
November 2013

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Recommended Citation

Irvin-Erickson, Douglas (2013) "Totally Unofficial: The Autobiography of Raphael Lemkin, edited by Donna-Lee Frieze, Yale University Press, 2013, 328 pp.," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1: Article 10.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.8.1.8>

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol8/iss1/10>

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***Totally Unofficial: The Autobiography of Raphael Lemkin,* edited by Donna-Lee Frieze, Yale University Press, 2013, 328 pp.**

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In 1951, the towering public intellectual Hannah Arendt summarily dismissed Raphael Lemkin's accomplishments. In "all of the societies formed for the protection of the Rights of Man", Arendt lamented, the humanitarian laws after the war "were sponsored by marginal figures—by a few international jurists without political experience". When he died in 1959, Lemkin left around twenty thousand pages of writings unpublished. A New York Times obituary eulogized him and attributed his early death to the strain of his "crusade" to abolish genocide from the world. It was an unrequited passion, indeed. Lemkin coined the word genocide and led a movement in the United Nations to outlaw it. Yet there was not a single publisher willing to publish his writings for fear that the topic of genocide was too limited and the potential audience too small.¹ His papers and manuscripts were carted off to a cousin's basement, unceremoniously. They would eventually make their way into archives, more out of historical propriety than a sense that they were the writings of a seminal jurist. As Arendt summed it up, the effort to enshrine genocide and human rights in international law bore "an uncanny similarity in language and composition to that of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals" which "no statesman, no political figure of any importance could possibly [take] seriously."²

Arendt had a point. The drafting process of the UN Genocide Convention removed much of Lemkin's first proposals. Interests trumped principles, despite Lemkin's protestations.³ Hersch Lauterpacht announced that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a defeat of the very principles it proclaimed to uphold. These documents were so ineffectual for so long that some scholars have suggested that current humanitarian laws and human rights discourse should be dated to the 1970's, not Lemkin's generation.⁴ Arendt overstated her case, however, when she dismissed the intellect of the jurists who wrote the century's humanitarian laws. Granted, Lemkin did not develop a philosophical system from which he derived the concept of genocide. He was, nevertheless, systematic.⁵ Thanks to the dedicated work of Steven Leonard Jacobs and Donna-Lee Frieze, Lemkin's works are being brought out of the archive and into print for the first time, allowing the depth and subtlety of Lemkin's ideas to finally be known.

Jacobs' edition of Lemkin's core writings on genocide (*Lemkin on Genocide*, Lexington Books, 2012) has been reviewed smartly by Adam Jones.⁶ The author refers the reader to Jones's essay, which makes clear that Jacob's volume is a landmark in the field of genocide studies and human rights. Turning our attention to Frieze's contribution to scholarship, it must be said that her edition of Lemkin's autobiography *Totally Unofficial* is nothing short of remarkable. The publication of the book fills a void in our understanding of how the UN Genocide Convention was drafted and enacted. Lemkin's first hand accounts make clear that the movement to outlaw genocide was, in fact, a movement. The passage of the law depended greatly on the pressure that Lemkin's colleagues leveraged on the delegates in the UN and the statesmen of UN member states. In this cause, Lemkin enlisted a legion of supporters acting as private citizens: poets, statesmen, artists, religious leaders, scientists, professors, and civil society leaders.⁷

The only qualm this reviewer has is that the publisher decided to bring out the book as a trade book. This might sell more copies and bring Lemkin's name to a wider readership—which is good. Yet one cannot escape the absence of a scholarly introduction. Frieze, however, was not to be undone. Her expansive knowledge of Lemkin's life and ideas finds its expression in her notes, making her edition a work of scholarship in the highest degree. For instance, she breaks new ground to trace the influence of Martin Buber's theology on Lemkin's explanation of the Jewish response to the Nazi genocide (p. 244, n. 2). In countless places, she provides erudite commentary on Lemkin's literary and philosophical allusions, which are easily missed yet absolutely necessary for understanding the full implications of Lemkin's text. For instance, Lemkin's quick mention of "the Frenchman Focillion" might seem fleeting, but for the student of ideas it is important to know that it was an art historian who gave Lemkin his definition of a nation, not a jurist or a political philosopher (p. 166; p. 255 n. 19).

As the introduction explains, for as much as “Totally Unofficial” was his own autobiography, Lemkin actually thought of the book as a “biography” of the Genocide Convention. From the first pages, he tells us that his family’s existence in the Russian Empire was made all the more precarious because Jews were forbidden from living on farms or in villages. In a section titled “Buying the Right to Live”, he recalls that the family was compelled to pay a prohibitive tenure to the owner of the farm, as well as a large bribe to the local police official, whom the children learned to fear “as a symbol of our bondage” (p. 12-13). In the context of pogroms and antisemitism, Lemkin tells us that he developed a deep sensitivity to injustice and violence from a very young age. The peoples of this region, he repeats frequently, were well acquainted with the consequences of living on the edge of empires. They saw bloodshed and upheaval. They knew purges and persecution. His life work on the Genocide Convention, he writes, was derived from his childhood experience of trying to survive and understand antisemitism and the violence of his world.

In locating the origins of his life’s works in his childhood, Lemkin ascribes the end to the beginning. His writings therefore employ an implicit teleology that is troublesome to the scrupulous reader looking for a historiography of the Genocide Convention. More importantly, the teleology naturalizes his life’s work and suggests that the course of his life was the only course possible. The claim actually undercuts one of the central points he tries to make in the final chapters. The success of the convention, he tells us, rested on whether or not his movement could convince, one by one, the “smaller” states of the merits of the law in order to outmaneuver British, French, US, and Russian opposition. The passage of the convention was not preordained.

The reader senses immediately Lemkin’s despair when Sir Hartley Shawcross, the British attorney general, hollers across the room “Nuremberg is enough! A Genocide Convention Cannot be adopted!” “There was an ominous silence among the delegates”, Lemkin wrote: “I sat with a sunken head at a luncheon table on the terrace of a small café near the Palais de Chaillot. It was an Indian summer, caressingly warm. The sun was shining, but it could not reach my frozen inner self” (p. 157). The next morning, Lemkin was in the office of the Lebanese prime minister asking for support in the hopes of gaining an ally on the drafting committee. Sensing that the British would seek the support of New Zealand to oppose the convention, Lemkin moved immediately to the office of the Prime Minister Peter Fraser, winning his trust and earning the approval from members of his delegation. A day later, Pakistan joined the coalition alongside India. In the words of their delegate Begum Ikramullah, the Genocide Convention “is written with the blood and tears of more than one million Moslems who perished through genocide during the partition of India in 1947” (p. 159). Describing the woman’s beauty and stature standing dressed in a sari, Lemkin writes: “I watched the faces of the delegates when she spoke. It was as if an angel had entered this drab room and touched them with its wings. I saw a sign of preoccupation on the face of Sir Hartley, but I was so elated that I even liked him at that moment. I thought how true was the saying of the ancient Greeks, that only a wounded physician can heal. Here was a delegate speaking for a wounded people, brining these sufferings within the context of present history” (p. 159-160).

Since the manuscript was far from finished, Lemkin failed to include much of the historical context surrounding his account of the passage of the convention. Here is where Frieze is at her best. Rather than taking Lemkin’s account as fact, we find Frieze interrogating Lemkin’s memory of dates, persons, and accounts against the historical record; she points out, among other things, his anachronistic use of the word “holocaust” in conversations he dates to 1942 (p. 247, n 6). But of special importance is the way Frieze makes extensive use of Lemkin’s papers and letters to augment Lemkin’s accounts of the conversations and conflicts he had as the Genocide Convention was being drafted. For instance, she charts the positive exchange between Lemkin and Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Erik Dons (p. 258, n. 3), and she clarifies the opposition to Lemkin’s idea of cultural genocide made by the Chairman of the UN Legal Committee for the Genocide Convention, Ricardo Joaquín Alfaro Jované (p. 249 n. 6). These are only a few examples among many others.

Frieze’s ability to assemble Lemkin’s autobiography into a readable narrative should not be overlooked. The manuscript, as Lemkin left it, was far from publishable. The first challenge was that it exists in several drafts, which are rarely paginated reliably and almost never dated. This makes it difficult to ascertain, from time to time, which versions of text Lemkin considered to be the more completed versions. Complicating matters is that the drafts sometimes match each other, but oftentimes diverge drastically. Many of the revisions Lemkin penciled into the manuscript have faded, but where they are readable another question is raised. Does the editor include these in the final version of the text? What about the places where Lemkin redacted important details or charming turns of phrase? Nor is it all together obvious how Lemkin intended the text to be structured, as the archives include several versions of a table of contents. How should his sweeping descriptions of memories interspersed with narrative fragments and vignettes be dealt with? The editing rules

Frieze applied are somewhat similar to the principles of eclectic textual criticism, where the scholar, presented with multiple versions of a text, considers the variants in each and tries to identify what the author's intentions might have been. The difference, of course, is that such analysis assumes that an original text at one time existed from which the eclectic copies were made. In Lemkin's case, the finished version remains unwritten.

The book will make a valuable addition to the library of genocide scholars, as well as anyone interested in the history of human rights in the twentieth century. It is a must read for those studying the passage of the Genocide Convention at the United Nations. That Frieze could so carefully assemble *Totally Unofficial* into a flowing and illuminating narrative is a gift to generations of scholars to come.

End Notes

1. Tanya Elder, "What You See Before Your Eyes: Documenting Raphael Lemkin's Life by Exploring His Archival Papers, 1900-1959," *Journal of Genocide Research* Vol. 7 No. 4 (2005): 469-499.
2. Seyla Benhabib is right to observe that Arendt was referring to Lemkin. See Benhabib, "International Law and Human Plurality in the Shadow of Totalitarianism: Hannah Arendt and Raphael Lemkin," in *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt*, edited by Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp 219-46. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1979), 292.
3. Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). See also William A. Schabas, *Genocide in International Law: The Crime of Crimes*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
4. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).
5. Douglas Irvin-Erickson, "Genocide, the 'Family of Mind' and the Romantic Signature of Raphael Lemkin," *Journal of Genocide Research* Vol. 15, No. 3 (2013): 273-296.
6. Adam Jones, "Book Reviews: Lemkin on Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* Vol. 15, No. 2. (2013), 233-245.
7. Richard Falk, *Achieving Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2009).