

MANUS I. MIDLARSKY. *The Killing Trap: Genocide in the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. xv, 463. \$28.99 (us), paper.

MANUS I. MIDLARSKY OFFERS a comparative study of three genocides – the Armenian, Jewish (Holocaust), and Rwandan – in which state power and policies are used to exterminate a perceived religious/ethnic group. He throws in the Cambodian politicide, several incidents of ethnic cleansing, and situations that avoided genocide to put forth an explanatory theory of genocide that takes into account the interaction of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. For theoretical clarity, in spite of wide and in-depth reading, contrary facts and interpretations are slighted.

In contrast with both rational choice as well as utopian (genocides are committed by perpetrators in a ritual of perceived self-purification) explanatory theories, Midlarsky argues that a perceived *threat* by and the *vulnerability* of the targeted population, combined with a perceived *threat* to and *vulnerability* of the perpetrators with respect to their control of the state, reinforced by the cynicism of bystanders and exacerbated by the fog of war in which the perpetrators perceive themselves as losers, are necessary conditions for perpetrators to be able to commit such horrendous humanitarian crimes. Two other explanatory factors are introduced. The first is the weakness of mutual identification among the victims, a situation inapplicable to the Rwandan genocide. The second, altruistic punishment by the perpetrators (renouncing one's own safety to punish the other), is offered to answer Michael Marrus's question (repeated at least five times): why do followers imitate leaders in participating in genocide? I will concentrate on the Rwandan case to clarify Midlarsky's thesis, though he eliminates weakness of mutual identification in Rwanda and insists fear took the place of altruistic punishment for the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide (p. 373), except when the extremist Hutus fled to the refugee camps in Zaire (p. 373).

For Midlarsky, there are three types of Realpolitik: first, prudent considerations of self-interest and balance of power characteristic of non-genocidal situations; second, imprudent Realpolitik, where a disproportionate use of brutal force is used by genocidal perpetrators; and third, cynical Realpolitik that characterizes the approach of bystanders who, in the absence of established legal and ethical norms, fail to intervene. A necessary condition for adopting a policy of imprudent Realpolitik is, first, a sense of loss of physical space under the control of the perpetrators; second, the adoption of revenge as a mode of loss compensation; third, the perception of the victims as wealthier; fourth, the premise that losses are more important in determining action than gains (act to avoid relative losses even if such a course of action entails gambling and risking even greater loss);¹ and fifth, the critical importance of territoriality to the concept of the state.

In the space remaining, I examine, as one probe into the theory's validity, the

¹ Cf. A. Tversky, A. and D. Kahneman, 'Loss Aversion in Riskless Choice: A Reference-Dependent Model', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, civ (1991), 1,039-62.

cynical Realpolitik of the bystanders rather than Midlarsky's theory of the imprudent Realpolitik and sense of loss of the perpetrators. 'In Rwanda, a cynical Realpolitik was invoked based on the fear that future US military embarrassment, as in Somalia, could jeopardize the Clinton administration at the polls' (p. 392). If US inaction is attributed to cynical Realpolitik, French action should be as well, both in its intervention on behalf of the Rwandan government to stem the rebel advance of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in February 1993 (p. 230, quoting Agnes Callamard in my co-edited book on Rwanda,¹ and in Operation *Turquoise* in June 1994 that, according to Gérard Prunier, provided '*political* cover for the many Hutu perpetrators of the genocide then fleeing to Goma and Zaire as the RPF advanced' (p. 234, my italics).²

When we introduced the Somalia syndrome as an explanation of risk-aversion by the United States in Rwanda in a report on the international involvement in the Rwandan genocide,³ we had not yet learned that, well before Somalia, the United States was determined to limit its financial exposure in Rwanda, a stand that undermined international intervention from the beginning. With respect to Callamard's account of French military intervention, she did indeed claim that French intervention 'prevented the Front from taking Kigali', but this referred to French action earlier in the civil war. Further, as she argued, the most important and dramatic consequence of French intervention was not the possible involvement of French soldiers in combat (which she acknowledged was unclear and controversial), but the effect of the French presence on internal security within Rwanda. Callamard's account stressed French general *political* detachment from Rwandan affairs.

Finally, it is too easy to miss the fact that Prunier was offering a *political* explanation for French intervention and not a military consequential account, as the French desperately tried 'to glorify the *Turquoise* intervention in the hope of washing off any genocidal bloodspots in the baptismal waters of "humanitarian" action' (Prunier, p. 296). The above corrections of inaccuracies and interpretations offer far more subtle accounts of bystander inaction and do not remove the cynicism behind US and French behaviour, and certainly not their short-sighted quality. More important, such accounts make it difficult to distinguish between actions based on self-interest that are prudent and other self-interested actions that are characterized as cynical for ignoring international ethical and legal norms. Midlarsky wants to enjoy his realist cake while professing a dietary abstention from idealism.

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¹ *The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire*, ed. H. Adelman and S. Suhrke (New Brunswick, NJ, 1999).

² G. Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York, 1995).

³ H. Adelman and A. Suhrke, *Early Warning and Conflict Management: II: The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwandan Experience* (Copenhagen, 1996).