

Demo-skepticism and Genocide

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Genocide studies have expanded rapidly over the last twenty years, impelled by events such as the Bosnian and Rwandan tragedies and aided by the interdisciplinary confluence between comparative politics, history, anthropology and other social sciences. The challenge from historical sociology is particularly meaningful and few scholars are better equipped to achieve this task than Michael Mann. His explanation, linking genocide to 'democracy', is a relatively novel one. However, while scholars from various disciplines broadly agree on the link between genocide and modernity, the description of ethnic cleansing as the 'dark side of democracy' is more controversial. This article assesses Mann's claim, contrasting it with recent research in the field: after situating Mann's contribution within the structure–agency debate, I question whether causality and human responsibility are lost. I then explore the broader, recent trend of 'demo-skepticism' to which the book belongs. Its main weakness is a contraction of the concept of democracy into that of 'majority rule'. This is accompanied by an intermittent overlap between the concepts of democracy, liberalism and neoliberalism, under the umbrella term 'liberal democracy'.

Rarely in recent history has the faith in democracy become so debilitated as in the current dawning of the twenty-first century. Terrorism and counter-terrorism have demolished many certitudes. Millions of people have demonstrated throughout the world since 7 October 2001, as the 'war on terror' officially began in Afghanistan while the wave of global protest began to expand. In several Western countries, the lack of governments' responsiveness accompanied by the introductions of new 'anti-terror' legislation often sacrificing human rights in the name of 'security', have led many to question whether we still live in a democratic age. 'Liberal democracies' are facing a legitimacy crisis, while disenchantment, even cynicism, with our very political systems has gained ground. It was predictable to anticipate that the new trend would sooner or later hit the academy and be reflected in the scholarly literature.

Until recently, the prevailing dogma in political science was the *democratic peace theory*. It claimed that 'democracies rarely fight one another because they share common norms of live-and-let-live and domestic institutions that constrain the recourse to war' (Rosato, 2003, p. 585). The theory largely originated during the Cold War, outlasting the latter's demise (Gowa, 2000). For some, the whole theory smacked of ideological imperialism whose goal was to 'instill a form of corporate government that reinforces private power against human needs and rights' and 'a triumph of rhetoric over reality' (Wilkin, 2003, pp. 655 and 657). More significantly, the theory is 'based on fixed definitions of democracy and war and a nation-state ontology of the international' (Barkawi and Laffey, 2001, p. 2).

However, the theory has by now produced its own backlash, which has gone even further, expanding into a general critique of democratic theory and the very idea

of ‘liberal democracy’.¹ It has combined with a much larger onslaught on the very notion of democracy, emerging in various areas and disciplines. I shall identify this new trend as *demo-skepticism*.

A similar consensus prevailed until recently in genocide studies: it claimed that genocides can only occur under totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, hence their emergence in democratic states should be ruled out. When Michael Mann set out to criticize this approach for the *New Left Review* (NLR) in 1999, his main target was J. R. Rummel’s (1994) theory of ‘absolute power’. Mann identifies Rummel as the ‘main representative’ of the ‘democratic peace’ school in genocide studies, arguing that, as democracies are essentially pacific, ‘they are the absolute antithesis of genocide’ (Mann, 1999, p. 18). If so, how to explain more problematic cases, from the rise of Nazism to more recent events in Rwanda and Yugoslavia (particularly Bosnia)? These two genocides provided powerful fuel against the very notion of ‘democratic peace’, particularly so within the field of genocide studies. In fact, Mann argued that ‘modern genocide can be regarded as “the dark side of democracy” ’ (Mann, 1999, p. 19).

By 2005, Mann had expanded his original NLR article into a sophisticated, complex and highly erudite volume, with a robust core thesis: the most horrific instances of ethnic cleansing, from the Armenian genocide to the Holocaust and the Rwandan massacres, have their roots in deepening or failed democratization processes or, rather, in the increasing participation of demographic majorities in representative politics. Governments ‘have justified themselves – and their genocides – “in the name of the people” ’ (Mann, 1999, p. 19).

Is ethnic cleansing hence a product of modern mass politics? This question can be broken up into its two constituent parts: (1) Is genocide modern? (2) Does it derive from democratic participation? While there is a broad interdisciplinary affirmative consensus on the former, the second point is relatively novel. Here, Mann’s approach clashes with both received wisdom and scholarly research on specific instances of genocide.

Weak and Strong States

Nearly all scholars of genocide agree on the modern timing of ethnic cleansing.² The twentieth century has been widely recognized as the century of nationalism and genocide. Most historians and social scientists concur on this grim assessment of the past century (see Carmichael, 2005; Hobsbawm, 1995; Kuper, 1981; Levene, 2005a; Melson, 1996; Shaw, 2003): never before has mass killing been carried out on such a vast scale and in such a short span of time. Mann shares this modernist approach to genocide, adding a fascinating section on imperial genocide among Native Americans. Although there are competing conceptions of modernity, what matters to most scholars is the role of the post-Westphalian state and its bureaucratic-military machine. How central is the modern state in the

occurrence of genocide? In particular, what is the role played by modern state elites and their decision-making processes?

Basically, two trends have confronted each other in genocide studies: the 'strong-state' thesis (Harff, 2003; Horowitz, 1980; Rummel, 1994; 2003) and the 'weak-state' thesis (Bloxham, 2003; Mann, 2005; Mommsen, 1997). The former, often identified as the *intentionalist* explanation, argues that genocide is rooted in the absolute concentration of power into the hands of tiny elites and its causes can be ascribed to a clearly identifiable 'chain of command'. The latter, sometimes referred to as the *functionalist* explanation, diagnoses its emergence in the collapse of empire, state disintegration, political chaos and other forms of state 'weakness'. The former view concentrates on agency or intention to kill, the latter on structure and the chain of circumstances as they unfold independently from full governmental control. This substantial cleavage in the literature can be identified as a debate about *structure* and *agency*.

However, we can better conceptualize this opposition as a continuum, rather than an irreconcilable dichotomy. In fact, the two approaches are not incompatible: state 'weakness' cannot be objectively measured. What matters is the subjective perception of weakness experienced by state elites, rather than any actual 'weakness' which could be empirically tested against variables of mass murder. For instance, 'paranoid' leaders, such as Saddam Hussein, Stalin and the Young Turks tended to radicalize their oppressive policies out of sheer fear of armed mutinies and defenestration. To engage rogue elements of the army and the party in mounting spirals of massacres and counter-massacres provided a vital 'safety valve' for the continuity and survival of these leaders. Even the Reign of Terror during the French revolution could be seen as a sign of state weakness or paranoid leadership. Yet, the sheer power of the state's bureaucratic machine contributed to mass murder on an unprecedented scale, such as the *Vendée* massacre (1793–4). French historians have debated whether this can be defined as the first modern democide or 'populicide' (Lebrun, 1985). State power was indeed further emboldened by nationalist fervour at the very peak of its 'weakness', leading to the first *levée en masse* (August 1793). The impact of state-led nationalist terror on ordinary people was in fact devastating. Hence, it is not the state's alleged 'strength' or 'weakness' which matters, but the perception of personal threat experienced by state elites.

Finally, in all of the documented cases of genocide, the power of even the 'weakest' states was unmatched in comparison with the inadequate, futile means of self-defense available to isolated rural communities and other hapless targets of genocidal practices.

'Weak-state' theorists see inter-state wars or civil wars as harbingers of societal and political 'anarchy' leading to the disruption of state functions. Holocaust scholars have long debated whether the war was a triggering factor for the Final Solution during Germany's eastward expansion. Some identify the war as *the* Shoah's

major catalyst (Fettweis, 2003). The same argument has been applied to the Turkish case, where ‘cumulative radicalization’ has been diagnosed as triggering the Armenian genocide (Bloxham, 2003; see also Melson, 1996), although the root causes can be found in the Young Turks’ nationalist ideology. Other scholars have analysed the causality of war by comparing genocide across continents and time spans (Bartrop, 2002).³ In general, a thin line separates genocide from war, two variants of the same destructive trend: genocide is ‘war carried out by other means’ (Shaw, 2003).

‘Civil wars’, as conceptually distinguished from inter-state wars, can also lead to genocidal outcomes. In both instances, the long-term devastation inflicted on the civilian population tends to outlast various generations, even exceeding the numbers of people directly killed by war (Ghobarah *et al.*, 2003). This was certainly the case in Russia’s potentially genocidal war on Afghanistan and its daunting legacy of massive loss of human life and destruction of the local economy, mostly due to millions of landmines.

Causality and Agency: Intentionalists vs. Functionalists

Wars are normally state led, yet what matters to the functionalists is their unpredictable and cumulative after-effects, rather than their conscious calculation by elites. Therefore elites may initiate war, but typically are unable to control their short- and long-term outcomes. Their *intention* can be found somewhere at the beginning, in the middle or in the concluding acts of the tragedy, yet it may not appear as a coherent pattern, as a homogeneous development.

Could we identify, in contrast, some obvious instances of *intentionalism* from start to end? Dealing with the Nazi Holocaust, Mann argues that, of all his case studies, the Shoah was the most *premeditated* and *state-centered* (Mann, 2005, p. 201). There was certainly a ‘master plan’ to eliminate minorities both in the mainland and in the conquered territories. Its traces and rationale can be found in Hitler’s early statements.⁴ But, as elsewhere, the real ‘final solution’ could only be contemplated and fully executed under *war* circumstances. It was then that escalation could be justified as ‘self-defense’. Minorities, aliens, foreigners, could now be re-conceptualized as a threat to ‘national security’. War provided the cover for carrying out massive crimes against humanity, entailing the annihilation of entire peoples and their cultures. What nowadays international relations theory identifies as the problem of ‘*securitization*’ was already applied by genocidal regimes against their targets.⁵

If so, why were Germany’s ‘auxiliaries’ (Mann, 2005, ch. 10) often more ‘willing executioners’ than the Germans themselves? Despite its imperial past, Austria has harboured since 1918 some of the strongest anti-Semitic movements. Or was it precisely because it had failed as an empire? After all, post-imperial polities, such as Turkey in the 1920s and even France in the 1960s, have tended to develop

extreme xenophobic trends. But anti-Semitism also became widespread elsewhere, in areas such as Poland and Ukraine, which were themselves victims of Germany's deeply anti-Slavic nationalism. To explain the Holocaust, Mann shifts back his focus on to state power, stressing the 'war state': in these occupied countries, collaboration with the perpetrators would have been impossible without the powerful support structure of the Nazi state, chaperoned by Germany's military hierarchy (Mann, 2005, p. 316). Therefore, in the Nazi case the structure–agency continuum tilts decisively towards the agency side. Mann finds it indeed difficult to accommodate his structure-centered approach to this instance.

Throughout the book, Mann rejects the intentionalist explanation, arguing that the clear 'intention' of committing genocide is rarely found (Mann, 2005, p. 7). However, this goes against the grain of most historical research. The very centrality of war as an explanandum leads us back to the role of political power and the state. Mann rightly begins his historical excursion with the Armenian genocide, to which he dedicates two highly detailed and passionate chapters. Yet, this is hardly an ideal testing ground for his theory. For instance, Mark Mazower (2001, p. 2) argues that 'As in all combatant states, the war had militarised every aspect of [the Turkish] government, and power lay chiefly in the hands of hardline nationalists' among whom a kind of triumvirate 'reigned supreme'. Most Turks were in principle opposed to the massacres, but their opposition was 'ineffectual'. Those who participated did so simply as a form of quick enrichment through pillage and rarely out of 'ethnic hatred'. The entire process was hetero-directed from above by the military pinnacle.

Holocaust studies are a vast field, but with increasing agreement over responsibilities and causality. This is also the case for Germany's 'auxiliaries'; for instance, regarding the deportations of Hungarian Jews, Christian Gerlach has clearly identified the 'chain of command' or top-down decision-making process from the Nazi leadership down to the Hungarian authorities, which had to act in close co-operation with their Axis allies (Gerlach, 2004).⁶

On the Rwandan case, Samantha Power (2002) more clearly explains the role of the Hutu extremist government as the chief (and only) agent of genocide. Grass-roots participation, as described by Mann, becomes at best a partial picture of a derivative phenomenon. Causality is palpably recognizable in nearly all literature on the Rwandan genocide, some of which is incorporated by Mann. The agents were the ruling elites in Kigali, specifically the Hutu-controlled army, the *gendarmérie* and the Interahamwe militia (Li, 2004; Power, 2002).⁷

Mann's argument proves even more difficult to sustain in the case of Milosevic's Yugoslavia (Mann, 2005, chs. 12–13), where the painful transition to 'liberal democracy' led to genocidal outcomes. Scholars of the Bosnian genocide tend to be more elite oriented and agency focussed (see Carmichael, 2002; 2005; Cigar, 1995; Cushman, 2004; Cushman and Mestrovic, 1996; Gallagher, 2003; Malcolm,

1994; Ramet, 1999; 2004; Simms, 2001). Comparativists and collective action theorists also concur in identifying a clear causality and 'chain of events'. For Russell Hardin (1997), genocide emanated from elite decisions and followed a quite linear logic of self-preservation through 'collective action':

Nothing that must first be socially learned can be primordial. Ethnic identification is a theoretical, not an instinctive notion. If you have it, you have learned it in your own lifetime, you did not somehow learn it at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 ... It was the war that preceded whatever ethnic hatred there now is (Hardin, 1997, p. 150).⁸

Yet, Mann disperses causality among a nebulous plethora of actors, failed institutions and historical contingencies. For instance, he discounts the key role played by Belgrade's political leadership in framing public opinion through the skillful use of television news. Milosevic's grip on power is hardly explicable without considering the constant underpinning received from Belgrade TV (Kent, 2005; Ramet, 1999; 2004, p. 746; Silber and Little, 1995; Thompson, 1999).

To be sure, Mann is no friend of theories of 'ancient ethnic hatreds', so often dominating in the US media and sectors of academia. He rejects these as untenable (Mann, 2005, p. 20). In criticizing the 'essentialist' works of Goldhagen and Dadrian, he aptly recognizes that 'ethnic groups never act collectively' (Mann, 2005, p. 20; see also Conversi, 2004b).⁹ Yet, he replaces 'ancient hatreds' with 'contingential hatreds' and processes of 'escalations' (Mann, 2005, pp. 503–4), by which a diabolical dynamic of attacks and counter-attacks is generated, leading to 'uncontrollable outcomes and unpredictable effects'. Partially losing the plot, Mann limits the scope of his analysis by focussing on states becoming 'nationalized' or 'essentialized' from 'contingent, eventful' processes (Mann, 2005, p. 360). Mann's agency-less approach becomes particularly evident with his lack of attention to the media and their capacity of mass mobilization in times of crisis.

The second and most important critical point in Mann's approach concerns his use of the concept of 'democracy'.

The Rise and Rise of *Demo-skepticism*

Until recently, the orthodox view was that genocides can hardly occur under democratic conditions (Rummel, 1994; 2003). Citizens in democratic states have ostensibly more power to speak out and denounce government misdeeds. This view seems difficult to counter-argue in terms of risk assessment: the higher the *concentration of power* in the hands of one or few persons, the higher the chance that this power, if unchecked, will be abused. In other words, Rummel and others argue that genocide (absolute killing) is the result of the *concentration of power* into the hands of a few people. Its only antidote is democracy. Can this argument be easily dismissed? Which approach could better explain all modern genocides,

politicides, democides and mass murders? For Mann (2005), democracy and mass politics not only are unable to avert genocides, they tend to encourage them.

Mann is not alone in criticizing this line of thought as he joins a rapidly growing circle of scholars, a larger, fashionable 'anti-democratic' trend which I define hereby as *demo-skepticism*. Demo-skepticism has recently emerged among US academics of different ideological persuasions, such as Amy Chua (2003), Roland Paris (2004) and Jack Snyder (2000).¹⁰ Despite some of their liberal, left and even Marxist credentials, their argument falls into line with the neo-conservative 'illiberal democracy' thesis advanced by US journalists and 'pop academics' such as Robert Kaplan and Fareed Zakaria.¹¹ Snyder (2000) provides a convincing argument against free elections and voting as a political panacea. In contrast to Mann, Snyder focuses on elites' manipulation and their cynical externalization of internal tensions through diversionary war and destructive developmental policies, with appropriate examples from Hitler's Germany and Milosevic's Serbia. He preferentially stresses the need for institution building, a free press and the rule of law.¹² For Paris (2004), hasty transition to free market democracy can lead to destabilization and chaos. Therefore, it is a matter of the speed in which specific countries are required to introduce wholesale market reforms. Again, the key prerequisite for tackling the destabilizing effects of free-market globalization is institution building: political and economic reforms should only be introduced once pluralistic institutions are consolidated.¹³ Amy Chua (2003) shares perhaps more interpretive ground with Mann since she specifically deals with ethnic conflict and mass murder as deriving from the imposition of free-market democratization.¹⁴ All these authors argue that mass democracy coupled with neoliberal globalization imperil multi-ethnic coexistence.

The problem is that most of them share a very 'condensed' view of democracy. They tend to conflate two conceptual levels in it, both of which may not have much to do with democracy per se. On the one hand, they confuse democracy with majoritarianism, that is, the governance practice of the modern nation state. Modern nation states have been conventionally conceived as the preserve of a dominant ethnic group or nation (Connor, 2004; Conversi, 2004a; Smith, 1991; 1998). On the other hand, there is a recurring conceptual overlap between democracy and neoliberalism, despite all the evidence that the two may well be incompatible. In other words, there is now deeper disagreement than ever before regarding the role played by democracy, especially if coupled with neoliberalism.

From Majority Rule to Genocide: The Ethnocratic Predicament

Mann (2005) convincingly demonstrates that majoritarian democracy may sustain genocide when the *demos* is associated with the *ethnos*. Unfortunately the latter is the rule, rather than the exception. He begins by dealing with the country which, until recently, was heralded as the beacon of 'liberal democracy', the USA (Mann, 2005, ch. 2). The American Constitution is the oldest unchanged one in the world

and remains an object of sacred veneration by most Americans from both the right and the left of the political spectrum. But the Constitution's opening sentence, 'We the people', lends itself to two opposite interpretations: one ethnic, the other civic. The 'people' can be either the *ethnos*, sharing putative descent, or the *demos*, simply sharing citizenship and hypothetically equal rights, irrespective of their descent. However, in a settler society that was built on pillage and destruction, and where the clearing of the conquered lands of its original inhabitants was legitimized in God's name, the ethnic variety tended to prevail, imbued with legalistic and ideological justifications (see Lieven, 2004). The importance of slavery for the functioning of the US capitalist system has been recognized by both Marxists and non-Marxist scholars alike.¹⁵ Despite, or because of, an all-pervasive assimilationist culture, sharp cleavages in the labour market persist and have been abolished by neither the Civil War nor the Civil Rights movement. As a case study, the USA stands out as the litmus test, where democracy has repeatedly become an empty concept for larger and larger sections of its population.¹⁶

Mann's core thesis about the democracy-genocide linkage becomes self-evident when applied to the case of Rwanda (Mann, 2005, chs 14 and 15). Possibly, this is the only case that fully substantiates the book's core argument: Hutu genocidal leaders always spoke in the name of majoritarian democracy against 'invaders' from the Tutsi minority (Mann, 2005, p. 443).

In truth, Mann's vision of democracy could be better rendered by the more suitable concept of *ethnocracy*, a political framework in which only the dominant ethnic group has the faculty of governing itself through democratically elected institutions and laws (Yiftachel and Ghanem, 2004).¹⁷ Yet, this has been precisely the prevalent pattern, first emerging in the West and then exported elsewhere. The term 'ethnocracy', originally coined to describe the Israeli political system, could in fact be extended to most modern nation states, notably in Eastern Europe.

Can Majoritarianism be Democratic?

Mann's stress is placed upon the negative role of electoral or representative democracy, although the argument is constructed as a broader diatribe against the perverse effects of 'liberal democracy'. But, the practice of electoral democracy should be more clearly detached from the philosophical principles of liberalism, intended as the defense of individual freedoms against authoritarianism and the 'tyranny of the majority'. This is particularly the case whenever liberalism is conceived as a set of principles in defense of the citizen from state intrusion.

Yet, Mann argues that 'democratic peace theory', the idea that liberal democracies promote greater harmony and peace between nations, 'is rooted in the *liberal* belief that, if the people's will is freely expressed, it will be pacific' (Mann, 2005, p. 22, emphasis added). This has elsewhere been identified as 'the most powerful

liberal contribution to the debate on the causes of war and peace' (Rosato, 2003, p. 585, emphasis added). A political philosopher could easily observe that this is not exactly a standard 'liberal' line, since the adjectives 'liberal' and 'democratic' have been otherwise divorced. Many European liberals thought precisely the contrary: that the seizure of power by the masses would lead to the perversion of liberty. Without turning to Pareto's and Mosca's right-wing 'elitism', Spain's conservative philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1994, p. 11) argued just that 'the accession of the masses to complete social power ... means that actually Europe is suffering from the greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations and civilization' (see also Dobson, 1989).¹⁸

Most famously, John Stuart Mill feared that democracy would lead to the 'tyranny of majority', to an uneducated mass taking over power from wise and educated leaders (quoted in Schwarzmantel, 1994, p. 31). In contrast with these famous warnings, Mill's writings on nationality and representative democracy partially contradicted his own liberal principles, contributing to a gradual drift towards majoritarianism (Connor, 1994, pp. 3–27). Later on, these ideas joined into the wider Western mainstream encapsulated in the principle of national 'self-determination'. The application of this principle to Europe after the First World War ushered in the end of the Central European and Ottoman dynastic empires and the entrance of the USA on to the global stage in a dominant position. Indeed, the distinction between democratization and *liberalization* has long been acknowledged in the 'transitology' literature (Linz and Stepan, 1996). A regime can 'open up' to market forces, while maintaining its authoritarian grip on society and even totalitarian rule – as with Franco's Spain and contemporary China, respectively.

A second problem lies in Mann's focus on representative democracy as legitimated mostly by *electoral* turnouts (in reality, he criticizes this vision, attributing it to Rudolph Rummel [see Mann, 2005, p. 22]). We know that democracy can be defined in a variety of ways, of which popular suffrage is a very limited aspect. Moreover, elections, whether free or constrained, can hardly be conceived without reference to mass manipulation, particularly in a rapidly globalizing and media-dominated world. As Ken Livingstone famously quipped, 'if voting changed anything, they'd abolish it'.

Democracy can alternatively be seen as a process which is not fulfilled with the obtainment of universal suffrage. It must continuously 'expand' into pluralistic deepening, including the protection of minorities and their participation at all levels. For most liberals, it is a matter of quality, rather than quantity. The main criterion for democracy is 'an increase, not in the number of those who have the right to participate in making the decisions which concern them, but in the number of contexts or spaces in which they can exercise this right' (Bobbio, 1987, p. 37).

Mann is apprehensive about 'people's power', the idea espoused by democrats worldwide that people ought to 'rule themselves'. As he rightly observes, this has

led to endless boundary-building practices legitimated by the principle of 'popular sovereignty', according to which people should be governed by laws and rules set by themselves, or by the leaders they have chosen (Connor, 2004).

The democracy which Mann refers to is obviously *majoritarian* democracy as developed in rapidly Westernizing societies. This is different from a deep-reaching democracy enshrining multiculturalism and the protection of minority rights. All the genocide perpetrators under scrutiny have undergone various degrees of Westernization, absorbing strictly majoritarian, indeed plebiscitarian approaches to politics. Most of them have aspired to achieve Western-style 'modernity' within a very short span of time, certainly less than a generation. The Eastward spread of the nation-state model, rather than 'democracy', has endowed new elites with unprecedented powers of extermination. Mann does indeed agree that, following revolution and Westernization, modern Turkey (*de facto* and *de jure* a Balkan country) could exterminate millions who were formerly protected by the more pluralist Islamic principles enshrined by the *millet* system (Mann, 2005, pp. 113–9).¹⁹ The post-Ottoman tragedy reflected the fate of el-Andalus (Islamic Andalusia): after the fall of the kingdom of Granada (1492), the Spanish *reconquista* culminated in the massive and successive expulsions of Jews, Muslims and heretics.

Democracy vs. Neoliberal Globalization?

Mann seems to agree with many demo-skeptics that the problem does not lie with democracy per se, but in the particular version which the US/West tries to export across the globe.²⁰ This critical approach has been catapulted into relative prominence since the beginning of the 'war on terror'. But what do the new demo-skeptics really mean by 'democracy'? In fact, it appears that the target of much of their criticism is rather unbridled marketization and deregulation turning into 'free market' dogmatism. For many, not only on the left, the new *bête noire* is subsumed under the general heading of *neoliberalism*. In fact, neoliberalism can rightly be opposed to traditional individual and human-centered liberalism, to the point even of being incompatible with it. Neoliberalism can hence be seen as liberalism's bastard offspring, derived through the latter's marriage with unchecked profit and global corruption. Thus the critics' true targets are not democracies per se, but more specifically globalizing market democracies.

At this point, we need to ask how far can demo-skepticism be read as a critique of globalization? Mann points only briefly to the role of global centralization emanating from the directives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other US-centered bodies (Mann, 2003; Mann, 2005, p. 526). Certainly, his understanding of the devastating impact of 'imperial' neoliberalism is one of the book's strongest points.²¹ He also adumbrates the global shift from *liberalism* to *neoliberalism* as an ominous sign of the times (Mann, 2005, p. 512). If liberalism and neoliberalism are

clearly antithetical, perhaps incompatible, then a neoliberal world order would most certainly usher us into a more conflictive and fragmented society than hitherto believed. Historically, *liberalism's* greatest failure has been its inability to provide a recipe for the prevention and resolution of ethno-national conflicts. Is *neoliberalism* likely to promise anything better? Or can it rather yield more illiberal outcomes? Mann has certainly gone to great lengths to provide an overarching pessimistic, yet realistic, response to these questions.

On the other hand, the lack of true pluralism in the crucial area of transparency of information may be more relevant: people have the right to know in order to make up their minds and decide. Without deep-reaching media pluralism, demographic majorities are more likely to succumb to Manichean calls for destructive patriotism and expansionism. It is not 'democracy' which is to blame, but rather the lack of it in the crucial area of news and knowledge circulation. Despite the internet, most people in the USA and elsewhere are still locked out from the crucial knowledge which they need to inform their political choices. Therefore, a study of the relationship between ethnic conflict and globalization should focus on the current democratic 'deficit', rather than on supposed democratic 'excesses', unless democracy is conflated with majoritarianism and populism.

Perhaps a much clearer articulation of the demo-skeptic argument comes from this side of the Atlantic. Colin Crouch (2004) has recently argued that we already live in a *post-democratic* age, where government slips away from popular control while big business and multinational corporations rule unchallenged. With globalizing neoliberalism, the era of popular sovereignty has come to an end, and with it the very meaning of democracy. The very fact that we begin to feel that we no longer live in 'democratic' societies could account for the rise of demo-skepticism. Long before the demo-skeptic turn, the Italian sociologist Franco Ferrarotti (1995, p. 9) had warned that the death of democracy is always a suicide, never a murder.

Conclusion

There is certainly no consensus as to whether majoritarian democracy can provide a bulwark against genocide. Michael Mann's main argument is that modern genocide and ethnic cleansing stem from failed democratization or what he calls the 'dark side of democracy'. By democracy he clearly means 'rule by the people' and 'for the people'. Mann obviously refers to 'representative democracy' as majority rule. This points to a set of related problems and controversies.

Mann's initial criticism was directed at state-centered theories, particularly the work of R. J. Rummel (1994; 2003). Rummel's approach is quite straightforward: paraphrasing Lord Acton, his central thesis is that 'Power kills. Absolute power kills absolutely' (Rummel, 1994, p. 1). This seems a rock-solid argument, difficult to counter-argue in terms of risk assessment: the higher the concentration of

power in the hands of one or few persons, the higher the chance that this power, if unchecked, will be abused. Can this argument be easily dismissed? In other words, Rummel and others argue that genocide (absolute killing) is the result of the concentration of power into the hands of a few people. Its only antidote is democracy. Which approach could better explain all modern genocides, politicides, democides and mass murders? Mann disagrees: democracy and mass politics not only cannot avert genocides, they can encourage them. He convincingly demonstrates that democracy in general cannot offer such a salvation. It failed to do so in the past and it will fail again, perhaps even more dramatically, in the current and future conditions.

This is the case even with the cradle of liberal-democratic values, the USA: Anglo-Saxon communitarianism did not contemplate an extension of democratic rights beyond the narrow boundaries of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant *ethnos*.²² However, even the pre-modern extermination of Native Americans and Aborigines can easily be seen as a consequence of the invincible concentration of power enjoyed by colonists, not only in technological terms. These conquerors and settlers were far from being democrats when it came to sharing their 'democracy', their Wild West settlements being genocidal *ethnocracies*. On the other hand, power was not firmly institutionalized in a state and its rule of law. No real system of checks and balances was available in the Far West when it came to seizing the indigenous minorities' ancestral lands. In contrast, Mann argues that 'democracy', intended as both the rule of the many and of the *ethnos*, is the true root of modern and future genocides.

After situating Mann's approach within the larger body of genocide studies, I have associated it with a much broader church, the *demo-skeptics*, which transcends the left-right divide. I have then identified some of the limits of the proponents of this approach: First, the *demo-skeptics* use a reductive concept of democracy as 'majority rule' or *majoritarianism*. Secondly, the anti-democratic 'blowback' could be better reformulated as a further critique of the devastating effects of imperial globalization. Thirdly, the name '*liberal democracy*' has meanwhile acquired a loose meaning, to the extent that these two distinctive concepts are used interchangeably. Perhaps Mann's book should have been more suitably titled 'The Dark Side of Majoritarianism', certainly a less catching title, but one more reflective of its actual content.

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Notes

- 1 For a critical overview see the essays in Barkawi and Laffey (2001).
- 2 The most influential book in this respect is probably Bauman (1989).

- 3 The 'cumulative' approach has also been applied to indigenous people: Madley's (2004) comparative study of *frontier genocides* among Tasmanians (Australia), Yuki (California) and Herero (Namibia) has revealed common patterns developing in three phases: (1) invasion and destruction of the local economy; (2) aboriginal response and retaliation; and (3) the settlers and the central government's slow drive towards 'final solutions' passing through several sub-phases such as deportation, mass incarceration, ecological destruction and 'domicide' (Porteous and Smith, 2001). On frontier genocides, see Levene (2005a; 2005b).
- 4 The more in-depth archival research becomes, the more the intentionalist approach seems to gain ground. There have been impressive advances in only a few years. Since Mann wrote his book the balance has tipped towards a focus on intentional decision-making (see Gerlach, 2000; Levene, 2005a). Mann mentions Gerlach's and Levene's work only *en passant*, almost casually (Mann, 2005, p. 209).
- 5 For an example of *securitization theory*, see Buzan and Wæver (2003). For a critical view of the Copenhagen school's attempt to redefine 'security' and enlarge the range of its possible applications, see Eriksson (1999). From a political philosophy perspective, Will Kymlicka (2000) argues that ethno-nationalism throughout Eastern Europe has been pervaded by the perception of minorities as potential security threats. To rephrase his argument, one may say that 'de-securitizing' majority-minority relations has represented the greatest challenge for post-Soviet politics.
- 6 The understanding of Hungarian collaborationism remains crucial: 'In the unremittingly grim record of the Holocaust no single chapter is quite so awful as the fate which befell Hungary's Jewish population' (Cesarani, 1997, p. 5). Mann does not give Christian Gerlach the credit he deserves, although he is probably the most influential 'intentionalist' Holocaust historian of the younger generation.
- 7 In Kinyarwanda, the very name the 'Interahamwe' means 'those who attack together' – hence those who have been orchestrated to do so.
- 8 Leaders may seem 'scurrilous', but also 'rational in their sequenced reactions to various turns in the mounting violence' (Hardin, 1997, p. 160). Followers need to identify with the causes, fears and hopes that are conveyed to them by various media, in a process in which 'identification is helped along by venal and bestial political leaders' (Hardin, 1997, p. 172).
- 9 Despite his use of generalizing and essentializing ethnonyms (typically, 'the Turks', 'the Armenians'), Dadrian (2004) has a lot to offer about Hitler's master-plan and ruminations on genocide.
- 10 The list is much larger if one moves beyond the study of ethnic conflict. It can include critiques of imperial globalization such as Meiksins Wood (2003) and Robinson (1996), who have developed innovative Marxist-based interpretations of the internal contradictions of 'liberal democracies' driven by market imperatives. In particular, Meiksins Wood (2003) describes neoliberalism as a 'totalizing' global order intent on destroying the planet and its inhabitants at an unprecedented pace.
- 11 Of course, liberals and leftists do not share the conservatives' longing for autocratic rule and their obsessive reference to 'ancient ethnic hatreds'. The authoritarian drift is more notoriously expressed by Leo Strauss's neo-conservative apology, often identified as anti-democratic, rather than 'demo-skeptic'.
- 12 Snyder's prescriptions are highly debatable, as he recommends constraints to democracy in various volatile regions, despite his awareness that this is often an impossible task. Reading between the lines, these areas could be easily identified as those more relevant to US strategic interests. In fact, he incorrectly argues that ethnic violence is absent among Central Asia's totalitarian US client states, discounting the vast literature on the impossibility of gauging ethnic dissent in non-democratic milieux (see Connor, 2004) – which may explain why conflicts there take increasingly religious-ideological forms. Snyder even charges human rights advocates with encouraging ethnic violence because of their misplaced universalism.
- 13 Paris applies his critique to peace-building operations in post-civil-war areas following mass population displacement, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- 14 Chua is excessively concerned with the fate of the Chinese diaspora, while her analysis remains historically circumscribed to the contemporary period. Chua's broader theories about ethnic conflict deriving from the spread of international communication have long been debated by political theorists (see Connor, 1994; 2004).
- 15 For a particularly provocative and ambitious interpretation, see Hobson (2005, pp. 161–90).
- 16 Older generations of neo-conservatives, such as Leo Strauss, have notoriously put forward Hitler's ascent to power as a proof that democracy and free elections can lead to dire consequences.
- 17 Mann only briefly refers to this concept (p. 519).
- 18 Classic conservative thought often portrays the mass man as the conceptual antipode of the individual living in a properly ordered society. Michael Oakshott and F. A. Hayek were admirers of Ortega, despite the fact that he was a conservative Spanish 'nationalist' and a follower of Martin Heidegger (Dobson, 1989).
- 19 See also Lieven (2000, pp. 148–57), Mazower (1999; 2004) and McCarthy (1995; 1983; 2001). It should be noted that, although Justin McCarthy has produced excellent works on the fate of Muslim minorities in the Balkans, he is not a reliable source on Armenian genocide, to the point of being regarded as a 'genocide denier' by most Armenian scholars.

- 20 Again, political philosophers have recently debated the feasibility of exporting Western-style liberal pluralism (see Kymlicka and Opalski, 2001).
- 21 The critique of neoliberal globalization is explored in more depth in *Incoherent Empire* (Mann, 2003).
- 22 This argument has been confirmed by other studies, more recently by Anatol Lieven's (2004) study on the ethnocentric core of US Jacksonian nationalism.

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