

Book review

L'ETÀ DELLO STERMINIO. EXTERMINATIONS BY UGO BARDI – A PROPHETIC BOOK- L'Età dello sterminio. Exterminios de Ugo Bardi -un libro profético-

GIOVANNA CAMPANI¹

One year after its publication, in 2024, 'Exterminations' by Ugo Bardiⁱ turned out to be prophetic, almost to the point of being overly so. Its central thesis, that exterminations are a regular feature of human behavior, has been amply confirmed by recent events, in particular in Palestine. That's not a good thing, but so is the world, and so the human mind appears to work. So, the book is even more valid today, after one year, than it was when it was conceived; when it was still possible to argue that humankind had shed away at least in part the worst demons of its heritage.

Figure 1.

Book cover



Source: Bardi (2024)

The book is based first on a statistical analysis of past conflicts. The result is that wars and exterminations are an "emergent phenomenon" of social interactions among

¹ University of Florence. Contact: giovanna.campani@unifi.it

groups. They have no cycles or regular patterns; they happen when the conditions favor them. The authors identified three factors that make exterminations likely, which they called the "three laws of extermination". They are 1) there exists an identifiable subgroup within a larger social system, 2) the extermination of the subgroup brings a significant economic advantage to the exterminators, and 3) the subgroup is unable to offer significant military resistance.

These three laws apply to most historical exterminations, a long catalog that the author examines through several poignant examples. Perhaps the largest extermination of all in recent history has been that of the Natives in North America, over about one century, starting in the early 19th century. The numbers are variously reported, perhaps converging on a total of about 10 million. Apart from the numbers, what's impressive is the sheer scale of the event: an entire continent was cleansed of its original inhabitants, under the concept of "manifest destiny" that was prevalent at the time. Then, there are many more examples. Some are especially cruel, such as the case of the Irish "An Gorta Mor," the great famine of the mid-19th century. The British government wasn't directly responsible for the collapse of the potato crops in Ireland, but they could easily have saved the Irish if they had intervened. But they refused to do so in the name of the concept of "free market" that at the time had reached the level of religious dogma (it still is, at least in part). Another fierce story is the extermination of the Southern Italian "brigands," people who were fighting for the independence of their country, but who were ruthlessly killed, including their women, sometimes photographed in death having been raped by Northern Italian troopers.

The laws of exterminations also apply well to the recent events in Palestine: a classic case of two ethnically, linguistically, and culturally different groups living in the same area. As it often happens in history, the larger group (Israelis) moves to eliminate the smaller one (Palestinians). It is not the only ongoing extermination in our times, but it is probably ruthless and tragic.

What can be done to stop, or at least reduce, these events? The book by Ugo Bardi couples systemic and practical considerations. One of his conclusions is that saving oneself alone is nearly impossible. If you happen to belong to a group that's going to be exterminated, your destiny is marked, unless you managed to leave the danger area much before disaster strikes. On the other side of the tsunami, Bardi discusses whether it is possible to avoid the accumulation of hate before it becomes impossible to stop. It is, too, a challenging task: stopping the wave of madness that precedes an extermination is akin to stopping a fast train on its tracks.

Bardi takes a systemic view, showing that these waves of hate follow a particular pattern: they grow, peak, and then decline. Within some limits, this behavior is unavoidable, but it can be mitigated by individuals who avoid being overtaken by the infection of hate. Bardi cites Charles McKay in his "Extraordinary Popular Delusions" when he says, "Men, it has been well said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one."

The book is independently published.

ⁱ Ugo Bardi is a polymath with interests that go from ancient history to the future of humankind. He is known mostly for developing the concept of "Seneca Cliff" or "Seneca Effect," which takes its name from the ancient Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca. It is based on the properties of complex systems, and it describes how they tend to collapse rapidly. After a career as a lecturer in the School of Chemical Sciences at the University of Florence, he is now active as a member of the Club of Rome and the World Academy of Arts and Sciences (WAAS). He is the author of several studies and books that deal with the future of humankind, the most recent one being "Exterminations;" the title is self-explanatory. Ugo also publishes fiction books, the most recent one being "Who Killed Mata Hari," a story that presents several of the concepts that he explores in his non-fiction works in a fictional way. He publishes his thoughts on the blog titled "The Seneca Effect" (Bardi, 2025).

Referencias bibliográficas

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