

11-2018

## The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Europe

Andy Aydin-Aitchison

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/id-journal>

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [International and Intercultural Communication Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), and the [Political Theory Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Aydin-Aitchison, Andy (2018) "The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Europe," *International Dialogue*: Vol. 8, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32873/uno.dc.ID.8.1.1155>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/id-journal/vol8/iss1/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the The Goldstein Center for Human Rights at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Dialogue by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact [unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu](mailto:unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu).



# Review

## ***The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Europe***

H. Zeynep Bulutgil. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 218pp.

### Andy Aydin-Aitchison\*

H. Zeynep Bulutgil's monograph, available now in paperback, has already received high praise and recognition, winning the American Political Science Association European Politics and Society Section book award in 2017. In this review, I set out what the book offers in terms of argument and evidence, and so outline its contribution to understanding ethnic conflict and ethnic cleansing. In the spirit of cross-disciplinary dialogue, I consider how Bulutgil's approach and insights can contribute to developments in the criminology of atrocity. Taken together the political science approach exemplified by Bulutgil, and criminological approaches characterized by disciplinary openness, complement each other in making sense of organized forms of identity-based violence.

*The Roots of Ethnic Cleansing in Europe* is an exemplary piece of social science writing. It sets out a clear argument in response to current theory; tests this against observations derived from statistical and case-based studies; considers negative and atypical cases to develop the theory further; and then reflects, with theoretical and empirical support, on the possibility to extend the theory beyond the context of twentieth-

---

\*Andy Aydin-Aitchison is senior lecturer in criminology at The University of Edinburgh. His current research in the criminology of atrocity focuses on police involvement in war crimes in Yugoslavia.

century Europe. If that seems like a lot to cover in a little over 200 pages, that's because the book wastes very few words and advances through argument and evidence at a lively pace. Both book and author richly deserve the recognition received.

The arguments focus on two factors inhibiting or disinhibiting ethnic cleansing (2–3). First, diverse cleavages in a multi-ethnic context divide a dominant ethnic group, promote common interests with sub-groups from non-dominant ethnic groups, and so weaken any faction supporting ethnic cleansing. Running against this, territorial conflicts emphasize ethnic cleavages over other divisions and alter the balance between ethnic groups, particularly where external belligerents, in pursuit of their own war, aims promote a formerly non-dominant ethnic group. The link arises as ethnicity is generally more territorial than other social categories (e.g., social classes). It occurs in non-repetitive patterns over space, in that while a journey through any series of territorial units is likely to involve repeatedly encountering the same social classes again and again, ethnic categories tend not to repeat in such a sequence (29–35).

Challenges of operationalization mean that, in the statistical element of the research, only internationally acknowledged states are included as perpetrators (4). These are paired in dyads with potential targets for “cleansing” defined as ethnic groups, and targeting is defined quantitatively in terms of how much of the group is targeted, and qualitatively in terms of the kinds of acts involved. The resulting cases are effectively minority-state-years (a given group exists as a minority in a particular state in a particular year) reflecting the fact that dyads change as borders shift. This gives around 12,000 cases, and forty-one episodes of ethnic cleansing, on which to base findings (67–68). The episodes of ethnic cleansing can be divided into three periods,<sup>1</sup> each associated with periods of war and shifting borders, reinforcing the hypothesized link between ethnic cleansing and territorial conflict: ten instances, in four states (and one successor state) centered in south-east Europe and Anatolia occur in the period around World War I (1912–23); twenty-five episodes, in ten states, largely in a swathe of territory from central Europe east into the USSR, but also including Greece, in the lead up to, during and immediately after World War II (1938–46); and four cases in Yugoslavia and the former USSR accompany the collapse of communism and the disintegration of those two federal states (1992–99).

The resulting models, presented across three tables (55–57) encompass a range of further variables designed to operationalize features of ethnic difference and other

cleavages. The first argument, that cross-cutting cleavages inhibit ethnic cleansing, is supported by evidence that groups in states with the least political competition (as a proxy measure of class divisions) have a greater chance of experiencing ethnic cleansing by a factor of sixteen compared to those with most competition (58). Similarly, Bulutgil presents evidence showing the significant and measurable impact on the likelihood of cleansing subsequently being directed at non-dominant groups whose status had been elevated by external aggressors in the course of territorial conflict (61–63). By this stage, there is already a robust set of evidence backing the initial hypothesis. Bulutgil advances further through a series of case studies examined against empirical expectations derived from her theory. These include the Greeks of the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic and displacements of Germans and Ukrainians following World War II.

The book makes space for a more detailed interrogation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in chapter 4 (122–49), allowing a departure from the neater operationalization that the statistical study requires. In appendix 2.1, listing cases of ethnic cleansing (67–68), the perpetrator of anti-Muslim ethnic cleansing in BiH is identified as Yugoslavia. But the single country focus of this chapter gives a greater sense of the messiness of a transitional period in which ethnic cleansing took place. The chapter makes clear the central role of political structures within BiH, including the Republican Assembly, the three main ethno-nationalist parties of government, and the breakaway Republika Srpska. The first wave of violence occurred on the heels of the international recognition of BiH's statehood. What would become Republika Srpska had already declared its secession from BiH as a republic of Yugoslavia. Although the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) played a key role in the earliest stages of this, the first phase of ethnic cleansing continued through the summer and into the autumn of 1992. JNA withdrawal was largely implemented by mid to late May 1992<sup>2</sup> and the primary protagonists of subsequent anti-Muslim violence were the police and military under Republika Srpska government authority. This is one point where the pace of the book could usefully slow a little, for example, to clarify the respective roles of the successor state of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia constituted in April 1992, the sub-state Republic of Serbia as part of that federation, and the autonomous but unrecognized Republika Srpska, within Bosnia and Herzegovina. Categorization of a potential, emerging but ultimately unrealized state (Republika Srpska) might support the extension of the statistical findings from the second chapter to non-state actors excluded for good reasons of operationalization.

The penultimate substantive chapter deals with atypical cases, including the Nazi genocide against European Jewish and Romani populations, and the wholesale displacement of various groups by the Soviet Union. Here, while the factors of territorial conflict do not apply in the same way, and in the case of Germany, political competition and evident social cleavages feature heavily up to 1933 (162–64), a combination of state capture, totalitarianism and elimination of alternative cleavages are offered as explanatory factors linking back to core arguments (164, 168–69). Factors, which might otherwise limit a faction supporting ethnic cleansing, are marginalized to such a level that little is needed to trigger such action. The political analysis maps on to Durkheim’s sociological observations of a unified state overcoming the heterogeneity of civil society to gather and direct human forces in line with its goals (1915: 34–35). In the final chapter preceding the conclusion Bulutgil considers the application of the theory to post-colonial Africa. Her care to think through the potential temporal and spatial limits to how the theory may travel evident here (e.g., 18 on assumptions of territoriality and non-repetitiveness of ethnicity not holding for South America) and elsewhere (Bulutgil 2018: 3) are fully in line with the thoroughness she displays throughout in constructing, testing and developing her theory. This work is undoubtedly a major contribution to research on ethnic cleansing.

I have written elsewhere on the development since the 1990s of a criminology of atrocity, focused on genocide, ethnic cleansing and other forms of large scale, systematic violence (Aitchison 2014). In many ways, the questions set out by Bulutgil at the start of the book logically precede the kinds of questions asked by criminologists when they focus analysis at the level of the individual. Yet this methodological individualism, a poor fit with systematic violence, is not representative of all criminological scholarship. John Hagan et al. (2005), Annika van Barr and Wim Huisman (2012) are examples of criminologists using structural and multi-level analyses to situate the actions of individuals and groups through which policies of ethnic violence are realized. The state, as a larger, macro-level unit of analysis, structures resources, interests and opportunities at meso- and micro-levels.

Recognizing the relatively “open” boundaries of criminology, which variously draws on law, sociology, psychology, economic, and to some extent political science, we can also turn to the *longue durée* sociological analysis of Siniša Malešević (2017) which charts the growth of social organizations as a driving force behind an increase in violence evident in war, genocide, revolution and terrorism. Bulutgil’s careful analysis and abstract

description of the social organization that is the state breaks it down, accounting for the shifting power balance of different factions (in this case, for or against ethnic cleansing). Linking the state as a form of organized power with ethnicities, territories and conflict, gives a deeper sense of the organizational keys that activate and legitimate ethnic violence. As such, her recent addition to our understanding of ethnic cleansing marks her out not just as a leading edge political scientist in this field, but an essential interlocutor for those determined to further develop in this field through multi-disciplinary conversations.

#### NOTES

1. Two cases, Iranians in USSR (1937) and Turks in Bulgaria (1950) do not fit this division perfectly. The case of the Iranians is given attention on pages 168–69.
2. This amounted to a removal of soldiers not born in BiH, around 20% of the force present, and transfer of remaining men and equipment to the Army of Republika Srpska and Territorial Defense, see UN (1992) paras. 5 and 6.

#### REFERENCES

- Aydin-Aitchison, Andy. (2014). *Criminological Theory and International Crime: Examining the Potential*, in Ilias Bantekas and Emmanouela Mylonaki (eds) *Criminological Approaches to International Criminal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 22–49.
- Bulutgil, H.Zeynep. (2018). *Response to Critiques and New Research Questions. Nationalities Papers*, early online release, DOI: 10.1080/00905992.2018.1474864.
- Durkheim, Émile. (1915). *Germany above All: German Mentality and War*. (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin).
- Hagan, John; Rymond-Richmond, Winona; and Parker, Patricia. (2015). *The Criminology of Genocide: The Death and Rape of Darfur. Criminology* 43(3): 525–62.
- Malešević, Siniša. (2017). *The Rise of Organised Brutality*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- United Nations. (1992). *Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Paragraph 4 of Security Council Resolution 752 (S/24049, 30 May)*.

van Baar, Annika and Huisman, Wim. (2012). The Oven Builders of the Holocaust: A Case Study of Corporate Complicity in International Crimes. *British Journal of Criminology* 52(5): 1033–50.