On the Aetiology and Genesis

of Genocides and other Mass Crimes

Targeting Specific Groups

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this report is to provide tools of analysis by reference to which the reader may understand how genocides and other mass crimes targeting specific groups can occur in human societies. It sets out from a historical and sociological perspective some of the main processes and causative mechanisms which have, in the past, led to the commission of such crimes. The report has been written at the request of the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. It does, however, not deal with the question whether genocide and other mass crimes targeting specific groups took place in the former Yugoslavia.

Conclusions drawn in this report are based on research into alleged genocides elsewhere than in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I have been asked to exclude all reference to Bosnia by the OTP. I understand from the OTP that this will enable The Chamber to consider the learning that exists in relation to genocide and to make such decisions about applying it to the facts of this case without any risk of my having expressed an opinion on what would be regarded, by many, as a “final question”, for part of this case.

The report does not challenge or try to go behind the existing legal definition of genocide. Its sole purpose is to summarise, synthesise and present in a condensed form some of the main general findings and insights developed in the field of ‘genocide studies’ over the past twenty years or so.

The historical and social scientific field of genocide studies, which has gradually been taking shape since the early 1980s and is still expanding today, has mainly grown out of two types of studies.

• On the one hand, the number of detailed in depth studies of specific historical cases of genocide and other mass crimes targeting specific groups has increased considerably over the past decades. Especially about the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman-Turkish Empire
during the First World War; about the persecution and genocide of the Jews in Germany and occupied Europe between 1933 and 1945; about the genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975 and 1979; and, lastly, about the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. But also other cases, less widely known, have increasingly been scrutinised. Most of these studies have been written by historians and are based on meticulously researched documentary and oral history sources.

- On the other hand, there is an increasing number of social scientists who, starting out from their own disciplines and using various theoretical approaches, are studying (aspects of) genocides and other mass crimes targeting specific groups. Among them are political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists, but also criminologists, psychologists and psychiatrists. Furthermore, there is a vast literature written by survivors, eyewitnesses, and

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bystanders; and there are outstanding studies by well-informed journalists, lawyers and others about different aspects of the subject.  

So in various ways the field of genocide studies may rightly be called interdisciplinary. Lastly, because of the increasing availability of many specific and detailed case studies and growing theoretical insight in genocidal processes in different times and at different places, more comparative studies, mostly written from a historical-sociological perspective, have become possible.  

Without any implication of completeness, one might say that the field of genocide studies has been shaped over the past decades by (now) senior (or retired) researchers and prominent authors like Raul Hilberg, Leo Kuper, Frank Chalk, Kurt Jonassohn, Helen Fein, Robert Melson, Irving Louis Horowitz, Omer Bartov, Yehuda Bauer, Israel Charny, Ervin Staub, Norman Naimark and others, whose research and writing is still considered to be of major importance, while at present many younger scholars are contributing new studies to the field. Their work also forms the basis for this report.

At regular intervals international scientific conferences on the subject of genocide and other mass crimes targeting specific groups are organized, there are several professional organizations of scholars in the field, and there are two leading professional journals, Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the Journal of Genocide Research. The still increasing scientific and also political and public interest in the subject has also led to the foundation of institutes and centers for further study of the field in quite some countries in Western Europe and North America, and at present historical and social science faculties of many universities offer courses on the subject.

In the Netherlands the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies has been founded quite recently. The Center was officially opened on September 8, 2003 with a public manifestation in the Aula of the University of Amsterdam. It has grown out of a joint initiative of the

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The founders were led by the idea that the Netherlands needed a center where academic knowledge and expertise about the Shoah and other genocides could be concentrated and further developed, that academic teaching on the subject required more systematic attention, and that such a center could give new impulses to the public awareness and discussion of a very serious and deeply problematic issue. The new Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies has four tasks: academic research; university teaching; stimulating public interest and discussion; and contributing to future programmes for ‘teaching the teachers’ on the subject.  

At present the academic staff of the Center consists of four members: one full-time professor and also director of the Center, Dr. Johannes Houwink ten Cate, and three part-time associate professors, Dr. Nanci Adler, Dr. Karel Berkhoff, and the present author, Dr. Ton Zwaan. The historian Johannes Houwink ten Cate is an expert on the Shoah in Western Europe, and especially in the Netherlands. His inaugural lecture (May 8, 2003) has just appeared in press: De naam van de misdaad en de persoon van de schrijftafelmoordenaar (The Name of the Crime and the Personality of the ‘Schreibtischenmörder’), (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA, 2003). The historians Nanci Adler and Karel Berkhoff are both specialists in 20th-century Eastern Europe, more especially the former Soviet Union/Russia. Nanci Adler recently published The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System, (New Brunswick, NJ./London: Transaction Publishers, 2002); Karel Berkhoff’s Harvest of Despair. Life and Death in Ukraine under Nazi Rule will appear in the spring of 2004 (Harvard University Press). The sociologist and anthropologist Ton Zwaan recently published the comparative study Civilisering en decivilisering. Studies over staatsvorming en geweld, nationalisme en vervolging (Civilization and decivilization. Studies on State Formation and Violence, Nationalism and Persecution), (Amsterdam: Boom, 2001), which contains case studies on the Armenian genocide, the persecution of the Jews between 1933 and 1939 in Germany, and the disintegration of Yugoslavia between 1985 and 1995.
On the Aetiology and Genesis of Genocides and other Mass Crimes
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1. Conceptualization: definitions and discussions

1. Since its first introduction in 1944, by the jurist Raphael Lemkin in his book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, the term 'genocide' has become well-established and gained wide currency. But it has also shown itself to be a highly complex and difficult concept, with a variety of meanings. Over the years it has been debated by politicians and diplomats, by lawyers and juridical specialists, historians and social scientists, and among various other intellectuals and the public at large. In the course of these debates certain aspects of genocide and related mass crimes have been highlighted, while others have been left mostly unexplored. Sometimes the concept has been broadened, in other instances it has been narrowed down. In public discussions, as reflected in the mass media, the term is sometimes used quite loosely, while in other situations it has been used in a strictly limited sense. And with every new case of alleged genocide since 1945 the meaning of the concept has been re-examined. Notwithstanding a certain broad agreement about the core meaning of ‘genocide’ among specialists in the field, discussions about the most adequate definition and conceptualisation are still being carried on at present. One may conclude that the meaning of the concept is not yet fixed other than where the legal concept is strictly defined.

2. Originally, Lemkin, in several of his contributions on the subject, aimed at a fairly broad conception of genocide. In his book of 1944 he stated for example:

‘Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killing of all the members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups (...) The objectives of such a plan would

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be the disintegration of the political and social institutions of culture, language, national feelings, religion, [and] economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups.'

And a few years later, in 1947, he wrote in an article in the *American Journal of International Law*:

‘(…) the crime of genocide involves a wide range of actions, including not only the deprivation of life but also the prevention of life (abortions, sterilisations) and also devices considerably endangering life and health (artificial infections, working to death in special camps, deliberate separation of families for depopulation purposes …).’

3. At about the same time deliberations were going on within several Committees of the United Nations, which in the end led to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, approved by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1948, and, according to a recent count, by now accepted by 142 countries. As is generally known, Article 1 of the Convention affirms that genocide ‘whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they [the signatories, TZ] undertake to prevent and to punish’, while under Article 2 ‘genocide’ is defined as consisting of:

‘any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (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.’

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4. In later years historians and social scientists in the field of genocide studies have reflected on the way in which the Convention has come into being, and there has been considerable discussion about the pros and cons of the definition of ‘genocide’ as formulated in the Convention. One of them, the lawyer and sociologist Leo Kuper, has pointed out that the Genocide Convention of 1948 was created in a fairly strongly politicised atmosphere, at a time when the first contours of the Cold War were taking shape. During the preparatory deliberations there were ‘major controversies’ regarding the essential nature of the crime, the groups to be protected, the question of intent, the inclusion of cultural genocide, the problem of enforcement and punishment, and the extent of destruction which would constitute genocide.¹¹

5. Kuper, who in his own work has generally followed the definition of genocide as given in the Convention, has furthermore argued that that same definition is sometimes too limited for historians and social scientists who are trying to understand and explain genocides and other mass crimes targeting specific groups. In his view it has been a major omission to exclude political groups from the list of the groups protected. Many other scholars have made the same point, sometimes adding the exclusion of economic groups (classes) as another omission. Usually two arguments are advanced to support this point. On the one hand it is argued that political differences are often as significant a basis for massacre and annihilation as racial, national, ethnic or religious differences. On the other hand genocidal crimes against national, ethnical, racial or religious groups are generally a consequence of, or intimately related to, political conflict, and, moreover, cannot be explained without reference to important differences in (political) power between the groups involved. Although quite a few scholars in the field of genocide studies have adhered to the definition of the Convention in their own work and virtually all of them acknowledge the importance of an internationally accepted definition, others have proposed various other definitions and conceptualisations. A few examples may illustrate this.

6. According to two well-known authors in the field, Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, ‘genocide’ can be defined as:

‘(…) a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.’ ¹²


Another senior scholar of genocide, Helen Fein, has asserted that ‘genocide’ is:

‘(…) sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim.’

Yet another genocide scholar, Israel Charny, has proposed as a generic definition of ‘genocide’:

‘(…) the mass killing of substantial numbers of human beings, when not in the course of military action against the military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of the essential defenselessness and helplessness of the victims.’

While yet another specialist in the field, Irving Louis Horowitz, defines ‘genocide’ briefly as:

‘(…) a structural and systematic destruction of innocent people by a state bureaucratic apparatus.’

As an example of a currently common and non-specialist meaning of the term ‘genocide’ Webster’s Third New International Dictionary can be quoted. Under the word ‘genocide’ it states that ‘genocide’ is:

‘the use of deliberate systematic measures (as killing, bodily or mental injury, unlivable conditions, prevention of births) calculated to bring about the extermination of a racial, political, or cultural group or to destroy the language, religion, or culture of a group.’

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7. Many other authors and sources could be quoted but it will be clear from these examples that although all scholars tend to focus on deliberate mass killing and destruction of innocent people as the core meaning of the concept of ‘genocide’, they also emphasise different dimensions and draw attention to different aspects of the genocidal process as a whole.

8. In itself this diversity in views should be no reason for surprise. The general concept of ‘genocide’ refers to a whole range of specific cases of alleged genocidal crimes in the real world, each consisting of (partly) different and quite complex events and developments in different countries and at different times, often difficult to understand and hard to explain. That complexity is reflected in the concept and in the historical and social scientific studies of the phenomena concerned. Moreover, ‘genocide’ is far from a neutral concept, it is in fact highly loaded in human and moral, and in political and juridical terms. Also, because various forms of violence and mass killing are central to it, many people tend to react to genocidal phenomena with strong feelings and strong opinions. And lastly, genocide is certainly also a crime, punishable under international law – in the eyes of many the most serious and heinous crime in human history. Hence perpetrators at all levels of responsibility usually do have a great interest in covering it up, keeping it secret, and in denying it, while on the other hand victims have a strong right to justice, and survivors rightfully claim acknowledgement of their fate and losses, and expect some form of redress and justice. So it is no wonder that ‘genocide’ can be considered a contested concept.¹⁷

9. At the time when the word ‘genocide’ was coined and the first efforts were made to conceptualize the phenomenon, by Lemkin and the various UN Committees which drew up and formulated the Convention, the main frame of reference for everybody involved was formed by the recent World War, German National-Socialism and its destructive policies, and the murder of the Jews – of which, by the way, then far less was known than at present. Although Lemkin himself was certainly aware of the outlines of the Armenian genocide, which had taken place only a few decades earlier, the destruction and extermination of the Jews became so to speak the ‘standard model’ of what genocide was about.

10. When confronted with information about other genocidal processes, at other times and other places, many people, whether consciously or unwittingly, tend to compare and ‘measure’ these processes against the ‘standard model’ of which so much is now generally known. In

itself this raises no grounds for objections. The German National-Socialist destruction of the Jews was undoubtedly the most systematic attempt to realise a ‘total’ and ‘complete’ genocide ever. As such it deserves to be studied and discussed over and over again, and it requires permanent attention in the public sphere. Some objections, however, may be raised, when comparison with the ‘standard model’ hampers the detection and recognition of other processes of persecution and genocide, when it, implicitly or explicitly, leads to conclusions that these other processes are ‘not really serious’ cases of genocidal policy or ‘only partial’ genocides, or even to outright denial that in other cases a genocidal policy is followed or some form of genocidal crime took place.\(^{18}\)

11. To counter this way of reasoning, prominent genocide scholars have in recent years emphasised that, in the words of the criminologist Alex Alvarez, ‘genocide appears in various forms and guises, each characterized by different goals and motivations’, and that ‘these different goals shape the various strategies and tactics’ used in specific cases.\(^{19}\) For Yehuda Bauer, for instance, genocidal policies and processes may best be perceived over a continuum, ranging from cases of mass murder through various types of genocide, with at its ultimate extreme the murder of the Jews. A few years earlier, Robert Melson put forward a similar argument, according to him it is of fundamental importance to recognize and acknowledge that genocidal crimes differ in terms of their intended lethality, duration, and scope.\(^{20}\) One might add that although ‘total’ genocide was certainly attempted by the National-Socialists with regard to the Jews, they did not wholly succeed. In fact, all genocides have been in a sense ‘partial’ genocides. To differentiate among them, Melson’s criteria of scope, intended lethality, and duration may be helpful. One may then find, for instance, that there have indeed been quite important differences between the murder of the Jews, and the National-Socialist genocidal policies towards parts of the Polish and Russian populations under German occupation, but one may simultaneously acknowledge that in all three cases a genocidal policy was followed and a genocidal process took place, and there is no point in belittling or denying the ‘seriousness’ of the latter two cases because of the extremely serious character of the former.

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\(^{19}\) Alvarez (2001), op.cit., p. 50.

12. Lastly, another helpful tool to detect and trace genocidal crimes has been developed by Helen Fein. She argues that basically five conditions may enable one to speak of a ‘genocidal policy’ or of ‘genocide’. In a nutshell: there is a continuity of attacks by the perpetrator to destroy group members; the perpetrator is a collective or organized actor; victims are selected because they are members of a group; victims are defenseless or are killed regardless of whether they surrender or resist; the destruction is undertaken with intent to kill and the murder is sanctioned by the perpetrators. These criteria, if found to be helpful by those applying the legal definition, may also help to distinguish between war crimes and genocidal crimes. Furthermore, Fein has identified two conditions – also emphasised in this report – typically found in genocides: firstly, the absence of sanctions against killing, or the failure to enforce them, and, secondly, the presence of ideologies and beliefs legitimating genocide.

As noted before, the meaning of the concept of ‘genocide’ in the historical and sociological field of genocide studies is still relatively open and in development. At present a broad, open, comparative, and processual approach to the phenomenon and the concept seems preferable.

13. Even though no single clear, unambiguous, and generally accepted definition of genocide exists, most definitions and conceptualisations contain important common elements. By focussing on these elements it is considered possible to arrive at a working and ‘sensitizing’ understanding of crimes of genocidal intent. Basing oneself on historical in depth studies of specific cases of genocidal crimes and on comparative historical-sociological studies of genocidal processes, it seems possible to deduce from these studies general insights into some of the main factors and causative forces which have contributed to genocidal policies and processes in the past, and may probably do so again in the future. These studies also shed some light on the broader circumstances and conditions under which genocidal processes may develop. Thus it seems possible to give an overview of the aetiology and genesis of genocides and other mass crimes targeting specific groups.

2. War, civil war, and genocidal crimes

14. A first point on which nearly all authors in the field of genocide studies agree is that genocide has to be carefully distinguished from war and civil war. War in the modern sense usually means a violent conflict between two or more sovereign states, primarily fought out between...
their armed forces. It may entail considerable numbers of military casualties. Because of the
development of a practice of ‘total war’, especially during the World Wars in the 20th century,
of which one of the consequences has been a blurring of the dividing line between
combatants and non-combatants, it may also lead to large numbers of civilian victims.
Military casualties and civilian victims of war are, however, not considered victims of
genocidal crimes. The same holds true for civil war. Civil war implies a violent conflict
between two or more armed and organized parties within a society formerly encompassed by
one sovereign state organization. The American historical sociologist Charles Tilly has
characterized such a situation as ‘a revolutionary situation’, or a situation of ‘multiple
sovereignty’. Where before one sovereign state with one clear central monopoly on violence
over the whole of the territory existed, there are now several armed parties within the same
territory, embroiled in contestation over the state, each claiming its own monopoly on
violence, while the previous central monopoly has fragmented and disintegrated. Civil war
may also lead to considerable numbers of casualties among the fighting forces of the parties
involved, and may bring about many civilian deaths, either directly through acts of war, or
through atrocities related to military action, but, again, the victims are usually not considered
victims of genocide.

15. What distinguishes genocidal situations in principle from situations of war and civil war is
that during genocides one party – the persecutors and perpetrators – is armed and organized
to use force, while the other party – the persecuted and victims – is not armed nor organized
to use force. Although in some cases there has been incidental armed resistance by small
groups from among the larger victim category, such armed resistance is rare, and moreover
usually crushed by the superior power of the perpetrators of the genocide. In genocidal
situations the means of violence and the means of (military) organization are extremely
unevenly distributed, and overwhelmingly concentrated on one side, that of the perpetrators.

16. These arguments are clearly reflected in several of the definitions quoted, especially those by
Charny, Chalk and Jonassohn, and Fein. Genocide is not war, nor civil war, it is a form of
one-sided, not two- or more-sided, killing; the victims are essentially defenseless and helpless.

23 In his work on the sociology of the state, Max Weber used the phrase “monopoly of violence” as a central defining
characteristic of the state (See: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1922, pp. 22, 29). It implies, inter
alia., that the state claims the exclusive right to use violence (monopoly), and that the use of violence by others is
forbidden. It also means that the state can dispose of the concentrated means of violence (arms and personnel),
which will usually be financed by taxes. A monopoly of violence and a monopoly on taxation pre-suppose each
other, and form together the backbone of any state.
against the power of the perpetrators; and even when they pose no threat in whatever sense, they are targeted for persecution, forcible uprooting, deportation, and potential and actual destruction.

17. Although most genocide scholars agree that genocide should be distinguished from war and civil war, they naturally simultaneously recognise that situations of war or civil war may contribute in manifold and various ways to the development of genocidal situations and genocidal crimes. For instance, (the threat of) war or civil war may provide an opportunity for genocidal crimes, while at the same time it may function as a cloak and a rationale for such crimes. Such has been very clearly the case with the Armenian and Jewish genocides, while it has also played a role in the Cambodian and Rwandan genocidal processes.

3. Crisis and genocidal crimes

18. In a more general sense, many genocide scholars have argued that genocides and other mass crimes targeting specific groups only occur under conditions of serious, extended, and enduring crisis of the state-society concerned. That may be considered a second common element about which most authors agree. No case is known in which genocidal crimes have ever been a ‘normal’ aspect of a human society over a longer period of time, nor does a genocidal process suddenly erupt in a society, out of the blue so to speak, as a totally unexpected, spontaneous development. On the contrary: genocidal crimes only happen during phases or episodes of grave crisis of and in a state-society.

19. Such crises result from interrelated previous international and domestic developments and forces; they flow from a fateful combination of long term developments and short term events; they develop more slowly or are brought about by quick and drastic changes; and they usually are primarily of a political and economic nature. Naturally, conditions of (threatening) war and civil war may contribute strongly to the development of such crises. But whatever their origins, the speed of development, or their primary nature, one of the most important consequences of such crises is a serious and increasing destabilisation of state and society, and in its wake increasing polarisation and decreasing pacification of social relationships, and a corresponding increase in the use of violence. Serious destabilisation can assume many

different forms and can manifest itself in various ways, but the following aspects, here formulated in a condensed form, are among the most important.\textsuperscript{25}

20. Firstly, under conditions of increasing external and internal pressure governments, state organs, and other political and administrative institutions start functioning less well than previously. This may entail repeated changes in government and political regime, and rather quick changes in the functioning of the state, especially with regard to the organised forces of the monopoly on violence. The monopoly itself may be undermined or, for various reasons, seriously impaired in its functioning. While political and economic problems multiply and increase, the state’s ability to handle, let alone solve, them, decreases.

21. Secondly, destabilisation will possibly also become manifest in increasingly sharper competition for political positions and power between various political elites, parties or groupings within the country. While the functioning of the state organisation and other political institutions deteriorates, the risk increases that relevant political elites stop accepting formerly legitimate restraints on their political behaviour and policies. They may then start to delegitimise the institutional order in various ways from within the state organs or from outside it, they may try to reinforce their power base through populist mass mobilisation, and, when the crisis deepens, they may even start considering the use of violence to reach their political aims, whatever these may be. If that happens, and political opponents start to threaten or even actually use force and violence against each other, serious depacification will set in which can manifest itself in political murders, violent street riots, terrorist attacks, and other forms of political violence. Once the threshold of violence is crossed on a sufficiently large scale, the polarisation process within the society will enter a new phase: it will become far more serious and massive, and it will become far more difficult to find a way back to more pacified conditions.

22. Thirdly, for the population at large, or at least considerable parts of it, the development of such a crisis and the ensuing destabilisation and polarisation will, among other things, lead to experiences and feelings of increasing tension, insecurity, and fear. These feelings may be brought about by drastically deteriorating economic circumstances – for instance, fast increasing unemployment, sudden loss of personal income, and increasing risks for personal property in money or goods. Such feelings may also be strongly enhanced once the state and the organized forces of the monopoly on violence – i.e. the police, the judiciary, and the

\textsuperscript{25} This argument has been worked out more fully in Ton Zwaan, \textit{Civiliseren en deciviliseren. Studies over staatsoorlog en geweld, nationalisme en vervolging} (Civilization and Decivilization. Studies on State Formation and Violence, Nationalism and Persecution), (Amsterdam: Boom, 2001), pp. 346-390.
armed forces – no longer seem able or willing to guarantee and actually maintain one’s personal security and that of the groups to which one feels oneself to belong. The increasing competition between the main political elites may also play a role. Parts of the population will actively participate in the political mass mobilisation, thereby they themselves will become part of the ongoing polarisation process, which, among other things, increases the chances that they will start to see supporters of other political groupings within the country increasingly as adversaries instead of co-citizens. ‘Neighbours’ may then turn into potentially dangerous ‘enemies’, so to speak.

23. When that happens the polarisation process will be propelled forward again. People will react differently to increasing material and physical insecurity, but for many the rising insecurity will also entail increasing mental disorientation and insecurity which may make more and more people more susceptible to radical political ideas, rhetoric, appeals, and promises on the part of radicalised political elites.

24. Some caveats are in place here. First, the developmental model of emerging crisis, serious destabilisation, and increasing polarisation between political elites and parts of the population, outlined above in a highly condensed form, is necessarily a very general one. How such developments have taken place in specific cases in the past – for instance, in the Ottoman Empire in the two decades preceding the First World War, in Germany between 1919 and 1932 during the Weimar Republic, in Cambodia in the first half of the seventies before the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975, and in Rwanda between 1990 and 1994 before the radical Hutu regime took over – is another matter and not under discussion here. Apart from historical differences between the cases – which are indeed quite considerable – the aim of the model is to point out broadly similar developments which may lead to situations in which genocidal crimes may be committed. Secondly, although the model points to several of the larger conditions and circumstances which may give rise to genocidal situations, it does not yet specify which factors and causative forces are decisive for genocides and other mass crimes targeting specific groups to emerge.

4. Political leadership, the state and genocidal crimes

25. One such decisive factor, which might be considered as a third, and very important, common element about which genocide scholars generally agree, is the central and crucial importance of the political behaviour of the national political leadership of a state-society, and the
political decisions it takes. Confronted with a serious crisis and the ensuing possible destabilisation, as sketched in the preceding section, the various political elites, parties, and groupings in a country may pull together and try to weather the storm as best as they can. Historically, this has, for instance, often happened in democracies under threat of war or during periods of war or serious economic crisis. But it is also possible that crisis and destabilisation mainly result in further discord, division, and polarisation among political elites and (politically mobilised) parts of the population. In such cases, it may so happen that after a period of increasing competition and strife, and usually by some combination of mass political mobilisation, the use of violence, and backstairs political intrigues, one (part or faction of a) radical or radicalised political elite comes out on top, i.e. succeeds in getting hold of the highest political and administrative positions in the state organisation. This is what happened when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933; when a radical faction of the political movement Ittihad ve Terakki under Enver and Talaat Pasja took over the Ottoman-Turkish government by force in 1913; when the Khmer Rouge army under Pol Pot and others conquered Phnom Penh in 1975; and when a shadowy group of mainly radical Hutu military officers under colonel Théoneste Bagosora took over power in the Rwandan capital of Kigali on the night of April 6, 1994.

26. Once in power at the level of the state, such radical and ruthless politicians and political elites may then thoroughly corrupt the state organisation, turn it into a de facto dictatorship, and make use of all the power resources of the state to realise their political aims. Genocide against certain groups or minorities may be among these aims, and in the four cases just named it certainly was. Seen in this light, genocidal policies are deliberately decided upon by a political leadership, and genocides begin with political decisions at the highest level of the state.  

27. The decisive importance of political decisions by the central political authorities has been put in different words. Some authors, like Chalk and Jonassohn, and Horowitz, talk of genocide by ‘a state or other authority’ or by ‘a state bureaucratic apparatus’. As Helen Fein has noted:

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‘Virtually everyone acknowledges that genocide is primarily a crime of state.’ Others, however, prefer to speak in this context of ‘the ruling elite’, ‘the political elite’, ‘the political establishment (governmental and non-governmental)’, or ‘the political leadership’. Where the one category of authors wants to emphasise the importance of the state organisation (the bureaucracy and the organised forces of the monopoly on violence) for and during the implementation of a genocidal policy, the other category of authors wants to underline that states are run by people, and that it is not so much the state as an institution or organisation as such which should be seen as the origin of evil, but the way in which the state is used by certain political leaders, their lieutenants and underlings.

28. But however formulated, all authors in the field of genocide studies stress that the overall perception, the attitudes, the behaviour, and the decisions of the central political leadership are a decisive factor in the emergence of genocidal crimes. Genocide is not a spontaneous expression of communal hatreds, extending back over long periods of time – although these may exist, and may be kindled and fanned by political entrepreneurs and ideologues under certain circumstances. Nor does genocide flow from primeval popular emotions which a government or political elite is unable to control. In other words, genocide and other mass crimes targeting specific groups are not phenomena which develop from ‘bottom up’. To be sure, most societies contain extremist individuals and small groups who may be ready and willing to use violence against innocent others, and serious crises, wars or civil wars often arouse considerable popular passions, but these forces on their own never descend to a genocidal process. Sometimes, under certain conditions, incidental atrocities or even massacres may result, or pogroms may ensue, but ‘normally’ the state and its law enforcement agencies, primarily the police and the judiciary, and if need be its military, will be able to contain, repress and sanction such forms of mass political violence.

29. When the state authorities fail to do so or are not willing to do so, they are encouraging and contributing to the development of a genocidal process. Such processes involve large numbers of people as victims, and considerable numbers as perpetrators. That shows again the crucial importance of the central political leadership in committing genocidal crimes. Genocidal crimes are ‘top down’ affairs. From the researched cases of genocidal crimes in the 20th century - ‘structural’ and ‘systematic’ series of forceful uprooting and violent events, deportations and massacres, over an extended area and during an extended period of time - the conclusion can be drawn that such crimes happen with knowledge, approval, and involvement of the state authorities.

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30. Such approval and involvement may take different forms, best thought of as a continuum. On the one side it may be an overt, explicit, and public policy, resulting from (usually secret) strategic decisions by the highest authorities to reach certain political, ideological, or economic aims. On the other it may be more covert, implicit, and secret. The actual perpetrators of genocidal crimes then act with the connivance, the complicity, and tacit approval of the state. It has been frequently observed that both forms may also follow upon each other. During a process of persecution and genocide several phases have been distinguished, by a so-called ‘ideal-typical’ method. First, the targeted group has to be defined; secondly, possessions of the members of the group have to be expropriated; thirdly, they have to be concentrated; fourthly, they have to be deported; and lastly, significant numbers of them have to be killed. Although in reality these phases may quickly and closely follow each other, depending on the circumstances, it has been observed that the earlier phases of the persecution process may take place quite publicly, while during the later phases secrecy becomes dominant. However, there are also other cases: the Rwandan genocide, lasting roughly three months, from beginning April 1994 to July of that year, was publicly and loudly announced and largely took place in the public space over the whole of the country, with many ‘common’ people participating, and for (nearly) everyone to see. It has also been noted that the actual murder and killing – the ‘ultimate’ phase of a genocidal process – may be done by state agents, often special units of police and/or military personnel, put in a special position, exempted from the rule of law, and usually also from normal military discipline, but also by special auxiliary or paramilitary groups indirectly linked to the central state authority. Such groups or gangs have, for instance, played quite a prominent role during the Armenian genocide and in Rwanda, for instance.

31. This third common element in the analyses of genocidal crimes implies several important corollaries. One is that in cases of genocide and other mass crimes targeting specific groups, the highest state authorities are always responsible for what takes place during the genocidal process because:

- of their direct active involvement in (the planning of) the forceful uprooting, deportation, and killing of people.
- of secret and silent complicity.


• (only hypothetically) of not acting at all, thereby neglecting the rights and lives of considerable numbers of citizens, and in fact condoning the genocidal acts which take place.

32. Another corollary is that acts of genocide, perpetrated by individuals, small groups, units, bands, or gangs, cannot be understood and judged in themselves, separate from each other and in isolation as it were. On the contrary, individual, ‘single’ acts are better viewed and understood as part of the overall situation in the area or (part of) the country where they take place, within the larger whole of the prevalent structure of power and authority. Specific cases of atrocities, massacres, rapes, extremely violent humiliation of victims, and of material destruction, torture, and killing, can certainly be analysed on their own, but they should also be seen against the background of the authority structure. Because of decisions at the highest level, whether they take the form of explicit orders, or consist of ‘silent’ understandings, individuals and groups on middle (for instance regional) and lower (for instance local) levels have the opportunity, can acquire the means, and are given the impunity to act as they do. Moreover, they are often encouraged by current political rhetoric, and also rewarded in material terms. It is their place in the overall relevant hierarchy of power and authority which ‘empowers’ them, so to speak, to act ruthlessly and callously – and this hierarchy is not necessarily only of a strictly bureaucratic-administrative or military nature, it can also be more general and informal. Because of that ‘empowerment’ people can and will do things they would probably never consider doing if they had to bear individually the full responsibility for their own acts within ‘normal’ political and legal circumstances. These insights tie in with the next section.

5. The process of genocide, planning and ‘division of labour’

33. In her definition of ‘genocide’ Helen Fein has stressed that genocide implies ‘sustained’ action by perpetrators.30 Genocide is not a separate event, nor one single act, it is more adequately conceptualised as a process in space and time: an interconnected series of many different acts by a considerable number of interdependent people, acting individually and in organised, collective forms. This may be considered as a fourth important common element in many analyses of genocides. The genocidal process is a string of patterned events, in which phases can be discerned, and which is characterised by a certain ‘inner logic’ of its own. Genocidal

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processes have a beginning, a structured course, and they come to an end under certain circumstances.

34. There are no accidental or unintentional genocidal crimes. As noted in the previous section, the beginnings of a genocidal process originate in a decision or set of constituent decisions by the central political leadership of the state-society concerned. They decide to start a genocidal policy, though such a policy may take quite different forms. Such decisions are only very rarely put down in written form. Decisions are taken verbally and are subsequently often passed on to lower levels in the hierarchy in verbal form only. As genocide scholars have thoroughly demonstrated, perpetrators on all levels of responsibility typically use veiled language, masked terms and euphemisms to conceal what their real intentions are, and what the actions ordered are really about. Silent understandings play a prominent role here, and in various circumstances ‘newcomers’ to the job very quickly learn the language and the silences required. This veiled language not only serves to hide the operations from possibly curious ‘outsiders’ and keep them as secret as possible, but also fulfills functions for the perpetrators themselves: by not clearly naming what is intended or actually going on they may evade full awareness of their own actions, or might even believe that these actions (or their own part in it) are not ‘quite real’. Moreover, with regard to the victims the language used may hide from them what is going to happen, and may also contribute to their dehumanisation in the eyes of the perpetrators, for instance when human beings are called ‘pieces’ or ‘packages’, or when killing people is called ‘special treatment’ or simply ‘work’. 31 One might surmise that especially the top leaders involved in the first phase of decision-making are well aware of the outrageous, extremist, and deeply criminal nature of their decisions.

35. The first decisions to launch a genocidal policy and the first orders to sub-top and middle level functionaries – whether they are administrative, military, or police officials, or paramilitary leaders – are not only usually verbal, but may also very well be couched in fairly general terms. To put it bluntly: genocidal crime is about getting rid of (certain categories of) people, is about doing away with ‘them’, and the overall strategic decision might well be just that statement. Certain people have to be excluded and ousted out of one’s state, society, country, territory; out of one’s village, town, or city; out of one’s area, province, or region. And the first generic strategic decision may consist of only two elements: the rough delineation of the target group or category (‘Armenians’, ‘Jews’, ‘Cham’, ‘Vietnamese’,

‘Tutsis’, ‘new people’, ‘intellectuals’, ‘kulaks’), and the outspoken desire or order to get rid of ‘them’. How the targeted group (or groups) is (or are) precisely defined, categorised, delineated, and marked off; which specific measures will be applied; which means will be used to get rid of them; when, where, how, and at what pace over which areas this should and will be done, is usually left to special, trusted plenipotentiaries or authorised agents. It is they who work out more precise preparation and planning, thereby activating various sorts of (state) agencies and organs and possibly also private businesses and organisations to take part in the whole undertaking. They in their turn usually also select their own trusted lieutenants, underlings, and lower level personnel, who will have to carry out the dirty work if it comes to that at some later date.

36. This sheds some light on preparation and planning with regard to genocidal crime. At the time of the first generic decision(s), there may be some very general, vague, and often highly fantasy-laden ideas about how to proceed. At most, these ideas point in a certain general direction: (forced) emigration, other ways to drive members of the targeted group(s) away, depopulation measures, forms of serious negative discrimination, unspecified ‘forceful’ measures, etc. But there is no detailed and ‘realistic’ plan, no step by step scenario, let alone a blueprint, of how to proceed to get rid of certain categories of people. Detailed preparation and planning typically start to take shape only after the general policy decision(s) has been taken. Planning evolves through time, between several responsible authorised agents and (parts of) organisations at various levels, including cooperation and competition, and with all the problems of coordination which are typical for any large scale undertaking. Every agent and organisation involved has a certain relative autonomy, a certain latitude in planning and acting, which will sometimes lead to close cooperation between different agents and organisations, but which at other times may bring about strife and stubborn conflicts between them. Planning also evolves through ‘learning by doing’, and so perpetrators go forward step by step, and also by leaps and bounds, to realise their aims, selecting and keeping ‘successful’ means and methods, and dropping ‘unsuccessful’ ways and means.32

37. And so the genocidal process gets into gear, leaving the initial and incipient phase, and progressing through planning and the first concerted efforts to put plans into practice, toward a next phase during which it becomes more and more a reality, steered, organised, and more or less coordinated. As genocide scholars have shown, genocidal acts and proceedings will then also become routinised fairly quickly. Planning becomes more and more intense, implementation and practical experience grow, means and methods will be systematically

32 Many specific examples can be found in for example Hilberg, op.cit., (1984).
applied, and what perhaps seemed at first incidental forceful measures and single massacres
will then, so to speak, ‘condense’ into genocide: the systematic and ultimately violent
persecution of certain categories within the population. In a way, genocides gather speed like
flywheels. In the beginning quite some energy and efforts are required to get them going, but
once the first phase is past, they may spin faster and faster till they are at maximum speed and
continue running smoothly. This does not imply that no more ‘obstacles’ and ‘difficulties’ will
surface during the genocidal process, but they will in all probability be ‘solved’, and the
process as a whole acquires its own structural dynamics, to which all involved – perpetrators
and victims, albeit in quite different ways – become more or less bound.

38. With regard to the perpetrators, an analogy might be drawn with a group of people entering
upon a ‘normal’ criminal career. One crime may lead to another, more serious crime, which
leads to a third, even more serious one, and so on. The people involved will get deeper and
deeper into criminal affairs, they will know about each other’s doings and they will have more
and more to hide. Because recourse to the law will become increasingly impossible, mutual
trust and distrust among them will become very important for the continuation of their
business, and, with heavy crime, probably also for staying alive. In the course of such a
process they will become each other’s accomplices, and it will then become more and more
difficult for anyone among them to opt out. Such behaviour may even be punished by death.
The more serious the crimes, the more strongly the mutual social compulsion among the
perpetrators will be, and the smaller the chances for ‘a way back’, individually and collectively.

39. This also has some bearing on the end of genocidal processes. Once under way, they will
seldom or never be stopped by the same people who set them in motion. There may be some
slackening, there may be delays, or even temporary halts for a variety of reasons and
depending on various circumstances and conditions, but in most cases genocidal processes
have only been definitively stopped by forceful outside military intervention. The Armenian
genocide only came to an end in 1918 when Turkey had lost the war, Allied troops entered
the capital, and the most important central leaders had fled to Germany (although it was
resumed upon several occasions later on). The Jewish genocide only ended when the Allied
Powers had completely conquered Germany, and the National-Socialist genocidal regime was
finally defeated. The genocidal practices in Cambodia were largely ended once the
Vietnamese army successfully invaded the country and the remaining Khmer Rouge leaders
fled to the jungle on the border with Thailand, and the genocide in Rwanda only stopped
after the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) had conquered a large part of the country, including
the capital, and leading radical Hutu ‘génocidaires’ were forced to flee to north-eastern Congo.
and other places in Africa, Europe, and the United States. As these examples show, genocidal practices are rarely stopped by ‘internal’ forces, but most often by ‘external’ forces, and then usually at great costs to those who ultimately intervene.

40. A last point in this section is concerned with the ‘division of labour’ among the perpetrators of genocidal crimes at different levels. Genocide scholars have shown that it is quite usual that the central political leadership, the top-level decision-makers, indeed do only just that. They take general decisions, but they usually do not take part in further detailed planning and preparation, nor do they actively participate in the actual execution of their general orders ‘in the field’, so to speak. They do not personally humiliate, terrorise, rape, uproot, deport, torture and kill members of the target group(s). Only very seldom do they witness such events directly. Although they are usually informed, in verbal and sometimes also in written form, by their adjutants and deputies about the course of specific genocidal actions and the overall genocidal process, they take no further direct part. Their part in the genocidal process is mainly: indicating the general direction, initiating in general terms, opening up of possibilities, and providing legitimisation and means in a broad sense, all through the authority of their own position and acknowledged leadership. They govern, literally, ‘at a distance’. And naturally, they may also incite people, publicly and in private, to despise and hate (members of) the target group(s), and to be prepared to take ‘action’ against them, thereby contributing to the development of a (potentially) genocidal situation. As will be shown in the next section, their public radical ideological stance usually plays an important role in the emergence of genocidal crimes.

41. Directing ‘at a distance’ may also be largely true for the sub-top and middle levels in the state and other hierarchical organisations involved in the genocidal process. Middle level officials and functionaries are more closely involved, but may still manage to stay largely out of the ‘ultimate’ phase of the process. In that final phase regional and local commanders, and lower administrative, military, police, and paramilitary personnel will do the active dirty executionary ‘work’, right down to the actual uprooting, terrorising, humiliating, deporting, raping, torturing, and killing of people.

42. The obvious paradox is that those with the greatest influence on the process as a whole – for originating, starting, generally preparing, planning, overseeing and directing it – are not the ones who execute the required violence, while those who do act violently have usually very much less to do with preparations, planning, and coordination – their ‘job’ being mostly exclusively at the executionary level. While the latter may be caught red-handed; the former,
those behind the scenes, bear no doubt a greater responsibility for the genocidal policy and process, but they are – in most historical cases up till recently – often not caught at all.33

43. Notwithstanding the intricate ‘division of labour’ within the category of perpetrators, and the relative autonomy (nearly) each and everyone of them has, all the perpetrators on the different levels are bound together by a more or less shared sense of purpose and intent: to get rid of the ‘undesirables’. To do so certainly requires superior power, but power, organisation, and adequate means of violence by themselves are not enough. Nearly all historical and sociological studies on genocidal crimes point to the crucial importance of some common and shared form of ideology.

6. Genocidal crimes and ideology

44. Most scholars in the field of genocide studies agree that ideology plays a major role in genocidal processes and should be seen as an important causative force – this can be considered as a fifth common element and insight. To be sure, a genocidal policy is decided upon by certain people, central powerholders within the state, and a genocidal process is initiated, launched, and maintained by them in cooperation with many others in different sectors and on different levels of the state-society. Genocides and other mass crimes targeting specific groups consist of interrelated and sustained hostile acts by organised particular human beings against certain categories of other human beings. But how people act and why they act in the specific ways they do, is for a large part determined and shaped by their culture and civilisation in a broad sense, and by the ideology they adhere to in a more narrow sense.

45. The general concept of ‘ideology’ is quite complex and has a variety of meanings, but the anthropologist Clifford Geertz has coined a meaning which may contribute to clarification at this point.34 According to Geertz, ‘ideology’ is best seen as a means of orientation: a set of more or less coherent ideas which enable people to make sense of the often opaque social reality around them, and enables them to act in that reality in ways they may then consider significant. An ideology usually contains a diagnosis and a therapy, a model of the world and a model for the world. It tells people something about the present state of affairs in their

society (and often also in the world at large), and it tells them how to act to bring about a more desirable state of affairs in the future. It gives direction and meaning, and it enables people to make sense of a social reality which is often hard to understand and may also be threatening, especially in uncertain times. Correspondingly, the need for (new) ideology generally increases when state-societies enter periods of encompassing political, economic, and social change, for instance, in times of serious crisis, revolution or (civil) war, when many new phenomena and developments may appear, when social relationships in a society undergo fundamental change, and older ways of giving meaning and purpose seem to lose their value or may actually become quickly obsolete.

46. Now, as has been argued in section 3 above, genocidal crimes occur during episodes of grave and enduring crisis. During the ongoing destabilisation, polarisation, and accompanying depacification, the different contending politicians and political elites will make use of ideas and ideologies to strengthen and legitimate their own power positions, to mobilise supporters, and to point out the directions in which they think actions and developments should go. They themselves may sincerely believe in the ideology they propagate, but they may also use ideas in a more cynical way, just because they believe they will help them to attain their aims – acquiring (more) power or staying in power, for instance. However, they will use ideas as they see fit, regardless of their truth-value, and above all aiming at arousing, preferably passionate, support for themselves and their policies. So they will take care to appeal to opinions, feelings, and perceptions which they have reason to believe already exist among their (potential) supporters and followers.

47. The ideologies invoked may initially span the whole spectrum of available political ideas, but as the crisis deepens and the polarisation process goes on, more moderate and reasonable ideas (and the politicians who propagate them) will inevitably lose out, while more radical ideas (and their protagonists) will gain influence. The political and social middle ground will then increasingly disappear.35

48. Among the radical ideologies varieties of nationalism will figure prominently. This is partly because the crisis is perceived as being of ‘national’ proportions, partly because nationalism as an ideology can have a very broad appeal for people of all sectors, layers and classes in society, partly because of a ‘natural affinity’ between nationalism and (a claim on) central political (and military) leadership, and also because nationalist ideology provides plenty of opportunities to play on individual and collective feelings of pride, identity, and meaning.

among the population at large. Of the many varieties of nationalism, which commonly range from moderate patriotism and civil nationalism on the one hand to radical and sometimes extremist (racist) ethno-cultural nationalism on the other, the latter often becomes dominant, albeit temporarily. This has happened in the four historical cases repeatedly mentioned before, with German National-Socialism after 1933, Turkish radical nationalism after 1913, extremist Hutu nationalism from 1990 onwards, and even in the case of Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975. Although initially the latter was frequently interpreted as a special case of Communist and Maoist radicalism, more recent studies have emphasised that many policies of the leadership, and especially the genocidal policies, were strongly shaped by Khmer ethnic nationalism.

49. The long-term social process of nation-formation is, among other things, a process of social inclusion and exclusion, and likewise radical nationalism is an ideology of inclusion and exclusion, and, ultimately, an ideology of defense and attack. In a situation of serious crisis, as indicated earlier, the radical nationalist ideological diagnosis will in any case contain a general ‘definition of the situation’, a rough, positive delineation of the ‘we-group’ of the nation, and a, usually strongly negative, definition of those who as a supposedly hostile ‘they-group’ of ‘enemies’ are held responsible for the situation in which the nation supposedly finds itself. Furthermore, the diagnosis will also point to a therapy. Typically, rhetoric is used and promises are made that the nation will be saved and redeemed when everybody devotes himself to the nationalist cause, when the nation will be purified from ‘alien elements’, and internal and external foes and enemies will be defeated. Whatever the specific circumstances and conditions, the classic nationalist credo of political autonomy, national unity, and a supposedly homogeneous, collective cultural identity will be emphasised.

50. The radical nationalist ‘definition of the situation’ usually consists of an outline of the ongoing crisis which comes down to the idea that the nation is slighted and discriminated against by others, that it has experienced unjustified losses of power and prestige in the (recent) past, and that it is threatened by even more serious losses in the near future. It will be argued that its vital interests, its security, and also its pride, identity and meaning, are at stake, and maybe even its sheer physical existence. Moreover, all this has come about through no

fault of its own. The national ‘we-group’ is most often depicted as consisting of honest, hard-working, and upright people, who always did their duty and want nothing more than their fair share of the cake, but who are harmed and threatened in unwarranted ways by ‘they-groups’ of supposedly powerful others. Although part of this diagnosis may be realistic, it is usually a mix of historical facts, half-truths, myth-making, and feelings of resentment, which may strongly appeal to many people who find themselves in such a crisis. The nationalist ideology ‘explains’ to them what is going on, it offers them a framework to understand their individual and collective historical and present fate, and for people who embrace the radical nationalist perspective possibilities for meaningful and purposeful action are opened up.

51. It is here that such collective belief systems may become dangerous for certain ‘they-groups’, ‘others’ who are not seen as belonging to the nation, but, on the contrary, who under the pressure of the ongoing crisis are increasingly defined as reprehensible, despicable, and blameworthy enemies. Strong identification with one’s own nation may then easily go hand in hand with strong disidentification with (members of) other nations or national groups, and with ‘traitors’ in one’s own ranks. Nationalist collective belief systems may give rise to collective hate fantasies, which astute politicians can channel into various forms of collective action and in policies directed against the supposedly threatening ‘outsiders’, whoever they may be and however they may be delineated. It is here also that the connections between such radical nationalist ideology, genocidal policies, and genocidal crimes lie.

52. From an extremist nationalist viewpoint supposedly threatening people, minorities, or otherwise delineated categories or groups within the population as a whole should be attacked. Because they are imagined as absolute evil, as the root cause of all the problems of the nation, and as posing a grave threat to its further existence and flowering, all measures against them are permitted. Moreover, because they are depicted as the epitome of evil, they are to a high degree dehumanised, and placed beyond the boundaries of the universe of common human moral obligation. They are outlawed in the widest sense possible, and should be excluded, terrorised, expropriated, uprooted, ousted, driven out and away, and ultimately, in the most extreme cases, killed. As Leo Kuper has observed:

‘Ideological dehumanisation of the victims is a constant feature, the mass slaughter itself being the denial of a common humanity. It is expressed too in the handling of the victims, in the disposal of their bodies, and in the obscene mutilation of the corpses. There are often ‘rituals of degradation’ which deliberately reject, with brutal contempt, the most deeply held human values, and the deepest sentiments of human attachment. Thus men are tortured
before their wives and children, women are repeatedly raped in the presence of their families, children are killed in the arms of their mothers, and prospective victims are forced to slaughter their fellow victims by the most fearful means.'

To be sure, in reality the individuals and groups targeted most often pose no or hardly any threat at all to the existence of the nation, let alone that they are responsible for the problems with which the nation may be confronted, or embody absolute evil. The point is, however, that once radical nationalist political leadership imagines them to be so, and considerable parts of the population come to share this belief, often reinforced by vigorous vilifying propaganda campaigns, the outcome may be disastrous. As sociologists have often observed, quoting their colleague W. Thomas: ‘if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences’.

53. Under such circumstances, political leaders who initiate genocidal policies, and active participants in genocidal processes at all levels of responsibility, may actually feel that they are doing the right thing, that they are rendering an important service to their nation. They may even be proud of what they are doing or have done – however horrible in the eyes of others – and may also afterwards show no sign of any remorse.

54. The foregoing argument does not imply that all those who are involved in launching a genocidal policy or who take part as active perpetrators in a genocidal process are exclusively motivated and driven on by an extremely nationalist persuasion, that they are all fanatical nationalists, nor does it imply that all perpetrators personally feel a deep hatred towards all members of the targeted group(s). Studies on perpetrators in different cases have shown that people may take part in a genocidal process for multifarious reasons and motives. Some may be driven by a nationalist conviction or (sadistic) hate against the victims, but others participate because they are out for money or other material rewards (for instance, the possessions of the victims), because they are serving their number, want to keep their job, or comply with orders from higher up, because they like to exercise arbitrary power over others, are looking for adventure and excitement, want to make a career, or simply because they felt they had no alternatives.

55. However, the argument does imply that radical (nationalist) ideology plays a large part in contributing to the development of a generally extremist political climate and to clearing the

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ground for a potentially genocidal situation. Moreover, it strongly contributes to the
delineation of the national we-group, the marking off of the they-groups to be targeted, to
their exclusion, vilification, stigmatisation and dehumanisation, and to the measures taken
together against them.

56. When it actually comes to genocidal acts, the overall nationalist ideology furthermore
functions continuously as the ultimate legitimisation, rationalisation, and justification of the
genocidal process. And, lastly, the overall nationalist ideology imparts to all perpetrators in a
process of genocide a general, more or less shared sense of direction, meaning, intent and
purpose. Whatever their personal motivations, thoughts, feelings, and considerations may be,
they are all part of and inextricably bound up with a complex collective undertaking and by
their behaviour they try to make it succeed: to persecute and get rid of certain categories of
people, considered as undesirable.

7. Victims

57. In this overview of the aetiology and genesis of genocidal crimes the focus so far has been
mainly on the perpetrators at different levels. And with good reason: without them there
would be no genocidal policy and no genocidal process. Many historians and others in the
field of genocide studies have however emphasised that it is also necessary and important to
look at the genocidal process from the perspective of the victims. Harking back to the
definitions quoted earlier, all authors point to certain aspects of the victim group(s). Chalk
and Jonassohn emphasise that the targeted ‘group and membership in it’ are defined by the
perpetrators. Fein stresses that persecution and genocide are sustained ‘regardless of the
surrender or lack of threat’ offered by the victims. In the same vein, Charny sees the victims
as essentially ‘defenseless and helpless’, while Horowitz characterises the victims as ‘innocent
people’.

58. As a sixth common element on which nearly all genocide scholars agree, one can state that
victims are generally exclusively chosen because of their supposed membership of a group or
a category targeted for persecution and destruction. They do not become victims of
persecution and genocidal crime for anything they have personally and individually done or
intend to do, nor because they are guilty of any crime or misdemeanour, nor because they
pose any real threat. One might even say that their individual behaviour, their individual
identity, and their own individual self-perception and self-definition are largely irrelevant. What counts in being selected as a victim is that specific individual people are perceived and defined by hostile others – the persecutors – to be members of a group or category which they consider reprehensible and despicable. The existence of such a group or category itself may be largely the product of the imagination of the hostile others, and usually many characteristics they ascribe to the group are wholly imaginary, flowing from their own collective hate fantasies.

59. For instance, preceding the genocidal campaign against the Armenians which started in the spring of 1915, they were collectively declared to form a mortal threat to the security of the Ottoman-Turkish Empire at war. Moreover, they were accused of having enriched themselves at the cost of the Turks, they were blamed, alternately, with the secret desire to rule over the Turkish people or to form their own sovereign state on Ottoman territory, and, lastly, they were accused of encouraging the enemies of the Empire. Such views tied in neatly with far older, wide-spread and strongly negative Turkish and Islamic prejudices and stereotypes with regard to Armenians in which they were for example depicted as ‘sly, untrustworthy and despicable christians’, as ‘ghiaours’ (an Arabic term, meaning: unbelievers who deserve to be killed), and as ‘the cattle of the sultan’. During the persecution of the German Jews in Germany between 1933 and 1939, official antisemite propaganda campaigns endlessly reiterated that all people from Jewish descent formed an interconnected community which was, moreover, continuously conspiring against the German people and the German state, that every Jew formed part of this community, that being Jewish was the most important, indeed the only important, characteristic of the individual people involved – the quintessential ‘master-trait’ so to speak, and that all and everything Jewish was synonymous with all conceivable historical and contemporary evil. In the early ’90s politicians and ideologues sympathetic to the so-called ‘Hutu Power’ movement declared all Tutsis and their ‘treacherous’ Hutu ‘friends’ and ‘servants’ to be dangerous mortal enemies of Rwanda,

plotting to kill all Hutus. Tutsis were often called ‘inyenzi’ (a Kinyarwandan word, meaning: ‘cockroaches’, or ‘insects’) which should be killed in time before they could do harm.\textsuperscript{44}

60. Notwithstanding the completely untenable and evidently magical ways of perceiving, thinking and reasoning about individual human beings and their relations to larger groupings and categories, genocide scholars have frequently noted that such and similar ways of perceiving and reasoning are in fact very widespread in many different human societies and have played an important role in virtually every genocidal process. During such processes individuals are (exclusively) reduced to their supposed membership of a group or category, and because the group or category is perceived as deeply evil, declared to be collectively guilty, and collectively condemned, individuals may be and are persecuted and destroyed.

61. Social scientists and historians who study processes of persecution and genocide have also pointed out several other regularities and mechanisms in this context. It has been observed frequently, for instance, that the group(s) targeted for persecution is (are) often vulnerable. It has also been argued that that vulnerability may even be one of the main reasons why they are targeted. A group which is not very powerful from the outset is certainly an easier prey for attack than a group that is well entrenched in society, influential and powerful. However, the view of Charny and others that victims are ‘essentially helpless and defenseless’ may be slightly revised: it is not so much that victims are relatively powerless and helpless right from the start of the genocidal process, but they are made increasingly vulnerable and defenseless by and through the persecution process itself, that is: by the powers and people sustaining that process. In specific cases, this may be brought about in various ways, and in one and the same case perpetrators may apply many different tactics to deprive the victims of any power and power resources of which they could previously dispose.

62. For example, during the persecution process of the Jews in Germany before World War II, they were step by step deprived of all their civil and citizenship rights, they lost their jobs and other means of existence, they were (pseudo-)legally redefined as ‘Jews’ instead of German citizens, they were increasingly excluded from public life and restricted in their movements in public space, they lost their houses, their social rights, were denied access to health services, public transport, schools, and universities, and so on, and so on. All this, and much more, happened over a span of six years, mainly through political and bureaucratic measures and compulsion (albeit with continuous and serious threats of physical compulsion in the

background), partly through direct (threats of) physical violence. In the course of these six years they lost virtually all their power resources, and the Jews who remained behind in Germany in 1939 – about half of them had left the country – were mostly elderly, poor, and powerless, and had indeed become very vulnerable to further attacks. In the case of the persecution and genocide of the Armenians basically the same development – depriving the targeted people of power resources – went much faster, and other tactics were employed. In the early months of 1915 all Armenian officers and soldiers in the Ottoman army – many just mobilised because of the war – were dismissed from the ranks, had to turn in their weapons, and were placed in so-called labor battalions. These battalions were forced to do hard labour under dire circumstances which resulted in the death of many Armenian males, while they were also decimated through outright killing. In April 1915 hundreds of leading and influential Armenian politicians, businessmen, lawyers, other professionals, and intellectuals, were arrested in the capital within days, deported by train, and subsequently nearly all killed. By these two swift and murderous actions the perpetrators had succeeded in depriving the Armenian population of a large part of its leadership, and thereby of its power, which probably contributed strongly to the relative ease with which the perpetrators could launch the large scale campaign of massive deportations on foot over long distances which became fatal for large numbers of the deportees. At the start of these deportations, which lasted for many months and took place over almost the whole territory of the Empire, the male heads of households and older boys were usually separated from the elderly males, the women, and the children, and were deported first. Later on the rest of the community followed.\textsuperscript{45}

63. It should be underlined that these three measures of forcibly uprooting people, forceful separation of families and households, and mass deportation of people to unknown destinations, which are part and parcel of nearly every genocidal process, in and by themselves go a very long way to making people powerless and extremely vulnerable. By forcefully breaking up the existing social relationships within the group and deeply disturbing the normal social life of the group through the use of violence, they also go a very long way towards the actual destruction of the group. For the people involved such measures invariably imply catastrophic experiences and very serious harm. For those who survive, it is usually very hard or well-nigh impossible to recover.

64. Scholars in the field of genocide studies have also noted as a regularity that processes of persecution and genocide tend to take (large parts of) the targeted group(s) by surprise.

Especially at the beginning of such a process it is often very difficult for the potential victims to discern what is going on, but also later on, when the process is well under way and up to a point more visible, it may remain quite hard for many members of the targeted group(s) to understand and realise what is going to happen. Obviously, this is precisely what the perpetrators are out for. By keeping their real intentions secret, by consciously hiding their planning and preparations as much as possible, by all sorts of tactics of deliberate misleading and deceiving of (members of) the targeted group(s) during the process of persecution, they try to maximise the surprise effects of their actions, to disempower the victims, raise the overall uncertainty and insecurity of the victims, and thus realise their aims.

65. But even apart from all these deliberate and premeditated activities from the side of the perpetrators, it remains difficult for many victims to foresee what hostile others are planning to do to them. Nobody can look into the future, reliable information is often difficult to come by, even more so in uncertain times, and victims most often live between hope and fear. Even when groups or categories are targeted by an alien and hostile occupying force, as was the case for many Jewish citizens in European countries occupied by Germany, it is very hard to fully realise that that force is aiming at the complete and total destruction of one’s life, one’s family and relatives, and the larger group or category one may feel one belongs to. It may well be even far more difficult to imagine and to conclude that your own government and your own state, and possibly also some of your own superiors, colleagues, acquaintances, neighbours, or other people you happen to know personally, are out for such destruction. However, even for those who more or less correctly feel or foresee what is in store for them, the possible courses of action are usually limited.

66. More or less suddenly confronted with (the threat of) organised, armed – and thus powerful – others with hostile intentions, there are basically only three ways in which people can react. They may try to hide or flee, they may put up some form of resistance or even a fight, or they may try to accommodate as best as they can to the then usually very fast and fundamentally changing circumstances and conditions.

67. Regarding the first option, sociologists and historians have more than once explained that for hiding in cities, towns, or villages, potential victims need to have trustworthy and reliable friends or other relations outside the targeted group, who moreover have the means, and are ready and willing to take the risk of hiding people who are wanted by the authorities. In virtually every case of persecution and genocidal crime, rendering help or assistance to the

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46 Cf. Zwaan (2001), op.cit., pp. 340-341. Biologists have repeatedly pointed out that in situations of sudden attack there are usually three responses possible: ‘fright, fight, flight’.

people targeted has been strictly forbidden and often been severely punished. Considerable amounts of money may also be required to pay for a more or less safe hiding place. When people can take to the hills, the mountains or the woods, to hide out there, which has happened on some scale during the persecution of the Armenians, in the case of Cambodia, and in Rwanda during 1994 for instance, they will after some time also need at least some outside support for food and other necessities of life. And in all cases there is the perpetual risk of betrayal. Trying to flee entails other difficulties, as among other things financial means, safe transport, unharmed travelling, and suitable sites to leave the country, are required.

When large groups among the population are hostile towards members of the targeted group, fleeing will be dangerous. Moreover, in all cases drastic decisions have to made, usually within a short period of time. Because of these problems hiding is often only possible for a tiny minority of the targeted group, and whether fleeing is an option for larger groups very much depends on the overall situation. In Eastern Anatolia, for instance, considerable groups of Armenians could flee with retreating Russian armies in 1915, others got over the border into Iran, and a small group left the Empire oversea, picked up by a few French and English warships which happened to be cruising along the coast, but the bulk of the Armenian population was trapped. Although (threatening) processes of persecution and genocide form the background to a large part of the streams of refugees all over the present world, massive flight of targeted group(s) is more often than not an exception.

68. The second option, to resist or to fight, is even more exceptional. As has been noted before, the targeted group is normally not armed nor organised to use force, and the perpetrators, who are prepared, organised, and armed, typically suddenly descend upon them. Whether this takes the form of large scale arrests, followed by detention, and subsequent deportation, or the form of destructive violent attacks or raids on neighbourhoods, towns, villages or hamlets, in all cases units of police, military, or paramilitary personnel will rather easily be able to dominate the situation. In such situations things will move fast, many people will be terrified and at a loss, and thereby paralysed, and most people will do as they are told. In several cases, genocide scholars and others have reconstructed incidents of individual and collective resistance, more organised resistance movements, and serious revolts under dire circumstances. One may think of the revolt in the Warsaw ghetto, of the revolts in the death camps of Sobibor and Treblinka, of Jewish partisan groups in Eastern Europe, and Jewish participation in resistance movements in Western Europe. In the case of the Armenians one may think of the Armenian defence of the city of Van in April 1915 against a strong Turkish army group, and the heroic fight and subsequent successful flight of an Armenian group in
the Musa Dagh mountains. During the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 there have been quite considerable efforts by courageous individuals, both Hutu and Tutsi, to stop what was going on, and there have been groups of Tutsis who, sometimes with success, put up a fight against their persecutors. While many succumbed, such acts of resistance have saved the life of some of the others. Moreover, such acts make clear that the view that targeted people during genocides are ‘led like lambs to the slaughter’ is not correct. But however one may want to interpret such events, it should be concluded that given the overwhelming inequality in power between the perpetrators and the victims, the option of resisting or fighting is rarely a possible course of action for most members of the targeted group(s).

69. The third course of action, trying to accommodate as best as one can to changing conditions and circumstances, is thus the one most often followed by most members of the targeted group(s) when they are directly confronted with acts of persecution. It should be emphasised that this option is not freely chosen by people, but that they act that way under strong and continuous compulsion and coercion by hostile others, backed up by serious threats and acts of physical violence. An important general consequence is that the persecuted, individually and collectively, then suffer a further severe loss of their relative autonomy, of their liberty and freedom to act according to their own will. Although there will be differences here between individuals and groups among the persecuted, depending on the specific circumstances, nearly all of them will become more vulnerable, and that vulnerability in itself may be taken advantage of by the perpetrators to act even more callously. But however the persecuted and victims may behave, their behaviour can hardly be judged in the ‘normal’ terms of personal choice, responsibility, and morality, because under the extreme conditions of violent persecution these terms no longer apply.

70. What happens to the victims of persecution once they are caught in person by the persecutors, may vary quite considerably. They may be detained for shorter or longer periods in temporary detention centres, prisons, improvised or highly organised concentration camps, or locked up in ghettos or city neighbourhoods. They may be forced to different forms of hard labour in cities, camps, or rural areas. They may be deported in various forms and under varying circumstances, on foot, by train, in buses or lorries, or aboard ships. In single transports of deportees they may be ambushed, plundered and (repeatedly) terrorised by rape, torture, wounding and murdering, or endlessly sent on from destination to destination. They may be directly killed in improvised or organised massacres on the spot, or on special killing fields nearby or further away. Or that may happen later on in death camps or at other places. And there are many different ways of destroying and killing people.
71. It is especially by trying to imagine the fate of the victims, not only in general terms but also in all their horrible details, that one may hope to grasp something of the real meaning of processes of persecution and genocide.

8. Summary

On the preceding pages it has been argued:

- Firstly, that genocide and other mass crimes targeting specific groups should be carefully distinguished from war and civil war, while at the same time one should recognise that situations of war or civil war may contribute in various ways to the development of genocidal processes.

- Secondly, it has been pointed out that genocidal crimes only develop and take place under conditions of serious and enduring crisis. A general model of the emergence of such crises has been presented in a very condensed form. Destabilisation of the state-society concerned, polarisation processes, depacification, and increasing use of violence are at the heart of such crises.

- Thirdly, in the course of the crisis a radical and ruthless political elite may succeed in taking over the state organisation. The political behaviour and decisions of this political leadership may be considered of decisive importance for the emergence of genocide. It has been argued that a genocidal process does not develop from ‘bottom up’, but that it is typically a ‘top down’ development, although the precise involvement of the state may take different forms. One corollary is that the highest state authorities are always responsible for what happens during the genocidal process, another corollary implies that ‘single’ acts of genocide should be (also) considered against the background of the prevalent power and authority structure within the state-society concerned.

- Fourthly, it has been emphasised that genocides may be best seen as (highly complex) processes, with a beginning, a structured course in which phases can be discerned, and an end – usually brought about by forceful external intervention. Furthermore, in trying to understand a genocidal process attention should be paid to the decision-making, the gradual emergence of planning and organisation, and the division of labour within the category of perpetrators.

- Fifthly, it has been argued that ideology is also of crucial importance for genocide to emerge. Usually, varieties of radical nationalism will figure prominently. They contribute to the
development of an extremist political climate; to the marking off of the groups or categories to be targeted; they legitimise, rationalise, and justify the genocidal process; and impart to the perpetrators a sense of direction, intent and purpose.

- Sixthly, it has been underlined that every genocidal process should also be considered from the angle of the victims, who are typically chosen because of their supposed membership of a group or category targeted for persecution. It has been argued, moreover, that such groups are made increasingly vulnerable and defenceless through the process of persecution itself, that it is usually very difficult for them to foresee what is going to happen, and that their possible courses of (re)action are severely limited. Keeping their fate central in one’s mind seems to be the best compass when studying, assessing and judging genocide.

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