

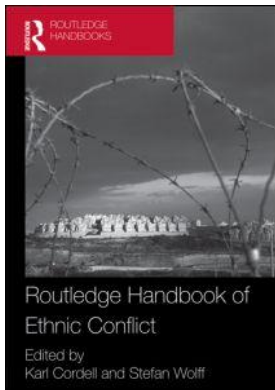
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 08 Dec 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict

Karl Cordell, Stefan Wolff

The causes and consequences of ethnic cleansing

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203845493.ch10>

Erin K. Jenne

Published online on: 12 Oct 2010

How to cite :- Erin K. Jenne. 12 Oct 2010, *The causes and consequences of ethnic cleansing from:* Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict Routledge

Accessed on: 08 Dec 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203845493.ch10>

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10 The causes and consequences of ethnic cleansing

Erin K. Jenne

Ethnic cleansing refers to ‘the expulsion of an “undesirable” population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these’ (Bell-Fialkoff 1993, p. 110). On the most basic level, it is the deliberate policy of homogenising the ethnic make-up of a territory. As this definition suggests, ethnic cleansing comprises not only ethnic expulsions and extermination during war, but also policies of ethnic homogenisation undertaken during times of relative peace. In strategic terms, it involves the removal of targeted minorities from a given territory and the subsequent resettlement of members of the dominant group in the minorities’ abandoned homes and property. In sum, ethnic cleansing consists of policies of ethnic expulsion and resettlement, which may be implemented either violently or non-violently. These policies are undertaken with the purpose of achieving ethno-territorial homogenisation.

The expression ‘ethnic cleansing’ did not enter the modern lexicon until the 1980s, when Kosovar Serbs publicly accused the Albanian majority of ethnically cleansing the province. The term was later applied retroactively to the Serb campaign against the Muslims during the Bosnian war as well as Belgrade’s attempts to empty Kosovo of ethnic Albanians in the late 1990s. Although the concept itself is relatively new, the phenomenon to which it refers is as old as human civilisation itself. The ancient Assyrians used collective deportations to manage internal unrest and rebellions as early as the thirteenth century BCE; both the Assyrians and the Babylonians exiled Jewish populations in the seventh and fifth centuries BCE. During and after the Crusades, Jews were massacred and expelled from Germany, England and France. In South East Asia, meanwhile, over 100,000 Cham people were driven out of their homes by the Vietnamese in the late fifteenth century. At the same time, the Roma and Jews were being expelled from Spain. During the religious wars, the Huguenots were driven out of France; and hundreds of thousands of Spanish Muslims, or Moriscos, were exiled from Spain in the early seventeenth century. In nineteenth-century America, many Native American tribes in the territories were corralled on to reservations under the policy of ‘Indian removal’. In Haiti, too, tens of thousands of French settlers were expelled from St Dominique by Haiti’s new leaders, who declared the country an ‘all-black’ nation. Following World War II, as many as 11 million ethnic Germans were driven out of East European countries on charges of collaboration with Nazi Germany. Around half a million Ukrainians and Belorussians were exiled from Poland to the territories of the Soviet Union, while 2 million Poles were transferred from the Soviet Union to Poland (Wolff 2004, p. 17). Over 12 million people were displaced in the 1947 partition of India, including as many as a million dead. The 1974 division of

Cyprus into Greek and Turkish regions led to the internal displacement of as many as 200,000 people.

Ethnic cleansing is still practised in the contemporary period. Outside of the Balkans, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Georgians were expelled from Abkhazia in the early 1990s. In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of Azeris and Armenians were exiled from their homes during the Nagorno Karabakh war. After Kurdish guerillas were crushed by Saddam Hussein's government in the First Gulf War, millions of Iraqi Kurds fled to Iran and Turkey to escape collective retaliation. In 1994, 500,000 Tutsis and Hutu political moderates were murdered and expelled from Rwanda in a coordinated effort by Hutu extremists to eliminate their political opponents. Indeed, it would appear that violent ethnic cleansing has accompanied almost every deadly conflict. In peacetime as well, countless programmes of 'silent ethnic cleansing' have been undertaken by political elites to consolidate their hold over a given territory. Such policies are difficult to monitor, much less prevent or resolve, by the international community.

Definitions: ethnic cleansing, genocide and population transfers

Ethnic cleansing, genocide and population transfers are often used interchangeably, so it is worth parsing their meanings. Naimark (2001, pp. 3–4) and Bell-Fialkoff (1993, p. 110) believe that the principal distinctions between these concepts lie in the *type and extremity of ethnic removal*. In their view, genocide and population transfers are both subsets of ethnic cleansing, with population transfers the most moderate form and genocide the most extreme. Their implied *targets* are another distinguishing feature. According to the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, genocide refers to 'acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group' (Art. 2). In contrast, ethnic cleansing and population transfers are designed to move or remove ethnic groups from a given territory. Because of its focus on human destruction, genocide is viewed as the most sinister and deadly of the three.

The underlying *goals* of the three policies constitute a third important difference. Genocide and ethnic cleansing are undertaken by one side of the conflict to rid the territory of one or more ethnic groups, while population transfers aim to resolve conflict through ethnic separation with the implied consent of the conflict parties as well as the international community (Wolff 2004, p. 13). A final distinction is their *ethical and legal standing*. Genocide is a crime under international law, whereas ethnic cleansing and population transfers are not – although the acts that comprise ethnic cleansing, such as deportations, *are* war crimes and crimes against humanity (Waters 2006, p. 4 n. 4). Nonetheless, it must be said that genocide, ethnic cleansing and population transfers shade into one another in terms of impact, severity, targets and methods. As Hayden (1996, p. 736) notes, '[p]hysical slaughter enters the picture as an element of ethnic cleansing, since, after all, it usually takes a great deal of pressure to persuade people to leave their homes for "homelands" that they might, in fact, never have seen'.

These nuances aside, choosing from among these terms is a politically loaded act with clear policy implications. Establishing that a campaign of ethnic removal constitutes genocide (as opposed to ethnic conflict or population transfers) implies a responsibility by the international community to halt the violence (Power 2002). So it goes for the distinction between ethnic cleansing and population transfers. Hayden

(1996, p. 734) observes that *our enemies* engage in ‘ethnic cleansing’ to further their private interests, while *we* undertake ‘population transfers’ to save lives and rebuild peace. The former is used to vilify expulsions by hostile governments, while the latter is used to legitimise similar policies by friendly governments. Indeed, a cursory examination of the record shows that the same event can be termed either ethnic cleansing or population transfer, depending on one’s perspective.

Ethnic cleansing in international law and public opinion

Beginning in the inter-war period, ‘states began experimenting with the exchange of minority groups as a means of solving the ethnic problems so deeply interwoven into the changing patterns of political conflict in eastern Europe’ (Office of Population Research 1947, p. 8). The centuries-long intermingling of ethnic populations in Europe came to be seen as a problem in light of the turn-of-the-century ideal of national self-determination under which territorialised national minorities had a right to self-government. This principle informed the 1919 Allied reconfiguration of Central and East European borders in the wake of collapsed multinational empires. In some cases, large minorities were stranded outside the borders of their putative national homelands, and the Allies dealt with these mismatches by concluding minority treaties with the new multi-ethnic states. In other cases, however, states were permitted to approximate a one-to-one nation-state fit through population transfers. The League-supervised Greco-Turkish and Greco-Bulgarian population exchanges are widely viewed as a success, since those countries have not engaged in war since the early 1920s. However, it may be argued that the exchanges merely legitimised Turkey’s expulsions of ethnic Greeks from the Anatolian peninsula after Greece’s failed invasion. In fact, the vast majority of the 1.2 million Greek refugees were expelled *before* the League-supervised exchanges got under way. Did these transfers facilitate conflict management or did they simply provide cover for policies of national homogenisation by the Turkish state?

Large-scale programmes of ethnic cleansing re-emerged after World War II when millions of Germans and Hungarians were deported from East European countries. The inter-war population exchanges served as a blueprint for these transfers, most notably in the case of German minorities. As many as 3 million ethnic Germans were deported from Czechoslovakia, leading to tens of thousands of deaths and summary executions in 1945. These actions were retroactively legalised under the 1946 Beneš Decrees, which sanctioned the forcible exile and expropriation of Germans from the Sudetenland. Following the mass expulsions, international legal norms began to turn against population transfers as an acceptable means of conflict resolution. Beginning with the Nuremberg judgement that Nazi population transfers constituted a war crime, the policy of involuntary resettlement gradually came to be seen as anathema to the international community.

During the 1990s Yugoslav wars, population expulsions were given the moniker of ethnic cleansing in the international press. The 1993 UN Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities came out against the practice, and the subsequent Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Art. 7) designated population transfers a ‘crime against humanity’. Also in the 1990s, a small group of security studies scholars began to re-evaluate this technique as a useful device for conflict resolution (Posen 1993; Mearsheimer and van Evera 1995; Kaufmann 1996,

1998; Downes 2004, 2006). These (mostly) hard-nosed realists have argued that, albeit costly and morally repugnant, partition and population exchanges may be the only means of resolving an intransigent conflict in which two or more groups are locked in mortal combat. On the heels of internecine warfare, neither side can trust that the other will not take the opportunity to vanquish them if they disarm – thus post-war reintegration of warring groups is a hopeless and potentially dangerous endeavour. To the argument that population transfers violate human rights, partition advocates argue that far worse atrocities would result from failing to partition the groups into separate territorial enclaves. Kaufmann urged policy-makers to ‘endorse separation’ in conflicts with significant sectarian violence, ‘otherwise, the processes of war will separate the groups anyway, at much higher human cost’ (Kaufmann 1998, p. 123). The argument for population transfers as a conflict management technique clearly turns on whether they prevent more human suffering than they cause.

The logic of ethnic cleansing

Ethnic cleansing consists of two tactics that can be executed simultaneously or sequentially. The perpetrators first use force, the threat of force, or other methods of intimidation to induce members of the targeted group(s) to flee. They then resettle the newly abandoned homes with displaced members of the dominant group. In this way, ethnic cleansers create permanent facts on the ground, helping them to consolidate their territorial claims.

The first step, ethnic removal, involves not only exiling ‘enemy’ groups from the territory (through induced flight, forced expulsions or mass murder), but also destroying or purposely defiling their sites of national significance, including graveyards, churches, monuments and other landmarks that tie the group to the land. In this way, ethnic cleansers sever both the corporal and symbolic links between the targeted group and the desired territory. It was not by accident that Serb paramilitaries destroyed Muslim mosques and burned libraries, manuscript collections and archives that served as the repositories of Bosnian Muslim national history. This ensured ‘the destruction of communal memory by the ethnic cleansers’ (Riedlmayer, 2007, p. 117). The centuries-old Ottoman bridge in Mostar, an important Muslim landmark, was destroyed for similar reasons. A Croatian militiaman explained the incident to a British reporter: ‘It is not enough to clean Mostar of the Muslims – the relics must also be removed.’ These policies of ‘cultural genocide’ are designed to complete the process of ethnic cleansing by wiping out the group’s national history and erasing all signs of its ties to the territory (Carmichael 2002; Gallagher 2003; Cigar 1995). Mass rape and forced impregnation serve as additional methods of ethno-territorial conquest. According to MacKinnon (2006, p. 145), ‘ethnic rape’ is ‘an instrument of forced exile, to make you leave your home and never come back ... It is rape to shatter a people, to drive a wedge through a particular community ... It is rape as genocide.’

The second step in the ethnic cleansing process is to resettle members of the dominant group in the homes of the displaced minorities and to replace or repurpose sites of national significance belonging to the undesired groups. This two-step process can be observed in most cases of ethnic cleansing, particularly during ethnic civil war. Ethnic segregation is the predictable result. In the Bosnian war, for example, many Serbs driven out of the Federation were resettled in the homes of Bosniaks or Croats in Republika Srpska (RS). Many Bosniaks and Croats expelled from RS were in turn

resettled in the homes of ethnic Serbs who had fled the Federation. Similarly, the Shi'as of Iraq were driven out of Sunni strongholds and Sunnis from Shi'a neighbourhoods. Both Sunnis and Shi'as were likewise expelled from Kurdish territory in the north. Displaced minorities tend not to return to their homes, but to resettle in territories where they can become part of the local majority. With each step, it becomes increasingly difficult for the expelled groups to reclaim their homes, livelihoods and national homeland. The territory has become effectively rebranded for the dominant group in whose name the campaign was waged.

The difficulty of returning minority refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes after the war indicates that ethnic cleansing campaigns continue well beyond the formal peace settlement. Koser and Black (1999, p. 8) note that after war 'returnees are often actively directed to certain areas, either to strengthen the position of one party against another, or, as in several recent conflicts such as that in the former Yugoslavia, as a continuation of "ethnic cleansing"'. The Ottomans, for example, moved Muslims into newly conquered Balkan territories while simultaneously transferring Christian communities to Thrace and Anatolia in order to consolidate control over lands they had already won in battle.

It should also be noted that while ethnic cleansing is usually associated with violence, it may also be conducted during periods of relative peace – through campaigns of intimidation, threats of force, or various forms of discrimination. As a general rule, ethnic war nearly always involves ethnic cleansing, but ethnic cleansing need not involve ethnic war. Territorial gains are territorial gains, whether begotten under conditions of peace or war. A key difference is that war can provide cover for extensive ethnic purges that would be difficult to justify during times of peace. For instance, during the 1999 NATO war, Slobodan Milošević was able to accelerate a decade-long campaign of 'quiet ethnic cleansing' in Kosovo to a rapid violent expulsion of Kosovar Albanians under the cover of NATO bombing.

The drivers of ethnic cleansing

What explains this phenomenon? Some have argued that contemporary ethnic cleansing is the unique by-product of system-level variables such as modernity, state formation or national self-determination. According to Bartov (1996, pp. 3–4), the 'mechanized, rational, impersonal, and sustained mass destruction of human beings, organized and administered by states, legitimized and set into motion by scientists and jurists, sanctioned and popularized by academics and intellectuals, has become a staple of our civilization'. Also invoking systemic factors, Mann (2005) claims that ethnic cleansing is the outgrowth of democratic norms under which the demos is equated with ethnos, thus laying the groundwork for the exclusion of rival ethnic groups, sometimes through violence. Still others contend that the age of nationalism and the doctrine of national self-determination both invite and justify policies of ethnic cleansing (Hobsbawm 1995; Naimark 2001).

A second stream of scholarship identifies grass-roots factors that facilitate ethnic cleansing. An essentialist line holds that the explosive force of nationalism and pernicious stereotypes about 'the other' fuel popular support for such campaigns. In this view, grievances from past experiences of victimisation and collective desires for revenge may lead victims of ethnic cleansing to become perpetrators in later periods (Lieberman 2006). In a now largely discredited thesis, Goldhagen (1996) argues that the

German people favoured expulsions and extermination of Jews during the 1930s and 1940s due to 'eliminationist antisemitism' rooted deep in the German culture. Interestingly, Goldhagen's culturalist narrative was written to rebut a social-psychological explanation of mass participation in the Holocaust. In this account, Browning (1992) draws explicitly on the work of Stanley Milgram to deconstruct the motives of individual members of German police reserve units tasked with sending Jews to concentration camps in Poland. They were ordered to shoot any excess persons who did not fit on the train cars destined for the camps. Although allowed to opt out of this task by their superiors, these individuals declined to do so – not out of animus toward the Jews, but rather out of a desire for social approval and deference to authority.

Alternative grass-roots explanations focus on ecological drivers of conflict, such as economic competition or social divides between groups. One argument follows that deeply divided societies – where social, class and ethnic cleavages coincide – are at greater risk of sectarian violence than more cohesive societies (Horowitz 1985; Kuper 1981; Fein 1993). In an account based on the logic of opportunism and inter-group competition, Götz (2007) contends that the Reich procured support for the Holocaust from working-class Germans by redistributing Jewish wealth among ordinary Germans – parcelling out Jewish furniture to those who had suffered from Allied bombing and transferring Ukrainian food and French luxury goods acquired by the Wehrmacht through its foreign wars. In this view, the complicity of ordinary Germans was bought by wartime elites. Similarly, Gross (2006) describes cases in which Jews who returned to their homes in Poland *after* the Holocaust were killed in pogroms organised by their Polish neighbours. He demonstrates that the Poles were largely motivated out of a fear of losing their new-found status and wealth that they had appropriated from their Jewish neighbours. As a general rule, there is a strong tendency for the dominant group to acquiesce, if not actively participate, in elite-organised campaigns that target ethnic minorities.

Still other grass-roots arguments focus on mutual enmities stoked by national symbolism (Kaufman 2001), mutual fears of victimisation during state transition (Posen 1993), and state institutions that can be used to mobilise people to engage in violence. Drawing on extensive field work in Rwanda, Straus (2006) concludes that the genocide in 1994 could not have taken place in the absence of these conditions on the ground. Others dispute the very notion that ethnic violence is the result of grass-roots fears of 'all against all' – a dynamic strongly suggested by the label 'ethnic war'. In one such critique, Mueller (2000, p. 62) contends that the violence and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Rwanda 'came about not because people generally gave in to murderous enmity, but because they came under the arbitrary control of armed thugs'. Ethnicity, in this view, served as 'an ordering device or principle [upon which politicians organised their campaigns], not as a crucial motivating force'. Although politicians and other leaders routinely recruit paramilitary groups to achieve their war aims, they quickly and easily lose control of the situation. It follows from this that 'a mass of essentially mild, ordinary people can unwillingly and in considerable bewilderment come under the vicious and arbitrary control of small groups of armed thugs' (Mueller 2000, p. 42).

In this view, ethnic cleansing is an *elite-driven* project rooted in perceived political or economic imperatives, patronage networks, ideologies of racial purity, or individual interests in private gain. Such arguments stand in marked contrast to those that focus on inter-group competition, mutual hatreds and fears as the primary impetus for ethnic

cleansing. Rather than viewing ethnic cleansing and other mass violence as a product of inter-group dynamics, where groups are assumed to be monolithic actors whose interests inform elite preferences, elite-based arguments draw a clear distinction between the responsibilities that ordinary people have in perpetrating the violence and those of the architects of such campaigns. In this formulation, programmes of ethnic cleansing are designed by elites – sometimes to benefit the dominant group, sometimes to stabilise the state, and sometimes to serve their narrow self-interests. For their part, ordinary people are forced or manipulated into cooperating with such policies – either through active participation or passive support.

Ethnic cleansing is sometimes undertaken in the interest of state or nation-building. Pappe (2006) argues, for example, that the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages by Israel in 1947–49 was a deliberate policy of state-building by Israeli elites and not, as sometimes argued, a defensive response to an earlier wave of Arab–Israeli violence or fears of Palestinian rebellion. Martin (1998, p. 858) explores the origins of the Stalin’s programmes of ethnic cleansing in which approximately 800,000 members of mostly diasporic nationalities were arrested, deported or executed between 1935 and 1938. These operations were undertaken partly to consolidate new national territories and partly out of suspicions by the Soviet leadership that diasporic nationalities in the borderlands were disloyal subjects vulnerable to manipulation by outside actors seeking to undermine the Soviet state.

In other cases, ethnic cleansers may be motivated by ideological convictions or desires for private gain. Browning and Jurgen (2004) demonstrate, for instance, that the commitment of Hitler’s inner circle to ‘racial imperialism’, the aim of ridding Central and Eastern Europe of its inferior races, led the Reich to abandon a relatively mild programme of ethnic cleansing the Jews from the region to one of exterminating the Jews as the fortunes of Germany changed during the course of the war. Valentino (2004, p. 234), too, writes that mass killing ‘is usually conceived of and organized by a relatively small number of powerful political or military leaders acting in the service of their own interests, ideas, hatreds, fears and misperceptions – not reacting to the attitudes or desires of the societies over which they preside’. He adds that ‘[p]erpetrators do not need widespread social support to carry out mass killing’, negative popular support or compliance is more critical to the success of such campaigns than active support by the wider population. Although Valentino focuses specifically on mass killing, his theory applies equally well to ethnic cleansing. In this view, ethnic cleansing campaigns are executed to achieve a specific end, including radical political reforms, seizing and settling territory, and suppressing insurgency. Consistent with this line of argumentation, Downes (2008) puts forward a strategic theory of mass violence to explain civilian targeting during war. He contends that targeting civilians as a wartime strategy is driven by a desperate desire to win the war while minimising the loss of human life and resources on one’s own side. Straus (2006) likewise argues that the ethnic cleansing in Rwanda was at least partly due to the hard-line leadership’s attempt to use mass violence to hold on to power in the face of growing international pressure to liberalise and democratise.

Naturally, elite and mass-level explanations of ethnic cleansing are not incompatible, and many authors advance one theory to account for elite policies of ethnic cleansing and another to explain public willingness to participate in them or permit their execution.

Conclusion

Ethnic cleansing follows a different logic than genocide. Since ethnic cleansing is principally aimed at consolidating control over territory, rather than destroying all or part of an ethnic group, conflicts with extensive ethnic cleansing call for territorial solutions such as regimes for land- and resource-sharing. They also call for targeted sanctions and prosecution of individual ethnic cleansers, rather than grass roots solutions that are aimed at healing societal divisions.

Second, our definition of ethnic cleansing should be broadened to encompass both violent expulsions and policies of quiet ethnic cleansing undertaken during periods of peace. This expanded definition should also include not only the exile of unwanted groups, but also the resettlement of homes and property with members of the dominant group. This broadened perspective suggests the need for interventions with a broader mandate than simply ending violent conflict and keeping the peace. Third parties should instead monitor and sanction policies of territorial aggrandisement – not only during times of violence, but prior to the outbreak of conflict and following the cessation of hostilities.

Finally, since ethnic cleansing is the key driver of wartime (and peacetime) segregation, effective conflict mediation requires an assessment of the extent to which ethnic cleansing is driven by grass roots fears, hostilities and insecurities, as opposed to elite policies aimed at territorial conquest. If the former, then ethnic cleansing is an extremely unfortunate but inevitable by-product of ecological pressures, and the international community should use population transfers to complete the separation of groups to prevent additional mass murder and violent expulsions driven by the inexorable logic of sectarian war. If the latter, then the international community should identify and target the architects of ethnic cleansing using a mix of legal and economic (and possibly even military) sanctions.

If societal cleavages or political or economic factors on the ground are *not* the main impetus of ethnic cleansing, and such policies are instead driven by the agendas of small groups of elites, then the most effective means of deterring or halting ethnic cleansing is changing elite behaviour rather than trying to effect large-scale political or economic changes such as democratisation and economic development (Valentino 2004). Prevention is, of course, easier than the cure, and the first step in preventing ethnic cleansing campaigns is monitoring elite behaviour, which might involve examining the statements and beliefs of influential political elites and powerful groups in transitioning or otherwise-at-risk societies. An effective early warning system for ethnic cleansing before it comes to fruition is clearly the most desirable policy response.

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