

Generational Being

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Genocidal violence has a target, which we can call the *genos*, even though it is not easy to say what that is. Etymology suggests that it is a group, tribe, kind; Lemkin understood it as a national, religious or racial group, and made a point of noting that it designated both target and attacker; the UN Declaration added *ethnical* to his list.¹ This has produced a knotted conversation about who or what counts as susceptible to genocide, and who or what is attacked and harmed by genocidal violence: individuals, certainly, but is the group itself a relevant object? Genocide is perpetrated by groups; what responsibility does the individual perpetrator bear? Efforts to respond are stymied so long as we regard the *genos* as an object at all. Far from a thing, *genos* indicates a mode of being, specifically, our essential generational mode of being. Generation is the activity of reproduction and modification that ties us to those who came before and those who will come after, and the *genos* sustains itself--though neither an *it* nor a *self*--by generation, bequest and inheritance. We may think of this in terms of biological ancestors and descendants, but we may also think of historical forebears and posterity, the bearing and transmission of traditions, and the work of preserving a culture through the education of the new. The structure is the same in each case and, at its most general, it is the generational structure of the world. *Genos* is sentimentally powerful--and dangerous--because it is so easily romanticized, and politically powerful--and just as dangerous--because it is easily naturalized. But it is also existentially powerful and cannot be ignored.²

How relevant can *genos* really be, now that we're all 21st century hybrids and enlightened cosmopolitans? If the choice is between what Zygmunt Bauman called the dream of purity on the one hand and the celebration of hybridity on the other, or the clean lines of racial hygiene on the one hand and the mess of sexual mixing on the other, of course we will celebrate the mix.³ Yet hybridity is not yet a solution. As Nicholas Thomas writes, it is "almost a good idea."⁴ It has done the necessary work of demoting purity as a social end, but it has also affirmed its position as a taxonomical condition, efficiently obscuring the question of whether a pure line of descent is a matter of a natural kind or a technique of knowing. As we will see, an initial desire to know where we belong becomes intensified as a desire for absolute belonging, then confounded with a desire to belong to an absolute *genos*.

Yet there is never a *genos*, only *genera*. We may belong to several of them--why not?--and what we experience or long to experience as belonging to a single, self-evident, self-generating group requires the generation and policing of boundaries: this and not that, this because not that, us because not them. We must establish the distinction between groups before we can have them overlap; we must establish purity in order to give sense to hybridity. Anthropologist Stefan Palmié describes the process: "[genera] are in no way mere reflections of empirically ascertainable, objective 'occurrences.'... They are the results of the work of situationally authoritative technologies of discernment and discrimination and their specific 'rules of recognition.'"⁵ The problem is that the structures we deploy to order our knowledge of the world are taken as ontological givens, and the classificatory infrastructure responsible for "hybridity effects"--in this case, blurring effects--rarely if ever are opened to scrutiny. In 1972

biologist Richard Lewontin published his renowned paper demonstrating that the genetic differences among individuals in each so-called race were greater than the differences between members of different races. What that paper might have been expected to do for the conversation within biology and beyond, Palmié's treatment of hybridity aimed to do for anthropology 40 years later.⁶

Yet even as the concepts of *genos* and genocide come undone, we persist in working ourselves into *genera*, understood, minimally, as the network of enduring relations linking us to those (of us) who have gone and to others (of us) who have yet to come. Anthropologists study this under the heading of *kinship*; Hannah Arendt studied it under the heading of *world*.⁷ The study of belonging is a privileged hermeneutic reflection on world. We come to be in a context that we have no choice but to experience it as *the* world, as world-as-such. It is our world--though we don't yet know to call it that--because its idiomatic and idiosyncratic address provokes us to understanding. It conditions us as knowers. Our world lays claim to us, puts us on the spot, gives us what we need to begin to understand its signs, and we belong to it before it belongs to us. It is not required that I do indeed understand all the signs--complete transparency is not the criterion--but we find ourselves in the hermeneutic situation where belonging means entering into the language and sign system as a passive and then also active participant in the activity of making sense.

We come to be by virtue of our passive initiation into the world and then our passive and active engagements in various worlds. The plural is significant. It only occurs to us to claim the world as *our* world in that moment when we realize that there are others, that is, the moment when we are addressed in languages and by signs we have to struggle with in a new way.⁸ The world that had been right there in the most intimate way suddenly addresses the infant across an appalling ~~of~~ distance, and she develops the game of Fort-Da; the schoolchild is set upon in the schoolyard in ways he never experienced at home; the music-lover catches glimpses of other worlds; the student encounters the world of molecular biology; the newly-wed tries to understand his in-laws; the migrant scrambles to learn a new language; the patient tries to decipher the sign system of the medical-pharmaceutical complex. We encounter worlds, each with a history and tradition, each one addressing us. We will come to belong to some, but not all at once and not all in the same way, and in some we will always be strangers.

The desire to belong to a *genos* is not nothing. It not only drives genocidal attacks but also conditions our cherished ways of being together as kin. We like the experience of belonging, but also, as helpless infants and social beings linked to the past and invested in the future, we *need* to belong. This is why we identify genocide as the very worst thing. In this context, the old fantasy of *something* called the *genos* that persists over time continues to make sense and has refused to go away. Ignoring this phenomenon leaves us unprepared for the theoretical work of understanding the relation of belonging, *genos* and violence, and disastrously unprepared for the knock on the door--if not ours, then our neighbor's or the door of the family across town or across the border. It also leaves us unprepared--not finally but in the first instance--for the reassuring, pernicious rhetoric of *them* and *us*. This is why an investigation of *genos* and genocide must proceed hermeneutically, beginning with our generational being.⁹

<A>Genealogy and *genos*<|>

We belong *no matter what* to those from whom we descended, whoever they were. In this sense, the TV genre of celebrity genealogy is on to something. Such absolute and passive

belonging is an ontological status, and to experience it without content is to experience it as though religiously, in the broadest sense of the term. “I belong, absolutely” is a statement as incomprehensible and as worthy of respect as Wittgenstein’s example from the Lecture on Ethics: “I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens.”¹⁰ Belonging “come what may” has the same affective appeal as Freud’s “oceanic feeling,” for which he in turn had little respect.¹¹ Featured on the U.S. P.B.S. genealogy show “Finding Your Roots,” Deepak Chopra discovers more information about his forebears than he had thought possible, and he describes the experience as finding an opening onto the universe. Yet rather than transcendent, it is an earthly belonging, born of the planetary fact that we came from and belong to the earth. Genealogical research is how we give discriminatory content to the feeling of belonging. It is not accidental that Chopra glimpses the universe through or in his family line: “Chopras all the way.”¹² On the one hand, we all belong to the same earth in the same way; that element of our being does not require any real or imagined other against whom to construe our belonging. On the other, we belong differently to our different parents. We share the condition of being somebody’s child, but the fate of being the eldest daughter of my mother and father, born where and when I was born, is different from the fate even of my older brothers or my younger sister, different from the fate of all you sons and daughters of all the other parents. What needs to be thought through here, in the crux of the genocide paradox, is the fact that in the existential grey area between being an earthling and being our parents’ child, each of us could be said to belong in many lineages, most of which we know nothing of. In terms of inheritance, we each occupy an intersection of ignorances. We will never know all the places we came from, nor all those people from whom we came.

What do we *think* we know? Our great great grandparents mark a genealogical turning point because there, living memory has given out, and their generation is commonly the point by which oral family history has failed.¹³ Their parents--for the Romans, the generation of the *atavus* and the *atavia*--lie just beyond reach. What had been clear lines of descent reaching from us back from one person to the next now become branches fading in the direction of un-named nodes. At this point, “To whom do you belong?” cannot be so easily answered with named, storied men and women, with the result that *my people*, which until now referred to the many particular people from whom I came, becomes *my people* in the singular, *a people*.¹⁴ No longer able to answer the question: “Who are my people?” we slip towards: “What is my people?” as if these were the same question. The diachronous project of filling in my ancestral tree cannot determine such a thing; beginning with me, the tree branches infinitely into the past and provides no criterion that will fend off that infinitude.¹⁵ We have to draw a criterion from somewhere else, and the ghosts of all the lineages not chosen and the ancestors still unknown haunt every selection.

In contrast, the synchronous project of drawing a pedigree seems to banish the ghosts from the start. That inverted genealogical tree figure grows from a single ancestor, identifying all his or her living descendants, and secures a place for me among them. Documenting the rhythm of generation and the geometrical increase in the number of descendants, the pedigree branches out but has its own limiting structure: to belong among these cousins I need only trace a single line that shows I belong to that ancestor. It is an elegant figure and a perilous one. Once the contingent, sovereign decision--this ancestor, not that one--is made, that is, once *a* family tree or a clade stands out against the Borgesian infinity of possible trees, the fact that it was a decision at all can be forgotten. This group, decisively delineated and consisting of those held together by the natural bonds of procreation, becomes both a natural group and the occasion of my

experience of belonging absolutely. This is where we indulge the fantasy that the *genos*--my *genos*--is the embodiment of its own principle. The desire to know those to whom we belong absolutely is confounded with a desire to belong to *something* absolute, an absolute *genos*. It is a tragic longing.

When genealogy--as a television spectacle or as personal research--turns to DNA for evidence, it is in the spirit of banishing the tragedy. Henry Louis Gates Jr. hosts *Finding Your Roots*, where guests investigate their family histories first through family lore, then in the historical archive, and finally by offering up a cheek swab and having their DNA analyzed. The premise is made explicit: "By decoding our DNA and revealing the diversity that is hidden in the branches of our family trees, we'll discover just how blurred the lines that divide us really are."¹⁶ Sometimes, *Finding Your Roots* uncovers genetic evidence that fills a specific gap in the historical record, naming an ancestor who would otherwise remain unknown. For people whose enslaved ancestors were not named in the U.S. Census before 1870, there are many gaps that would not otherwise be filled.¹⁷ At such moments the evidence of biology supports the lore of family and kin, and directs historical research to other parts of the archive. At the same time, it aligns with more suspect thinking of race.

Each guest is presented with a pie chart, which is then discussed as a picture of who she is: "You are 12% Native American, 28% Sub-saharan African," etc.. The designators marking the pieces of pie are all geographic, usually referring simply to continents but occasionally they are made to refer to more specific groups: Ashkenazi, British, Iberian Peninsular, Ibo. Each chart does indeed show a diversity of genetic origins and each one is offered as further evidence of blurred boundaries. But the premise perpetuates the problem. Imagine the most satisfying of surprises in such a show: an anti-Semite is presented with a chart showing that she has Jewish ancestors, or a white supremacist turns out to be descended from black people. The racist is convinced of the ontological claim that where you come from *is* who you are, but this is also the unspoken premise of the epistemological-ontological claim that to know who you are, you have to know where you come from. The racist declares that the divisions between the races are *real*; for Gates, DNA analysis shows that the blurriness of those divisions is *real*. Both reinforce the expectation that by telling us where we *really* come from, science can set us straight about who we *really* are and where we *really* belong.¹⁸

Dorothy Roberts puts the case starkly: "The ideology of race as a natural division between human beings that is written in our genes will have devastating political consequences. It can serve as a linchpin of a new, already emerging biopolitics in which the state's power to control the life and death of populations relies on classifying them by race."¹⁹ The invention and discovery of the gene in the late 19th century gave us a way of thinking of the causes of family resemblance as located in the material structures of our bodies. It is also the case that genetics took shape as a science in an era dominated by the ideology of purity. Roberts argues that two powerful ideologies--biological race and genetic determinism--are ascending in tandem in America now, and have large and growing influence on public policy and public understanding. Thus large scientific studies such as the Human Genome Diversity Project and the Genographic Project become the focus of public attention and, while the scientists who run them are insistently opposed to genetic determinism, many Americans remain willing to accept genetic explanations for social relationships and behaviors because they continue to believe that race is inherited biology. "These race-gene claims simultaneously confirm the myths that races exist in genes and that genes can tell us everything about ourselves. Together, they support a biological explanation for the widening racial chasm in health, incarceration, and social welfare."²⁰

<A>Genos and race</>

When the attackers come and the men with guns call you out, it does not matter that you think of yourself as a hybrid, or having multiple identities, or as no more or less than a human being. Arendt writes: “If one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew.”²¹ Subjected to racist attacks, one responds as racialized, not as a matter of accepting the designation imposed by one’s attackers, but as a way of contesting what *Jew* and *race* mean. It means reclaiming the genos from the naturalized category of race. Frederick Douglass writes in his 1845 *Narrative of an American Slave*:

<EXT>My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant—before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off.²² </>

His mother was sent to a farm 12 miles away and on a few occasions she managed to see him, setting out at night to walk to where he was, lying with him as he settled to sleep, and then walking the 12 miles back before sunrise.

<EXT>I do not recollect of ever seeing my mother by the light of day.... I was not allowed to be present during her illness, at her death or burial... For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder development of the child’s affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result.²³ </>

Injustice can be said in many ways. Douglass responds in terms of nature, as will Orlando Patterson a century and more later when he names this fate of natal alienation a “natural injustice.”²⁴ Douglass’s father was a white man, probably the plantation owner. Douglass belonged to him as an instrument, making impossible the relationship by which he could have belonged to him as a son. In Patterson’s analysis, Douglass was alienated from birth and severed from the practices that constitute a subject to whom a culture may be transmitted. He was alienated from the instant of his birth, which is to say there is no question of agency or responsibility on his part. No one wills his own birth. Birth is not an act one performs, so any consequences that rebound on him by birth are not of his doing. The words *bastard* and *slave* attach to us with no reference to anything we have done. Yet so do *son* and *daughter*.

Moreover, he was denied *at birth* the capacity to make the claims of birth, and this specifically constitutes what Patterson identifies as a natural injustice. Douglass was alienated from his own birth, which would have tied him to past generations and an existing community, would have given him native, local status, and allowed him to make a claim on those who brought us into the world. He writes of the natural maternal affection that was destroyed in his mother and the filial affection that was stunted in him by an owner whose sexual and generational violence makes a hideous paradox of the word *father*.²⁵ Patterson writes:

<EXT>It was this alienation of the slave from all formal, legally enforceable ties of “blood” and from any attachment to groups or localities other than those chosen for him by the master, that gave the relation of slavery its peculiar value to the master. The slave was the ultimate tool, as imprintable and disposable as the master wished.²⁶</>

That is to say, being able to make a natal claim on our forebears allows us to turn towards the new generation and in turn open ourselves to their claim on us. Because a slave could not make a claim on his parents, he had no natal claim or power to pass on to his children.

With *natural* injustice Patterson is not objecting to a contingent, natural distribution of characteristics.²⁷ Nor is he concerned with a natural unfairness in the distribution of talents or characteristics. Instead, he points to a breach of what he, like Douglass, takes as a natural order that stands beyond the law. How else is one to name the injustice of a law that attacks the relations of mothers, fathers and children? What word other than *blood* communicates the value that is denied when families are broken up by the practice of selling-out? What term other than *kinship* describes the structure that implodes when, as Hortense Spillers describes, one’s father is also one’s owner and the owner of one’s mother, siblings, neighbours, co-workers, indiscriminately?²⁸

Yet, whose nature is this? What kin? Enforceable ties of “blood” existed for whites in the plantation system in the form of legal institutions of marriage, ownership and inheritance supported by social institutions of the cult of virginity, the fantasy of dynasty and ideology of white supremacy. The child of the white slave-owner and his white wife did not suffer natal alienation; he could grow up protected by (and also subject to) his parents and the law, and need never undergo anything like the experience of Mr. Reed, a once enslaved man interviewed by Ophelia Settle Egypt of Fisk University around 1930:

<EXT>The most barbarous thing I saw with these eyes I lay on my bed and study about it now – I had a sister, my older sister, she was fooling with a clock and broke it, and my old master taken her and tied a rope around her neck--just enough to keep it from choking her--and tied her up in the back yard and whipped her I don’t know how long. There stood mother, there stood father, and there stood all the children and none could come to her rescue.²⁹ </>

What was denied to Mr. Reed and his family was something the white family had: the ability to protect each other, to be responsible for each other, to act on that responsibility and to have those responsibilities supported by law.³⁰ In that case, the injustice can be described by appealing solely to existing legal forms, and the claim to equality can take the form of an appeal for equal treatment under existing law. Justice is a matter of extending protection so that no-one may whip a girl without fear of interference from her kin or fear of punishment under the law.

Still the question persists; What kin? Daniel Patrick Moynihan could write in his infamous 1965 report that, although African Americans had achieved legal liberty, they had not yet achieved equality due to the pathologies of family life to which the Negro family fell victim: “divorce, separation, and desertion, female family head, children in broken homes and illegitimacy.” He observed that in 1963 nearly one-quarter of Negro births were illegitimate, nearly one-fourth of Negro families are headed by women, and Negro women have “too many children too early,” all evidence that the Negro family was disorganized and breaking down. While the white family “remains a powerful agency not only for transmitting property from one

generation to the next but also for transmitting no less valuable contracts with the world of work and education,” the Negro community “has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is too out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole.”³¹ Enslaved people called upon the law; the response, when it came, took the form of access to the naturalized rules that had supported the dominance of white men all along. Yet, as Spillers writes:

<EXT>the captive person developed, time and again, certain ethical and sentimental features that tied her and him, across the landscape to others, often sold from hand to hand, of the same and different blood in a common fabric of memory and inspiration. We might choose to call this connectedness "family," or "support structure," but that is a rather different case from the moves of a dominant symbolic order, pledged to maintain the supremacy of race.³²<\>

What other nature, then? What other kin? How else to describe what Douglass and his mother, Harriet Bailey, suffered in their separation? Slavery imposed conditions that undermined slave families and communities in order to eliminate kinship as a mode of identification and as a place of resistance to the imposed identity of mere slave, the property of this or that plantation. Claudia Card, drawing on Patterson, though making no claims about “blood,” gives us the language of social death, which breaks the bonds between people by suppressing the customs that mark our distinctive modes of being, our entry into the human world, our passage through it and our departure from it.³³

Yet Bailey’s response, in the face of that death threat, was to create a night time world where she could put her son to bed. We don’t know how she did it--what support she had from the people who would cover for her, the arrangements she made with the female driver who must have been caring for the child Frederick--but we know enough from his testimony to recognize her as a subversive. Meanwhile, who did feed Frederick Douglass? Who provided him with more of the sustained attention that allowed him to become who he was? As Shannon Hoff writes in her phenomenology of belonging:

<EXT>The individual lives inside broad worlds and structures of significance, and she is able to live a more or less meaningful and competent individual life because of the various forms of involvement she has with these worlds and structures--the involvement of belonging, participating, enacting, mattering, and so on. She develops the capacity for meaningful activity as a consequence of being passive both to their formation and cultivation of her as well as to their meaningfulness.³⁴<\>

Self-possession is an achievement rather than a starting point, one never achieved without the attention and cultivation Hoff describes. These are genealogical relations we can learn nothing of from DNA.

<A>Kinship Revisited<\>

Kinship is the name for the object of our longing when we long to belong absolutely; it is the essentially generational structure that ties us to past and future. The relation of parents and children is central, but in two distinct ways. *That* there have been parents and that there will be children is the minimal material condition for a sustained human world, but, as a material condition, it specifies little about the character of the relation and the shape and content of the

world. Rather, our description of the relation simultaneously constitutes it as a condition and begins to constitute a *worldly* generational structure. Kin are those to whom we belong generationally, and the *kinship group* is the name anthropology has given us for the self-generating *genos*, in its various forms. Yet, despite the assumptions that informed the discipline for 150 years, those forms are not necessarily founded on a generally shared biological or natural understanding of what *parent* or *child* means. Social anthropologist Alan Barnard notes:

<EXT>‘Kinship,’ as defined in the human context, depends on the existence of [culturally articulated] rules, which in turn are understood by ordinary human beings in relation to culturally specific sets of linguistic and extralinguistic categories. The notion that kinship has a biological foundation is really dependent on the cultural definition of ‘biology’. Even in Western societies [which emphasize biological relation], ‘biological’ kinship is often as much a metaphor for social relations as a statement of relevant biological fact.³⁵ </>

In 1967 Claude Levi-Strauss could still refer casually to the “natural links of kinship,” but in 1984, David Schneider’s reconsideration of his own fieldwork on kinship in Yap demonstrated “the way in which kinship has been studied does not make good sense.”³⁶ The system of relations codified in studies of European and North American families had produced the distinction between real kinship relations (based on biology and nature) and fictive (created) ones.³⁷ Applying it to Yap meant forcing relations there into familiar anthro-biological shapes, but now, making a hermeneutic return to the same data, Schneider allowed the phenomenon to set the system in motion. Other anthropologists would go on to describe Malaysian migrant fishing communities where bonds of kinship are formed not just by procreation but by the sharing of meals, and Andean villages where the children one feeds are one’s *own* children.³⁸ Others studied the Inupiat of Alaska where patterns of naming and belonging take their elements from the role one plays in a hunting crew.³⁹ Still others described gay communities in San Francisco where kinship was constantly reconceived in terms of love, friendship and biology.⁴⁰ In each case, *kinship* signifies a mode of temporal being together, of being with one another towards past *and* future. This is the mode of being that is vulnerable to genocidal violence.

Significantly, identifying an originary need to preserve something of the dead does not sharpen the boundaries of a *genos*, but instead opens the questions of which dead and whose deadneed. Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern’s study of the people of Alltown, Lancashire, England shows how a kinship group archieves coherence but evades definition.⁴¹ Shifting their focus to from social and/or biological relations to modes of relatedness, Edwards and Strathern sidestep the anxiety produced by the thought of an infinite family tree; none of the sets of connections they find is infinite, but peter out thanks to lack of interest, or social exhaustion. There in Lancashire, an English population that might be expected to present all the features of the familiar Eurocentric kinship model turns out to use *own*, *our own*, *disown* in ways that include and exclude according to a shifting and unpredictable set of criteria. People are directly connected to one another, or linked through mediating people who may or may not be relatives. Some people drop off the chain of connections and fall out of the group, whether they are relatives or not. Edwards and Strathern write: “Limits are set by how far one wishes to claim--or own, or own up to--such connection”⁴² The *genos* may be a self-limiting group after all, but with the limits provided by the contingencies of lack of affection, interest or time, all of which the authors regard not as external factors that interrupt the endless chain of kin but as internal to the

workings of kinship. What is crucial is that the responsibility first felt in the context of familial belonging--the desire to keep something of the ones we know and love--passes into the context of kinship as a responsibility to remember "our dead." But who are they, *our* dead? Whose dead? How far back? The originary existential responsibility emerges as a *genos*-making practice in social and historical conditions that will always have to reckon with lack of interest, forgetting, and memorial exhaustion.

Spillers writes of fabrics of memory and *inspiration*; I want to emphasise networks of memory, which call us to responsibility for the past, and of *aspiration*, which show our investment in the future. She rejects *ethnos* when it is deployed as a category that forces a phenomenon into stillness, fixing it in place and in time. She writes: "Moynihan's 'Families' are pure present and always tense. 'Ethnicity' in this case freezes in meaning, takes on constancy, assumes the look and the affects of the Eternal."⁴³ Generation disrupts such constancy; *genos*, as a generational structure, is always in movement, always expectant but always in mourning too.

<A>Conclusion</>

Once it is extricated from the certainties of genetics and the presumption of naturalism, kinship emerges as the generational structure of world. We come to be in relation to those already here, and our relationships take shape in the interactions that involve such mundane practices as holding and feeding, speaking and singing. We are addressed in these locally and culturally specific ways long before we are addressed explicitly in the voice of parental or pedagogic authority, and long before we experience ourselves as the inheritors of a distinctive culture. According to all these and other modes of relatedness, we come to inhabit *a* world and belong to a *genos*. Its past matters to us and we share it with those who inhabited this world before us. The dead enter our thoughts, occupy places in our world and make demands upon us, not least that we should sustain our shared world in ways they no longer can.⁴⁴ Thus its future matters to us not only for the sake of our own actions and creations, which we hope might have a life longer than our own, and not only for the sake of the ones to come, but also for the sake of the dead whose suffering might yet be redeemed. Walter Benjamin anticipated a violence from which not even the dead would be safe, that is, a world-destroying violence that could consign its victims to oblivion.⁴⁵ The Nazi genocide aimed to kill all generations, but the violence that attacks the belonging-together of generations--using rape, enforced pregnancy, sterilization, stealing children, separating families, moving communities, disrupting education, and preventing handing down and inheritance--attacks a world and is genocidal too.

Genos can never be sure of itself, and neither the redemption of past suffering nor the conservation of our present work is ever guaranteed. This must be so, since generational life is necessarily open towards the future in the mode of expectation, towards the past in the mode of mourning, and towards other genera in the mode of uncertainty. What would be new about the new generation if we, their progenitors and educators, could know in advance who they were and what they would do? For Arendt, this newness is simultaneously a promise and a threat: the promise that the work we have done will be maintained and remembered in a world renewed by the ones to come; the threat that, grasping their freedom, they will destroy what we pass on to them. Even as they renew the world by their own lights, they forget, letting go of what we committed ourselves to remembering and reminding us of our own failures of memory and our responsibility to mourn. Finally, *genera* are necessarily plural, and the distinctive worlds we live in abut and intersect. The world consists of many worlds. So long as we think of *genera* as fixed

and worlds as closed, we have no language for what happens when apparently sharp boundaries run right through us. Overlaps and intersections become occasions for fear and, in the absence of a worldly (political) space where contestation happens without guns, they become the place of genocidal violence.⁴⁶

¹ Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*, 93.

² For a powerful argument for the existential significance of genocide as an affront to worldliness, see Shmuel Lederman, “A Nation Destroyed.”

³ Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, 6.

⁴ Nicholas Thomas 1996, quoted in Palmié, ““Mixed Blessings and Sorrowful Mysteries: Second Thoughts About “Hybridity””.”

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ When Siddhartha Mukherjee published his bestselling *The Gene: an Intimate History* in 2016, his repetition of the argument still attracted comment. Then again, we should not be astonished by the need to repeat evidence and still have it fail to penetrate public consciousness in the United States, where Creationism is still sometimes discussed as though it were an alternative to Evolutionary Theory, and where political leaders deny the human causes of climate change.

⁷ I understand the structure of individual, worlds and world according to the pattern established by Arendt when she writes of *man*, *people*, and *world*: “For only within a framework of a people can a man live as a man among men, without exhausting himself. And only when a people lives and functions in consort with other peoples can it contribute to the establishment upon earth of a commonly conditioned and commonly controlled humanity” Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah” in *The Jewish Writings*, 297.

⁸ Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception.”

⁹ For an approach to these questions that engages the growing literature on epigenetics, see Ada Jaarsma’s contribution to this volume.

¹⁰ Wittgenstein, “I,” 8.

¹¹ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 11. Hortense Spillers reads this Freudian image as an analogy for undifferentiated identity. See Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 72.

¹² PBS, *FINDING YOUR ROOTS | Deepak Chopra’s Ancestral Pilgrimage | PBS*.

¹³ See the entry for *atavus* in Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*.

¹⁴ Sociobiologist R.I.M. Dunbar writes of the selection of an ancestor as the unifying element of a kinship group: “What is particularly interesting in this context is that it makes very little difference whether the members of the kinship group are themselves directly related to that ‘ancestor’ or not, since beyond about four generations removed in time the coefficients of relationship between two individuals are so low that they are, to all intents and purposes, unrelated. Indeed, it makes little difference whether that ancestor actually existed or not: the sun, the moon and Mother Earth are as functional in this context as one’s great-great-great-grandfather.” R.I.M. Dunbar, “Sociality Among Humans and Non-Human Animals,” 775.

¹⁵ See Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race,” 26.

¹⁶ Cece Moore. <http://www.pbs.org/weta/finding-your-roots/blog/season-wrap-finally-dna-takes-center-stage/>

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- ¹⁷ The first genealogical shows Gates undertook focused on African Americans in particular. Later, he established a genetic analysis research brand, African DNA.
- ¹⁸ There is a considerable literature on this phenomenon. See Nash, “Genetic Kinship.” and Roberts, *Fatal Invention*, 2011.
- ¹⁹ Roberts, *Fatal Invention*, 2011, 297.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 299.
- ²¹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 268–69.
- ²² Douglass, *Autobiographies*, 15–16.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ²⁴ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.
- ²⁵ See Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 76.
- ²⁶ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 7.
- ²⁷ Ethics used to offer the example of being born blind while others are born with sight as a natural injustice, but ableism has changed that conversation so thoroughly that the example is obsolete. See Lemos, “The Concept of Natural Right.”
- ²⁸ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 76.
- ²⁹ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 8.
- ³⁰ Lisa Guenther writes: “Kinship relations were thus constructed in law as a source of confinement without shelter, or constraint without protection, for any child born to a slave woman, while the father’s right to choose or “elect” his children was guaranteed absolutely.” (Fecundity and Natal Alienation 22)
- ³¹ “The Moynihan Report: An Annotated Edition - The Atlantic.”
- ³² Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 75.
- ³³ Card, “Genocide and Social Death,” 74.
- ³⁴ Hoff, “Rights and Worlds,” 360.
- ³⁵ Alan Barnard, “Rules and Prohibitions: The Form and Content of Human Kinship,” 786.
- ³⁶ Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, 201. See also Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Rev. Ed.
- ³⁷ Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, 171–73.
- ³⁸ Carsten, *After Kinship*, 139.
- ³⁹ Bodenhorn, “He Used to Be My Relative.” If the kinship among the Inupiat is signaled by blood, it is now the blood of the hunted whale. For additional examples of the reshaping of the concept of kinship in anthropology, see Carsten, *Cultures of Relatedness* and Franklin and McKinnon, *Relative Values*.
- ⁴⁰ Weston, *Families We Choose*. Not surprisingly, the richest source of theoretical reflection on these questions is Queer Theory. See Butler, “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?”; Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*; Freeman, “Queer Belongings”; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*; Munoz, *Cruising Utopia*.
- ⁴¹ Edwards and Strathern, “Including Our Own.”
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 159.
- ⁴³ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 66.
- ⁴⁴ See Brown, *The Reaper’s Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*.
- ⁴⁵ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Thesis 6.
- ⁴⁶ Bernstein, *Violence*.

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