1 From Ethnocide to Ideocide

This study is concerned with large-scale, culturally motivated violence in our times. Its chapters, whose arguments are previewed here, were drafted between 1998 and 2004. Thus, their principal arguments were developed in the shadow of two major kinds of violence. The first kind, which we saw in Eastern Europe, Rwanda, and India in the early 1990s, showed that the world after 1989 was not going to be entirely progressive and that globalization could expose severe pathologies in the sacred ideologies of nationhood. The second kind, officially globalized under the rubric of the "war on terror," may be marked by the cataclysmic attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Virginia on September 11, 2001. This latter event bracketed the 1990s as a decade of superviolence, a decade characterized by a steady growth in civil and civic warfare in many societies as a feature of everyday life. We now live in a world, articulated differently by states and by media in different national and regional contexts, in which fear often appears to be the source and ground for intensive campaigns of group violence, ranging from riots to extended pogroms.

In the 1940s and for some time after, many scholars began to assume that extreme forms of collective violence, especially those combining large-scale killing with various forms of planned degradation of the human body and human dignity, were direct by-products of totalitarianism, notably of fascism, and were discernable in Mao's China, in Stalin's Soviet Union, and in smaller totalitarian societies. Alas, the 1990s have left no doubt that liberal-democratic societies, as well as a variety of mixed state forms, are susceptible to capture by majoritarian forces and large-scale ethnocidal violence.

So we are forced to ask and answer the question about why the 1990s, the period of what we may now call "high globalization," should also be the period of large-scale violence in a wide range of societies and political regimes? In referring to high globalization (with more than a gesture to high modernism), I flag a set of utopian possibilities and projects that swept many countries, states, and public spheres after the end of the Cold War. These possibilities were captured in a series of intertwined doctrines about open markets and free trade, about the spread of democratic institutions and liberal constitutions, and about the powerful possibilities of the Internet (and related cyber technologies) to mitigate inequality both within and across societies and to increase freedom, transparency, and good governance in even the poorest and most isolated countries. Today, only the most fundamentalist supporters of unfettered economic globalization assume that the domino effects of free trade and high degrees of cross-national market integration and capital flow are always positive.

Thus, this work is one more attempt to address the following question: why should a decade dominated by a global endorsement of open markets, free flow of finance capital, and liberal ideas of constitutional rule, good governance, and active expansion of human rights have produced a plethora of examples of ethnic cleansing on one hand and extreme forms of political violence against civilian populations (a fair definition of terrorism as a tactic) on the other? In the course of what follows, I shall occasionally take issue with some prominent efforts to tackle this question. Here, I confine myself to stating, in simple terms, the ingredients of a different sort of answer, an answer rooted in a preoccupation with the cultural dimensions of globalization. Some critics saw my earlier effort to characterize the (then) emerging world of globalization (1996) as perhaps a bit too harsh in its criticisms of the modern nation-state and as naively cheerful about the benefits of global flows. This essay addresses the darker sides of globalization directly.

To arrive at a better understanding of what globalization may have to do with ethnic cleansing and with terror I propose a series of interlocking ideas. The first step is to recognize that there is a fundamental, and dangerous, idea behind the very idea of the modern nation-state, the idea of a "national ethnos." No modern nation, however benign its political system and however eloquent its public voices may be about the virtues of tolerance, multiculturalism, and inclusion, is free of the idea that its national sovereignty is built on some sort of ethnic genius. We have just seen this point of view expressed with shocking civility by Samuel Huntington (2004), in an open call to alarm about the way in which Hispanic people in

the United States are threatening to secede from the American way, seen as a narrow Euro-Protestant cultural doctrine. So much for the idea that ethnonationalist positions are confined to dark Baltic states, raving African demagogues, or fringe Nazis in England and northern Europe.

It has been widely noted that the idea of a singular national ethnos, far from being a natural outgrowth of this or that soil, has been produced and naturalized at great cost, through rhetorics of war and sacrifice, through punishing disciplines of educational and linguistic uniformity, and through the subordination of myriad local and regional traditions to produce Indians or Frenchmen or Britons or Indonesians (Anderson 1991; Balibar 1990; Scott 1998; Weber 1976). It has also been observed by some of our great political theorists, notably Hannah Arendt (1968), that the idea of a national peoplehood is the Achilles' heel of modern liberal societies. In the argument here, I draw on the ideas of Mary Douglas and other anthropologists, to suggest that the road from national genius to a totalized cosmology of the sacred nation, and further to ethnic purity and cleansing, is relatively direct. There are those that argue that this is only a risk in those modern polities that have mistakenly put blood at the center of their national ideology, but blood and nationalism appear to be in a much fuller and wider embrace in the world as a whole. All nations, under some conditions, demand whole-blood transfusions, usually requiring some part of their blood to be extruded.

This inherent ethnicist tendency in all ideologies of nationalism does not explain why only some national polities become the scenes of large-scale violence, civil war, or ethnic cleansing. Here we need recourse to a second idea, involving the place of social uncertainty in social life. In an earlier essay entitled "Dead Certainty" (1998b), I develop a detailed argument about the ways in which social uncertainty can drive projects of ethnic cleansing that are both vivisectionist and verificationist in their procedures. That is, they seek uncertainty by dismembering the suspect body, the body under suspicion. This species of uncertainty is intimately connected to the reality that today's ethnic groups number in the hundreds of thousands and that their movements, mixtures, cultural styles, and media representations create profound doubts about who exactly are among the "we" and who are among the "they."

The speed and intensity with which both material and ideological elements now circulate across national boundaries have created a new order of uncertainty in social life. Whatever may characterize this new kind of uncertainty, it does not easily fit the dominant, Weberian prophecy about modernity in which earlier, intimate social forms would dissolve, to be replaced by highly regimented bureaucratic-legal orders governed by the growth of procedure and predictability. The forms of such uncertainty are certainly various. One kind of uncertainty is a direct reflection of census concerns: how many persons of this or that sort really exist in a given territory? Or, in the context of rapid migration or refugee movement, how many of "them" are there now among us? Another kind of uncertainty is about what some of these mega identities really mean: for example, what are the normative

characteristics of what the constitution defines as a member of an OBC (Other Backward Caste) in India? A further uncertainty is about whether a particular person really is what he or she claims or appears to be or has historically been. Finally, these various forms of uncertainty create intolerable anxiety about the relationship of many individuals to state-provided goods—ranging from housing and health to safety and sanitation—since these entitlements are frequently directly tied to who "you" are and thus to who "they" are. Each kind of uncertainty gains increasing force whenever there are large-scale movements of persons (for whatever reason), when new rewards or risks attach to large-scale ethnic identities, or when existing networks of social knowledge are eroded by rumor, terror, or social movement. Where one or more of these forms of social uncertainty come into play, violence can create a macabre form of certainty and can become a brutal technique (or folk discovery-procedure) about "them" and, therefore, about "us." This volatile relationship between certainty and uncertainty might make special sense in the era of globalization.

In this context, in myriad ways, some essential principles and procedures of the modern nation-state—the idea of a sovereign and stable territory, the idea of a containable and countable population, the idea of a reliable census, and the idea of stable and transparent categories—have come unglued in the era of globalization, for reasons explored in the chapters that follow. Above all, the certainty that distinctive and singular peoples grow out of and control well-defined national territories has been decisively unsettled by the global fluidity of wealth, arms, peoples, and images that I described in *Modernity at Large* (1996).

In simpler words, where the lines between us and them may have always, in human history, been blurred at the boundaries and unclear across large spaces and big numbers, globalization exacerbates these uncertainties and produces new incentives for cultural purification as more nations lose the illusion of national economic sovereignty or well-being. This observation also reminds us that large-scale violence is not simply the product of antagonistic identities but that violence itself is one of the ways in which the illusion of fixed and charged identities is produced, partly to allay the uncertainties about identity that global flows invariably produce. In this regard, Islamic fundamentalism, Christian fundamentalism, and many other local and regional forms of cultural fundamentalism may be seen as a part of an emerging repertoire of efforts to produce previously unrequired levels of certainty about social identity, values, survival, and dignity. Violence, especially extreme and spectacular violence, is a mode of producing such certainty by mobilizing what I have elsewhere called "full attachment" (1998a), especially when the forces of social uncertainty are allied to other fears about growing inequality, loss of national sovereignty, or threats to local security and livelihood. In this sense, one of the repeat motifs of my own arguments here is that, to use Philip Gourevitch's brutal aphorism about Rwanda, "genocide, after all, is an exercise in community-building" (1998: 95).

The social productivity of violence does not in itself account for the special ways in which violence against groups

defined as minorities seems to have taken on a new life in the 1990s, from the United States to Indonesia and from Norway to Nigeria. One could argue that the still contested European Union is in many ways the most enlightened political formation in the postnational world. Yet, there are two Europes in evidence today: the world of inclusion and multiculturalism in one set of European societies and the anxious xenophobia of what we may call Pim Fortuyn's Europe (Austria, Romania, Holland, France). To account for why otherwise inclusive, democratic, even secular national states spawn ideologies of majoritarianism and racialized nationalism, we need to probe more deeply into the heart of liberalism, as I do in chapter 4.

That analysis leads me to observe that the tip-over into ethnonationalism and even ethnocide in democratic polities has much to do with the strange inner reciprocity of the categories of "majority" and "minority" in liberal social thought, which produces what I call the *anxiety of incompleteness*. Numerical majorities can become predatory and ethnocidal with regard to *small numbers* precisely when some minorities (and their small numbers) remind these majorities of the small gap which lies between their condition as majorities and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted national ethnos. This sense of incompleteness can drive majorities into paroxysms of violence against minorities, in conditions that I analyze in special detail with respect to Muslims in India throughout the book, especially in chapter 5.

Globalization, as a specific way in which states, markets, and ideas about trade and governance have come to be organized, exacerbates the conditions of large-scale violence because it produces a potential collision course between the logics of uncertainty and incompleteness, each of which has its own form and force. As a broad fact about the world of the 1990s, the forces of globalization produced conditions for an increase in large-scale social uncertainty and also in the friction of incompleteness, both of which emerged in the traffic between the categories of majority and minority. The anxiety of incompleteness (always latent in the project of complete national purity) and the sense of social uncertainty about large-scale ethnoracial categories can produce a runaway form of mutual stimulation, which is the road to genocide.

This approach to the growth in large-scale cultural violence in the 1990s—combining uncertainty and incompleteness—can also provide an angle (neither a model nor an explanation) on the problem of why such violence occurs in a relatively small number of cases, especially if the total universe is measured by the current number of independent nation-states. The argument presented here—which pivots on the relationship between globalization, uncertainty, and incompleteness—allows us a way to recognize when the anxiety of incompleteness and unacceptable levels of uncertainty combine in ways that spark large-scale ethnocidal mobilization. One might argue that the co-presence of high levels of both sentiments is a necessary condition of large-scale violence. But sufficiency, as is so often the case in the social sciences, is another matter. Sufficiency might be provided by a rogue state (Iraq and the Kurds), by a racist colonial structure (Rwanda), by a tragically ethnicized constitution-building process (Yugoslavia after Tito), or by criminal leaders driven

by personal greed and illicit commodity networks (Liberia, Sudan). In India, which is a central example throughout this book, the condition of sufficiency appears to have to do with a special contingency that links a major political partition to a series of internal legal and cultural fault lines.

One more point needs to be made. The large-scale violence of the 1990s appears to be typically accompanied by a surplus of rage, an excess of hatred that produces untold forms of degradation and violation, both to the body and the being of the victim: maimed and tortured bodies, burned and raped persons, disemboweled women, hacked and amputated children, sexualized humiliation of every type. What are we to do with this surplus, which has frequently been enacted in public actions, often among friends and neighbors, and is no longer conducted in the covert ways in which the degradation of group warfare used to occur in the past? Considering the many elements that go into a possible answer, I suggest that this excess has something to do with the deformations that globalization has brought to the "narcissism of minor differences," a theme I address in chapter 4.

The core of that argument about the surplus of rage, the urge to degradation, is that the narcissism of minor differences is now vastly more dangerous than in the past because of the new economy of slippage and morphing which characterizes the relationship between majority and minority identities and powers. Since the two categories, owing to the pliability of censuses, constitutions, and changing ideologies of inclusion and equity, can plausibly change places, minor differences are no longer just valued tokens of an uncertain self

and thus especially to be protected, as the original Freudian insight might suggest. In fact, minor differences can become the least acceptable ones, since they further lubricate the slippery two-way traffic between the two categories. The brutality, degradation, and dehumanization that have frequently accompanied the ethnicized violence of the past fifteen years are a sign of conditions in which the very line between minor and major differences has been made uncertain. In these circumstances, the rage and fear that incompleteness and uncertainty together produce can no longer be addressed by the mechanical extinction or extrusion of unwanted minorities. Minority is the symptom but difference itself is the underlying problem. Thus the elimination of difference itself (not just the hyper-attachment to *minor* differences) is the new hallmark of today's large-scale, *predatory narcissisms*. Since the elimination of difference project is fundamentally impossible in a world of blurred boundaries, mixed marriages, shared languages, and other deep connectivities, it is bound to produce an order of frustration that can begin to account for the systematic excess that we see in today's headlines. The psychodynamics and social psychology of this line of inquiry, a difficult subject well beyond my own expertise, require deeper exploration than presented in chapter 4.

These ideas about uncertainty, incompleteness, minorities, and the productivity of violence in the era of globalization may allow us to reposition the world of unilateral and perpetual war and long-distance democratization, unveiled by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11, and the world of long-distance terror, unleashed by Al-Qaeda and

others against the West in the same period. Chapters 2, 5, and 6 were written in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and were composed in Europe and India in the six months that followed the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Some things have changed since then, but not others.

The new sorts of cellular political organization (represented by Al-Qaeda), the increasing reliance in asymmetric warfare of violence against civilian populations, the growth in the tactic of suicide bombing, and, most recently, the tactic of the broadcast beheading (of more or less casual participants in scenes of violent struggle) force us to ask yet a new set of questions. These concern the sources of global rage against the forces of the market, the special nature of recent anti-Americanism in many parts of the world, and the odd return of the body of the patriot, the martyr, and the sacrificial victim into the spaces of mass violence.

Let me conclude this overview by focusing on the most recent form of public and mass-mediated shock to enter the dramas of violence staged in the name of religion, nationality, freedom, and identity, namely the videotaped kidnappings of victims in Iraq and, in some instances, their beheading, as a media tool for exerting asymmetric pressure on various states, most recently including India, by groups associated with militant Islam. In some ways, we see a return here to the simplest form of religious violence, the sacrifice, about which René Girard (1977) has written eloquently. Starting with the videotaped beheading of Daniel Pearl in Pakistan soon after 9/11, the public sacrifice has grown into a more systematic tool of political expression. Those who are kidnapped and actually beheaded or under threat of being beheaded are not necessarily wealthy, powerful, or famous. They include, for example, a poor and desperate group of labor migrants to Iraq from India, Kuwait, and elsewhere. These poor migrants, themselves fodder in the traffic of globalization, signal a counterpoint to the impersonal death produced by the United States Air Force in Iraq or by Al-Qaeda in New York City, Nairobi, and Saudi Arabia over the past few years. Televised beheadings in Iraq stage a strong gesture to a more intimate and personal sacrifice by combining known and identifiable victims with a more gradual and deliberate ceremony of violent death, a more stately drama of the armed powers "behind the mask." These tragic victims are the involuntary counterparts of the suicide bombers of Palestine, Iraq, and Sri Lanka. In these cases, ideologies produced by various forms of desperation about asymmetry produce victims and martyrs as instruments of freedom. These singular bodies are a desperate effort to bring back a religious element to spaces of death and destruction that have become unimaginably abstract. They might also be viewed as moral responses, however shocking, to the tortured, leashed, humiliated, and photographed bodies of Muslim men in American custody in Iraq and Afghanistan.