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Critical Genocide Studies

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Over the last two decades, the interdisciplinary field of genocide studies has dramatically expanded and matured. No longer in the shadow of Holocaust studies, it is now the primary subject of journals, textbooks, encyclopedias, readers, handbooks, special journal issues, bibliographies, workshops, seminars, conference, Web sites, research centers, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and a unit at the United Nations. If not yet fully theorized, the discipline is characterized by a number of debates and approaches. As the outlines of the field 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. It is, in other words, a call for 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.

Key words: genocide, critical theory, mass violence, Lemkin, Holocaust

Over the last two decades, the interdisciplinary field of genocide studies has dramatically expanded and matured. Genocide studies no longer stands in the shadow of Holocaust studies. It is now the primary subject of journals, textbooks, encyclopedias, readers, handbooks, special journal issues, bibliographies, workshops, seminars, conference, Web sites, research centers, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, and a unit in the United Nations. If not yet fully theorized, the discipline is characterized by a number of debates and approaches.

As the outlines of the field 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. It is, in other words, a call for 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.

My use of the term “critical genocide studies” overlaps in many ways with that of A. Dirk Moses,² whose important historiography of genocide studies reveals much about the state of the field even if our emphases differ somewhat—mine is more concerned with the decentering associated with Derridian deconstruction and a Foucaultian archeology of knowledge, and his is more concerned with critical theory in the tradition of the Frankfurt School and recent work on empire and world systems theory.³ A handful of other scholars, such as Anton Weiss-Wendt, Donald Bloxham, Daniel Feierstein, Thomas Cushman, Adam Jones, Mark Levene, Jens Meierhenrich, and Dan Stone, have also published works that are partly or largely in the spirit of a critical genocide studies without

using this name. So it seems that perhaps a threshold has been reached where we can speak of a critical genocide studies. My thoughts in this necessarily brief article will be selective, pointing out some of the domains and directions of a critical genocide studies.

Before beginning, I should note that when people sometimes hear a term such as “deconstruction” or “critical” they dismiss it as “postmodern,” “nihilistic,” or “relativistic.” All of these terms are complex and have their distinct genealogies. My view is that deconstruction is a method of decentering and critique, and such critique, in the sense of critical inquiry, is at the heart of the academic enterprise and should be front and center in the field of genocide studies. Such reflection will only make the field stronger and richer.

My perspective is no doubt linked to my own engagement with genocide studies as I approached it from anthropology, a discipline that has had little voice in the field despite offering important insights into genocide. No doubt this is part of the reason why a critical genocide studies perspective has been a central focus of the Rutgers Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights, even as we have been programming genocide prevention, a topic that is often viewed in opposition to or at least in tension with academic genocide studies, let alone critical genocide studies. My own view is that the study of genocide prevention has much to gain from critical genocide studies (and vice versa), but the perceived opposition of academic genocide studies and applied genocide prevention speaks to the scholar/activist divide that is part of our origin myth.

The Origin Myth

Anthropologists like to examine origin myths, and I am no exception. Ethnicity, we tell our students, is a social category linking a group of people who perceive themselves to share ancestry and identity markers (language, food, dress, religion, and so forth). The sense of ancestry is frequently linked to an origin story, which helps provide a sense of solidarity and belonging as well as a sense of difference from other ethnic groups. Ethnic categories are fluid and multiple; thus a person might identify him- or herself (or be identified) as Chinese, Han, Cantonese, Chinese-American, or American depending on time and place. I will return to this point later.

Many other sorts of groups are also bound by an origin myth, which provides them with a sense of solidarity, belonging, and identity. This includes academic disciplines. In North American anthropology, for example, Franz Boas is venerated as the father of the discipline and is known, among other things, for refining the anthropological concept of culture and method of participant observation and for challenging the notion of biological race. Introductory anthropology students often hear stories about his exploits and efforts to demonstrate that race is a social construction, an endeavor that has continued in North American anthropology into the present.

Within genocide studies, Raphael Lemkin is even more revered as the field’s founding father.⁴ Like Boas, he is remembered for his conceptual work (coining and defining the term “genocide” and writing a history of genocide), life history (including his escape from Poland as World War II began and centering on his life-long quest to criminalize the destruction of human groups), and advocacy (working tirelessly for the passage and ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UNCG), of which he referred to himself as “the founder”). In many respects, he has come to be viewed as the prototypical genocide scholar: academically informed yet politically committed to this pressing social issue, an orientation and a tension that continue to the present. Indeed, the tension between scholarship and

activism is the Janus face of genocide studies, one that continues to inspire and divide scholars, as recent controversies over resolutions and the proposed merger of two academic associations illustrate.⁵ One research direction for a critical genocide studies is to examine the origins of this Janus face, which has strong roots in modernity, Enlightenment thought, the anti-slavery movement, humanitarianism, and human rights.

The genocide scholar-activist prototype is evident in *Pioneers of Genocide Studies*,⁶ an important volume of autobiographical essays written by many of the “first generation” of scholars who helped forge the field of genocide studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It also includes an abbreviated version of Raphael Lemkin’s unpublished autobiography, “Totally Unofficial Man.” Many of the *Pioneers* essays are striking for their resonance with the Lemkin narrative of finding one’s calling and becoming passionately engaged in genocide studies and prevention. While this is no doubt partly the result of the framing questions that were posed to the contributors—the first two questions were concerned with what “led” the author to study genocide and how genocide became “an imperative for you”⁷—it seems likely that they, like many other genocide scholars today, see some of Lemkin’s passion in themselves.

Pioneers makes a valuable contribution by chronicling the origins and institutionalization of genocide studies and providing an understanding of some of the varied reasons that scholars entered the field. Many had a direct connection to genocide through the Holocaust or Armenian Genocide; indeed, a few contributors, like Lemkin, escaped from or even survived Nazi occupation.⁸ Others came to the field more indirectly through the experience of the 1960s, the civil rights movements, and human rights activism. By the early 1980s, several landmark texts began to appear, including Leo Kuper’s *Genocide: Its Political Uses in the Twentieth Century*.⁹ The first conferences on genocide began to be held, and an incipient network of scholars was being formed, one that would lead to the 1995 creation of the Association of Genocide Scholars, now the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS). The essays in *Pioneers* are illustrative of genocide studies in other ways, exemplifying the field’s interdisciplinarity and initial concern with a given set of twentieth-century cases, in particular the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust with other mentions of cases such as Biafra and the Cambodian Genocide.

Genocide Studies and the Holocaust

Pioneers also raises a question: Why did genocide studies begin to emerge in the late 1970s? Why not earlier? Or even in the immediate aftermath of the passage of the UNCG as accusations of genocide began to fly soon thereafter? Raphael Lemkin himself sought to indict the Soviet Union for committing genocide during the break-up of the Baltics by kidnapping Jewish children and “working Jews to death in drainage projects” in Romania.¹⁰

While Cold War concerns and politics were involved, this question points toward the other key origin of genocide studies: the Holocaust, an event that shadows the discipline, always there even if sometimes in the background or taken for granted. The Lemkin origin story is a perfect example. While Lemkin’s *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*¹¹ focuses on the Holocaust and indeed contains many important legal documents, it is his chapter 4, “Genocide,” that gets all the attention in genocide studies. Perhaps the Holocaust would have figured more prominently in this origin story if Lemkin’s attempt to push genocide to the forefront of the charges at the Nuremberg trials had been successful. As it was, he left Nuremberg early and devoted his efforts to getting genocide

codified in international law. The promulgation of the UNCG, not the Holocaust, is frequently viewed as the landmark moment in the genealogy of genocide studies.

This narrative elides the fact that, without the Nazis' attempted annihilation of European Jews and other groups, Lemkin's word might never have made it into the dictionary and the field of genocide studies might not exist, Lemkin might have been a forgotten man, and we might very well be talking about "extermination" and "crimes against humanity" instead of genocide. In other words, no Holocaust (as the Nazi atrocities were later constituted), no Lemkin, no UNCG, no genocide studies. For these and other reasons, the Nazis' attempted destruction of the Jews and other groups clearly stands as a watershed event in the twentieth century, one that helped catalyze the human rights regime and led to the emergence of genocide studies.

The origins of genocide studies are also closely tied to another discipline that emerged from the ruins of the Holocaust: Holocaust studies. Even this field only began to emerge after the 1960s Eichmann and Auschwitz trials, the publication of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and increasing efforts at memorialization.¹²

As it grew, Holocaust studies came to be concerned with its own set of issues, including profound questions about uniqueness and representation. In contrast to genocide studies, which has a social science emphasis that I will discuss below, Holocaust studies has been more often linked to the humanities. As *Pioneers* illustrates, a number of first-generation genocide scholars split off from Holocaust studies because of their commitment to comparison, which remains a central theme in genocide studies and is referred to as comparative genocide studies.¹³ Indeed, the discipline's predominant social science/positivistic orientation is frequently concerned with discerning commonalities and general principles about the phenomenon of genocide, a bias that is in keeping with a normative commitment to prevention. (This theme runs through Holocaust literature to a lesser extent, in part because of the uniqueness issue which orients research toward a single past event.) The field's first introductory text, Jones's *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*,¹⁴ embodies this disciplinary epistemology as the bulk of the chapters focus on case studies and social scientific findings, even as it seeks to de-center some of the field's biases.

Disciplinary Orientations, Blind Spots, and Biases

The different emphases of Holocaust studies provide one vantage through which to think critically about and discover new approaches to genocide studies. Indeed, some of the more interesting contemporary work in genocide studies is being done by scholars, in particular historians, such as Bloxham, Jacques Semelin, Moses, and Stone, who came to genocide studies from an initial engagement with Holocaust studies. Their work clearly fits into the rapidly emerging sub-discipline of critical genocide studies. As genocide studies has matured and the influence of the uniqueness argument has waned within Holocaust studies, genocide studies has, in turn, started to enter into the debates within Holocaust studies. The title of Bloxham's recent book, *The Final Solution: A Genocide*,¹⁵ highlights this point.

More broadly, a critical genocide studies would be concerned with exploring other fields—to name a few, indigenous studies, philosophy, cultural studies, visual and literary arts, semiotics, and critical theory—that have important insights to bring to bear on genocide even as they ask us to rethink the existing assumptions of the field. To be sure, there are some scholars from such disciplines who are active in the field. However, their

voices, as well as the larger insights that may be gleaned from their home disciplines, tend to be more muted than historical and social scientific scholarship in the field.

Yet another fertile direction for research in critical genocide studies comes from scholars working outside of the North American and European regions in which genocide studies has emerged. One illustration of this point is Feierstein's work as well as that of other Latin American scholars who are questioning the boundaries of genocide studies from an alternative regional and Spanish-language perspective.¹⁶ Such scholarship helps genocide studies interrogate its possible ethnocentric assumptions and discover new ways to envision the field.

The Anthropology of Genocide

My own engagement with genocide studies, which began in the early 1990s when I began conducting research on the Cambodian Genocide as a graduate student and attending IAGS meetings, has in a sense followed along these lines in terms of approaching the field from an outside perspective. When I attended my first IAGS meeting in 1995 I was surprised to find only one or two other anthropologists in attendance (Robert Hitchcock and Pamela Ballinger, if I recall correctly). Genocide studies was also barely on the radar in anthropology, despite the important work that had been done on indigenous peoples.¹⁷ Likewise, some of the relevant concerns and insights of anthropology were completely outside the orbit of genocide studies.

The cultural patterning of violence provides one illustration of this point. Because of their long-standing immersion in and in-depth understanding of given societies, anthropologists are ideally positioned to provide an experience-based perspective on how genocides unfold, how they are understood by both elite and lower-level actors, and how people deal with the experience and aftermaths of genocide. Thus, on the one hand, an anthropological perspective complicates easy assumptions about state ideology and agency/motivation. To understand motivation and process, then, one needs to grasp the local understandings that mediate social practices. This can be seen in a variety of domains, ranging from the elite's deliberations to the confines of the torture chamber. The rigid model of state ideology–perpetrator motivation breaks down from this perspective, refocusing our attention on process and context. I have sought to illustrate this point in relationship to the Cambodian Genocide even as a small but growing scholarship on genocide has emerged within anthropology in part because of the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda.¹⁸

On the other hand, an anthropological perspective suggests that we need to broaden our concerns about the aftermaths of genocide. Usually, this issue is largely glossed over with the assumption—yet again linked to the Janus face of genocide studies—that prevention is the primary normative goal. This is certainly a critical and admirable aim. However, the fixation on prevention may divert our attention away from another critical issue: how people deal with the experience and aftermaths of genocide.

Perusing through the key references on genocide uncovers little concern with this issue. Aftermaths usually mean a concern with denial and legal redress. (Holocaust studies provides another interesting foil in this regard as the field has been deeply concerned with issues of trauma and memory.) Given their on-the-ground interactions with perpetrators and victims, anthropologists have been able to provide a new way of looking at issues of experience, coping, ritual, and memory. There is even a growing literature within anthropology that seeks to explore the local understandings and social practices that undergird the human rights regime, including transitional justice mechanisms such as

tribunals.¹⁹ All of this is not to say that we should ignore the issue of prevention, but rather that we should instead cast our gaze on a wider range of aftermaths. Moreover, prevention is also at stake here since past genocide, including issues of local experience, coping, and memory, is one of the possible primes for future genocide.²⁰

Definition

An anthropological perspective also raises important questions about the issue of definition, one of the central concerns of genocide studies. First there is the semantic question: What does “genocide” mean in different societies where genocide is taking or has taken place? For the term genocide emerged at a given moment in time and in a particular context. What do we miss when we label mass violence “genocide” without seeking to ask what such violence means in given context? Jones’s introductory text touches on this point, listing different terms.²¹ But to truly understand genocide, we need to grapple with local glosses, which may inflect our analysis in new directions and toward previously unrecognized dynamics and meanings. This is all the more critical after the fact, given the correlation between memory and genocide.

A second and related question also emerges: What are the categories that victims and perpetrators use to label and understand one another? This question, with which scholars had been grappling on an academic level since the early 1980s, gained legal salience in the 1990s with the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and for Rwanda (ICTR) and the ensuing difficulties of fitting terms such as “Hutu” and “Tutsi” into the rigid categories of the UNCG. From an anthropological perspective, the reification of race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality seems both ethnocentric and misleading. To argue that race is immutable, a key trope of debate when the UNCG was being promulgated (and one that was made when notions of biological race still predominated), is to implicitly reassert an essentialized conception of race that has been used by perpetrator regimes and has long since been shown by people like Boas to be a social myth. Race is a social construction and, like ethnicity, religion, and nationality, is clearly, and often highly, mutable. Perhaps one of the more informative illustrations of this point is the not-so-distant assertion that the Irish were a race of savages. Or one can travel to a country like Brazil, where racial categories have very different valences. More disturbingly, the UNCG has created a set of privileged protected groups while leaving others unprotected and analytically invisible.

By starting with contextualized, as opposed to rigid, pre-existing socio-legal categories, a critical genocide studies might help us understand how a wide variety of identities, including non-Western ones, crystallize (i.e., shift from a more fluid state to one that, at a given moment in time, becomes less fluid, or what I have elsewhere called the “crystallization of difference”²²) in a variety of genocidal situations. From this perspective, the UNCG definition²³ constitutes a historical and social construction that, while having important legal implications, should have been more broadly defined to include the destruction of any sort of group as defined by the protagonists in genocide. Some scholars have usefully proposed something along these lines in terms of definition,²⁴ but scholarly definitions of genocide tend to be clunky and awkward. There are strengths and weaknesses to a more or less detailed definition.

My own view is that there is also much to be said for definitions which accord with the principle of economy that less is more and that open rather than foreclose analysis. While recognizing that all definitions have weaknesses, we might simply define

genocide as the more or less coordinated attempt to destroy a dehumanized and excluded group of people because of who they are.

Viewing genocide as “more or less coordinated” allows for the inclusion of cases that range from highly planned, state-sponsored genocides to those that are more haphazard and diffusely carried out. In the latter case, the state’s role might have more to do with permissibility than with intent (e.g., not forbidding or doing nothing about acts of genocide that are carried out by armed groups on the ground or allowing victim groups to live under conditions of life that lead to their destruction, as in the case of many Native American genocides). The destruction of a group may be in whole or in part.

Such a definition has significant implications, opening the door to cultural genocide, genocide committed by non-state agents, genocide by neglect, and genocide of political, economic, social, and other groups as constituted in specific historical and cultural contexts. It also allows us to escape the rash of “-cides,” such as “politicide,” which have been proposed to overcome the gaps in the UNCG. We need, in other words, to explore a much wider range of cases, including those in which there was a more haphazard attempt to destroy a group or a group was destroyed over time by more indirect means, including structural ones,²⁵ or by neglect and indifference. This definition is more in the spirit of Israel Charny’s too-often-dismissed application of the term genocide to almost any targeted civilian group. However, it goes one step further by opening up the possibility that non-civilian groups might be the target of genocide (e.g., the attempted mutual destruction of two highly armed protagonists in the course of war).

In the end, we might view the above definition as a methodological definition, although of course all definitions have methodological implications. By this I am suggesting that genocide scholars deploy a broad definition for the purposes of analysis, one that allows us to consider the widest range of cases. Whatever bottom-line definition of genocide a scholar selects in the end, a methodological definition would contribute to his or her research by providing additional case material, including (for those who adhere to a more narrow definition) information on why genocide does not take place in certain situations, an area of study that Kuper so nicely illustrated but that has never been taken up in a significant way by scholars in the field. A critical genocide studies invites us to take such chances by exploring new areas that have been cordoned off by prevailing assumptions, biases, and gate-keeping maneuvers.

For example, one of the critiques of such a broad definition invokes what might be called the dilution metaphor. If we open the door to a very broad array of cases, the argument goes, we “dilute” the meaning and power of the term. Dilution is an interesting term, conjuring up the image of a pure substance being adulterated by an implicitly contaminating extraneous element (it is, ironically, the sort of metaphor that is often linked to genocide). But who determines what is extraneous? The dilution trope is a gate-keeper notion that asserts case-study primacy and relevance on the basis of embodied metaphor, not critical analysis. There is no *a priori* reason why genocide should encompass a smaller set of cases. Indeed, the field of genocide studies might experience enormous growth and vitality by opening the doors to a much broader range of cases. Recent scholarship in critical genocide studies has moved in this direction, seeking to explore what would happen if genocide were to encompass a much broader range of cases, including the many forgotten genocides.²⁶

Even if it stayed in the background, the Holocaust very much put its imprint on the UNCG and many of the subsequent scholarly definitions that emphasize intent,

particularly with regard to the role of the state. And perhaps we have all missed much by focusing so much on the classic definition. Recent research in cognitive science, for example, has shown that categorical understanding is very much tied to metaphor, metonymy, and prototype effects.²⁷ In other words, people think about phenomena like genocide through metaphor, metonymy, and prototypes. While this potential shift in the way in which we think about definition and genocide could be an article in and of itself, I want here just to note the somewhat obvious point that the Holocaust has long served as the prototype of genocide and Auschwitz as one of its key metonyms. What this means is that in the back of our minds many, if not most, of us have the Holocaust prototype in mind when discoursing about genocide.

The uniqueness debate suggests this bias, but we find it in many contexts, ranging from issues of definition to canonization. The Holocaust is also often the case-study exemplar that implicitly stands in danger of categorical dilution through association with other, less exemplary cases. The uniqueness debate provides another manifestation of this point. The obvious salience of the Holocaust notwithstanding, there are other possible prototypes and exemplars, including the massive destruction of largely forgotten peoples, such as the Taíno of Hispaniola during the conquest and colonization of the New World or the large number of political groups that perished under Stalin or in Maoist China. What if these cases were the starting points of genocide studies? A critical genocide studies asks us to consider what such a rethinking of the concept of genocide might entail.

A related decentering comes from a reconsideration of Lemkin's work. While still heavily influenced by the Holocaust prototype, Lemkin's conception had a broad historical purview and analytical focus on the different ways in which group life is destroyed, which he viewed as potentially encompassing not only physical but also biological, cultural, and political destruction carried out by state and non-state actors. Over the last decade there has been a growing body of work that conceptualizes genocide from an often Lemkinian perspective, with its long historical purview, interest in antiquity and colonialism, and understanding that genocide might unfold over the course of long periods of time (as opposed to the short duration of most of the case studies on which genocide studies tends to focus) and through a variety of mechanisms (again, beyond the usual focus on state-sponsored mass murder), including cultural destruction. Accordingly, scholars have begun to consider what were largely forgotten genocides by increasingly focusing on issues such as colonialism, conquest, settler societies, and modernity.²⁸ This is the work of a critical genocide studies, but there remains much more to do as such cases tend to be relegated to the margins of the genocide studies canon.

Why have we ignored these cases? The reasons are manifold and complex. The Holocaust prototype is one as it directs our attention to a certain manifestation of the genocidal process, foregrounding state and ideology. Perceived relevance might be another factor as scholars have witnessed a number of cases of genocide take place during their lifetime (even if we have also ignored other contemporary cases, such as the plight of indigenous peoples). There is also more information available about many of these cases, making it easier to research and write about them. As disciplinary structures of knowledge become ensconced, habit and tradition, as well as the interests that sustain them, also become factors in directing our attention to certain cases.

Metanarratives of progress and civilization might also structure our thinking, directing our gaze to genocidal despots (Hitler, Pol Pot, Milošević, al-Bashir) and authoritarian

regimes. The language of the UNCG codifies this language, stating that genocide is “condemned by the civilized world”²⁹ (Lemkin himself frequently used this register). Such language implies that genocide is only carried out by barbarians and savages, an understanding condensed by symbols such as the shrunken head that was found at the Buchenwald camp and exhibited at Nuremberg. While genocide is brutal and to be condemned, it is also something that is closely intertwined with modernity and even democracy.³⁰ The discipline’s long-standing neglect of Native Americans, slavery, and indigenous peoples illustrates this point.³¹

A critical genocide studies asks us to consider why scholars have looked away from such issues. One reason may well be a “liberal” tendency³² among genocide scholars to seek “progress” and, as the UNCG states, “to liberate mankind from such an odious scourge.”³³ We return to the Janus face of the discipline. A critical genocide studies does not demand that we give up this objective but instead that we think critically about its genealogy/framings and our potential conceptual biases and thereby find new ways to approach the problem. For example, how does the image of the “savage”/“barbaric” Other we construct in our analyses also construct, through inversion, an image of us as modern, developed, and civilized? What do we miss by such identifications? One answer is that our gaze might too easily be directed away from the relationship between genocide and modernity and toward explanations that smack of ethnic primordialism, stage theory (an implied progression from a state of savagery to civilization), atavism (the Nazis as a throwback), or biological/psychological reductionism (our “barbaric” or “sadistic” “nature”—think of *Lord of the Flies* and *Psycho*³⁴).

Canonization

Such decenterings ask us to think critically about the canons that have emerged in genocide studies. To date there has been a strong bias toward a genocide studies canon, which is approximated in Figure 1.

With certain exceptions, the bulk of scholarship in the field of genocide studies, especially from the 1980s through the 1990s, has focused on the Twentieth-Century Core, with the Holocaust both in the foreground and in the background in the ways discussed above. Like all canons, there has been fluidity within the canon as the status of some groups has changed (e.g., there is the beginning of a shift in the status of Ottoman Assyrian and Greek Genocides from Forgotten Genocides to the Periphery or perhaps even Second Circle).

The model of the genocide studies canon is, of course, an ideal type, but it gestures toward some of the disciplinary biases that have emerged in the field. For example, while cutting against the grain in many ways and discussing the Periphery or even Forgotten Genocides at times, Jones’s introductory text still gives primacy to the Twentieth-Century Core, likely because this is what people usually teach about.³⁵ A similar statement could be made about readers and edited volumes in the field.³⁶ A critical genocide studies asks us all to consider how such biases have shaped our own research and teaching and, though decentering, to re-envision our field of study.

As this discussion suggests, issues of definition and canonization are not value-neutral but are also linked to issues of power and knowledge. Why, we must ask, is it that certain cases of genocide are forgotten? The literature on denial (which has its own Janus face of ensuring historical accuracy about horrible events while potentially diminishing debate) has grappled with this question. But we also need to consider why we

Prototype	Holocaust
The Triad	Holocaust Armenian Genocide Rwanda
Twentieth-Century Core	Holocaust Armenians Cambodia Rwanda Bosnia Darfur (twenty-first century) Indigenous peoples (taken as a whole)
The Second Circle	East Pakistan Kurdish case Guatemala Herero/Nimibian Kosovo Carthage Settler genocides Ukrainian/Soviet
The Periphery	Indonesia Argentina Specific cases of indigenous peoples Genocides of antiquity Assyrian and Greek cases East Timor Burundi Maoist China Democratic Republic of the Congo
Forgotten Genocides	Multitude of more or less invisible/hidden/forgotten cases

Figure 1: The genocide studies canon

focus on certain cases and topics and what sorts of inclusions and exclusions ensue. What is left invisible to us and what can we do to cast light on what has formerly been opaque? Given the inevitable politicization of our topic, how might we be influenced by given interests and agendas? Why, we need to ask, are certain cases forgotten, remembered, recognized, or even intentionally hidden or written out of history? For our discipline to flourish, we need to consider a wide range of such questions, to decenter and rethink our taken-for-granted assumptions and biases, to seek out new ways to approach the field, and to engage in critical genocide studies.

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Notes

1. I would like to thank Nicole Cooley, Samuel Totten, Henry Theriault, Joyce Apstel, Antonia Pop, and Dirk Moses for their comments and suggestions on this article.
2. A. Dirk Moses, "Toward a Theory of Critical Genocide Studies," Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence, 18 Apr 2008, <http://massviolence.org/Toward-a-Theory-of-Critical-Genocide-Studies> (accessed 5 Jul 2011).
3. See A. Dirk Moses, "Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the 'Racial Century': Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36,4 (2002): 7–36; A. Dirk Moses, "Raphael Lemkin, Culture, and the Concept of Genocide," in *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, ed. Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses (New York: Oxford UP, 2010), 19–41; A. Dirk Moses and Donald Bloxham, "Genocide and Modernity," in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 156–93.
4. The focus on Lemkin has increased dramatically over the last decade, in part because of the publication of Samantha Power's best-selling *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) (Joyce Apstel [Liberal Studies, New York University], in discussion with the author, 25 Feb 2012) and a strand of critical genocide studies that uses Lemkin's historical work to reconsider the field's traditional emphases. See, e.g., Jürgen Zimmerer and Dominik Schaller, eds., *The Origins of Genocide: Raphael Lemkin as a Historian of Mass Violence* (London: Routledge, 2009).
5. See, e.g., Gal Beckerman, "Top Genocide Scholars Battle over How to Characterize Israel's Actions," *Forward: The Jewish Daily*, 16 Feb 2011, <http://www.forward.com/articles/135484/> (accessed 21 Feb 2011).
6. Samuel Totten and Steven Leonard Jacobs, eds., *Pioneers of Genocide Studies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002).
7. Samuel Totten and Steven Leonard Jacobs, "Introduction," in Totten and Jacobs, *Pioneers*, xiv. See also A. Dirk Moses, "The Field of Genocide Studies," in *Genocide: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 1–23.
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13. See Scott Straus, "Second-Generation Comparative Research on Genocide," *World Politics* 59 (2007): 476–501.
14. Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011).
15. Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009). See also the recent exchange on Bloxham's book: Jürgen Matthäus, Martin Shaw, Omer Bartov, Doris Bergen, and Donald Bloxham, review forum of *The Final Solution*, *Journal of Genocide Research* 13,1–2 (2011): 107–52.
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20. See Samuel Totten and Rafiki Ubaldo, eds., *We Cannot Forget: Interviews with Survivors of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda* (Piscataway: Rutgers UP, 2011), and other interviews with survivors and memoirs.
21. Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 23–4.
22. See Hinton, *Why Did They Kill?*
23. For the UNCG's definition of "genocide," see *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, 9 December 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277, Article II, <http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm> (accessed 3 Feb 2012) [UNCG].
24. See Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990); Helen Fein, "Genocide: A Sociological Perspective," *Current Sociology* 38,1 (1990): 1–126.
25. See, for example, Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, on structural genocide.
26. See, for example, Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (New York: Oxford UP, 2010); Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007); René Lemarchand, ed., *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2011).
27. George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2007).
28. See, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2000); Hinton, *Annihilating Difference*; Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*; Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005); Moses, "Toward a Theory of Critical Genocide Studies"; A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History* (New York: Berghahn, 2004); A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone, eds., *Colonialism and Genocide* (New York: Routledge, 2007); A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York: Berghahn, 2008); Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State*, vol. 1, *The Meaning of Genocide* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005); Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State*, vol. 2, *The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005). See also the early volumes by Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*; Chalk and Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide*; and Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997).
29. UNCG.
30. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*; Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*.
31. John H. Bodley, *Victims of Progress*, 3rd ed. (Mountain View: Mayfield, 1990); Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide*; William L. Patterson and Paul Robeson, eds., *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People* (New York: International Publishers, 1970).
32. Moses, "Toward a Theory of Critical Genocide Studies."
33. UNCG.
34. William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (New York: Berkeley, 2003); *Psycho*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Universal City, CA: Universal Home Video, 2000).
35. In a 15 February 2011 lecture at the Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights on "Studying Genocide, Preventing Genocide," Adam Jones noted the dilemmas inherent in selecting cases and the dangers of canonization. His own efforts at grappling with these problems are illustrated in differences between the first and second editions of his books, with the first edition chapter on "The Armenian Genocide" being recast as the "The Ottoman Destruction of Christian Minorities" in the second. Similarly, he expanded the chapter on first edition chapter on "Stalin's Terror" to "Stalin and Mao" in the second edition. He noted that he self-consciously attempted to weave in a number of cases, ranging from attacks on witches to post-US invasion Iraq to cut against the grain of canonization.
36. But see Chalk and Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide*, for an early exception.