

Chapter 1

Imagining Genocide

And sometimes what he has to do for the state is to live, to work, to produce, to consume; and sometimes what he has to do is to die.

Michel Foucault¹

Cambodia's geography, we are taught, resembles a bowl, with a vast central plain surrounded by a series of mountains. In the southeast lie the Cardamom and Elephant Mountains and to the north and northeast, lie the Dangrek Mountains and Annam Highlands, respectively. According to Ian Brown, the "land and climate have helped to shape the Cambodian people and their way of life."² The region has a tropical climate, dominated by two monsoons. Beginning in late May or early June, the prevailing southwest winds bring the summer monsoon. Heavy rains and thunderstorms inundate Cambodia, causing the Mekong River to swell in size. This flooding, in turn, causes a tributary of the Mekong—the Tonlé Sap River—to reverse course. Consequently, Lake Tonlé Sap—that Great Lake which dominates the central Cambodia plain—expands four-fold in size. The enormous volumes of water, silt, and nutrients give rise to over 200 varieties of fish, and these form the major source of protein for the people of Cambodia.³ In November, northeast winds dominate the region, bringing dry weather and cooler temperatures. The water-level of the Mekong drops, and the course of the Tonlé Sap River once again reverses its flow.

Over the millennia, these climatic conditions have influenced farming practices, certainly. But so too has the quotidian life—such as harvest festivals, religious ceremonies, wedding practices—of Cambodia's people been affected. Historically, the people of Cambodia—the Khmer—have been lowland wet-rice cultivators. The Khmer landscape has been that of villages and hamlets, with houses strung along roads, streams, and dykes.⁴

A vastly different geography was imagined (and thus attempted to be created) by Pol Pot. The secretive leader of the Communist Party of Kampuchea—the Khmer Rouge—Pol Pot viewed Cambodia (renamed Democratic Kampuchea under the Khmer Rouge) as a place of purity "amid the confusion of the present-day world,"

1 Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, Vol. 1, P. Rabinow (ed.) (New York: The New Press, 2000), 409.

2 Ian Brown, *Cambodia* (Herndon, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2000), 11.

3 John Tully, *A Short History of Cambodia: From Empire to Survival* (Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 3.

4 Michael D. Coe, *Angkor and the Khmer Civilization* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 40–42. See also Michael Vickery, *Society, Economics, and Politics in Pre-Angkor Cambodia* (Tokyo: Center for East Asian Cultural Studies for UNESCO, 1998).

“a precious model for humanity” whose revolutionary virtue exceeded that of all previous revolutionary states.⁵ Pol Pot’s geography contributed to the death of over two million of Cambodia’s people—nearly one-third of the country’s population—in less than four years.⁶

As a Geographer, I am most concerned with trying to understand the spatially-informed discursive foundations of the Khmer Rouge, of how the practitioners of genocide justified the material practices that led to the mass killings.⁷ My starting point is that those people accused of genocide invariably show little or no remorse for their actions—irrespective of whether their actions are defined as genocide or not. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, for example, most Nazi leaders, including Adolf Eichmann and Heinrich Himmler, were unapologetic. They *believed* in their actions. Similar attitudes are found in other genocides, such as in Rwanda. And in Cambodia, Pol Pot exhibited no remorse at the time of his own death for the millions who perished under his reign. Other Khmer Rouge cadre, such as Nuon Chea and Ieng Sary, continue to proclaim their innocence of any wrong-doing. In all cases, these perpetrators of mass death were creating their own notion of social justice and, by extension, their own moral geographies.

Rather than adopting a psychological approach, of trying to get inside the minds of the “decision-makers” and their “followers,” I am interested in the rationales provided, how these were justified and, in particular, how *geography* figured into these rationales. My intent is to repeatedly ask how certain *spatial* categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating.⁸

5 Quoted in Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 341.

6 The total number of deaths resultant from the genocide has been subject to intense debate. Demographers and anthropologists, activists and apologists, have all waded into the fray. Typical estimates range from a low of 1.5 million deaths to a high of approximately 3.3 million deaths. See, for example, Michael Vickery, “How Many Died in Pol Pot’s Kampuchea?” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 20(1988): 377–385; Ben Kiernan, “The Genocide in Cambodia, 1975–1979,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 22(1990): 35–40; Patrick Heuveline, “‘Between One and Three Million’: Towards the Demographic Reconstruction of a Decade of Cambodian History (1970–1979),” *Population Studies*, 52(1998): 49–65; Craig Etcheson, “Did the Khmer Rouge Really Kill Three Million Cambodians?” *Phnom Penh Post*, April 30, 2000; Ben Kiernan, “The Demography of Genocide in Southeast Asia: The Death Tolls in Cambodia, 1975–1979, and East Timor, 1975–1980,” *Critical Asian Studies*, 35(2003): 585–597; Damien de Walque, “Selective Mortality during the Khmer Rouge Period in Cambodia,” *Population and Development Review*, 31(2005): 351–368; Craig Etcheson, *After the Killing Fields: Lessons from the Cambodian Genocide* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2005); and Damien de Walque, “The Socio-Demographic Legacy of the Khmer Rouge Period in Cambodia,” *Population Studies*, 60(2006): 223–231.

7 I should state up-front what this book is not. It is not an attempt to understand why the rank-and-file cadre carried out the violent practices (i.e., torture, execution, forced labor) that led to the millions of deaths. For an excellent discussion of this question, see Alexander L. Hinton, *Why Did They Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

8 Such a task is heavily indebted to that of Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 27.

I am interested in the geopolitical discourses, the narratives and “spatial logics” that support, justify, and legitimate mass killings: In short, I want to understand the geographic imaginations constructed by state actors and how, in turn, these are used to justify “genocidal” practices.

How did the perpetrators of mass violence conceive of Cambodia’s geography, and what type of spaces were they attempting to construct? Conceptually, these same concerns exist in the various attempts to understand genocides in other contexts and other places, such as Germany and Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. What type of society were the practitioners of genocide attempting to create? In the case of Cambodia, I identify one particular geographical imagination, one that directly influenced the machinations of violence. Here, I forward the idea of *anti-geographies*.

Many geographers have approached Geography from the stand-point that *geography* is literally about the writing of space. In the context of European colonialism, for example, Gearóid Ó Tuathail proposes that the practice of geography was “an active writing of the earth by an expanding, centralizing imperial state.”⁹ If this is so, then anti-geographies entail the erasure—the un-making, or un-writing—of space. This un-making, I argue, is foundational for the justification and legitimation of mass killings perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge.

My task, though, is immediately stalled by a linguistic problem. What is meant by genocide and mass killings? Did the killings—which are not denied by the perpetrators—constitute genocide? As will be clear momentarily, this question hinges, firstly, on how genocide is defined, and, secondly, whether the actions of certain individuals correspond with the agreed-upon definition of genocide. These are tremendously important, particularly in the effort to bring the Khmer leaders to justice, but these are also tangential to my larger project.

Since Raphael Lemkin coined the term “genocide,” there have been numerous debates, discussions, and definitions forwarded. Rather than replicating these debates, I begin with the simple proposition that mass killing—genocide—is a political process. This statement also requires some explanation. Jenny Edkins makes a distinction between the “political” and “politics.” The former, according to Edkins, is usually taken to be that sphere of social life commonly called *politics*, which would include elections, political parties, the state apparatus, and so on. Instead, Edkins suggests that the political “represents the moment of openness ... when a new social order is on the point of establishment, when its limits are being contested. Politics, in contrast, is what takes place once the new order is institutionalized.”¹⁰ Too often researchers focus on the consequences—the outcomes—of policies and practices, rather than tracing the genealogies of those actions. Edkins maintains that the political, however, is not a question of conflict between preexisting classes or other groupings whose interests can be presumed, but rather a question of the struggle to form new (and always precarious) coalitions of power.¹¹

9 Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 2.

10 Jenny Edkins, *Poststructuralism and International Relations: Bringing the Political Back In* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner Publishers, 1999), 2, 126.

11 Edkins, *Poststructuralism and International Relations*, 127–28.

Consequently, how something is recognized as *true*, *legitimate*, or *just*, is a political process. Just as academics and international lawyers continue to seek an “authentic” and “accurate” *representation* of genocide, so too have the practitioners of mass violence attempted to sanction their actions. This does lead to my overall concern: How did Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge discursively legitimate and justify those material practices that led to mass killings? In anticipation of subsequent arguments, their justifications were *political*; they necessitated a particular representation of reality as they conceived of the real.

The Language of the Political

Political language ... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable ...

George Orwell¹²

For most people, language shapes their understandings of the world. Only rarely can there be direct observation of events and, accordingly, it is “language that evokes most of the political ‘realities’ people experience.”¹³ To this end, Murray Edelman argues that the political is linguistically constructed. Throughout *The Killing of Cambodia*, I employ a post-structural approach to understand the linguistic structuring of political reality.

There is no single definition of post-structuralism. Nor is there an agreed upon methodology or theory upon which to base one’s research. Rather, the term refers to a collection of ideas—conceptual signposts—based on the writings Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler, among others. For me, post-structuralism is an approach, an attitude, an awareness of possibilities.

Post-structuralists ask fundamental questions about language and subjectivity. In particular, post-structural approaches disrupt meanings and labels, categories and classification schemes; in other words, post-structuralism challenges terms that are assumed to be natural and unchanging. In so doing, post-structuralists propose that the distinctions we make are not necessarily given by the world around us, but are instead produced by the symbolizing systems we learn.¹⁴ Furthermore, post-structuralism permanently troubles the notion that there can be a direct relationship between objects (i.e., genocide, justice) and the meanings they denote. Thus, there is no pre-interpreted reality (or explanation, for that matter) of genocide, nor is there an essential definition of genocide waiting to be discovered and agreed upon. Rather, the *meanings* of genocide are made discursively. Discourses of meaning are implicated in struggles for power and dominance between humans.¹⁵ Genocide, even the act of identifying and defining genocide, is a *political process*.

12 George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1981), 171.

13 Murray Edelman, *Political Language: Words that Succeed and Policies that Fail* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 3.

14 Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

15 Denis Cosgrove and Mona Domosh, “Author and Authority: Writing the New Cultural Geography,” in *Place/Culture/Representation*, James Duncan and David Ley (eds) (New York: Routledge, 1993), 25–38; at 29.

Meaning, from a post-structural vantage point, is not guaranteed by a world external to it.¹⁶ This implies that meanings are constructed. There is, consequently, no ontological referent to genocide. Indeed, this accounts for the cottage-industry that produces “new and improved” models and meanings of genocide. Instead, this term, in particular, is socially produced, politically contested, and temporarily fixed. When scholars or policy-makers use terms, such as genocide, they do so discursively.¹⁷ However, the temporary fixing of meaning is never a neutral act; it involves both interests and questions of power.¹⁸ Post-structuralism, consequently, through a focus on discourse, power, and knowledge, offers a revitalized framework from which to approach—but not finalize—the theoretical and empirical study of genocide.

A rudimentary understanding of semiotics is fundamental to all post-structuralism.¹⁹ The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure proposed that meanings should not depend on reference to “real” objects or ideas. Rather, he proposed that meaning only resides in a *sign* and nowhere else. Saussure explained that a sign consists of two terms, a *signifier* (e.g., sound, written image, or graphic), and a *signified* (i.e., meaning). Barthes provides an example of a bouquet of roses. These roses (as signifier) may symbolize (signify) his passion for another person. However, we are not dealing with just two terms, a signifier (roses) and a signified (passion). Rather, a third term exists, this being the sign. A sign, therefore, is the associative total of the first two terms and derives meaning from being different from all other signs. Barthes emphasizes that the “roses” as signifier and “passion” as signified existed before uniting and forming the third object, the sign. Consequently, one should not confuse the roses as signifier and the roses sign: the signifier is empty, the sign is full, it is full of meaning.²⁰

Furthermore, and this is the truly radical departure proposed by Saussure: the relationship between the signifier and the signified is purely arbitrary. The word “cat,” for example, does not necessarily have to refer to the object which we have *learned* to identify as a cat. In other words, the signifier does not express the meaning, nor does the signified resemble the form or sound; to use a term appropriately—which, of course, may be politically contested—is to know what it means.²¹ A classic example, is the traffic light as sign. The colors red, yellow, and green (in a North American context) each signify a particular action. Red, for example, “signals” drivers to stop, while green “permits” drivers to continue. These associations, however, are purely

16 Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, 2nd edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 171.

17 As political signs, terms such as “genocide” may be weakened through overuse.

18 Weedon, *Feminist Practice*, 171.

19 For more extensive discussions, see Vincent B. Leitch, *Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 2nd edition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993); Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, 3rd edition (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993); Belsey, *Poststructuralism*.

20 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972 [1957]), 112.

21 Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, 11.

arbitrary. There is nothing inherent in the color red, for example, that denotes the action to stop. And indeed, in other contexts, the color red may symbolize other actions or even emotions (e.g., love, anger, or danger).

Saussure and other “structuralists” attempted to “fix” meanings within language systems. The problem with this perspective, as Weedon explains, is that it does not account for the plurality of meaning or for changes—whether historical or geographical—in meaning.²² In contrast, post-structuralists have demonstrated the malleability of signs. Raman Seldon and Peter Widdowson, for example, illustrate that the dictionary confirms the relentless deferment of meaning, as opposed to the unity of any given sign:

Not only do we find for every signifier several signifieds (a ‘crib’ signifies a manger, a child’s bed, a hut, a job, a mine-shaft lignin, a plagiarism, a literal translation, discarded cards at cribbage), but each of these signifieds becomes yet another signifier which can be traced in the dictionary with its own array of signifieds (‘bed’ signifies a place for sleeping, a garden plot, a layer of oysters, a channel of a river, a stratum). The process continues interminably, as the signifiers lead a chameleon-like existence, changing their colors with each new context.²³

The indeterminacy and contingency of language is further—and aptly—illustrated in Derrida’s well-known discussion of the work *pharmakon*. A Greek word, it can mean either “poison” or “cure,” depending on the context of translation.²⁴ Poststructuralists, consequently, argue that no particular signifier can refer to any particular signified; indeed, every signified functions in turn as a signifier in an endless play of signification.²⁵ The meaning of “genocide,” as a sign, is thus open to multiple interpretations. As a corollary, certain actions (i.e., the killing of people) may or may not be defined and interpreted as a genocide. This, then, accounts for the inactions of governments throughout the twentieth-century when confronted with mass killings. To understand the debates surrounding genocide in these terms, therefore, “not as struggles between bias and accuracy, nor as repeated and ever more accurate revisions based on improved information” but rather as “the ongoing contention between competing political and philosophical perspectives” permits us “to see the repeated overturning of interpretations not as a futile and absurd quest for the truth but as a social and political struggle over the production of meaning.”²⁶

22 Weedon, *Feminist Practice*, 24.

23 Seldon and Widdowson, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, 126–27.

24 The seemingly contradictory “nature” of *pharmakon* as either “poison” or “cure” foreshadows another important concept, namely that constructed meanings, or discourses, are neither inherently good or bad. Such evaluative claims must necessarily be context-specific. It is for this reason that perpetrators of genocide have been able to justify (in their minds, at least) the killing of massive numbers of people.

25 Sarup, *Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism*, 41.

26 Ellen Somekawa and Elizabeth A. Smith, “Theorizing the Writing of History or, ‘I Can’t Think Why it Should be so Dull, for a Great Deal of it Must be Invention,’” *Journal of Social History*, 22(1988): 149–162; at 155.

The political is constructed linguistically. However, language always exists in historically and geographically specific *discourses* which inhere in social institutions and practices. It is to this concept—discourse—I now turn.

Discourse and the Power/Knowledge Nexus

Knowledge about any given object, and especially the production of that knowledge, is crucial to an understanding of political practices, including genocide. Here, I draw liberally on the ideas forwarded by Michel Foucault. Throughout his many writings, Foucault provided a critique of the way modern societies control and discipline their populations by sanctioning the knowledge claims and practices of the human sciences.²⁷ This is particularly salient when one considers genocide, in that knowledge claims were widely employed to justify the killing of people. As scholars have exhaustively documented, the murder of Jews, for example, in the Nazi death camps was approved by members of the medical establishment and other scientists.

A Foucauldian approach is concerned with how knowledge is produced and subsequently deployed. We may assert, for example, that the construction and forwarding of particular policies that “justify” and “legitimate” mass killings is predicated on particular “knowledges;” these knowledges, furthermore, are derived from the efforts of academics, activists, policy-makers, and so on. These knowledges, likewise, are produced via research, personal beliefs or observation, and various forms of “data collection.”

Given that knowledge is neither neutral nor value-free, but rather the outcome of political processes, it follows that knowledge is intricately associated with social relations. Moreover, given that social relations are not necessarily asymmetrical, one is left with the proposition that “power” assumes a pivotal role in knowledge production. And in fact, Foucault forwards the idea that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.²⁸

Power, though, should not be conceived *a priori* as a negative force that one may use to coerce another. From a Foucauldian perspective, power differs from traditional accounts: Power is exercised rather than possessed. Furthermore, power is conceived as being inherent within social relations. Power circulates; power is exercised. This proposition, of power as being exercised, is significant in that it directs our attention from focusing on a dominant class or institution, and toward the relations between different groups of people. Power and the production of knowledge are not simply the result of an oppressive capitalist system or its apparatuses. On this count, Foucault is clear: power is not the privileged domain of a dominant class; authorities do not have a monopoly on the exercise of power, or on the production of knowledge.²⁹ In his

27 Sarup, *Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism*, 72.

28 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by A. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 27.

29 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.

History of Sexuality, Foucault explains that power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared; relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (e.g., economic processes); there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations; there is not power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives; and there is no exercise of power without a correlative resistance.³⁰

Researchers, accordingly, should direct their attention to the exercise of power in the production of knowledge vis-à-vis genocide. Who has the authority to *define* certain groups as “unworthy of life”? Who has the authority to *justify* and *legitimate* the mass killing of these people? How are these violent and inhumane policies and practices *explained* to the public? In short, a focus on the power/knowledge nexus leads to a greater engagement with discourses.

Discourse, for our present discussion, refers not to the standard dictionary definition of a conversation or written expression, but rather to *disciplines of knowledge*. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault’s principal text in which he outlines his coordinates of discourse and discursive formations, discourse is derived from statements which have four attributes.³¹ First, a statement must have a material existence. By this, Foucault simply means that statements must appear: they must be articulated. The form of statements, however, is open. Political speeches, policies, laws and regulations, most assuredly, are statements. So too, however, are graphs, charts, maps, censuses, history books, personal identification cards, and so on.³² Second, and relatedly, statements must have a substance; they are manifest in particular places and at specific times. When these contexts change, so too does the discourse. Third, statements do not have as their correlate an individual or a particular object that is designated by this or that word. This is crucial, for it directs attention to the fact that there is no “true” referent that we are attempting to describe. Statements do refer to objects, but these do not derive in any sense from a particular state of things, but stem from the statement itself.³³ Again, when politicians or academics refer to genocide, they are not referring to a fixed object, for there is no “true” or “essential” genocide. A genocide only *becomes* a genocide when relevant state actors assert—through political statements—and agree that a situation of mass killings is a genocide. Is this a tautological argument? Yes, it most certainly is. But how else can one account for the political vicissitudes of the twentieth-century that have shrouded discussions of genocide? What else accounts for the inaction of the United Nations during the spring and summer of 1994 as hundreds of thousands of people were slaughtered in Rwanda? Why else has the international community

30 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, translated by R. Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 94–95.

31 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, translated by A. Sheridan Smith (London: Pantheon Books, 1972), 91–99.

32 As discussed later, the Khmer Rouge made extensive use of slogans and songs to disseminate political statements among the people.

33 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by S. Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 7–8.

(at the time of writing) disagreed as to whether the on-going violence in Darfur constitutes a genocide?

Foucault forwards a number of principles that guide his understanding of discourses. To begin with, a discourse must be treated as a discontinuous activity, its different manifestations sometimes coming together, but just as easily excluding each other. In other words, there is often considerable agreement among the various discourses of genocide forwarded by scholars, politicians, or even those standing trial for the crime of genocide. However, despite these similarities, there are also remarkable divergences, which lead to different interpretations and evaluations. Foucault refers to this as the principle of discontinuity. Also, Foucault proposes a principle a “rarity,” arguing that “everything is never said.”³⁴ All knowledges are partial and, consequently, discourses are selective. However, the absences, or silences, are not to be automatically thought of as an indication of repression. This is important when considering government-sanctioned discourses. We cannot presume—although we may, through empirical work, argue—that discursive practices conceal a hidden agenda. Further, Foucault forwards a principle of specificity: a particular discourse cannot be resolved by a prior system of significations. In other words, we should not imagine that the world presents us with a legible face, leaving us merely to decipher it.³⁵ Genocide is not “waiting to be discovered;” it must be agreed upon. Lastly, discourses, for Foucault, are limited. They restrict what is or is not to be included.

A Foucauldian approach to discourse, in sum, is to view discourses not as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as *practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*.³⁶ The knowledge that enables us to answer questions, to make policy, to make judgements pertaining to a particular actions is informed—indeed produced—by the discursive practices constituting and demarcating the field. Consequently, there can never be a singular discourse of genocide, but rather multiple, contradictory, and contested discourses of genocide.

A post-structural approach to genocide, as such, identifies two different tasks which, in general, have defined the field of “genocide studies.” On the one hand, there is the task of defining and arguing whether a particular event, such as the mass killing of people, should be considered a genocide. This task has been largely assumed by legal scholars who attempt to prosecute the perpetrators accused of genocide. On the other hand, there is the task of understanding the motivations, the intentions, the knowledge-claims forwarded by the perpetrators.³⁷ Social scientists, and especially historians (but also sociologists and anthropologists), have mostly engaged in this

34 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 118.

35 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 229.

36 Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 49.

37 I may, at this point, be accused of side-stepping the moral question of right and wrong implied by the term *genocide*. This is, in fact, a question I explore in the final chapter, namely, the implications for social justice. Suffice it to say, I believe social justice is likewise discursive, resultant from a political process. There can be, in other words, no “universal” human rights. Rather than promoting a nihilistic position, I will argue that this stance is, in fact, more liberating. Consider: Human rights are not pre-ordained, handed down by some omniscient being. Rather, someone, or some group of people, must decide what constitutes a

task. Geographers, curiously, have been mostly silent on the subject of genocide. This is surprising, given that key *spatial* concepts may provide important insights into the intentions of the perpetrators of genocide.

Geographical Imaginations

The writing of our geographies is a process of creating and inscribing meanings about our places and spaces.

Denis Cosgrove and Mona Domosh³⁸

The struggle over geography is also a conflict between competing images and imaginings ...
Gearóid Ó Tuathail³⁹

Peter Taylor recently suggested that “God invented war to teach Americans geography.”⁴⁰ Of course, he is being deliberately provocative, his statement designed to induce engagement. Nevertheless, there is a rather large kernel of “truth” contained within part of his statement, namely that war does facilitate geographic interest—though not necessarily understanding. Susan Schulten notes that following certain pivotal moments during the Second World War—the German invasion of Poland, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and the assault on Normandy—Americans bought in a matter of hours what in peacetime would have been a year’s supply of maps and atlases. She continues that this nationwide attention to maps brought the farthest reaches of the war into everyday conversation, and demonstrated the powerful relationship between war and geography.⁴¹

Raising the connection between war and geography at this point is not to suggest that Geographers are Mars’ handmaidens. Rather, it is to emphasize the importance of geographic knowledges. Geography, as Schulten explains, is a way of distinguishing “here” from “there,” without which little sense can be made of human experience. However, and this relates directly to the urgency and immediacy associated with warfare, wars have deliberate and explicit effects on the *nature* of geographic knowledge and of spatial representation. For example, Schulten elaborates that Americans pored over new maps—namely, Goode’s “homolosine projection”—that highlighted America’s *proximity* to Europe and Asia, shaking the nation’s well-developed sense of isolation.⁴² Maps, therefore, were just one medium

universal human right. *Would you want Pol Pot, Joseph Stalin, or Adolf Hitler to make that decision?*

38 Cosgrove and Domosh, “Author and Authority,” 27.

39 Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, 14.

40 Peter J. Taylor, “God Invented War to Teach Americans Geography,” *Political Geography* 23(2004): 487–492.

41 Susan Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1–2.

42 Schulten, *Geographical Imagination*, 2–3.

(among many) that re-defined America's geographic knowledge—imagination—of the world.⁴³

But what exactly is meant by “geographic knowledge”? In common parlance, the phrase often refers to some understanding, some knowledge, about a particular place. Consequently, geographical knowledge may be understood as that information purported to explain, describe, and interpret the distributions and characteristics of people and places. This is a fairly standard approach to Geography: the writing of peoples and places. Conversely, geographical knowledge may also encompass a normative dimension in that it prescribes *where* people are to be located. David Harvey explains that states, for example, may institute normative programs for the production of new geographical configurations and in so doing become major sites for orchestrating the production of space, the definition of territoriality, the geographical distribution of population, economic activity, social services, wealth and well-being.⁴⁴ In either case (the former being more descriptive, the latter being more normative), geographic knowledges are representations.

Edward Said referred to these knowledges as *imaginative geographies*.⁴⁵ These “ways of seeing,” according to Said, “legitimate a vocabulary, a representative discourse peculiar to the understanding of places that becomes *the* way in which a place is known.”⁴⁶ Imaginative geographies are, in effect, geopolitical discourses—metageographies—that provide the foundation of foreign policy. As explained by Lewis and Wigen, metageographies may be conceived as “spatial structures”—geopolitical visions—through which people order their knowledge of the world. They maintain that diplomats, politicians, and military strategists employ metageographical frameworks no less than do scholars and journalists. Lewis and Wigen note, for example, that during the Cold War Americans relied heavily on a tripartite classification scheme to give order to the map—the familiar First, Second, and Third World divisions. More recently, new metageographies have emerged, such as US President George W. Bush's “Axis of Evil.” Lewis and Wigen warn that such geographical constructs do not simply lead to faulty understandings of human societies but instead constitute ideological structures.⁴⁷ Derek Gregory concurs, noting that imaginative geographies, or metageographies, involve a politics of space. He asserts, “Who claims the power to represent: to imagine geography like this rather than like that? The process of articulation is ... also a process of valorization.”⁴⁸ In short, geographic representations undergird political practices. Consequently, as Lewis

43 For more in-depth discussions on the relationship between war and the development of (Anglo-American) geographical thought, see Trevor J. Barnes and Matthew Farish, “Between Regions: Science, Militarism, and American Geography from World War to Cold War,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96(2006): 807–826 and Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

44 David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 213.

45 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

46 Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 61.

47 Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

48 Derek Gregory, “The Lightning of Possible Storms,” *Antipode* 36(2004): 798–808.

and Wigen conclude, when used by those who wield political power, the outcomes can be truly tragic; indeed, metageographies may be used as tools of genocide.⁴⁹

In short, there is no *presentation*, only *re-presentation*.⁵⁰ However, it was not until the early 1990s that Geographers and other social scientists began to seriously question how spaces and places, people and events, are represented.⁵¹ Traditionally, James Duncan and David Ley explain, Geographers participated in “descriptive fieldwork” whereupon the objective of research was to observe and record—through proper training—the world and its inhabitants. Such an approach was supplemented, or in some circles, supplanted, by a more positivist orientation. Associated with the “quantitative” revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, Geographers attempted to describe and understand the world through the use of various statistical measures. Undergoing an ontological and epistemological revolution—as opposed to a methodological revolution—Geography was soon dominated by practitioners who sought to adopt the principles and practices of scientific investigation.⁵²

Positivist science, broadly defined, consists of several characteristic features: the collection of data through observation and measurement of things that are “known” to exist and can be directly experienced; the development of generalizations and deduced laws that can only follow on the basis of repeated observations and the testing of hypotheses about causal relations that exist between phenomena; to combining of accepted generalizations and hypotheses into theories and laws that explain how the world works; and the assumption that theories can never be completely validated (i.e., verified) in the sense of proved absolutely correct, but can be provisionally accepted until contrary evidence or data are collected.⁵³

Both descriptive fieldwork and positivist approaches are considered to be *mimetic*, meaning that each approach attempts to provide an accurate representation of reality. Many of the foundational assumptions underlying these approaches, however, were critiqued and challenged by Geographers during the 1980s and 1990s, culminating in what some referred to as a “crisis of representation.” Specifically, some Geographers (and other social scientists) questioned the long-held beliefs of an independently existing reality and the mimetic theory of representation; others questioned the ability to accurately record and interpret reality, however defined; and still others rejected the search for “truth” and the totalizing ambitions of modern science, i.e., the search

49 Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, ix–xiii, 8. See also James A. Tyner, *America's Strategy in Southeast Asia: From the Cold War to the Terror War* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

50 This theme is well-developed in the writings of Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Edward Said, and those scholars informed by post-structuralism.

51 Geography, certainly, was not alone. According to Roxanne Doty, the question of representation has historically been excluded from the academic study of international relations. Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

52 Duncan and Ley, “Introduction,” 2–3.

53 Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, Brendan Bartley, and Duncan Fuller, *Thinking Geographically: Space, Theory and Contemporary Human Geography* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 29; see also Ron Johnston, *Philosophy and Human Geography: An Introduction to Contemporary Approaches*, 2nd edition (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), 11–54.

for universal laws.⁵⁴ Derek Gregory is blunt in his assessment: Human geographers must work with social theory because we have little choice. “Empiricism,” for Gregory, “is not an option” because the “facts” do not (and never will) “speak” for themselves, no matter how closely we listen.⁵⁵

According to Denis Cosgrove and Mona Domosh, the “scientific way of knowing is no longer regarded as a privileged discourse linking us to truth but rather one discourse among many, which constructs both the object of its enquiry and the modes of studying and representing that object.”⁵⁶ Doty explains, for example, that “International relations are inextricably bound up with discursive practices that put into circulation representations that are taken as ‘truth.’”⁵⁷ This expands upon Foucault’s articulation of truth: Truth, for Foucault, is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it. Truth, accordingly, is “subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations; it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation.”⁵⁸

The “crisis of representation” is vitally important to contemporary discussions of genocide and mass violence, for it highlights the processes involved in defining what constitutes genocide. Numerous scholars, for example, have argued that one defining feature of genocide is the deliberate killing of civilians. Such a distinction serves ostensibly to separate genocidal practices from those of warfare. Shaw concludes that the “difference between war and genocide is not the destructive character of the action, the violent modality, or the typical actor.” Rather, the “difference lies in the construction of civilian groups as enemies, not only in a social or political but also in a military sense, to be destroyed.” According to Shaw, genocide, unlike war, “constructs unarmed civilian populations as the objects, in their own right, of the types of armed violence normally applied only to armed enemies.”⁵⁹

Supposedly, this distinction removes other violent acts—the aerial bombings of Hamburg and Dresden, the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the environmental warfare waged over Vietnam—from the realm of “genocide.” Shaw, therefore, is able to argue that “although mass slaughter of civilians—for example at Dresden or Hiroshima—was evil and illegitimate, it could still be understood at least

54 Duncan and Ley, “Introduction,” 2–3.

55 Derek Gregory, “Intervention in the Historical Geography of Modernity: Social Theory, Spatiality and the Politics of Representation,” in *Place/Culture/Representation*, James Duncan and David Ley (eds) (New York: Routledge, 1993), 272–313; at 275.

56 Cosgrove and Domosh, “Author and Authority,” 28.

57 Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 5.

58 Michel Foucault, “Truth and power,” in C. Gordon (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, translated by C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, and K. Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109–33; at 131–32.

59 Martin Shaw, *What is Genocide?* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2007), 111–112.

partially under the rubric of war. Civilians were part of the enemy: but no civilian group was an enemy distinct from the enemy state.”⁶⁰ Chalk and Jonassohn likewise exclude civilian victims of aerial bombardment in belligerent states from *their* definition of genocide. Chalk and Jonassohn maintain that in this age of total war belligerent states make all enemy-occupied territory part of the theater of operations regardless of the presence of civilians. Civilians are regarded as combatants so long as their governments control the cities in which they reside.⁶¹ Such a stance contrasts with that of Leo Kuper who has argued that the bombing of civilian enemy populations does constitute genocide.

Herein lies the problem of representation. Genocides are defined externally. At no point throughout the twentieth-century since the term “genocide” was coined has any one identified their own policies or practices as genocide. Neither Pol Pot nor Slobidan Milosivic, for instance, characterized their policies—which led directly to the deaths of many hundreds of thousands of people—as genocide. Charges of genocide are always raised by other people, other institutions, other governments, than those perpetrating violent acts. What counts as genocide, therefore, as opposed to some other “legitimate” form of mass killing, is a political process. It is not surprising that many American scholars would not consider the annihilation of Native Americans as a genocide; it is also not surprising that such scholars would not consider the brutality associated with the enslavement of Africans in the United States genocidal. And it is not surprising that many scholars would not consider the loss of life associated with the use of napalm and cluster bombs in Vietnam and Cambodia by the US military as genocidal acts. Following Cosgrove and Domosh, judgements that we make—including those judgements directed toward genocide—are not based on any concept of empirical truth but rather lie in a realm of moral discourse, a central element in the struggle for meaning.⁶²

Geographic knowledges are not mimetic representations of reality or truth. Rather, they are the product of the political; they are produced. How then do we interpret the underlying geographical imaginations of the mass killing of people? I begin with the premise that mass killings—practices that become labeled as genocide—are neither natural nor inevitable. Rather, these result from the deliberate forwarding of actions that lead to widespread death and destruction. Such practices may be direct and explicit in their murderous intent, such as the gassing of Jews and other persons during the Holocaust, as well as other forms of executions and bombings. Practices may also indirectly contribute to mass killings, such as starvation, exposure, or disease resulting from forced relocation/forced labor, or from the intentional confiscation, destruction, or blockade of the necessities of life.⁶³ Given such a stance, I concur

60 Shaw, *What is Genocide*, 112. It should be noted, further, that not all scholars would consider the bombing of Dresden or Hiroshima as evil or illegitimate. Such a statement reflects yet another contested representation.

61 Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

62 Cosgrove and Domosh, “Author and Authority,” 29.

63 Benjamin A. Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killings and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 10.

with Valentino who argues that the effort to understand mass killing should begin with an examination of the capabilities, interests, ideas, and strategies of groups (i.e., the Khmer Rouge) and individuals (i.e., Pol Pot, Khieu Samphan) in positions of political and military power and not with factors that predispose societies to produce such leaders.⁶⁴ What is required, following Valentino, is an attempt to understand the “strategic logic” of mass killing.

However, we must also recognize that any strategic logic is inherently a *spatial logic*. In other words, a particular and normative geographic knowledge undergirds the ideas and strategies of groups and individuals; a specific geographic vision is sought for society, a national myth is to be constructed. Such a geographic imagination thus addresses many key aspects of mass killing: Who is to be included in, or excluded from, the desired society? What is the most effective way of achieving the desired society (i.e., relocation or the elimination through death of people)? How are social relations to be arranged in the new society?

Our task is to uncover the “battle for truth,” those discourses—those spatial representations—that promote and facilitate, justify and legitimate, the *sanctioned* killing of people. The task of analysis, therefore, is “not to reveal essential truths that have been obscured, but rather to examine *how* certain representations underlie the production of knowledge and identities and how these representations make various courses of action possible.”⁶⁵ In *The Killing of Cambodia*, consequently, I attempt to chart out those geographical imaginations that justified, for the Khmer Rouge, the death of a people and a place.

64 Valentino, *Final Solutions*, 64.

65 Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 5.