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0521538548 - The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing

Michael Mann

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## The Dark Side of Democracy

This book presents a new theory of ethnic cleansing based on the most terrible cases – colonial genocides, Armenia, the Nazi Holocaust, Cambodia, Yugoslavia, and Rwanda – and cases of lesser violence – early modern Europe, contemporary India, and Indonesia. Murderous cleansing is modern – it is “the dark side of democracy.” It results where the *demos* (democracy) is confused with the *ethnos* (the ethnic group). Danger arises where two rival ethnonational movements each claims “its own” state over the same territory. Conflict escalates where either the weaker side fights rather than submit because of aid from outside or the stronger side believes it can deploy sudden, overwhelming force. But the state must also be factionalized and radicalized by external pressures like wars. Premeditation is rare, since perpetrators feel “forced” into escalation when their milder plans are frustrated. Escalation is not simply the work of “evil elites” or “primitive peoples.” It results from complex interactions among leaders, militants, and “core constituencies” of ethnonationalism. Understanding this complex process helps us devise policies to avoid ethnic cleansing in the future.

Michael Mann is a professor of sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is author of *The Sources of Social Power* (Cambridge, 1986, 1993) and *Fascists* (Cambridge, 2004).

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> vii
1 The Argument	I
2 Ethnic Cleansing in Former Times	34
3 Two Versions of “We, the People”	55
4 Genocidal Democracies in the New World	70
5 Armenia, I: Into the Danger Zone	III
6 Armenia, II: Genocide	140
7 Nazis, I: Radicalization	180
8 Nazis, II: Fifteen Hundred Perpetrators	212
9 Nazis, III: Genocidal Careers	240
10 Germany’s Allies and Auxiliaries	279
11 Communist Cleansing: Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot	318
12 Yugoslavia, I: Into the Danger Zone	353
13 Yugoslavia, II: Murderous Cleansing	382
14 Rwanda, I: Into the Danger Zone	428
15 Rwanda, II: Genocide	449
16 Counterfactual Cases: India and Indonesia	474
17 Combating Ethnic Cleansing in the World Today	502
<i>Works Cited</i>	531
<i>Index</i>	559

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[More information](#)

## Preface

Since my previous work had neglected the extremes of human behavior, I had not thought much about good and evil. Like most people, I had tended to keep them in entirely separate categories from each other as well as from ordinary life. Having studied ethnic cleansing, I am now not so sure. Though I am not attempting here to morally blur good and evil, in the real world they are connected. Evil does not arrive from outside of our civilization, from a separate realm we are tempted to call “primitive.” Evil is generated by civilization itself.

Consider the words of three prominent historical figures. We tend to think of President Thomas Jefferson as embodying Enlightened reason. Indeed, it was in the name of the advance of civilization that he declared that the “barbarities” of the native American Indians “justified extermination.” A century later, President Theodore Roosevelt, a decent modern man, agreed, saying of the Indians, “extermination was as ultimately beneficial as it was inevitable.” Forty years on, a third leader said, “It is the curse of greatness that it must step over dead bodies to create new life.” This was SS Chief Heinrich Himmler, who is rightly considered as the personification of evil. Yet he and his colleague Adolf Hitler said they were only following in the Americans’ footsteps. As I will argue here, murderous ethnic cleansing has been a central problem of our civilization, our modernity, our conceptions of progress, and our attempts to introduce democracy. It is our dark side. As we will see, perpetrators of ethnic cleansing do not descend among us as a separate species of evildoers. They are created by conflicts central to modernity that involve unexpected escalations and frustrations during which individuals are forced into a series of more particular moral choices. Some eventually choose paths that they know will produce terrible results. We can denounce them, but it is just as important to understand why they did it. And the rest of us (including myself) can breathe a sigh of relief that we ourselves have not been forced into such choices, for many of us would also fail them. The proposition underlying this book is that murderous ethnic cleansing comes from our civilization and from people, most of whom have been not unlike ourselves.

In trying to understand them, I owe debts to many. This is mainly a work of secondary analysis, depending on the primary work of others. My research

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Michael Mann

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

*Preface*

is at the dismal end of a terrible subject matter, focusing on perpetrators, not on heroic resisters or even dignified victims. I can only admire many of my sources – the fortitude of survivors who bore witness to the horrors they experienced, the bystanders who carefully described what they saw, those who contributed to independent reports and judicial courts of inquiry, and those scholars who have dedicated their careers to comprehending what happened.

I have received much stimulation over the last few years from the Sawyer Seminars on Mass Violence held at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California. My thanks go to Norman Naimark, Ron Suny, Stephen Steadman, and Bob Zajonc, my co-organizers, to Doug McAdam, the director of the Center, and to all the Seminar's students and visiting speakers. They have all contributed intellectually to this book.

I owe a more particular debt to Hilmar Kaiser for inspiring me with his brilliant yet passionate scholarship on the Armenian genocide. I also thank Raymond Kévorkian for his kindness in giving me his major unpublished manuscript and Ödül Bozkurt for her translations from the Turkish. For help on the Nazi genocides I thank Ian Kershaw and Michael Burleigh for authoritative research guidance, Christopher Browning and George Browder for criticisms of an earlier manuscript, and Martin Tahany for German translations and Peter Stamatov for Magyar translations. Mark Lupher provided helpful criticisms of an earlier draft on Communist cleansings. Aleksandra Milicevic often corrected my outsider's ignorance of the Balkans, and I was privileged to discuss with Scott Straus his remarkable research in Rwanda. Patricia Ahmed helped me collect materials on India and Indonesia. I also thank David Laitin for his vigorous and helpful criticisms of my central arguments, though I fear my amendments will still not have satisfied him. UCLA provided me with generous research funds and talented students (I have named four of them here). As always, John Hall has given general intellectual encouragement, while Nicky and Louise Hart and Gareth and Laura Mann kept me sane amid such a disturbing research project.

Los Angeles, December 2003