

2 | *Fallacies of the comparative genocide paradigm*

Since genocide studies grew in the shadow of Holocaust studies, they have had to struggle to establish their autonomy. Among historians, the weight of Holocaust historiography is so great that genocide remains a poor relation. The necessity of comparison, which might otherwise be seen as normal in historical and social-scientific research, is seen as a hard-won gain over the idea of Holocaust ‘uniqueness’ (Huttenbach 2009). Each additional ‘genocide’ has to be painstakingly added to the canon, often after political campaigning as well as scholarship. The recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide, pursued both by historians (Hovanissian 1987, Dadrian 2001) and campaigners, is a model which advocates of recognizing other genocides have followed.

Thus although genocide studies have generally criticized the sacralized idea of the Holocaust as a ‘unique’ event – otherwise it would be difficult to talk meaningfully about its relationships to other episodes, and full bridging would be difficult – it still profoundly influences how the field develops. With the Holocaust as the standard against which other genocides must be measured, most predictably ‘fail’: hence a narrow scope for ‘genocide’ is confirmed, and euphemistic descriptions such as ‘ethnic cleansing’ are adopted instead to describe the ‘failed’ episodes (Shaw 2007: 37–62). Yet this does not exhaust the problematic influence of ideas about the Holocaust. Even if bridging from the Holocaust sometimes works for *recognition* of other genocides, its consequences for *understanding* genocide are mostly profoundly negative. The bridging approach, I shall argue, has been associated with a theoretical and methodological paradigm which has restricted our understanding of the Holocaust as well as of genocide.

The core academic idea which is inspired by bridging is that the understanding of genocide should proceed by comparing one episode to another. Around this, I argue in this chapter, are clustered a number of key assumptions of the principal paradigm in the field, which I therefore call the *comparative genocide paradigm*. That this is

not just one of many paradigms, but the dominant approach, is clearly reflected in the way that the field has usually been defined, as 'comparative genocide studies' (Scherrer 1999).

Comparative method and genocide research

Comparison is normal, unavoidable and necessary in social science and history. Yet the value of comparison depends on its purpose, how its units are defined, and the frame of reference within which it is made. Precisely because comparison is axiomatic, the idea is hardly sufficient to define a field. Therefore genocide studies' self-definition in these terms suggests the weakness of its theoretical goals. Indeed for some practitioners, the purposes of comparison hardly go beyond the essentially political goal of recognition.

The kind of comparative reasoning to which 'bridging' most obviously leads is argument by analogy. This is the most limited type of comparison, understanding new events by reference to established narratives of given events. Not surprisingly there is, writes the sociologist Alberto Toscano (2010: 153), 'a contemporary trend to see analogy as a representational trend that stifles singularity and novelty, reinforcing the standardised prejudices as doxa'. In contrast, meaningful comparison depends on developing theoretical frameworks, which do not depend on narratives of specific events but can make sense of a whole universe of events. As Charles Ragin (1989: 19) puts it, 'it is not difficult to make sense of an individual case . . . or to draw a few rough parallels across a range of cases . . . The challenge comes in trying to make sense of the diversity across cases in a way that unites similarities and differences in a single coherent framework.'

Even when it moves beyond its analogical starting point, genocide studies still remain a branch of the most common kind of comparative social science which deals with variations between what are seen as discrete national cases. In this sense, comparative study is 'the branch of sociology that uses society as its explanatory unit' (Ragin 1982), where 'society' is understood as a national unit. This kind of sociology and political science compares national societies, seeking to explain variation in the dimension studied in terms of the societies' more fundamental differences. When this traditional comparative sociology is taken seriously, Philip McMichael (1990: 385) points out, 'The logic of comparative inquiry requires independent or uniform cases and

formal quasi-experimental designs for comparative generalization.’ This kind of work is common in the more readily quantified areas of social science, dealing with regular micro-phenomena such as crime and electoral trends. However comparative genocide studies, like other fields dealing with more irregular macro-phenomena such as war and revolution, has unsurprisingly produced little work of this kind.

This kind of comparative study involves, moreover, what Ulrich Beck (2005: 43–50) calls ‘methodological nationalism’, which over-privileges national contexts of social relations. In the mid twentieth century, this led to the reification of national peculiarities or ‘social science as stamp-collecting’ (Shaw 2000: 68–70). The idea corresponds to a division of labour between domesticated social sciences (sociology, politics, etc.) which work largely within national contexts, and International Relations which deals with interstate relations. At the end of the twentieth century, this division was breaking down because of the ‘global’ changes associated with the end of the Cold War (Albrow 1997). The idea of global understanding also implied a changed view of earlier history, so that a methodological separation between the study of ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ processes was increasingly seen as archaic in historical as well as sociological research. In this context, although comparative social science continued to be practised, its heyday (Armer and Marsh 1982) had passed, and ‘the comparative method’ was less discussed.

In serious comparative work in genocide studies (going beyond loose, analogical reference to established cases), the dominant approach has comprised integrated sequential studies of a few major episodes within thematic frameworks which allow qualitative comparisons. Numerous major volumes (recent examples include Weitz 2005, Valentino 2004, Mann 2005, Midlarsky 2005, Sémelin 2007 and Kiernan 2007) follow this approach, which has undoubtedly led to enriched understanding, principally of the restricted universe of major cases. Moreover this kind of work has been less tightly bound by the formal requirements of comparative enquiry and has sometimes moved partially beyond ‘methodological nationalism’. Nevertheless even these manifestations of comparative genocide have often involved assumptions about the nature of appropriate comparisons which reflect the analogical bridging of Holocaust-inspired discourse, as well as the mainstream understanding of comparative social science. I shall examine these assumptions in turn, explaining the way the comparative paradigm

works as an interlocking set. Although no one writer represents this paradigm in its entirety, and many scholars would disagree with some of its elements even if they accept others, these assumptions have real influence in the field, and the ideal type which I present below represents, I believe, an interlocking set of obstacles to fuller sociological and historical understanding of genocides.

The study of 'genocides' rather than genocide

The starting point for the paradigm has been the assumption that there are stand-alone episodes which can be compared. Here the Holocaust influence is very evident. In constructing it as a paradigmatic evil event, modern Western culture simultaneously emphasized the distinctive features of the Nazi mass murder of the Jews and de-emphasized the ways in which that campaign of atrocity was linked to others (against other populations and by other actors) as well as to their common Second World War context. Holocaust historiography has been framed by the general social-construction processes discussed in Chapter 1. It has generally held fairly tightly to the idea of the Holocaust as a very distinctive set of policies, processes and events, to be studied in their own frame. For Holocaust historians, as Dan Stone (2008) emphasizes, any comparison with other genocides remains a novelty. Yet as we have seen, the Nazi extermination of the Jews was not originally understood as a stand-alone episode, but as part of the wider sets of Nazi and indeed many-sided atrocities in the world war. Lemkin (1944) referred to 'the Nazi genocide' as a multi-faceted, multi-targeted process, rather than separately to Nazi genocide against the Jews, which he saw as only a part of that process. The point is not that Lemkin was right and 'Holocaust' scholars wrong (I pursue the arguments further in Chapter 4) but that labelling a particular set of events a 'genocide' is always a somewhat arbitrary decision. There is always more than one way to define the limits of a particular set of historical processes.

Comparative genocide studies has, however, got badly stuck with the idea that what it is studying are discrete 'genocides' (Armenian, Rwandan, Cambodian, etc.), sharply differentiated from other social processes as well as from each other. In implementing bridging, it recognizes additional distinct genocides even when these occur simultaneously and connectedly with genocides already recognized.

So alongside the Holocaust, the Nazis are widely argued to have committed further ‘genocides’ of the mentally disabled, Roma and Sinti, Poles, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Russians, Serbs and other Slavs, etc. The Ottoman Turkish regime is similarly believed to have carried out serial genocides of Greeks, Assyrians and other Christian groups as well as of Armenians (Travis 2010: 173–292). Yet the view of these as separate ‘genocides’ has more to do with nationalist reclamations of history than with analytical reasoning concerning processes which were highly intertwined.

This approach fails to distinguish the *principal* object of study, which is genocide in general as a type of social action, social relation and social structure, from an entirely *secondary* question, whether, how and when to delimit particular episodes from each other (Shaw 2007: 81–96). Moreover, it answers the latter question in fundamentally inappropriate ways, since there is much to be learned by looking at the common elements of these separated ‘genocides’, especially when they occur in the same time and context and even more when they are perpetrated by the same actors. These inappropriate answers are the results of further, closely linked assumptions to which I shall now turn.

Priority of mega-genocides, ‘rarity’ of genocide

The comparative genocide approach, while allowing recognition of new genocides, tends to prioritize studying the few cases of extremely large-scale and exceptionally murderous genocide which are most easily represented as stand-alone events. Hence the Armenians, the Holocaust and Rwanda take centre-place in most recent grand tomes. The consequence is that genocide studies has been dominated by what Levene (2005a: 163) calls ‘mega-genocides’. Smaller-scale and less murderous (but still hugely socially destructive) events, even though far more numerous and indicative of the prevalence of genocide, are often marginalized. In particular, what Kuper (1987: 32) seminally called ‘genocidal massacres’ have tended to be excluded from the main frame of the field. Indeed, Jacques Sémelin (2007) insists on a categorical distinction between ‘genocide’ and ‘massacre’: only large-scale, clearly ‘intentional’ policy-driven events count as genocide.

Certainly, the mega-genocides can be made to stand out from history as sacred evils. Yet it is more important to appreciate the extent to which even these cases are embedded within histories of war, political

competition, religious domination, colonization, etc. The dominance of the field by mega-episodes involves a serious distortion of the overall pattern of genocidal violence, and leads directly to the questionable consensus which Straus (2007: 479) summarizes from his survey of recent literature, that 'Genocide is a rare event.' Genocide is only 'rare' because it has been defined in a way that excludes many smaller and localized cases. Even the UN Convention's specification of five means of genocide is too broad for scholars who redefine genocide simply as 'mass murder' (Chalk and Jonassohn 1990, Charny 1988 and 1991). This reduction to mass murder is a pervasive tendency in comparative genocide research, and can be seen in a range of recent comparative and single-case studies (e.g. Midlarsky 2005, Straus 2006, Sémelin 2007).

Here there is a close coincidence between the dominant academic paradigm and the nationalist political agendas of those who claim to speak for major victim-groups (even if many of the authors cited would distance themselves from these agendas). For Jewish nationalists, if the Holocaust is the prime genocide, then the destruction of Arab society in Palestine a few years later – which manifestly involved far fewer victims, a very much smaller proportion of whom were murdered – cannot be genocide. Likewise, from the point of view of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, because the mass murder of Rwandan Tutsis was a major genocide, smaller-scale massacres of Hutus by the RPF itself cannot be genocide. Such arguments not only sustain dubious political agendas, but also work to block a full view of the scope of genocide in the 1940s and the 1990s respectively. This is a type of argument that would never be entertained if we were discussing a similar question in another field. In war studies, for example, no political interests would block us from seeing major and minor examples of the same phenomenon, in the same period, involving a variety of actors. Yet in genocide studies, the dominant assumptions about the demarcation of genocides work in precisely this way.

Singular perpetrators, singular victim-groups

A corresponding component of the comparative genocide paradigm is that the social relations of genocide tend to be represented in one-dimensional terms. Perpetrators perpetrate; victims suffer victimization; and, last but not least, bystanders stand by. Certainly, the core meaning of genocide is the destruction of a civilian population or

group by armed power, and in this sense the idea involves the qualitatively asymmetrical relationship which is captured by the 'perpetrators/victims' dichotomy. Yet in the comparative genocide paradigm, much more is generally assumed. Perpetrators are assumed to be single hierarchically organized collective actors typically centred on state power, victims to be socially coherent collectivities typically (in the terms of the UN Convention) ethnic, national, racial or religious groups. Bystanders, in contrast, are sociologically anonymous: this is an empty category indicating no particular type of actor.

There is considerable disagreement on the secondary characteristics of perpetrator organizations. It has been noted that they involve particular types of regime, rather than of state (Dadrian 2001: 155), and require the support of other social actors, such as paramilitaries and social constituencies, to carry out their goals (Mann 2005). But that the organizers of genocide are basically centralized, hierarchical actors is widely assumed, excluding the possibility that diverse arrays of state and non-state actors might be responsible. Empirical evidence that the perpetrators of anti-population violence are often more diverse has even led Christian Gerlach (2010) to reject the genocide concept as irredeemably contaminated by unrealistic assumptions about perpetrators. It is difficult not to share his frustration with the prevailing narrow conceptions, but these should be linked to the comparative genocide paradigm rather than the idea of genocide as such.

Likewise, although many scholars add social classes, political and/or gender groups to the list of victim-group types, few dispute that each genocide involves a singular, specific victim-group deriving from, as Helen Fein (1990: 24) puts it, 'basic kinds, classes, or sub-families of humanity, persisting units of society'. Even if some add the important qualification that victim-groups are defined by the perpetrators (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990: 23), the idea of a singular target- or victim-group remains fundamental. Underlying this is the idea of 'ownership' of each genocide by a particular group that is targeted, ownership which remains with the descendants and especially the political representatives of such groups decades or even centuries later. This notion is essential for maintaining the links of genocide studies to the commemorative traditions of ethnic, national and other groups, but it blocks conceptualization of the complex and often two- or multi-sided targeting which is normal in genocide. In order to deal with the latter, the singular victim-group concept requires us either to identify a series

of simultaneous genocides by the same perpetrators (e.g. Nazi genocides against the mentally handicapped, Roma and Sinti, etc., as well as against the Jews) or to conceptualize ‘major’ and ‘minor’ victims (for example, Tutsis and ‘moderate Hutus’ in Rwanda in 1994).

The idea that particular victim-group identities should define our understanding of genocide is attractive because it pays attention to victim experience. Bartov argues of Nazi genocide that ‘listening to the voices of victims, Jewish or not, is crucial to the kind of empathy that brings with it a modicum of understanding’. But this is accompanied by the following assertion, which defends the particularity of Jewish experience against a broader view of the Holocaust and Nazi genocide: ‘I am not sure that writing about *many* genocides instead of just one is a moral statement; but I *am* sure that it precludes empathy’ (Bartov 2010: 28, emphasis in the original). Here ‘empathy’ becomes an enemy of an integral approach, even to a particular genocidal history in a given time and space. Apparently we cannot listen to Jewish and other victims at the same time: in Bartov’s study of the ‘erasure’ of Jewish life and culture in Galicia (in today’s Ukraine), which occurred simultaneously with the removal of Polish life and culture from the region, the latter is often recognized parenthetically, in references to ‘Jews (and Poles)’ (e.g. Bartov 2010: 67). A synthetic narrative of genocide in a given historical context, let alone any generalization about genocide in larger historical periods, would appear to be impossible.

In the comparative paradigm, therefore, perpetrators are coherent, organized groups driven by hatred, which is a *sine qua non* of the explanatory thrust since it makes them *purely evil*. Victims are not really actors, but fundamentally passive *pure victims*, since the violence of genocide is by definition ‘one-sided’ (Fein 1990: 13, Charny 1994: 75). The problem, of course, is that historical reality is more complex. Even in the most asymmetrical conflict, victims are also actors. And while *individual* victim-actors are mostly *not* also perpetrators of anti-civilian violence, the larger ethnic and national groups to which they belong – and especially political movements based on them – often include those who are perpetrators, either simultaneously or at a different moment in time. Moreover, even the most asymmetrical conflict is often embedded in a system of conflicts, in which actors from victim-groups are allied to other actors who are perpetrating violence.

The Holocaust is of course the prototype of pure ‘perpetrator/victim’ relationships, since European Jews were almost entirely unarmed in the

face of the Third Reich. Yet Jews did resist both non-violently and violently, and in their armed resistance allied themselves with Nazism's Soviet enemies. The latter in turn perpetrated their own genocidal violence against various populations before, during and after the Second World War. And after the war, the Zionist movement in Palestine, while rescuing Jewish victims of Nazism, used their suffering as part of a rationale for its own violence against the Arab population. Such complexities do not, of course, render the terms 'perpetrators' and 'victims' redundant, but they oblige us to recognize that no population group is purely perpetrator or victim, but that all such groups, and often individuals within them, have complex and changing roles which these terms only partially capture.

The underlying problem here is that the purity of victims' victimhood is important not only for maintaining a simple 'perpetrator/victim' analytical model, but also for group 'ownership' of genocide. Which ethnic or national group, or movement claiming to speak on its behalf, wants to own a messy, conflicted historical record in which its own members have committed violence against civilians as well as being victims? The integrity of the 'perpetrator/victim' dichotomy is fundamental to the comparative genocide paradigm's fit with nationalist narratives of genocidal victimization. The danger is that the idea of singular victim-groups becomes a device policing our understanding more or less directly in the interests of particular communal identities (e.g. Jewish, Tutsi) and often of political institutions and causes which mobilize them (e.g. the Israeli state, the RPF government). It asserts by definitional or methodological fiat the superior importance of the general targeting of a particular nationality or ethnicity. This in turn fragments our understanding of how genocide develops through combined, sequential and sometimes mutual targeting of different groups. Likewise it blocks recognition of the complex discriminations along lines of class, gender, party and locality which – together with more indiscriminate violence against whole ethnic and national populations – actually characterize genocide.

Third parties as bystanders

If the way that the comparative genocide paradigm uses 'perpetrators' and 'victims' needs to be rethought, the matching 'bystander' category should be abandoned altogether. This category recognizes that

genocidal relations involve people who are neither perpetrators or victims, but it is mainly a residual, catch-all category for those who don't belong to the defining groups. The term 'bystander' wraps up these third parties, moreover, in a particular kind of relationship to the conflict between perpetrators and victims. They 'stand by', observing, perhaps commenting – but, like the victims, characterized by passivity. They are not regarded as actors, and this confirms that only the all-powerful perpetrators are really actors in genocide.

Certainly, passivity is *one* common stance in relation to genocide by *some* kinds of third party. States and other actors who have the power-capabilities to prevent or halt genocide often do not see their interests engaged or develop effective policies to oppose it. Population groups in genocide zones who are not themselves directly threatened often fail to stand up for their neighbours, whether out of hostility, indifference or fear. Global media audiences who are aware of distant genocides may not look for, or find, meaningful ways of showing solidarity. These and many other responses to genocide could be called 'bystanding', in the sense of observing without acting to halt genocide. Yet while this description may be morally enlightening, it is sociologically weak: it tells us little about the different modes of and reasons for 'bystanding' which are apparent in the three different cases. Moreover none of these responses should necessarily be considered 'non-action'. On the contrary, many of these actors may indeed be acting, according to their own perceptions of their interests, values and capabilities, even if in ways which fail to prevent or which even facilitate genocide. From a moral point of view, the only action which counts may be that which helps stop violence; from a sociological point of view, however, actors often have other interests, are involved in other relationships and undertake other sorts of action.

So 'bystanders' and 'bystanding' are inadequate ways of framing the range of third-party actors and actions that impinge on genocide. Just as perpetrators include many different types of actor (states, regimes, parties, armies, armed movements, factions within all of these, and others), and victim-groups are varied (ethnic, national, racial, religious, political, class, gender, etc., together with the organizations which represent them), so third-party actors may include all the types of actors who may be perpetrators and victims, and more. While perpetrators are generally armed power-actors, and targets/victims are basically unarmed civilian social groups, third-party actors may be either.

Moreover, the impact of third-party actions on genocidal situations is not restricted to 'bystanding'. Most obviously, there is also 'intervention', not only in the military form in which it is often advocated, but also through political, ideological, social and cultural action designed to impact on genocide.

However even the 'bystanding/intervention' dichotomy utterly fails to illuminate the full scope of third-party action. This conceptualization assumes that third parties are simply oriented towards genocidal situations, and must adopt one of these alternatives. In reality third parties, *simply because they are third parties*, are partially or mainly oriented towards other situations as well as to genocide. Yet their non-genocide-oriented actions may have as great an impact on the genocidal situation as any deliberate 'intervention'. For example, neither the Soviet Union nor the Western Allies developed a general policy of intervention to halt the Holocaust; yet in the end, their military campaigns against Nazi Germany achieved that result. Of course when they liberated the camps, they applied policies to help the survivors; this shows how genocide-oriented actions may develop out of policies not primarily designed as intervention. Bystanding and intervention were both components of Allied policies towards the Holocaust, but neither was really the main driver of the policies which actually had the greatest impact on it.

Regime and ideology

The comparative genocide paradigm's other core assumptions are the closely linked ideas that totalitarian and authoritarian regimes are typical perpetrators, and that racist ideology is the root cause of their violence. These assumptions reflect the origins of the genocide idea in the Nazi context, and the belief that perpetrators will normally resemble the Nazis to some degree. It is widely believed, as Geoffrey Hartman (2009: x) claims, that 'What we do know clearly is that genocides are incited by a demagogic leader who lends credence to a scapegoating myth and reinforces that "narrative".' Contemporary leaders implicated in genocide, such as Slobodan Milošević and Saddam Hussein, are assimilated to a Hitlerian stereotype, although their systems of power and their rationales for genocidal policies are significantly different from Hitler's. Thus the 'regime' assumption not only blocks recognition of the complex and varied nature of perpetrator actors,

reinforcing a fundamentally statist conception of them which is belied by the evidence. It also tends to minimize the differences between genocidal states (and indeed among dictatorial and authoritarian regimes), and embeds as a general understanding something which belongs to a specific time and place.

This approach gels easily, of course, with the assumption that Western democracies and international organizations are the 'answers' to genocide, not part of the problem. It marginalizes troubling issues such as the involvement of more-or-less democratic settler governments in colonial genocide, the role of Western democracies in promoting national homogenization in the era of the world wars, the role of the Western powers and the UN in producing genocide-prone partition plans as solutions to ethno-political conflicts, and the role of democracy promotion in stimulating genocidal violence in the twenty-first century.

The assumption that the root cause of genocide is a racist or similar exclusive ideology, which designates a particular group for destruction, is closely related to the regime assumption. If genocide is defined by a particular victim-group, then perpetrators' *attitudes towards that group* are easily assumed to be the primary cause of violence against them. Once again, the Holocaust is the model: if the Holocaust was about the Jews, then it is easily concluded that Nazi anti-semitism was its driver. The general approach that is derived from this looks for 'race-hatred' towards particular groups. A recent example is John Hagan and Wynona Rymond-Richmond's (2009) attempt to explain attacks on 'African' groups in Darfur in terms of racist labelling, downplaying factors such as counter-insurgency and competition for land (Shaw 2011).

An obvious weakness of the assumption that racism against a given target group must drive the genocide against them is that genocidal actors have complex ideologies. Even at the level of ideology we need to ask how racist attitudes fit with other ideas the perpetrators hold. Nazi attitudes towards Jews were conditioned by the belief in the superiority of Germans and Aryans over *all* other peoples: they were part of a hierarchical racist world-view which also regarded Slavs, blacks, homosexuals and others as inferior. This comprehensive racism, in turn, was linked in Nazi ideology with nationalism, eugenics, patriarchy, and other strands. To understand the ideological sources of Jewish persecution we need to understand the linkages

between these sets of ideas. The salience of this point is underlined by the fact that genocidal actors often have multiple targets, either simultaneously or sequentially: we need to investigate the common frame which drives a collective actor to attack several population groups. In these cases, it is hardly likely that the specific attitudes towards the groups will be unconnected.

In any case, we cannot assume that perpetrators' ideologies are coherently or consistently developed, or that ideology drives genocidal policies in a simple way. Even the most ideological genocidists hold fantastic, pseudo-scientific ideas that are significantly incoherent. Genocidal policies often represent more pragmatic situational responses to threats, difficulties and the actions of others, including the target groups as well as third parties. We must take seriously the idea that genocide often constitutes *policy* and like all policy develops situationally, rather than as some sort of unbending implementation of an original idea. In the Nazi case, historians have long moved beyond the idea that anti-Jewish policy resulted from a singular intention on Hitler's part, to look at the dynamics of a field of policy implemented by complex party, state and military bureaucracies, which was constantly changing as Nazi Germany expanded its control of the European continent and faced new challenges in the world war.

The inbuilt tendency of the comparative genocide paradigm towards ideological explanation derives from a deep-rooted paradox of the 'perpetrator-victim' dyad. Because victim-group experience is regarded as 'sacred' and perpetrator 'intentions' as extraordinarily evil, the focus is on the most 'evil', racist ideas rather than on more mundane ideas that they may share with other political actors. The definitionally criminal character of genocide also works in this direction, pushing towards indicting perpetrators for their ideological beliefs as well as their particular decisions. Thus, as I have explained elsewhere (Shaw 2007: 81–96), genocide studies tend to get stuck at the first stage of sociological explanation, examining the subjective orientations of the actors (indeed really only the perpetrators). They fail to move sufficiently to the more complex causal and contextual explanations that are normally sought for social phenomena. This reflects the 'sacred-evil' quality of genocide: if it is not a normal social phenomenon, it cannot be explained by normal sociological means.

Domesticated genocide

Linked in the comparative genocide paradigm to the emphasis on regime is the assumption that genocides are produced primarily in domestic rather than international relations, and become of international significance mainly because they offend against the Genocide Convention and demand international intervention. These assumptions are reflected in influential explicit claims for the domestic character of the most important genocides. Thus the political scientist Robert Melson (1992: 18) refers to ‘total domestic genocides like the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust, including the extermination of the Gypsies, ... the destruction of the Kulaks and the Cambodian “autogenocide”’. Christian Scherrer (1999) also distinguishes ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ genocides – putting the Holocaust in the ‘domestic’ category – while René Lemarchand (2002) remarks that both Jews and Rwandan Tutsis ‘have been the target of a “total domestic genocide”, to use Melson’s phrase’ (501). As I have argued (Shaw 2007: 149), such ‘domestic’ characterizations cannot be sustained. All these and other major cases involved populations targeted across borders or for reasons connected with international conflict, and had intimate relations with international politics and war. Yet such ‘domestic’ categorizations are strongly linked to the conceptions of perpetrators, victims and bystanders which we have discussed. Perpetrators and victims are assumed to be locked in an essentially ‘domestic’ conflict, of which international actors are essentially ‘bystanders’, or in which they ‘intervene’.

Of course despite such ‘domestic’ claims, many scholars actually treat the production of genocide at least partially in international contexts, since these are difficult to avoid in the rounded historical treatment of almost any episode. Indeed Melson (1992) argued that when international and civil wars occur together, there is the strongest chance of the onset of genocide – an argument which has been seen as among the most relevant claims for the international production of genocide (Krain 1997: 348). Yet the core of the ‘domestic’ mindset remains even when some international context is recognized, because it is embedded in the dominant methodological assumption that genocide consists of a series of *discrete* cases which must then be compared.

A restricted view of international relations

The comparative genocide paradigm allows international relations a particularly restricted role. An international dimension is recognized in almost all genocide research: typically, international context is incorporated ad hoc in accounts of the genesis even of supposedly ‘domestic’ genocides. But the main role of international relations is seen not in the *production* of genocide but in *responses* to it once it has occurred. It is assumed that the largest global and world-regional contexts of international relations do not produce genocide, and the great (especially Western democratic) powers and international organizations are not responsible for it. Rather, legitimate states and international institutions respond, it is assumed, to the domestically generated genocide of local authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

These assumptions are simply the other side of the way methodological nationalism has embedded itself in genocide research. Yet they are also articulated and reinforced in the way that International Relations has approached genocide. Most IR literature has explored the responses of the the great powers (mainly the USA) and the UN to genocide, chiefly in the context of ‘humanitarian intervention’. IR literature did not initially identify genocide, however, as the necessary condition for such intervention. For example, Nicholas Wheeler’s influential survey (2000) saw only one (Rwanda) out of seven cases of humanitarian intervention as raising questions of genocide. Indeed even Rwanda was not immediately analysed in genocide terms. One of the best IR books on genocide is Michael Barnett’s *Eye-Witness to a Genocide* (2002), about his secondment to the UN during the Rwanda crisis: only afterwards did he realize fully what they had been dealing with. Barnett’s ringside experience may be unusual, but his absorption of the ideological reflexes of the practitioners was typical. Just as political leaders had been reluctant to use the ‘g-word’, so IR scholars were (and often remain) too willing to use practitioner euphemisms like ‘humanitarian crisis’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ for situations which involved genocide.

Rwanda did eventually raise the profile of genocide issues in IR, for example in Alan Kuperman’s (2001) critique of the limits of intervention in 1994. In recent normative and policy-oriented developments, notably around the Responsibility To Protect, genocide issues are increasingly salient (Bellamy 2009). This literature shares, however,

the assumption that the IR issues concern responses to genocide rather than its production, assumed to be largely domestic. Certainly, among authors critical of 'humanitarian intervention', we find arguments that reject this 'production–response' dichotomy: for example, that intervention helps to produce the genocide it is supposed to prevent (Gibbs 2009), and that genocide is 'provoked' by attempts to bring about intervention (Kuperman and Crawford 2006). Yet while the former argument leads us to consider the roles of great powers and international organizations in producing genocide, the latter continues to ascribe primary responsibility to local actors.

In this it aligns with older IR discussions of how genocide is produced. The pioneering analysis of Barbara Harff and Ted Robert Gurr (1988), for example, identified forty-four 'genocides and politicides' between 1945 and 1988 (yet they classified only six of these as genocides, an attribution which should be questioned in the light of the broader definition advocated above). However, they classified these episodes not according to international context, but according to the types of relationships between states and target populations, in line with Harff's (1986) earlier concept of genocide as involving the domestic form of 'state terrorism'. The types in terms of which they classified the 'genocides' ('hegemonial' and 'xenophobic') indicated relationships that could have international dimensions, but they did not highlight these. Moreover although they also classified their episodes regionally, they did not analyse the role of regional international relations in their genesis. And while their analysis covered exactly the Cold War period, this context was not problematized (the term 'Cold War' does not even occur in the article), although in many of their cases it was germane. In this sense, the article typifies the omission of international contexts of genocide. Even in Harff's later statistical study (2003), genocides and politicides are still seen as a product of 'isolated states' that could 'eliminate unwanted groups without international repercussions'. She concludes that alongside domestic 'political upheaval' and 'prior genocides', 'exclusionary ideology' and 'autocratic' regimes are major predictors of genocide and politicide. International relations are seen as necessarily constraining, rather than enabling, genocide: 'The greater degree to which a country is interdependent with others, the less likely its leaders are to attempt geno-/politicides'. Thus although Harff (2003: 64–5) acknowledges that '[i]nternational context matters for geno-/politicides', this is only in terms of effects on 'international responses'.

Subsequent work has certainly indicated ‘international’ production more explicitly. Matthew Krain (1997: 335), using Harff and Gurr’s data, criticized the argument of Rudy Rummel (1997) that the structure of states and the distribution of power within them explained genocide or ‘democide’. Instead, Krain argued, changes ‘in the political opportunity structure’ were key to adoption of genocidal or politicidal policies by states, and ‘changes in the international political opportunity structure (often caused by war) have important structural effects on the national political opportunity structure’ (Krain 1997: 330, 331). So while Krain continued to see genocide/politicide as fundamentally a ‘national’ phenomenon, concluding (1997: 355) that ‘civil war involvement is the most consistent predictor of the onset of genocides or politicides’, he agreed (as we saw above) with Melson that when international and civil wars occur together, there is the strongest chance of genocide onset. Yet the argument that domestic situations are most potent is still asserted: Harff has argued (2003: 57) that ‘almost all genocides of the last half-century occurred during or in the immediate aftermath of internal wars, revolutions, and regime collapse’.

The post-Cold War era has seen more wide-ranging comparative work by IR scholars. Benjamin Valentino (2004) argues for seeing ‘mass killing’ (he eschews a specific genocide focus) as ‘strategic’ political action. In a wide-ranging survey, Valentino’s ‘motives/types’ (including ‘territorial’, ‘counterguerilla’ and ‘imperialist’), and his ‘scenarios’ (including colonial enlargement, expansionist wars, guerilla wars, terror bombing and imperial conquests and rebellions) obviously indicate international relations. Yet Valentino draws no particular attention to the relationships between ‘international’ and ‘domestic’ in delineating his types and scenarios, and the central focus of his ‘strategic’ argument is the implicitly ‘domestic’ focus on regime–population relations. Like Harff and Gurr he sees mass killing as a problem of localized political conflict, and his ‘strategic’ conception, although enlightening in its own terms, remains centred on perpetrators. Genocidal actors are understood in simplified unified-state terms: he gives little indication of the messiness of genocidal situations, in which civilians are often not only victims but also participants in violence (for this he is criticized by Stathis Kalyvas (2004)).

The focus on ‘response’ is not a purely academic choice. It reflects the dominance of US scholars in both IR and comparative genocide

studies, and their attachment to US power. As Michael Desch (2006: 108) points out, 'it is an article of faith among American elites that the United States has a moral responsibility to shut down virtually any mass political violence, but especially to stop genocides in the making'. Although Samantha Power's (2002) historical critique suggests that mostly it has failed in this task, Desch (2006), David Hoogland Noon (2004) and Jeffrey Record (2005) have shown that 'genocide' analogies have a powerful rhetorical function for US policy makers. For example, President George W. Bush justified Operation Iraqi Freedom by the fact that in 'the 20th century, some chose to appease murderous dictators, whose threats were allowed to grow into genocide and global war' (quoted by Record 2005: 17). Yet policy making by analogy in general, and through the Holocaust analogy in particular, is highly flawed (Desch 2006). These critiques of the function of 'genocide' in US policy making are important steps towards a critical approach to the international relations of genocide. As David MacDonald (2009) has shown in a wider survey, how violence comes to be represented as genocide is a complex and contested process with powerful implications for international politics. Yet we need to move beyond studies of genocide representation and rhetoric to the role of international relations, including Western powers and international institutions, in producing genocide.

An ahistorical paradigm

I have argued that the discreteness of genocidal episodes and their contained characters are powerful assumptions, even when there is no explicit assertion of domesticity. Almost all the major synthetic works that have been produced – from the pathbreaking survey of Chalk and Jonassohn (1990) to most of the studies in what Straus (2007) calls the 'second wave' of genocide research – deal with a certain number of major genocides considered as discrete phenomena. Comparisons can be made as broadly as one wants across historical time, so that Christopher Powell (2011), for example, compares cases ranging from thirteenth-century Languedoc to 1994 Rwanda. Episodes are typically treated successively and compared across their discrete situations but without systematically drawing connections between them. The literature is more interested in *transhistorical comparisons* between these cases than in *historical connections*, prioritizing

domestic and local environments rather than larger contexts. Thus the comparative method in genocide studies is understood in a fundamentally ahistorical sense, if we understand history as being about sequences, linkages and development.

This tendency prioritizes domestic and local environments rather than systematic investigation of international contexts. For example, one can find many comparisons between the Holocaust and Rwanda (e.g. Lemarchand 2002, Miles 2003, Sémelin 2007), but fewer systematic discussions of the connections between Nazi policies and those of the USSR, the Western Allies and eastern European states allied to both, in the Second World War; or of the connections between what happened in Rwanda in 1994 and preceding genocidal violence in Burundi and Uganda or succeeding violence in the Congo. Yet *prima facie* these two specific 'international' contexts have more to tell us about the Holocaust and Rwanda respectively than comparisons between them.

What is at stake here is the integrity of a historical understanding of genocide. In part, the trans- or ahistorical tendency reflects the disciplinary origins of genocide studies in sociology, and the influence of comparative social science. Yet even historical research has been heavily influenced: a recent survey of the historiography of genocide (Stone 2008) is largely an accumulation of case studies, with little more than an aspiration to comparison. Certainly we need close, particular research in order to construct synthetic studies, but the empiricist bias of historiography and its suspicion of approaches such as 'world history' which attempt to synthesize broad panoramas in single narratives, probably also play roles here. Even Mann's study of 'ethnic cleansing' (2005) mostly fails to sustain the macro-historical framework proposed in his major work, and falls into a comparative approach.

The result is that there are historical studies of genocide, but there is not really *a history* of genocide, in the sense of work which seriously interrogates the tendencies of genocide over time and the variation between different periods. Promisingly entitled volumes such as Weitz's *A Century of Genocide* (2005) turn out to be the usual comparisons of four or five major episodes, through a thematic prism (in his case, 'utopias of race and nation'); they almost never offer a comprehensive, developmental history of genocide in the given period. Even Ben Kiernan's (2007) 'world history of genocide' offers an

uneven combination of extensive surveys of genocide in key regions of Western imperial expansion with fairly conventional, discrete case studies of the largest recognized genocides of the twentieth century. The linkage between the two is established entirely through transhistorical themes – cults of antiquity, a fetish for agriculture, ethnic enmity and imperial and territorial conquests – illustrated by comparing cases across recorded history. So Kiernan's book is primarily about continuities in the history of genocide: although it also offers some clues to its discontinuities, historical *change* is not its main theme.

Conclusion

It is the contention of this book that the comparative genocide paradigm blocks the understanding of genocide, in which historical change is central. In the next chapter, I outline a different paradigm of international historical-sociological understanding, within which transhistorical comparison no longer plays the defining role, although comparisons continue to be made on the basis of a different set of assumptions.