**The Consequences of Denial**

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In my studies of genocide, I have discovered that the process of every genocide has predictable "stages" or processes. When I developed the theory, I called it the "stages" of genocide, a term I now regret because the word "stages" implies linearity. They aren’t linear because they usually operate simultaneously. I should have simply called the "stages" processes. But there is a logical order to them, because a “later” process normally depends on a logically “prior” process.

The relationship between the processes is like the figures in a Russian Matryoshka "nesting doll" in which an original leader's figure is at the center, and later leaders' figures nest outwards until we reach the figure of the current leader on the outside.

This theory of fundamental processes is based on the structuralist theories of Jean Piaget. By observing the development of his own and other children, Piaget noted fundamental cognitive and moral processes that are transformed in a predictable order in each child's development. Piaget showed how cognitive processes are directly related to moral processes. I studied at Harvard with Lawrence Kohlberg, a follower of Piaget's theories who used moral dilemmas to reveal the fundamental processes of moral reasoning. His work has proved quite powerful in analyzing people's explanations for their decisions. I also studied with Prof. James Fowler, who showed how Piaget's cognitive stages inform stages of faith.

Anthropologists look for the fundamental structures in human societies and cultures. When I studied anthropology at Chicago, I saw that socio-cultural processes are also structured. Van Gennep showed that the structure of rites of passage is similar in many cultures. Marcel Mauss did the same for sacrifice. Professor Victor Turner taught me that rituals and symbols are keys to understanding social, political, psychological, and religious structures. These rituals often use the same symbols in many cultures- fire, water, blood, crosses, meals.

I wrote my master’s thesis on the movie, "The Graduate." In it I showed that the film uses the structure and symbols discovered by Van Gennep for rites of passage. I wrote a grammar for the film using Noam Chomsky's theories of transformational grammars.

When I was in Law School at Yale, Mike Nichols was directing a play at the Long Wharf in New Haven. I took the thesis to him to see if my thesis made any sense. He invited me for lunch. "You nailed it," he said. "We had story boards with those symbols in exactly the order and with the meanings you deciphered."

When I began my work in genocide studies in Cambodia, I realized there are also fundamental operations - processes - that occur in genocides. I looked for transformational processes that give order to and change societies. I first identified the "stages of genocide" in 1987 by comparing the Cambodian genocide with the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. I looked for fundamental processes that led to those genocides. They are the socio-cultural processes that interact to transform a society into one that developed into genocide.

Most people here probably know "The Ten Stages of Genocide" model I developed. I never expected it to be so widely used. But the Ten Stages were not brought down from Mount Sinai on a stone tablet. When I first wrote the model, it had eight stages. Colleagues suggested two more, which I added in 2012. There are undoubtedly other processes that I haven't thought of. It's only a model.

It has proven useful to look for these processes because they help us see when genocide is coming and what governments can do to prevent it.

For those unfamiliar with the model, here it is, briefly:

→ The first process is Classification, when we classify the world into us versus them.

→ The second is Symbolization, when we give names to those classifications like Jew and Aryan, Hutu and Tutsi, Turk and Armenian, Bengali and Pashtun. Sometimes the symbols are physical, like the Nazi yellow star.

 → The third is Discrimination, when laws and customs prevent groups of people from exercising their full rights as citizens or as human beings.

→ The fourth is Dehumanization, when perpetrators call their victims rats, or cockroaches, cancer, or disease. Portraying them as non-human makes eliminating them a “cleansing” of the society, rather than murder.

These first four processes taken together result in what James Waller calls "Othering."

→ The fifth process is Organization, when hate groups, armies, and militias organize.

→ The sixth is Polarization, when moderates are targeted who could stop the process of division, especially moderates from the perpetrators’ group.

→ The seventh process is Preparation, when plans for killing and deportation are made by leaders, and perpetrators are trained and armed.

→The eighth process is Persecution, when victims are identified, arrested, transported, and concentrated into prisons, ghettos, or concentration camps, where they are tortured and murdered.

→ The ninth process is Extermination, what lawyers define as genocide, the intentional destruction, in whole or in part, of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

When I outlined “the stages of genocide" in a memo I wrote in the State Department in 1996, I realized there is another process in every genocide: → Denial.

Denial is actually a continuation of the genocide, because it is a continuing attempt to destroy the victim group psychologically and culturally, to deny its members even the memory of the murders of their relatives.

Let us now consider some of the purposes and consequences of denial.

**Denial is used to validate national and ethnic origin myths.**

Nations and ethnic groups have myths about their origins that take on sacred meaning. For the US the origin myth is Manifest Destiny. That myth holds that the North American continent was set aside by God for a new nation led by white Europeans.

This myth was the justification for the genocide of Native Americans who already occupied North America. The myth even held that most of America was *terra nullius,* unoccupied and undeveloped.

Because of this origin myth, Americans have always denied our genocide of Native Americans. We justify the genocide as self-defense against hostile “Indian tribes” that attacked peaceful white settlers.

Turkey’s myth is Pan-Turanism. It holds that Turkic peoples were destined to rule Anatolia and the Middle East. Turks worship the true religion, Islam. Christians who did not worship Islam had to be exterminated. This myth was used to justify the genocides of Armenians, Pontic Greeks, Assyrians, Circassians, and other Christians.

The origin myth of Pakistan is that the nation was created to protect Muslims who were persecuted in India. Even though Pakistan included two parts, its unity was necessary for the self-defense of Muslims against Indian Hindus.

Pakistan used this origin myth to justify its genocide against Bengalis when they asserted their independence in 1971. The genocide was a defense against separatism. It was a counterinsurgency.

A common theme of Denial is defense against enemies within the nation.

Let’s now look at the consequences of Denial.

**Denial continues the genocide of both the victims and their survivors.**

Denial continues the trauma of genocide. It transfers the trauma into the future to new generations.

Denial prevents the open wounds of genocide from ever healing.

Every society is made of families bound together by love. But every family member will eventually die. As my father used to remind me, "The mortality rate is still one hundred percent.

All families have a desire to honor and bid farewell to their dead. Funerals are ways every society affirms that the dead have departed, but life will go on. Death doesn't have the last word.

Denial closes the door to mourning.

The reason genocidists bury victims in mass graves or throw their bodies into rivers or the sea is to deny them personhood.

Genocidists try to deny the final triumph of life. They are the devils of death.

That is why recognition of genocide is so important. The survivors need public acknowledgement of their trauma and their grief.

Silence tells survivors that they grieve alone.

Genocide recognition is the public ritual of collective responsibility. It is the acknowledgement of our common humanity.

Recognition reasserts “the unifying diversity of our humanity.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Denial of genocide is what the Pakistani and US governments and other governments today are doing to citizens of Bangladesh and Bengalis around the world.

Neither the Pakistani nor US governments, nor any other governments, should be party to denial of a historical fact as profound and important as the 1971 genocide of the people of Bangladesh.

Elie Wiesel repeatedly called denial a **double killing**, as it strives to kill the memory of the event.

Hitler famously used the denial of the Ottoman Empire's genocide of Armenians to justify his plan to exterminate the Jews.

In 1939, Hitler said, " Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"

Around the world, victims of genocide ask first for recognition of the crime committed against them.

Recognition of genocide is as essential to healing as closing an open wound. Without such healing, scars harden into hatred that cripples the victim and cries out for revenge.

**Denial harms the perpetrators and their successors.**

There have never been any trials in Pakistan of the generals who perpetrated the Bangladesh genocide.

Trials are the best antidote to denial. But they seldom happen. So we must depend on education.

There were no trials of the US Army generals and state governors who ordered the genocide of Native Americans. The US Congress has never even apologized.

[Brigadier](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigadier_%28India%29) [R. E. H. Dyer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reginald_Dyer) was never tried for the murder of over a thousand Indians in the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The colonial poet Rudyard Kipling even justified Dyer's genocidal orders. Kipling wrote, "he did his duty as he saw it."

The Bengali Nobel prize winning poet [Rabindranath Tagore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabindranath_Tagore) renounced his British knighthood over that massacre. Britain has never formally apologized.

After the Ottoman Courts-Martial of 1918-1920, there were no further trials. The killers literally got away with mass murder. With blood on their hands, they returned to their work.

Out of that denial grew a Turkish state that denied the existence of all non-Turks within Turkey. Kurds became “mountain Turks,” Kurdish schools were closed, and people speaking Kurdish had their tongues cut out.

Studies by genocide scholars prove that the single best predictor of future genocide is denial of a past genocide coupled with impunity for its perpetrators.

Genocide Deniers are three times more likely to commit genocide again than other governments. Turkey is still attempting to suppress the self-determination of the Kurdish people. It bombs and invades Kurdish areas in northern Syria and Iraq to this day.

Turkish school children are taught that the Armenian genocide is a myth. Turkish writers who write the truth are prosecuted for “insulting Turkishness,” even Orhan Pamuk, who the Nobel Prize. Publishers like Hrant Dink who dare to publish the truth are murdered, and their murderers are celebrated as national heroes. These are the results of racist ultranationalism and fascism.

Pakistan and the US still deny that the Bangladesh war of independence resulted in a Pakistani genocide.

Pakistan portrays the war as a counterinsurgency to maintain Pakistani nationhood.

If Pakistan is ever to become a real democracy it must acknowledge its own past. Like an alcoholic drunk on the liquor of ultranationalism, it must first admit its own illness before it can leave its addiction.

The current Pakistani government did not commit the Bangladesh genocide. Why should it not face the truth about the crimes General Yahya Khan and the Pakistani Army committed fifty years ago?

Why should the US not recognize the Bangladesh genocide and recognize US complicity in that crime?

Why should this be so hard? Germany has renounced blind nationalism. Germany has become one of the strongest democracies on earth.

**Denial harms the bystanders.**

Denial allows the power of the perpetrators to go unchallenged.

Recognition is a moral rebuke to the perpetrators.

Countries that recognize the truth about the Pakistani Genocide in Bangladesh are considered enemies by the ISI, Pakistan's extremist Muslim intelligence service.

The parliaments of many countries have affirmed the fact of the Armenian Genocide in unequivocal terms. The US Congress finally recognized the Armenian genocide this past year.

The time has come for the US Congress to pass a resolution recognizing the Bangladesh genocide. The US should apologize for US complicity.

We would not expect the US government to be intimidated by Pakistan, an unreliable ally with a deeply disturbing human rights record, graphically documented in the State Department’s International Religious Freedom Report on Pakistan. We would expect the United States to express its moral and intellectual views, not to compromise its principles.

Telling the truth would ultimately be good for US-Pakistani relations, because they would no longer be based on diplomatic lies.

**Denial dishonors the truth-tellers.**

A Joint Congressional Resolution recognizing and commemorating the Bangladesh Genocide would honor America’s extraordinary Foreign Service Officers who risk their lives and their careers to report on the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971.

They and others left behind thousands of pages of reports, now in the National Archives, many now declassified, that document that what happened to the Bengali people was government-planned, systematic destruction of a people—what Raphael Lemkin meant when he coined the word genocide.

By passing such a resolution, the U.S. Congress would pay tribute not only to our diplomats who were in Dhaka in 1971, but also to America’s first international anti-genocide movement. US Ambassador Henry Morgenthau and the Foreign Service Officers in the Ottoman Empire in 1915, along with Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Cleveland Dodge, and the [American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Near_East_Foundation)  raised over a billion dollars (in today's money) to help the Armenians. They exemplify America’s true legacy of moral leadership.

The American Consul General in Dhaka, Archer Blood, wrote a dissent channel cable to Washington protesting Secretary of State Kissinger's US "tilt toward Pakistan." But Blood was ignored. He never got another diplomatic assignment.

That was what also happened to Ambassador Henry Morgenthau when he protested the Armenian genocide. His integrity ended his career.

Of course, the State Department did not want Ambassador Morgenthau to tell the truth. After he returned to the United States, he never got another diplomatic assignment. But he inspired his son, Henry Morgenthau, Junior, who became FDR’s Secretary of the Treasury and was a tireless advocate for rescuing Jews during the Holocaust.

Let us today commemorate those who died in the Bangladesh Genocide, but also Consul General Archer Blood and others who had the courage to tell the truth about it.

Let us remember Ambassador Morgenthau’s words when he met with Talaat Pasha, who asked him:

*“Why are you so interested in the Armenians anyway? You are a Jew, these people are Christians..”*

Morgenthau replied:

*“You don’t seem to realize that I am not here as a Jew but as the American Ambassador.…I do not appeal to you in the name of any race or religion, but merely as a human being...”[[2]](#footnote-2)*

1. Jeremy Maron, Statement at this conference. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Morgenthau, Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story, Taderon Press, 2000, p. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)