



# Genocide and permanent security

Anthropological Theory

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DOI: 10.1177/14634996261433688

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## Abstract

This essay accounts for this dual function of “genocide” as simultaneously a vehicle of state power and resource to challenge it by situating it in the long history of permanent security rather than in a whiggish story of civilizational progress. Synonymous with European empire, the foundation of the European state and global capitalism, permanent security is sovereignty’s conceit that reserves the right to “shock the conscience of mankind” in the name of self-preservation. Whether “genocide” serves or contests this conceit is the question.

## Keywords

genocide, permanent security, original accumulation, empire, bombing

What is the function of the concept and law of genocide today? That is a burning question in the international recognition campaigns for the Rohingya people of Myanmar, the Uyghurs of China, Ukrainians, and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. To answer this question, it is necessary to begin in the 1940s and think backwards and forwards. As is well known, Raphael Lemkin (1900–1959) coined the term in writing his book, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, published in late 1944, but completed a year before (Lemkin, 1944). Much to his disappointment, his neologism did not feature as an independent indictment in the Nuremberg Trials; it was listed merely as an example of a war crime. Then, in late 1946, the General Assembly of the United Nations resolved to develop a treaty on genocide to repair the faults of the Nuremberg judgements, which limited crimes against humanity to wartime. After two years of negotiations, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide was passed in late 1948.

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The convention was very different from Lemkin's formulation in *Axis Rule*. His broad definition of genocide sought to capture the totality of a genocidal occupation that aimed to cripple or destroy a nation in various ways, including cultural and political dimensions. It was replaced by a legal code that focused almost exclusively on mass biological destruction, because that is what most UN delegates associated with what later became known as the Holocaust. For Lemkin, genocide was not only the Holocaust—the “crime without a name” as British prime minister Winston Churchill is often quoted as asserting, although he was referring to the German army's mass destruction of Soviet civilians in its invasion of the USSR in 1941: genocidal warfare so to speak. Lemkin averred that genocide was a synonym for “wars of destruction” (Lemkin, 1944: 80), and that many nationalities were victims of German genocidal practices. He sought to update the Hague Conventions of (1899 and 1907) that covered occupations of conquered territory to outlaw genocidal occupations: genocide as a modality of warfare. But Lemkin's point was lost in genocide's codification in international law, which distinguished between war and genocide (Moses, 2025).

This transition is well known but insufficiently appreciated in paeons written to the “human rights revolution” after the Second World War, because the whiggish understanding of the genocide convention emplots it into a progressive story of legal learning processes. Taking the twentieth century as a whole, that story posits that, after both world wars, the “international community” decided to establish new norms and laws to prevent the catastrophes that had befallen it. Whatever the limitations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Genocide Convention, and the Refugee and Geneva Conventions, so it continues, subsequent developments are gradually perfecting the foundations established in the late 1940s and early 1950s (e.g. Bass, 2000)

A longer-term perspective reveals a more complex, and fraught, story. The invention of genocide and its legal codification marked a moment in the enduring contest to tame state power via law and what I call the “language of transgression”: the idiom defining truly transgressive evil that “shocks the conscience of mankind” and calls for intervention. This language can be traced to theological critiques of the Spanish conquest of the Americas in the sixteenth century by figures like Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) and Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546). From the outset, massacres and labor exploitation stood at the center of controversy. These Spanish priests assailed such abuses as barbaric and savage, reversing the Eurocentric categories. However, they did not oppose empire as such, which they regard a legitimate vehicle for spreading Christianity (Castro, 2007). Outright anti-colonial figures, by contrast, could also adopt the language of transgression to confront empire and its extractive practices (Moses, 2021).

As a Polish-Jewish lawyer who experienced antisemitism in interwar Poland, studied the Soviet collectivization in Ukraine, and was a believer in cultural collectives (nations, religions, ethnicities) as the building blocks of humanity, Lemkin, a committed Zionist, embodied a “small nations” subjectivity and view of history (Etkind, 2023a; Loeffler, 2017). This subjectivity was constitutively anti-colonial because it understood genocide as a function of imperial expansion that violated the rights, and even threatened the existence, of occupied peoples. His conceptualization of genocide in *Axis Rule* reflects this intention. At the same time, as a liberal, anti-communist lawyer, he believed in the

efficacy of humanitarian empire as the vehicle for spreading “civilization,” much like the sixteenth century Spanish theologians whose writings he admired. Also a pragmatist, he participated in the radical narrowing of his genocide concept as it was codified by the United Nations to ensure that a convention was passed, even if with a lowest-common-denominator definition.

In doing so, Lemkin was co-responsible for “depoliticizing” genocide by making it a crime against identity alone, perpetrated against groups for no other reason than for its hated racial or national attributes, despised for who they are and not for anything they have done. In this way, the typical circumstances in which masses of civilians were killed after the World War II—in wars of national liberation and in civil/secessionist wars—would be difficult to classify as genocide despite the efforts of victim groups and their advocates. That was why the majority of UN delegates radically narrowed Lemkin’s “anticolonial” conception of genocide. They wanted to make genocide a tool for states by enabling them to wage wars of extermination without being caught by the genocide convention: to protect sovereignty’s right to “permanent security,” namely to violate civilized norms in circumstances of perceived existential danger by engaging in military campaigns against entire populations.

And yet, as the “crime of crimes,” as it came to be called, genocide was—and remains—a powerful rhetorical tool for victims of history to name their traumatic experiences and seek international protection. The global support for South Africa’s case against the State of Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) furnishes an example of this function. The anti-colonial conceptualization of genocide continues to challenge the permanent security practices of powerful states that hide behind genocide convention’s exacting standard of proof.

This short essay accounts for this dual function of genocide by situating it in the long history of permanent security rather than in a whiggish story of civilizational progress. Synonymous with European empire, the foundation of the European state and global capitalism, permanent security is sovereignty’s conceit that reserves the right to “shock the conscience of mankind” in the name of self-preservation. Whether “genocide” serves or contests this conceit is the question.

## **Permanent security and the birth of modernity**

Permanent security was born with the European state and capitalism, and both were born in expansion abroad. Karl Marx (1818–1883) partially captured this coupling in his notion of “so-called original [*ursprüngliche*, often translated as ‘primitive’] accumulation,” the process by which English commons and church lands were privatized and agricultural producers were separated from their means of production to become wage laborers, whose surplus the capitalist kept in accumulating further capital. Marx focused on the expropriation and proletarianization of the English peasantry—what he called “the classic form” of original accumulation—because he wanted to account for the birth of industrial capitalism in England (Marx, 1906: 787). But he also observed that this English transformation was dependent on earlier imperial developments. “In actual history,” declared Marx, “it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly

force, play the great part” in original accumulation (Marx, 1906: 785). He adumbrated the violent expropriations of European empire beginning with the Spanish in the Americas:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. (Marx, 1906: 823)

This list suggests original accumulation outside Europe consisted mainly of violent plunder: “The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement, and murder, floated back to the mother-country and were there turned into capital” (Marx, 1906: 823).

Marx followed his contemporaries in distinguishing between colonies of exploitation and settler colonialism. The latter were “real Colonies, virgin soils, colonised by free immigrants” and “colonies properly called” (Marx, 1906: 838n1). But he was less interested in the fate of their Indigenous peoples than in the capitalist exploitation of settlers. For that reason, he regarded colonies of exploitation as more brutal: “The treatment of the aborigines was, naturally, most frightful in plantation-colonies destined for export trade only, such as the West Indies, and in rich and well-populated countries, such as Mexico and India, that were given over to plunder.” (Marx, 1906: 825). Missing was a sustained analysis of the principal form of original accumulation in settler colonies, namely the expropriation of the land after the removal of its indigenous owners (Coulthard, 2014: 19–20). Dispossession rather than proletarianization is the salient mode of accumulation in the settler colonies, amounting to a distinctive mode of “settler accumulation” (Brown, 2014: 7).

This mode of accumulation has been analyzed most acutely by the Australian historian Patrick Wolfe, who defined settler colonialism as a structure rather than event. Indigenous labor is not the main source of accumulation; land is. Labor—whether free or enslaved—is imported and is fed by the ceaseless expansion of agriculture that displaces the Indigenous population. In this way, the international slave trade was premised on settler-colonial elimination of indigenous control of land (Wolfe, 2006). Eliminating indigenous people could take various forms: “Indigenous people are either rendered dependent on the introduced economy or reduced to the stock-raids that provide the classic pretext for colonial death-squads” (Wolfe, 2006: 395). Either way, their collective ownership of land needs to be smashed to enable the labor exploitation that more interested Marx. That is the deep structure of settler accumulation.

For his part, Marx noted settler colonial violence only briefly in his *Capital*, reporting how settlers in New England set premiums on “every Indian scalp and every captured red skin” (Marx, 1906: 825–826). His mention that this practice occurred when “a certain tribe” was proclaimed “rebels” points to the logic of permanent security in colonialism and state-building: namely defending original accumulation from indigenous resistance.

The German jurist Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) made this point although from the opposite political perspective. A proponent of European empire and for a time an

apologist for the Nazi state, Schmitt well understood the violence of what he called “land appropriation” (*Landnahme*). It is the process of territorial conquest and annexation that he saw as the basis not only of European expansion but of statehood itself. The establishment of European states could be traced to what he termed “the so-called *Völkerwanderung*,” mass migrations of peoples tantamount to “a series of great land appropriations.” The same process obtained in empire: “The history of colonialism in its entirety is as well a history of spatially determined processes of settlement in which order and orientation are combined.” The legal order of European empires was predicated on control of territory that was wrested from “‘wild’ peoples” in colonial wars of annihilation. These wars disregarded the constraints of competition and warfare among European states, which were displaced to the far-off non-European lands, thereby stabilizing Europe (Schmitt, 2002: 80–82, 132, 142). The liberal Bernard Dernburg (1865–1937), state secretary of the German Colonial Office from 1907 to 1910, was a reformer who opposed genocidal policies towards Germany’s African subjects. However, he understood what great European land appropriations meant for indigenous peoples.

It cannot be doubted that some aboriginal tribes, like some animals, will have to disappear in the civilization process [*in der Zivilisation untergehen müssen*] if they are not to degenerate and become wards of the state. We are fortunate in our German colonies that we are not too heavily burdened by such elements. But the history of colonization of the United States, surely the greatest colonial project that the world has ever seen, had as its first act, the virtually complete extermination [*Vernichtung*] of the aborigines. (Schmoller et al., 1907: 8)

Combined with his influential theory of statehood as consisting in the sovereign’s ability to proclaim states of emergency and violently impose order, Schmitt’s notion of land appropriation effectively made imperial conquest and settler colonialism the secret driver of Western state development. And that development necessarily entailed the extermination of indigenous peoples.

The language of transgression developed to allow this process of state formation and original accumulation by smashing resistance in two ways: first by justifying settler colonial warfare against indigenous resistance, and secondly by condemning the permanent security practices of imperial rivals, whether the Iberian powers in the early modern period or the fascist and communist ones in the twentieth century. I call them illiberal, because they tended not to be perpetrated in the name of universal values. Liberal modes of permanent security, by contrast, normalized its modality of settlement, state-formation, and original accumulation as a theodicy, a story of civilizational progress that benefitted humanity.

Paradoxically, the greater destructive potential inheres in liberal permanent security, because it does not face the dilemma of its illiberal variant, namely having to limit reprisal killing because empires of exploitation depend on conquered populations for tribute and labor. Settler colonial formations, by contrast, tend to replace conquered populations as they sought the land and not to the labor of those they conquered. What is more, because they tended to expansion rather than autarky, the ambition of permanent liberal security is global.

## Elements of illiberal permanent security

Illiberal permanent security possesses three attributes. First, groups are reified as the premise for accusations of *collective guilt*: minorities and social classes as internally homogeneous historical actors with collective agency and interchangeable parts. It is a group-based logic of vicarious responsibility, such that one can punish or kill members of a community in one locality to avenge crimes that some members co-religionists (or co-nationals) in another community may have committed against one's own co-religionists/nationals elsewhere—even long ago: the logic operates in time as well as in space. As the anthropologist Peter Loizos elaborates, this “totalizing doctrine of collective passive solidarity allows the nationalist to treat all members of an enemy group as dangerously active. If they are fertile women they will reproduce and nurture children who will grow into fighting men, or reproducers in turn. Older men and women are givers of advice and succour, and children are simply potential adults. To the reflective nationalist there can be neither non-combatants nor innocents” (Loizos, 1998: 650).

The second element is *pre-emption*. Groups can be targeted not for what its members have done but for what some of them might do. Those sympathetic to state security imperatives will assert its strategic logic in such circumstances. Rounding up all members of a group because some of them collaborated with the enemy is routine in wartime emergencies, they will say. Punishing an entire group to prevent potential attacks by some of its members is a security crime. Seeking to destroy or cripple groups on this logic so they can never again represent a threat is a crime of permanent security.

The third element is thus *paranoia*. Illiberal permanent security is governed more by fantastical security imperatives—paranoid threat assessments—than by the aesthetic of racial purity as implied by the Holocaust archetype. The historian Saul Friedländer posed the analytical task thus: how to explain why Nazis and many other Europeans regarded Jews “as an *active threat*, for all of Aryan humanity in the long run, and in the immediate future for a Reich embroiled in a world war,” meaning that “the Jews had to be exterminated before they could harm ‘Fortress Europe’ from within or join forces with the enemy coalition they had themselves set against the Reich” (Friedländer, 2007: 557).

The Nazis perfected illiberal permanent security, and that is what the genocide convention proscribes. Its model understood Holocaust as a non-political hate crime. Whereas “normal; ethnic/national conflict pertains to ‘real’ issues, like land, resources, political power, and national security, no such conflict is said to be discernible in the Holocaust of European Jewry, whose victims were passive and agentless objects of the perpetrators’ ‘hallucinatory’ ideology” (Kuper, 1981: 91–94). Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe gave this proposition a philosophical underpinning by arguing that “the extermination of the Jews . . . is a phenomenon which follows *essentially* no logic (political, economic, social, military, etc.) other than a spiritual one, degraded as it may be” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990: 37). The historian Martin Gilbert underlined this distinction when he wrote that the Nazis killed Jews not “because they were soldiers or partisans, or constituted a threat to German rule, but because they had been characterized as beneath the dignity of human beings” (Gilbert, 2004: 25). The French political scientist Jacques Semelin likewise separated destruction for the sake of subjugation, which is political and partial, from destruction as total eradication, like the

Holocaust, which was driven by delusional, paranoid and non-political considerations of ethnic purity and aesthetics (Semelin, 2007: 37–42, 332–342). The former characterizes civil wars, the latter genocide.

The Nuremberg judges did not allow such paranoid threat perceptions to count as evidence of military necessity. They rightly distinguished between real threats, like partisan, who were legitimate targets, and anticipated threats, like Jewish children who may grow up to be partisans, who were illegitimate targets. This necessary distinction, though, left undisturbed military action against entire societies and what is effectively genocidal warfare characterized by political violence, like anti-colonial rebellions. This distinction between political non-genocide on the one hand, and racial, ideological genocide on the one other conceals the combatant/civilian distinction *within* such groups. It ignores the fact that both categories of violence contain massacres of civilians who pose no objective threat to perpetrators in actual conflicts. This conventional view suggests a hierarchy between types of human destruction. Non-political violence is worse because it targets innocent victims of paranoid and ultimately inexplicable racial hysteria, while political violence is an explicable outcome of interethnic conflict, often in civil war, in which the victims are not passive and therefore not completely innocent.

## Permanent security and killing children

The Nazi commander of *Einsatzgruppe D*, SS-Führer Otto Ohlendorf (1907–1951), drew on an existing German security discourse for the rationale of his troops' mass murder of Jews. Believing himself innocent of criminal intentions at his trial in 1947, which starred Benjamin Ferencz, he did not cite superior orders to escape the hangman's noose: he justified them in the name of "necessity." When asked about murdering children, he maintained that Jewish children would grow up to resist the occupation when they understood that Germans had murdered their parents. Realizing that he was advancing an unconventional argument, Ohlendorf explained that the Germans sought more than military security; their aim was permanent security, which entailed a radically different temporal structure. It was concerned not only with eliminating immediate threats but also with future threats. Governed by a logic of prevention (future threats) as well as pre-emption (imminent threats), it strove to close the gap between perceived insecurity and permanent security. It thereby entails a fatally restless and dynamic process indentured to a paranoid subject who not only perceives grave threats but manufactures circumstances in which they become self-fulfilling prophecies; for example, attacking others who are thereby driven into a hostile (defensive) posture (Massumi, 2007).

Herewith, Ohlendorf expressed a truth about state and para-state thinking and behavior that rarely speaks its name. At times, articulate mass murderers can give devastatingly clear accounts of their motivations that we ignore because of their provenance. But the analytical point is not to adopt Ohlendorf point of view but to turn the concept back onto him and his ilk, to expose the terrible implications of what he was saying about the Nazi project and sovereignty generally.

Killing children as future threats is a sure sign of illiberal permanent security aspirations. The Biblical book of Exodus recounts how the Egyptian pharaoh ordered midwives

to drown Hebrew baby boys to weaken the captive Jewish people. Surviving this murderous security policy, this author's namesake (but not relative), Moses, went on to lead the Jews out of slavery and exile to the "promised land" (Exodus 1: 22). Centuries later, as if acting on precedent, King Herod, the Roman-appointed ruler of Judea, felt threatened after he was informed that the infant Jesus was "king of the Jews" as prophesied in the scriptures. In the infamous "massacre of the innocents," Herod had baby boys in Bethlehem murdered to ensure that the newborn Jesus would be eliminated, inaugurating an enduring subject in the Jewish and Christian artistic imaginations (Matthew 2: 16–18; Jacobus, 1999). To likewise eliminate potential rivals, the eldest son of a deceased sultan in the early Ottoman court would imprison and ultimately execute his brothers, even if they were infants (Börekçi, 2009: 409).

The practice of killing perceived future threats is all-too modern as well. Young Turk leader Talaat Pasha explained the deportations of Armenians in these terms in an interview with a German newspaper in 1916: "We have been reproached for making no distinction between the innocent Armenians and the guilty: but that was utterly impossible in view of the fact that those who are innocent today might be guilty tomorrow" (Guroian, 1986: 143). North American settlers justified murdering Indian children with the argument that "nits make lice" (Kane, 1999). More recently, the former director of Guatemala's Peace Archives told the national court prosecuting military leaders for various crimes against indigenous people in the 1990s that "The army's objective with the children was to eliminate the seed for future guerrillas" (Burt, 2016: 149–150).

After killing 160 children on a military base in Peshawar, Pakistan, in 2014, a Taliban spokesman said that they "killed children in [the] army school because they would join [the] army in the future." Likewise, a landlord militia leader in India admitted that "We kill children because they will grow up to become Naxalites [Maoist insurgents] and we kill women because they will give birth to Naxalites" (Parashar, 2014). When the children of an Islamic home school group in upstate New York asked why a man arrested for plotting to attack their mosque wanted to kill them, they did not understand his paranoid logic: he saw the children as future Islamic terrorists in the USA, so he sought to eliminate them in an act of anticipatory self-defense.

That was also the logic of two rabbis in a West Bank settlement when they wrote *The King's Torah*, in which they stated that Jewish law licensed killing Palestinian babies and children because "it is clear that they will grow to harm us" (Estrin, 2010). The Australian terrorist who murdered 51 praying Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019, shared this logic. Children "will one day become teens, then adults, voting against the wishes of our people, practicing the cultural and religious practices of the invaders, taking other people's lands, work, houses and even attacking and killing our children," he declared. The necessary action is inescapable: "You burn the nest and kill the vipers, no matter their age" (Tarant, 2019).

## Liberal permanent security

Liberal powers draw the line at killing children as policy; they are innocent and cannot be an explicit target. That is what the judges at Nuremberg told Ohlendorf. They cannot be

considered a future threat. In response, Ohlendorf said that Allied bombers knowingly killed German children in flattening their cities. But that is different, is the argument. Killing children in this way was acceptable because it was an adjunct to a higher purpose and not an end in itself. That is the theory of mass killing in liberal permanent security.

Its theoretical justification was given by none other than Robert Jackson, the US chief prosecutor at Nuremberg. A month after the Nuremberg Charter was issued, explained its rationale in a *New York Times Magazine* article. Titled “The Worst Crime of All,” he justified why aggressive wars were the supreme crime because all other wartime crimes derived from the act of invasion. From the terrible ravages of the war that he witnessed as he toured defeated Germany and learned of its crimes, he drew further conclusion: “If there are to be future wars we have got to win them” by “being better killers, by killing more and killing more quickly than the enemy, by killing with less risk to ourselves” (Jackson, 1945: 89). In making this declaration, he then proceeded to advocate violating the principle of distinction between combatants and non-combatants by casting warfare as conflict between peoples and not solely military forces. He was subtly justifying civilian destruction, although he did not mention the Allies’ bombing of German and Japanese cities that killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. “For the fact is obvious that modern war has become more and more a struggle between whole populations, not between armies alone. The issue is which shall be subjugated and which will survive” (Jackson, 1945: 89). Killing the enemy’s civilians until they surrendered in the name of military necessity was the strategy. That is modality of liberal permanent security, which can kill as many children as genocidal illiberal permanent security.

## Permanent security today

States will wantonly kill the enemy civilians, including children, when they feel it necessary, whether the Russians in Ukraine or Israelis in Gaza. To be sure, those states claim they are waging legitimate warfare in the manner of liberal permanent security: not genocide. Their critics, by contrast, focus on the treatment of Ukrainian and Palestinian children, their kidnapping and bombing in the former, and their bombing, shooting, starvation, and subjection to lethal exposure in the latter. In doing so, they are trying to narrate them into the terrible historical practice of targeting enemy children as future threats that characterizes illiberal permanent security. They are trying to paint them as Nazis: like Ohlendorf.

Progressive Israelis, like the historian Moshe Zimmermann, openly worry that the Israeli government is reasoning about Palestinians as a future threat: “in the internal discussion in Israel, it plays a role that people who are today sitting in the government openly say that for us it makes no difference whether it is small children or women: the Palestinians—it begins with ‘those Palestinians in Gaza are from the outset are guilty for what happened [on 7 October 2023], and there we can act prophylactically’” (Zimmermann, 2025: 1.17m 32–48s). He went so far as to invoke Heinrich Himmler’s notorious Posen speech of 4 October 1943 that justified murdering Jews to save Germany from a security threat, saying “it sounds familiar when one hears the talk on the rightwing of Israel.” If the comparison held, he concluded, then Israelis on the right “are the same” as the Nazis (Zimmermann,

2025: 1.18m 34s). Such analogies can threaten academic employment in many countries, but a German audience listened to Zimmermann's elaborations in stunned silence, seemingly unable to contradict the honored guest from Jerusalem.

International relations scholars have understood the aspiration for total domination as inimical to human society. The intellectual tradition of "offensive realism" stretching back to the beginning of the twentieth century identified the aspiration of great power "supremacy" as hubristic (Morefield, 2009). "Absolute security," Henry Kissinger famously called it, deeming the goal deeply disruptive: "Absolute security for one power means absolute insecurity for all others," he wrote in 1957, and repeated in other contexts, from Russian to Israeli policy, in subsequent decades (Kissinger, 1957: 2). This goal was extended to the globe in the US-led "war on terror" that made pre-empting threats its feature. "If necessary," declared US National Security Strategy in 2006, "under long-standing principles of self defense, we do not rule out the use of force before attacks occur, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack" (Bush, 2006: 43). Now Russians say the same of US policy, even mischievously quoting Kissinger (Pukhov, 2012). Historian Alexander Etkind (2023b) has pointed out that if an aggression starts from the concerns about permanent/absolute security, it leads to "nemesis" that is defined as the evil action returning to the evildoer on the amplified scale. Examples are the expansion of NATO as the result (rather than the cause) of the Russian invasion of the Ukraine, and desolation of the Crimean Peninsula after its annexation by Russia (Putin wished to turn it into "our Mecca" but the resorts and sanctuaries are empty because the security situation has much worsened).

International relations scholars have not applied this insight to the question of genocide. Focusing on what the language of transgression highlights as truly shocking evil reveals moments of transition in global sensibilities. Since the Second World War, the Holocaust and analogizable events, like the Genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994, have "shocked the conscience." Now billions are shocked by Gaza, if not Western political classes and seemingly most Jewish people; they are shocked by Hamas atrocities on 7 October 2023. The Israeli destruction of Gaza is an intractable source of discursive disputation because it is—or was—an armed conflict in the mode of Jackson's liberal permanent security but is accompanied by Nazi-like genocidal rhetoric, as Zimmermann and many others have observed. What is more, it is occurring in the context of an illegal occupation of an Indigenous people that resists its colonization and exile in various ways, from the terroristic to the non-violent.

Increasingly, the Holocaust narrative seems to be giving way to a new understanding of evil for two reasons: because the Holocaust narrative has been conscripted to justify Israel's destruction of Gaza—in the name of preventing a "second Holocaust," with Hamas as latter-day Nazis—and because observers from the Global South to the Global North understand colonial occupations, rather than the Holocaust, as the prime historical evil. Now the settler, including the Zionist as the latest colonist, is considered the prime villain of history. How and why this transition is occurring requires greater scrutiny but there is no mistaking the changing winds in the language of transgression. It is illuminating liberal permanent security as genocidal, thereby repoliticizing a concept whose foundations were flawed in its codification in the 1940s.

## Acknowledgements

Part of this text are adapted from the author's *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

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## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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