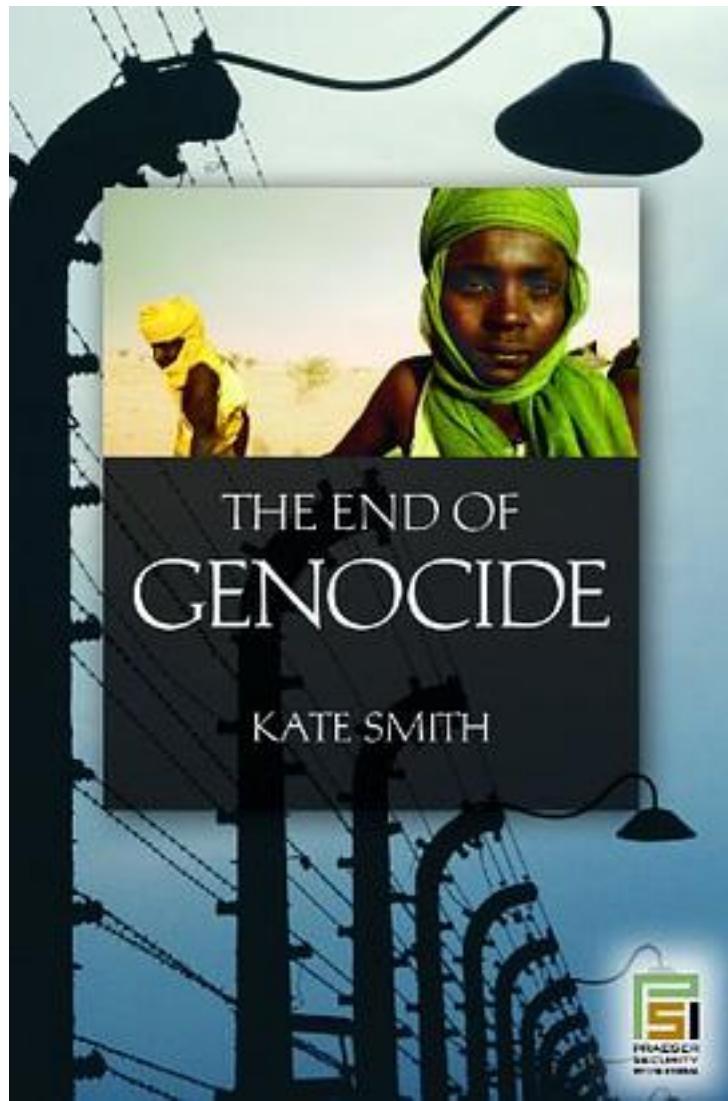


The End of Genocide



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Genocide is a crime, yet it is also perceived as a regrettable but unavoidable eruption into violence from an unsolvable conflict. This sense of inevitability can lead to paralysis. In genocide, there are four roles: victim, perpetrator, bystander, or hero. Genocides have happened in our lifetime, so which role did we play? If we did nothing but watch or pass comment when images of atrocities crossed our television or computer screens, if we turned the page after reading the disquieting headlines or deleted the email with the disturbing news, then we were bystanders. Our complicity is implicit. We might be less likely to do nothing if we believed that genocide were preventable. Kate Smith argues that it is. Genocide is a recurring phenomenon that arises from a set of specific political and societal circumstances. It is a failure of society. It is an extension of the conflict of one national, ethnic, racial or religious group against another where the only solution is for some elements of one group to cause the death and immiseration of the other group. A common defense against complicity is to dehumanize the perpetrators, to treat them as objects. We say to ourselves, It can only be crazy men who do such things. But genocide is all about the interrupted and destroyed lives of ordinary people: the victims and the perpetrators; ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, where hatred is fueled by ethnic nationalism. Yet an alternative type of nationalism exists: civic nationalism, which is typically nonviolent. The factor that makes civic nationalism civil is civil society: media, churches, banks, businesses, charities, and universities, for example. The ethnic threat and conflict still exists and ethnic violence can occur, but the pre-genocidal conditions are dissipated, diluted by intergroup negotiation and dialogue. Genocide is switched off. Smith examines the major genocides of the past century as well as the genocides that didn't happen, and asks whether the near-genocides had civil society and the realized genocides did not.

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