“IT IS UNDERNEATH US”: THE PLANETARY ZONE IN BETWEEN AS AN AMERICAN DILEMMA

PART 3 DISCUSSED the frontier interpretation of hostis humani generis, which enabled the formulation of a new model of civilization that depended on perpetual self-actualization through foundational disruption—an intervention that transformed institutional, rather than territorial, space. The hostis humani generis constellation became the way in which such internal reformulation could take place. Rather than identifying barbarians somewhere near civilization along the horizontal lines of maps, the frontier model introduced a vertical imaginary, in which civilized ideals hovered as universal truths above, whereas barbarians were imagined to lurk “underneath us” (quoted in Peters, Torture, 147).

Yet the frontier model of civilization depended on a stark distinction between the inside and the outside of the U.S. nation-state. The international sphere was still best understood by the civilizational logic of (horizontal) maps rather than that of (vertical) common norms and institutions, and thus it remained alien to the frontier model. Even though the frontier model’s discursive success was perpetuated by the “parochial, inward nature of the two Cold War Powers” in the period immediately after World War II (Craig and Radchenko, Atomic Bomb, x), it became increasingly necessary to consider the international sphere in all contemplations of legitimate violence in the United States. It soon became relevant that different rules of legitimate violence applied within the nation, where only the law could make violence legitimate, than in the world beyond—a world that Americans tended to construct in essentialist terms, as Turner’s frontier thesis presupposes and novels like Native Son confirm (see Wright, “Bigger,” 15).

This inside-outside distinction was difficult, or even impossible, to maintain for a nation that ended World War II with the use of the atom bomb in 1945, an event often dubbed the first act of the Cold War rather than the last act of World War II. An important new argument about legitimate violence in terms of national statehood emerged with the mass killing of civilians as a normalized element of Western warfare. The argument was that, in the international realm, American essentialist
claims to legitimate violence (which rely on the premise that the innocent are protected by violence) are no longer acceptable when Americans engage in the mass killing of innocents (Glover, *Humanity*, 69–116). Members of President Harry Truman’s administration and associated commentators convinced a shocked US population of the necessity and virtue of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as an example of “democracies beating the totalitarians at their own game” (Sembower, “Democracy and Science,” 500), but the public’s acceptance of these claims tended to include an element of inarticulate yet profound skepticism (see Boyer, *Early Light*; Broadhead, “Shadow”).

Leo Szilard, a nuclear physicist renowned for his role both in the development of the atom bomb and its later political critique, summarizes the dilemma of legitimate violence in the atomic age: “By and large, governments are guided by considerations of expediency rather than by moral considerations. . . . Prior to the war I had the illusion that up to a point the American Government was different. This illusion was gone after Hiroshima” (“Interview”).

If the difference between the United States and every other country is that the United States commits violence only according to certain moral standards, and that it allows individuals to commit violence to reactualize timeless original values for the essentially benevolent institutions of the state, and if this difference breaks down because of the use of weapons of mass destruction on Japan and Germany, the implication is clear: “Can anyone doubt that . . . [if it had been Germany rather than the United States that had dropped the bomb] we would have sentenced the Germans who were guilty of this crime to death at Nuremberg and hanged them?” (Szilard, “Interview”). Interpreting the atom bomb’s use as legitimate was consistently encouraged, but there was an important concern that the United States might indeed have been “Hitlerize[d]” (to use Dieter Georgi’s term) by World War II (quoted in Broadhead, “Shadow,” 45). The final part of this book addresses this concern. It investigates both the renegotiation of the relationship between the frontier model and the essentialist model and the increasingly widespread and successful essentialist interpretation of hostis humani generis, which is able to retain a claim of “American exceptionalism” as the root justification for American violence as legitimate violence (Pease, *Exceptionalism*, 33).

In response to the destabilization of distinct national and the international realms, a more mature interaction between the frontier interpretation and the essentialist interpretation of hostis humani generis had to develop. The essentialist Cold War apparatus and the human rights regime provided the respective platforms for a parallel use of the two models across the domestic and the international spheres: Cold War dichotomies carried essentialist distinctions inward, while the human rights regime carried the notion of perpetual civilizing self-actualization outward (Beck, “Enemy Images”; Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*, 156–61).

The contemplation of each domestic or international phenomenon that included
claims to legitimate violence became open to a frontier interpretation and an essentialist interpretation of the hostis humani generis constellation. Irreducibly different emphases in the interpretation of figures within the constellation, rather than irreducibly rivaling models of civilization, thus began to inform the discursive divisions between neoconservatives and progressives, and between hawks and doves.

Essentialist interpretations of legitimate violence after World War II relied on the classic construction of one good entity facing two complementary evil entities. Such interpretations have been extremely successful at harmonizing the institutional rise of the human rights regime as representative of all humanity (universal human rights have to be defended against those who do not honor them) and the rise of the Cold War security apparatus, presented as the global containment of communism (the free world has to be defended against an invasive, oppressive realm), on behalf of a claim of specifically us legitimate violence. In the relationship between these two discursive patterns of claiming legitimate violence, essentialist arguments tended to use a structure that resembles William Blackstone’s definition of hostis humani generis (*Commentaries*, 2:71): a praedo (a direct representative of communism or, more generally, totalitarianism) and a pirata (who, as a citizen of the globe, violates human rights anywhere) could be viewed as complementary threats to the United States as a global power. As long as totalitarianism and crimes against humanity were condemned as complementary threats to civilization (represented, again, by us institutions), the different narrative implications of each antagonist construction remained unproblematic. In this manner, the complementary use of communist praedones and anti–human rights piratae could successfully stake a claim to legitimate violence, according to an essentialist interpretation.

A good example of a text that does this successfully is the Truman Doctrine of 1947. President Truman’s speech establishing this doctrine is often considered to mark the beginning of the Cold War. In his speech, Truman presupposes and affirms an intertwined use of the essentialist model and the frontier model. He emphasizes that “one of the chief virtues of democracy . . . is that its defects are always visible and under democratic processes can be pointed out and corrected” (“President Harry S. Truman’s Address before a Joint Session of Congress”). He explicitly refers to the frontier model as the only right path toward civilization and embraces the institutionalized implementation of the frontier approach in the United States as a model for global civilizational becoming: “One [American] way of life is based upon the will of the majority, and is distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression. The second [totalitarian] way of life is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed
minorities or by outside pressures” (ibid.). The stark contrast with totalitarianism as the frontier institutions’ barbarous mirror image links the characteristics of the frontier model to the essentialist model. Because us institutions are invested in the implementation of civilization, they can be treated as inherently civilized when compared to totalitarian institutions, which are invested in the implementation of barbarism. Truman’s speech in general also emphasizes American military force as a necessary unifying basis for a functioning international human rights law. This is based on the conviction that, “unless democracy and development are understood and pursued in very particular ways, their pursuit may place human rights at risk” (Donnelly, Universal Human Rights, 186).

While essentialist interpretations thus rely on a straightforward “one good versus two evils” interpretation of the constellation in texts, frontier interpretations increasingly rely on the conscious inclusion of form as a relevant element of an argument. Texts of the time that follow a frontier interpretation tend to be wary of giving us institutions carte blanche to make claims of legitimate state violence. This perspective emphasizes the gap between civilizational values and institutional actions in practice. The first chapter of part 4 discusses the importance of totalitarianism in the cultural and legal renegotiation of hostis humani generis after World War II and links this discussion to a reading of Kurt Vonnegut’s novel Mother Night (1962). This novel, set against the backdrop of the 1961 trial of the Nazi logistics expert Adolf Eichmann, interrogates the possibility of legitimate violence in times of human mass destruction as a normalized element of warfare. Vonnegut uses the hostis humani generis constellation to keep the novel intelligible as a moral text, a strategy that operates by separating the Hitlerizing violence of mass warfare from the more civilized force of a muscular human rights regime.

Vonnegut does not negotiate legitimate violence by foregrounding the nature of a delineated praedonic core antagonist, as Dashiell Hammett and Richard Wright do. Instead, Mother Night chooses sides between two parallel ways of interpreting civilization. The essentialist interpretation is constructed as an inevitably barbarous embrace of totalitarian logic that informs any industrial war and security apparatus. In this way, Vonnegut treats the American war and security apparatus like the rich, the externalized pirate-emperors of early modernity. In Charles Johnson’s Free Prince speech (discussed in chapter 1), the rich had been constructed as corrupt and violent transitional entities that preceded an anticipated civilized order. In Mother Night, these rich would be representatives of a war machine and security apparatus that, according to Vonnegut, claim the status of representatives of civilization but cannot do so persuasively. A fully operational human rights regime, then, represents the dawn of a legitimate civilization that replaces the rich impostor.

Vonnegut tacitly agrees with Truman that it may be necessary to defend the existence of such a human rights regime violently, and that such violence is just. In Mother Night, Vonnegut honors historical figures such as Tuvia Friedmann, a well-
known Nazi hunter who has helped bring Eichmann to Jerusalem and to justice.\textsuperscript{2} Likewise, Vonnegut’s use of the hostis humani generis constellation corresponds with the then-recent renegotiation of the constellation as a legal fiction in international law (specifically, in relation to Eichmann trial that serves as the novel’s context) that not only allows but explicitly requires the praedo to represent a totalitarian state. The important difference, however, is that Americans can appear as such praedones as well. The second chapter in part 4 examines a discourse that counters such accusations of Hitlerizing and that has begun to recreate a consensus on legitimate violence from within the essentialist interpretive context. In the 1980s, the most important tool of this consensus becomes the figure of the international terrorist, who turns into a new praedo. With the help of this figure, the American citizen can be reimagined as an innocent who requires protection worldwide. The chapter analyzes two politically opposite texts of the 1980s—\textit{Terrorism: How the West Can Win} (1986), edited by Benjamin Netanyahu, and \textit{Pirates and Emperors, Old and New} (1986), by Noam Chomsky—and shows that this understanding of the citizen as an innocent represents an emerging new consensus that began late in the Cold War and continued after its end.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the consensus that the international terrorist is the antagonist of the United States and of humanity as a whole is fully achieved, but it is precisely this achievement that allows new forms of criticism of essentialist perspectives. The final chapter of part 4 interprets Mohsin Hamid’s second novel \textit{The Reluctant Fundamentalist}, first published in 2007. This novel features the elusive pirata protagonist Changez, who is the protagonist and narrator—as Howard W. Campbell Jr. is both the protagonist and narrator of \textit{Mother Night}—and who, like Campbell, is elusive precisely because he exists in a context of normalized violence largely without committing violence himself. \textit{The Reluctant Fundamentalist} is set in the years around 9/11 and during the ensuing War on Terror. The novel links the characterization of the War on Terror to the imaginary of early modernity and the Mediterranean as the birthplace of essentialist discourse. Appropriately for the concluding chapter in this book, Hamid uses the constellation to fundamentally question whether hostis humani generis is, in fact, the right constellation to use in formulating a doctrine of legitimate violence in the first place.