

Susana Ferrin Perez

René Cassin 'Human Writes' Essay Competition 2020 – runner-up

Competition judge Danny Finkelstein commented:

“All three of these essays were really good. They were each compelling in different ways and some of the writing was very fine. Susana Ferrin Perez's essay was superbly done, pulling you into her argument with moving description and an arresting beginning”.

Why is genocide still happening, and what can we do to stop it?

*Mothers and fathers, children, babies too
Gone in a blink into the empty sky
Their simple crime was being born a Jew*

*Hard to believe whole countries never knew.
Too terrified, perhaps, to even try
Imagine what a Fascist world might do.
–Sheena Blackhall¹*

'At the sound of the gong',² she awoke on her side on her 'straw-stuffed mattress laid on the floor'³ close to her mother. It was early on a cold winter's morning.⁴ The snow had covered the camp and neither her thin clothes nor the 'two iron stoves' in the barracks were enough to keep her warm.⁵ She could hardly remember the last time she bathed, but she hoped today was not the day.⁶ She could not face having only her skin to protect her from the ice and cold on the pathway from the barracks to the bathhouse.⁷ She knew very well that

¹ Blackhall, S. (2020). *Holocaust, Auschwitz*. Retrieved from <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/of-auschwitz-7-poems/>

² Auschwitz-Birkenau. (2020). *The order of the day*. Retrieved from <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/life-in-the-camp/the-order-of-the-day>

³ Auschwitz-Birkenau. (2020). *Life in the camp*. Retrieved from <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/life-in-the-camp/>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Auschwitz-Birkenau. (2020). *Life in the camp*. Retrieved from <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/life-in-the-camp/>

⁷ Ibid

'sickness and death' could be waiting to strike.⁸ Only last night she had helped carry the corpses of two women.⁹ What she did not know is that the gates of the camp would be opened that day and would remain forever so.

On 27th January 1945, '[s]oldiers of the 60th Army of the First Ukrainian Front opened the gates of Auschwitz Concentration Camp'.¹⁰ The Red Army liberated Auschwitz and set eyes on an atrocious reality that the Nazis had failed to hide from the world, 'millions of clothing items and tons of hair told their own appalling story', the Holocaust.¹¹ It was there and then that humankind pledged to remember, in its collective memory, the atrocities of the Holocaust so that it would never happen again.¹²

It cannot be denied that '[t]he suffering inflicted by Hitler fell outside the realm of expression'.¹³ However, in order to remember and learn from the past, a word was needed to refer to those unspeakable crimes.¹⁴ It would be Raphael Lemkin who would coin "Genocide"; a combination of 'the Greek derivative *geno*, meaning "race" or "tribe", together with the Latin derivative *cide*, from *caedere*, meaning "killing"'.¹⁵ Four years later, genocide would be prohibited by the United Nations General Assembly.¹⁶

In this context, it becomes imperative to pose the question: What is genocide? Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide ('UNCG') and Article 6 of the Rome Statute define genocide as 'any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group'.¹⁷

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Auschwitz-Birkenau. (2020). *The order of the day*. Retrieved from <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/life-in-the-camp/the-order-of-the-day>

¹⁰ Auschwitz-Birkenau. (2020). *Day of liberation*. Retrieved from <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/liberation/day-of-liberation>

¹¹ United Nations. (2020, January 21). 'Never Again' means constant retelling of Holocaust story, Secretary-General stresses at exhibition opening, citing rising antisemitism, other hatreds. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm19943.doc.htm>

¹² Ibid

¹³ Power, S. (2002). Chapter 3: The crime with a name. In S. Power, *A problem from hell: America and the age of genocide* (pp. 31-46). New York: Basic Books 42

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Power, S. (2002). Chapter 4: Lemkin's Law. In S. Power, *A problem for hell: America and the age of genocide* (pp. 47-60). New York: Basic Books 60

¹⁷ International Criminal Court. (2011). *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*. Retrieved from <https://www.icc-cpi.int/resourcelibrary/official-journal/rome-statute.aspx> and Office of the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. *Analysis framework*. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/ar/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/osapg_analysis_framework.pdf

Unfortunately, despite the condemnation and criminalisation of genocide by the international community, the Holocaust would not be the last one. The turn of the century was marked by another genocide in Western Sudan.¹⁸ '[G]overnment-funded Arab militias [...] systematically destroy[ed] Darfuris by burning villages, looting economic resources, polluting water sources, and murdering, raping, and torturing civilians'¹⁹. In fact, the number of deaths amounted to 70,000 at the start of 2003.²⁰ It is thus opportune to pose the question: Why is genocide still happening, and what can we do to stop it?

Genocide is still a phenomenon in the twenty-first century because the international community is allowing it to be, and the underlying reasons behind this reality are several.²¹ First, despite the fact that the international community might have agreed a formal legal definition of genocide, in practice, individual countries disagree 'on what constitutes genocide and the appropriate reaction to the threat'.²²

In addition, under international law states are sovereign, which translates into 'freedom from unrequested external interference in the internal affairs of the state, particularly if this interference is coercive in nature'.²³ This principle explains, although does not justify, the reluctance of states to intervene in another state's internal affairs in the face of genocide, despite the UNCG's 'legal framework for states to override the rights of sovereignty whenever genocide was committed'.²⁴

Second, while countries may be prepared, of their own accord, to denounce the atrocities taking place in another country, they are not willing to direct a solo effort to stop them due to the great volume of resources involved and the lack of accountability for their inaction.²⁵ Government leaders, particularly in the EU and the US, 'are not prepared to invest the military, financial, diplomatic, or domestic political capital needed to stop [genocide]'.²⁶

¹⁸ World Without Genocide. (2017). *Darfur Genocide*. Retrieved from <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/darfur-genocide>

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Pigmon, J. (2011). *Evil: Genocide in the 21st Century*. Retrieved from Rollins College: https://scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=mls_55

²¹ Power, S. (2007, April 28). *Can genocide be stopped in an age of terror?* Retrieved from University of Oregon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVsXEij-pPo>

²² Ibid n19 68

²³ Cronin, B. (2007, July). *The tension between sovereignty and intervention in the prevention of genocide*. Human Rights Review 8, 293-305. Retried from <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-007-0024-4>

²⁴ Ibid 295

²⁵ Power, S. (2007, April 28). *Can genocide be stopped in an age of terror?* Retrieved from University of Oregon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVsXEij-pPo>

²⁶ Power, S. (2002). Chapter 14: Conclusion. In S. Power, *A problem from hell: America and the age of genocide* (pp. 504-516). New York : Basic Books 508

Unquestionably, the US position regarding each genocidal crisis is the result of 'concrete choices made by this country's most influential decisionmakers after unspoken and explicit weighing of costs and benefits'.²⁷ This cost-benefit analysis consists of circumventing the participation in foreign struggles virtually inoffensive to US security, and preventing 'the moral stigma associated with allowing genocide'.²⁸

Alas, it follows that in order for the prevention and intervention in genocidal crisis to be included as a foreign policy objective, it must be in the national interest.²⁹ It must be noted that 'Bosnia was the sole genocide of the twentieth century that generated a wave of resignations from the U.S. government' and this was most certainly a response to the public denunciation and pressure.³⁰

Third, although international organisations, including the UN and the ICC, were founded upon the premise to protect human rights, they lack comprehensive support by powerful nations and the necessary infrastructure to tackle genocide³¹. Incontestably, the UN's failure to respond to genocidal crisis rests on its bureaucratic structure.³² 'If the UN wants to prevent genocide in the twenty first century, genocide needs to be identified in a more efficient and timely manner'³³. This structure coupled with the requirement for unanimous agreement leads, more often than not, to no or limited action being taken.³⁴ Even in the best-case scenario, the delay in the response will render the combined effort futile.³⁵ 'The focus of stopping genocide will require expediency in decision making, rapid deployment of troops and full UN member support'.³⁶

For instance, in the last century, the Rwandan Genocide unravelled within a period of only a hundred days³⁷, and demonstrated the acute need for a rapid response. In 1994, the Tutsi and members of the political opposition were slaughtered with machetes at the hands of the

²⁷ Power, S. (2002). Chapter 14: Conclusion. In S. Power, *A problem from hell: America and the age of genocide* (pp. 504-516). New York : Basic Books 508

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Power, S. (2007, April 28). *Can genocide be stopped in an age of terror?* Retrieved from University of Oregon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVsXEij-pPo>

³⁰ Ibid n26 509

³¹ Ibid n28

³² Pigmon, J. (2011). *Evil: Genocide in the 21st Century*. Retrieved from Rollins College : <https://scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=mls> 63

³³ Pigmon, J. (2011). *Evil: Genocide in the 21st Century*. Retrieved from Rollins College : <https://scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=mls> 63

³⁴ Power, S. (2007, April 28). *Can genocide be stopped in an age of terror?* Retrieved from University of Oregon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVsXEij-pPo>

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid n32 70

³⁷ BBC. (2019, April 4). *Rwanda genocide: 100 days of slaughter*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26875506>

Hutus, leaving 800,000 people dead.³⁸ The US ambassador to the UN would articulate in this regard, ‘our regret over what we let happen over those 100 days causes us to mourn–with sincerity–without sufficiently strengthening the international system we need to truly assure ourselves that our preparation and practice today is up to the challenges we face’.³⁹

The policy has been one of silence and looking away.⁴⁰ ‘It is the indifference or collaboration of people in other countries that allows genocide to continue’.⁴¹ The prevention of genocide requires the use of both soft and hard power in the foreign policy of sovereign states and that cannot be achieved without political will.⁴² Political condemnation, enforcement of economic sanctions, rapid international engagement, and deterrence promotion by increasing resources to intensify the punitive measures address to *génocidaires* is what needs to be done to stop genocide.⁴³

In the twenty-first century, ‘Turkic Muslims, particularly Uyghurs’ are perceived as ‘an ethno-nationalist threat to the Chinese state’.⁴⁴ As a result, in 2014, Beijing launched the ‘Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism’, which under the pretext of eradicating terrorism, aims at repressing their identity⁴⁵ by establishing ‘a mix of political education camps, pretrial detention, and prison’⁴⁶. For instance, ‘[i]nside political education camps, detainees are forced to learn Mandarin Chinese, sing praises of the Chinese Communist Party, and memori[s]e rules applicable primarily to Turkic Muslims’.⁴⁷

In Myanmar, the Rohingya have been suffering discrimination and subjugation. Since 1982, they have “effectively been denied citizenship” and as a consequence, constitute ‘one of the largest stateless populations in the world’.⁴⁸ In 2017, the repression reached its peak when ‘the Myanmar military began a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing against Rohingya

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Power, S. (2014, April 16). *Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power at the United Nations Commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide*. Retrieved from <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/remarks-ambassador-samantha-power-united-nations-commemoration-20th-anniversary-rwanda>

⁴⁰ Power, S. (2002). Chapter 14: Conclusion. In S. Power, *A problem from hell: America and the age of genocide* (pp. 504-516). New York : Basic Books 503

⁴¹ Sherry, B. (2020). *Why does genocide still happen?* Retrieved from <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/whp-origins/era-7-the-great-convergence-and-divergence-1880-ce-to-the-future/76-yeah-but-betaa/a/read-why-does-genocide-still-happen-beta>

⁴² Ibid n39 508

⁴³ Ibid n39 514

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch. (2018). *Eradicating ideological viruses: China's campaign of repression against Xianjiang's muslims*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs-10>

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch. (2018). *Eradicating ideological viruses: China's campaign of repression against Xianjiang's muslims*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs-1-10>

⁴⁶ Ibid 2

⁴⁷ Ibid 4

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch. (2020). *Rohingya*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/tag/rohingya>

Muslims involving mass killing, rape, and arson that forced over 740,000 to flee, most to neighbouring Bangladesh'.⁴⁹

The Darfuris of Sudan, the Tutsi of Rwanda, the Muslim Uyghurs of China and the Rohingya of Myanmar are evidence that genocide is still happening across the globe. 'The world failed all those who died, and those who continue to suffer as a result of [genocide]. We cannot fail them again by allowing their stories to be forgotten'.⁵⁰ It is a matter of moral responsibility for the international community to prevent, halt and condemn violations of human rights, violence and mass atrocities.⁵¹ 'No single country can provide answers on its own to the challenges of our day'.⁵² The key resides in 'convincing countries that it is in their national interest to invest in an international system in the short term to obtain benefits in the long term'⁵³ so that 'time and again' becomes 'never again'.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch. (2020, August 24). *Myanmar: Rohingya await justice, safe return 3 years on*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/24/myanmar-rohingya-await-justice-safe-return-3-years>

⁵⁰ United Nations. (2020, January 21). *'Never Again' means constant retelling of Holocaust story, Secretary-General stresses at exhibition opening, citing rising antisemitism, other hatreds*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm19943.doc.htm>

⁵¹ Pigmon, J. (2011). *Evil: Genocide in the 21st Century*. Retrieved from Rollins College : https://scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=mls_71

⁵² Borrell, J. (2004, November 3). *A new Europe in a new world*. Retrieved from https://www.coleurope.eu/system/files_force/speech-files/speech_borrell_la_nueva_europa_en_el_nuevo_mundo_en.pdf?download=15

⁵³ Power, S. (2007, April 28). *Can genocide be stopped in an age of terror?* Retrieved from University of Oregon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVsXEij-pPo>

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