

Chapter 8

A Slow and Endless Horror

So far I have been suggesting that our situation of facing the consequences of climate change for our future is unprecedented. We've never before contemplated the possibility that the life we know might be altered beyond recognition in quite this way. But it's worth pausing to consider whether this relation to the future is really all that new. Are we in fact experiencing as strange a moment as all that? Aren't people in modern cultures used to facing these kinds of uncertainties as a matter of course by now? What is really new in our current situation?

We are, after all, the heirs of a long history of devastation. Over the past several centuries our societies have engendered and endured systemic, irreversible transformation in its various forms, including those in which expansion and liberation evolved into devastation and genocide. For half a millennium we have had to accept the possibility that the invasive power of modern economic and political regimes could destroy entire traditions, cultures, and peoples. This history is so long, difficult, and bloody—and so convenient to ignore—that it may be useful to review it for a moment.

The European encounter with the New World led to an era of colonization on nearly every continent, a pattern that in turn frequently decimated native populations and drew upon the murderous enslavement of Africans to provide labor for the new world. The scientific and industrial revolutions, in their turn, made possible the creation of modern industrial capitalism, which superseded traditional trades and handicrafts, forced a long demographic shift from the countryside to the city, and subordinated national economies to global trade and financial networks, forever altering the preindustrial way of life. At times, that process had brutal effects. The British application of a particular theory of the free market in

countries across its far-flung empire led to the Irish famine of the 1840s, the devastating famines in India in the late 1800s, and ultimately to what Mike Davis has called the “making of the Third World.”¹⁰⁹ Eventually, the bureaucratic power of the modern state, coupled with military and imperial ambitions, nationalism, or racism, created the concentration camps in South Africa during the Boer War, the little-known genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples in Namibia (then South West Africa) under German control in 1904 through 1907, and the Armenian genocide of 1915–1923.¹¹⁰

This history has only intensified over the decades since. World War I shattered the complacency of Europe and destroyed a generation of young men; a decade or so after the war ended, the Depression began; that long ordeal ended with World War II, which in turn introduced the nuclear bomb and the Holocaust. The changed geopolitical conditions after the war led to the foundation of the state of Israel and the displacement of the Palestinian people; it also opened the way for the independence of India, which came to pass with the Partition of India and Pakistan, an event accompanied with the slaughter of around one million people. Shortly thereafter began the Cold War, the arms race between the superpowers, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, which in limited ways continues to this day. Over this period, the legacy of the Enlightenment took on a darker hue; the example of the American and French Revolutions, which had initially opened the way for nations around the world to intervene in their traditions and reinvent themselves, inspired the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, whose leaders eventually sought such systemic, wholesale change that they plunged their nations into famine or worse (under Stalin in the 1930s and Mao in 1958–1962). In the wake of the Holocaust, which inspired the world to vow that it would “never again” tolerate the attempt to destroy a people, we instead witnessed genocide and the massive destruction of human life in Burundi, Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, East Timor, Rwanda, Darfur, and elsewhere, as well as the murder of roughly five million people, still ongoing, in Congo. In the early years of the present century, 9/11 brought to the fore international, stateless terrorism and its counterpart, the “war on terror”; these developments, along with events in Rwanda and Congo, suggest that in

the coming decades this history of violence will continue outside of state control, becoming an endemic feature in failed states around the world.

Throughout the past several centuries, then, human beings have never been assured that the life they know will endure; on the contrary, the prospect of global violence, the attempted decimation of whole peoples, and in recent decades, the destruction of the entire human race have loomed large as distinct possibilities. We have been living with disaster for a long time. By now we may have become used to the possibility that the entire lifeworld in which we live is terribly fragile and that humanity itself may disappear. In response, however, we have attempted to beat back the forces of destruction in the hope we can put the worst behind us and enter an era of peace. In the United States, for example, we have tended to assume that the emancipation of the slaves put the most egregious forms of oppression safely in the past. The international community, having founded the United Nations, warded off a nuclear war, survived the Cold War, and prevented the outbreak of many other conflicts, may also believe that it has finally marked out the boundary of disaster's kingdom.

How well does climate change fit within this history? In her remarkable Earthseed series, composed of the novels *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, Octavia Butler depicts a future United States wracked by the consequences of climate change, speculating that in a society torn by violence, insecurity, poverty, and lawlessness, slavery will return. The form of slavery she envisions is more sexual and economic than racial, based in the exploitation of individuals rather than a visible category of persons. Nevertheless, her work suggests that if things go awry, the forms of injustice we Americans think we have surpassed will return.

While we have not often contemplated these possibilities in the debate about climate change, her suggestion has the ring of truth. If a crisis is deep enough and lasts long enough, all bets will be off; the guarantees of the Constitution will not protect the poor from the rich or the weak from the strong. After all, they have never done so completely, and even now the battle to guarantee civil rights for all continues. Butler's novels remind us that we have not eradicated inequality and exploitation from our society; the endurance of class privilege and deep poverty, as

well as the resegregation of public education and the neglect of inner-city communities, tell us that we have used the fact of our previous abolition of slavery and other open abuses to justify tolerating a host of social ills today. The persistence of these profound inequalities creates the conditions for harsher practices to return. This point extends to the international context as well. If we consider the inevitability that under the pressure of climate change millions of people will attempt to migrate across national boundaries, that societies will clash over resources, and that various states, weakened by perpetual crisis, may not be able to prevent conflict, we must admit that conditions will be ripe for the return or proliferation of many forms of injustice.

In that case, climate change may create the conditions for reversing the guarantees established by democratic societies and the modest achievements of the United Nations. Going forward into the ruined future, we may instead recede into a version of the past. The major difference is that this time, we would not be able to escape from that past so easily through establishing individual rights or creating economic growth. That future will have discredited such possibilities, showing that they could not deliver on what they promised, for the societies that protected individual rights will have been the same that created planetary distress. Moreover, because we will retain the memory of less woeful days, we may experience such injustice with greater pain than did our ancestors, many of whom had no memory, and no notion, of human rights. Used to being treated fairly, we will resent the opposite fiercely. The return to certain abuses will not merely take us back to the past; it will cancel what we thought were permanent guarantees and thus traumatize us intimately. We may then learn that the notions of liberty and individual rights are only fictions, resting within a network of exploitative social relations we never fully attempted to dismantle.

Inspired by reflections like these, we may wish to denounce those who keep alive the structures of inequality. But climate change undercuts such an attempt at moral clarity. A look at the international consequences of climate change tells us this much. On one level, the fact that the world's industrial nations have emitted and will eventually emit far more greenhouse gases than other nations is already a sign that we live in a world shaped by yet another form of oppression, a greenhouse gas imperialism.

We who live in the developed world are clearly perpetrators of a great violence. Yet it is not as if we will escape the consequences of our actions. We are immersed in a society that continues to emit greenhouse gases at a ridiculous pace, and most of us will also live long enough to endure the consequences of those emissions. We, too, will endure great difficulties; our societies will be wrenched as well. As a result, we will become our own victims. Some of today's wealthy may assume that their money will enable them to survive relatively unscathed through a dystopian future. But no individual should be complacent; economic disarray and internecine violence have a way of shattering any smug arrangements, destroying businesses and households, and leaving individuals stranded in the midst of chaos. The return of injustice and violence potentially extends to *all* of us; we cannot be sure we are not enslaving ourselves, creating a prison that neither we nor others can escape.

If we take these scenarios just one step further, we can place the potential consequences of climate change within the history of collective destruction. In a previous chapter I mentioned that climate change most likely created the conditions for the brutal violence in Darfur.¹¹¹ In itself, of course, climate change does not actually take human lives; it creates the miserable matrix for that violence. By destroying ecosystems, depriving people of their livelihoods, and forcing them to migrate, climate change vastly increases the opportunity for conflict. The events of Darfur illustrate that fact well. Once climate change increases in its severity, further violence of this kind is nearly inevitable—and not only in areas far removed from the developed nations. Because the modern state often takes unintelligent, corrupt, and oppressive forms, because several versions of violent stateless entities (insurgent armies, separatist organizations, or jihadist movements) have emerged and are likely to arise in many regions of the world, because absolutist ideologies of various kinds still have armed adherents, and because ethnic rivalry and prejudice thrive as well, all the ingredients for international conflict, civil war, and systemic murder remain in place. Now that we're adding climate change to the mix, those ingredients are more combustible than ever before.

The prospect of this future violence takes shape against the background of our greater awareness of its costs. In recent decades, many interpreters have become increasingly conscious of the psychological

consequences of surviving war, genocide, sexual violence, domestic abuse, and other horrific events. As they have argued, trauma is devastating because its severity breaks into consciousness before the mind can adequately prepare itself—or, more precisely, in a way for which it could never prepare itself; as a result, the mind bears the wounds of events it cannot absorb or understand. Because traumatic experiences in some sense never fully *take place* for their victims, they can never move on, never entirely live after those events.¹¹² In the era of the Vietnam war and after, we in the United States have called this “post-traumatic stress disorder,” and in the wake of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we recognize that this syndrome continues to afflict soldiers and civilians alike.

But if we take the possibility of severe, global climate change seriously, and thus acknowledge the near inevitability of the genocides to come, what happens then? Can we be traumatized by events that have not yet taken place? If trauma is characterized by an inability to absorb experience into the ordinary realities of life, could envisioning the horrors of the future have a similar effect? For a modern Cassandra, such a trauma would be possible: she would behold events to come with an intensity that would devastate her. Perhaps a modern version of a biblical prophet would endure the same. But it is instructive that such figures, announcing what they see, are never believed; those who hear their warnings melt away, unmoved. That indifference makes clear that for the rest of us, anticipatory trauma does not seem possible. After all, if we are *imagining* trauma, we are not truly living it, nor is it shattering our minds in a way for which we are not prepared. Perhaps future events can never be as real to us as past or present ones. In that case, climate change simply cannot be as vivid for us as the horrors of a certain past.

What, then, is the status of a violence to come? An awareness of the immense consequences of our ordinary acts today for the lives of ourselves and others will shadow those acts, giving them a haunting depth. A truthful look at our current practices—especially at the exceptionally high rate with which we burn fossil fuels in the United States—should give us pause. Are we perpetrating a kind of genocide ourselves, just one that will take place later? Are we participants in a systemic violence that will work itself out only over the coming decades? Part of the answer must be no; as I suggested above, climate change is not itself genocidal,

for it provides no more than the matrix for conflict. But since it does that much—and can therefore generate a perpetual *series* of horrific events—it is actually much *larger* than any single genocide. It is at once less and more than the violence in Darfur.

In fact, since we cannot know precisely what form of climate change our present use of energy will create in the future, the *specific* implications of our acts remain out of reach. The problem here is not an experience that is too vivid, so shattering we simply cannot absorb it, but one that is too removed, too difficult to capture. Climate change works on tape delay: someone acts in a harmful manner, and the results might emerge soon, perhaps decades later. It also works in the aggregate; any single act can contribute to an overall disorientation of the climate, which in turn causes a series of further physical processes to kick in. Climate change is caused by a systemic violence that is cut off from any direct tie to its consequences.

As a result, our actions as participants in a fossil-fuel economy are accompanied, not by trauma, but by its photographic negative, as it were, its equally devastating counterpart—a violence we can infer but not actually see. Our actions thus take on an unknowable extra dimension, an imprecise but palpable edge, for they are inevitably shadowed by the horror to come. For trauma in its original sense, events are too vivid and specific for the mind to handle; in contrast, for the anticipatory trauma of our time, the mind conceives of a real violence that is not yet vivid or specific enough. If trauma is the result of an experience that is too intense, too heavy, we live an experience that is too light. But in this way, we too participate in events we cannot absorb, a horror we cannot assimilate.

These reflections may clarify the place of climate change within the history of enslavement, war, and genocide. But what about its effect on a world now used to the prospect of global nuclear war? That threat, far more encompassing even than genocide, threatened to destroy the entire human reality in a moment, almost without warning, wiping out everything we cherish in a single blow. Without a doubt, it endangered our individual and collective lives on a fundamental level. The fact that a head of state in the United States or the Soviet Union, and to a lesser degree in other nations, could in a single gesture threaten the viability of the human race was unprecedented. In the nuclear era, the existence of

humanity as a whole ceased to be guaranteed; it was no longer as definitive a reality as nature itself.¹¹³ No longer could we be confident that a divine force was protecting us or that our cultural values might in some way prevent our annihilation. Indeed, for a time it seemed possible that the contest over those values might *lead* to our annihilation. The things we held sacred and the things that threatened our reality were potentially one and the same.

But in contrast to climate change, nuclear annihilation, however horrifying, seems almost comforting. We imagined that event as an *interruption* of our everyday lives. What made it truly terrible was the prospect that it would suddenly destroy billions of lives that would otherwise continue and possibly flourish. As a result, for virtually everyone the threat of nuclear war inspired an immense desire that ordinary life itself would endure. The absolutely horrifying thought of the world's end authorized an absolute affirmation of the familiar. That emotion was typical not only of anti-nuclear activists but of heads of state as well: the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, propagated by the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, drew on this emotion, claiming that the Soviets would not destroy us if they knew we would destroy them in turn, and vice versa. The idea was that our affection for the lives we led and our hope for the future would make it impossible to push the button. The prospect of total destruction could paradoxically lead ordinary citizens as well as heads of state back to their primary loyalty to the familiar world, perhaps even intensifying that loyalty in a manner not known to any prior generation. If anything, the nuclear era inspired us to regard ordinary life as fragile and so to value it all the more. The threat could somehow give the everyday a stunning intensity.

Climate change, however, is another matter. As I suggested in the introduction, this time around, the prospect of future ruins *arises from* our way of life, rather than threatening to interrupt it. Virtually everything we do in advanced industrial societies is powered by the burning of fossil fuels in a process that directly contributes to global warming. The implications of this threat are thus truly unprecedented. If we wish to ward off a globally traumatic event, our task is not simply to *avoid* a certain course of action, to refrain from hitting the button. We face the much more difficult challenge of *undoing and transforming* a fundamental

aspect of our societies on a massive scale. This time, *we* are the threat, and if we wish to preserve anything like the lives we lead today, we must change those lives as soon as we can.

As a result, this threat has a very different impact on our attitude toward everyday life. Under the pressure of climate change, the everyday is at once precious and a threat: it is split at its core. Where the nuclear led us to affirm ordinary life virtually without reserve, climate change forces us to imagine how it can be transformed so it will no longer undermine itself. This affection for our way of life paradoxically does opposite things: it at once motivates us to sustain *and* to change it, to cherish *and* transform what we know. Our way of life speaks at once of what we wish to protect from trauma—*and* of the trauma it will create. In that case, we are *even today* both perpetrators and victims, slowly destroying our lives and surviving that destruction at the same time. Thus even the relative clarity of trauma dissolves into a contradictory, paradoxical state that blends the imposition and endurance of disaster.

The moral clarity of the threat and the necessity of responding to it are different this time as well. If severe climate change takes place, it will not happen in a single, annihilating event. An all-out nuclear war truly would have decimated the conditions for human life; even if a few victims struggled on briefly, in the end no one would have survived. Climate change, however, has its impact over decades and centuries. In contrast to the single event, its pace seems incredibly slow—so slow that we might decide simply to ignore it. If it seems slow, it is also sure; if we ignore it, it will destroy what we take for granted. It is thus a truly insidious threat, almost creepy in its persistent force. But it is also less absolute in its potential devastation; because it is comparatively slow in human terms (though not on the evolutionary time scale), we can well imagine that it would never truly annihilate us, never actually bring our world to an end; on the contrary, given its pace, we might guess that a good share of the human race would survive it, though with lives quite different from what we know today.

This contrast between nuclear war and climate change may explain why we do not yet take the latter very seriously. In the nuclear era, we got used to an all-or-nothing scenario. Either the world would end, truly and for good, or it would go on without a hindrance. Climate change doesn't

give us either ending to the story. It doesn't destroy us outright, nor does it let us live on as we are. It combines devastation and survival. It doesn't give us apocalypse, nor does it give us the satisfaction of having avoided the world's end. It is something altogether different, as if it is at once sinister and benign. It's as if climate change tells us that the world ends, yet it goes on—or that it ends, gradually, *as* it goes on. It gives us that unprecedented experience: a slow and endless horror.

This dimension of climate change compounds its already paradoxical effect on everyday life. Because the consequences of climate change are neither immediate nor absolute, we can surmise, if we wish, that it imposes far less of a moral imperative on us than the nuclear threat did. Our society so far hardly wishes to embark on the necessary effort to comply with that imperative, for it is still thwarted by those who protest against taking action, and the rest of us have not yet demanded a revolutionary transformation strongly enough. We delay and hesitate while crucial decades go by. Such recalcitrance would have been impossible in the nuclear era: nobody seriously attempted to deny that the bombing of Hiroshima had taken place or that the Soviet Union existed. Today, however, in the United States, negating reality has become the profession of many and the hobby of millions, and a general indifference or passivity characterizes many more.

In consequence, for Americans reality is split once again: the physical fact of climate change has not yet achieved the status of a social or political fact. At the moment, we Americans live in a society that fails to acknowledge the crisis of the biosphere. The climate tells us one thing, our politics another. In consequence, we endure a state of radical dissociation. For us in the United States, things are truly confusing: not only is the world ending as it goes on, we also hear that it is not ending at all. Because we cannot defeat that false message, we sense that our everyday lives devastate our own future—and present—while also being asked to pretend they are doing nothing of the sort. The contrast between our knowledge of the consequences of our actions and a collective, deadening indifference continues to grow, making the incoherence of our experience even worse.

Here again, in retrospect the nuclear doesn't look so bad. The nuclear threat almost seemed to take care of itself: the doctrine of mutually

assured destruction captured the situation well, making it plausible that no one would ever push the button. Furthermore, once technicians installed various fail-safe devices to forestall accidental nuclear war, we could assume that massive annihilation would take place only if a person actually *chose* to authorize it for some purpose. That notion of human control gave us hope that the moment of destruction would never arrive. We could believe that this choice came with a certain moral clarity, a deliberate decision to destroy or preserve the world.

With climate change, however, we can have no such illusion. If anyone is in control of *this* threat, all of us are. But it would be foolish to imagine we actually *are* in control. The physical complexity of climate change dramatically undermines the moral clarity we might bring to bear on preventing it. The limits of our knowledge, the immense difficulty of communicating what we *do* know to all the world's citizens, and the huge challenge of altering our material practices in midstream make it very likely that many of the world's people, including ourselves, might help bring about severe climate change without knowing it and without intending to do so. The physical processes at stake will work themselves out even if we do not fully grasp them or if we deny that they exist at all.

That possibility points to another instructive contrast to the nuclear threat. In the height of the nuclear era, observers sometimes rated the degree of danger by estimating how many minutes remained before “midnight”—before the dread hour of nuclear conflagration. Today, the same metaphor would work well—up to a point. But this time around, it's quite conceivable we could live *past* midnight and not notice a thing. As I suggested earlier, the dread hour of triggering a series of positive feedback loops could arrive while no one lifted a finger. What then? We have no common language for describing what the world looks like when it survives such a moment. Our nuclear fictions, of course, constantly imagined not the nuclear event itself but a post-nuclear landscape—as if it were even remotely possible that something like human life could go on for very long after that event. Those fairy tales have little relevance to our situation today. Now we must confront the possibility that all of us will live in a world that seems unchanged after it has been fundamentally harmed.

How do we describe that world? We could use the metaphor of the ship already struck by the iceberg and about to sink, as I did in the previous chapter. But even that notion only goes so far. That ship might keep going for a few more *decades*, sinking very slowly into the depths while the years pass. We simply do not know how to understand a world that lives after the disastrous moment has passed and finally becomes aware of its situation—but *too late*.

One type of story provides an inventive response to this situation. The back-to-the-future scenario, especially in the *Terminator* movies, imagines that in a disastrous future we might come back to this present and avoid doing anything to cause that future. This scenario does at least imagine a life *after* the disastrous event. But it does so in order to convey the urgency of acting *now*—as if all of us in the present have been sent back from that future to make sure it doesn't happen. This type of story is perfect for the era of climate change: indeed, nearly all of the warnings that scientists give us about the effects of our fossil-fuel economy could be told in that way. But what happens if we discover that the event has already taken place—and we have no machine to help us go back in time and make things right?

Our inability to know when that moment will take place or if it has already happened, as well as our relative lack of control over whether it will happen, stems in part from the radical limits in our knowledge of climate change. In the nuclear era, everyone knew well enough what pushing the button would lead to. But with climate change, things are utterly different. If scientists had not begun to calibrate the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere in the mid-twentieth century, and if they had not become attentive a couple decades later to the possible consequences of introducing greenhouse gases in novel quantities into the atmosphere, none of us would have had more than a vague sense of what was taking place. Without the ongoing work of hundreds of scientists around the world, we wouldn't have a ballpark estimate of our situation even today. Yet despite that effort, nobody knows how climate change works in all its permutations. One reason for this contrast may be that human beings created nuclear bombs, could test them, witness their results, and contemplate their possible use. Nobody planned and implemented climate change.

But we could plan and implement a planetary *response* to climate change. Some observers are fond of saying that if America once embarked on the Manhattan Project to create the nuclear bomb, why couldn't it do the same to create a new energy economy? One problem with this comparison is that today the United States, or more likely the international community, would need to create *several* equivalents of that project, invent a range of new technologies, and implement them on a wide scale. We need a Manhattan, a Brooklyn, a Queens, a Bronx, *and* a Staten Island Project, just to get started. But the further irony is that the goal of that earlier project was to create a devastating weapon; the goal this time—and a far more difficult one—is to *prevent* destruction. Of course, in that era American government officials argued that they needed a weapon to prevent the Nazis, and then the Soviets, from destroying the nation. They hoped to use destruction to ward off destruction. This time around, we have no convenient weapon we could use to blow up climate change.

This demand for a different kind of national—or more likely, international—project will require us to alter our relation to the technological breakthroughs of the modern era. In the Manhattan Project and thereafter, the United States hoped to secure its dominance by taking the logic of destruction to its limit and becoming the supreme master of annihilation. Although the development of a nuclear weapon was certainly new, it nevertheless operated within the general flow of history, toward the ever-greater capacity to destroy. It arose as well from within that broader historical dynamic, the creation of many technological innovations—the production of the automobile and the airplane, radio and television, digital systems and the Internet—which took for granted another version of the power to destroy, to use the Earth's resources without reserve for human benefit. Climate change will not allow us to go with this flow, for it demands that we make technological breakthroughs that will roll *back* the pattern of destruction. It demands that we *contest* the entire momentum of the modern era, indeed the celebration of the “modern” itself.

On many different counts, then, climate change represents a major shift from a danger that has become quite familiar to us. In retrospect, the nuclear era seems positively saturated with moral clarity—with a clear and present threat, the prospect of an instantaneous and absolute end, a public that readily agreed that such a threat existed, a specific

technological project that could be completed to respond to that threat, and a presumably sane and rational figure who could be relied upon not to choose annihilation. Climate change undercuts these certainties at every turn. It gives us a scenario loaded with paradoxes and contradictions, one that seems to complicate the necessary urgency several times over.

If this quick, cursory look at our place within the history of the modern world teaches us much, it tells us at least that the terrors of the past few centuries, along with their apparent moral certitudes, have not prepared us for the present moment. Climate change ushers us into a truly new era. Living with climate change throws us out of our familiar narratives: it tells us that we have not surpassed the violence of the past and that the apparent guarantees under which we live may be illusions. As we live in the shadow of future devastation, the bitter taste of what may eventually transpire invades our daily lives, giving us the uncanny sense that our ordinary actions are accompanied by the trauma to come. Climate change also cracks open the tale of the willed, instantaneous death of nuclear annihilation, for it constitutes an event that finishes off one way of life while letting us live on in a disaster that takes generations, if not centuries, to unfold. It is as grave a threat to the Earth and its people as any before it, yet it is less understood, less amenable to our control, and more difficult to prevent. As this prospect weighs on us, it splits our reality to the core, forcing us to live at once with and against our ordinary lives, to cherish what we must also change. Our challenge today is to bear up under all these difficulties nevertheless, to do what must be done, and in defiance of the long odds, to sustain as habitable a planet as we can for ourselves and for those to follow.

Notes

109. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (New York: Verso, 2001).
110. On the genocide in South West Africa, see David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).
111. Although many observers use the word "genocide" regarding the events in Darfur, it may not be the best term to capture the complexity of the violence

there. “Genocide” is now our term of choice to designate collective murder, even though it technically refers to an attempt to decimate members of a particular race or ethnic group. We need another term to specify violence that arises from different motives or spills over particular ethnic boundaries. For a reliable guide to the recent history of Darfur, see Julie Flint and Alex De Waal, *Darfur: A New History of a Long War*, revised (New York: Zed Books, 2008).

112. For a classic discussion of these themes, see Shoshana Feldman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992). For a broader history of constructions of trauma, see Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
113. The “nuclear era,” of course, is by no means over, since technically the possibility still remains that one or more powers could use nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the fear of nuclear war between the great powers no longer defines our moment (although the international community continues to worry about nuclear proliferation and nuclear terror), and accordingly I will describe the “nuclear era” using the past tense.