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When Hatred Controls a Nation

by Nadia Qazi

(English 103)

The Assignment: Write an appropriately documented argument essay, 4-6 pages long, which makes use of at least four scholarly sources.

Song of Those Who Died in Vain

*Sit down and bargain
All you like, grizzled old foxes.
We'll wall you up in a splendid palace
With food, wine, good beds and a good fire
Provided that you discuss, negotiate
For our and your children's lives.
May all the wisdom of the universe
Converge to bless your minds
And guide you in the maze.
But outside in the cold we will be waiting for you,
The army of those who died in vain,
We of Marne, of Montecassino,
Treblinka, Dresden and Hiroshima.
And with us will be
The leprous and the people with trachoma,
The Disappeared Ones of Buenos Aires,
Dead Cambodians and dying Ethiopians,
The Prague negotiators,
The bled-dry of Calcutta,
The innocents slaughtered in Bologna.
Heaven help you if you come out disagreeing:
You'll be clutched tight in our embrace.
We are invincible because we are the conquered,
Invulnerable because already dead;
We laugh at your missiles.
Sit down and bargain
Until your tongues are dry.
If the havoc and shame continue
We'll drown you in our putrefaction.*

-Primo Levi, 14 January 1985

On Saturday, February 12, 1993, the Markale Market in Sarajevo was jammed with weekend shoppers. Silently and without warning, a 120 mm mortar shell sailed into the crowd, hitting a table in the open-air market. It exploded with a ferocious blast, tearing heads and limbs from bodies and scattering arcs of blood for yards around. Some corpses were so dismembered that they couldn't be identified as men or women. The marketplace shook with the shrieks of the injured and the sirens of police cars and ambulances. As the hours passed, the harsh, grating sound of bodies being dragged across the broken glass could be heard by the world as it watched in grim horror at this latest atrocity of the Serbians. On that fateful day, 66 innocent civilians died in the attack, while more than 200 were wounded. The market massacre was the goriest spectacle in 22 months of fighting in Bosnia, but it was not the only violent act in the genocide launched by the Serbians. The former Yugoslavia has been devastated by the barbaric practices of mass rape, murder, torture, and forced detention. Despite the horrors of "ethnic cleansing," the United States displayed shameful passivity and indifference to the bloodletting in Bosnia.

Unfortunately, Bosnia is not the only example of genocide. Perhaps the most famous is the Holocaust, but there were others—Cambodia, Mayan, and Rwanda are some examples. The most disheartening thing about genocide is that it can be stopped, but few people choose to stop it. Once we learn to recognize the warning signs of genocide, we can launch campaigns aimed towards removing hatred between groups. Individuals in a society must be acquainted with the preconditions of genocide in order to stop it before it occurs. The dehumanization of a group of individuals, the launching of false propaganda, the presence of mob mentality, growing resentment and hatred against a group, feelings of revenge, the idea of a threat, and feelings of impunity are all warning signs and precipitating causes of genocide. This can best be countered and prevented with the establishment of justice, human rights, and peaceful resolutions of conflicts. A spirit of reconciliation, harmony, compassion and benevolence also goes a long way in settling disputes and grievances. After all, as Gandhi once said, "An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind."

"There are no devils left in Hell. They are all in Rwanda." Thus said a Roman Catholic Missionary as quoted in *Time* in its May, 1994, issue. Hatred, cold calculated merciless hatred, led to the monumental and murderous rampage that was Rwanda in 1994-1995. This genocide was the bloodiest in the recorded history of Africa and was more ruthlessly efficient than the gas chambers in Nazi Germany. Up to a million people were butchered in the first month of mayhem and bloodletting. Many were murdered eyeball to eyeball by "friends and neighbors" simply because of tribal distinction marked upon their identity cards. The toll of the massacre of Muslims in Bosnia was more than two hundred thousand, but it was over a four year period. The genocide of six million European Jews occurred over many years in the 1930s and 40s. However, the daily kill rate in Rwanda was five times that of the Nazi death camps and "averaged well more than eleven thousand five hundred, with surges of daily murder rates as high as forty-five thousand" (Peterson 253). This was the tragic culmination of years of planning, organization, and plotting. The Hutus were "programmed to kill" (252).

The hatred between the Hutu and Tutsi dated back to at least the 19th century, even though both tribes spoke the same language and had the same religion and had lived peacefully together for centuries. The Hutus were farmers while the Tutsi raised livestock. "Tutsi" came to mean rich, while Hutu, or "servant," meant someone with less than ten cows. Interestingly, the Hutus could become Tutsis in a special ceremony if they became wealthy enough. Similarly, the

Tutsis can fall into a Hutu lifestyle. The Germans and then, the Belgian colonialists and missionaries reinforced and exploited this division between the two tribes and called the Tutsis inherently superior and “ordained to lead by God” (Peterson 258). In his landmark work entitled, Me Against My Brother, Scott Peterson writes of an old traveler’s book written in 1910 by Duke Adolphus Frederick of Mecklenberg during a tour of Imperial Germany’s African colonies. He said,

The Watutsi are a tall, well-made people with an almost ideal physique... [Hutus are the] primitive inhabitants. They are a medium-sized type of people, whose ungainly figures betoken hard toil, and who patiently bow themselves in abject bondage to the later arrived yet ruling race, the Watutsi. (258)

In another account, other observers described how the missionaries saw the Tutsis as “Hamitic Semites” or “African Jews.” The Hutus were described by a Belgian doctor as having a “brachycephalous skull” and as being “childish in nature, both timid and lazy, and as often as not, extremely dirty. They form the serf class” (259).

The Tutsis were systematically favored by the Belgians, and the Hutus were largely denied education and political power. The Hutu opposition and resentment finally resulted in the Revolution of 1959 which caused the slaughter and expulsion of the minority Tutsi tribe. In a series of armed incursions, episodic bloodshed, mass migrations, and political upheavals, the majority Hutus were ultimately convincingly brainwashed into believing that their existence depended upon an exclusive Hutu rule. The Hutu extremists prepared for a “final solution” in exterminating the Tutsi “problem” forever. The Tutsis were to be annihilated.

How did all of this resentment and hatred against the Tutsi people culminate as it did into this horrific tragedy? The answer to that is something that is called the “gathering storm” effect. In the early 1990s, Rwanda was known as the “Switzerland of Africa.” It was “a welcome sanctuary, compared to the rigors of its chaotic neighbors...a haven of order and hospitality” (Peterson 248). Although tribal skirmishes were acknowledged, they were not taken seriously. However, beneath Rwanda’s verdant hills there was hidden famine. Rwanda was the second most densely populated country in Africa. It had 800 people crammed on every square kilometer. The average woman gave birth to nearly nine children (248). People were starving. Still, according to Peterson:

Rwanda was the most overtly ‘religious’ country in Africa. With more than 80% of the population professed believers in the Roman Catholic Church, the hungry turned to the Church for help...Sister Gratia handed out bean seed in 1990 to some of the 500 who gathered at her doorstep each day... “When the earth is ill, then the people are ill,” she said, and her words more prophetic than she could have known. “People are slowly suffocating. It is a time-bomb ticking.” (249)

This type of political instability does not alone explain why this evil genocide took place, but it does show the circumstances in which the seeds of evil were sown. As one analyst said, “When you put two rats in a cage, they go to separate corners and leave each other in peace. But when you put 30 rats into the same cage, they eat each other” (249). The Rwandans are not rats, but the “gathering storm” effect, in which people are stressed in a society that contains the warning signs of genocide, puts people in a position where they can behave like animals.

Similarly, the “gathering storm” analogy and scenario can be applied to Bosnia. The genocide in Bosnia was not the product of a few skirmishes between the Bosnians and the Serbs. No, the causes of the war in Bosnia can be traced back to decades and even centuries of resentment and hatred against the Muslims, when the Ottoman Turks dominated the region since 1389. However, the tension between the Croats and Serbs became more apparent during World War II when the Serbs, fighting alongside Russia and the Allies, suffered at the hands of the fascist Croatian military units. Communism and nationalism quickly took over, leading to a gradual deterioration of morals, equality and education. Under the new communist government, the Serbians gained much power and exerted it abusively on the Croats and Muslims to avenge perceived past injustices. In the February 1993 issue of U.S. News and World Report, Miodrag Perisic, a member of the Yugoslav government and a leading Serbian literary critic, said:

What has taken place in Bosnia is revenge for two world wars and a fear of history repeating itself. The behavior of the Serbs is a reflection of the past. Communism put them to sleep but the first shot awoke atavistic passion. (58)

Revenge, settling old scores, and vendetta also played a major role and were predominant themes in all these horrific and appalling examples of savagery and human barbarism. Whether in Nazi Europe or in the misty hills of Rwanda or in the bloody fields of Bosnia, taking revenge was a significant precipitating factor in the slaughter of innumerable innocent people who were branded as the “other” or the evildoers. In Bosnia, the Serbs, with an almost demonic furor, under the leadership of Radovan Karadzic and President Slobodan Milosevic, terrorized unarmed civilians with shocking savagery and brutality. Their campaign for “ethnic cleansing,” a deliberate act to exterminate Muslims for the purification of Bosnia, is frighteningly reminiscent of the Holocaust of the Second World War. At that time, the world had been shocked to learn of the Nazi’s mass extermination of thousands of Jews and minorities. Unfortunately, it is plainly apparent that the United States of America learned nothing from that devastating experience. Clinton and his administration continued to watch apathetically as the Serbians eradicated all traces of Muslim existence in Bosnia.

According to the Bosnian War Crimes Investigation Institute, there were nearly 70,000 people in concentration camps in Bosnia that reeked of death and destruction. Many more Bosnians were forcefully evicted from their homes, robbed of their most valuable possessions and humiliated in every way imaginable. Men, women, and children were seen marching in deadly exodus at gunpoint to distant cities which had been seized by Serbian and Croatian soldiers. In one exodus to Travnik, a city seized by Croats, 1600 inhabitants were forced to walk for 15 hours without food, drink, or rest. Carrying nothing but the items on their backs, the Bosnians marched through a no-man’s land where a bloody battle raged on. Ed Villiamy, a journalist who reported the exodus, described it in the August 29, 1992, edition of the Toronto Star as follows:

Fresh blood was sprayed across the asphalt in places. It was sticky underfoot, and there are worst places to step on accidentally than ripped flesh and human pieces, here and there, along the lane. (1)

In the northeast city of Broko, a dilapidated customs warehouse stands on the bank of the Sava River, one of the many death camps that was used in Bosnia. Broko was no exception to

the grotesque horrors of other camps. Between May 15 and June of 1993, 1350 of the 1500 prisoners held there were slaughtered and dumped in the Sava River to “feed the fish” as one Serbian guard stated. Alija Lujinovic, a 53 year old traffic engineer who was imprisoned in Broko, told the International Red Cross and Newsday that Serbian soldiers would randomly execute prisoners and have them cremated in an oven for animal feed. This was the product of the years of Serbian resentment and hatred. This was one of many examples of Serbian revenge.

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, in his monumental work On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill on War and Society, extensively researched the inverse relationship between distance and killing—“killing is made easier as the distance between perpetrators and their victims increases” (Waller 236). Grossman claimed that he has “not found one single instance of individuals who have refused to kill the enemy under these circumstances [maximum range], nor...a single instance of psychiatric trauma associated with this type of killing” (236). This distance is not only physical but also has a moral, psychological, and emotional aspect to it. Close range killing is made easier if the victims have already suffered a “social death.” The concept of “social death” which was perhaps first introduced by Orlando Patterson, the famous Harvard sociologist, has three main features—“subjection or personal domination, excommunication from the legitimate social and moral community, and relegation to a perpetual state of dishonor” (Patterson 37). Historian Marian Kaplan applied the same concept of social death to Jews of Nazi Germany. Sociologist Helen Fein asserted that a necessary, although not adequate, prerequisite for genocide is the definition of the victim as outside the perpetrators’ “universe of moral obligation” (Waller 237). The three main mechanisms essential for understanding the social death of the victims is: 1) Us-Them Thinking 2) Dehumanization of the Victims and 3) Blaming the Victims. Extensive research has shown that social categorization and Us-Them thinking does not necessarily lead to hatred, killing and genocide; but the powerful message of Us against Them combined with other components can ultimately lead to the motto of “kill or be killed.”

In his book, Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing, James Waller describes an incident that appeared in the *New York Times* in which a Bosnian Serb, armed with an automatic weapon, knocked on the door of a Muslim neighbor and ordered her outside. According to the *New York Times*,

The Muslim woman proclaimed, “Visovic, you know me, you know my husband...How can you do this to me?” Visovic replied: “That time is over. I no longer know you.” Whereupon he ordered her to crawl along the street as he kicked her repeatedly (244).

Erik Erikson, the famous developmental psychologist, promulgated the idea of “pseudo speciation,” which refers to the extreme lines that we draw between “Us and Them.” He wrote that people tend to consider themselves the only true human species and some others as “less than human.” During political or social turmoil and upheaval, this may engender fanaticism, fear and hatred of other “pseudo species.” These “pseudo species” are then considered different and mortally dangerous, who are not human, who do not count, and can be killed without any feelings of kinship or compassion for the victims. In social psychology, this concept is commonly known as “dehumanization of the victims.”

For centuries preceding the Holocaust, Jews were regarded as aliens who were stigmatized and considered “vile and diabolical;” their dehumanization was already well

entrenched in the fabric of German and European culture. The withering anti-Semitic propaganda in Nazi Germany was therefore extremely successful in keeping the Jews outside the “moral universe” of the perpetrators. As Haig Bosmajian, a professor of communication studies states, “The distance between the linguistic dehumanization of a people and their actual suppression and extermination is not great” (Bosmajian 29). For instance, in the Holocaust the Nazis redefined Jews as “bacilli,” “parasites,” “vermin,” “demons,” “syphilis,” “cancer,” “excrement,” “filth,” “tuberculosis,” and “plague.” A Gestapo official once told a member of the Warsaw Jewish Council, “You are no human, you are no dog, you are a Jew” (Baur 8). The victims are often blamed for their suffering and are considered deserving of their fates. Extensive research has been conducted to explain this sordid phenomenon. Henry Dicks reports that once the British made a group of German civilians march through a concentration camp immediately after the war. One of the Germans remarked, “What terrible criminals these prisoners must have been to get such punishment” (Dicks 262). In short, the concept of the “just-world phenomenon” can make us indifferent to extraordinary evil. The victims are suffering because they “deserve it.” Justice is served. Interventions are not warranted, because we see no evil; our exposure to suffering therefore does not necessarily lead to compassion and a call to action.

False propaganda played a major role in the death and destruction of the Mayan people of Guatemala since the 1960s. Approximately 200,000 Guatemalans were killed, more than 40,000 “disappeared,” and more than a million people became refugees. Large scale massacres and ultimately, genocide, were carried out by government death squads in the 1980s and 90s. The Mayans were called “communists” and “subversives” by the government-controlled media, and the army did not want to distinguish between civilians and combatants. Efraim Rios Montt, an army general who had taken control of the government, was famously quoted as saying, “We do not have a policy of scorched earth. We have a policy of scorched Communists” (Waller 198). The Serbs in the former Yugoslavia launched a barrage of lethal false propaganda against the Muslims in a prelude to their campaign of terror, slaughter, and “ethnic cleansing.” According to Roy Gutman, author of the 1993 Pulitzer Prize-Winning book A Witness to Genocide:

The best guide to what the Serbs were doing came from their own propaganda...’Under such a hot, Balkanic sky,’ began one tract, ‘necklaces had been strong of human eyes and ears, skulls have been halved, brains have been split, bowels have been torn out, human spits and children’s bodies have been pierced by bayonets...The document was titled ‘Laying Violent hands on the Serbian Women,’ and its main allegation was that the Muslims and Croats were committing genocide against the Serbs...The tract accused Muslim authorities of launching a jihad or holy war against Serbs...I viewed the propaganda as a coded message for the army and the paramilitary bands operating under loose army supervision. The key sentence was missing: “This is war, and if they’re doing this to us, we’ll do it to them.” In the Balkans, where revenge is part of the code of honor, it went without saying. It was the green light for atrocities. (10)

Disinformation and false propaganda through a controlled media was perhaps most efficiently and successfully used by the Nazis. As Goebbles once famously said, “When you tell a lie often enough, people will start believing it.” The Hutus in Rwanda used Radio des Mille Collines for inciting violence and pogroms against the Tutsis. The radio station kept screaming,

“The grave is only half full, who will help us to fill it?” Similar examples of vicious propaganda can be found in other atrocities, whether in the former Soviet Union, Cambodia, or Latin America.

According to Waller, other factors contributing to a culture of cruelty include an escalating commitment, ritual conducts, repression of conscience, and extreme desensitization to violence. Conformity to peer pressure, for example, has been described by military scholars, where the cohesive bonds among soldiers in military and paramilitary organizations are a lot stronger than the bonds they form with anyone else at any other point in their lifetimes. The main lesson from this analysis of cultures of cruelty is that ordinary individuals, when immersed in “total institutional environments” can transform who they are in ways that would be normally incomprehensible. As Darley states, “Being processed through a killing machine can kill an individual” (Darley 210).

The victims of genocide’s “ethnic cleansing,” rape and murder at other times, are condemned for their passivity and for not fighting back. For example, Hannah Arendt, a notable scholar, was perhaps the first one to suggest that the victims of the Holocaust contributed to their own demise. She claimed that fewer than six million Jews would have died if Jewish leaders had not collaborated, to various degrees, with Nazis like Eichmann. As Waller concluded, “The absence of resistance may confirm perpetrators’ beliefs of their victims’ inferiority. Franz Steigel, commander of Treblinka, spoke to this directly: “They were so weak; they allowed everything to happen...that is how contempt is born. I could never understand how they could just give in as they did...” (254).

The perpetrators of murder and mayhem often exploit the idea of a threat from their victims. This ethnic group or groups of people are perceived as a threat to political power, social and financial institutions, or religious and racial “purity.” At this point, Us vs. Them behavior takes over, and this perceived threat has to be eliminated. Elimination of this threat is most easily embarked upon when there is significant and often lopsided military advantage of the group bent upon annihilation. As we saw in Nazi Germany, the former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda, the powerful undercurrents of these evil forces played a major role.

Bloodshed, murder, and plunder become the order of the day, particularly since the perpetrators were convinced that there was no retribution or accountability. They could carry out their evil and nefarious designs with impunity. Had the United Nations or the Great Powers shown strong leadership and taken decisive action, particularly in the case of Bosnia and Rwanda, the cost in human lives and political and economic consequences would have been significantly mitigated. The International Court of Justice is belatedly now bringing some of the worst war criminals to justice while others have gone scot-free. Rehabilitation of the victims and of the refugees is another major responsibility of international organizations as well as major powers. Financial and economic compensation will also go a long way to heal the deep wounds of these unfortunate victims.

Education is needed to make the public more aware of world genocide and more sensitive to the topic. Having schools teach ethics and morals will help to encourage individuals to fight for all oppressed groups, or at least speak out against social injustice. It is necessary for schools, colleges, and the media to participate in this fight against hate, by emphasizing truth and compassion. Once the public is made aware of the realities of the horrors of genocide, and learns to identify the warning signs, it will be easy for them to take precautions to avoid more killing, shame and destruction. It is necessary for schools, colleges, and the media to counter popular misconceptions about minorities and to help resolve disputes between people before they

escalate into campaigns of hate, discrimination, and victimization. Hate groups and hate mongers should be curtailed, dissuaded, and brought to justice. Freedom of the press and expression should not degenerate into spewing venomous propaganda against minorities and ethnic groups. The press, electronic media, the Internet, and other forms of dissemination of information should be held responsible to uphold the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and ethical conduct. Whenever anti-Semitism, Islamic phobia and other forms of bigotry and hatred rear their ugly heads, a robust and vigilant response must be mobilized by all concerned. In this regard, educational institutions, teachers, and religious and community leaders all should assume their role to create a society and social order endowed with tolerance, mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, and harmony particularly in this multicultural society.

We have exhaustively discussed and analyzed the psychodynamics and the appalling and calamitous consequences of genocide, massacres, and Holocausts and “ethnic cleansings.” These are ugly blots on the face of human civilization that denigrate and degrade humanity itself. Time and again, mankind has degenerated into a dark and evil abyss of brutality, bestiality, and barbarism, yet humanity stood idly by-impotent, immobile, and impervious. It has failed repeatedly to act courageously and nobly, to protect the helpless, the downtrodden, the “terrorized.” The cost has been incalculable. Our sense of shame should be stupendous: our dishonor should be immense. This must never be allowed to happen again. We must strive, with all our might, for peace, justice, and human dignity. We must fight for human rights, for justice and equity, for freedom and for humanity.

We must inculcate love and compassion and service to humanity. We must fight against tyranny, falsehood, violence and oppression. We owe this to the sacred memory of those innocent souls who offered the ultimate sacrifice. We owe this to ourselves and our future generations. We are the last best hope of humanity. We cannot afford to fail. **We shall not fail.**

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