling, Volker Bruch; Countries: Germany/Austria; Language: German; Year of Production: 2013; Production Company: W-Film; Duration: 96 minutes.

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7 Desbois founded an organization aimed at locating the sites of mass graves of Jewish victims of the Einsatzgruppen in the former Soviet republics and the Eastern bloc.
Adolf Eichmann’s capture is undoubtedly one of the most famous criminal captures of history. A high-ranking, bureaucratic Nazi who engineered the Final Solution, Eichmann fled to Argentina after the end of World War II. Argentina became a haven for Nazi war criminals, protected by a right-wing government. Attempts by Germany to extradite from Argentina Dr Josef Mengele, who had conducted medical experiments on camp prisoners, were unsuccessful.

In 1958, Israel’s intelligence agency, Mossad, received a tip that Eichmann was living in Argentina. It was not until 1960 that Mossad acted on this and conducted an operation to capture Eichmann and bring him back to Israel to stand trial for his Holocaust crimes. Operation Finale [Chris Weitz, 2018] deals not with the life and crimes of Eichmann, or his life in Argentina,1 but the Mossad operation to capture him. Starring a high level cast including Oscar Isaac as Mossad agent Peter Malkin and Ben Kingsley as Eichmann, the film is splendidly acted by all cast, including a serious role for the traditionally comic actor Nick Kroll. Isaac in particular delivers, capturing the internal struggle of a man who lost his sister and her children in the Holocaust but who has to come face to face with the architect of his family’s death and try to extract information — and a signature — from him.

The film starts with the tip received by Mossad from a Holocaust survivor living in Argentina. Lothar Hermann’s daughter Silvia was dating a German boy, Klaus, who lived with his ‘uncle’, Ricardo Klement. But Hermann recognises Klement as Eichmann, and reports this to Mossad. What follows is the most gripping part of the film: the operation to confirm Eichmann’s identity and capture him. It is enthralling because the Mossad team has to identify Eichmann without tipping him off and risking him fleeing. Eichmann is identified by photos taken by one of the agents from a bag, from which the agency compares photos and determines that his ears are the same. The operation then turns to the capture. Eichmann is a man of habit and timeliness, taking the bus to and from work every day at the same time. He is ultimately captured by the team as he walks from the bus stop to his house, put into a car, drugged and taken to a safe house.

After the capture, the movie slows significantly, dragging out the 10 days during which the team had to hold Eichmann in a safe house before they could remove him from Argentina. In this time, the Israeli government requires a signature from Eichmann demonstrating his agreement to go to Israel and stand trial. While some agents try intimidation tactics, Malkin tries the far more effective technique of creating rapport with the prisoner, eventually securing Eichmann’s signature. It is this technique that creates conflict for Malkin, having ‘ordinary’ conversations with the man who engineered his family’s death.

In the film, during this time, Klaus is collaborating with Argentinean police to hunt the Mossad team, a scenario which seems highly unrealistic (that a teenage boy would head up his own police hunt squad?) — and in fact, this did not happen. In the film, the team are almost caught, all deserting the safe house at the last minute, barely evading Klaus’ hunting squad. The agents, with Eichmann, then head to the airport. Eichmann had to be snuck out of Argentina, so this is done with Eichmann in the guise of an El Al pilot, flying a plane of Israeli diplomats back to Israel after visiting Argentina for its 150th Independence Day celebrations. Almost all the team boards


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the plane, and they are ready to go, but the plane’s departure is delayed at the last minute, risking Eichmann being reclaimed by Klaus and his police squad. Malkin has to run back to the airport to file papers that had been removed by a Nazi, and at the very last minute, the plane takes off with Eichmann on board.

The film closes with the trial of Eichmann, with the agents played by Isaac, Kroll and Mélanie Laurent all present. We learn that Eichmann was executed in 1962, and that Malkin kept quiet about his role in the operation until his mother’s death, when he told her that he had avenged his sister and captured Eichmann.

Overall, the film is very close to the reality of the operation. The few cinematic licences taken are that there was no love interest between Malkin and Laurent’s doctor character, who was in reality a male doctor; there was no hunting squad of police with Klaus Eichmann; and there was no last-minute hold up of the plane taking off — it took off without a hitch, heading to Israel. Interestingly, it is the created scenes which are the least gripping and do feel like they do not fit; for example, the love story between Malkin and Laurent’s agent/doctor are unnecessary and add nothing to the story.

Apart from that, the details are accurate, down to the fact that Malkin wore gloves when capturing Eichmann because he didn’t want to touch Eichmann. Scenes were filmed in the original locations in Argentina (e.g. the actual cinema where Silvia met Klaus). In this regard, it is an excellent film to use in an educational context, being largely true to the facts and context of the operation. It also weaves in the psychological challenges for even highly trained intelligence agents when dealing with génocidaires: the internal struggle and temptation to simply execute the prisoner out of revenge for the deaths of their families and the 6 million Jews, rather than return him to face trial. We see Malkin struggling, picturing Eichmann’s direct involvement in his sister Fruma’s death. The temptation is real and at times a too-easy option, but ultimately the team supports each other and ensures that they do not stoop to the Nazis’ level, but rather, apply rule of law and return Eichmann to face trial for his crimes. In his book about the operation, Malkin speaks of them as “professionals” who “realized the best revenge was getting him [to Israel]... that the point of this thing wasn’t just an eye for an eye but justice.”

It is a shame that the film did not touch more upon the aspect of the trial that dealt specifically with Eichmann’s capture. While Eichmann’s trial is of course notable for being the (domestic) trial of a high-ranking Nazi who contributed substantially to the Holocaust, in the legal world it is also renowned for its significant contribution to jurisprudence on jurisdiction. There were two issues of jurisdiction in the case: one, universal jurisdiction (prosecuting someone for crimes committed in a different country); and two, whether it is legal to exercise jurisdiction over someone who was kidnapped from another country. This second head of jurisdiction is obviously highly relevant to the film’s subject matter, as it raises the question of the legality of the very operation that is the focus of the film. Eichmann’s defense contended that Israel had violated international law by kidnapping Eichmann. The issue was even addressed by the United Nations Security Council, which deftly sidestepped the controversy by declaring it an issue between Israel and Argentina, requesting Israel to make reparations to Argentina, and encouraging friendly relations between the two countries. Ultimately, the Israeli court was never going to allow Eichmann a loophole through which to escape trial and punishment, and so it was decided that, regardless of how a defendant was obtained, once

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4 United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 138*, June 23, 1960 (UN Doc. S/RES/138). The matter was amicably closed between the two countries, undoubtedly because Argentina could hardly create an international incident over someone who had committed crimes in the Holocaust.
he was in custody, he could be tried.\footnote{This was not unprecedented, however, as the court made reference to cases from other jurisdictions including England, in which this rule was applied; \textit{Attorney General v Adolf Eichmann}, District Court of Jerusalem, Criminal Case No. 40/61, Judgment, 11 December 1961; see also \textit{Attorney General v Eichmann}, 36 ILR 277 (1968) (Supreme Court of Israel 1962).} Malkin does not touch of this in his book, but it can only be imagined that the appeal against jurisdiction based on their own actions would have affected the Mossad team members; another psychological battle for those involved, which would have been interesting to see portrayed on screen.

\textit{Operational Finale} is available on Netflix, opening access to the story of Eichmann’s capture to a substantial audience worldwide. Netflix is available worldwide (except China, North Korea and Syria),\footnote{Netflix, “Where is Netflix available?” Accessed March 16, 2019, \url{https://help.netflix.com/en/node/14164}.} and Netflix specifically promoted this film; thus the distribution of \textit{Operation Finale} as a form of Holocaust education is very effective, particularly given that it stars the popular and very prominent \textit{Star Wars} actor, Oscar Isaac. In this regard, along with \textit{Schindler’s List} [Steven Spielberg, 1993], based on audience reach, this is surely one of the most impactful Holocaust films. While it may not tell the story of the Holocaust itself, the capture of Eichmann (and other war criminals and génocidaires) is part of the broader process of genocide, a significant element of survivors’ recovery through seeing justice done to the perpetrators of a genocide in which they lost family, community and a significant part of their group, however that may be defined. Thus, bringing to film the stories of the people who bring perpetrators of atrocities to justice is vital. It is also inspirational, likely influencing the next generation to be part of the intelligence and justice mechanisms that contribute to punishment of perpetrators and consequently deterrence of future atrocities.

Title of the Film: Operation Finale; Director: Chris Weitz; Producers: Oscar Isaac, Brian Kavanaugh-Jones, Fred Berger; Screenplay: Matthew Orton; Cinematography: Javier Aguirresarobe; Film Editor: Pamela Martin; Sound Designer: Scott Hecker; Music: Alexandre Desplat; Cast: Oscar Isaac, Ben Kingsley, Mélanie Laurent, Lior Raz; Country: United States; Languages: English/Spanish/French/German; Year of Production: 2013; Production Company: MGM/Automatik; Duration: 122 minutes. Available on Netflix.

A myriad of films about conflicts and atrocities, war crimes and war crimes trials are made each year. Some of them are feature films, and some are documentaries. One of those documentaries is *The Trial of Ratko Mladić*, premiered in November 2018 at the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam. It is a thorough, accurate, multidimensional and nonmanipulative account of one of the biggest war crimes trials in history. As such, it speaks to at least three audiences: those interested in the former Yugoslavia, those interested in war crimes trials and judicial responses to mass violence, and those interested in perpetrators and perpetration of mass violence.

Ratko Mladić, the Bosnian Serb general who commanded the Bosnian Serb Army (Vojska Republike Srpske, VRS) for the duration of the Bosnian War (1992-1995) was first indicted in 1995, by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. The ICTY was established in 1993 by the United Nations Security Council to hold those most responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes accountable. It was an international court, dependent on state cooperation to make arrests. When Mladić was indicted in 1995, alongside Radovan Karadžić, the President of Republika Srpska, a statelet that was being built through violence and expulsion, there was no political will to make the arrests. Mladić was finally apprehended in 2011, in a small village in a northern province in Serbia, in bad health, hiding with relatives. In December 2017, the ICTY closed, just weeks after pronouncing Mladić guilty and sentencing him to life imprisonment. The case is currently on appeal and scheduled to be completed in 2020.

Mladić was charged for a large set of incidents relating to: 1.) the violent campaign Bosnian Serb forces engaged in in the spring and summer 1992, resulting in the death, torture, rape and expulsion of thousands of non-Serbs from large areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2.) siege of Sarajevo, 3.) genocide after the fall of Srebrenica, and 4.) the hostage-taking of UN blue helmets. It was a huge case, years and years in the making, as prosecutors painstakingly worked on lower-level perpetrators, civilian, military, and paramilitary. The ICTY indicted 161 individuals and convicted 89. A number were army officers. For example, the Popović et al., and Tolimir cases dealt with Mladić’s subordinates during and after the fall of Srebrenica. Those cases helped lay the groundwork for the Mladić trial, both in terms of practice i.e. how to conduct and manage a large case, and in terms of content - the evidence - what is that essential proof that needs to be presented by the prosecution to prove a case beyond a reasonable doubt.

This documentary focused on the genocide component of the case, which is understandable given the size of the trial. It would have been very difficult to tell the story of the entire trial in any meaningful way in 90 minutes or so, because the court heard almost 600 witnesses, accepted tens of thousands of pages of documents into evidence and produced a record so large that it would take one individual several years to study it thoroughly. Therefore, the majority of the documentary...
deals with Srebrenica, the only set of incidents the ICTY entered convictions for genocide, and Prijedor. The latter is likely less familiar to readers, even though for those who study the former Yugoslavia, it is well known as a town in north-western Bosnia where the violent campaign to take over municipalities in early 1992 led to mass victimization, detention in camps such as Omarska, Trnopolje and Keraterm, and led to drastic demographic changes and the virtual disappearance of non-Serb communities. As in the Karadžić case, the prosecutor has attempted to prove that events in Prijedor and a set of other municipalities in 1992 were so drastic, so violent and so systematic that they have reached the threshold where they should be considered genocide. The trial judges ruled, in both Karadžić and Mladić that they were not convinced that threshold has been reached. Mladić was however convicted for extermination, persecution, murder, and forcible transfer of non-Serbs from that area. Both cases are currently on appeal.

This documentary is a product of a long-lasting dedication, study and a clear-headed approach. Often enough, documentarians take on, out of the noblest motives, complex trials to depict without dedicating enough time to understand how trials work. Sometimes they get carried away and depict how atrocities take place in black-and-white simplistic narratives and make perpetrators almost cartoonish caricatures, evil to the point where the audience has an easy job, to sit back and judge. This is not the case here. The film draws heavily upon the work of individuals with expertise and does not make mistakes that may pass by unnoticed by most, but that would irritate those that spend their lives observing these trials. This documentary is serious, does not take cheap shots to make grandiose moral points, and is balanced: listening to both prosecutors and defense counsel, survivors and Mladić’s family members. Importantly, at the premiere in Amsterdam, in the Q and A, members of the prosecution and defense were there, and showed support for the film.

What we know about the details of these atrocities in the former Yugoslavia, we know largely because of trials. Millions of documents, almost five thousand witnesses, years of court proceedings enabled us to have the biggest, most thorough collection of material about the war in the former Yugoslavia in the ICTY archives. Amazingly, the ICTY is the only war crimes court that provides extensive access to its evidence material. Of course, not everything is accessible, as some documentation and testimony remains confidential, but much is available, to everyone and for free. Those sources can be used for what Diane Orentlicher called “shrinking the space for denial.” In the recent years, the interaction of history and war crimes trials has been investigated even more, and historians can benefit greatly from using these records. Historians have been central to ICTY cases, and one of them, Robert Donia, wrote a thorough political biography of Radovan Karadžić, based on Donia’s expert testimony in over a dozen trials.

At times, ICTY evidence had a deep impact, challenging long-held views about what really happened, such as in the case of the so-called Scorpions video.

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12 Iva Vukušić. “Nineteen Minutes of Horror: Insights from the Scorpions Execution Video”, Genocide Studies and
The archival material the documentary uses, in combination with contemporary interviews, is an example of excellent use of evidence material. For example, images of Mladić in the aftermath of the fall of Srebrenica show an arrogant man clearly enjoying his victory. It is this kind of footage, which is juxtaposed to courtroom proceedings, and interviews with participants in the process: prosecutors and defense attorneys, Mladić’s son, survivors whose families were wiped out. That is peppered with images of Mladić in the seventies, enjoying family holidays. One of the strongest points of the documentary was in how it treated one iconic image from the aftermath of the fall of Srebrenica. That is footage some readers may remember, of Ramo Osmanović, a man filmed on a meadow after capture as he was fleeing Srebrenica, calling loudly to his son and other Muslims to turn themselves in to Serb forces, telling them they will be fine. Ramo is etched in our memory as only that – a man on a meadow calling for others to surrender, thinking that is their best hope for survival. In fact, it wasn’t. Ramo and his son Nermin were murdered and exhumed years later, in 2009, from two different mass graves: Nermin’s remains were found in Snagovo close to Zvornik, and Ramo’s in Zeleni Jadar, in the vicinity of Srebrenica. Both are now buried in Potočari memorial graveyard, across the road from where the UN was based in the protected area of Srebrenica.

In this documentary, what is shown through interviews with his wife who survived the war, and who testified at the ICTY, are two pictures: Pictures of Ramo and Nermin before the war. In that moment, the documentary reminds the viewer that even iconic images have backstories, and Ramo and Nermin had lives before that footage, lives that were cut short through the violence the trial tries to address. After seeing this film, the image of Ramo in our minds does not need to be only of a scared man on a meadow, who will soon be killed. We see Ramo in another light, and that is important. Ramo was a victim, but he was also much more than that.

What this film shows, albeit only subtly, is the extraordinary work so many people have done in order to conduct these investigations and hold these trials. Although he is in the film just for a moment, on a photograph, pictured standing next to a mass grave, it is worth mentioning the French investigator Jean-Rene Ruez who was in Tuzla just weeks after Srebrenica fell, looking for clues as to where the missing people were. He was the lead Srebrenica investigator for six years, seizing documents, interviewing perpetrators, survivors and family members, and searching for mass graves. Who we do see is Eldar Jahić, an investigator with the Prosecutor’s office in Sarajevo, who spent months on the exhumation of the Tomašica mass grave close to Prijedor. Tomašica is one of the biggest mass graves in Bosnia, and Jahić spent months at the site, alongside colleagues, knee-deep in mud, rain or shine, coordinating the work of getting those decomposing bodies, hundreds of them, out of the ground, to get them cleaned, identified, and properly buried. Peter McCloskey, an American prosecutor, spent a decade prosecuting Srebrenica cases, one after another. McCloskey and his team were able to reconstruct what various actors did in the process of mass executions after the fall of Srebrenica, hour per hour. What these investigators, prosecutors and analysts did to prosecute and punish perpetrators and recover remains, is astounding, and was anything but easy. What we know about Srebrenica and other crimes, and we know a lot, is due to their work.

Finally, for those interested in the former Yugoslavia, there are several recent, or reasonably recent films, both documentaries and feature films, that touch upon some of the topics discussed in this review. First, one documentary and one feature film by the same author, Ognjen Glavonić, a young Serbian director. Depth Two is a documentary from a few years back, and it is notable for two reasons: it is very well researched and accurate, and it is both beautiful and poetic. The film...
deals with the operation to hide bodies of Kosovar Albanians killed by Serbian forces during the Kosovo war in 1998, and 1999. Glavonić’s award-winning feature film, from 2018, *The Load* is an expansion on the topic of moving dead bodies in order to conceal the crime. The film is accurate, beautiful and moving. One feature film exploring the aftermath of violence from the perspective of the perpetrator and his family is Mirjana Karanović’s *A Good Wife*. Karanović masterfully describes just how difficult it is to come to terms with the past in a society that does not want to do that. Finally, the feature *Men don’t cry*, based on real-life attempts by civil society groups to try to help war veterans in Bosnia and Herzegovina live with their trauma. All these are exceptional contributions that bring nuance and humanity to thinking about the war in the former Yugoslavia. War is one of the most extreme experiences any person or any country can go through. These films, along with the documentary *The Trial of Ratko Mladić* successfully uncover this universal struggle, pain and difficulty of dealing with a violent past. Thus, for anyone interested in these processes, this is clearly a must-watch.

Title of the Film: *The Trial of Ratko Mladić*; Directors: Robert Miller, Henry Singer; Producers: Ida Bruusgaard, Jovo Martinovic; Cinematography: Richard Gillespie; Film Editor: Anna Price; Music: Anne Nikitin; Country: United Kingdom; Languages: English, Bosnian, Croatian; Year of Production: 2018; Production Company: Sandpaper Films; Duration: 99 minutes.