

Mass Killing and Local Context

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Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Lee Ann Fujii, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2009.

Yang Su, *Collective Killings in Rural China during the Cultural Revolution*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

One of the most robust findings of the political violence scholarship is that mass murder and war are closely linked.¹ “All episodes of genocide and political mass murder of the last half century have been carried out...in the context of internal war and regime instability,” notes Barbara Harff.² For Martin Shaw, genocide is simply yet another form of warfare.³ Yet, surprisingly, until recently the mass murder and civil war scholarships developed alongside each other without engaging in fruitful dialogue or building on one another’s insights and findings.

One possible reason for this lack of communication is that each literature searched for causes of the phenomenon it studied at opposite ends of the government-civilians continuum. While genocide scholars were interested in studying why and how a government massacres civilians, civil war scholars sought to analyze why and when civilians and non-state actors rise up to challenge the government. However, as a result of the “micropolitical turn” in the civil war literature,⁴ and with the genocide scholarship moving away from the narrow state-centered approach, there is a convergence between the two literatures. As the books reviewed in this article demonstrate, new research on the genocide in Rwanda, collective killings in China during the Cultural Revolution, and civil war and mass violence in the Congo not only build on similar theoretical insights, but also complement each other. In other words, civil war and genocide scholarship are apples and oranges no more.

At the same time, while genocide scholars increasingly rely on the insights and findings of the civil war literature, the same cannot be said about students of civil war, in whose studies the literature on genocide and mass killings is still overlooked. Both literatures would benefit from drawing upon and paying closer attention to each other’s research questions, methodologies, and findings. This review essay proposes the ways in which each literature can contribute to its counterpart and puts forward new questions and research agendas for further research on mass violence.

The Development of Genocide Research

In the beginning, there was Lemkin. Raphael Lemkin, a Poland-born American of Jewish descent, is the founding father of genocide studies. He coined the term and jumpstarted genocide research with his seminal 1944 text, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*.⁵ Lemkin was an international law scholar, and thus adopted the macro, national level as the most appropriate level of analysis. Other scholars also focused on the state because in the modern world it is mainly governments that have sufficient means and resources to “destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such,”⁶ although in theory many groups and organizations can commit genocide. The main historical case studies—Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the Holocaust, Cambodia, and Rwanda—seemed to justify this focus on the macro factors of government policies and actions. Yet, the heavy emphasis on the macro level has also become a straightjacket for the booming field, with its conferences, associations, and academic journals.⁷

Scott Straus divides the genocide scholarship into two main groups.⁸ Many key studies of the “first generation” of genocide research, mainly from the 1970s to 1980s, sought to explain genocide by concentrating on structural factors, such as deep societal divisions,⁹ cultures of exclusion,¹⁰ ethnic animosities, and economic conditions.¹¹ Others blamed mass killings on nondemocratic regimes, emphasizing the connection between genocide and totalitarianism,¹² or on autocracy with its concentration of power in the hands of few individuals, not restrained by appropriate checks and balances.¹³

However, Straus notes that these studies suffered from serious shortcomings, causing their validity to be questioned. Authoritarian regimes are numerous, while genocides are few, and the same argument can be made about cultures of exclusion and ethnic conflicts, not to mention deep social cleavages and hard living conditions.¹⁴ From these and other critiques of the first generation studies the “second generation” research emerged in the early 2000s, which, while rejecting the substance of the previous findings, nonetheless continued to concentrate on macro factors and explanations. Even the scholars who pioneered the study of microfoundations of genocide focused primarily on government agents, as Christopher Browning and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen did in their separate projects on the Nazi Reserve Police Battalion 101 during the Holocaust.¹⁵ Thus, some scholars still view regime type as the critical cause of genocide, but reject the linkage between authoritarianism and mass murder.¹⁶ For others, the specific regime type has no effect and the causes of genocides are modernity and the modern nation state,¹⁷ elite choices,¹⁸ or ideologies.¹⁹ Yet, while presenting new theoretical and empirical perspectives on genocide and mass murder, the second generation studies have failed to overcome the very same shortcomings that plagued the first generation research, namely, the inability to clearly define and operationalize the concept of genocide; an unclear and loosely defined universe of cases, the boundaries of which vary greatly with each definition; and the small number of actual genocides, which inhibit their ability to propose a generalized theory. Furthermore, there are questions to which neither first nor second generation macro-level research have provided sufficient answers, such as how to explain subnational variation in the killing rates.

The attempts to increase the universe of cases by expanding the definition of genocide and proposing new concepts started in early 1990s and led the field toward terminological cacophony. Rudolph Rummel analyzed democides; Barbara Harff studied politicides; Michael Mann tried to explain murderous ethnic cleansing; while Benjamin Valentino and colleagues simply dealt with mass killings, defined as 50,000 victims over the course of five years. But little consensus on definitions emerged, and new concepts, such as collective killings, proposed by one of the books reviewed in this article, continue to appear. It should be noted that the attempts to move beyond the rather restrictive legal definition of genocide are not limited to large-N oriented social scientists. Historian Norman Naimark adds the destruction of political groups (which was included in the draft of the Genocide Convention but did not make it to the final text) to argue that several genocides were committed by Stalin. Timothy Snyder's groundbreaking research presents a regional history of Eastern Europe, in which the Holocaust is analyzed in conjunction with, rather than being detached from, various other atrocities which devastated the "bloodlands." Christian Gerlach puts forward a more general idea of extremely violent societies as conceptual alternative to genocide.²⁰ A result of this move away from the strict legal definition of genocide was that the state-oriented research started losing ground, because there were mass killings in which murder was simply not a state policy, making the existing theories less relevant. Mass murder, viewed not as a policy but as a process, or a particularly monstrous collective action, begged for new research approaches and theoretical insights.

Furthermore, unlike the political scientists of the first and second generation genocide research, who were mainly international relations scholars and quantitatively oriented comparativists, the bulk of the emerging third-generation research are qualitative scholars, spending months and years in their research sites conducting fieldwork, and therefore more aware of and attuned to local factors, which are not accounted for by large-N statistical studies. In other words, the genocide and mass murder scholarship has begun undergoing what Charles King describes as the "micropolitical turn" in the study of violence.²¹ Starting with the micro-level works of Browning and Goldhagen, historical community-level research, such as Jan Gross's *Neighbors*, and Straus's work on Rwanda,²² genocide scholars, and especially the social scientists among them, started paying increasing attention to local factors, dynamics, actors, and conflicts.

This growing attention to local factors takes different forms. For example, in his study of East Timor, Geoffrey Robinson goes beyond concentrating on decision making of elites in the capital, and refuses to view the conflict in terms of dichotomous Indonesian government versus the East Timorese people divide. He analyzes the conflict between different groups of East Timorese, which is rooted in the policies and patterns of governance and warfare of the Portuguese colonial administration. At the same time, Robinson neatly divides East Timorese into pro-integration (with Indonesia) and pro-independence camps and views the mass violence as largely corresponding to "master cleavage" fault lines.²³ Others, such as Lee Ann Fujii and Yang Su,

whose books are reviewed in this article, place micropolitical factors and dynamics at the center of their research. These locally oriented genocide scholars have a substantial and growing body of theoretical and empirical work to draw on, as the civil war and intrastate violence literature made its micropolitical turn several years earlier, jumpstarted by Roger Petersen, Elisabeth Wood, and Stathis Kalyvas.²⁴

The books reviewed in this article describe three very different cases of mass civilian victimization. In Rwanda at least 800,000 civilians were killed in a state-organized genocide, taking place against the background of an ongoing civil war. In rural China during the Cultural Revolution up to three million villagers were brutally murdered in collective killings, a largely unintended outcome of mass mobilization and violent political conflicts in the capital and urban centers. In eastern Congo several million people have lost their lives as a result of civil war, foreign military invasions, and local massacres, accompanied by the complete collapse of the state and its infrastructure. These cases of mass violence differ in terms of the respective state strength and involvement in the killings, the forms of violence used, the identity of the targeted groups, and numerous other aspects.

Yet there is a common thread that connects these authors' visions of collective killings in China, massacres and rapes in the Congo, and genocide in Rwanda. In each case, collective violence is deeply embedded in and affected by local conditions and social structures that shape the form and often the outcome of violence. Thus, argues Su, in the Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi during the Cultural Revolution, the root causes of mass violence were the patterns of Chinese migration to these regions and the village-level competition for scarce land, rather than the totalitarian and murderous utopian vision of the society, unchecked concentration of powers in the government hands, or Mao's policies, as the earlier theories would have suggested. For the Rwandan genocide, ancient ethnic hatreds between Hutus and Tutsis, political struggles between the government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front, or cultures and histories of exclusion and discrimination cannot explain why there were Tutsis who ended up joining the Hutu *Interahamwe* killing squads and Hutus who got massacred, their "correct" ethnic identity notwithstanding. These are the pre-genocide community level networks and interpersonal relations that do the work, posits Fujii. In the Eastern Congo, claims Severine Autesserre, ostensibly local and regional factors, such as the patterns of migration and land use, cause the violence, not international actors' desire to exploit the country's natural resources or neighboring governments' policies. As long as international institutions and their representatives on the ground refuse to recognize and address these local factors, peacebuilding efforts will fail to bring any relief to the suffering civilian population.

Mass Killing as Outcome, Process, and Action

Writing on the Great Leap Forward, Frank Dikotter points out that, contrary to the historical record, "mass killings are not usually associated with Mao...and China continues to benefit from a more favorable comparison to the devastation usually associated with

Cambodia and the Soviet Union.”²⁵ The devastation and mass killings, however, did not end with the Great Leap Forward fiasco. During the Cultural Revolution, argues Su, “at least 400,000 and possibly as many as three million were killed in the countryside villages by neighbors” (p. 2). The weapons were “ad hoc and primitive,” mainly farm tools or stones (p. 4). In several cases the victims were simply pushed off a cliff. The victims posed no threat to the regime and by and large showed no resistance. What, then, explains such intimate and primitive killings of unarmed and harmless people? Furthermore, why were two provinces, Guangdong and Guangxi, substantially bloodier than others? To explain this variation, a subnational unit of analysis is needed. For Su, this unit is the local community.

Needless to say, “intimate and primitive killings,” as Su describes them, did not start and unfortunately did not end with the Cultural Revolution. Why people kill their neighbors is also the key question for Fujii. *Killing Neighbors* does not purport to explain the causes and the origins of the genocide in Rwanda. The study takes as given the fact that Hutus (as a group) massacred Tutsis (as a group). Yet, how can the ethnic fear and ethnic hatred visions of the Hutu versus Tutsi master cleavage account for why some Hutus eagerly joined the killings of Tutsis, while others, instead of hunting down Tutsis, went after other Hutus? How was it possible for some people to both kill and save Tutsis, and why were some Tutsis allowed to join the Hutu *Interehamwe* killing squads? Furthermore, why were so many murders committed by groups which were substantially larger than they needed to be to simply kill the defenseless victims? To answer these questions, Fujii goes one step further than Su and analyzes individual perpetrators of mass violence, their choices, and actions.

The question that preoccupies Autesserre’s work on the Congo is not only why violence, massive in scale and genocidal in many aspects, takes place in this presumably post-conflict society, but also why, substantial efforts and resources notwithstanding, the international community has failed in its peacebuilding attempts. Furthermore, why is this violence confined to several regions, North and South Kivu, Katanga, and the Ituri district? To understand why the violence started, argues Autesserre, it is necessary to look at the regional and local dynamics in the eastern regions; to understand why it continues, one needs to analyze what makes international actors in the Congo, such as the UN peacebuilders, blind to these local developments and therefore incapable of devising efficient conflict-resolution strategies.

Each of the case studies presents a challenge to the macro-level, state-centered theories of mass killing. In China mass killings were not simply an outcome of state-led policy of murder and annihilation. In the Chinese countryside, notes Su, “there was no army, no Red Guards, no systematic bureaucratic machinery of genocide. Neighbors killed neighbors.” In the Congo, the mere existence of the state, let alone its ability to carry out policies, was often questionable at best. The macro-level research is similarly unable to adequately explain individual deviations from the general pattern of killings. Furthermore, the existing theoretical apparatus is ill-equipped to deal with in-case, subnational variation. However, while the state-centered analysis and macro-level theories are unable to provide sufficient answers to questions put forward by Su,

Fujii, and Autesserre, this does not mean that the state or the macro level play no role whatsoever. In line with Kalyvas's argument,²⁶ in rural China, Rwanda, and the Eastern Congo, mass violence is the product of interaction between the national and the local.

The methodology adopted by the authors, and to a large extent their findings, is determined by the level of analysis they adopt. Combining meticulous archival research, interviews with perpetrators of violence and their victims, analysis of official county gazettes, and statistical analysis of a large-N dataset, Su reconstructs the violence that took place in rural China during the Cultural Revolution. Given that there was no genocidal policy and local actors in the countryside enjoyed a high degree of autonomy as far as killings were concerned, why did some communities kill their members in public rallies, with primitive weapons, but in a highly organized fashion? For Su, a sociologist, the social movements literature provides a natural theoretical anchor.

"Killing *en masse*, as much as going on strike, is still a collective action problem," notes King.²⁷ However, this insight has been largely overlooked by scholars of mass violence. Viewing mass killing as a special form of collective action, Su puts forward the community model, which considers five related processes as crucial for collective killing to take place. The first concerns "collective ethnic categorization," shaped by the community's history, tradition, and culture. The second process generates potential victims in the community. While there is no central command to designate the killable, the government may have long-standing policies that encourage scapegoating, discrimination, and abuses. The third process generates potential killers in the community. In the case of collective killings in China, the actors included the county, township, and village cadres, and the militia members under their leadership, who sought career advancement and needed to prove their revolutionary zeal. The fourth process is the demobilization of legal constraints, an outcome of the breakdown of legal and social order and the legacy of numerous political and social campaigns. The fifth process is the demobilization of moral constraints, and framing the situation in terms that make the killings possible. These five processes, argues Su, echo what he sees as the major theoretical perspectives of the social movements literature: collective identity, resource mobilization, political opportunity structure, and framing (pp. 11–24).

In the community model, the state, its actors, and institutions, are important, but their effects are indirect. In rural China during the Cultural Revolution, the government, while not ordering killings, nonetheless had a tangible impact on the violence. State actors identified and labeled certain groups and individuals as class enemies and made this category killable as a result of a long history of scapegoating and abuses. The government policies also ignited competition for resources and political and armed clashes among the urban elites, while the local killings in the countryside were an unintended outcome of these struggles. Finally, the authorities in the capital were important because they mobilized people for action throughout the state, and subsequently lost control over the mobilized masses.

In the Chinese countryside during the Cultural Revolution, thousands, if not millions, were beaten, tortured, and killed in public "struggle rallies" because they had the misfortune to belong to the so-called Four Types of class enemies—former

landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and “bad elements.” These labels, assigned after the communist takeover of the country, were often arbitrary. If there were no landlords or rich peasants in the village, “middle peasants” were labeled, and in some cases quotas had to be filled regardless of the actual economic and social reality on the ground. Furthermore, by the time of the Cultural Revolution, the labels lost any practical meaning as the land had been redistributed in the 1940–1950s and many of the actual landlords and rich peasants had passed away. Yet the government needed class enemies for mass mobilization and scapegoating, so the labels became permanent and hereditary. Political struggles and mass mobilization in the cities spilled over to rural areas where local cadres, seeking career advancement or simply trying to secure their privileged status and salary, unleashed murderous campaigns against the Four Types to prove their revolutionary zeal. While this top-down story of communist cadres massacring a scapegoated minority group might fit neatly with many macro-level theories of genocide, the reality on the ground, argues Su, was much more complicated.

By concentrating on the bloodiest provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, Su links the killings to the patterns of Chinese migration to these poor and inhospitable areas, and fierce competition for resources, first and foremost land, between different Chinese clans and surname lineages. Although the victims were killed as “class enemies,” clan identities played an important role. The stronger clan identities, the higher the death toll. On the surface peasants enthusiastically engaged in class struggle, but they were only too happy when the victims came from rival clans. In some cases local cadres tried to protect and assist class enemies from their own clan. Finally, the framing of political conflict in war terms had a special resonance in these Cold War frontline regions that bordered Vietnam and the British-controlled Hong Kong, thus facilitating mobilization for collective killings.

Whereas for Su mass violence is collective action, Fujii treats it as collective and individual acting. In Rwanda people labeled as Hutu massacred people labeled as Tutsi in a deliberate genocidal campaign, orchestrated by the state. The violence was ethnic; there is no doubt about that. But how and in which ways was it ethnic? (p.10) Fujii views state-sponsored labels, in her case ethnicity, as a script for violence, with its distinctive actors, roles, and meanings. The outline and the general distribution of duties are known, but “no director’s vision is ever hegemonic” (p. 13), as there is always room for individual improvisations that deviate from the initially prescribed roles. The emphasis on acting also underscores the fact that genocide is not a single event, but a process, dynamic and fluid. This dynamism, however, is too often ignored by the explanations at the macro level, which neatly divide people into stable and exclusive categories such as “perpetrators” or “bystanders.” As Fujii demonstrates, such categorization fails to capture the complexity of violence—people can move between categories and belong to several categories at once. This focus on dynamism is the basis of the social interaction argument put forward by the book. On the ground, genocidal violence is social interaction because it is based on and embedded in pre-genocide ties, structures, and experiences, which often determine who kills, who gets killed, and who survives, state policies notwithstanding. It is social interaction also because

violence is affected by social dynamics that originate in the killings itself. Paraphrasing Charles Tilly, Fujii maintains that “killing produced groups, and groups produced killings” (p. 19).

Fujii’s focus on individual actions and social interactions leads her to adopt qualitative research design of in-depth interviews in two rural communities which appear in the book under the pseudonyms of Kimanzi and Ngali. Although the main focus is on low-level perpetrators of mass violence, Fujii also presents valuable data on survivors, bystanders, and rescuers. To properly evaluate the impact of ethnicity during the genocide, her study also looks at the period that preceded the violence and the role of ethnicity in daily life before 1994. The outcome is a fascinating, but somewhat uneven, political ethnography of mass violence. Some findings, such as that the ethnic labels “Hutus” and “Tutsis” are relatively recent constructs and in the past people moved between these two categories as their economic status changed, or that there were no ancient ethnic hatreds between Hutus and Tutsis, are widely known to scholars of genocide and political violence. The intention to demonstrate the limitations of the ethnic fear and especially the ethnic hatred arguments is important and well warranted, both theoretically and empirically, but hardly innovative. The key and very important contribution of the book is in its treatment of violence as a script people act out and modify, and the focus on actual behavior of ordinary people in extraordinary times. By adopting this lens on the moving target of violence, Fujii skillfully presents the complexity and the messiness of genocide. The findings are often remarkable. There were Tutsi who were allowed to join the Hutu killing squads. There were people who killed only to conceal the fact that they were hiding Tutsis in their homes. There were active perpetrators who were targeted. There were families in which one member eagerly killed while another eagerly saved Tutsis.

At the same time, these new layers of complexity should not inhibit generalizations. Widely used categories and classifications are often incapable of adequately capturing the reality, but this does not mean that no categorization is possible. That people alter the general script of violence does not mean this script should be ignored altogether. What the picture, presented by Fujii, boils down to is that during mass violence, people always have room for maneuver and improvisation on the margins, and the forms these improvisations take depend on micro-level ties and structures, rather than macro-level concepts. But scholars should certainly care about improvisations on the margins, as these margins are the difference between life and death for many people.

Collective killings in rural China were an outcome of the state actors’ success at mobilizing the masses, and the failure to control them; in Rwanda, the genocide was a success of the government in that so many Tutsis were killed, and a failure in that there were Tutsis survivors and Hutu rescuers. In Autesserre’s analysis of the Congo, the role of the state and its institutions is much harder to analyze, and not only because the Congolese state has at some point effectively ceased to exist, being replaced by international actors and an arrangement reminiscent of the colonial-era “trusteeship.” The book is not only about the roots and causes of violence, but also about what the international community tried to do about it, and about how the combination of local-level

violence and international-level ignorance had led to the perpetuation of a humanitarian disaster unprecedented in the post-WWII world.

In recent decades, the Congo, after being devastated by Mobutu's kleptocracy, civil wars, and invasions by several foreign militaries, has become the site of a substantial and determined international peacebuilding effort, arguably the key test for the UN peacekeeping and conflict resolution strategies and policies. The peacebuilders, focusing on the national and international levels, succeeded in imposing a peace agreement, removing foreign troops from the Congolese soil, and creating through elections a presumably unified and functioning government with a plethora of accompanying formal institutions. What the international community was unable to achieve is pacification of the eastern parts of the country—the Kivus, Katanga, and Ituri regions, where the violence often took especially gruesome forms and genocidal proportions, and more than once threatened to escalate into full-blown national and international war. Why was this the case? According to Autesserre, the reason is that the peacebuilding policies were focused on the macro level and therefore simply could not properly address the real causes and dynamics of violence in the eastern Congo, which were distinctively local, sometimes related to, but usually independent from, national and international cleavages and conflicts.

Like Su for rural China, Autesserre finds the causes of violence in the eastern Congo in (1) the patterns of migration, land use, and conflicts between and among Congolese of the Rwandan descent and the “indigenous” groups in the Kivus, Katanga, and Ituri; (2) how these local tensions and conflicts were manipulated and exacerbated by the Mobutu regime policies; and (3) how they were affected by the spillover of genocide from neighboring Rwanda, foreign military invasions, and civil war. Thus, the most important causes of violence are found at the local and regional, rather than the macro (national and the international), levels. Yet, despite the evident failure of the top-down solutions to bring peace, international actors and peacebuilders on the ground had stubbornly refused to recognize the bottom-up nature of mass violence and to tackle its root, local causes.

Why then are well-educated, well-read, and well-intentioned policymakers and officials so stubborn in their refusal to acknowledge and address local causes of violence, preferring instead to concentrate on the national and international levels? Building on a qualitative analysis of several hundred in-depth interviews, public and classified documents, and policy memos, Autesserre debunks popular, but incorrect, conspiracy theories and allegations, such as the international actors' desire to exploit Congo's vast natural resources, and identifies the dominant international peacebuilding culture as the key cause of inaction and resistance to addressing local issues. “Western and African diplomats, UN peacekeepers, and the staff on nongovernmental organizations involved in conflict resolution,” she claims, “share a set of ideologies, rules, rituals, assumptions, definition, and standard operating procedures.” It is this dominant, and probably even hegemonic,²⁸ culture that “made it possible for foreign interveners to ignore the micro-level tensions that often jeopardize macro-level settlements” in Congo and beyond (pp. 10–11).

Peacebuilders and diplomats, argues Autesserre, are trained to work with presidents and government officials. They view and analyze conflicts in macro-level terms. They live in a world of official documents and statements, and rarely travel outside the capital. They approach the situation with a readily available, one-size-fits-all toolkit of policies and definitions that completely disregard local conditions. They label the Congo as a “post-conflict” society while fighting is still going on simply because a peace agreement has been signed. They view the organization of elections as a panacea to all state-building ills. In short, they are disoriented “humanoids,” as the locals sometimes call them (p. 1). Socialized in the dominant peacebuilding culture, they stick to macro-level solutions and dismiss all the alternative approaches. The trouble with this approach with regard to Congo is that none of these top-down, macro-level policies are adequate to effectively address the violence that devastates the eastern regions of the country.

Much like Su and Fujii, Autesserre forcefully demonstrates that labels, such as “former landowner,” “Tutsi,” or “post-conflict society,” matter because they define the script that people and organizations act out. If you are a “landowner,” you get killed even if you currently have no land; if you are a “post-conflict society,” you get elections even if you are woefully unequipped to carry them out. Similar to Fujii’s work, *The Trouble with the Congo* is not only about hegemonic visions and scripts, but also their contestation and breakdown. In Rwanda the hegemonic project was that of state-sponsored ethnicity and genocide; in Autesserre’s work, the hegemonic project is the current international peacebuilding culture. However, hegemony does not mean a complete absence of contestation. Thus, in Rwanda there were people who challenged the state-mandated dichotomous divide between Hutu and Tutsi. In Congo, argues Autesserre, a handful of officials, aware of and attuned to local conditions, also made a desperate attempt to challenge the dominant peacebuilding culture. Ironically and sadly, local contestations of mass murder proved to be more successful than local contestations of disastrous peacebuilding. What the book is unable to explain, though, is how and why local violence in the eastern Congo region became genocidal in proportion and intent, and monstrous in form (rape, torture, cannibalism). The reader, wishing to understand these aspects of the Congolese violence, will have to look for answers elsewhere.

The emphasis on the local factors, previously overlooked in the genocide and mass violence literature, is not the only contribution of the books under review. Confirming the findings of Harff, Shaw, and other genocide scholars, these studies present a clear link between war and mass killing. In the Congo, mass killing was not only the outcome, but often the very way in which the war was fought; in China, argues Su, the framing of political conflict in war terms (even though no actual war was taking place) was among the key reasons why communities and people mobilized for collective killings. There, wartime emergency rhetoric provided a clear incentive to overcome collective action problems and to make drastic measures thinkable and acceptable. For Rwandans, war and genocide simply blended into one event, memory, and narrative. “The most common word that people used to refer to the period of 1990–1994 is *intambara*, which means ‘war,’” notes Fujii. “People seemed to use this word most often

despite there being multiple ways to refer to ‘genocide’ in Kinyarwanda” (pp. 14–15). However, unlike many previous studies, Su, Fujii, and Autesserre not only recognize the link between mass killing and war, but also build on the insights of the recent civil war literature. Yet there is much more that both the genocide and the civil war literatures can learn from one another.

Enhancing the Dialogue

As noted above, the reviewed books present fascinating theoretical and empirical perspectives on mass violence during genocides, collective killings, and civil wars. These studies also build on a common foundation, that is, the importance of the “local” for understanding the causes, unfolding, and outcome of violence, and the promotion of a dialogue between the branches of political violence research. Still, much more can be done to enhance this dialogue. Each field can learn from and contribute to its counterpart in terms of methods, key research questions and agendas, and findings.

Probably the key lesson the genocide literature can learn from the studies of civil war is the importance of explaining variation in outcomes. Selection on the dependent variable is all too common in genocide studies, and various attempts to increase the universe of cases by creatively redefining the concept of genocide nonetheless fail to pay sufficient attention to “dogs that did not bark,” meaning genocides that failed to emerge, notwithstanding numerous similarities to cases with a genocidal outcome.²⁹ This can be done by comparing cases that had genocides and mass killings to cases that, despite having similar independent variables, were either entirely peaceful or had violence that did not assume genocidal forms and proportions. The genocide literature has not completely overlooked the “negative” cases; yet few scholars have incorporated these into their analysis.³⁰

Another type of variation, still largely unexplained by the mass killings literature, is the subnational variation in the forms and rates of killing during the same genocide or mass murder campaign. While Straus has noted regional variation in the patterns of killing in Rwanda, genocide scholarship still awaits a systematic analysis of subnational dynamics and outcomes. Su’s work, seeking to explain the exceptionally high death toll of collective killings in Guangdong and Guangxi as compared to the largely peaceful Hubei, is an important step in this direction.

Additional and related variation that awaits analysis by genocide scholarship is the difference between urban and rural settings. Even if ordered and meticulously planned by national-level elites, the actual killings take different forms in urban and rural areas. Yet research too often tends to focus on the urban centers, whether it is the analysis of the Young Turks’ government in Istanbul or the Warsaw Ghetto. While the civil wars scholarship long ago recognized and sought to overcome this urban bias,³¹ genocide studies still lag behind, with the notable exception of research on Rwandan genocide. Clearly, in some cases a magnifying lens on the urban setting, such as in Andreas’s work on Sarajevo,³² can uncover important hidden dynamics. Still very little is known

about what goes on in the countryside during genocides and mass killing campaigns. Consider the Holocaust. Out of about 3.3 million Jews in pre-war Poland, about 30–40 percent lived in rural communities and small townships of the agrarian eastern countryside. Many more resided in similarly small townships and villages on the Soviet side of the border. Still, besides the fact that the vast majority were killed, little is known about the Holocaust in rural areas or about how being in urban or rural areas affected the patterns and chances of escape, resistance, and survival.³³

Genocide scholarship will benefit from incorporating the civil war literature into the study of resistance to genocide. What factors explain the emergence of armed resistance? Why in some places, such as Bialystok in Poland, Musa Dagh in the Ottoman Empire, or the Biseseo Hills in Rwanda, did people fight back? Why did some join armed resistance while others remained passive? Was it because of geographic and topographic factors, grievances, and social and economic endowments, or due to distinctively local factors? The huge body of research on the onset of armed uprisings and mobilization into armed groups might shed light on this unexplored puzzle.

Genocide scholarship also tends to overlook economic conditions and motivations. While the research on the role of economic endowments, and lootable versus nonlootable resources, is at the forefront of civil war research,³⁴ genocide scholars, with some exceptions, downplay the importance of economic variables. However, economic factors affect why, when, and how people lose their lives not only during civil wars, but also during genocide. Local conflicts over land, as Su aptly demonstrates, played a much more important role than ideological factors during the Cultural Revolution mass killings. The economic usefulness of the Lodz ghetto to the Nazi war effort enabled it to survive until the point when the Soviet troops were less than a hundred miles from the city. Opportunities for enrichment matter not only in the business world, but also during genocide. In the Soviet city of Odessa during the Holocaust, “the temptation to inform on one’s neighbors and take over their living space—especially in overcrowded apartment buildings in the desirable city center,” was often too strong for people to resist, notes King.³⁵ In Poland a brand new profession, the *szmalcowniks*,³⁶ people who identified and blackmailed hiding and disguised Jews, has been revealed. The motivation was not personal; most blackmailers did not know their victims. But the action was ostensibly local, for hardly any German could tell a Jew from a Pole by accent or behavioral traits. The blackmailers did not personally kill; but thousands, if not tens of thousands, of Jews, stripped of money, lost their chances for survival. Yet beyond the knowledge that the Great Depression was one of the main causes of Hitler’s rise to power, little is known about how economic factors, and especially local-level economic conditions and relations, affect the outbreak and intensity of mass killing.³⁷

Related to economic factors is the issue of governance and the provision of public goods by the rebels, which appears as an emerging research agenda in the civil war literature.³⁸ Genocidaires not only kill their victims; sometimes they also provide public goods or allow others to provide them. In Srebrenica, Theresienstadt, and the Khmer Rouge’s S21 prison, people were not only slaughtered, but also governed, fed, and

in some cases educated and medically treated. Genocide and mass killing require bureaucracies and public administration not only to kill, but also to control the victims, and later to assist the survivors. Fully recognizing this fact and learning from the civil war scholarship will move the field of genocide studies forward.

Finally, the literature on civil wars is methodologically much more advanced than its genocide counterpart. Quantitative studies of genocides and mass killings exist,³⁹ and there is a plethora of high quality qualitative research. What is largely missing is the mixed-methods approach, which has been adopted in several key studies of civil war. While genocide and mass killing scholars most frequently use archival research and in-depth interviews to study perpetrators of violence, the field will benefit from a more extensive adoption of surveys, similar to surveys of combatants, which are increasingly used by civil war scholars.⁴⁰ The field of genocide studies might also follow the civil war scholarship's use of the spatial analysis of violence and, yes, game-theoretic, formal models research on genocide.⁴¹

Although the field of civil war studies is more theoretically and methodologically advanced, it can benefit from the literature on genocide and mass killing. First of all, genocide scholarship reminds scholars of civil wars that states and state policies have a tangible impact on the outbreak and unfolding of violence. That does not mean that the state should be brought "back in" to the civil war research; it is not entirely absent from the field. At the same time, while several recent works on civil wars, most notably Jeremy Weinstein's important study,⁴² tend to virtually ignore the role and policies of the state, the findings of genocide scholars clearly demonstrate that state institutions, governments, and leaders are of crucial importance as far as political violence is concerned.

In addition, as Kalyvas notes, territorial control is "a key factor shaping the dynamics of civil war."⁴³ However, the civil war literature tends to view territory mainly as a piece of real estate. Genocide scholars demonstrate that territorial control is also linked to and influenced by emotions, feelings, and attachments to and for land, and that these factors affect the dynamics of violence. The emotional value of the territory gained or lost should be better incorporated into analysis.⁴⁴ More generally, the civil war scholarship can benefit from the genocide literature by learning about the role of people's feelings and emotions in the process of mass violence, even if the impact of this factor is often poorly theorized and not easily operationalized.⁴⁵ Grievances that lead to violence, after all, are not only structural or economic discrimination and exclusion.

Over the years, being heavily skewed toward qualitative, historically oriented process tracing, the field of genocide studies has learned to recognize and pay attention to temporal change. Genocide scholars long ago recognized that not only the magnitude and speed of killings, but also the very nature of violence changes over time. The killing of Armenian notables in Istanbul in April 1915 and the death marches of Armenian masses to the Syrian Desert are very different events in both form and substance. Although both fields recognize the dynamism of the processes they study, genocide scholars are more advanced in being attuned to temporal change in the form of violence

than their civil war counterparts, who can benefit from paying more attention to debates over what causes genocidal violence to change in nature and form.⁴⁶

Finally, civil war scholars can benefit from studying how genocide literature treats labels. While genocide scholars tend to neatly divide the entire world into perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, the recent civil war scholarship views labels—whether Reds or Whites, Liberals or Conservatives, Republicans or Monarchists—with extreme suspicion, and argues that adopting a particular label often has more to do with local conditions than with the war’s master cleavage. Genocide scholars demonstrate that labels often determine death and survival, and therefore should be taken seriously. These labels, as Fujii correctly points out, might not capture all the complexity of the situation, but they are still important. Building on the genocide literature findings, scholars of civil wars should recognize that labels are not only adopted, but also assigned, often quite arbitrarily, as Su demonstrates in his discussion of class quotas in the Chinese countryside. Once adopted for whatever reason, labels prove to be stickier than many scholars assume. In some situations and contexts it might be relatively easy to opportunistically switch labels, but in others this is not the case; and few people know this better than those studying genocides. Labels take a life of their own, especially in the context of violence, when children and grandchildren might be targeted because of a particular label, adopted by or assigned to their ancestors many decades ago.

Thus, each field would benefit from paying closer attention to the methods, theories, and findings of its counterpart. At the same time, there are also questions and agendas that both civil war and genocide scholars have not fully addressed, leaving venues for further research.

New Questions and Agendas

The key task for locally attuned genocide and mass killing research is to systematically analyze whether (and which) local factors, dynamics, and identities actually have an effect on mass killings, their origins, unfolding, and outcomes. The books reviewed in this article as well as recent research on other cases of mass killings, such as the Jewish pogroms by the East Europeans during the Holocaust, suggest that local factors and conditions indeed have an impact on where mass violence erupts.⁴⁷ And if this is the case, how significant is this impact? Furthermore, do local factors matter only when the state, its agents, and institutions are completely absent or extremely weak? In China collective killings were not a state policy, although the state allowed the killings to take place. In “deadly communities,” analyzed by Jeffrey Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, the Soviet state was already out and the Nazis not yet in, and in the Congo the state was virtually nonexistent. What happens when mass murder is ordered by the state? In state-ordered killings, do local factors have an effect only on the margins?

Timothy Longman’s study of the church and genocide in Rwanda presents the stories of two parishes. In one, local actors worked with the state before and during the genocide, singling out Tutsis, labeling them as insurgents’ accomplices, and, finally,

murdering them. In the other, the dominant local actors and many common villagers continuously resisted the state's murderous policies. At the end of the day, however, in both places almost all Tutsis were slaughtered.⁴⁸ So why should scholars take local factors seriously? This is a challenge that further research will have to tackle head-on.

Longman's story of two parishes is also a useful reminder that even if local factors do matter, in the study of genocide and mass killings, as in the political violence literature more generally, the impact of the "local" should not be overstated.⁴⁹ There is hardly anything local in the Treblinka gas chambers. At the same time, precisely because the Holocaust is the most centralized, bureaucratized, and industrialized case of genocide, and hence the most unlikely place to search for the "local," it can provide the most convincing evidence of the impact, or at least presence, of local factors and dynamics.

Consider Auschwitz, for example. It is known that prisoners' groupings existed and competed in the camp. Belonging to a certain group could determine one's chances of getting an easier job, an additional slice of bread, or a pair of shoes; often it meant the difference between life and death.⁵⁰ Much less is known about how and on what basis these groups were formed, and how belonging to a certain group (or no group at all) affected behavior and chances of survival. There was variation among the ghettos—some rebelled while others did not; in some people starved while in others life was more or less bearable. Sometimes this variation can be explained by differences in Nazi policies on the ground, but in many cases the main sources of this variation were internal. Jewish experiences were not monolithic and were shaped and affected by local factors and conditions. Often these local factors made the difference between life and death—in some cities, where the Jewish community was more integrated into the local, non-Jewish society, thousands were able to pass as non-Jewish and survive; in cities where the level of Jewish integration was low, the chances of hiding among the non-Jews were miniscule.

Another broad avenue for further research is to understand whether, and to what extent, local dynamics and conflicts affect the patterns of victims' behavior. While both the civil war and the genocide literatures have devoted at least some attention to the perpetrators of violence, scholars have almost completely overlooked the choices of those on the receiving end of violence. Yet, people targeted by violence have choices to make and strategies to adopt. They can resist, escape, or search for ways to cope with their misfortunes. They can simply do nothing. Understanding the choices and the calculus of the victims is hardly possible without paying attention to local factors, conditions, and dynamics. Overlooking the victims, on the other hand, leads to an incomplete and skewed image of political violence.

Finally, a crucial task for the micro-level-oriented scholarship is to produce research that is not only factually rich and attuned to local details and dynamics, but also that can be aggregated up to generalizable explanations that examine the links between local processes and macro-level outcomes.⁵¹

Notwithstanding its theoretical and empirical promises, the "micropolitical turn" in genocide studies will not be easy to accomplish.⁵² It is true that in the case of genocides, as compared to civil wars, the practical and methodological aspects of research

might present a serious challenge. The data are more likely to be nonexistent or inaccessible, with fatality rates unknown or distorted and documents mute or full of euphemisms. Perpetrators might be unwilling to share details that implicate them in the worst of crimes; the majority of the victims will be dead, and the bystanders may be preoccupied with finding explanations and excuses for inaction. These concerns should not be overlooked or underestimated. Nevertheless, the decades of high quality historical and social science research on various genocides and civil wars have demonstrated that many practical and methodological obstacles can be overcome. What is needed, though, is for scholars to ask the right questions.

NOTES

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2. Barbara Harff, "No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955," *American Political Science Review*, 97 (February 2003), p. 70.
3. Martin Shaw, *War and Genocide: Organized Killing in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).
4. Charles King, "The Micropolitics of Social Violence," *World Politics*, 56 (April 2004): 431–55.
5. Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis Of Government, Proposals For Redress* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944).
6. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948, Article 2.
7. *Journal of Genocide Research; Genocide Studies and Prevention; Holocaust and Genocide Studies*.
8. Straus, 2007; Scott Straus, "Political Science and Genocide," in Donald Bloxham and Dirk Moses, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 163–81. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed discussion of the first and second generation research on genocide.
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13. Rudolph Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994).
14. Straus, 2007.
15. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993); Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996). It should be noted that Straus does explicitly discuss either Browning or Goldhagen in his classification of genocide research generations.
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18. Benjamin Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Manus I. Midlarsky, *The Killing Trap: Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

19. Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

20. Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin's Genocides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

21. King, 2004.

22. Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

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24. Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Elisabeth Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

25. Frank Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–62* (New York: Walker&Co., 2010).

26. Kalyvas, "The Ontology of "Political Violence"; Kalyvas, 2006.

27. King, 2004, p. 448.

28. Autesserre's description of dominance echoes the definition of hegemony in Ian Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 44.

29. Straus, 2007.

30. Among scholars who incorporate negative cases in their analysis the most notable example is Manus Midlarsky. Scott Straus compares genocidal vs. non-genocidal outcomes in his ongoing research. Goldhagen's "Hitler's Willing Executioners," p. 408, includes some reference to other cases, but these, Italy and Denmark, can hardly be seen as sufficiently close to Germany as far as his independent variables are concerned.

31. Kalyvas, 2006.

32. Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets and Black Markets: The Business of Survival in the Siege of Sarajevo* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

33. Yehuda Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

34. Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Richard Snyder, "Does Lootable Wealth Breed Disorder? A Political Economy of Extraction Framework," *Comparative Political Studies*, 39 (October 2006): 943–68; Lawrence Markowitz, "Unlootable Resources and State Security Institutions in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan," *Comparative Political Studies*, 44 (January 2011): 156–83.

35. Charles King, *Odessa: Genius and Death in a City of Dreams* (New York: Norton, 2011), p. 236.

36. Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

37. But see Isaac Kamola, "The Global Coffee Economy and the Production of Genocide in Rwanda," *Third World Quarterly*, 28 (2007): 571–92; Philip Verwimp, "The Political Economy of Coffee, Dictatorship, and Genocide," *European Journal of Political Economy*, 19 (June 2003): 161–81; Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1998); Michael Thad Allen, *The Business of Genocide: The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Wolf Gruner, *Jewish Forced Labor under the Nazis. Economic Needs and Racial Aims (1938–1944)* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

38. Zachariah Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Ana Arjona, Social Order in Civil War, Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 2010.

39. Harff; Valentino; Valentino et al.

40. See, for example, Ana Arjona and Stathis Kalyvas, Preliminary Results of a Survey of Demobilized Combatants in Colombia, available at: <http://stathis.research.yale.edu/documents/Report5-06.pdf>; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, "Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War," *American Political*

Science Review, 100 (August 2006): 429–47; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, “Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War,” *American Journal of Political Science*, (April 2008): 436–55.

41. Ongoing research in this direction is conducted by Andrew Kydd and Scott Straus.

42. Weinstein.

43. Stathis Kalyvas, “Promises and Pitfalls of an Emerging Research Program: The Microdynamics of Civil War,” in Stathis Kalyvas et al., eds., *Order, Conflict, Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 399.

44. But see Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

45. An important exception in the civil war literature is Elisabeth Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

46. But see Jason Lyall, “Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence from Chechnya,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53 (June 2009): 331–62.

47. Jeffrey Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, “Deadly Communities: Local Political Milieus and the Persecution of Jews in Occupied Poland,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 44 (February 2011): 259–83.

48. Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

49. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence.’”

50. See, for example, Tuvia Friling, *Mi Ata Leon Berzhe: Sipuro Shel Kapo BeAushvitz* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2009) [Who Are You Leon Berger? A Story of a Kapo in Auschwitz].

51. I thank Jason Lyall for making this point.

52. King, 2004.