

The concentration camp and development: the pasts and future of genocide¹

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ABSTRACT Our conception of history remains largely tethered both to the notion of Europe as the epicentre of history and to categories of knowledge that may not be particularly productive of meaning in the present and near future. Eric Hobsbawm's short twentieth century is bookended by 1914, the year the Great War commenced, and 1991, which witnessed the break-up of the Soviet Union. Nationalists in countries such as India imagined Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 as the beginning of a new dawn, and similarly the gruesome genocide in Rwanda in 1994, which occurred despite the hoarse shouts of 'Never Again' that emanated in the wake of the Holocaust, stands forth as testimony to the brutal violence that above all characterized the twentieth century. We might say that the twentieth century has been interminably long, originating in some respects in General Sherman's still unreputed doctrine of total terror, and is still with us. Lal suggests that our understanding of genocide remains similarly hobbled by the definitions offered in the International Convention on Genocide and other legal instruments, and that even less restrictive applications of legal conventions are likely to be inadequate if we are to anticipate future genocides. Hindutva, or extreme Hindu nationalism, to take one example, targets not only Muslims but even, more spectacularly so, 'soft' Hindus. It has genocidal impulses towards the practitioners of a religion that it purports to defend, viewing Hinduism as a chaotic, polycentric and indefensible faith. What will the concentration camps of the future look like? Lal moves to a detailed consideration of the statist and evolutionist doctrine of development, and concludes with some thoughts on the invisible holocausts committed, or likely to be committed, in the name of development, the 'international community' and other supposed verities of the human condition.

KEYWORDS categories of knowledge, colonialism, concentration camp, development, famine, genocide, holocausts, minorities, twentieth century

A long prolegomenon to an allegedly short twentieth century

One of the more recent works of the esteemed British historian Eric Hobsbawm takes as its title *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century*,

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1914–1991.² Though European powers were at war with each other over several centuries preceding the nineteenth century, their rapid acquisitions of overseas territories, their drive towards industrialization and nation-building, and the revolutions of 1848 all had the cumulative effect of shifting the terrain of war from Europe to the colonies. It was not only the scale of the war that engulfed Europe between 1914 and 1918, a war whose very characterization as the First World War suggests how far European conflicts are routinely assumed to have meaning for the rest of the world,³ but rather the shattering of the dream that violence could, both casually and systematically, be inflicted on colonized peoples while Europe itself remained inured to its effects, that perhaps justifies marking 1914 as the inauguration of a new century. It is also during the war years that the Bolsheviks gained power in Russia, and so brought into being an experiment that placed in strange but not atypical apposition the ideas of emancipation and orchestrated terror, and that crumbled only with the decimation of the Soviet Union in 1991.

As apparently reasonable as is Hobsbawm's framework for understanding the twentieth century, it remains resolutely Eurocentric, as well as driven by a rather conventional notion of history as the unfolding of events: events tethered, in particular, to violence and revolution. At this juncture of intellectual history, the charge of being Eurocentric is an all too familiar one, often levied to score polemical points rather than from serious intellectual intent; but its commonplace character or abuse makes it no less serious when the object of the critique is a scholar of extraordinary repute with pretensions to being progressive, ecumenical in his conception of history, and having the world at his fingertips. One wonders why, for example, the twentieth century should not be viewed as having been inaugurated in 1905 when Japan dealt Russia a crushing blow and so

2 London: Michael Joseph 1994.

3 It is true, of course, that many countries not involved in the conflict were, in one manner or another, dragged into the war. Over a million Indian men were dispatched overseas by the British government of India to fight a war which by no stretch of the imagination could be described as their war. Their needless sacrifice, not even of the some 50,000 men who laid down their lives in the battlefields of Mesopotamia and Flanders, has barely been noticed in Britain. The war's consequences for India were far-reaching: as prices of essential commodities shot up, standards of living declined precipitously. Defence expenditures increased by 300 per cent, and the usual shenanigans, once again so amply on display in George Bush's war on Iraq, about the imperative to preserve the world for freedom could be heard while people starved. See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947* (Delhi: Macmillan India 1983), 168–72; Indian National Congress, Punjab Subcommittee, *Report of the Commissioners* [appointed to look into the Jallianawala Bagh massacre], vol. 1: *Report* (Bombay: Karnataka Press 1920). But my larger argument here is that Europe unthinkingly remains the template for the history we do, even if it is the history of some other place such as India, and that this hubris of knowledge creates its own forms of oppression.

became, to nationalists in India and Indonesia, a wondrous sign of resurgent Asia. 'Japanese victories stirred up my enthusiasm', wrote Nehru in his autobiography, 'and I waited eagerly for the papers for fresh news daily. . . . Nationalistic ideas filled my mind. I mused of Indian freedom and Asiatic freedom from the thralldom of Europe.'⁴ One can say that subjugated natives no longer were obliged to believe in the inherent superiority of the white race, and that there has seldom been so momentous an awakening. From the point of view of colonized subjects, the most important phenomenon of the twentieth century was decolonization, however much its mention has receded if not disappeared from contemporary political commentary and academic tomes on modernity. Subhas Chandra Bose, the founder of the insurgent Indian National Army, writing about Japan's military prowess three decades after the destruction of the Russian naval forces, deplored Japan's occupation of China but nonetheless recalled the 'great things' Japan had done 'for herself and for Asia. Her re-awakening at the dawn of the present century sent a thrill throughout our Continent. Japan has shattered the white man's prestige in the Far East and has put all the Western imperialist powers on the defensive.'⁵

If Japan's victory over Russia in 1905 is proposed as one possible way, among many others, of imagining the beginnings of the twentieth century, one can similarly be tempted into marking its close with something other than the fall of the Soviet Union, most notably and ominously the Rwandan genocide of 1994. For years the western powers, chastened by the nightmarish experience of the Holocaust perpetrated upon the Jews, had been shouting themselves hoarse with the slogan 'Never Again'. And yet, despite mounting signs of the fratricidal conflict between Hutus and Tutsis, and with full knowledge of the atrocities that began to be perpetrated before their very eyes, France, the United States and the United Nations mutely partook, by their permissive indifference, of the ferocious killings that in a little over three months had left 800,000 Tutsis dead.⁶ The former European colonial powers and the United States furnished a new meaning to the term 'free world', a world that frees one from moral responsibility and yet insists that borders that are not one's own should be free to trafficking by multinational corporations and arms dealers. (Nearly the entire world should be placed on the 'free' side of the ledger, considering that it is ringed by McDonald's franchises and American

4 J. Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* [1941] (Boston: Beacon Press 1958), 29–30.

5 S. C. Bose, 'Japan's role in the Far East', in *Through Congress Eyes* (Allahabad: Kitabistan 1938), 212.

6 Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux 1998).

military bases.) On the one hand, as has been indisputably documented, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda was ordered to wind up its operations in the midst of the killings; on the other hand, the French, who had inherited the colonial mantle from the Belgians, were supplying arms to the Hutu-led Rwandan army even as their ambassador to the United Nations was describing France's objective as 'naturally exclud[ing] any interference in the development of the balance of military forces between the parties involved in the conflict'.⁷

The numerous peculiarities of the Rwandan genocide apart, such as the extraordinary ethnic and cultural proximity of the perpetrators to the victims,⁸ or the fact that amidst the late twentieth century's unparalleled arsenal for destruction the bulk of the killing was achieved with machetes, spears and clubs, one must also pause to ask whether at least some people who might have been in the position of restraining the killers or calling them to account were not emboldened in their indifference by the fact that these were black-on-black killings. The phrase 'primordial conflicts' is all too easily available to those who are predisposed to viewing certain conflicts, whether in the Balkans or in Africa, as not merely intractable but as opaque to the enlightened West. The West, one had every reason to believe from what was allowed to transpire in Rwanda, had given up on Africa. The Cambridge School of historians famously wrote about the 'scramble for Africa' among the colonial powers towards the end of the nineteenth century, but a century later western powers all seem to be ready to disown that troubled legacy. The scramble now is to get out. Africa had a way of inserting itself into the western consciousness then; it still does so today. Africa cannot be forgotten; nor can it be forgiven. The gruesome violence of the twentieth century seems, then, to have served no purpose other than to warn us, brutally and unceremoniously, that it had no purpose, however profuse the atonements, however widespread the epidemic of apologies that engulfed the last decade of the twentieth century. The precise terror of Rwanda is that our moral sensibilities appear to have been diminished rather than enhanced over the course of a century.

That Hobsbawm treats history as 'event' rather than 'category' is, as I have already hinted, a problem of a different order, one to which I shall turn in due course. Much more nuanced than the more commonly known pretenders to the enterprise of world cosmologies, Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, Hobsbawm never quite declared that history has come

7 Ibid., 149–57.

8 See David Newbury, 'Irredentist Rwanda: ethnic and territorial frontiers in Central Africa', *Africa Today*, vol. 44, no. 2, 1997, 211–22; Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2001), 41–75.

to an end, and that it only remains for people belonging to the underdeveloped or developing worlds to embrace the multiple and related virtues of globalization, electoral democracy and free enterprise. Nevertheless, he has come precipitously close to embracing this view, as the brackets he places on *his* twentieth century suggest. The inexorable and iron laws of history that Hobsbawm's Marxism trumpeted were surely not vindicated with the demise of the Soviet Union, but the moral support that many so-called progressives have offered to political and military interventions as necessary humanitarian gestures, from the bombing of Serbia to the invasion of Iraq, suggests that the free world's achievements are seen as the *telos* of all human history.⁹ At the end of the Cold War, as we might recall, there was considerable rejoicing that the entire world could gain from what was termed the 'peace dividend'. One view that quickly gained wide currency was that since most of the wars fought between 1945 and 1991 were, to varying degrees, engagements that the United States and the Soviet Union waged through their proxies—partly by necessity, since a direct conflagration between the two superpowers spelled annihilation, and partly by choice, since these proxy wars, besides feeding the armaments industries of both nations, were the most expedient way of disseminating their respective ideologies and passing on the casualties to purportedly inferior races—the fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the collapse of Communism throughout the Eastern bloc would necessarily diminish the resort to violence.

That we would have anything but 'peace' should have been clear from the fact that the demise of the Soviet Union and the decimation of Iraq went nearly hand-in-hand: indeed, the Gulf War was conducted partly with the justification that it was the most desirable and morally efficacious way of putting into effect what Bush Senior termed the 'new world order'. In each of the three principal military engagements of the United States since the Soviet bloc disintegrated and before the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the American-led and comically named 'coalition of the willing'—the Gulf War, NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia and the war to hunt down Osama bin Laden and members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban—the word 'genocide' lurked in the air, occupying in the discursive space the same place as does an

9 Some readers might insist on consistency and ask why I should deplore the failure of the West to intervene in Rwanda while critiquing the interventions that did take place in Iraq and Serbia. This quest for consistency, whatever its assumed virtues, can become another mode of evading the politics of knowledge behind all such phenomena. It is more important to probe why the West does intervene on some occasions and not on others, the relationship of such interventions to geopolitical ambitions, the particular nature of the intervention and the location of political action within the matrix of ethical thinking. For some reflections on these questions, see Samantha Power, *'A Problem from Hell': America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: HarperCollins/Perennial 2003).

uninvited guest who is neither inside nor outside. In each instance, the chief villain of the piece—Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic and Osama bin Laden—could be viewed with some justification as evil incarnate, indeed as a person full of genocidal intent: Saddam had gassed the Kurds; bin Laden harboured genocidal fantasies against the Americans and, more broadly, certain enemies of Islam; Milosevic, transformed from the good Communist into the Serb nationalist, became one of the principal architects of the destruction of the culture of Bosnian Muslims and Kosovars.¹⁰ Even the Taliban were, to all practical purposes, genocidal towards their women, if by genocide we mean that members of a specific group, here chosen on account of their gender, were targeted by a political regime and systematically stripped of their rights to education, health, livelihood and everything else that ordinarily makes possible a fulfilled life.¹¹ And, yet, in each case there seemed some reluctance to encompass the villains under the rubric of

10 With respect to Kosovo, it is now clear that stories of the mass disappearance of Albanian men, and of mass graves, were grossly exaggerated, perhaps planted by NATO and the American administration. Moreover, the Kosovar Liberation Army, hailed in the West as the supreme liberator of Albanians from the monstrous grip of Serbia, carried out as many killings as did the Serbian armed forces and their supporters.

11 There are important distinctions that come to mind that I cannot develop here, from the idea of war itself as a highly gendered activity and the cruel caricature of men who refuse to fight as 'effeminate' to the disproportionate impact that wars generally have on women and children, the sexual license that wars are seen to confer on men, the deployment of rape as a weapon of war, and 'genocidal rape' or 'rape warfare'. On the policy of what American feminist law professor Catherine MacKinnon has termed 'procreation by rape', see Vesna Kesic, 'Muslim women, Croatian women, Serbian women, Albanian women . . .', in Dušan I. Bjelic and Obrad Savic (eds), *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2002), 313. The treatment of women under the Taliban illustrates some of the difficulties attendant on prevailing conceptions of genocide as well as femicide. Doubtless, there were women who were subjected to sexual abuse, but I am not aware that the Taliban, notwithstanding the disputes between Pathans, Tajiks and Hazara, subjected women of other ethnic and linguistic groups to rape and sexual abuse as a matter of policy. (Indeed, in the early months of the ascendancy of the Taliban, they were vigorously defended by many people as restoring order to a country that had descended into complete chaos, and women were described as feeling safe for the first time in years.) But the denial of medical facilities, education and social services to women was so prevalent as to go well beyond what is ordinarily captured by the phrase 'gender discrimination'. Are there circumstances under which the deliberate isolation of a specific group of people, who are allowed to regress to an earlier stage of development—and by development I denote not what is encompassed by the modern and statist ideology of development, but rather by the growth of human consciousness, moral sensibilities and civic institutions—can be construed as genocidal in intent? For valuable discussions, see Nancy Hatch Dupree, 'Afghan women under the Taliban', in William Maley (ed.), *Afghanistan and the Taliban: The Rebirth of Fundamentalism?*, rev. edn (New Delhi: Penguin 2001), 145–66; and Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords*, rev. edn (London: Pan Books 2001), 105–16.

'genocide'. Only a few thousand Kurds had been killed,¹² both Saddam and bin Laden had, at one time, been befriended by the Americans, and the Americans were not keen on being viewed as partners in crime. The Taliban had brutally sequestered their women, but no one could say that their numbers had been drastically reduced; if anything, it is Afghan men, whether belonging to the Taliban or otherwise, who have suffered huge losses since fighting first broke out with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Arguably, then, the fall of the Soviet Union was much less the definitive moment than the commonly accepted readings of it suggest, and the bookends that Hobsbawm places around the twentieth century, 1914 and 1991, derive from the received view of history: a view in which, as shall also be seen, history itself remains the supreme uncontested category. The twentieth century is now recognized as an exceptionally violent period, and estimates of those killed in wars, insurrections and genocides run to at least 200 million. In the 1980s, 60 per cent of scientists were described as being engaged, directly or indirectly, in defence research,¹³ a fact that, however much scientists, defence officials, policy experts and counter-terrorism specialists may wish to resist its implications, has some bearing on the totalizing nature of violence in the twentieth century. If we take the twentieth century to be a category not so much of time as of mentality, a category signalling disposition towards a certain kind of violence that was eroding the restraints that societies had often times placed upon themselves, then it may be much more fitting to think of the twentieth century as interminably long, a century that began well before its allotted moment and that shows few signs of receding. The Kentucky-based farmer and writer Wendell Berry noted with his usual perspicacity following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that the modern doctrine of warfare 'was set forth and enacted by [Union] General William Tecumseh Sherman, who held that a civilian population could be declared guilty and rightly subjected to military punishment'.¹⁴ Sherman was articulate in the expression of his passionately

12 I refer only to the chemical attack on Halabja under Ali Hassan al-Majid (also known as 'Ali Anfal' or 'Ali Chemical') on 16 March 1988, which caused between 4,000 and 7,000 fatalities. This received far more coverage than the entire Anfal campaign against Kurds in Northern Iraq over a seven-month period in 1988, which is estimated to have led to the loss of as many as 100,000 Kurdish lives. See Middle East Watch, *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds* (New York: Human Rights Watch 1993), available online at www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal (viewed 10 March 2005).

13 Ashis Nandy, 'The twentieth century: the ambivalent homecoming of homo psychologicus', *Hitotshubashi Journal of Social Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1, July 2001, 22.

14 Wendell Berry, 'Thoughts in the presence of fear', in *In the Presence of Fear: Three Essays for a Changed World* (Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society 2001).

held belief that nothing was impermissible in the endeavour to break the spirit of the enemy. One of his more critical biographers credits him with the invention of the concept of 'total war';¹⁵ and Berry himself concludes his thoughts on Sherman with the telling observation: 'We [in the United States] have never repudiated that doctrine.'¹⁶

Terror has a much longer history than terrorism, and the unknown soldier of the First World War, who has come to epitomize the anonymity of modern warfare, was already lurking in the unmarked graves of the Civil War. However, the Civil War had been fought between near equals, and victory, allowing for certain contingencies, could well have gone to the other side. What often gives a genocidal edge to total violence is immense disparities of power, and the late nineteenth century witnessed a number of developments that heralded the formal arrival of the genocidal twentieth century. Advances in military technology had in part facilitated the expansion of colonial rule: as a British officer fighting in Multan in western India at the end of 1848 confided to his diary, there was much cause to exult in the triumph of 'that true weapon the bayonet, which never yet failed to bring success to the British soldier'.¹⁷ Yet the bayonet could only go so far, as the introduction of the machine gun so amply demonstrated. The disequilibrium in military strength, these days suggested by images of Israeli F-16s pounding Palestinian settlements from the air, was beginning to acquire a new meaning. The bullets fired from the Maxim gun in rapid succession tore into the flesh, splintering bone, puncturing large holes in the body. Mounted on a gunboat, the Maxim gun appeared to Winston Churchill, who took part in Kitchener's campaigns that led to the conquest of the Sudan in 1898, as a 'beautiful white devil' that floated 'gracefully on the waters', wreathed in smoke.¹⁸ The loving lyricism with which Churchill describes the battle of Omdurman, at the end of which 20 Britons were dead and 11,000 Dervishes had sunk down in tangled heaps, should obscure neither the terrible tedium experienced by Kitchener's men nor the moral lessons drawn from this conflict by European observers. The 'mere physical act' of firing 'became tedious', noted Churchill, as one Dervish after another was cut into pieces: this was 'the most signal triumph ever gained by the arms of science over barbarians'.¹⁹

15 John Walters, *Merchant of Terror: General Sherman and Total War* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1973).

16 Berry, 'Thoughts in the presence of fear', 6.

17 Quoted in V. G. Kiernan, *Colonial Empires and Armies 1815-1960* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing 1998), 123.

18 Winston Churchill, quoted in Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press 1981), 118-19.

19 Quoted in Headrick, *Tools of Empire*, 118. See also John Ellis, *A Social History of the Machine Gun* (New York: Pantheon 1975).

A huge army, what Churchill described as ‘the strongest and best-armed savage army yet arrayed against a modern European Power’, had been almost effortlessly destroyed in the space of a few hours with minimal loss of life to the victors. But had Churchill been more prescient, he would perhaps have underscored the ‘tedium’ experienced by white men as they buried black bodies under mounds of bullets rather than the enormous chasm opened up by western arms between the ‘civilized’ and the ‘savages’. Hannah Arendt had a different phrase to capture not only the bureaucratization of killing, but the moral distancing that takes place when the pulling of the trigger and the filing of papers become tasks akin to one another.²⁰ Evidently, ‘the banality of evil’ has many forms: once Kitchener had dealt with the Dervishes, and a number of other recalcitrant savage tribes, he eventually turned his attention to the troublesome Boers further south. Unlike the Dervishes, who had appeared in battle *en masse*, and died likewise, the Boers engaged in guerrilla tactics. Kitchener sought to decimate them with what one writer has described as a ‘double sweeping operation’: one measure consisted in flushing them out through systematic drives, ‘organized like a sporting shoot, with success defined in a weekly “bag” of killed, captured and wounded’.²¹ This was not wholly exceptional, considering that hunting for the scalps of Native Americans was a popular past-time for the white man. Scalps were exhibited to an admiring public, and the trophy hunters were local heroes. Kitchener was somewhat more innovative with his second measure, arguably showing himself in numerous ways to be the forerunner of the Nazis. To prevent civilians from offering material and moral support to the guerrillas, Kitchener conceived of a plan to sweep the country clean of them, and he herded Boer women and children into refugee camps as though they were cattle, sheep or horses.²² Their rations were set absurdly low in the hope that the men would be encouraged to surrender, and disease was rampant in the camps. Recalling

20 See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* [1963] (New York: Penguin 1977).

21 Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Random House 1979), 522.

22 There is, in principle, an important distinction to be drawn between camps intended to hold or sequester civilians, such as the internment camps for Japanese-Americans created by Franklin Roosevelt’s Executive Order, and the extermination camps established by the Nazis. One effect of such distinctions has been to reinforce arguments that plead for the uniqueness of the Holocaust, just as this form of reasoning unduly focuses on intent. The hardening of boundaries does not allow for the easy accommodation of numerous cases in which the lines between internment or segregation and extermination were blurred. Kitchener’s contemporary (and forerunner, one might say), General Valeriano Weyler (1838–1930), the governor of Cuba, initiated the policy of reconcentration (*reconcentrado*) in 1897 in his attempt to inflict defeat on Cuban insurgents. Weyler, who admitted to great admiration for Sherman, hit upon a plan to separate peasant men, women and children from guerrillas by placing them in camps. Those who were not in camps were dubbed rebels and seditionists, and were liable to be shot on the spot; but those inside the camps did not fare much better, and as many as 400,000 succumbed to disease,

Churchill's description of the tedium involved in cutting down Dervishes with a machine gun, one is not surprised that, as Thomas Pakenham puts it, 'administrative problems' involving civilians 'always bored' Kitchener. Pakenham is remarkably forthright in his assessment of the contribution of Kitchener, once lionized as one of the greatest proconsuls of empire, to civilization: 'Today, Kitchener is not remembered in South Africa for his military victories. His monument is the camp— "concentration camp", as it came to be called. The camps have left a gigantic scar across the minds of Afrikaners: a symbol of deliberate genocide.'²³

A short prolegomenon to an interminably long past

The twentieth century, then, might have been much more than the 'short' century that has been described by Hobsbawm, and that it is assumed to be by all those who jointly mark the disappearance of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of the space of the Internet as a radical possibility for the fulfilment of the ideas of democracy and liberty, as the twin signs of the inauguration of a new period in human history. Hannah Arendt was among the first scholars to recognize that concentration camps were not an invention of totalitarian governments, having been used not only in South Africa but in India for the retention of 'undesirable elements'.²⁴ But she was

medical negligence, malnutrition and mistreatment. See G. J. A. O'Toole, *The Spanish War: An American Epic 1898* (New York: Norton 1986), 56–8. The tactic of herding rural populations into camps in an effort to deprive insurgents of food and shelter was used during the Malay insurgency, and resurfaced in the form of the Strategic Hamlet programme initiated by the Americans in Vietnam in 1962. See Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin 1984), 255–8. The term 'concentration camps', as used by Hannah Arendt (see below) and myself, encompasses a broad semiotic register.

²³ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 522–4.

²⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, rev. edn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1973), 440. Arendt's mention of India is unaccompanied by any reference, but she is almost certainly referring to the practice, adopted by the British in the late nineteenth century, of keeping people who were considered to belong to 'criminal castes' and 'criminal tribes' under 'protective custody'. British officials construed members of these allegedly criminal castes and tribes, running into the millions rather than the tens of thousands, as 'criminals by birth', as firm a recipe for genocide as one can imagine. The severe disabilities imposed upon these criminal castes and tribes for well over a century point to deliberate and systematic attempts to reduce their numbers. Members of criminal castes and tribes are among those unfortunate victims of genocide who have not been recognized as such; invisibility takes on new meanings with reference to them. Most histories of India do not even spare a word for them, but the work of Sanjay Nigam has been exemplary in drawing attention to them; see his 'Disciplining and policing the "criminals by birth"', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, April–June 1990, and no. 3, July–September 1990. The Criminal

even more perspicacious in her identification of concentrations camps as sites of total domination of an unusual kind. She described them as 'the laboratories in which the fundamental belief of totalitarianism that everything is possible is being verified': here the intention was not only to 'exterminate people and degrade human beings', but to eliminate, 'under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behavior and of transforming the human personality into a mere thing, into something that even animals are not'.²⁵ The vast scale on which the Nazis committed their crimes made them improbable to others; equally improbable, the Nazis might have thought, would be the accounts of survivors. Those who dared to speak the unspeakable would be viewed with suspicion: having returned to the world of the living, Arendt writes, the survivor who bears witness 'himself is often assailed by doubts with regard to his own truthfulness, as though he had mistaken a nightmare for reality'.²⁶

If Arendt could reach back to the Boer War and to British colonialism in India to describe the origins of that totalitarian form of terror known as the concentration camp, it is just as reasonable to ask what the concentration camp of the future might look like. Is the concentration camp only a thing of the past, or has it metamorphosed into different forms? When Theodor Adorno declared that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, could he also have meant to say that we did not, after all, survive the concentration camp? Dazed women, men and children walked out of the camps, but did civilization outlive the onslaught? 'The idea that after this war', reflected Adorno,

life will continue 'normally' or even that culture might be 'rebuilt'—as if the rebuilding of culture were not already its negation—is idiotic. Millions of Jews have been murdered, and this is to be seen as an interlude and not the catastrophe itself. What more is this culture waiting for?²⁷

Has the concentration camp, unmoored from its precise location, shorn of its physicality, freed from its chains, bounded no longer by barbed wires, come to occupy a different space? If the concentration camp never really

Tribes Act was first passed in 1871, amended in 1882, and extended by turn to various parts of India, including the Madras presidency in 1911. The government of India has made half-hearted attempts to 'denotify' these castes and tribes, but their living conditions remain wretched and stigma continues to be attached to them.

25 Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 437–8.

26 *Ibid.*, 439.

27 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. from the German by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso 1978), 55.

disappeared, even as the only form in which we 'knew' it vanished, might that point to an ominous future for genocide and the categories through which we have hitherto understood it? Will it suffice to speak of genocide as the wilful elimination, in part or in whole, of groups of people, whether conceived through the categories of nationality, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference or linguistic identity, and point to continuing violence in the Sudan, Chechnya, the Chittagong Hill Tracts and elsewhere as instances of genocide in our time, or do our times call for some radical rethinking of genocide? Does our present understanding of genocide permit us to recognize the numerous forms, institutions and socio-cultural practices, many cast as benevolent interventions, through which it might be practised?

I am by no means merely adverting to the argument, considerable as its merits indubitably are in some instances, that many recent military engagements have been tethered on the slimmest ideas, generally a strange conjoining of infantilism with a moral rhetoric as offensive and hypocritical as it is an invitation to perpetuate terror in the name of eliminating terrorism. The 'new world order' of 1991 gave way to the notion of 'humanitarian intervention' in 1999, and this in turn was succeeded, in the war against terror, by the terrifying notion that 'if you are not with us, you are against us'.²⁸ It is the Gulf War (1991), as well, that serves as the template for what has now become firmly enshrined as the philosophy of American military engagement, namely, the notion that the loss of lives on the other side is acceptable if not desirable 'collateral damage' so long as no lives are lost on one's own side. The triumph in the Balkans was trumpeted with the observation that not a single American life had been lost to enemy gunfire. That is one principal reason why bombing from altitudes of 10,000 feet or more, where it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish military targets from the civilian infrastructure, is now considered normative, even a form of moral bravery. These forms of 'humanitarian intervention' are, let us recognize, just as asymmetrical as those colonial wars of expansion, conquest and self-aggrandizement that decimated entire tribes or communities in the Americas, Australia and Africa. One might argue that each age has its own form of benevolent violence, and that 'humanitarian interventions' have only supplanted the discourse of 'civilizing mission' that was rampant in the nineteenth century. Civilizing missions entailed punitive expeditions to bring 'unruly' tribes to their senses and the 'pacification' of warlike people and entire villages, and humanitarian interventions now appear to operate in somewhat similar idioms. What, then, should strike us as distinct in the idea of 'humanitarian intervention', and why should we think of it as

28 For a more extended discussion, see Vinay Lal, 'Terrorism, Inc.: the family of fundamentalisms', *The Little Magazine* (New Delhi), vol. 2, no. 5, September–October 2001, 33–43.

anything other than a very contemporary form of state politics that has been us with for a long time?

To gain some sense of just how far we have traveled along the road to more evolved forms of oppression that will, at least in part, have the effect of making genocide invisible, it is necessary to begin with the observation that we live amidst times when the categories deployed in the service of cognitive frameworks have become overwhelmingly oppressive. A case in point is furnished by the categories—the bedrock of political science and modern nation-state systems and nearly always prevalent in discourses surrounding genocide—of ‘majority’ and ‘minority’. Every nation-state has its minorities, and the keenest political observers are, it is reasonable to aver, in agreement that any political system that safeguards the rights of minorities is least likely to gravitate towards violence and oppression. No lesser a person than Mohandas Gandhi, whose political acumen was not less remarkable than the moral sensibility that he brought to politics, took the view that the litmus test of a democracy is its treatment of its minorities. Minorities have often had good reasons to fear majorities. Nonetheless, even a modicum of reflection suggests that genocides or systematic acts of repression are not always perpetrated by majorities upon minorities, and the Sunni stranglehold over power (and thus the appropriation of state-sanctioned violence) in Shia-majority Iraq under the regime of Saddam Hussein is only the most contemporary and well-known illustration of the phenomenon of a minority wielding immense power over a majority. Over 500 years of colonialism, European minorities, whether in settler colonies or otherwise, and sometimes dwarfed by native majorities as in India under the British, rendered extinct large indigenous populations, exercised naked and hegemonic power over their subjects, and transformed the colonies that fell under their jurisdiction.

What, then, if a minority acted with the confidence of a majority and, contrariwise, a majority thought of itself as a minority? And what if, to bring a sharply political edge to our reflections, the minority was not so transparently emboldened by its monopoly over the use of force, but was rather a minority that had almost seamlessly assimilated itself into the social fabric of the country? While they have doubtless occupied a disproportionately important place in the socio-economic life of India, the Parsis or Zoroastrians, whose share of India’s population has always been minuscule, never exercised military influence and seldom displayed any interest in wielding political power, and there is little to suggest that they have ever been resented by the comparatively gargantuan Muslim, not to mention Hindu, majorities. Hindus, on the contrary, constitute the overwhelming majority of India’s population, and even in undivided India would have accounted for 70 per cent of its people, but nonetheless have for nearly a century imagined themselves as a besieged people. They today frequently rehearse the complaint that they are treated akin to a discriminated minority and view Hindu-dominant India as an anomaly in world politics, a nation

whose outright majority is cowed into submission by one or more minorities. The modern movement of Hindu nationalism that goes under the name of Hindutva has been fuelled, in part, by the perception that Hindus are the largest majority in the world that allows itself to be oppressed by a minority, namely the Muslims. Hindutva's websites, magazines, official pronouncements and various other instruments of propaganda are awash with the claim that the largest ever genocide perpetrated in history took place with the Muslim occupation and brutalization of India.²⁹

The excessive tolerance of a majority can, on this account, make it vulnerable to the depredations of a depraved minority; moreover, from the standpoint of militant Hindus, Muslims are never anywhere in a minority, since Islam does not, in principle, recognize the idea of the nation-state, and Muslims imagine themselves as part of a worldwide community, the *ummah*, as Hindus never can. Thus the Muslim 'minority' in India is really a majority, and not merely the advance column of a world-conquering faith. Leaving aside the particularly egregious distortions that inhere in this view, such as the propensity to view Islam as a monolith, or the occlusion of the fact that Muslims are conspicuous among those who belong to the lower strata of society, the more general point about how categories of 'majority' and 'minority' have been naturalized needs reinforcement. Once the ideas of proportional political representation and the census had become firmly etched in the modern political imaginary, it became impossible to dislodge the notions of 'minority' and 'majority', and political science has done everything to consolidate this modality of thinking. The notions of 'majority' and 'minority' are the bread and butter of modern constitutional politics, as discussions over the recently concluded elections in the 'liberated' countries of Iraq and Afghanistan so amply demonstrate.

I have elsewhere advanced the argument that, as we move along in the twenty-first century, oppression will increasingly be exercised through the categories of knowledge, and that naked force, military might and the brutal class oppression of industrial society will be less visible instruments of violence.³⁰ This may seem a particularly inopportune moment to put forth such an argument, considering the instances of contemporary violence, whether genocidal or otherwise, that I have already enumerated in this paper. Besides the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the conflicts in Rwanda, Uganda, Congo, Sudan and the Ivory Coast, there are more complicated cases of violence targeted at specific groups that appear to fall

29 For an elaboration of this point, see Vinay Lal, 'North American Hindus, the sense of history, and the politics of Internet diasporism', in Rachel C. Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (eds), *AsianAmerica.Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyberspace* (London: Routledge 2003), 98–138. The anxiety that informs Hindutva is analysed in Vinay Lal, 'India in the world: Hinduism, the diaspora and the anxiety of influence', *Australian Religion Studies Review*, vol. 16, no. 2, Spring 2003, 19–37.

30 Vinay Lal, *Empire of Knowledge: Culture and Plurality in the Global Economy* (London: Pluto 2002).

short of 'genocide' as the term is commonly used by scholars. Many human rights activists in India have not been reticent in describing the pogrom that was directed at Muslims in Gujarat in early 2002, which took the lives of at least 2,000 people and left another 150,000 homeless, as genocide. The evidence is indisputably clear that the violence, though perhaps not instigated by the state in the first few hours, was then carried out with the full force of state power and with the active participation of functionaries of the state charged with checking the violence.³¹ The genocides of the future will likely be directed not at entire populations, but rather at what one might term sufficiently symbolic sectors—and not necessarily, as one might be tempted to infer from previous genocides, intellectuals, political elites or the wealthy—of the targeted group. Human rights activists who have investigated the killings in Gujarat found that the murderers and arsonists directed their wrath not only at Muslim-owned shops and buildings but at a disproportionately large number of mosques and, even more ominously, at *dargahs*.³² In Gujarat, as in many other parts of India, the burial sites of Sufi saints attract Muslim and Hindu worshippers. That the perpetrators of violence viewed *dargahs* and other sites associated with Sufis as particularly deserving of destruction is illustrative of the argument, to which I shall return in closing, that the fear of oneself is often greater than the fear of the other. Hindus who worship at *dargahs* are not only, from the perspective of militant Hindus, apostates, traitors and friends of Pakistan: they are palpable reminders of the syncretism that has historically characterized what later assumed the corporate identity of Hinduism, uncomfortable reminders indeed of everything that advocates of a masculinist (and often genocidal) faith masquerading as Hinduism have disowned in their own past. The genocide perpetrated against Muslims masks Hindutva's genocidal impulses towards Hinduism.

While it is transparently obvious that sheer military might subjugated the Taliban, the stubborn resistance of the Palestinians in the face of the overwhelming military superiority of Israel, which has not denied itself such obscene advantages as the deployment of F-16s in Palestinian neighbourhoods, should alone give some pause to reconsider the supposedly inevitable success accompanying the application of military force. Consequently, in suggesting that oppression and genocide should increasingly be understood as an aspect of the imperialism of categories, it becomes necessary to enquire into the origins of these categories and how they

31 Siddharth Varadarajan (ed.), *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy* (New Delhi: Penguin 2002) is a good compendium, and the role of the state is also heavily documented in Human Rights Watch, 'We Have No Orders to Save You': *State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*, Human Rights Watch Report, vol. 14, no. 3 (New York: Human Rights Watch 2002).

32 See, for example, *Genocide: Gujarat 2002*, a special issue of *Communalism Combat* (Mumbai), vol. 8, nos 77–8, March–April 2002, 94–7.

operate. These categories are the handiwork of social scientists and other academic workers, and it is my submission that, in the era of globalism, when the same icons of popular culture proliferate everywhere, trade disputes universally come under the jurisdiction of the World Trade Organization or some other economic regime such as NAFTA, and financial markets are inextricably linked, nothing is more global than modern knowledge and its categories. The modern academic disciplines, especially the social sciences, are now replicated in universities around the world, though the prodigious discussion around globalization scarcely gives a hint of this development. The formal frameworks of knowledge have bequeathed to every corner of the globe a universal and supposedly tested and verifiable recipe for development, technological progress, successful management and democracy—the last enshrined in the idea of ‘free elections’ and further guided by the magical incantation of ‘one person, one vote’. Gestures against globalization of a certain kind—the stone-throwing that accompanied the opening of a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant in Bangalore, the burning of the warehouses of the Indian subsidiaries of Monsanto upon the introduction of a terminator seed or the destruction of a McDonald’s by a French farmer—are captured in popular memory, but it is useful to recall that American-style business schools are being embraced around the world, that for well over one generation the economics textbooks of Paul Samuelson have reigned supreme around the globe, and that no one protested when social science in the American, British or French idiom began to prevail in the ‘developing’ and ‘underdeveloped’ worlds. Indeed, the very ideas of ‘development’, ‘growth’, ‘scarcity’ and ‘poverty’ with which economists, social planners, sociologists and politicians in the non-Euro-American world work are sanctified by several generations of western experts. Even more so than Coca-Cola, Disney or manifestations of American-style youth culture, formal modeling and other mathematized forms of social science have reached into every corner of the world. Economists in dictatorships, democracies and dukedoms are, in so far as their work as social scientists is in question, fundamentally alike, however acute the degree of variance in the constraints placed on their ability to contribute to scholarly literature. The well-meaning protestors in Seattle and Genoa may have been echoing popular sentiments about globalization, but when we speak of the growing polarities, the extension of the ranks of the very poor as well as those of the very rich, it becomes incumbent on us to reflect upon how the categories of ‘poverty’ and ‘scarcity’ themselves operate to produce oppression.

Not all categories are alike; they have greater or lesser epistemic force, by which I partly mean that some—‘poverty’ and ‘scarcity’, to name two—have become so naturalized that the discursive fields generally concerned with enquiring into such phenomena, among them economics, geography and sociology, no longer feel they have to perform much explanatory work. Economists might dispute how poverty is to be alleviated, and the concept of purchasing power parity (PPP) allows them to understand that a dollar buys

half a dozen eggs in American cities but a full meal at a roadside restaurant in India. The World Bank and United Nations bodies use some such figure as \$1 or \$2 per capita spending money per day to compute how many people the world over can be described as living in poverty, but seldom allow any other conceptions of poverty to enter into their calculations. Since economists seldom if ever think dialectically, none would think of writing about poverty by writing about the super-rich. Similarly, the economist is unable to distinguish between the poverty that one is born into, the poverty into which one is forced, the poverty that the supposed victim imagines as a form of wealth, the poverty that draws a line between needs and wants, the poverty that stands forth in repudiation of consumption, the poverty that becomes (as in the traditions of both Indian renunciates and warrior saints) one's armour and so on. Indeed, in many post-industrial societies, most particularly the United States, the poor are despised only because they cannot partake of the consumer society and are, thus, traitors to the notion of the ultimately good life.

Some categories are provisional, others are more enduring; some, such as 'development', have an extraordinary tenacity. Some categories are of recent vintage, the 'international community' being a notable case in point. If today the United States acts to subjugate, chastise or warn another people, it attempts to do so in the name of the international community. That was never much of a consideration when the United States fought in Vietnam, initiated the bombing of Cambodia or mined the harbours of Nicaragua. Other categories have been invested with newer meanings and have received different and revived forms of circulation. The idea of being literate, to take one example, has been in circulation since at least the late mediaeval period, and it set up a hierarchy between literates and illiterates; however, the category of literacy, as a perusal of the *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests, is much more modern than we might suppose. Literacy is a form of measurement, one used to browbeat nations into shame, contrition or submission. Where previously ethnologists drew on anthropometry and craniometry to draw distinctions between superior and inferior civilizations, or to delineate 'criminal types', today the ranking of civilizations draws on other criteria. Naked forms of racism are no longer tolerated, and there would be universal outrage at the suggestion that women and men with shapely or pointed noses are more elevated beings than those who are snub-nosed.³³ Instead, those people among whom literacy rates are low now substitute for

33 'They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got', comments Marlow in the first chapter of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. He is describing European adventurers. 'It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much'; Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Land and Sea* (New York: Hanover House 1953), 37.

those with unshapely noses: they are the pathetic ones, ripe for intervention.³⁴ The United Nations, for one, is unequivocal in its various pronouncements that literacy rates are one of the three principal measures for determining where a nation-state shall stand on the scale of civilization.

Modern, largely invisible, holocausts are being perpetrated on significant sections of the world's population. I have so far desisted from establishing a catalogue of genocides, partly because the twentieth century has been particularly fecund in this respect and we are in any case far from completing the catalogue. Hitler infamously precipitated the elimination of the Jewish population with the observation that no one remembered the extermination of the Armenians, and there is every possibility that the twenty-first century might be richer still in other, hitherto still invisible, holocausts. Nothing furnishes more vivid illustrations of this argument than the idea of 'development', which remains indubitably the clearest example of the genocidal violence perpetrated by modern knowledge systems on the integrity of human communities. The saga of Soviet terror originated in the brutal collectivization of Russian agriculture and in the impulse to industrialize rapidly, and consequently increase productivity, by the use of forced labour. Millions of deaths were achieved, not by superior forms of armament, but by coolly and rationally conceiving of these deaths as the necessary price to pay for development. In a similar vein is the Chinese Communist Party's heartless embrace of ruinous economic policies, the attempt by political functionaries to make the subjects of the state partake in the Great Leap Forward, and the consequence of this extreme folly: 25–30 million people dead from starvation.

Yet these starvation deaths are not routinely thought of as constituting a genocide or a holocaust, and they have not impacted our memory and sensibility with anything even remotely resembling the force and effect with which the Holocaust has nearly everywhere become part of the awareness of diverse political communities. On the one hand, denying the veracity of the Holocaust is a criminal offence under the law in Germany, and Holocaust-deniers face considerable opprobrium in various other countries as well; on the other hand, demographers and specialists in Chinese history and politics aside, the world has never been very much bothered by the history of famine mortality in modern China. Nor were these starvation deaths the only ones that took place in the name of development, or in the interest of proving right the pet theory of some economist. The famine mortality in India from 1876–1902 alone has been estimated, quite conservatively, at anywhere between 12 and 29 million, and at least one progressive British commentator who had the misfortune of witnessing the 1876 Madras famine prophesized

34 Michael Ward, in his otherwise novel study, *Quantifying the World: UN Ideas and Statistics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004), misses the entire politics of literacy measurements, such as those encountered in the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report*.

that when 'the part played by the British Empire in the nineteenth century is regarded by the historian fifty years hence, the unnecessary deaths of millions of Indians would be its principal and most notorious monument'.³⁵ This pronouncement has gone the way of many other moral denunciations, deep into oblivion, and there are still British historians ready to pronounce British rule in India as well intentioned and, on the balance, good for India; but none of that should obscure the critical word in William Digby's assessment, namely his observation that the deaths were 'unnecessary'. Had Digby said 'wilful', he would still not have been doing injustice to his material. Farmers, villagers and communities were sacrificed not merely to poor policy, or to keep the Indian army and railways in good shape, but because colonial officials were of the firm view that purportedly tested theories of economic advancement and human development could not be surrendered to compassion, moral sentiment or emotional responses to which inferior beings, such as natives and women, were susceptible. In 1877 Richard Temple, charged with enforcing the famine code in the severely affected areas of the Deccan during the Viceroyalty of Lytton, was insistent that principles of free market economics should be brought to bear on the management of the famine. Half a million affected people were removed from public works. Temple refused permission to colonial officials to remit land taxes even in famine districts, and engineered, during the height of the famine, the passage of the Anti-Charitable Contributions Act of 1877, which (in Mike Davis's words) 'prohibited at the pain of imprisonment private relief donations that potentially interfered with the market-fixing of grain prices'.³⁶ Cutting rations for male coolies assigned to heavy labour, Temple set the daily caloric intake for them at 1,627, which compares with the approved diet (in 1981) of 2,050 calories for a seven-year-old child engaged in normal activity and the diet of 1,627 calories assigned to inmates of Buchenwald engaged in hard labour.³⁷ Davis rightly minces no words in describing Temple as the 'personification of free market economics as a mask for colonial genocide'.³⁸

We are likely to see starvation deaths and the killings in concentration camps as discrete forms of violence, when in fact they are equally derived from the categories—development, bureaucracy, progress, instrumental rationality—of modernity. The victims of social engineering will surely not care to choose between different forms of death, but some victims are assured at least of monuments in their name. There are no monuments or

35 William Digby, quoted in Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso 2002), 8.

36 Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 39–40; this paragraph draws more generally on chs 1, 4, 5 and 10.

37 *Ibid.*, 39. The exact diet at Buchenwald from 1939 until the liberation of the camp in 1945 is specified in *The Buchenwald Report*, trans. and ed. David A. Hackett (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1945), 146–9.

38 Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, 39.

memorials to the victims of development; ironically, they remain singularly 'underdeveloped' even in this respect. Many people would insist on knowing how one can speak of development's victims at all, and there are even scholars who, while claiming to speak as progressive spokespersons on behalf of the 'genuinely' oppressed, can barely disguise their scorn at groups on behalf of whom victimhood status is sometimes claimed.³⁹ The very word 'development' perpetually unsings its own grave, so to speak: every parent is rightfully persuaded, for instance, that nothing should obstruct the development, or growth and well-being, of her or his child. A battery of experts exists in most modern cultures to provide the optimum conditions under which the development of children can transpire,⁴⁰ and no reasonable person considers the objective as less than laudable, though we all are also aware that many of the 'experts' are entirely dispensable.

What passes as 'common sense' impedes the placement of development alongside the Holocaust, genocide, wanton killing, destruction and dispossession. That is one obstacle to the construction of a political archaeology of the idea of development. Moreover, by the second half of the nineteenth century, if not earlier, social thinkers in the West had largely come to accept the idea that civilizations were to be placed alongside a scale, and a form of evaluative scale still survives, indeed thrives, in the idea of development. For this idea to be at all meaningful, it must presuppose that there are nations that are developed, others that are developing and yet others that doggedly persist in remaining underdeveloped, a testament to Oriental laziness or the savagery of a dark continent. Frequently, these terms are substituted by others, though each set has its own particular resonance. The term 'third world' had extraordinarily wide currency until very recently; among other terms that abound, one hears of 'post-industrial societies', of nations in the throes of 'advanced' or 'flexible' capitalism and of countries, which when not outright 'backward' are merely 'industrializing'. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa, as I have previously suggested, are sometimes called 'failed' states, and we know what remedies—structural adjustment, subjection to a regime of sanctions, even recolonization—lie in wait for those who fail; at the other extreme, the proponents of the 'development' lexicon are reluctant to use the word 'over-developed' to describe some of the developed states, though that description seems apt for

39 A particularly good example of such extreme insensitivity to, and mockery of, victims of development is Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward: Postmodern Critiques of Science and Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2003).

40 For example, Betty Farber, *Guiding Young Children's Behavior: Helpful Ideas for Parents and Teachers from 28 Early Childhood Experts* (Garden City, NY: Preschool Publications 1998). The discussion in Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2001), is useful.

at least some countries whose appetite for consumption and self-aggrandizement is also reflected in their obesity rates.⁴¹

In the near aftermath of the Second World War, the 'underdeveloped' areas of the world were invited to open themselves to intervention by the more 'developed' countries, as though genocide were so imbricated in the human sensibility at that juncture that another avenue had to be found for it, albeit couched in the language of benevolence. No one had quite reflected on Gandhi's observation that if a small island had to occupy a good deal of the world to satisfy its wants and vanity, one shuddered to think what the consequences would be for the world if a large country such as India resolved to imitate Britain. Had Gandhi been alive to witness the burgeoning economic 'development' of China and (to a somewhat lesser extent) India, one can be certain that he would have, far from wanting to recant his assessment, been firmly convinced that the ideology of development always hungers for sacrificial victims. Amidst widespread disease, hunger and malnutrition, numerous world organizations, such as the Department of Social and Economic Affairs at the UN, boldly inferred that rigorous demands, from the forfeiture of traditional livelihoods and the rejection of religious values to the painful adjustments required by the erosion of the moral economy and the conception of the commons,⁴² could be placed upon those who wished to answer the irresistible calls to development.

By the mid-1950s, the idea of development had achieved the status of unimpeachable certainty, global in its reach and totalizing in its capacity to order and evaluate human relations. This was unequivocally the way to the future, and all who dared to reject development as an ill-thought panacea were condemned to become pariahs, the burnt carcasses and rejects of history. Yet the violence perpetrated in the name of development was never recognized as violence, and not merely because it makes for poor media coverage or less than sensational journalism. In what was more than a fleeting moment of fancy, Nehru conveyed the idealism that allowed his generation to view dams as the future 'temples' of humanity. Little thought would be given, over the next few decades, to the 40–80 million people conservatively estimated by the World Commission of Dams to have been displaced from their traditional homelands by dams, a displacement that, for

41 Some of these terms have other insidious histories: to take one example, 'flexible' capitalism is a short-hand for the corporate strategies that have led to 'downsizing', increase in part-time labour, the reduction of the permanent work force and the emasculation of labour unions. The discussion of development in this paragraph and the following draws largely on Lal, *Empire of Knowledge*, 111–13.

42 By 'commons' I mean not only the idea of shared public spaces, communal property and the common inheritance of communities (from the wisdom of the elders to shared knowledge about medicinal plants), but also everything that is implied in the phrase 'moral economy' as it is encountered in the writings of E. P. Thompson, the reflections of E. F. Schumacher and the intellectual and political practices of Mohandas Gandhi.

people whose attachment to their land cannot be measured by monetary worth, was often tantamount to loss of soul and life. Developmental violence on this scale has every characteristic of ethnic cleansing—the open targeting of a particular group, in this case the ‘poor’ and the ‘underdeveloped’, drawn largely from the ranks of ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples, and their subsequent eviction—but it is not recognized as such. Unlike practitioners of open genocide, who may have to face the gallows or the humiliation of trial before an international tribunal, the stalwarts of this form of ethnic cleansing are often fêted for their humanitarian contributions to human welfare. As Ivan Illich has suggested, what is particularly insidious in the idea of development is that, following the Nazi practice of employing Jews in unpaid labour as their own contribution to their death, it ‘enlist[s] people in their own extinction’.⁴³ The future of concentration camps may be more grim than we commonly recognize.

Coda

The study of genocide has, as I have attempted to argue, been constrained: in part by the emphasis on groups or communities who have borne the brunt of oppression on account of their ethnicity, nationality or religious outlook; and in part by the tendency to dwell on violence in its most palpably naked forms, such as the extermination camps in which Jews were herded and then dispatched to their death or the brutally open incitements to violence of the sort witnessed in Rwanda where radio announcements spurred the Hutus to massacre the ‘cockroaches’. Various other forms of genocide have gone wholly or largely unnoticed, and there is little prospect that we will even recognize the holocausts unfolding before our eyes until we understand the oppression of categories that have come to exercise a tyrannical sway over our lives. At least a few commentators have begun to recognize the truly genocidal potential of categories that are seen as innocent, as can be witnessed in the skepticism with which they receive invocations by the United States to the ‘international community’. However much ‘the international community’ is presented as something of a natural, self-generated phenomenon, embodying the collective and moral will of humanity, there are also good reasons for viewing it as a newer, apparently more ‘democratic’, form of imposing the depraved morality of the powerful upon the powerless. Let us not forget that the decade-long sanctions regime put in place against Iraq, during which mortality rates in Iraq (and not only of children, though their deaths expectedly evoked more sympathy) skyrocketed, would not be terminated by the United States on the grounds

43 Ivan Illich, quoted in Claude Alvares, *Science, Development and Violence: The Revolt against Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press 1994), 137.

that the 'international community' could not condone Iraq's flagrant violation of UN resolutions.⁴⁴

There is, on sustained investigation, a transparency about 'international community' as a category of oppression that eludes many other categories. I commenced this paper with Eric Hobsbawm, and have previously remarked that Hobsbawm treats history as the unfolding of events, but never really pauses to understand history as a relatively recent category of now universal import. Let me, in closing, return to history and to its attempted monopoly over our conceptions of the past. Most societies lived without history textbooks—or, indeed, other textbooks, though here again history textbooks, over which controversies are often bitter and deep, have a salience in modern societies that is quite distinct—until they emerged as nation-states, although now a society without textbooks is all but inconceivable. Textbook publishing is a phenomenally huge and profitable business, and there is at least as much reason to be alarmed by textbook cartels as there is to fear oil cartels. Textbooks have homogenized forms of knowledge throughout the world, and societies that had numerous ways to engage with the past—myth, vernacular forms of knowing, the wisdom of elders, folktales, among others—have increasingly turned to history textbooks and to the narratives produced by professional historians to access the past and resolve disputes arising from its interpretation. As numerous historians, myself included, have documented in substantial detail, the controversy in India over the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth-century mosque in the north Indian city of Ayodhya, alleged by Hindu extremists to have been the site of a particularly significant Hindu temple before the temple was razed to make way for the mosque, was turned over to historians. On 6 December 1992, the Babri Masjid was destroyed by a crowd numbering in the thousands.⁴⁵ In the wake of this act of desecration, violence erupted in many parts of India.

Whatever the precise history of the now-extinct Babri Masjid, the mosque survived for well over 450 years, mostly during the time when Hindus did not care much for their history, and were certainly content to settle for what might be described as a very muddled history of the Babri Masjid. What makes modern forms of knowledge particularly oppressive for much of humankind is our diminishing capacity to live with ambiguity, an argument to which both George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden stand forth as sinister witnesses. Nothing can make nineteenth-century colonialism look benign, except of course to those who are still predisposed towards looking at colonialism as an endless variant of the narrative of 'Custer Died with His Boots On', but nonetheless the forms of colonization being attempted today suggest that the goriest chapters in genocide have yet to be written, most

44 Anthony Arnone, *Iraq under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War*, rev. edn (Cambridge, MA: South End Press 2002).

45 Vinay Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2003).

particularly if we keep in mind the most expansive conception of genocide as the extinction of distinct lifeforms and cultures. The present of the developing world, in the worldview of those who have set out to bring development to the unenlightened, is none other than the past, sometimes the very remote and mist-shrouded past, of the developed world; and, indeed, in this lies one of the greatest uses of the developing world, which preserves in its institutions and social practices the memory of a European past that is lost or of which there are only very dim traces. The 'barbarism' of the developing world is always a reminder to the 'developed' world of the past it left so long ago, and of the profound blessings of Christianity, reason and western science. The future of the developing world: well, there is no future, since its future is already known to Europe and America. Indeed, the developed world already lives the distant future of the developing world. As the future of the developing world as a whole is none other than the present of the developed world, so the future of the tribal or the peasant is only to live the limited conception of life of the planner, economist, policy analyst and management guru. The other word for such a future is 'genocide'.

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