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Paradigms of Genocide: The Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, and Contemporary Mass Destructions

By ROBERT MELSON

ABSTRACT: When confronted with mass death and forced deportations, the contemporary world community has often reached for the Holocaust as a paradigmatic case of genocide in order both to make sense of and to condemn current events. This article suggests that the Armenian Genocide sets a more accurate precedent than the Holocaust for current mass disasters, especially such as those in Nigeria and in the former Yugoslavia, which are the products of nationalism. Conversely, the Holocaust is a prototype for genocidal movements that transcend nationalism and are motivated by ideologies that have global scope.

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IN this century, the world has experienced four tidal waves of national and ethnic conflict and genocide in the wake of crashing states and empires. These waves were punctuated by the first and second world wars and by the postcolonial and post-Communist eras. During World War I and its aftermath, as the Ottoman Empire collapsed, it committed genocide against its Armenian minority. In the same period, the disintegration of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires set off *Volksisch*, nationalist and fascist movements that repressed minorities and precipitated World War II. In the context of that war, the Nazis attempted to exterminate the Jews and Gypsies and committed partial genocide against other peoples. Following World War II, as former European colonial empires, notably Great Britain and France, withdrew from their possessions, they left behind fragile regimes that lacked legitimacy. Such so-called Third World governments frequently ruled over culturally plural societies and tried to impose the hegemony of one ethnic group over the rest. In reaction, minorities rebelled and sought self-determination. This led to ethnic wars and genocide in places like Indonesia, Burundi, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Iraq. In the wake of the recent collapse of Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, we are experiencing the fourth wave of nationalist upsurge, ethnic conflicts, and genocide. Meanwhile, it should be noted, the third wave of postcolonial genocide has not yet spent its force.

The Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust are the quintessential in-

stances of total genocide in the twentieth century. In both instances, a deliberate attempt was made by a government to destroy in part or in whole an ethnoreligious community of ancient provenance that had existed as a segment of the government's own society.¹ In both instances, genocide was perpetrated after the fall of an old regime and during the reign of a revolutionary movement that was motivated by an ideology of social, political, and cultural transformation. Also in both cases, genocides occurred in the midst of world wars. These may be said to account for some of the basic similarities between the two genocides, but there were significant differences as well.

The perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide were motivated by a variant of nationalist ideology. The victims were a territorial ethnic group that had sought autonomy, and the methods of destruction included massacre, forced deportations, and starvation. In contrast, the perpetrators of the Holocaust were motivated by ideologies of racism and antisemitism, an ideology of global scope. The victims were not a territorial group,

1. On the basis of the United Nations definition, it is possible to distinguish between genocide in whole and genocide in part. In this article, a total domestic genocide is a genocide in whole directed against a group of a state's own society, while a partial genocide is a genocide in part. Total genocide implies extermination and/or massive death of such an order that a group ceases to continue as a distinct culture. Partial genocide stops at extermination and the annihilation of culture. For further discussion of these distinctions, see Robert F. Melson, *Revolution and Genocide: On the Origins of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 22-30.

and for the most part they had sought integration and assimilation instead of autonomy. The death camp was the characteristic method of destruction.

Though in some essential ways the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust resemble each other, the point of this article is that contemporary instances of partial genocide such as that which occurred in Nigeria in 1966-70 and is occurring in the former Yugoslavia today have more in common with the Armenian Genocide than they do with the Holocaust. This comparison stems from the character of the victim groups, from the ideology of the perpetrators, and from the methods of destruction. As in Armenia (and unlike the Holocaust), in Nigeria and Yugoslavia the groups singled out were territorial and had sought self-determination; the ideology of the perpetrators was a variant of nationalism; and the method of destruction included forced deportation, starvation, and massacre.

The analysis in this article briefly lays out some essential similarities and differences between the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust and then shows how the former bears more of a resemblance than the Holocaust does to contemporary partial genocides such as those that have occurred in Nigeria and Yugoslavia.

SIMILARITIES

The similarities between the course of the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust may be briefly noted. These include the low social status and rapid ascent of the two minorities in the Ottoman Empire and imperial Germany, respectively; the

revolutionary transformations of both empires and the coming to power of revolutionary vanguards like the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in the Ottoman Empire and the Nazis in Germany; the redefinition and recasting of the identities of the majority and minority communities (Turks and Armenians, on the one hand, and Germans and Jews, on the other); and the implementation of genocide following the revolutionary state's engagement in international war.

The Armenian Genocide

In traditional Ottoman society, Armenians, like other Christians and Jews, were defined as a *dhimmi* millet, a non-Muslim religious community of the empire. Their actual treatment by the state varied to some extent with the military fortunes of the empire, with the religious passions of its elites, and with the encroachment upon their land of Muslim refugees from the Balkans and the Caucasus and of Kurdish pastoralists.

Although by and large *dhimmis* were free to practice their religion, they were considered to be distinctively inferior to Muslims in status.² However, in the nineteenth century the Armenians challenged the traditional hierarchy of Ottoman society, as they became better educated, wealthier, and more urban. In response, despite attempts at reforms, the empire became more repressive, and Armenians, more than any other

2. See Roderic H. Davison, "Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century," *American Historical Review*, 4:844-64 (1954).

Christian minority, bore the brunt of persecution.³

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Ottoman sultans were caught in the vise between great power pressures on the one hand and the demand for self-determination among their minorities on the other. By the time Abdul Hamid II came to power in 1876, he had set a course of political and social repression and technological modernization. Nevertheless, he could not halt the military and political disintegration of his regime, and he was replaced in 1908 by a political revolution of the Young Turks, who had new and radical ideas of how to address the Ottoman crisis.

In the first instance, the CUP, the political organization formed by the Young Turks, attempted radically to transform the regime following liberal and democratic principles that had been embodied in the earlier constitution of 1876. They hoped for the support of the great powers for their reforms, but neither the European powers nor the minorities reduced their pressures. On the contrary, they took the opportunity of internal Ottoman disarray and revolutionary transformation to press their demands, and between 1908 and 1912 they succeeded in reducing the size of Ottoman territory by 40 percent and its population by 20 percent.⁴

Concluding that their liberal experiment had been a failure, the CUP leaders turned to pan-Turkism, a xenophobic and chauvinistic brand of nationalism that sought to create a

new empire based on Islam and Turkish ethnicity. This new empire, stretching from Anatolia to western China, would exclude minorities or grant them nominal rights unless they became Turks by nationality and Muslim by religion.

This dramatic shift in ideology and identity, from Ottoman pluralism to an integral form of Turkish nationalism, had profound implications for the emergence of modern Turkey.⁵ At the same time, pan-Turkism had tragic consequences for Ottoman minorities, most of all for the Armenians. From being once viewed as a constituent millet of the Ottoman regime, they suddenly were stereotyped as an alien nationality. Their situation became especially dangerous because of their territorial concentration in eastern Anatolia on the border with Russia, Turkey's traditional enemy. Thus the Armenians, at one and the same time, were accused of being in league with Russia against Turkey and of claiming Anatolia, the heartland of the projected pan-Turkic state.

This was the situation even before World War I. When war broke out, however, the Young Turks, led especially by Enver Pasha, joined the German side in an anti-Russian alliance that would allow the pan-Turkists to build their state at Russia's expense. It was in this context of revolutionary and ideological transformation and war that the fateful decision to destroy the Armenians was taken.

By February 1915, Armenians serving in the Ottoman army had

3. See Melson, *Revolution and Genocide*, pp. 43-69.

4. See Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 153.

5. See Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

been turned into labor battalions and either were worked to death or were killed. By April that same year, the remaining civilians had been deported from Eastern Anatolia and Cilicia, in an early form of ethnic cleansing, toward the deserts near Aleppo. The lines of Armenian deportees were set upon again and again by Turkish and Kurdish villagers who were often incited and led by specifically designated killing squads, *Teshkilat-i Makhsusiye*, that had been organized by members of the CUP.⁶ Those who escaped massacre were very likely to perish of famine. In this manner, between 1915 and the armistice in 1918, some 1 million people, out of a population of 2 million, were killed. Later a half million more Armenians perished as Turkey sought to free itself of foreign occupation and to expel minorities. Thus, between 1915 and 1923, approximately three-quarters of the Armenian population was destroyed in the Ottoman Empire.

The Holocaust

The Holocaust had similar origins, albeit with significant variations. Jews were a traditional pariah caste in Europe that in the nineteenth century began to advance in social, economic, cultural, and political spheres. It is in this context that the antisemitic movement got its start. Initially, it was dedicated to revoke Jewish emancipation and to undermine Jewish progress. Later it

6. See Vahakan N. Dadrian, "Genocide as a Problem of National and International Law: The World War I Armenian Case and Its Contemporary Legal Ramifications," *Yale Journal of International Law*, 2:221-334 (Summer 1989).

spawned an ideology that identified the Jews as a biologically alien tribe that was part of a worldwide conspiracy to control the world. In imperial Germany, however, antisemitic political parties failed to make significant inroads, and on the eve of the Great War, the movement was marginalized and in retreat.⁷

Like the Young Turks, the Nazis came to power after the collapse of an old regime. The German state experienced defeat in World War I, a failed revolt from the Left, inflation, depression, and the collapse of the democratic Weimar Republic. It was this interregnum, starting with the fall of imperial Germany, that enabled the Nazis to come to power.

Led by Hitler, whose charismatic persona and ideology united them, the Nazis were a movement centered on a cult of the Führer and racialist antisemitism. Once in power, the Nazis sought to recast Germany as an "Aryan" nation from which they would eradicate Jews and banish what they called the "Jewish spirit." Between 1933 and 1945, Germans scrambled to prove to themselves and to each other that their lineage had not been "polluted" by the infusion of Jewish "blood" and that their character had not been shaped by Jewish, or even Christian, values.

Indeed, the higher one went in the Nazi hierarchy, the "purer" and more brutal one was expected to be. This attempt to recast one's identity in opposition to a mythical Jew and his *weltanschauung* accounts in part for

7. See Richard S. Levy, *The Downfall of the Anti-Semitic Political Parties in Imperial Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975).

the growing radicalization of Nazi policy. In order to please Hitler and the Nazi elite, various spheres of the party and state began to compete with each other over Jewish policy and over the mantle of who was most radical on the Jewish question.

The Holocaust was implemented in three overlapping stages. Between 1933 and 1939, Jews were defined, expropriated, and expelled from Germany. Between 1939 and 1941, as the Germans invaded Poland and set off World War II, Jews were concentrated in ghettos near railroad transit centers, especially in Poland and the other occupied countries of eastern Europe. Between 1941 and 1945, as Germany invaded Russia, the seat of the supposed Jewish world conspiracy, Jews were first massacred by shooting squads, and later, for the sake of efficiency and secrecy, they were deported to killing centers where they were gassed and cremated.⁸

DIFFERENCES

Like their similarities, the differences between the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust may be plotted along the same dimensions: Jews and Armenians differed in status in the two empires; Nazi racist antisemitism differed significantly from the pan-Turkist nationalism of the Young Turks; and the killing of the Armenians relied mostly on massacre and starvation rather than on death camps.

Like the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the Jews were an eth-

8. See Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1967; new ed., New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985).

noreligious community of low status in Christian Europe. Unlike the Armenians, however, who were the subject of contempt for being non-Muslims, the Jews of feudal Europe became a pariah caste stigmatized as "killers of the Son of God." Thus Jews were not only despised in most parts of Europe; they were also hated and feared in a manner that the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were not.

In the nineteenth century, to the extent that the state became bureaucratic, society meritocratic, and the economy capitalistic, Armenians and Jews began to advance in status and wealth. Indeed, it has been suggested that Armenian and Jewish progress was viewed as illegitimate and subversive, which precipitated antagonistic reactions both in the Ottoman Empire and in Imperial Germany, respectively.⁹

Here at least two variations may be noted. Whereas Armenians were a territorial group that increasingly made known its demands for greater autonomy and self-administration within the Ottoman system, Jews were geographically dispersed, and thus, with the exception of the Zionists who sought a Jewish state in Palestine, most made no territorial demands on the larger societies in which they lived.¹⁰ Instead, to the extent that they accepted the modern

9. See Melson, *Revolution and Genocide*, p. 137.

10. For discussions of the ideological cross-currents that affected Jews in this period, see Jonathan Frankel, *Prophesy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

world, most Jews sought assimilation into the culture and integration into the wider society.

The reaction against Jewish progress, assimilation, and attempts at integration became a European-wide movement of antisemitism, a form of racism that set up unbridgeable obstacles to Jewish inclusion. According to antisemites, like Dühring, for example, not even conversion would allow Jews to become the equals of Germans or other Europeans. Already in 1881, he wrote:

A Jewish question would still exist, even if every Jew were to turn his back on his religion and join one of our major churches. Yes, I maintain that in that case, the struggle between us and the Jews would make itself felt as ever more urgent. . . . It is precisely the baptized Jews who infiltrate furthest, unhindered in all sectors of society and political life.¹¹

According to Wilhelm Marr, for example, Jews were not only an alien race; they also constituted an international conspiracy whose aim was the domination of Germany, Europe, indeed the whole world. Thus not only did antisemites found a movement that opposed Jewish progress and assimilation; they also formulated a far-reaching ideology that helped them to explain the vacillations and crises of the modern world. It was an ideology that came to rival liberalism and socialism in its mass appeal.

By way of contrast, no such ideology of anti-Armenianism developed in the Ottoman Empire. Armenians

11. Cited in Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jews in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 273.

may have been popularly despised for being *dhimmis*, or *gavurs*, and later under the Young Turks they may have been feared as an alien nation supposedly making claims to Anatolia, the heartland of the newly invented Turkey. However, even pan-Turkism left the door open to conversion and assimilation of minorities, something that racism and antisemitism explicitly rejected.

Moreover, though the Young Turks may have claimed that the Armenians were in league with their international enemies, especially the Russians, their nationalism never led them to the bizarre excesses that later became Nazi antisemitism. There was no equivalent in the pan-Turkish view of Armenians to the Nazis' hysterical struggle against the "Jewish spirit," which was said to linger in Germany and Europe even after most of the Jews had been murdered. As Friedländer has noted:

It was the absolutely uncompromising aspect of the exterminatory drive against the Jews, as well as the frantic extirpation of any elements actually or supposedly linked to the Jews or to the "Jewish Spirit" . . . which fundamentally distinguished the anti-Jewish actions of the Nazis from their attitude toward another group.¹²

Finally, it should be noted that the death camp, a conception of the Nazi state, was an extraordinary organization, not seen before or since. It was a factory managed by the SS but

12. See Saul Friedländer, "On the Possibility of the Holocaust: An Approach to a Historical Synthesis," in *The Holocaust as Historical Experience*, ed. Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), p. 2.

staffed at all levels by the inmates themselves. Its primary aim was to dehumanize and kill its prisoners after confiscating their property and making use of their labor. Although Jews, like Armenians, perished in massacres and by starvation, the use of the death camp as a method of extermination differentiated the Holocaust from the Armenian Genocide.

It will readily be seen that partial genocide in Nigeria and other culturally plural societies in the Third World, as well as genocide in post-Communist states like Yugoslavia, bears closer resemblance to the Armenian Genocide than to the Holocaust.

NIGERIA

Genocide has been committed throughout the non-Western world, in Indonesia, Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan, East Pakistan, and Iraq. In all of these instances, a shaky and hardly legitimate postcolonial state ruling over a culturally plural society attempted to establish the hegemony of a leading ethnic group over other ethnic segments of society. These attempts at domination provoked movements of resistance and self-determination, which the postcolonial state then tried to halt by force, including massacre and partial genocide.

Nigeria gained independence from Great Britain in 1960. It was organized as a federation of three states, each centering on a major ethnic group. The northern state was dominated by the Hausa-Fulani, the western by the Yoruba, and the eastern by the Ibo. The major ethnic groups jock-

eyed for power at the federal level, while each had its minorities that felt discriminated against at the state level of the federation.

The postindependence government, dominated by Hausa-Fulani Muslims, was resisted by southern largely non-Muslim groups, especially the Ibos. In 1966, after a failed military coup, thousands of Ibos were massacred in northern Nigeria. In 1967, a year after the massacres, the Ibos tried to secede. They called eastern Nigeria "Biafra" and fought a war of self-determination until 1970, when their secession collapsed.

During the war, over a million Biafrans starved to death as a result of the deliberate Nigerian policy of blockade and disruption of agricultural life. Thus, between 1966 and 1970, a genocide-in-part occurred in Nigeria, following the U.N. definition. It is important, however, to recall that what happened in Biafra differed from the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide in that the policies of the Nigerian Federal Military Government (FMG) did not include extermination of the Ibos.

YUGOSLAVIA

A definitive history of the recent and current conflict in the former Yugoslavia does not yet exist, but it is possible to render a provisional sketch. The Yugoslav disaster stems from the failure of the Communist regime to establish legitimate political institutions, a viable economy, and a compelling political culture. After Tito's death in 1980, ethnically based nationalist movements started to mobilize and to demand greater

autonomy, if not yet self-determination. The process of dissolution and disintegration was drastically accelerated with the rise of Milošević, who articulated an integral form of Serbian nationalism and irredentism that called for the creation of a Yugoslavia dominated by Serbia, such as had existed after World War I. This movement frightened the other nationalities and encouraged intransigent elements.

Milošević's integral Serbian nationalism in a context of Yugoslav and Communist institutional decay and insecurity helped to sharpen ethnic enmities, to strengthen centrifugal forces throughout the federation, and to accelerate the processes of disintegration. Thus, on 27 September 1989, the Parliament of Slovenia adopted amendments to its constitution giving the republic the right to secede from Yugoslavia. Thousands of Serbs demonstrated in Novi Sad, fearing for their status in an independent Slovenia. On 3 July 1990 the Parliament of Slovenia declared that the laws of the republic took precedence over those of Yugoslavia; on 22 December 1990 Slovenia reported that 95 percent of the voters supported a plebiscite on independence; and on 25 June 1991 Slovenia declared its independence from Yugoslavia.

A similar march of events occurred in Croatia, which also declared its independence on 25 June 1991. The big difference between Slovenia and Croatia, however, was the presence of a large Serbian minority in the latter. Moreover, no sooner was independence declared in Croatia than the Tudjman regime launched an anti-Serb campaign that would have

alarmed the Serbs even if nationalist elements among them had not been earlier mobilized by Milošević. Now that their kin were being threatened in Croatia, Milošević and other Serbian nationalists could call forth the terrible history of the Ustasha genocide of World War II to mobilize the Serbs against Croatian independence and in support of Serbian irredentism.

After 25 June 1991, when Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence, thereby creating Serbian minorities, especially in Croatia, the Serb radicals, using the cover of the Yugoslav army, launched an attack whose main intent was to incorporate Serbian-populated Croatian territory. To this end, Serbian forces not only initiated hostilities but set out on a path of terrorism and massacre in order to drive Croats out of areas that they desired to incorporate into greater Serbia.

This policy of terrorism and ethnic cleansing was set in motion with even greater ferocity against Bosnia when it declared its independence on 3 March 1992. Indeed, in time both Serb and Croat forces descended on Bosnia with the clear intention of carving up and destroying a state that initially had tried to stand aside from ethnic nationalism and had opted for a pluralist society. But both Serb and Croat nationalists were intent on either carving up and destroying Bosnia or making of it a rump state that would in time collapse. To this end, especially the Serbs, led by Karadzic in Bosnia, practiced massacre, ethnic cleansing, and cultural destruction against those they called the Turks. Taken together, such poli-

cies of destruction on a wide scale are called genocide.¹³

Keeping Nigeria and Yugoslavia in mind, however, it is also important to note the great fear and insecurity that possess everyone when a government is challenged and a state begins to disintegrate. This great fear, especially in culturally plural societies, leads people to seek the shelter of their families and kin and persuades various groups to band for protection and to view each other as potential enemies.

Indeed, before a culturally plural state like Nigeria or Yugoslavia disintegrates, its politics may revolve about various ethnic issues of group status and the distribution of scarce goods, but once a state crashes, for whatever reasons, ethnic groups begin to fear for their lives, as well they should. Once a political order disintegrates, who can guarantee an ethnic group that its mortal enemies will not come to power and destroy it? It is this great fear that has seized all the groups in Yugoslavia, including those Serbs who are the main perpetrators of partial genocide.

COMPARISONS OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE WITH NIGERIA AND YUGOSLAVIA

In both the Nigerian and Bosnian cases, we can see some parallels to the Armenian Genocide. A dominant

13. According to Helsinki Watch, genocide is taking place in Bosnia and other former areas of Yugoslavia. Although all sides have been accused of atrocities, it is the Serbian side, especially in Bosnia, that is charged with genocide. See *War Crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1992), p. 1.

ethnic group in a culturally plural society attempted to establish its hegemony. It was resisted by minorities that attempted some form of autonomy or self-determination. In reaction, the dominant group perpetrated repression and genocide. There are significant differences as well that may be even more instructive, since it is the differences that tell us how genocide varies under different conditions.

The crucial difference between a total domestic genocide, as occurred in the Armenian case, and a partial one, as occurred in Nigeria, can also be seen by comparing the two. Unlike the Armenians, once Biafra was defeated and the danger of secession passed, the Ibos were not massacred or further expelled from Nigeria. On the contrary, there was a genuine attempt to reintegrate the Ibo population into Nigeria when the war ended.

This difference may be due to two reasons. First, although the FMG was dominated by Hausa-Fulani elements, it included minorities in its leadership; indeed its commander, General Gowon, was a Christian from the north. Thus the FMG never developed an ideology of "northernization" or "Muslimization" the way the Young Turks relied on Turkification and sought to create an ethnically homogeneous Turkey. Second, the territorial issue, a crucial element in the Armenian case, was missing. The Ibos of the north were "strangers" and not "sons-of-the-soil"; thus they could not make a legitimate claim to northern territory.¹⁴

14. See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), for discussions of how groups

Moreover, it is significant that the Ibos had their own area, which, except for its oil, the north did not covet. Indeed, the Biafran state was never claimed as the homeland of the Hausa-Fulani in the manner that Anatolia had been staked out by the Turks. Thus a federal solution to ethnic conflict could be implemented in Nigeria, the way it could not in the Ottoman Empire.

Once the Ibos were driven from the north back into their space, and the Biafran secession was defeated, the northern elements in the army and elsewhere succeeded in their major aims. Further massacre and starvation of the Ibos were unnecessary for ideological, territorial, or any other reasons, and the partial genocide ceased.

Two major similarities between the Armenian Genocide and the partial genocide occurring in Bosnia should be apparent. Like the Young Turks, the Serbian, and to some extent the Croat, nationalists are also dreaming of a large state that would include their peoples and exclude other ethnic and national groups. Like the Armenians, the Muslims, an ethnoreligious community making claims to land, are being massacred and driven out by Serb and Croat nationalist movements that seek to incorporate their lands and "cleanse" the area of their presence and to destroy their culture.

validate their claims to status and power. A basic distinction lies between those who have historically dominated an area and migrants who are new arrivals. The first, the "sons-of-the-soil," make their claims on the basis of ancestral privilege; the second cannot. Thus Armenians in Anatolia could make a claim to the land, the way Ibos in the North could not.

However, the status of Bosnia as an independent state recognized by the international community marks a significant difference between the Yugoslav case, on the one hand, and the situations of Ibos in Nigeria and of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, on the other. Neither Armenians nor Biafrans were widely recognized as members of independent states while their destructions were in process.¹⁵

INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS

Some major similarities and differences between the Armenian Genocide and the current wave of mass murder may lie in the role of the international community. The Armenians were largely abandoned to their fate, in part because the genocide occurred in the midst of a world war. During the Cold War, both the Eastern and the Western blocs discouraged movements of self-determination, fearing superpower involvement, and the African states did the same, fearing their own disintegration along ethnic lines. This explains, in part, why the Ibos, like the Armenians, were also abandoned, except for some humanitarian relief.

In the current period, following the Cold War, the international community is giving mixed signals about how it will react to partial genocide. On the one hand, it acted forcefully to limit the Iraqi attack on the Kurds

15. See Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); John J. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

following the Persian Gulf war; on the other hand, it seemed paralyzed to act to halt the partial genocide that was being committed in Bosnia, despite the fact that on 27 and 30 May 1992 the United Nations imposed a trade embargo on Serb-controlled Yugoslavia and on 22 September 1992 it expelled that country from the United Nations. It seems that the international community intervened with force in Iraq because some member states saw their national interests threatened by Iraqi aggression. Since no such clear interests seemed to lie in Bosnia, it was abandoned like Armenia and Biafra before it.

That partial and not total genocide is occurring in Bosnia, unlike Armenia, should be very cold comfort for the world community. Seventy years after the Armenian Genocide and 48 years after the Holocaust, a European state is practicing genocide, while Europe, the United States, and the United Nations are unable or unwilling to halt the slaughter. If genocide cannot be halted in Europe, it cannot be stopped or prevented anywhere else. This then is the new world order that we are facing as we are about to enter the second millennium.

CONCLUSION

The Armenian Genocide, rather than the Holocaust, may serve as a closer prototype for current mass murders in the postcolonial Third World and in the contemporary post-Communist world. In Nigeria and Yugoslavia, for example, as in the Armenian case and unlike the Holocaust, minorities were territorial ethnic groups, aiming at some form of

autonomy or self-determination while the perpetrators were driven by a variant of nationalism, and the methods of destruction involved massacre and starvation. In the Holocaust, the victims were not a territorial group; the ideology was a variant of a global racism and antisemitism, not nationalism; and the characteristic method of destruction was the death camp. Indeed, in the contemporary world, only the Cambodian genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge bears a closer resemblance to the Holocaust than to the Armenian Genocide.¹⁶

On seizing power on 17 April 1975, the Khmer Rouge set about destroying various strata and segments of Cambodian society. These included the urban upper and middle classes and various ethnic communities like the Vietnamese, the Chams, and the overseas Chinese. The killing of ethnic communities was based on Cambodian racism and paranoia—the fear that if such communities were not destroyed, the indigenous Khmers would be submerged by aliens, especially the Vietnamese.

The parallel to the Nazi case becomes more apparent in the Khmer Rouge attack on the urban middle and upper classes. Here the Khmer Rouge were motivated by a global ideology—a perverted form of Marxism—in which such classes played the role of the compradore bourgeoisie that was allied to imperialism and capitalism. Unlike the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire, these classes were not a territorial group making

16. See Melson, *Revolution and Genocide*, pp. 264-67.

claims to the heartland of the Khmers. Like the Jews under the Nazis, according to the Khmer Rouge, these urban classes were an ideologi-

cal category that had to be killed in order to destroy imperialism and to usher in a more perfect world.