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Genocide as Social Practice

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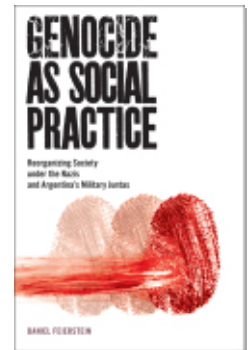
Published by Rutgers University Press

Feierstein, Daniel & Town, Andrew & Hinton, Laban.

Genocide as Social Practice: Reorganizing Society under the Nazis and Argentina's Military Juntas.

New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014.

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Toward a Typology of Genocidal Social Practices

Then there was neither this grief
nor the thankless condemnation of looking back.
Then exile did not matter
and I did not seek comfort for loneliness.

—Victor Heredia, “Then”

Many writers have sought to define the essential features of the Nazi genocide. Rather fewer have attempted to understand how genocidal social practices have varied across different societies during the twentieth century. Fewer still have moved beyond comparative analyses of this sort to consider genocidal social practices as a social process—in other words, as a *sequence of social changes* accompanied by *predictable* changes in social relations, attitudes, and values, albeit with distinctive local variations.

In fact, in the sixty years following Raphael Lemkin’s pioneering study in 1944, only eight authors presented any new classifications of genocide: Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, Israel Charny, Vahakn Dadrian, Helen Fein, Leo Kuper, Roger Smith, and Barbara Harff. In the first part of this chapter I will critically analyze these eight models before going on to suggest a new way of organizing and categorizing genocidal social practices that includes what I call “reorganizing genocide.” As we will see, this type of genocide is the link between the two historical events that are explored in this book: the Nazi genocide from 1933 to 1945 and Argentine state terror from 1974 to 1983.

Eight Typologies of Genocide

No sooner had Lemkin coined the term “genocide” than he became aware of the need to distinguish between different types of genocide. For Lemkin, genocide was a “new word . . . to denote an old practice in its modern development.”¹ So, it was necessary to differentiate, say, the massacre of civilians by the Mongols

in the Middle Ages from the massacre of the Armenians by the Turks during World War I, particularly if one intended to describe both events as genocide. The two scholars who made the greatest effort to develop a coherent typology of genocide before 2005 were Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn. Chalk and Jonassohn's classification, published in their classic book *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (1990), is summarized below. However, before looking at it in detail, it is worth remembering that Chalk and Jonassohn pointed out in a later article that other typologies are possible, depending on what kind of factors are examined. These factors could include ways of relating between different groups within a society, power relations between different societies, the means employed to carry out mass annihilations, or the causes, intentions, or results of each genocidal process.² Chalk and Jonassohn chose the purposes of the perpetrators as their organizing principle, and in fact all eight models examined below are based either on the causes, intentions, or results of genocide.

In his study, Lemkin divided genocides into three different types according to their purpose:

1. Those seeking to destroy a nation or group completely. He considered this kind of genocide to be typical of the ancient world.
2. Those seeking to destroy a culture by assimilating its members rather than by killing them. This was later separated from genocide and given the legal name of "ethnocide."
3. Those seeking to destroy both the group and its culture. Lemkin considered the Nazi genocide as a prototypical instance of this third type.

However, although Lemkin's distinctions are interesting, Chalk and Jonassohn have rightly pointed out that Lemkin did not realize that the prototypical form of genocide in the twentieth century involved a society destroying a portion of *its own citizens*. Indeed, we might add that Lemkin was unable to see this despite his own experience of Nazism, which was the basis of his theoretical work.³

A critical reading of Lemkin and others such as Hervé Savon, Irving Louis Horowitz, and Vahakn Dadrian caused Chalk and Jonassohn to reformulate their own ideas several times. In 1990 they distinguished four types of genocide, according to the intentions of the perpetrator:

1. To eliminate a real or potential threat to society
2. To spread terror among real or potential enemies
3. To acquire economic wealth
4. To implement a religious belief, a scientific theory, or an ideology

It is clear that Chalk and Jonassohn's categories will be more useful than Lemkin's for the purposes of our study, even though they focus exclusively

on intentions, thus diverting attention away from the underlying *causes* of different genocides. The causes are more obscure but may prove more instructive once they are fully understood.

In contrast to Chalk and Jonassohn's relatively complex definition of genocide, Israel Charny's study in 1994 defined genocide quite simply as the mass killing of defenseless victims, whether intentional or otherwise. Charny was thus forced to consider a much wider range of situations. In fact, he distinguished six main types of genocide, linked to *how* the genocidal practice is carried out:

1. Genocidal massacre (mass murder on a smaller scale)
2. Intentional genocide (an explicit intention to destroy a specific targeted victim group). Charny subdivides this into
 - a. Specific intentional genocide—against a specific victim group
 - b. Multiple intentional genocide—against more than one specific victim group, either at the same time or in closely related or contiguous actions
 - c. Omnicide—simultaneous intentional genocide against numerous races, nations, religions, etc.
3. Genocide in the course of colonization or consolidation of power
4. Genocide in the course of aggressive (“unjust”) war (killing of civilians in military actions)
5. Genocide as War Crimes against Humanity
6. Genocide as a result of ecological destruction and abuse

Charny's classification is perhaps undermined by its sheer scope, but the definitions of types 1, 2, and 3 are, in my view, extremely useful for distinguishing different instances of genocide according to their intentionality and the nature of the practices involved. This sort of analysis would clarify whether it is appropriate to use the term genocide to describe types 4, 5, and 6, or whether these are better described as “crimes against humanity.” As we will see, Charny's classification is helpful in constructing a new typology just as his definition of genocide proved helpful in the previous chapter for defining the concept of genocidal social-practice genocide and fixing its limits.⁴

Although he also considered the question of intentionality, Dadrian constructed a typology more related to the *results* of genocidal practices. His classification in 1975 consisted of five categories:

1. Cultural genocide (Lemkin's “genocide by assimilation”). In my view, this could be included under the category of “ethnocide.”
2. Latent genocide: as a by-product of war. Dadrian gives the bombing of civilian populations in wartime as a typical example, which makes it similar to Charny's type (4) “killing of civilians in military actions” or the broader concept of crimes against humanity.
3. Retributive genocide: massacres that aim to punish a minority that challenges a dominant group. Dadrian states that a minority is not necessarily

a numerical minority. It may be any group that is socially subordinate in the balance of power.

4. Utilitarian genocide: that which is done with the purpose and result of gaining control of economic resources. It is thus related to Charny's type (3) "genocide in the course of colonization" and Chalk and Jonassohn's type (3) "to acquire economic wealth."
5. Optimal genocide: aimed at the total extermination of a population. Prototypical cases would be the Armenian genocide and the Nazis' attempt to exterminate the European Jews.

Unfortunately, Dadrian's types have too many overlapping variables (causes, outcomes, intentions) and so more than one category could be applied to the same historical event. In particular, "optimal genocide" can include any of the other four categories.

In contrast to Dadrian, in 1979 Helen Fein made a fundamental distinction between genocidal social practices carried out "before" and "after" the founding of the modern nation-state. Fein subdivided genocides committed "before" the emergence of the nation-state into two types: religious and ethnic. With respect to genocide committed "after" its emergence, Fein distinguished among three types:

1. To legitimize the existence of the state
2. To eliminate an indigenous group blocking the way to state expansion
3. To respond to a rebellion against the state⁵

We will return to the question of the nation-state later in this chapter, where I will argue that it is the emergence of the nation-state that marks the turning point in the development of modern genocide.

Despite being one of the first scholars to question the restrictive definition of the 1948 Genocide Convention, Leo Kuper—like many later critics—believed in the need to defend legality. This led him to base three of his five categories of genocide on the Convention's definition, while he groups the other two under "related or similar atrocities" because they are outside the scope of the text approved by the United Nations. His first three types, which correspond to the categories of genocide of the Convention, are

1. Genocides aimed at settling religious, racial, and ethnic differences
2. Genocides designed to terrorize the peoples conquered by a colonizing empire
3. Genocides designed to enforce or fulfill a political ideology

Kuper also distinguishes two types of "related atrocities":

4. Mass political killings
5. Attempts to destroy an economic class (including those that occurred under communism and "real socialism")⁶

Kuper's notion in type (1) of genocide as "dispute resolution" is questionable, and types (3) and (4) are difficult to tell apart. Nonetheless, Kuper's is the only classification of genocide that explicitly includes attempts to destroy a social class—as defined in the Marxist sense of a specific relationship to the means of production and the type of work done. But perhaps this type is only applicable when the people who embody those social relations are *physically* annihilated, as happened in Cambodia during the 1970s. However, the Cambodian genocide was in many ways unique, and, in any case, it is doubtful that social reorganization without the *physical* elimination of individuals embodying certain ways of relating to others counts as full-blown genocide or even as a genocidal social practice.

Although the possibility of genocide obviously increases under any totalitarian regime, the key question for Marxist thinkers and communist regimes is whether "the disappearance of the bourgeoisie" actually involves killing the middle classes or simply transforming them into manual workers. Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci all believed that the bourgeoisie must cease to be bourgeois by surrendering ownership and control of the means of production. None of them advocated anything more than expropriation and loss of social privileges. Conversely, physical destruction does not of itself guarantee that others—whatever their class origins might be—will not perpetuate the same social structures. Moreover, physical destruction is incompatible with Marxist humanism—although it is true that this philosophy only developed after Khrushchev's famous denouncement of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956.

Arguably, the most powerful communist leaders of the twentieth century, Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong, did not resort to killing as a strategy for political, economic, and social reconstruction, despite persecutions and even mass killings under both regimes.⁷ For Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, however, the elimination of a materialistic, individualistic, and pro-capitalist urban population was a way of building socialism. In 1973 Pol Pot had noted that urban areas quickly eliminated socialism and reverted to their old ways as soon as the Khmer Rouge retreated from the cities. When he came to power in 1975, Pol Pot acted on the assumption that the social relations existing under capitalism could be destroyed only by annihilating those who embodied these relationships. The Cambodian genocide is therefore a clear ethical warning to socialist thinkers because—like Stalinism and Maoism—it was supported by a socialist ideology, expectations of social improvement, and the struggle for justice.

Continuing with our analysis of typologies, in 1999 Roger Smith made a basic distinction (derived from Kuper's work) between "external genocide" directed at other peoples, and "domestic genocide," which targets members of the society itself, a distinction that I will use in other parts of this book. Smith

identified five types of genocide, which can be applied to both “external enemy” and the “internal enemy,” namely:

1. Retributive genocide: where an invader punishes a conquered people or a society punishes members who represent a (possible) challenge to authority. It is used mainly as a rationalization (e.g., the Nazi genocides). Smith’s prototypical example is the early military campaigns of Genghis Khan.
2. Institutional genocide: politically sanctioned mass murder in ancient and medieval times. It works without a challenge from the victims and is in fact intended to prevent retaliation. The prototypical example would be the Crusades.
3. Utilitarian genocide: where deaths enable the acquisition of land and other resources or improve the standard of living of the dominant people or class. Many examples can be found in the period of colonial domination and exploitation of indigenous peoples from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries (and in Latin America into the twentieth century).
4. Monopolistic genocide: a tool for the elite to monopolize and centralize power, the most frequent cause of genocide in the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Smith cites the genocides in Cambodia, Pakistan, and Armenia, although some cases seem to overlap with the next category.
5. Ideological genocide: the desire for a perfect society leads to the extermination of those considered “impure”—for example, the Crusades, Nazism, Stalinism, and Cambodia. Smith claims that ideological genocide is the chief category but fails to justify his assumption that ideology played only a minor role in premodern genocides but is at the core of modern genocides (particularly “domestic” genocide).⁸

Smith’s categories provide some interesting insights (for example, the ideas of retributive genocide and utilitarian genocide). But, like Dadrian’s types mentioned earlier, they tend to overlap, and this reduces their usefulness for comparative purposes.

Finally, Barbara Harff distinguished four basic types. In each case the main distinguishing feature is the type of social practice prior to the genocidal process, something that none of the other models takes into account and that proves to be extremely helpful.

1. Postwar and postimperial genocide: resulting from war and/or the weakening or collapse of empires. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire led to the Armenian genocide during World War I, while the defeat of the German Empire in World War I gave rise to the Nazi genocide during World War II. The massacres following Genghis Khan’s military campaigns of expansion would be a different example.
2. Postcolonial genocide: old ethnic and/or religious grievances resurface after decolonization, sometimes (but not always) leading to attempts to

form break-away states. Harff cites South Sudan, Biafra, Bangladesh, Burundi, and East Timor as prototypical cases.

3. Postcoup and postrevolutionary genocides: refers to annihilation by the right-wing or left-wing governments following a regime change. Harff includes Stalinism and Pol Pot's regime, as well as Latin American dictatorships.
4. Genocides of conquest: refers mostly to the annihilation of indigenous peoples in America, Australia, Africa, and Asia during the period of European colonization or in the new nation-states founded by European settlers.⁹

Harff's typology is very clear and provides a new perspective on the different processes leading to genocidal social practices. Although the processes she describes are not necessarily the main *causes* of genocide, the clarity and coherence of Harff's approach make it invaluable for constructing a typology of genocidal social practices.

Toward a Typology of Genocidal Social Practices

The aim of this chapter is to critically assess the most important typologies of genocide published to date in order to develop a new classification of genocidal social practices as specific ways of destroying and reorganizing social relations.

In my analysis of Kuper's typology, I argued that "modern genocide" requires the physical—not just symbolic—destruction of a human group. Following Fein's distinction between genocidal social practices carried out "before" and "after" the founding of the modern nation-state, I will define "modern genocide" as any genocidal social practice related to the destruction of a human group since the late fifteenth century, especially those involving Europeans or European settlers. "Modern genocide" is founded on four historical events:

1. The beginning of the first protomodern state in Spain with the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon in 1469.
2. The expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain (in 1492 and 1501, respectively) to achieve religious and political unity.
3. The simultaneous discovery of America by Europeans in 1492, followed by debates about the humanity of the Indians (e.g., did they have souls?). The debate had already commenced in the mid-fifteenth century with the beginning of the African slave trade and was to continue for nearly four centuries with regard to the populations of Africa, Asia, and Oceania.
4. The consolidation of the Inquisition and the logic of "interpellation" through the persecution of "witches" and "heretics." (Interpellation is the way in which ideological state apparatuses cause people to tacitly accept a particular view of themselves and of the world.)

Accordingly, I will consider deaths resulting from military conquests in the ancient and medieval world as forms of “pre-state genocide” (although the Crusades are perhaps a transitional case because of their strong ideological component).

Within modern genocide, or genocidal social practices, I will distinguish four basic types:

1. Constituent (foundational) genocide: aimed at destroying ideologically “unacceptable” populations and/or political opponents in a new nation-state.
2. Colonial genocide: the annihilation of indigenous populations, primarily to seize their land and natural resources and/or to subjugate them as a labor force. This differs from other types of “modern” genocide in that it clearly targets people perceived as being from outside the colonizers’ society.¹⁰
3. Postcolonial genocide: specifically refers to the destruction of the local population by the colonizer during the struggle for national independence. However, if genocide results from power struggles between indigenous groups after independence, it should be classed as type (a).¹¹
4. Reorganizing genocide: refers to destruction aimed at transforming hegemonic social relations *within* an existing nation-state. As we will see, this mode is dominated by the logic of concentration camps, so another name for this fourth type could be “concentration camp genocide.” However, the term “reorganizing” includes other aspects that are not necessarily present in the “concentration camp” definition.¹²

Let us now examine each of these four types of genocide, or genocidal social practices, in more detail. The first type—constituent (foundational) genocide—is based on the assumption that genocidal social practices are an integral feature of modernity, rather than an irrational departure from it or a hangover from the past.¹³ In most cases, the emergence of a new nation-state in Europe and the Americas (between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries) or in Africa (in the twentieth century) gave rise to a new social order within its territory.

Argentina was no exception. After seventy years of civil wars following the May Revolution of 1810 until the definitive formation of the Argentine state in 1880, the new nation annihilated three large population groups: (1) indigenous peoples, particularly through military “campaigns” in Patagonia and the north-eastern region of Chaco (1870–1884); (2) black descendants of African slaves—who comprised up to 50 percent of the population in some provinces at the time of independence; the men were used as cannon fodder in the Argentine War of Independence against Spain (1810–1818) as well as in the War of the Triple Alliance against Paraguay (1865–1870), and—because most Afro-Argentines lived in appalling conditions—they bore the brunt of the cholera

epidemics of 1861 and 1864, and the yellow fever epidemic of 1871; (3) *caudillos*, or provincial leaders, many of them half-castes or *mestizos*, who still supported local autonomy over centralized power.¹⁴

In short, constituent (foundational) genocide aims to define or redefine the power relations in a particular territory by crystallizing or realigning latent power structures, or by creating them from scratch.

The second type—colonial genocide—targets people perceived as being *outside* the colonizer's own society. This form of genocide was particularly common during the so-called Scramble for Africa (1881–1914), a period of rapid colonization by the European powers. Prototypical examples would be the annihilation of the Herero people of South-West Africa by Germany between 1904 and 1907, and the Italian atrocities against civilians during the conquest of Abyssinia (1935–1940). However, similar cases can be found at earlier periods of history, for example during the Spanish colonization of the Americas.

This form of genocide is related to constituent (foundational) genocide, but it is also different in several ways. It is part of the logic of territorial conquest under capitalism and serves an entirely economic purpose. Consequently, not all capitalist colonial domination involves genocide. Rather, genocide develops as a response when indigenous peoples actively resist or otherwise hinder or obstruct the economic development of a colony. Often they are condemned to annihilation through confiscation of their land and destruction of their livelihood, leading to starvation or malnutrition. Some of these practices survived in the twentieth century and can still be found in the twenty-first century in the few regions of the planet that are not completely controlled by global capitalism, such as some tribal areas in the rain forests of the Brazilian Amazon and Paraguay.¹⁵

The third type—postcolonial genocide—is found across a wide range of historical and political contexts. Typical examples are the counterinsurgency wars in Indochina, Algeria, and Vietnam between 1945 and 1975. The operating principle was similar: a link between the old colonial rule and the new circumstances of the Cold War.¹⁶ In the global war on communism, counterinsurgency doctrine drew on the ethnopolitical figure created by the Nazis—the Judeo-Bolshevik—to denigrate colonial populations, using images that fused political and racial stereotypes.

Some of these images reappear in the fourth and last type—reorganizing genocide—and especially in the case of Guatemala. Central America was never officially annexed by the United States as Indochina and Algeria were by the French. However, the U.S. government assumed an active role in expanding capitalism throughout the region in the 1950s. Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador became informal colonies run by groups of family oligarchies—for example, the “fourteen Salvadoran families.”¹⁷ Land belonging to indigenous peasant communities was cleared to make way for large-scale agricultural estates

and the production of export crops. Those who resisted eviction were branded as communists and murdered in United States–supported counterinsurgency operations. That was how—especially in Guatemala but also in El Salvador—the discourse of the elite came to equate “indigenous” with “subversive.”¹⁸

During the Cold War, South America depended less obviously on the United States than did Central America. Although the Southern Cone countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay) clearly underwent reorganizing genocides in the 1970s and 1980s, there was no appeal to racism to stigmatize the victims—a fact that was later used to deny the genocidal nature of the killings.

Reorganizing genocide acts specifically on existing social relations. However, the disappearance of those who embody certain ways of relating to others would not be enough to prevent similar relationships in the future if it were not for the simultaneous use of denouncers/informers to provoke mistrust among friends and neighbors, thereby destroying grassroots solidarity as well as political opposition. Under reorganizing genocide, murder is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The real aim is to “reorganize” society by breaking down “relations of reciprocity” among its members—a theme that is developed at length in the next chapter—and replacing them with new forms of political, economic, ideological, and cultural power.

Reorganizing Genocide and the Logic of the Concentration Camp: Destroying and Reorganizing Social Relations

This book focuses on a specific type of genocidal social practice that I have labeled as “reorganizing genocide” because its purpose is to restructure the society of an existing nation-state *from within*. This restructuring aims to modify social bonds and relationships, social conventions, aspects of daily life, forms of political mediation—in short, to transform the concrete and abstract operations of power within a given society.

If the technology of power that characterizes the modern world is the destruction and reorganization of social relations, the instrument through which this type of genocide operates is the concentration camp. Concentration camps appeared in the late nineteenth century as temporary measures within wartime states of emergency and were used by the British in South Africa to prevent civilian noncombatants from helping the Boer guerrilla forces during the Second Boer War (1899–1902). However, although more than 26,000 women and children died of disease and malnutrition in these camps, it was the Nazis who first realized their potential as instruments for spreading terror. According to the Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben, “The entire Third Reich can be considered a state of exception that lasted twelve years. In this sense, modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of

exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system.”¹⁹ Agamben considers the concentration camp as the “nomos of modernity” in the sense that the modern nation-state—even under democracy—cannot survive without centers in which normal legal guarantees and protections are suspended and basic rights are denied. The Nazis’ innovation was to include the concentration camp as part of a strategy for transforming society as a whole.

One way that reorganizing genocide differs from, say, foundational or colonial genocide is that the metaphor of a *struggle between nations* is replaced by medical metaphors. The Nazis themselves claimed that in killing Jews and other population groups, they were removing a tumor from the body of Germany. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the Nazis committed other types of genocide as well. As Guillermo Levy and Tomás Borovinsky have rightly pointed out, Nazism is not a unitary political and social phenomenon.²⁰ On the contrary, it is a historical knot that is difficult to disentangle, including now the myth of having founded a new state—the Third Reich, which was to last for a thousand years; the colonial expansion of Germany, which had been late in achieving statehood; and a strategic plan to reorganize Europe and the Soviet Union as well as Germany itself along racial lines.

All this was possible because Nazi racism was “politicized racism.” It was the Nazis’ willingness to repress communism that persuaded Hindenburg and the conservative elite to help them into power, and German communists were among the first people to be sent to concentration camps. However, between 1933 and 1936, the Nazis’ list of political dissidents came to include not only communists, socialists, and anarchists, but dissidents and oppositionists from within National Socialism itself, together with homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and of course Jews, who were to become the main target of Nazism once war broke out. In the period 1936–1938, the emphasis was still on punishing political, “social,” and common criminals, sexual deviants, and conscientious objectors, but the images of the “thieving Gypsy” and the “Judeo-Bolshevik,” a figure that will be explored in later chapters, were gradually racializing crime and criminalizing race.

With the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the Soviet Union in June 1941, racism played an increasingly central role in Nazi policies. Nazi discourse was now directed not only against Jews and Gypsies, but against other “non-Aryan” peoples, especially Slavs. The Slavs occupied territory that the Reich needed for its expansion in the East and were treated in much the same way as colonized peoples had been treated during the Scramble for Africa. However, the Jews—and more specifically the ethnopolitical “Jewish Bolshevik”—were killed because they were seen as a threat to the German social body. As the Reich expanded, the “reorganizing” character of Nazism required not only the

material annihilation of the Jewish Bolshevik but the symbolic annihilation of Jewry and Jewishness from all the occupied territories.

So what was the essential Jewish characteristic the Nazis wished to eradicate from Europe? As Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out, before the modern state of Israel came into being in 1948, the Jews were a people “straddling modernity” with one foot in each country and their soul in humanity.

It was precisely the Jews’ internationalism and humanism, together with their failure to form a nation-state of their own in an age of nationalism, which meant—in the Nazis’ view—that they could not be absorbed into the new order. Also, the socialist movement had been historically internationalist and so, in Hitler’s mind, Judaism and communism were inseparable. The Nazis felt they were waging an ideological crusade to save Europe and Western civilization from the “Asian barbarians” of the Soviet Union and their allegedly Jewish leaders.

The genocidal “reorganization” of society first practiced by the Nazis utilized techniques that would later be developed during the counterinsurgency campaigns against guerrilla and national liberation movements in the 1950s and 1960s before the military seized power in Argentina in 1976 with the aim of “reorganizing” Argentine society. Unlike the Nazi genocide, the so-called Dirty War in Argentina was, in fact, a politically motivated genocide that made no attempt to hide its goals behind the nineteenth-century concept of race and so did not need to waste time and resources persecuting ethnic minorities. That the Argentine military were clear about their goals from the outset can be seen in the name they gave to their new regime: the “Process of National Reorganization.” So it was that in the Republic of Argentina, an already existing nation-state that had been built—like most nation-states—on genocide, the *de facto* government of the military dictatorship proposed to “re-found” the state on a new social, political, and cultural basis. The tool chosen to carry out this reorganization of society was the concentration camp.

“Process of National Reorganization” has been rejected as a euphemism by many historians. Instead, they prefer the terms “military dictatorship” or “Dirty War” to define this period in Argentina’s history. However, both these alternatives are actually more confusing and euphemistic than “Process of National Reorganization.” There were many military dictatorships in Argentina during the twentieth century. However, none of the previous dictatorships proposed a “social reorganization” of this magnitude. Similarly, “Dirty War” is a misnomer that wrongly implies a civil war in which casualties are more likely to be soldiers than civilians.²¹

One commonly accepted way of understanding the period from 1974 to 1983 (which conventionally starts with the military coup of March 24, 1976, but in fact really begins with Perón’s death in July 1974, or earlier) is that it was the culmination of a series of military suspensions of civilian government (1930,

1943, 1955, 1962, 1966). But this denies the qualitative abyss between the Argentine military's political project in the 1970s—national and social reorganization—and its previous policies and practice, even though, in some cases, the same people were involved in both.

The specific details of the Nazis' and the Argentines' genocides will be analyzed in detail in later chapters. However, in the process we should not to lose sight of the strategic objective of this book, which is to unravel possible continuities between these two events in order to understand modern genocide, a phenomenon that drove Raphael Lemkin to create a new name for it despite the presence of mass killings throughout history.

If a new word was needed in the twentieth century to describe a new type of annihilation, perhaps it was because the reorganizing genocide of the concentration camps lies, as Agamben has rightly pointed out, at the heart of our social order, forming the "hidden matrix" of modernity.