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A Comparative Study of the Assyrian and Guatemalan Genocides

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE
ASSYRIAN AND GUATEMALAN GENOCIDES

By

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Bachelor of Arts - Political Science

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2010

A thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

This century has witnessed many genocides throughout the world by the hands of leaders and citizens alike. These unjustifiable acts have not failed to exist even today. Although a lot of research and scholarly work has been dedicated towards the study of genocide, there is no single reason as to why it occurs; rather there are many theories that indicate what leads to genocide. The question still remains why does genocide happen? This thesis will attempt to answer this question by analyzing various theoretical perspectives, as well as comparatively observing two case studies that have not been extensively discussed. In doing so, I hope to a) better understand the theoretical implications of genocide and how they explain what causes it; b) find warning signs within both cases; and c) understand both the internal and external factors that come into play during civil unrest

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A tremendous thank you to the numerous historians, scholars, and activists who have dedicated their lives to the studies of genocide and human rights atrocities. Your work offers a voice for the victims of these acts and your tireless efforts to prevent these atrocities is truly admirable. Your work has allowed me to compile resources to prepare this thesis and I hope to one day contribute to this area of study as well.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wonderful and amazing parents who have been my rock through every stage of my life. Everything I am today is because of these two and I hope one day I can be as inspiring to others as they are to me. They constantly motivate and push me to pursue my goals and endeavors and have never discouraged me from chasing my dreams. I would not be where I am today without their undying belief in me and my passions.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the countless people who fell victim to acts of genocide and human rights atrocities; your plight and struggles will never be forgotten.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.”

— Primo Levi

Throughout history, the world has witnessed some of the most heinous of crimes against humanity. Some have been more widely acknowledged than others, thus causing history to forget some of the most gruesome and disheartening of genocidal acts. Although many world leaders have repeatedly stated that genocide should "never again" occur, yet time and time again we have failed to prevent such horrendous acts. Moreover, society has become more and more accustomed to turning a "blind-eye" so to speak and ignoring the scenes that are taking place before them.

The question that many scholars and activists ask is why does genocide¹² occur? Why is it that various organizations and countries have failed at preventing and stopping genocides overtime? The answer to the first question is one that is complex and heavily debated. Genocides occur for a multitude of reasons including incentives of political gain and stability. They tend to occur in societies that are amidst internal conflict or on the brink of one. The second question is undoubtedly due to a lack of understanding and

¹ Genocide definition: Rafael Lemkin derived the term genocide from the Greek work "geno" meaning race or tribe and the Latin word "cide" meaning killing. Lemkin defines Genocide as the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group.

² My definition of genocide draws from Lemkin's definition, however I would include the importance of intent on the part of the perpetrator. In cases of genocide, there must be a deliberate intent and purpose for conducting the act. Moreover, such acts can be committed against ethnic, religious, tribal, and/or racial groups for purposes of eradication.

empathy on the part of humanity. We as a society, as one whole, as one being in this world have failed to acknowledge and remember each and every genocide as holding a significant mark in history. We have acknowledged some acts and held them to higher esteem and forgotten others, leaving them to have little to no impact in history.

While the Armenian genocide receives a great deal of attention from global society, the Assyrian genocide is left forgotten. While the Rwandan genocide is held as one of the most atrocious acts in Africa's history, the Namibia genocide against the Herero people is left forgotten. While we remember many massacres and genocides in Latin America, we forget one of the most atrocious, the Guatemalan genocide. The issue with such ambiguity and lack of awareness is that it inadvertently causes genocide to occur or at least makes it more feasible for such acts to take place. When society doesn't know these victim groups, it becomes difficult for them to empathize with them, therefore more difficult to promote prevention/intervention when such situations occur. As we will see in this research, both case studies presented show genocides committed against indigenous members and similarly both have maintained an ambiguous status in history. The issue is that if society chooses to turn a blind eye on certain genocides, then inevitably such acts may become more common and to some extent a "norm."

Scholars and human rights activists have raised questions and concerns regarding current issues around the world that are not being appropriately addressed by international organizations, governments, and/or media outlets. The current situation in Iraq and Syria with the invasion of the Sunni militant group ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) has raised some very legitimate concerns for the Christians of the country, including: the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriac-Christians (Daragahi, Dombey 4). Since

the invasion into various parts of Iraq, there have been cases of mass murder, torture and rape against the non-Muslim community. In parts such as Tell Hajaja of Iraq, members and supporters of ISIS were found destroying much of the Assyrian artifacts and historical structures (AINA “ISIS Destroys 3000 Year-old Assyrian Artifacts in Syria 1). Such acts can be seen as the beginning steps and warning signs of genocide as a certain group is attempting to dehumanize and destroy a culture through means of murder and complete eradication of its history. Although the media and global governments have addressed the issue of ISIS invading parts of Iraq, such problems of deliberate destruction of certain groups have not gained much media attention nor global attention as such acts should. The question is why? The answer is that there is a small diaspora of Assyrians. In total, Assyrians make up close to .28% of the world’s population (with a total population of roughly 2 million). They do not have a state of their own and nor do they have adequate media outlets to pass such information along. However, Assyrians are not the only groups that face such problems, in fact the majority of indigenous groups in the world have come across these same challenges. Mass atrocities become more and more feasible when done against groups that are commonly unknown to the average person.

In this thesis, I will examine the Ottoman genocide against the Assyrian population and the Guatemalan genocide against the Mayans, in hopes of analyzing theoretical arguments as to a) why such genocides took place b) why they have not gained scholarly attention and c) why they are significant today. I chose these two case studies for numerous reasons. Firstly, in respect to the time frame, the Assyrian genocide took place pre-holocaust and before the term “genocide” was ever coined, whereas the Mayan genocide took place post-holocaust; I feel that this vast difference in time is

important when comparing and evaluating such acts, because it enables researchers and scholars to analyze the effects of such differences. Secondly, although there has been literature on both, the previous works lacked in depth examination much less comparison of the two, despite the plethora of similarities between them. Thirdly, both of these cases have similar outcomes and similar set of causes that. Moreover, both cases clearly fit the definition of genocide based on my criteria (see footnote 2). As such, the method of case selections allowed me to use a comparative “method of similarity” in my research design³(Skocpol 1984). I chose to qualitatively research both studies, rather than quantitatively, primarily because systematic quantitative data on these cases is not available. Although the Assyrian case has not received very much attention, there has been some recent scholarship, such as David Gaunt’s work in both “The Ottoman Treatment of Assyrians” and *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors: Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I*. I draw my research from numerous scholars such as Hannibal Travis (Travis 2010), Gabriel Yonan (Yonan 1996), Adam Jones (Jones 2006), David Gaunt (Gaunt 2006; 2011) and many others who have thoroughly discussed and researched the accounts of the given genocides as well as many others of similar plight; although it should be noted that they base their research on primary documents and interviews. Finally, I conclude my research by discussing why genocides occur and how these two case studies serve as important examples for prevention of future massacres and genocidal acts.

³ One drawback of this research method is that there is no variance in the causes or outcome among both cases (King, Keohane and Verba 2001). However in the conclusion, I will provide examples of some contrasting cases where ethnic tension was present, but the tension did not escalate to genocide because one or more of the causes was absent.

CHAPTER 2: GENOCIDE

Defining Genocide

Genocide⁴ is a term that has a great many definitions, implications and interpretations. The concept is one of the most debated and controversial topics presented across the world. The murkiness of its definition paves way for the perpetrators and culprits of such acts to protect themselves from global condemnation based on technicalities. The grey area between what is and isn't considered a genocide lies the issues with prevention and intervention among the international community. Scott Straus notes in his work "Destroy Them to Save Us" that there are many issues still unanswered in regards to genocide such as structural components that account for such acts as well as why do certain countries that share theoretical components of genocide succumb to such acts where as others do not? (Straus 545).

In order to adequately define the term genocide, I will look at the various definitions given by a few number of scholars, including the scholar who first coined the term himself, Rafael Lemkin; he derived the term genocide from the Greek work "geno" meaning race or tribe and the Latin word "cide" meaning killing (Lemkin 79). However, one must not just merely look at scholarly definitions when analyzing such a distinct yet controversial term, but rather also review the way it is modeled in the United Nations

⁴ Genocide can be easily confused with such terms such as "massacre," "political violence," and/or "revolution." A massacre is the deliberate killing of certain members of a group in part or in whole. Although genocide can have the same intent, according to various forms of genocide one does not need to be killed in order for genocide to occur (i.e genocide can also be prevention of births within a group or forcibly transferring children of one group to another group). Similarly, genocide is a form of political violence however it is not political violence in it of itself. Political violence can also be seen in forms of war, famine, counter-insurgency etc. Revolution is an act of transforming the government, but it doesn't require the use of genocide. Genocide may or may not occur during a revolution, but it's not the deliberate intent of the act.

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, as well as its legal bindings in International Law.

The founder of genocide studies, Raphael Lemkin, defines genocide as the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group. Genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation (Jones 10). Martin Shaw defines genocide in six different forms: Ethnocide and cultural genocide, gendecide, politicide, classicide, urbicide, and auto-genocide. In what follows, I will briefly discuss all of those forms of genocide.

Ethnocide and Cultural Genocide

Ethnocide is defined as “the destruction of members of a group, in whole or in part, identified in terms of their ethnicity” (Shaw 65). The controversy with this term is that it is often loosely interchanged with the term genocide itself, which is inaccurate. Shaw argues that ethnocide should cover all members of a certain cultural group whether it be race, religion, and/or ethnicity. In 1981, UNESCO stated that “ethnocide means that an ethnic group is denied the right to enjoy, develop and transmit its own culture and its own language, whether individually or collectively” (Shaw 65).

Gendercide

Gendercide is defined as “the deliberate extermination of a race of people, by analogy it would be the deliberate extermination of persons of a particular sex (or gender)” (Shaw 67). The term is sex neutral and thus can be used in regards to the deliberate killing of males or females. Some might say that the witch hunts in medieval Europe, widow-burning in India, female genital mutilation, the denial of reproductive

freedom, misogynist ideologies, and sex selection of children can be categorized as forms of gendercide. One example of gendercide, which Shaw cites (see genocide scholar Adam Jones), was in 1995 when Serbian forces slaughtered unarmed men of combatant age, while women and children were expelled by bus to Bosnian territory. One limitation that this form of genocide offers is that although some of these examples noted above were deliberate targeting of women, the acts were not necessarily carried out with the intent of eradicating a particular sex. Many of these examples can have also stemmed from political violence which in turn led to these acts. It should also be noted that gendercide is often times difficult to prove, because very seldom can one prove that women were deliberate targets of an act or that there was intent to deliberately eradicate all women from a society. It is true to state that during times of genocide women can become targets and casualties of these acts, but not necessarily are the sole victims.

Politicide

Politicide is a very controversial form of genocide that is difficult to distinguish from genocide itself. It is loosely defined as the deliberate targeting and killing of members from a particular political group (Shaw 68). One example of politicide would be during Stalin's persecutions as a form of politicide. One can also note that during the Rwandan genocide, Hutu nationalists first killed the opposition party which included Hutus.

Classicide

Classicide, though very unusual, is defined as the deliberate targeting of social classes for destruction (Shaw 72). One example of such a form of genocide is found during Mao's anti-peasant campaign, as well as Stalin's terror famine (during the period of 1932 to 1933). With Classicide there is a sense of class-targeted genocide.

Urbicide

Urbicide is defined as an attack on political elites who are urban, and it is generally combined with more conventional ethnic-national targeting (Shaw 76). However, very rarely are urban areas direct or sole targets during genocide. One example is Sarejevo during the Bosnian genocide, where it resulted in the annihilation of Sarejevo's environment and infrastructure; moreover civilians were denied water, medicine, food and many basic needs. One limitation of this is that, again similar to gendercide, such acts might stem from political violence and war, thus the intent might not have been to destroy an infrastructure but rather it occurred as a result of war or some act of violence.

Auto-genocide

Auto-genocide is defined as self-destruction and is seen as a collective genocide (Shaw 76). This case, which can be seen during the Cambodian genocide, refers to killings within a group in which the perpetrators belong to:

“Confusing mass killing of the members of the perpetrator's own group with genocide is inconsistent with the purposes of the Convention, which was to protect national

minorities from crimes based on ethnic hatred...it was concluded nonetheless that there was genocide, this had to be seen as 'auto-genocide' (Shaw 76).

However, this term has become controversial to prove overtime, even in the Cambodian case.

Although Shaw gives an adequate explanation of genocide in its various forms, due to the focus of this thesis, I will develop my own definition for genocide alone, using his various definitions and explanations, as well as Lemkin's definition. Genocide will be defined as the deliberate intent and act of killing and slaughtering members of a specific ethnic, religious, racial, tribal, and/or political group⁵; therefore the perpetrator is engaging in ethnocide and politicicide as a whole; furthermore, acts will be considered genocidal if and only if there is a deliberate intent of eradication/annihilation involved.

When did Genocide Originate?

Although mass murders and such atrocities have been common in history well before even the biblical era, the term genocide wasn't developed until after the Holocaust, Rafael Lemkin is noted as the founder of the concept of genocide. There is a common misconception that genocide began in the twentieth century, however this is not the case. Contrary to this school of thought, although genocide is fairly new term in history, it is not a new concept, rather it can be dated back to as far as Ancient Greece and Rome. The issue at hand is that there are so many vast interpretations towards the meaning of genocide that many of these acts are misconstrued as just acts of violence and war, and are not observed from a genocidal stand point.

⁵ I exclude some of his other forms of genocide such as gendercide and urbicide because a) they are difficult to prove and account for b) they don't fit into my criteria for genocide.

Genocide can be traced back to after the third Punic war between the Romans and the Carthians where hundreds of thousands of civilians in the Northern Algerian province were slaughtered and massacred by the Roman army (Mulligan 1). The Athenian genocide against Melians is another example of a genocide that dates back to pre-biblical times, where there was a clear distinct intent for genocide and where thousands were massacred. According to Gerard Mulligan in his article “Genocide in the Ancient World”:

“This was meant as a warning to Athens’ allies throughout Greece to remain loyal during the war with Sparta. The massacre of Melos was noted at the time as being out of the ordinary which is surprising given that the brutal war between the two states had been going on for 15 years” (Mulligan 1).

Another noted genocidal incident in history was during the Trojan War, where King Agamemnon had proclaimed that he wanted to murder every single Trojan. Adam Jones quoted Agamemnon in his book, Genocide a Comprehensive Introduction, as stating the following:

“We are not going to leave a single one of them alive, down to the babies in the mothers’ wombs—not even they must live. The whole people must be wiped out of existence, and none be left to think of them and shed a tear” (as cited in Adam 4).

Although there is not an adequate account for how many Trojans died during this ten year battle, it is clear that this thought process was genocidal, but it is a mirror image of how many leaders in today’s day and age justify mass killings.

Who are the Targets of Genocide?

To kill a tree, sever its roots", or as the Russian philosopher Alexander Solzhenitzyn put it: "To destroy a people, you must first sever their roots"

As noted, there are many forms of genocide ranging from deliberate attacks on certain ethnicities, religious groups, genders etc. The victims depend solely on the intent and incentive behind the genocide. Overtime, there have been such atrocities in various parts of the world committed by different members of society. Generally speaking, the targets are usually those deemed as a threat to the country, the government, the society or even a particular cause or movement if there is one.

In some cases, such as the Cambodian genocide, the targets are a certain class of people like those that are educated or scholarly because they posed a threat to the newly empowered Khmer Rouge government, to which they sought out to completely liquidate their own people (Ronayne 49). During the Rwandan genocide, the targets were the minority tribe Tutsis by the majority tribe of the Hutus. The goal in Rwanda was to eradicate all the Tutsis from society, this in part due to the fact that they held a great deal of resentment towards them for their privileged status in society in a post-colonial Rwanda thus they were viewed upon as threats to the Hutus (BBC News Africa 1).

Although the targets are seen as specific groups, the main target and the bulk of the focus is the identity within these groups. Whether the goal is to eradicate all Tutsis or all of the educated people or all of the women within a village, the main target is to break the identity of these individuals within society and within history. The goal is to destroy the quintessence of who they are by stripping them of their essence. Groups are

not merely killed, on the contrary they are taken through a series of torturous steps beginning with stages of dehumanization, destruction of history, and their psychological embodiment. When those who carry out genocide aim at destroying historical symbols, such as artifacts or manuscripts, they are to some extent attempting to erase their history from where they feel the problem began. Similarly, when rape is carried out, it is used as a tool to destroy not just one's mental stability, but one's essence as well by breaking the person both mentally, emotionally and physically. It is one of the most efficacious ways of breaking a person by making them feel degraded and dishonored. During some genocides such as Rwanda, Congo, and Bosnia, rape was conducted to impregnate the woman so that they would bring to society children of the desired group, thus eradicating chances of bearing more children from the targeted group (DR Congo: M23 Rebels Kill, Rape Civilians | Human Rights Watch 1).

The psychological, moral, and historical destruction of a group is key in any genocide, because it destroys all willpower within the group thus the key target in any genocide is complete utter destruction of the given society, not just its people but its entire entity starting from the roots.

In present day Iraq one can see the Christian population amidst a genocide carried out by an Islamist fundamentalist group, ISIS or ISIL (Islamic Society in Iraq and Levant), where Christians (Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, Syriac Christians, etc.) are being ordered to either convert to Islam, pay a high tax, or face execution. Furthermore, much of the Assyrians historical artifacts have been destroyed or burned down, including their churches and statues in Mosul (ISIS Plundered Assyrians As They Fled Mosul; Families March 42 Miles 1). There have also been numerous accounts of rape and murder

among much of the Christian villages in provinces of Nineveh and Mosul. Such actions are trying to demolish and eradicate the roots of a society by destroying their history (through destruction of historical artifacts, structures and scriptures), raping their women and murdering their children. These actions are steps towards a modern day genocide against any and all Christian groups and it might very well be one of the more successful ones within a given country. ``

How does Genocide Occur?

Overtime these atrocities have taken place for a multitude of reasons and have been carried out from leading government officials to their very own citizens. Often time's genocides occur for a particular political gain or motive. If a particular group of people is cited to be a threat for public and/or political officials, the extreme route to take would be to eradicate them from the country. In the next chapter, I review competing theories which have been proposed to explain why genocide occurs. A related question has to do with the process of genocide.

There are many steps that play out into this process of eradication: firstly, leaders must effectively orchestrate an alliance with other groups whether it be on a local front or the global stage. It is important for the perpetrator to establish trust with his/her people either through promises, claims, or fear; secondly, one must dehumanize the victims of genocide in the public eye. In the past, this has been done through media sources. Hitler managed this through his plethora of speeches including his most infamous speech to the Reichstag in 1942 where he stated:

“This criminal race has the two million dead of the (First) World War on their conscience, and now hundreds of thousands. Let no one say to me: we cannot send them into the mire. Who concerns themselves about our men? It is good if preceding us is the terror that we are exterminating the Jews. The attempt to found a Jewish state will fail” (Rosenbaum 73).

One can see his attempt at demonizing his victimized group by calling their race “criminal.” Such verbiage is an attempt to spread hate and disdain for Jews and anyone who supports them. Such acts could also be witnessed during the Rwandan genocide when radio announcers would call the Hutus cockroaches that must be exterminated. Such acts are examples of Symbolic Politics theory, which this research will discuss more extensively in later chapters. This theory proclaims that perpetrators use emotion over reason for racial, religious, and/or ethnic means to turn a group of people against the targets of genocide.

Thirdly, leaders must form a plan as to how to eradicate such groups. In the case of the holocaust it was the concentration camps and gas chambers. In the case of Rwanda it was the use of machetes to hack people to death. In the case of Cambodia it was mass deportation and starvation. Finally, leaders must establish why they are committing this genocide. If one can devise a plan as to why it is important to rid the world of these people and convince the public, it is plausible to pursue the plan and carry it out. According to Adam Jones, leaders can unite groups against the “inferior” individuals when they proceed to dehumanize and demonize them. Moreover, because there is a lack of commonality between the two groups (perpetrators and victims), there is a lack of sympathy towards the inferior group. (Jones 4).

This discussion raises infamous question: Why do countries commit genocide?

This question has been asked by many scholars overtime, but there hasn't been a definitive answer. Essentially, there is no one correct answer. Often times, a country will commit a genocide when it feels a particular group is a potential threat to its well-being or sustainability of power. They can also occur in cases where there is a sense of ethnocentrism within a country, thus there is this yearning for a monoethnic society where only one ruling ethnicity is present within a nation or perhaps only one ruling religion within a country.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

The causes of genocide and ethnic violence has been highly debated among scholars, politicians, and numerous human rights organizations. Genocide is not a new phenomenon that has begun to emerge; rather it has been a part of history for centuries, even as far back as the biblical era. However, an appropriate name was given to such acts after mass eradication was carried out by Nazi Germany against its various minority groups. Nearly eight decades since the world cried out “never again” after the Holocaust took place, we have witnessed nearly sixteen genocides since then, including the current one in Iraq against its indigenous and Christian minorities. There are many mass atrocities and genocides that are currently debated but have not been adequately studied. Scholars and researchers are faced with the same questions time and time again: Why do genocides still occur? Although there is no definitive answer as to why such acts are committed, there are a many theories as to why states and state actors take part in acts of genocide and crimes against humanity.

In the political science literature, there are six main theories that have been used to explain genocide: A) Rational Choice Theory B) Symbolic Politics Theory C) Structural theories D) Economic Theory E) Modernization Theory F) Group Entitlement/Group Sentiment Theory. Within each of these theories, the authors assess various case studies and offer preventative measures against genocides. Each theory examines why states and state actors might be more prone to civil unrest given their economic, political, and ethnic hardships in comparison to the rest of the world. After reviewing their theories, the conclusion of this chapter will propose which theory or

theories this research will be using in order to A) explain the reasons such acts against humanity occur and B) better understand the two case studies that will be presented.

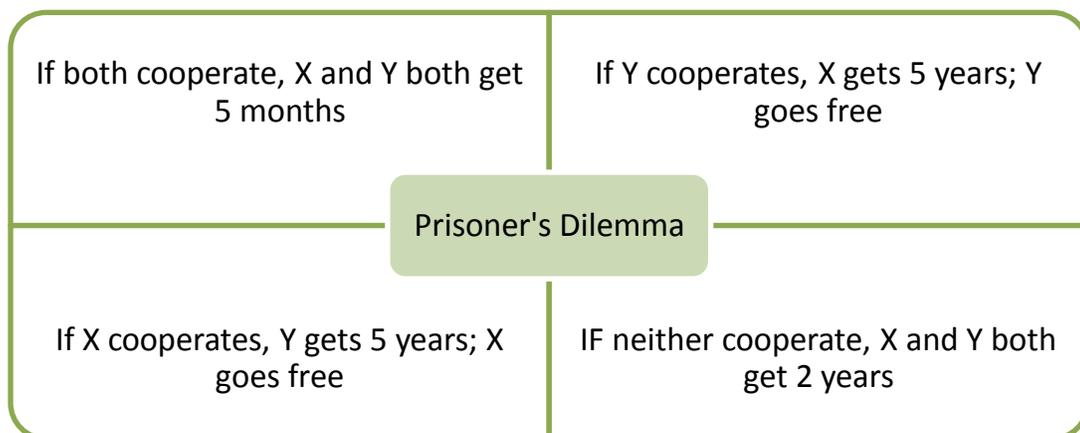
Rational Choice Theory:

George Homans, was an American sociologist and founder of behavioral sociology and exchange theory. He also pioneered Rational Choice Theory, which paved the way for many scholars of Economics, Sociology, and Political Science to explain certain actions in human behavior, including the act of genocide. In 1961, Homans laid out the framework for the theory, however in the late sixties and seventies, theorists such as Peter Blau and James Coleman (Crossman 1), expanded the theory's framework and incorporated ideas of norms and incentives behind the theory. Within the discipline of Political Science, Mancur Olson (1965) and Anthony Downs (1957) also made important contributions to the theory.

Rational choice theory, assumes that individuals seek to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs (Olsen 1965). In other words, the theory assumes that one will do any action (including actions against norms or moral standards) so long as it's beneficial to one's self and maintains one's incentives. Rational choice theory has a fundamental assumption of rationality. Rationality means that "individuals make decisions that maximize the utility they expect to derive from making choices" (Munck 2002, 166). In this context, rationality takes a different form from its more commonly accepted definition of "sane" or "morally right." In this case, rationality is merely following a "rational" benefit-cost analysis for a preferred outcome. This theory can be best explained through the Prisoner's Dilemma, which is the notion that if faced with two

prisoners, both being “rational,” one might not get cooperation from either parties even if would produce the optimal outcome for both parties.. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia on Philosophy, “The “dilemma” faced by the prisoners here is that, whatever the other does, each is better off confessing than remaining silent. But the outcome obtained when both confess is worse for each than the outcome they would have obtained had both remained silent. A common view is that the puzzle illustrates a conflict between individual and group rationality” (Kuhn 1). Figure 1, which refers to the "Prisoner's Dilemma, illustrates how individual and group rationality may diverge:

Figure 1: Prisoner’s Dilemma



Rational choice theory also suggests that groups are likely to engage in collective action only when individual group members are induced to join through offers of selective incentives which make it individually rational to cooperate with the group.

Of the six main theories, and the most popularly supported among scholars (Kaufman 45), Rational Choice theory offers an explanation into the deep rooted causes of ethnic unrest and instability in certain countries and why such acts, given similar circumstances, are not seen in other countries. In her article entitled “Is Ethnic Conflict

Rational”, Charlotte Langridge, considers the notion that Rational Choice Theory can play a heavy role in ethnic conflicts. She states:

“Fearon and Laitin (2000) use the constructivist approach to discredit the Primordial approach used by Kaufman (2006) and Oberschall (2000)... They find considerable evidence ‘linking strategic aspects of the construction of ethnic identities to violence, and more limited evidence implicating specific cultural or discursive systems’ (2000:846). The most common narrative is that large-scale ethnic violence is provoked by elites seeking to gain, maintain or increase their hold on political power. Elite manipulation is interpreted as instrumental rationality under Weber’s (1979) classification, as a form of concealed self-interest” (Langridge 1).

One distinct aspect of Langridge’s analysis is that of elite manipulation, which is practiced more often than not in genocides. This notion proclaims that leaders want to maintain or gain power and do anything necessary to accomplish this, even if it means deceiving the general population. Such acts can be seen in the Rwandan genocide, Bosnian Genocide, Ottoman genocide, the Holocaust and many others. This is an important factor, because it is one of the most predominant warning signs of genocide.

Rational choice theory and ethnic conflict can seemingly go hand in hand. Offenders often do anything in their power, including mobilizing certain groups via dehumanization and demonization of their targets. When one group finds significant reasons to disdain another group, it infiltrates tension within the state that can lead to ethnic conflicts and outbreak. Although Rational Choice Theory has and continues to have critics that attempt to disprove its claim, there are several examples of genocidal

acts that can incorporate the theory into their individual cases. In order to better understand the implications Rational Choice Theory has on ethnic conflicts and genocide, we will briefly look at and analyze some cases that adequately illustrate the theory.

One of the most adequate examples of rational choice theory is the case of Rwanda. In the case of Rwanda, scholars have attributed the conflict to the assassination of former president Habyarimana after the Arusha accords. Habyarimana, a Hutu, was giving a lot of power to the Tutsis, which angered the Hutu majority. Furthermore, elements of dehumanization of the Tutsis by Hutu extremists created internal tension within the country. Members of the Tutsi tribe were described as “cockroaches” that needed to be killed, these disgusting creatures that were corrupting the country, thus making it more “plausible” for the Hutus to slaughter them. Undoubtedly, the acts that took place were gruesome and morbid, according to rational choice theory the Hutus were merely acting on “rationality” to benefit themselves and maintain their security and power within the country.

Although Rational Choice Theory offers a plausible explanation for the role of state actors and states in genocides, it has many critics that claim it overlooks many elements that fall into play during genocide. One such critic, Manus Midlarsky author of The Killing Trap: Genocide in the Twentieth Century, claims that Rational Choice perspectives tend “to not be integrative” (Midlarsky 74).

“Typically, they do not suggest separate processes operating at different levels of society (required assumptions of rationality at all levels), which together may present a coherent explanatory whole” (Midlarsky 74).

He claims that morality, to some extent, does come to play; moreover, he claims that there is also a significant element Rational Choice Theory ignores and that is past genocides; Midlarsky argues that many state actors that choose to carry out such acts, observe past genocides that were deemed as “successes” and analyze the reasoning behind those acts in order to help promote their own incentives.

Some of the critiques this theory faces are valid and on point. It does fall short in many facets and it fails to observe the different angles that each case might face. For example, it offers a more general observation that human beings by nature are selfish and that this in turn can be used to explain actions taken upon by state actors during genocides. However, it fails to take into account economic aspects, cultural aspects, religious aspects and many others that distinguish why certain states in similar situations choose genocide, while others don't. One theory that incorporates such components is the Symbolic Politics Theory and it is of the most highly supported theories to explain ethnic violence and Genocide.

Symbolic Politics Theory

Symbolic Politics Theory, by definition, presumes that behavior and attitudes are more strongly linked to personal beliefs than to material interests (Quadagno *Aging and the Life Course*). Symbolic politics theory “builds on the findings of neuroscience, which show that emotions, not rational calculations, motivate people to act” (Kaufman 51). Unlike Rational Choice Theory, this theory incorporates elements of ethnicity, religiosity and social status as drivers in emotional decisions that might lead leaders and individuals to engage in ethnic violence and genocide, whereas Rational Choice Theory overlooks such elements and focuses strictly on the rationality behind the act.

Stuart Kaufman, professor of Political Science at the University of Delaware, is a firm advocate of the Symbolic Politics Theory. In his article, “Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice? Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence,” Kaufman critiques Rational Choice Theory regarding ethnic violence and genocide, claiming that this theory overlooks important components of ethnic violence. His argument is that people act based off of emotions, not rationality or self-preservation per se. For example, if one is in fear for their life, his/her first instinct will be to maintain security and safety, and will then do whatever it takes to ensure this happens because emotionally they are in fear. This same idea can be used with the act of genocide. If a person or group of persons believe that their place in a state is at risk due to another group, they will carry out any actions that will maintain their security within their country, even if such acts are extreme.

Such myths and symbols are the sole basis for loyalty towards one’s state, one’s religion, one’s ethnicity. Anthony D. Smith, author of *Myths and Memories of a Nation*, claimed that these myths are combinations of historical facts and elaborated stories that make people more inclined to remain loyal to a particular group. He goes on to state that these symbolic affiliations may change overtime depending on circumstances. “Naturally, such myths and symbols possess many features—formal, aesthetic, psychological, social, and political—which merit attention... both kinds of national mythmaking emerge and persist in an often contrapuntal relationship. They thus both divide, and unite, the communities whose identity and consciousness they underpin. They divide them, because, as the case-studies make clear, different modes of myth-making are embraced

by opposing strata; and they unite them because, out of this tension of opposites” (Smith 57-58).

Much like Rational Choice Theory, Symbolic Politics Theory has faced a great deal of criticism as well. The main critics of this theory are rationalists such as Fearon and David Laitin who claim that myths and symbols cannot possibly explain ethnic violence (Kaufman 47). To better understand this theory and to see if its implications are sound, I briefly look at the Bosnian genocide and the effects of the previous genocide against Serbians during former Yugoslavia.

One important and overlooked note regarding the Bosnian genocide is that it was to some extent sparked by intolerance committed against Serbians during former Yugoslavia (roughly early 1940s) which created hatred and hostility within Serbian communities of future generations towards Croats and Bosnians; in turn, this would be followed by acts of genocide committed against these two groups by the Serbs. This is a perfect example of Symbolic politics theory because it sheds light to this self-preservation of one’s own culture and/or religion. These factors became highly vital and the mobilizers of the Bosnian genocide, because Serbs became highly unified in maintaining power and remaining loyalty within their groups because of certain events, myths, and/or symbols.

It is accurate to state that many factors come into play with genocide. It is reasonable to suppose that Symbolic Politics Theory, though it has its imperfections, is a sound theory to consider when assessing ethnic violence and/or genocides. The evidence suggests that people are generally very emotional, in some contexts. During genocide, more often than not, both perpetrators and victims are driven by their emotions and

instincts. Both perpetrators and victims hold symbolic meanings as mobilizers for unity within their respective communities and this sense of unity is what creates strength within a movement, no matter how extreme it might be. Although symbolism and ethnic loyalty are important factors when analyzing genocide, another equally important component is state structure and how the state itself could instigate such ethnic fall outs.

Structural Theory

Many scholars, politicians, and state actors around the world would argue that democracy plays a key role in how states respond to certain challenges. Democracy is seen as the “cure all” for most situations and states that lack democratic institutions are more prone to instability and violence. This primarily is due to the theory that autocratic institutions and leaders might cause civil violence and possible division among sects within a given territory. In the end the main question is why do some countries turn to genocide or ethnic violence when facing hardships, while others that are in similar situations do not? It can be assessed that first world countries are much less subject to carry out ethnic cleansings while third world countries are more susceptible to them and this is in part due to the state’s structure.

One supporter of this theory, Dr. Gregory Stanton and author of “Early Warning,” rules out the notion that genocide is the result of conflict. Rather, he believes that “structural factors such as totalitarian or autocratic government or minority rule correlate substantially with the incident of genocide” (Stanton, “Early Warning” 271).

Authoritarian regimes, and the likes of them, tend to create instability within the country due to various stress factors. Such factors can create insecurity and fear within different populations, and these fears can lead to acts of genocide. It is also vital to note that

governments that are in a transition state due to a) assassination b) coup d'état c) revolution or even d) electoral transitions in some cases, are more susceptible to ethnic violence and genocidal behavior because the state becomes weaker and more fragile.

In an attempt to further implement this theory into play, the table below provides a comparative analysis among four separate genocide cases (see Table 1). It looks at their state structure and some sub factors that were mentioned above. This is not to say that these four examples or cases speak for all cases, but rather to evaluate whether indeed this theory is an adequate assessment for genocides.

Table 1: Structural Theory Analysis

COUNTRY NAME:	FORM OF GOVERNMENT:	WAS THERE A COUP? REVOLUTION? ASSASSINATION INVOLVED?	TARGETS OF GENOCIDE? :
SUDAN	AUTHORITARIAN	*COUP IN 1989 **CONFLICT WITH REBEL GROUPS AND GOVERNMENT 2003	NON-ARABS
RWANDA	DICTATORIAL	ASSASSINATION	THE TUTSI'S AND TUTSI SYMPATHISERS
CAMBODIA	DICTATORIAL/COMMUNIST	*COUP: KHMER ROUGE TAKE OVER OF LON NOL GOVERNMENT 1975	THE INTELLECTUALS AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS
GERMANY	TOTALITARIAN AUTOCRATIC	NONE	JEWS, GYPSIES, HOMOSEXUALS AND THE DISABLED.

From the five case studies shown in Table 1, the leading outlier would be Nazi-Germany in it that the genocide was not an imminent result of a coup, revolution or assassination.

Aside from that case, we can infer from these five cases that all were under some form of a dictatorial regime. Sudan was actually formerly a democratic regime until after the coup

which it became under the control of an Islamic dictatorship with Shariah law. Rwanda was a dictatorship before the assassination of its president, however after the assassination the country lost complete stability and went into a fragile state. Cambodia was formerly under a socialist regime with the Lon Nol government, however gained a dictatorial regime with the overthrow by the Khmer Rouge. In each of these cases, with the exception of Cambodia, the targets were minority groups within the country that were deemed as threats for one or more reasons.

From this figure one can infer that the Structural Theory, to some extent, may explain genocides. States that have undergone government transitions are more susceptible to instability and ethnic violence. Similarly, countries that under dictatorships is more prone to genocides versus states under more democratic/socialist control. Although this theory has potential sustenance, there are many other components that need to be considered, one of which is the economic permanence within a state.

Economic Theory

For centuries, economic deprivations and problems have led to various forms of turmoil, including protests, revolutions, violence, and crimes against humanity. States become the most fragile when their members no longer have essentials for daily living and economic conditions become dire. During such times, state actors might become more anxiety driven and frustrated for their shortcoming:

“Difficult life conditions give rise to scapegoating and ideologies that identify enemies and lead a group to turn against another. Conflict between groups and self-interest are additional instigators of group violence. Discrimination and

limited violence change individuals and groups and can lead to an evolution that ends in mass killing or genocide” (Staub 303).

Ervin Staub wrote in his piece, “The Origins and Prevention of Genocide, Mass Killing, and Other Collective Violence,” that genocide and genocidal acts will probably worsen during the 21st century because times of poverty, injustices, social and psychological disorganization that “prevent the meeting of basic human needs in a rapidly changing world tend to lead people to turn ethnic, religious, national or other identity and to gain support and security” (Staub 304). He brings up a vital point that difficult times are usually instigators for group violence and/or genocide; it is important to note that he mentions that these economic deprivations do not lead to group violence at once, but rather such deprivations effect the psychological mindset of individuals which, in turn, leads to group grievances and violence against other members in order to gain security.

Economic theory, much like all theories, has its critics as well. One such critic, Donald Horowitz, claims that it doesn’t provide an explanation as to why there is such a strong antipathy sentiment during ethnic conflict. As Horowitz accounts in his book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*: “The sheer passion expended in pursuing ethnic conflict calls out for an explanation that does justice to the realm of feelings... a bloody phenomenon cannot be explained by a bloodless theory” (Horowitz 140). Moreover, he states that the economic theory for genocide and ethnic conflict focuses on how such conflicts arise from competition for jobs or business leaders competing for the same market, etc.

Although to some extent Horowitz makes a valid claim, if one looks at where genocides commonly arise, they are seldom found in countries with abundant wealth, but

rather they most often take place in third world or developing countries. To illustrate this theory into play, I have created a figure showing some cases of genocide in different areas of the world (see Table 2). The figure looks at the GDP change growth for that particular country during the time of the genocide (if applicable), the GDP per capita, the population, and the education rate. Economic theory looks at how economic competition can drive people towards ethnic tension, however one aspect I would like to tie into economic theory is education because lesser educated societies tend to be more prone towards violence and much more easily mobilized towards genocides.

Table 2: Economic Theory Analysis

GDP CHANGE

COUNTRY:	POPULATION:	GDP:	GDP PER CAPITA:	LITERACY RATE: (total population)
CAMBODIA Genocide of 1975	2,400,000 (1975)	0.023% (1975)	\$108 (1975)	35% (est.1975)
ARGENTINA Genocide of 1976-1983	26,079,000 (1976)	.93% (1970)	\$1,931.46 (1976)	93.9% (1980)
RWANDA Genocide of 1994	7,000,000 (1994)	7.4% (1994)	\$652 (2010)	64.8% (2000)
SUDAN Genocide of 2003	33,610,000 (2003)	7.1% (2003)	\$2,496 (2006)	71.9% (pre 2011 secession)

From the data, we can infer that economics has some significance to these genocides. All four of the cases shown had significantly low GDP per capita in comparison to the developed world. However the literacy rates were not significantly low, rather they were

moderate to high. Based off of these findings, I would agree with Horowitz and other critics of Economic theory that although economics might play an underlying factor, it isn't the driving force of genocide. If anything, economically unstable countries are more susceptible to conflict as a whole because of the surfacing tension within the state due to high unemployment rates and difficulty to make a means for living. The theory doesn't account for genocidal acts or ethnic tension, it accounts for tension as a whole that may or may not lead to a genocide. A theory that goes hand in hand with economic theory, but is slightly different, is Modernization Theory and it explores some aspects that the previous theory overlooked.

Modernization Theory

Modernization theory, similar to Economic theory, implies that individuals begin to act out in violence when their means are not kept and maintained. More importantly, modernization theory implies that individuals are prone to anger and frustration when they are not offered as many opportunities as individuals in other countries might be. One might pose the question, what is the difference between modernization theory and economic theory? The answer is that modernization theory doesn't just look at the economical state of the given country, but rather its level of social structural change and development of institutions in comparison to other countries. Modernization is the idea that countries that when countries push towards a more modern society and less traditional one, will enjoy a life of higher standard and freedom. However, the theory also notes that during the transition, there may be significant disruptions which lead to mass political violence (Huntington 1968).

The theory emerged in the 1950s as an explanation of how the industrial societies of North America and Western Europe developed (Crossman 1). There are many steps that incorporate modernization, some of which are: importation of technology, increased level of schooling, development of mass media, development of democratic institutions, and sophistication in transportation. The country will in turn become more urbanized and advanced. Dirk notes:

“...failed states, we often hear today (eg. Harff, 2003)"that have experienced Perverted modernizations. Had they followed the western, preferably the North American, road to modernity, it is implied, they would not have become totalitarian states and perpetrated genocide on their own or neighboring populations” (Dirk 3).

Donald Horowitz wrote in his classic, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, that conflict and modernization can be incorporated in three ways: firstly to view ethnic conflict as a “mere relic of an outmoded traditionalism”; secondly, to regard ethnic conflict as a traditional but unusually stubborn impediment to modernization; and thirdly is to interpret ethnic conflict as an integral part – even a product – of the process of modernization (Horowitz 96-97).

“People’s aspirations and expectations change as they are mobilized into the modernizing economy and polity. They come to want, and to demand, more—more goods, more recognition, more power. Significantly, too, the orientation of the mobilized to a common set of rewards and paths to rewards means, in effect, that many people come to desire precisely the same things....it is by making men

“more alike,” in the sense of possessing the same wants, that modernization tends to promote conflict” (Horowitz 100)

Modernization theory proclaims that in a world where industrial societies are rapidly growing and becoming more and more developed lesser developing countries that are not as accessible to such resources become more prone to conflict and violence.

Overtime, genocide and such conflicts occur more frequently in lesser modernized societies for many reasons: first, lesser modernized countries seem to be more traditional societies, thus more traditional societies tend to hold onto older/less contemporary customs that are more acceptable towards various forms of violence; secondly, lesser modernized countries strive to become more industrialized and advanced, however state conditions inhibit them from this, thus leading to frustration and despair that can cause tensions within the society; and lastly, more modern countries have a set of norms that prevent extreme or inhumane behavior. More modern countries are more critical against brutality and violent behavior, thus although genocide/ethnic conflict is possible in any society, it is less probable to take place in more advanced societies. In an interview with Nathan Gardels of Global Viewpoint, political scientist Francis Fukuyama stated that in order to become a modern state, one has to accept and embrace western civilization, moreover embrace a secularized culture and democratic norms (NPQ 2009).

The effects of modernization, or the lack thereof, can be seen in case studies such as Cambodia, Rwanda, Sudan, Namibia, Guatemala and many other developing countries that have succumbed to the pressures of the rising industrial world. The one outlier in this theory is the Holocaust, because Germany was an economically modernized country

which succumbed to acts of genocide. According to Robert Allen, Germany had overtaken Great Britain in an industrial production by the early twentieth century (Allen 45-46). He also states that Germany was progressing in the manufacturing and technological aspects of economy by the mid-1800s. Although modernization and economic theory both explain various factors and sub-factors within genocide, they don't explain pre-industrialized genocides. For example, the Assyrian genocide, which will be discussed further later on in this research, took place in 1915 during the Ottoman reign. Industrialization wasn't at its peak nor was modernization, however a mass genocide against Assyrians, Armenians and Greeks took place in a region that was beginning to modernize but where the economy was agricultural and social structures remained traditional. Although modernization and economic elements played little to no effect in this atrocity, ethnic/religious sentiment and political strife also had an effect, which brings us to the final theory of genocide, Group Sentiment Theory.

Ethnic Sentiment and Group Entitlement Theory

By definition ethnocentrism is a) the belief in the inherent superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture and b) a tendency to view alien groups or cultures from the perspective of one's own. Ethnic sentiment is when one holds their own ethnic ties to higher standards and sympathy above others. Similarly, group entitlement is the belief that one's ethnicity, religion, race, tribe etc. is eligible for power or other abundances before any other groups. In certain cases, it's been found that some groups are resented and become targets of genocide because of their mobility and success⁶. In other cases, the group's inferior social status might make them targets as well⁷.

⁶ See Chapter 4. The genocide committed against the Assyrians is a prime example of this.

⁷ See Chapter 5. The genocide committed against the Mayans is a prime example of this.

Most genocides begin with the perpetrators fearing a threat to their own identity and self-preservation whether that be their religion, ethnicity, or race. Ethnic Sentiment Theory and Group Entitlement Theory evokes the notion that one is willing to do anything, even the most atrocious of acts, to make sure that their individual group advances and remains secure above all others. With ethnic sentiment comes anti- ethnic sentiments and often times anti-Semitism towards “inferior” groups. Group Sentiment Theory is one of the most agreed upon theories among many scholars in regards to ethnic violence and genocidal acts. Ervin Staub, in his book *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*, wrote

“Because people define themselves to a significant degree by their membership in a group, for most people a positive view of their group is essential in individual self-esteem—especially in difficult times. The need to protect and improve societal self-concept or to find a new group to identify with will be powerful” (Staub 16).

This theory raises the argument that post-colonial countries are more susceptible to internal conflict because of colonial identities and tribal identities. This is not to say that non-colonized countries are not prone to genocide as well, but more so that countries that pre-colonized/post-colonized nations hold more importance towards colonial identity that can lead to group sentiment. Horowitz claims that there are two groups “advanced” and “backward” and that colonial powers favoring one group which would be the more educated, refined, and modern group advanced and treats the group differently. The backwards group are seen as uneducated, indigenous and even barbaric (Horowitz 148).

“The fear of extinction needs to be viewed against the specific content of the exclusivist demands made by the groups entertaining such fears...two or more incipient societies in a single state is an uncomfortable situation, and it often produces impulses to make the society homogenous, by assimilation, expulsion, or even extermination...the fear of extinction is actually a projection” (Horowitz 180).

Mark Levene notes similarities between the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust by citing the same fear and anxiety that the states were on the verge of destruction. (Levene 307-308). Every genocide that has taken place to some extent has this sense of ethnic sentiment as an underlying factor that causes an outbreak of violence. This sentiment of “advanced” and “backwards” that Horowitz has introduced, doesn’t just apply to cultural differences, but economical, class and educational strives as well. Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge felt the educated groups were a threat to society and thus carried out an annihilation to create a more homogenous society. Similarly, Rwanda’s Hutu population carried out the annihilation of its Tutsi population because they were deemed as inferior and minorities within the country, but more importantly seen as political threats, thus to eliminate all threats to power a complete eradication of the race was carried out.

The theory of ethnic sentiment and group entitlement is one of the most plausible theories to apply to genocides and genocidal behavior. Out of all of the theories, this one explains the psychological and emotional aspects of such acts, whereas the previous theories do not and face criticism. Nonetheless, every theory presented in this chapter demonstrates a particular factor that plays a role in genocide. Although, many of these theories have their critics, their importance should not be overlooked. Though they may

not apply to each act of ethnic violence and/or genocide, they offer explanatory views that can a) explain why certain genocides do occur and b) how to look for early warning signs for preventive measures against such acts. For purposes of this research, I will be using the theory of group entitlement/ ethnic sentiment as well as structural theory. My argument is that genocides tend to occur in societies that are under dictatorial/authoritarian rule versus democratic societies; moreover, I believe that the notion of group sentiment is highly effective in genocides and is a mobilizer amongst the culprits. States that weigh heavily on tribalism and ethnocentrism are commonly states that fall victim to genocide, internal civil conflict, and/or corruption on many levels (e.g many African states such as Rwanda, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.). Leaders find it more feasible to rally common ethnic, tribal, and/or religious groups towards a purpose or cause against the targeted group by implementing this notion of ethnocentrism or that one's culture/tribe should be dominant and superior within the state. Such actions can be carried out more easily in weaker states due to the rising tensions within the country.

CHAPTER 4: THE SEYFO GENOCIDE

If the thunder is not loud, the peasant forgets to cross himself – Assyrian Proverb

The nineteenth century was the peak for wars and mass atrocities in vast areas of the world. During the First World War, the Ottoman Empire carried out a mass genocide and extermination of its Christian members including Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks. During the massacre, the Ottoman's and Kurdish forces subjected the Assyrians to mass deportation, starvation and public executions. Unlike the Armenians and the Greeks, the Assyrians were and still are deemed as an indigenous group that were once dispersed in various parts of Turkey, Iran and Iraq. As a result, accounts of the Assyrian genocide are not as renowned in history books as that of the Armenian genocide. In Rene Lemarchand's book Forgotten Genocides, Hannibal Travis stated the plight of Assyrians as:

“So thorough has been the cultural and physical annihilation of the Assyrian people that even the memory of their distinctiveness is at risk. They may end up being relegated to the marginal category of those onetime Arab, Kurdish, or Turkish Christians who eventually became refugees before they were assimilated into Western Societies” (Lemarchand 123)

Roughly 275,000 Assyrians were murdered during the Seyfo ⁸Genocide of 1915 to 1918, yet it remains to be incorporated in many history books. This in part is due to the fact that the victims are part of an indigenous society that lacks a diaspora as that of the Armenians and Greeks. Without a larger community, it becomes challenging to make ones voice heard in a larger community of cultures. However, the Assyrians were not always a minority or an indigenous group. Rather, they were part of what was once a powerful empire throughout the Middle East.

History of Assyrians

The Assyrian people, also known as Chaldeans and/or Syriac Christians, are a Semitic people that resided and ruled in what was once Mesopotamia (Modern day Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran). They speak distinct dialects of various forms of Aramaic and are divided into tribal affiliations such as: Urmia, Tiyari, Jillu, Barwar and many others. Initially, the predominant practiced religion among the Assyrians was the Sumero-Akkadian Mesopotamian religion with Ashur being the national God. After Christianity began to spread throughout various parts of the Middle East/Mesopotamia, Assyrians claim that they became one of the first civilizations to convert to Christianity. They can be divided into various parts of Christianity including, but not limited to: the Nestorians or the followers of the Church of the East (Mar Shimoun), Roman Catholics or Chaldean Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, the Ancient Church of the East. Although Assyrians once made up a vast amount of the population in the Middle East, they now

⁸ Seyfo is a Mesopotamian Neo- Aramaic term for the Assyrian word “Saypa” meaning sword. It’s an abbreviation of the phrase “shato d’sayfo” meaning the “year of the sword.”

make up a mere three million total throughout the world (Peter Betbasoo "Brief History of Assyrians" 1).

As noted, Assyrians come from a history of one of the most powerful and strong empires to ever rule in the Middle East. Though highly potent and powerful during its time, the empire was also notorious for its brutality against any and all of its enemies. It was also highly known for its captures and enslavements of various adversaries, such as the Israelites. The empire reigned for roughly three hundred years and within those years it conquered a vast multitude of lands such as the Egypt, Israel and Babylonia. The empire's commanders and soldiers were infamous their brutality so that any and all enemies could be warned of their fate should they commit any treason. As Farrer notes:

"Judged from the vaunting inscriptions of her kings...the kings of Assyria tormented the miserable world. ... how they flung away the bodies of soldiers like so much clay; how they made pyramids of human heads; how they burned cities; how they filled populous lands with death and devastation; how they reddened broad deserts with carnage of warriors... choked rivers with dead bones; how they cut off the hands of kings and nailed them on the walls, and left their bodies to rot with bears and dogs on the entrance gates of cities; how they employed nations of captives in making brick in fetters; how they cut down warriors like weeds, or smote them like wild beasts in the forests, and covered pillars with the flayed skins of rival monarchs." (Farrar, *The Minor Prophets*, pp. 147,148).

The rule of the empire can be divided into three distinctive periods: The Old Assyrian Age, Middle Assyrian Age, and the Neo-Assyrian age (Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, and Early Iron Age).

“740 B.C., Tiglath-Pileser III began the creation of the Assyrian Empire, well reflected in the scriptures of the Old Testament and amongst whose rulers are Sargon (721–705 B.C.), Sennacherib (704–681 bc), Esarhaddon (690–699 bc), and Ashurbanipal (668–627 B.C.). At its largest, the neo-Assyrian Empire ran from Elam to Egypt.”(Darvill 1).

In 612 B.C., the Battle of Nineveh led to the destruction of the capital city of Assyria. An allied army of Persians, Medes, Scythians, Cimmerians, Babylonians and Chaldeans successfully overthrew the most powerful empire at the time. The State of Assyria became weaker and more volatile after the death of King Ashur Banipal. The nation became prone to many internal civil wars and many different sects, such as Babylonians, sought independence. King Nabopolassar led the Babylonians to freedom, however he relentlessly fought against the Assyrian empire until Nineveh was completely destroyed. With the help of neighboring counterparts, the overthrow was successful (The Fall of Nineveh 1).

The destruction of the Assyrian Empire is seen as a downfall for their cruelty and evil forms of gaining power. Many historians and scholars claim that the downfall of the empire was noted in the Bible:

“The prophet Nahum predicted the destruction of Nineveh in the book that bears his name. The following items were to be a part of the destruction of that great

city: 1. An "overflowing flood" would "make an utter end of its place" (Nah. 1:8)
2. Nineveh would be destroyed while her inhabitants were "drunken like drunkards" (Nah. 1:10)
3. Nineveh would be unprotected because "fire shall devour the bars of your gates" (Nah. 3:13)
4. Nineveh would never recover, for their "injury has no healing" (Nah. 3:19)
5. The downfall of Nineveh would come with remarkable ease, like figs falling when the tree is shaken (Nah. 3:12)" (Padfield, "The Destruction of Nineveh" 1).

After the destruction of the Assyrian Empire, Assyrians became scattered throughout the Middle East. For a short period of time they were ruled by Babylon until the culture slowly disintegrated into aboriginal status. During the first century, Christianity became more prevalent, thus more conversions occurred among Assyrians and they became more monotheistic in beliefs. Soon after the majority of Assyrians settled in various parts of the Middle East, Europe and the Americas. A great majority would be found in Iraq, Iran, Syria and what was called the Ottoman Empire. During these times Assyrians were met with intolerance and treated as second class citizens, a status that they remain to have throughout the Middle East as well as globally.

The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire or Turkish Empire was founded in 1299 by Osman Bey or Ottaman Bey during the breakup of the Seljuk Turk Empire. One of the longest reigning empires since Assyria, it ruled in power for roughly six centuries before its collapse. In *Smyrna's Ashes* by Dr. Michelle Tusan, she labels the Ottoman ruled areas "the Near East." At its peak, the empire ruled over Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania,

Macedonia, Hungary, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, parts of Arabia and much of the coastal strip of North Africa. (Tusan 13) According to Amanda Briney's article, "The Ottoman Empire", the rapid growth of the empire was partly due to the disorganization and weak states that it conquered, making it easier to take siege and power.

The Ottoman Empire was under strict Islamic Rule where the Sultan was regarded as the "protector of Islam." In 1453, the city of Constantinople was made the capital of the Ottoman Empire by Sultan Mehmet II, when it was conquered from the Byzantine Empire. Once conquered, Constantinople was renamed Istanbul or as it was known "the city of Islam" (BBC "Ottoman Empire (1301-1922)"). Since the beginning, the Ottoman's felt this sense of insecurity and in order to ensure stability of power, they instilled various forms of alliances within small groups of slaves and Christian converts. When Sultan Mehmet II took charge of Constantinople, he saw to it that the great majority of the population was slaughtered and re-populated the city with members from other parts of the Ottoman Empire.

Setting forth complete Islamic rule, the Ottoman Empire proceeded with the conversion by "fire and sword" movement, which excluded religions that had any Holy texts (e.g., Judaism and Christianity). Members of such religions were not forced to convert, initially, but rather were permitted to practice their religions if they agreed to pay a Jizah or special religious tax (Yonan 16). Prior to the Arab and Turkish invasions, most Assyrians had already converted from their polytheistic religion to either Judaism or Christianity (Lemarchand 124-125). As Yonan notes:

“The Christian communities came under special religious protection under the Arabic term *ahl al-dhimmi*, meaning 'peoples under protection'; their right to practice their religion and follow their own church laws was guaranteed by treaty” (Yonan 16).

Although Gabriel Yonan, author of *The Forgotten Holocaust*, wrote that Christians seldom faced intolerance by Muslim counterparts prior to the ninth century, Hannibal Travis states otherwise. In particular, Travis notes that Jews faced many persecutions and massacres during the seventh century (Travis 147). The Ottoman's instilled what was called a *Millet* system. Within this given system, the religious *milletbashi* or religious heads were given documentation stating that their particular religious members were not of equal to Muslims or Islam as a whole, but were allowed to practice civil and family law according to their own religious texts (Yonan 18).

Gabriel Yonan states that the Christian *millet*s were empowered by the Ottoman Empire during the fifteenth century. Many treaties were passed within the international community, particularly France, which bid permission for Christian minorities to proceed with creating missionaries and such, however the treaties did not avoid discrimination against the Christian minorities. Deemed as inferior and treated as second class citizens, Christians were not permitted to build churches or toll bells. Yonan notes: “There was a poll tax and clothing edicts. Christians had to mark their houses with dark paint. Fanatical provincial governors were allowed to commit cruel and arbitrary acts against Christians without being punished” (Yonan 26).

One of the most strongest empires in history, the Ottomans were able to maintain their power by being able to keep the reign within one family for nearly seven centuries. Although they ruled for a lengthy period of time, the empire became relatively weak and unstable within the 1600s and 1700s. “In the 1700s the Ottoman Empire began to rapidly deteriorate following the Russo-Turkish Wars and a series of treaties during that time caused the empire to lose some of its economic independence” (Briney 1). During the 1800s the empire experienced many rebellions made it internally weaker and increased the threat of losing power and by the end of the 1800s political and social instability only paved way for much negativity from the international community (Briney 1).

“The expansive Ottoman empire's decay was momentarily slowed in the 19th century by Reforms imposed by the Western great powers, in pursuit of their own interests. This reform period (Tanzimat) was introduced under Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839). The famous reform edict (Hatti-Sherif) appeared under his successor Abdul Madjid (1839-1861), and it was intended to abolish unrestricted medieval despotism. The administrative system was organized anew according to European models and ministries were created. The legal system, hitherto based on Islam sharia, was to be modernized on the basis of European (French) patterns” (Yonan 26).

By the end of the 1800s and the beginning of 1900s the Ottoman Empire had grown weak and weary of its political threats to stability. During the nineteenth century, Britain became an ally of the Ottoman Empire against the Russian Empire⁹, which was trying to

⁹ During the 1800's (particularly 1830's -1860's), Britain had been sending aid to the Assyrians. The archbishop of Canterbury had started missions on the border between Turkey and Persia to help aid

gain control and pave way for protection for the Christian Orthodox minorities kept under the Ottoman rule. This conquest by the Russian counterparts, and the subsequent support by the Christian minorities, bid way for the Ottomans to deem its ethnic and religious minorities as groups that could potentially further weaken their system and lead to their downfall, thus the empire carried out a full pledged genocide against much of its Christian populations including Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians.

The Assyrian Genocide: Seyfo

Although the genocide against Assyrians was carried out during the same time frame and in the same manner as the Armenian and Pontiac Greek genocides, over the years it has lost its place in history. Seldom is it discussed in comparison to the Armenian genocide and this is primarily due to the fact that the Assyrian diaspora is relatively smaller than that of the Armenian and Greek diaspora. For purposes of this research we will be looking at the different Assyrian towns/villages that were afflicted with the massacres and review the acts that were carried out by the Ottoman Empire.

By the end of the nineteenth century, all spiritual, political, and religious power was controlled by the Turks despite the various ethnic groups inhabiting the Ottoman Empire. By this time, the region was shared by Assyrians, Armenians, Greeks, Bosnians, Bulgarians, Albanians, Jews, Serbs and Kurds. In order to maintain this power and control, the Turks carried out many acts of violence and sustained any uprisings from these groups. The Assyrians were spread out into separate villages across the empire. They could be found in the Hakkari Sanjak region of Van, Erzerum, Diyarbekir, Bitlis,

approximately 100,000 Assyrians (Tusan 96). Prior to its alliance against the Russian Empire, Great Britain had previously sent aid to the Christian members of the Ottoman Empire, including the Assyrians.

Kharberd/Harput, Sebastia/Sivas, Western Armenia, Lake Urmia of Iran and the Northwestern region of Syria. (Khosroeva “The Assyrian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire and Adjacent Territories” 270-271). Prior to the Seyfo genocide, the first massacres against Assyrians occurred from 1843 to 1845 and nearly 10,000 Assyrians were murdered, many women and children were taken into bondage and many Assyrian leaders including priests and tribal chiefs were eliminated (Lemarchand 125).

“Several Europeans visited the Assyrians in the mid-nineteenth century, describing them as the ‘only Christians in the East who [have] maintained their independence’ ...’independant of all foreign rules’ ...historians of the Assyrians record that their first massacre in modern times took place in the 1840’s in Northern Mesopotamia...massacred tens of thousands Assyrians, enslaving many women and children, and plundering and burning their villages.” (Travis 238-239).

Many of the women and children were sold to slavery. Such acts did not cease, but continued more ferociously the following years. According to scholars and historians, the Turks were not the sole perpetrators in these acts nor the genocide that followed, but rather many Kurds assisted in these acts and carried them out. One report that was cited in Hannibal Travis’ book *Genocide in the Middle East*, noted the brutality of the acts, stating: “the houses of the wretched inhabitants were fired...neither sex nor age met with favour or mercy; the mother, brothers, and sisters of the patriarch were the objects of peculiar barbarity; the former being literally sawed in two, and the latter most shockingly mangled and mutilated” (Travis 240). These massacres were only the beginning stages of

the systematic genocide acts that would be carried out in worse fashions by the same culprits many years later.

The Assyrian Genocide, commonly known as Seyfo (the way of the sword), took place between the years 1914-1923 by the Ottoman Empire. At the time, the Young Turks Regime was under the leadership of Rashid Bey, who was in charge of the systematic killings against Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. The genocide spanned over three countries: Turkey, Iran and parts of Iraq. The most brutal scenes of the genocide were seen in Van and in the vicinity of Urmia, Iran where many Assyrians were slaughtered. The perpetrators were not just Turks, but rather even the Persians and Kurds had succumbed to massacring Assyrians as well (Lemarchand 126).

Similar to what took place during the Bosnian genocide and the holocaust, Assyrians were split up into two separate groups. The first group was simply shot by gun on the spot. The second group was taken to a separate location and placed in a housing unit. They were starved for eight days straight. Within these eight days, they had their fingers broken and/or dismembered, certain limbs cut off joint by joint, both hands amputated off, and were eventually killed by being stoned to death and having their throats slit. The women were often times raped and enslaved. There were certain Assyrians that were merely deported, but due to the conditions they were under many of them died of famine. David Gaunt stated,

“The degree of extermination and the brutality of the massacres indicate extreme pent-up hatred on the popular level...they were collected at the local town hall, walking in the streets, fleeing on the roads, at harvest, in the villages...under

torture, on the way to put on trial... a common feature was that those killed were unarmed, tied up, or otherwise defenseless (Jones 161-162). Throughout 1915, roughly 25,000 Assyrian lives were lost, along with 21,000 in Jazire, 7,000 in Nisibis, 7,000 in Urfa, 7,000 in the Qudshanis region, 6,000 in Mardin, 5,000 in Diyarbikir, 4,000 in Adana, 4,000 in Brahimie, and 3,500 in Harput. Overall, the entire genocide cost of the lives of 250,000 Assyrian people (as cited in Lemarchand 127).

In 1914, it was estimated that five hundred thousand Assyrians resided in the Ottoman Empire and Persia. During this time, British and Russian rule was spreading and becoming more powerful. They began to gain support from many Christian groups, particularly Assyrians, which wanted protection and support from the European governments to help aid them against discrimination and massacres from the Ottomans. The Ottoman Empire wanted to spread complete “Turkification” throughout its regions, thus they carried out a Jihad or holy war against Christianity; moreover, the Ottomans wanted to weaken the British and Russian control in certain areas of the Middle East and wanted to gain control in Afghanistan and India (Lemarchand 125). Enver Pasha or Enver Bey (last name changed according to rank), military officer in the Ottoman Empire and leader in the Young Turks Revolution, wanted to liberate British, Italian and Russian colonies with Muslim inhabitants and planned a jihad stretching from Assyrian areas to North Africa, Central and South Asia and Eastern Europe (Lemarchand 125).

Similar to how most genocides begin, the government infiltrated hate propaganda towards its targeted group, in this case its Christian minorities. Hannibal Travis quotes one Jihad appeal to Muslims that stated:

“Kill them: God will punish them in your hand and put them to shame; and ye will overcome them. He will rejoice the hearts of believers, and take away the wrath from the hearts unbelievers...you have become slaves of the people of the Cross...The Great God is ordering you to fight with your foes everywhere” (Travis 246).

Proceeding genocides would use a similar fashion in mobilizing the people against a group in order to successfully carry out a mass extermination of a particular group. In this case, leaders in the Ottoman Empire chose to demonize and dehumanize a particular group, but most importantly it chose to show the Muslims the threat they faced at the hands of Christians by stating “you have become slaved of the people of the Cross.” Such a statement makes for a powerful and influential mobilizer against Christians by showing that their religion has weakened the Muslim state and to some extent enslaved them or depowered them.

By the end of 1914 and beginning of 1915, the Ottoman armies invaded all of the Russian occupied areas of northern Persia and forced a complete evacuation of all Russian forces. During the brink of World War I, the genocide began to take place against Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians. They faced public executions, mass killings, rape, deportation and starvation. The Ottomans began their invasion through Iran. More specifically, in October of 1914, the Ottoman forced issued a mass deportation of all Assyrians and “destruction of their culture” in the city of Van, Iran (Travis 247). Travis notes that although these acts were called “deportations” they were realistically mass murders against different districts in Persia. During these assaults, various Assyrian tribes had been attacked including the Jilus, Diz, Baz, Tiyaris, Tekhumas, and many others.

Djevdet Bey, the governor of Van, and Halil Bey both carried out massacres in Seert/Serde, Bitlis, sounding towns of Urmia, and the Hakkari regions (Travis 247).

Some of the most gruesome of accounts would be found in the Hakkari region of present-day Turkey, Diyarbakir, and Van of Iran. After attempting to persecute Christians in Azerbaijan, the Ottoman military moved forward to Van and its neighboring villages. One ghastly event, possibly one of the worst that took place, was in the neighboring village of Serde or Siirt. Jevdet Bey, leader of “The Butcher’s Battalion” or Kasap Tuburu, had ordered the murder of all Assyrians residing there. All in all, he and his men massacred roughly twenty thousand civilians (Khosoreva 267-274). Ugur Umit Ungor wrote in his book, The Making of Modern Turkey: Nation and State in Eastern Anatolia, 1913-1950, similar accounts of the brutality carried out by two individuals in particular, Major Ali Haydar and General Mursel Baku, against Armenians, Kurds and “certain tribes” (Ungor 128). Ungor recalls one noted incident where fifty unarmed civilians were gathered, tied together and “mowed down by machine gun fire” (Ungor 128). The brutality didn’t end there, he also mentions that during this raid there were tortures carried out by iron and boiling water as well as beheadings, stoning and burning of families alive (Ungor 128). Raphael de Nogales, an Ottoman officer had described some of the scenes in Siirte as:

“The ghastly slope was crowned by thousands of half-nude and still bleeding corpses, lying in heaps, or interlaced in death’s final embrace...there we found police and populace sacking the homes of the Christians” (Travis 248).

Sadly, the horrific stories continued to surface and in one account the targets were women and children. During one event, a group of Kurdish soldiers had raided a library in Siirte. They forced the women to carry out all of the books and place them in a pile, one that would be lit on fire soon afterwards. What the women didn't anticipate is their children being ripped out of their arms and thrown into the blaze and when the mothers attempted to save their children, they were shot at once (Kino "Genocide and Repentance").

Many Assyrians were forced to leave their homes and their lands were confiscated amidst the process. Reverend Joseph Naayem, a survivor of the genocide, wrote *Shall this Nation Die?* A moving piece full of depositions and personal testimonies of survivors, particularly during the massacres in Siirt. The testimonies further evoke the ruthlessness and sheer inhumanity displayed by the Turks and their Kurdish aid. Some reports showed women being left half naked in the middle of streets with stab wounds so deep that their intestines were shown (Naayem 131). One grave testimony given by Madam Djalila describes the dire situation that was amounting from the very beginning until its peak. Her testimony shows that there was a lack of understanding as to what was taking place and many Assyrians didn't realize what was occurring until word reached from other surrounding villages that the Kurds were not merely raiding villages, but killing their members. She describes how she and her family feared for their lives and lived in a state of constant anxiety. One story she tells is of a man named Youseff Chaya and how he had been hiding in the Chaldean church until one night he came to their home only to be arrested during a raid by the Kurds. She speaks of the moments leading to his death as well as his nephew's:

“He asked to see his little nephew, an only son among seven sisters, kissed him tearfully and bade us farewell. With us there was also a boy of twelve, called Fardjalla, and whom we had hidden with our men. Worn out by the excessive heat he had come out and joined us. He, too, was seized "Do not be frightened, dear, you will be happy in Heaven." The scoundrels then took the two poor Christian boys outside the house, and shot them before its very door” (Naayem 132-133).

These haunting accounts were just a few of many. Mar Severius Barsaum, representative of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch in France wrote that around ninety thousand Syrian Orthodox Assyrians had been killed and one hundred fifty six churches had been set to fire (Travis 260). In Southeastern part of Anatolia, more than three hundred villages and 150 churches were destroyed. People were killed mercilessly in these and to a large extent were trapped within their villages. Even escaping their lands was deemed unforeseeable and implausible, although many attempted to.

A large majority of the populations attempted to flee Persia to Iraq, but as was the case in the past, they were met with harsher circumstances in other areas either due to famine, illness, or further massacres in other parts of the region. Urmia, a city in Iran, had a great deal of foreign missionaries that were serving there at the time of the massacres, many of which became eyewitnesses to the events. Between January and February of 1915, Ottomans, led by Kachali Khan, invaded the city of Urmia, where they abducted sixty one leading Assyrians from the French Missions for ransom. One memoir by Mary Lewis Shedd about her husband, William Shedd, a missionary, notes that historian Kasravi portrayed Assyrians of Urmia in a negative light, deeming them to be devious

and “bent on killing,” but this was an attempt on his part to transform the victims into villains to further justify the actions of Ottomans.

“As early as 1913 there were serious threatening of a general massacre of Christians in Turkey. . . . It was only a little over a year afterward, in the late summer of 1915, that the blow fell, and practically all the Syrian Christians who escaped massacre, fled across the border into Persia, where they found temporary refuge. The Assyrians have always been an inoffensive people, and their cruel treatment at the hands of Turks and Persians is inexplicable” (Shedd, 134,170).

Anahit Khosroeva, an Assyrian activist and historian, wrote a piece in the book *Armenian Genocide* by Richard Hovvannessian, where she described the attacks against Assyrian villages as some of the most barbaric scenes. With regards to Urmia, she notes that prior to the attacks, there were roughly three hundred families totaling about 2,500 individuals, however by the end of the massacres all but a couple hundred remained. (Khosroeva “The Assyrian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire and Adjacent Territories” 271). She goes on to recount the other various forms of torture and havoc that took place in the surrounding villages, such as Khosrova where close to seven thousand members were gathered together only to be slaughtered; Haftvan where seven hundred and fifty individuals were beheaded and five thousand women were taken and sold to Kurdish harems or brothels; and Kanachar where two hundred people were burnt alive. (Khosroeva “The Assyrian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire and Adjacent Territories”271).

“The painful exodus from Urmia to Mesopotamia began and was accompanied by severe human losses. An English eyewitness noted: ‘I saw the picture of the tragic flight of an outcast nation. I speak of the Assyrians’” (Khosroeva “The Assyrian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire and Adjacent Territories”271).

Between the years of 1916 to 1917, more deportations took place in Tur-Abdin, Nisibin, Bitlis, Mardin, and Urhai. Jevdat Bey continued his raids in different cities aside from Siirt, including Redwan, Tentas, Altaktanie, Artoiun, Charnakh, Harevana and many other cities between Iran and Iraq. All in all, nearly twenty thousand Assyrians were killed during these massacres, but the killings didn’t end there. After Russian forces were forced to Evacuate Van and the surrounding cities, they moved onto the Khoi. The city of Khoi was invaded shortly afterwards and the villages there were shaken with terror in what would become a complete bloodbath of the Christian civilians there.

In 1918, Turkish and Kurdish forces had entered Khoi a region in Persia. One of the survivors, Reverend John Eshoo, recounts his memories of the brutal massacres that took place. He stated that there were two separate groups: The first group was basically sent to what he describes as a slaughterhouse in caravansary of some sort and within this twenty people at a time would be shot to death. The second group, which consisted of residents of the suburb city, were placed in a “spacious courtyard” and starved for eight days until it was their time to be executed. When it came to the execution, Reverend Eshoo, recounts the torturous and gruesome methods:

“At last they were removed from their place of confinement and taken to a spot prepared afor their brutal killing...The procession of the victims was led by two

green turbaned Sayids (the highest religious order in Islam), one with an open book in his hand, reading from it aloud the passages pertaining to the holy war, and the other carrying a large bladed knife...the executioners began by cutting first the fingers of their victims, joint by joint, till the two hands were entirely amputated. Then they were stretched on the ground, after the manner of the animals that are slain in the fast, but these with their faces turned upward, and their heads resting upon the stones or blocks of wood. Then their throats were half cut, so as to prolong their torture of dying” (AINA “1918 The Massacre of the Assyrians in Khoi, Persia”). He goes on to say that many of the victims would actually be buried before they were dead.

As is the case in most genocides and civil conflicts rather, there tends to be this “you’re either with us or against us” notion that instills fear among the people, and which seemingly goes hand in hand with the theory of ethnic and group sentiment. Mobilizing people for ethnic, religious, economical, and/or political gain by making consequences for any and all members that go against such policies. This method was carried out in the Ottoman genocide, but carried on over the years during the Holocaust, Rwanda, Cambodia and many other genocides to come. Non-Turkish or non-Islamic residents were not the only targets of the Ottomans, but in actuality anyone that was against them or refused to follow orders would be executed immediately. Enemies against the government were treated severely and their acts were deemed as treason.

“When the government of Diyarbakir gave orders to the officials to kill ...a native of Baghdad was Kaimakam of el bashiri...and an Albanian was Kaimakam of Lijeh. These two telegraphed that their consciences would not permit them to do

such work, and that they resigned their posts. Their resignations were accepted, but they were both secretly assassinated” (Travis 248).

Some Ottoman officers in particular found it difficult to participate in many of the cold-blooded acts. Raphael de Nogales, a Venezuelan Ottoman commander described the scenes as ghastly and morbid. Bodies were left half naked and bloodied throughout streets. These images that he described, showed the lack of empathy as well as respect that the Ottomans and Kurds had for their victims. “The ghastly slope was crowned by thousands of half-nude and still bleeding corpses, lying in heaps....overcome by the hideous spectacle...we found the police and the populace engaged in sacking the homes of the Christians” (Travis 248). Many German officials such as Walter Holdstein who worked at the German consul in Mosul blamed Rashid Bey for the massacres that occurred against Assyrians and Chaldeans. He stated that the government was “undoubtedly” to blame and that the Christian population had become outlawed (as cited in Travis 249).

Conclusion and Aftermath

The Assyrian genocide or Seyfo lasted from 1914 to 1918 and cost an estimated 250,000 Assyrian lives. After the Russian revolution of 1917 and the end of the Czar’s regime, the hope for independence for Assyrians grew grim. Hannibal Travis wrote that after the revolution, Assyrians were not permitted to return back to their homelands, moreover under the new Kemal Ataturk regime, many of the surviving Assyrians were murdered and their women and children were sold into harems and brothels. Some Assyrians were deported entirely from Mesopotamia and placed into Turkey (Travis 256-

257). After the genocide and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, many Assyrians were found displaced within various parts of the Middle East including Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Many had left their homelands towards Europe, Australia and the Americas in hope of regaining a new life abroad. Seyfo remains to be one of the most brutal and catastrophic acts against a given group, yet it is seldom mentioned in scholarly work.

Seyfo displays many of the theories discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. Group sentiment and rational choice are two of the theories that are witnessed during these acts. The Ottoman Empire, wanting to maintain control and power, did everything and anything that would rationally make a gain to their means and end to anyone who would come in the way of that. Although the acts were undoubtedly barbaric, their motive was to maintain control by any means necessary. Simultaneously, they accomplished this by mobilizing Muslims against Christians by demonizing Christians and portraying them as traitors not only to the Empire but Islam itself.

Although the acts that took place have been described as the same if not worse in comparison to those that took place against Armenians and Greeks, the genocide itself is not held to the same degree as the others. In fact, Hannibal Travis has stated in many of his works that the Assyrian genocide is nearly indistinguishable from the Armenian genocide. That being said the question remains as to why it is not as renowned given its severity. One reason suggested by the president of the Assyrian National Association of America, Joel Werda, was that many of the Assyrians that lived in these raided provinces, spoke Armenian as well as Assyrian, thus a great deal of them were noted to be Armenians instead (Travis 261). In cities such as Urmia, often times it was common for an exchange of languages and cultures, which in turn made it more complex to

distinguish the different Christian cultures. Hannibal Travis credits such Armenian scholars as Peter Balakian and Richard Hovannessian for their efforts on recognizing the atrocities committed against the Assyrian communities (Travis “The Assyrian Genocide” 127).

Throughout the research, I was able to uncover that some scholarly work that covered the Armenian and Assyrian genocides, miswrote “Assyrian” as “Syrian.” For example, the memoir of William Shedd and his missionary work in Urmia, repeatedly made mention of the atrocities committed against “Syrians.” Henry Morgenthau Sr. memoirs on the Armenian genocide make mention of the Syrian and Nestorian plight rather than Assyrian and Chaldean stating “the horrible massacre of helpless Armenians and Syrians” (Lewy 140). Often times Assyrian and Syrian Christian is interchanged and confused in literature when they are two separate entities. This confusion might not directly cause the genocide to be overlooked, but certainly paves the way for scholars and historians to argue and discredit that the genocide against Assyrians ever occurred, which to some extent is what the Young Turks regime would have wanted; the complete annihilation of Assyrian history and to a larger extent, existence. Even to this day Assyrians and Syrians are often times confused and interchanged with one another which leads to frustration for the Assyrians to form an identity of their own.

Another theory is the lack of scholarly work committed towards the Assyrian genocide. Although scholars and historians like Hannibal Travis, who have dedicated themselves towards educating others on the events of Seyfo, books and articles on the Assyrian genocide are rare to come by. A great majority of the works can be accredited towards Travis, Anahit Kosroeva, William Shedd, Gabriel Yonan and the many others

that gave their own personal testimonies or testimonies of others in their work.

Undoubtedly, Assyrians are an indigenous group and although there are Assyrians that play a role in governments throughout the world such as, Congresswoman Anna Eshoo of California and Afram Yakoub the chairman of the Assyrian Federation in Sweden, the Assyrian voice is seldom heard and their plights are rarely attended to.

Lastly, it is important to mention that similar to the Guatemalan genocide (which will be discussed later in this thesis), there are many international factors that come into play. The rivalries that took place in the background of this genocide are arguably causes for the atrocities. The Ottoman Empire was dissipating in power and simultaneously the Russians were gaining more control and power; this led to conflict between the two which inadvertently led to the genocide. On a similar note, the Ottoman and the British had a similar backdrop of conflicts with the British attempting to cripple the Ottoman economy and freeing certain states (e.g. Albania and Kuwait) from Ottoman rule. Moreover, the British became allies with Russians, which caused the Empire to become weary of their slow loss of power; thus, in an attempt to maintain power it attempted to eradicate and threaten its control which would be any supporters/sympathizers to the Russians which in this case was the Christian population, especially the Assyrians.

Unfortunately, given the indigenous status the Assyrians hold, their diaspora is inarguably smaller than that of the Armenians, thus making it challenging to exchange information more publicly. Assyrians are, comparatively, smaller in population to Armenians and Greeks. The Assyrian history and culture is infrequently discussed in educational institutions, which in turn creates ambiguity towards the ethnic groups; moreover, due to the lack of awareness and knowledge on the Assyrian history, it is

difficult to sympathize or show interest, for lack of a better phrase, towards a group whose people are not fully recognized or known.

In recent times, Assyrians faced yet another genocide in Iraq when members of ISIS invaded the city of Mosul, destroying nearly every Assyrian artifact and causing Assyrians to flee their homes. Similar to the Ottoman method, ISIS wishes to create an Islamic state and gave the Christians three options: convert, flee, or die. Although Assyrians around the world took to the streets to march in solidarity protests, they were continuously confused as “Yazidi Christians”, “Kurdish Christians,” or simply “Iraqi Christians,” and were not given their own identity as Assyrians. The same was done during the Armenian genocide, when Assyrians were merely categorized as Armenians or Syrians, rather than their own ethnic group. This lack of empathy within the media community and even the global community as a whole is only further infiltrating the demise of the Assyrian people and their history. How can we discuss the atrocities that took place in the past, when we are negating their existence in the present? This is the core of the problem and the core reason the Seyfo genocide has lost its place in history, because the world has turned a blind eye against indigenous members, both in the past and the present.

Similar to the Assyrians, the indigenous members of Guatemala faced a genocide of their own that would become overlooked and to some degree forgotten. Often times noted as the “silent holocaust,” the genocide against the Mayans during the Guatemalan civil war was one of extreme viciousness and trepidation.

CHAPTER 5: THE GUATEMALAN GENOCIDE

“We have no voice” – Guatemalan Rape Survivors

In Guatemala, what started as a civil war would become a global “blame game” for the genocidal acts that would occur during the conflict. The civil war began in the early 1960s and lasted roughly thirty six years. However the genocide took place during three of those years, 1981 to 1983. The unrest broke out under the rule of the former dictator, Efraín Ríos Montt, due to social and political inequality particularly for the Mayan people, causing an uprising within the group. Rebel groups began to form against the Montt government, but scholars and reports state that the government’s violence was highly disproportionate and indiscriminate. The majority of the targets were the Mayan people. However, as this research will show, the issue with this genocide is that it is not clear whether or not the indigenous people were deliberate targets of the genocide. It is argued by many scholars, such as Benjamin Valentino, that the violence was aimed towards areas with the most guerilla activity. As General Gramajo stated:

“The guerrillas won over many Indian collaborators...Therefore, the Indians were subversives, right? And how do you fight subversion? Clearly, you had to kill Indians because they were collaborating with subversion. And then they [the human rights advocates] would say ‘you’re massacring innocent people.’ But they weren’t innocent. They had sold out to subversion” (Valentino 212).

The government portrayed the Mayans in a very hostile light. One could even argue they attempted to portray them as terrorists wreaking havoc within the country, thus giving an illusion that they had to sustain the upheaval and were left no choice than to do it

violently. By the end of the genocide, it is estimated that more than two hundred thousand people were either killed or missing, and an additional 1 to 1.5 million were displaced or sought refuge in neighboring countries like Mexico. One of the most trying circumstances has been to prove that these acts were indeed genocidal, given the murkiness of what is defined as genocide. The CEH or the Commission for Historical Clarification successfully did this in their piece “Guatemala Memory of Silence” where they wrote a report on the accounts that took place. The commission managed to prove that close 626 massacres took place in Mayan villages, particularly in the departments of Quiché, Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, Alta and Baja Verapaz of rural Guatemala (Linstroth 144).

The Mayan people, similarly to the Assyrians, were once very powerful within Guatemala, and especially prior to the Spanish conquest. They had one of the most powerful empires in Latin America, but soon after the conquest, they became minorities within their land and were treated as second class citizens. In order to understand how the civil unrest occurred in Guatemala and what provoked the Mayans to speak out against the government, one must analyze the powerful history of this indigenous people.

History of Mayan

One of the three ancient and powerful civilizations of Central and Southern America, including the Aztecs and Incas, the Mayan once ruled all of the Yucatán Peninsula, modern-day Guatemala, Belize, parts of Mexico, the western portion of Honduras and El Salvador. The Mayan civilization began around 2600 B.C., during the preclassic period, although the start of the civilization is debated among scholars till this day. The evolution of the empire can be divided into nine periods: Olmec Period, Early

Preclassic Maya, Middle Preclassic Maya, Late Preclassic Maya, Early Classic Maya, Late Classic Maya, Colonial period, and the period under Independent Mexico.

The Mayans developed their own solar calendar, thus accordingly the creation of the world began between 3113 B.C and 3114 B.C. and Mayan civilization followed years afterwards. The first Mayan settlements began around 1800 B.C. or the beginning of the Preclassic period. They were highly religious people that were polytheistic and worshipped many gods that were related to nature including gods of the sun, moon, rain and corn (Burkholder and Johnson 6-12). One of the unique things about Mayan civilization is that it flourished in a tropical climate, whereas most of the other civilizations and empires survived and gained greatness in drier climates.

The Mayan Empire was ruled via hierarchy with nobles and kings. In 100 B.C. the city of Teotihuacan was founded and became the center of cultural and religious trading in Mesoamerica. Around 100 A.D. there was a decline in the Olmec civilization and simultaneously there was a decline and abandonment within Mayan cities, which led to the collapse of the Preclassic Period and led into the Classic Period.

During the classic period, the Mayan civilization became much stronger and its population grew into the millions. The Mayan people created many small empires and kingdoms within some of their cities such as Caracol, Tikal, Palenque, Copan, Xunantunich and Clakmul. As urbanization became more prevalent, the Mayan civilization became agriculturally intensive and technologically sophisticated (Crist and Paganini 24). The kingdoms and civilizations began to expand ties with neighboring areas and villages and others cultures, and in turn achieved many achievements, including artistic and agricultural. The Mayan civilization and empires became “enigmatic” and

stronger over the years, until the Spanish conquest and the mysterious disappearance of the once powerful kingdom.

Much of the Mayan history is murky and debated among many scholars, primarily because most of the historical knowledge is deciphered from hieroglyphic scriptures found in ancient Mayan ruins, therefore it is ultimately left to interpretation of these artifacts and hieroglyphic writings on walls and scriptures. For example, initially historians and scholars believed the Mayan people were peace loving individuals including scribes and priests. However when further investigating the hieroglyphics, one could infer and conclude that the society was at times ruthless and full of conflict and violence. “As epigraphers finally learned to read the Maya glyphs, a darker picture emerges, of warring dynasties, court rivalries, and palaces put to the torch. Maya history became a tapestry of precise dates and vividly named personages” (Gugliotta “Mayan Rise and Fall” 1).

The Mayans came under the rule of Siyaj K'ak' or Fire is Born after he conquered the city of Tikal in around January 16, 378 A.D (Gugliotta “Mayan Rise and Fall 1).” The rise of Fire is Born is controversial and highly debated among historians and scholars, because although he is credited with the rise of the Mayans to greatness, many scholars argue that the Mayans would have achieved this success with or without his conquer of the land. Nonetheless, he accomplished many things for the Empire, including the installation of new dynasties and forming new alliances with neighboring areas. Originally from a land called Teotihuacán, a metropolis near what is now Mexico City, he managed to spread many influences from that region.

“I don't know if Fire Is Born invented the new system," says Nikolai Grube of the University of Bonn, "but he was there at the beginning” (Guigliatta “Mayan Rise and Fall” 1).

During his reign, the Mayans build some of the most prominent stepped pyramids within their religious areas and palaces. Being a highly religious society, the Mayans participated in human sacrificial practices, which usually took place within these pyramid temples. Although human sacrifice was rare in Mayan culture, it was not uncommon; in fact, dedication of major building projects or the placement of a new leader, would require human sacrifice (Sharer and Traxler 751).

Although many deemed these acts to be barbaric, many would argue that similar to previous and proceeding empires, such acts showed authority and evoked fear amongst enemies.

“Mediating between the heavens and earth were the Maya kings—the kuhul ajaw, or holy lords, who derived their power from the gods. They functioned both as shamans, interpreting religion and ideology, and rulers who led their subjects in peace and war...conducted elaborate public rituals to give metaphysical meaning to movements of the heavens, changes of the calendar, and the royal succession” (Guigliatta “Mayan Rise and Fall” 1).

The Mayan empire ruled for centuries before its mysterious demise around the eighth and ninth century. The society's demise is considered “mysterious” due to the lack of information surrounding the destruction of what was once a very powerful empire. Many factors led to the downfall of the empire including overpopulation, invasion of the Spaniards and other foreign entities, peasant revolts, and the collapse of trade routes.

Much of the cities in lowland areas became abandoned and by 900 A.D. the civilization had collapsed in its entirety (Burkholder and Johnson, 12). By the time the Spaniards invaded, the Mayan empire had collapsed and the people were living in agricultural villages or smaller political units.

After the downfall of the empire, the Mayans were dispersed among areas of the Spanish colonial empire and subsequently among different countries such as Guatemala and Mexico. They faced discrimination and were treated as second class citizens. These deprivations and acts of intolerance against the group could be seen in Guatemala and part of the uprising during the civil war was due to revolts held by the Mayan population against the regime.

Brief History of Guatemalan Turmoil, Efraín Ríos Montt's Regime, and the Guatemalan Civil War

The Guatemalan Civil War lasted from 1960 to 1996. It claimed the lives of roughly two hundred thousand, mainly Mayans and some Ladinos. The Ladinos are heterogeneous in culture and are a mix of mestizo and Hispanicized cultures and are not considered indigenous. However, turmoil within the country began decades before the civil war. The tension within the state, according to the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), began as early as 1821, after the proclamation of independence posed by the government elites which created an authoritarian state and promoted violence towards the poor and Mayan people:

“The anti-democratic nature of the Guatemalan political tradition has its roots in an economic structure, which is marked by the concentration of productive wealth

in the hands of a minority. This established the foundations of a system of multiple exclusions, including elements of racism...the most profound manifestation of a violent and dehumanizing system” (CEH 17-18).

During the years of 1944 to 1954, also known as the Ten Years of spring, Guatemala began to experience a series of revolutions and a brief encounter with democracy and social reform. This initially began with the overthrow of the former dictator Jorge Ubico in 1944. Following this overthrow, Juan José Arevalo won the elections in 1944, and became the president; he implemented many laws towards social reforms such as increased funding for education, labor reforms, and universal suffrage except for illiterate females (*Golden New York Times* 1; Jonas). Arevalo was then succeeded by Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, who would be overthrown by a U.S.-backed and CIA led coup in 1954 which placed Carlos Castillo Armas and his military regime in charge. This stance by the government of the United States, and the proceeding actions during the civil war, would impact relations between the two countries, as a lot of the blame for tension was placed on the part of the United States. For the next decade, there would civil strife that would lead to a spark of uprisings among the indigenous Mayan groups and the Ladino peasants. A vicious cycle overtook the nation over the next few decades where there would be a series of social injustices that in turn, would lead to protests and political instability. Moreover, this unrest often lead to military coups and despotism. The constant turmoil and change within political, social and cultural realms led to further instability which caused the state to resort to violence in order to maintain social control (CEH 18).

Armas led the country until his assassination in 1957, when he was shot dead by a palace guard. Following this assassination, Luis Arturo Gonzalez Lopez would gain power until his death in 1965, subsequently Oscar Mendoza took over until the coup of 1982. Between the times of 1954 to 1981, many Guatemalans lost their lives. Scholars estimate that almost forty to sixty thousand people were murdered between these years alone (Jonas 2012: 312). The coup in 1982 would be the turning point in the civil war and would lead towards the genocide against the Mayan people.

On March 23, 1982, after the coup d'état against Angel Anibal Guevara, General Efraim Rios Montt gained full power over Guatemala. A member of the Guatemalan Republican Front and influenced by his highly religious Pentecostal background, Montt incorporated violence and religion into the government. His belief was that a true Christian would hold a Bible in one hand and a machine gun in the other (Chelala 1). Initially, Guatemalans were optimistic that the swift regime change would bring about equality and human rights within the country, however what was awaiting them was not something the citizens had anticipated, particularly the indigenous Mayan groups.

Montt systematically and to some extent, cleverly, implemented the *National Growth and Security Plan*. On the surface, this plan appeared as a positive movement that would help the indigenous groups become integrated within society, however below the surface showed the intolerance towards these groups by deeming them uneducated and “immature,” thus more susceptible and vulnerable in becoming communist supporters. By June of 1982, violence broke out in the rural areas by various rebel groups. Montt carried out a campaign called Frijoles y Fusiles or (Beans and Rifles) was a program that was designed to keep control over the guerrillas and rebelling groups; those who

cooperated with the government would be rewarded with beans and those that rebelled would be punished with rifles (Jonas 2012: 314-315). During this time Montt would carry out one of the most horrific accounts of crimes against humanity, as he and his regime slaughtered hundreds of thousands of indigenous Mayans.

The Genocide against Mayans

There are two distinct aspects that make the Guatemalan genocide unique amongst other atrocities. Firstly, the genocide took place against an indigenous group, the Mayans, which make up the majority of the population within the country. Somehow, the minority groups within the country managed to withhold and gain control of both economic and social structures. Secondly, the genocide incorporates elements of gendercide, or the deliberate targeting of women. In this case women, which seemed to carry the brunt of the tortures and agony, were raped and slaughtered constantly. They were treated as “rewards” or loots of the war. The acts during the genocide were carried out savagely and inhumanely; moreover, they took place over a long period of time which again is unusual in majority of genocides. The great majority of atrocities span over a few years, but not decades and certainly centuries, however in the case of Guatemala, the tension and intolerance towards the Mayans began as far back as the 1800s. Montt’s regime would successfully wipe out a large number of Mayans during their dictatorship, leaving a culture shackled by the acts that took place.

During Frijoles y Fusiles, villages were raided in search of those that were supporting rebels or the opposition. These villages were populated by Mayan civilians, thus leading historians and scholars to argue that this indeed was a deliberate act of genocide against a certain group. The Guatemalan government proclaimed that they

merely targeted rebel groups that showed hostility. CEH's studies prove otherwise. Rather the CEH prove that Montt's government and military carried these acts out purposefully against Mayans in hopes of ridding them.

“The widespread village-level massacres occurred in regions that are overwhelmingly Mayan. The initial scorched-earth sweep was followed quickly by a militarized reconstruction of the conflict zones ... seize and hold control over these territories and make them ‘governable’” (Oglesby and Ross 22).

Elizabeth Oglesby notes that Mayans were separated into two groups: The “good Mayans” and the “bad Mayans.” The “good Mayans” were those that were pro-government and anti-rebel movement, thus they could be redeemed: however, the “bad Mayans” were anti-government, thus must be eliminated (Oglesby 28-29). The vast amount of information and scholarly work regarding the genocide were conducted with testimonials from survivors or witnesses of the massacres.

The research provides strong evidence that Mayans were targets of government counter-insurgency program. J.P. Linstroth, who formerly worked in the Immigration department and reviewed the cases of many Mayan refugees gave a thorough account of the acts that took place and incorporated interviews conducted with some of the Mayan survivors. What he describes are horrific events on the part of the government and the guerrilla rebel groups. Both sides portray savagely images where men were often abducted to be tortured, killed or trained to fight for the cause and the women were brutally raped (Linstroth 140). As he notes: “La Violencia or the period of ‘Maya Genocide’ may be characterized as one of the worst in the twentieth century—where whole Mayan villages were burned and destroyed, men, women and children massacred,

and women viciously raped, and so many tales of untold atrocities” (Linstroth 144). To be clear, Linstroth didn’t reveal the identities of the deposed, but used pseudonyms to protect their identities, so any names provided in this research from his work would be using those pseudonyms and not the actual names; also Linstroth blocks out any names of locations given, again to protect the families and identities of these individuals, nonetheless the visuals and accounts given are enough to portray the severity of the atrocities.

Many of the depositions taken distinguished the soldiers from the rebel groups, stating the soldiers wore more sophisticated uniforms and were easily eminent, whereas the rebel groups tended to speak different dialects of Mayan and generally wore plain green uniforms. Many of the testimonies described images of decapitations that took place as both the soldiers and the guerrillas were blamed for using machetes against their victims. One testimony by “Carlos” recounted Montt’s soldiers hacking men with machetes and burning women and children within their homes.

“I saw a lot of men...and a few women, about sixty in all, who had all been tied up. Their hands were tied between their back and their feet were tied as well. Some were dead and some were alive. They were hacking at their bodies with machetes...All of these people were surrounded by soldiers who were ordering other people from (the name of the village) to do the killing...they [the Guatemalan army] killed everybody there...gathered all the women and children together in a house and burnt them and the house down” (Linstroth 147).

This notion that machetes and decapitations occurred was carried out in multiple depositions including one by “Victor” and “Felipe,” both of which showed that Montt’s

army and the guerrillas carried out similar atrocities; another interview with “Ines” shows that Montt’s army raped and pillaged women constantly, even in fields where women would gather food. She recounts one incident where she was in the field and was raped by three soldiers, which she claims looked like Spanish Ladinos (Linstroth 148).

“Miriam” remembers one incident where the rebel groups carried out rapes as well that were equally appalling and vivid. She described her rapist as angry and threatening, that if she screamed he would merely say she was trying to run away and he had to kill her (Linstroth 149). According to “Guatemalan War Rape Survivors,” an article in the Guardian, between 1960 and 1996, more than one hundred thousand women became victims of rape either by Montt’s army or by the insurgents. Rape is not just merely an act to implement fear, it is essentially an act that promotes the destruction of the women and as this article mentions it is one of the most effective forms of eliminating a culture (De Pablo, Zurita, and Tremlett 2). When raping the women, they are essentially making sure that the population of Mayans is reduced and the population of the culprits is increased, thus eventually making the victimized race disappear in its entirety. Aside from this goal, rape is a form of dehumanization and making the individual feel weak and helpless, and powerless which psychologically damages the victim on many levels. Once again these elements of genocide elude to theories such as symbolic politics, ethnic sentiment, and group entitlement, and even a bit of rational choice theory; these alarming acts of rape and destruction of a particular group are acts that essentially “strengthen” the perpetrators in hopes of maintaining and expanding their power. Rational choice plays a role in this, because although one could argue such acts are morally wrong and in no way rational, to the perpetrator these are the most rational acts in order to end a particular group from

expanding and in turn giving room for expansion of their own group by raping these women. The article, “Guatemalan War Rape Survivors,” also notes that many of these women became abandoned by their husbands, deeming them as lowly for allowing the rape to proceed.

“The soldiers ambushed me. My little girl was with me. She was very frightened and she cried...I remember there were three of them who raped me, but I don’t know how many more because I lost consciousness.’ When Maria made it home and told her husband, he rejected her, saying that if she had come back alive, it was because she had let the soldiers rape her—testimony of Maria Castro” (De Pablo, Zurita, and Tremlett 2).

Although the genocide only took place in the early eighties, many of the testimonies given in the article state that violence, intolerance, and such acts of torture still take place in Guatemala, as of 2010 at least six hundred eighty five women were killed and there have been one hundred or so cases of rape and dismemberment (De Pablo, Zurita, and Tremlett 3).

The CEH also makes mention of the forced disappearances and kidnappings made on the part of the government and the guerrillas, although the article states that this was not common within the insurgent groups. Many times these kidnappings took place in exchange for economic support; the victims of kidnappings were generally political figures, diplomats, and/or business people (CEH 43). In most cases, those that were abducted, such as foreign ambassadors, were executed. The insurgents would also forcibly recruit civilians especially children, to join their cause and ultimately force them to commit murders.

Nobel Peace Prize Laureet, Rigoberta Menchu spoke of such instances when her mother was kidnapped and later murdered by the Guatemalan army in her biography and testimony, *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. In Rigoberta's case, her family was all too well acquainted with these kidnappings, given the fact her younger brother had gone missing and her father had been kidnapped and murdered as well. Menchu's claims portray and image that such kidnappings were all too common within the villages. She speaks of her mother's heroism alongside many other indigenous women within their community, who took to the streets and protested against the regime for kidnapping their children and expresses their revulsions against these acts (Menchu 231-232). She recounts the moments leading up to her mother's abduction, rape and eventually murder. When the women and children went to congress and voiced their concerns for the kidnappings, rape, and massacres and as expected they were met with hostility immediately. Following these protests, Menchu's mother was kidnapped, raped and murdered.

“My mother was kidnapped. And from the very beginning she was raped by the town's high-ranking army officers. I have in my hands details of step of the rape and torture suffered by my mothers...my mother was being tortured and not to know anything about the rest of the family...the army took her to a place near the town where it was very hilly...her face was so disfigured, cut and infect...my mother died in agony” (Menchu 234-235).

This was one of many testimonies and accounts of what happened during this civil war. Many stories and experiences shared this same fate and plight. To describe the acts as barbarism is an understatement; the Mayan people were treated as voiceless entities

whose identity was slowly being destroyed by two groups. Undoubtedly, the Mayans were cornered, confined, and trapped within their distinct villages with little to nowhere to run and without a shadow of a doubt; these acts were deliberate acts of genocide in hopes of destroying this culture.

Aftermath of the Genocide

All in all a total of two hundred thousand Mayans died in the genocide in between 1981 and 1983. Many Mayans managed to migrate to the outskirts of Guatemala and settle in other countries such as Mexico or seek asylum within the United States. Former dictator Montt was sentenced to prison and faced trial for his crimes against humanity, where he was found guilty and sentenced in 2013. Who was to blame for the genocide? Undoubtedly, Montt and his regime were to blame for the bulk of the atrocities, but unfortunately it is more complex than it might seem. Firstly, many scholars and even Mayan people would place the blame on the insurgents as well due to the fact that they caused just as much havoc during the same timeframe. The crimes they committed were no less in ferociousness as that of Montt's army, but rather of the same magnitude. Secondly, some would blame the United States and CIA for the civil war which indirectly leads to the genocide, since it was with their aid that Montt was placed in power. Recently, reports of Israel having a hand in the genocide have also come to surface. Some reports claim that the Reagan administration worked with Israeli officials in providing helicopters to the Guatemalan army so that they could hunt down any and all fleeing villagers. In one interview, a soldier under General Otto Perez Molina (the current Guatemalan President) stated:

“they told me how they would strangle people with lassos, slit women with machetes, shoot people in the head in front of the neighbors, us U.S. planes, helicopters and 50 gram bombs to attack people if they fled into the hills” (Parry “Israel’s Hand in Guatemala’s Genocide”).

In fact, former president Reagan is heavily blamed for his role in the entire ordeal, naming him and the entire United States as enablers of the act. Since 1953, the United States had a heavy hand and influence in Guatemalan politics. During the time of the scare of Communism, former president Eisenhower, as well as former U.S. ambassador John Puerifoy, stated their concern for communism taking over in Guatemala and eventually other areas because the president, Arbenz, was a communist (or so they proclaimed). Thus, in 1953 the CIA successfully overthrew him. Then in 1982, once again the CIA overthrew the president of Guatemala and installed Montt as president, which is when all the turmoil hit its peak.

Without a doubt, many people are to blame for the endured devastation of the Mayan people. There is no justification, nor solid reasoning for why these acts were committed. In the same respect as the Assyrian plight during Seyfo, Mayans have not had an equal voice in history. This genocide, though very disturbing and one of the worst during the twentieth century, has not received as much recognition as other genocides of its time. Despite its drastic magnitude, it too has lost its place in history books and is seldom discussed.

There are many reasons for this that can be argued. Firstly, when observing this genocide there is one factor that stands out as discussed previously and that is that it occurred amidst a civil war, thus the war takes precedence in history. Most scholarly

articles and books discuss the civil war itself and at times make mention of the massacres that occurred during it; however, they seldom make mention of the genocide alone. To some degree, it has become overshadowed by the war and it has become difficult to distinguish the lives lost during the genocide alone versus the lives lost during the war. Secondly, similar to the Assyrians and their indigenous status, Mayans share the same class; therefore their Diaspora is not as large as more dominant cultures. The Mayans that were able to share their testimonies were those that were either seeking asylum or those that were interviewed. Just like with the Assyrians, there is this lack of empathy or difficulty in forming empathy towards the Mayans, due to their indigenous status and the lack of awareness regarding their culture. Thirdly, there are conflicting arguments on the genocide. As Linstroth wrote in his piece, some Mayans that worked in the immigration services stated that those giving testimonies were “exaggerating” their accounts to seek asylum in the United States. Some Mayans were for the insurgents and thus might have different accounts for what took place during the war. There are conflicting accounts and that paves room for arguments amongst scholars and humanitarians about whether or not this should/should not be considered an act of genocide. Such reasoning and murkiness has led to the plight of the Mayans to be nearly forgotten or overlooked.

Finally, similar to the Assyrian case, the Mayan genocide puts into perspective many of the theories discussed in earlier chapters including rational choice theory, Symbolic politics theory, and ethnic/group sentiment¹⁰. Undoubtedly, both of these cases have shown perpetrators displaying extreme and destructive means in carrying out these

¹⁰ One of the two main perpetrators of this genocide were the rebel groups which contained Mayan individuals as well. This particular part of the genocide is an outlier to the group entitlement theory. Although these rebel groups were trying to promote a stance for their own group, they were also killing members within their own group.

mass murders, which eludes to rational choice playing a heavy role in these acts. It is important to observe the importance of self-preservation and preservation of one's own culture/religion and most importantly expanding one's own stance in society, which has a strong basis for symbolic politics and group sentiment¹¹.

¹¹ Please see conclusion for more thorough discussion of evidence and theories.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This past century has been shaken by a pandemic of atrocities committed in various parts of the world. Although each act against humanity is equally alarming and appalling, each incident has not been portrayed by the same token; rather, some acts of genocide have received far more historical consideration than others. This research analyzed two historical genocides, both of catastrophic impacts to their victims that have received far lesser coverage and acknowledgment throughout history. This research sought to address at two specific questions: first, why do genocides occur? And secondly, why are some genocides acknowledged more than others?

In order to answer the first question, we analyzed the meaning and various forms of genocide as well as the various theories that are discussed among scholars and humanitarians.

There are many conflicting theories with regards to genocide and why it occurs. As discussed earlier, many of these theories are controversial for various reasons and some are deemed inadequate. The two theories I believe are most plausible with regards to this topic are group sentiment and structural theories. Both explain two dynamics that play a role in genocide. Firstly, the structure of a state is of high importance, not only the type of regime within the state, but also the stability of the state as well as we see in both of the case studies presented. With the Assyrian genocide, it is clear that there was an authoritarian state under an empire that was slowly losing power and falling apart. This in turn causes friction not only internally but externally as well. In this case structural theory is useful for explaining the causes of genocide, because one can infer that due to the

instability of the empire, it drove the Ottomans to take the most extreme precautions to maintain power. Similarly, Guatemala faced the similar circumstances, perhaps even more extreme. Both the Ottoman empire and the Guatemalan regime were experiencing volatility within their respective states whether it be constant shift of power (as was the case of Guatemala) or the threat of losing power (as was the case of Ottomans), both of which can drive the leaders to take extreme measure to maintain power. In the case of Guatemala, the country was unstable for decades and was faced with many coups, protests and revolutions. For the most part, Guatemala was subjected to dictatorial regimes that limited social and economic equality. In both of these cases, the indigenous groups were silenced, shunned, and treated as second class citizens by their respective regimes. The types of government that are in power are a vital aspect when observing why genocides occur, because more often than not dictatorships are highly prone to such acts of violence, because dictatorships are usually internally unstable.

Secondly, the theory of group entitlement and ethnic sentiment is a core player in genocides. In the Assyrian genocide, the Ottomans wanted to unite Muslims against all Christians portraying them in a very negative light. There were two main groups that the Ottomans were particularly favorable towards, first being Islamic and the second being Turkish. The Empire was able to mobilize Muslims against Christians by portraying them as villainous deviants who merely want to destroy Islam and its very essence. In the case of Guatemala, the government was more favorable towards the minority groups or non-indigenous members and the guerrilla groups were more favorable towards anti-government individuals, those caught in the middle of this crossfire were the indigenous Mayans who had little to no affiliation with either group. Group entitlement paves way

for groups to feel as though they are the ones that are most deserving within the state and they use this mentality to implement this notion in others within their groups. It allows room for discrimination and intolerance, most importantly it opens the door for ethnic violence. Ethnic sentiment allows different ethnic groups to mobilize together towards a particular cause, no matter how extreme. As stated in Chapter 3 of this research, group entitlement offers two dimensions: firstly, groups may become targets because of their mobility and/or success; secondly, groups may become targets because of their inferior social status.

The international dimension plays a key role in both of these genocides in various aspects. International intervention in respect to preventing and aiding genocide is an aspect seldom touched on. Alliances play important parts during these acts, because they can either a) help the perpetrators in achieving their goals or b) help the victims in ceasing the genocide. Both of these cases show how different countries played different roles during the genocides. For example, Russia can be seen not only as an underlying factor for the genocide as it posed a power threat to the Ottoman's, but also as an ally for the Assyrians by offering military protection to some extent. On a similar note, during the Guatemalan genocide, there were rising tensions between the United States and the former Soviet Union; such tension caused the U.S. to suspect Soviets of aiding rebels and therefore provoked Americans to support the Guatemalan government's counter-insurgency efforts that tragically left many Mayan dead. The international community plays an important role on how these genocides erupt and maintain sustenance. To some extent, one could argue that the external factors can have more of an effect on a particular genocide (whether positive or negative) than the actual internal factors.

These two theories mentioned are common denominators amongst most genocides and more often than not are the leading perpetrators of crimes against humanity. Generally they are the cause of intolerance within society and the cause of genocides. The second issue this research addressed is why certain genocides are more acknowledged or more recognized than others?

This is a complicated question to answer simply because there is no single correct answer. The main reason is that the genocides discussed in this research are against indigenous groups that have little to no voice in their own respective regions, let alone the rest of the world. Assyrians and Mayans, though rich in history, are second class citizens globally and that is an important fact. Often times scholars limit the status of these individuals to their respective countries, when in reality their status is of global nature; no matter where they choose to live, they will always be minorities, indigenous, and treated as such. There is also a lack of awareness about these cultures. Their histories are hardly touched on in classroom books, therefore it is difficult for members of the first world to feel empathetic/sympathetic towards groups they know little to nothing about. Although countries such as England, France and Germany discuss Assyrians and their history, countries like the United States seldom do and this creates a cultural and social barrier among these indigenous groups, elites, and global citizens.

A second aspect that should be taken into account is that both of the case studies at took place over a vast period of time which creates confusion and opens room for debate as to whether or not the acts are genocidal. There seems to be a correlation between the time frame of massacres, their frequency, and global sentiment. When massacres occur frequently against groups over a span of time, the acts are deemed less

genocidal and more as internal conflicts that occur constantly over time. For example, the Assyrians didn't just experience massacres during the 1915 Seyfo Genocide, but in the mid-1800s as well. The Guatemalan case had decades of intolerance towards the Mayans throughout different regimes. In fact, the case of Guatemala is very complex because the Mayans faced deliberate attacks since the 1800's as well and throughout the civil war, which in turn could be why the Mayan case is often not recognized as a genocide, but rather an effect of war. The two perpetrators during this conflict were both members of the Guatemalan army as well as the rebel groups (which contained Mayan people), thus leading many scholars to argue that the people murdered were casualties of war.

A third aspect is the surrounding dynamics around these genocides. With regards to the Assyrians, the genocide took place amidst the Ottoman Empire's slow disintegration and its attack on the Armenians and Greeks as well. The Armenians and Greeks, both having nations of their own and rather large communities, are more recognized than the Assyrians which have smaller populations and no nation-state of their own. Furthermore, history tends to focus on the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and the massacres against Armenians and Greeks, than the Assyrians. With regards to Guatemala, the genocide took place amidst a civil war and vast amount of coups/regime changes. Thus, history tends to shed light more so on the turmoil that took place for decades, rather than the genocide that lasted three years.

Lastly, there is the element of denial. In this case, I'm not speaking of the denial from the deliberate culprits, but rather the culprits beneath surface. For example, the Assyrian genocide was carried out by Turks and Kurds, but if one looks deeper it is evident that the the Germans had some responsibility. For example, the German Kaiser

and the ambassador to the Ottomans, funded and financed the genocide and war against Russians that took place (Travis 233-237). This makes countries and allies of such countries, more susceptible in not shedding light on such matters in order to avoid any blame. The Guatemalan genocide was carried out by the army and guerrillas, yet the United States, CIA and Israel all shared a part in the matter. Once again, these countries and entities take the stance of turning a blind eye to avoid acknowledging their mistakes. This is an important element that is overlooked when discussing why certain genocides are overshadowed by others.

There were some limitations to this research. Firstly, I only discussed two cases rather than a larger group of cases, which leaves room for certain biases. Secondly, both of these genocides lacked a substantive amount of scholarly work, which makes it difficult to thoroughly analyze the drastic impacts of the atrocities. Additionally, much of the historical evidence for both cases is incomplete and not always accessible; this includes government documents and/or any first-person accounts of people who might have already died, thus cannot be interviewed. The research touches on elements different from other scholarly research by observing two genocides that are infrequently discussed in hopes of understanding why genocides occur. By analyzing such cases, perhaps we can observe warning signs for current and future genocides. The research on both of these studies ¹² can be related to the current plight of Assyrians in Iraq and Syria, as well as the Syrian civilians caught in the crossfires between the Assad regime and rebel groups. My theory is that if we begin acknowledging genocides against all members, we will be able to find adequate measures for preventing genocides by observing warning signs. I hope

¹² Although this research compares only two cases that have similar causes and outcomes, a comparison of additional cases – where there were ethnic tensions, but genocide did not occur because of the absence of a key cause—would strengthen the analysis.

further my research on this study and further examine the correlation between human rights and political structures within states in hopes of understanding why certain states are more prone to genocidal behavior, whereas other states are not.

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