



Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal

Volume 5 | 2010

Issue 2 | Article 2

Editors' Introduction

Daniel Feierstein

Henry Theriault

Abstract.

This special section focuses on genocide and related mass violence in Latin America. Clearly there is a long history of genocide of indigenous peoples, from the arrival of Columbus and other conquerors to the present day. Perpetrated first by European colonial powers, particularly Spain and Portugal, genocidal activities continued in postcolonial settler states following the revolutions of the nineteenth century. Government shifted from Europe to local Euro-American, as well as in some cases indigenous, elites, who shared economic and thus political power with imperialist international actors—including, in many cases, the United States and some of its large corporations. Human-rights abuses continued. In the second half of the twentieth century, the Cold War–era National Security Doctrine, as well as state-specific tensions and agendas, played out in various Latin American contexts in a new round of repression, genocide, and other forms of mass violence. The Guatemalan Genocide of the 1980s and systematic killings and general military repression under dictatorships in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s are perhaps the best-known cases, but others abound.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp>

Recommended Citation

Feierstein, Daniel and Theriault, Henry (2010) "Editors' Introduction," *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2: Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol5/iss2/2>

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

Editors' Introduction

This special section focuses on genocide and related mass violence in Latin America. Clearly there is a long history of genocide of indigenous peoples, from the arrival of Columbus and other conquerors to the present day. Perpetrated first by European colonial powers, particularly Spain and Portugal, genocidal activities continued in postcolonial settler states following the revolutions of the nineteenth century. Government shifted from Europe to local Euro-American, as well as in some cases indigenous, elites, who shared economic and thus political power with imperialist international actors—including, in many cases, the United States and some of its large corporations. Human-rights abuses continued. In the second half of the twentieth century, the Cold War-era National Security Doctrine, as well as state-specific tensions and agendas, played out in various Latin American contexts in a new round of repression, genocide, and other forms of mass violence. The Guatemalan Genocide of the 1980s and systematic killings and general military repression under dictatorships in Chile and Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s are perhaps the best-known cases, but others abound.

The goal of this special section is to add to the growing literature on genocide and mass violence in Latin America through scholars working within Latin American societies. The pages that follow contain what the editors believe is a substantive step toward a new understanding of the dynamics of genocide and related mass violence in Latin America, past and present, as well as analyses of the responses from within those societies to their history and the social and institutional forces toward mass violence. This contribution is especially timely, with world attention focused recently on Spain's attempt to try Augusto Pinochet and current trials of alleged perpetrators of mass violence in Argentina. Crucial to efforts at transforming Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, and other affected states and societies is a clear and honest engagement with the human-rights abuses in both the recent and the distant past—an engagement that includes discussions of the complex issues of historical memory: ideas about the ways the past can or should be represented; views on the use of different concepts such as “genocide,” “crimes against humanity,” “civil war,” and “mass violence,” and the consequences for historical memory of using this or that term in a given context; and more. We hope that the articles in this special section will contribute to this process.

No study of genocide in the western hemisphere should begin anywhere but with the attempted annihilation of indigenous peoples that forms the basis of Euro-American states and societies and has been an ongoing project of small and large, weak and powerful settler states from Canada to Argentina. “Discussing Indigenous Genocide in Argentina: Past, Present, and Consequences of Argentinean State Policies toward Native Peoples” by Walter Delrio, Diana Lenton, Marcelo Musante, Mariano Nagy, Alexis Papazian, and Pilar Pérez, presents research findings on the genocide of indigenous peoples of Argentina that has been largely edited out of the Argentine national narrative in a manner similar to that of other American settler states. The historical details in this article alone make it an important contribution to the literature, but the authors' analysis of how these historical details have been

excluded from public understanding of Argentine history and identity represent a tremendous addition. An important accomplishment of the authors is to highlight the role of denial of the Argentine state as the agent of destruction of indigenous peoples in the past as a way of rationalizing the choice not to direct state resources and commitment to help stabilize and reconstitute indigenous groups in the face of debilitating poverty and marginalization in the present. Based on an ignoring of Argentine agency in the past, the contemporary situation is misrepresented as an unfortunate but unavoidable natural progression, rather than as a social problem that can be addressed through public policy and for which the Argentine state and society have ethical and legal responsibility.

To support this rethinking of the destruction of indigenous peoples, Delrio et al. make a compelling case for seeing it as genocidal. Of special interest for those noticing cutting-edge trends in genocide research will be the authors' discussion of the separation of male and female indigenous people as a means of preventing indigenous births and displacing full indigenous progeny with those of mixed race—another illustration of the concept of “life force atrocity” presented by Elisa van Joeden-Forgey in *Genocide Studies and Prevention 5:1* (April 2010). It is also noteworthy that the forcible transfer of indigenous children to European contexts—for instance, as domestic servants—was extensive and systematic in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, predating similar processes in twentieth-century Australia, Canada, and the United States.

For those familiar with the history of US genocide of Native Americans, it is striking to see a parallel process in Argentina, corresponding in terms of time and methods. But what is also noticeable in the Argentine case that is relatively absent from the US context is the prominence of critical condemnations of and speculations about the implications of Argentine treatment of indigenous peoples. Print media outlets as well as political leaders recognized the process for what it was and publicly challenged it. While it is difficult to see how anything could increase our moral repugnance at the commission of genocide, this evidence shows that genocide was carried out by an aware society that operated through conscious choice and with knowledge of the results of those choices—not through the vague “natural” process that Delrio et al. refute. At the same time, this history of resistance to genocide represents an important alternative narrative of Argentine national identity that can provide a basis for reconfiguring that identity today in line with recognition of past harms against indigenous peoples and a commitment to justice, political participation, and support for community reconstitution.

This intervention that places genocide of indigenous people at the center of human-rights discourse with respect to Argentina is crucial at a moment in Argentine history when that history is itself being publicly and critically examined. Whatever the benefits of the current effort to assess ethical and legal responsibility for the mass human-rights abuses of the 1970s and 1980s, if the process of reformulating Argentine national identity in line with genuine respect for human rights—a process that most societies in the western hemisphere, including the United States, have not undergone—ignores genocide of indigenous peoples, the result will simply substitute one falsifying narrative for another. Delrio et al. present analyses both of the current more active denial meeting the growing assertion of genocide as the correct characterization of what indigenous peoples have suffered and of the issue of reparations that is the emerging next step beyond an accurate appraisal of history. Their discussion of the importance of the term “genocide” even in indigenous communities makes an important contribution and opens a new line of thought in ongoing debates about

the proper use and definition of genocide. It is our hope that this important work, as well as other similar studies, will play the role it should in contemporary Argentine national self-reflection and that it will support efforts toward long-term justice and group reconstitution for indigenous peoples in Argentina and beyond. The article's treatment of the role of homogenizing thinking even in the contemporary reparations debate provides important insight into how the conceptual elements of genocide have material consequences even in its long-term aftermath and underline the fact that properly addressing the impact of genocide requires engaging conceptual as well as material harms and forces.

The wealth of historical data and intellectual insight in Delrio et al.'s article includes a very interesting but unstressed detail that will be of great interest to many scholars of genocide. It has now become widely known that the Entente powers used the term "crimes against humanity" in their 1915 statement to the Young Turk perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide, and recent scholarship has found that the term seems to have been used even in the 1890s. Delrio et al. have found a public use of the term to characterize the Pozo del Cuadril massacre of the Ranquel people in Argentina in 1878.

Our second and third articles document systematic and extensive state violence against Argentine citizens by the authoritarian regime of the 1970s and 1980s. Mario Ranalletti's "Denial of the Reality of State Terrorism in Argentina as Recent Past Narrative: A New Case of 'Negationism'?" presents a novel discussion of negation of the historical realities of this mass violence in a backlash movement by apologists for the military regime, whose members are now facing historical as well as legal accountability. These negationists, some of whom belong to a new generation whose view of this period is mediated through historical narrative rather than direct experience, seek to rewrite the history of state violence in Argentina; they have developed a new narrative that presents state violence as a defensive reaction against forces destabilizing Argentina. Militarist nationalism is an assumptive foundation of this new narrative.

Exposing the manipulations of this narrative, which systematically ignores clear evidence of state-initiated oppression and mass violence, is not only important for Argentina but presents a useful model for other cases. This is clear from the approach taken by Ranalletti, who uses the specific French strain of Holocaust negationism and scholarly analysis thereof as a framework to approach the emergent phenomenon in Argentina. While there are differences between the cases, the contextual similarities, including the relationship to socially dominant Catholicism, are substantial. This analysis will at once resonate for those engaged in similar struggles of historical truth against negation that are tied to conflicts over militarization and democratization, such as Turkish negation of the Armenian Genocide and Japanese negation of the Nanjing Massacre and the "comfort women" system, and provide an entry point into the Argentine case. It will also support future comparative work on these cases of negation and the issues of long-term justice and societal rehabilitation that are at stake.

Ranalletti's focus on negation of recent Argentine state violence resonates with Delrio et al.'s excavation of genocide of indigenous peoples and the embedded and normalized denial of that historical reality in Argentina today. Ranalletti's exposure of the very public and explicit attempts to negate historical reality and refashion the Argentine national narrative in line with forces of militarism and violence may help contemporary Argentinians to gain awareness of the subtler forces of denial of indigenous genocides, while Delrio et al.'s focus on the latter may help those who

would otherwise dismiss negation focused on the 1970s and 1980s as a marginal phenomenon to appreciate its potential depth and the danger it poses. These authors have opened up an important line of inquiry, and future research might examine the historical and cultural connections between and the overlapping of these two negationist forces, one publicly contested, the other normalized into invisibility.

As our title suggestions, prevention of genocide and related mass violence is a priority of this journal and of the organizations that sponsor it. As important as it is to develop accurate understandings of historical cases and their ongoing legacies, outstanding justice issues, and so forth, and to present information on and analyses of ongoing cases to support and even spur intervention, prevention is the key to breaking the long and, unfortunately, apparently interminable cycle of genocide in human life. Yet prevention is in many ways the most difficult social and political task, and developing strong scholarship on prevention is equally challenging. Theorists must engage in complex analysis of trends based on past events and the social and political context(s) of cases of concern just to create a basis for their work. This work often requires both speculation about future processes and counterfactual reasoning based on past cases of genocide and past events in the society or societies under direct consideration. It also involves high-stakes judgment calls based on unavoidably insufficient data.

In “The Opposition Front against Compulsory Military Service: The Conscription Debate and Human-Rights Activism in Post-Dictatorship Argentina,” Santiago Garaño takes up the challenge of preventing mass violence in a penetrating and insightful manner that provides a framework for future scholarship. In this article Garaño does three important things. First, he recognizes that conscripting young men coming of age in Argentina into the military up to 1995 really meant applying forces of social construction to mold these young men into militarist and nationalist servants of military-state structures rooted in a long history of mass human-rights violations and violence against Argentine citizens. Integrating young men into the Argentine military meant reproducing a repressive state apparatus and perpetuating human-rights violations. (Lurking behind this treatment is the role of geopolitical powers, especially the United States, in supporting this militarism and nationalism and in forcing onto the western hemisphere itself an international structure in which military conflict and power are the dominant modes of exercise of sovereignty and social cohesion.) Second, he identifies resistance to compulsory military service in Argentina as an important act of prevention of mass violence that sought to break the chain of socialization of young men into the militarist and nationalist Argentine state narrative. Garaño respectfully presents the self-aware resistance of parents who refused military service for their sons as social resistance based in the family—which is quite different from dominant models in North America and Europe, where formal political and community organizations dominate. Third, he focuses attention on a key but often ignored aspect of the militarization of young men: not just an appeal to but the manipulation and molding of their masculinity to integrate it into the nationalist project. In recent decades, ground-breaking feminist and other scholarship has shown how central sexual violence is to war and to one-sided mass violence, particularly genocide, and how closely this violence is tied to the masculinities promoted and imposed by military indoctrination and life. Military cohesion and motivation are in part a function of shared misogyny and acts of violence against women and girls. Following feminist authors who have advocated a change in the socialization of men and boys, especially in a military context, Garaño emphasizes the importance of this change for Argentina.

Garaño's article complements the work of Ranalletti in a meaningful way. It is precisely the negationist recasting of the history of militarist-nationalist human-rights abuse by the Argentine state as a positive social force in defense of human rights that obscures the real intent and meaning of integrating youth into the military: "good citizens" are manipulated into supporting this militarist nationalism for good, even ethical, reasons. The exposure accomplished by these two articles in tandem provides the accurate information that those acting on ethically decent motives need to translate their good intentions into a positive, human-rights-promoting result.

Argentine state violence in the 1970s and 1980s forms the backdrop for both Ranalletti's and Garaño's articles. Some view this violence as genocidal, while others link it to genocide as a closely related form; for them, there is no question that these two articles fall squarely within the purview of *Genocide Studies and Prevention*. But even those who do not recognize this violence as genocidal or as on a continuum with genocide will, we hope, appreciate why we believe these articles have such an important role to play in scholarship on genocide. The first links practices of negation in Argentina to Holocaust negationism—and, by extension, to denials of many other cases of genocide and related mass violence. The second presents an important case of possible genocide-prevention efforts and a model for other projects of genocide prevention. The fact that recent negationism aimed at increased nationalist militarization of Argentina did not prevent the reopening in 2005 of trials of alleged perpetrators of state terror and has not reinvigorated the tradition of state violence today may in part be due to resistance to compulsory military service through the broad anti-militarization movement Garaño describes, among many processes of resistance.

Our first article provides important historical context for this third article as well. While Garaño treats the contemporary struggle over militarism and nationalism in Argentina, which has its origins in part in the nineteenth-century nationalizing project of genocide that is the foundation of the contemporary Argentine state, Delrio et al.'s important work helps us to comprehend how deep the roots of today's militarist nationalism penetrate into the subsoil of Argentine history and identity. Argentine state-sponsored mass violence in recent decades can be seen as the long-term effect of 19th Century genocide.

As is perhaps clear from this introduction, a limitation of this special issue is the focus on Argentina. While not intentional but a function of submissions, it is beneficial in presenting a very complex overall treatment of mass violence in that country. At the same time, we hope that future general issues of *GSP* will work from this important first step and will include work on various states and societies in Latin America—from Guatemala and El Salvador, through Colombia and Brazil, to Uruguay and Chile—from scholars in Latin America.

Daniel Feierstein, Professor of Sociology and Genocide Studies, Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero and Universidad de Buenos Aires

Henry Theriault, Professor of Philosophy, Worcester State College, Massachusetts