

## Structure and Fantasy: Genocide and The Homogenization of Identity

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### Abstract

In this article I examine one of the most intractable separations in the historiography on perpetrators: that between those who study the Holocaust (and genocide in general) as a structural phenomenon—the outcome of major international pressures such as competition between states and the radical decision-making of states in crisis—and those who study it as a voluntaristic phenomenon, with a focus on the actual killing process, often examining perpetrators as individuals in a quasi-anthropological fashion as meaning-producers in moments of crisis but with less focus on elites and the decision-making processes that brought about a genocidal situation in the first place. I will refer to these two approaches as “structure” and “fantasy” for convenient shorthand, though it is of course the case—as with all ideal types—that scholars who fall into one or other category rarely ignore altogether the other factors. By examining this scholarly divide I aim to reconcile the competing interpretations, thus providing a meaningful synthesis of them, with the hope of encouraging further research on genocide that takes a new, wider approach to the subject. I seek to demonstrate that, whilst both approaches have contributed greatly to our understanding of genocide, bringing them together allows us to perceive genocide as a part of “normal” human behaviour insofar as it derives from and exacerbates social crises that require the institutions and structures of the modern state in order to function, but that also require fantasy-thinking in order to be thought of as permissible in the first place and in order that the context of crisis in which genocide takes place can be made manifest, with the consequence that perpetrators feel the necessity of their action.

*Keywords:* Holocaust, genocide, historiography on perpetrators, structure, fantasy-thinking

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## 1. Introduction

In Hermann Hesse's novel *Narcissus and Goldmund*, which ponders the possibility of reconciling Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian sides of human life, the vital force which is the young Goldmund thinks to himself at one point that "one of the disadvantages of school and learning" is "that the mind seemed to have the tendency to see and represent all things as though they were flat and had only two dimensions. This, somehow, seemed to render all matters of the intellect shallow and worthless ..." (Hesse, 1969, p. 73).

As scholars, we might be tempted simply to brush off these thoughts as the daydreams of a man of action, or else to admit that the problem exists but that there is nothing to be done about it. Calm reflection and disinterestedness are characteristics of scholarship which always stand in opposition to the flux and dynamism of the actual events such scholarship seeks to understand. But perhaps there is something especially nerve-wracking about Hesse's warning when it comes to studying genocide. I refer not to the problem of empathy, for this is a red herring (we do not have to become perpetrators, "only" try and understand their thought processes) but to the shocking contrast between platitudinous—literally, flat, two dimensional—words on a printed page and the horrific violence of what is described. Are not such attempts shallow and worthless?

The problem is laid bare in an extract from Anna Langfus's now little-read novel of 1960, *The Whole Land Brimstone* (orig. *Le sel et le soufre*). The protagonist, a Jewish woman passing as Aryan, encounters a Nazi who has recently been involved in killing actions. He explains to her patiently and calmly that the murder of the Jews is a necessity that has been ordered by the Führer. The protagonist is confused by the fact that before her she sees a sensitive man, but one who openly admits to having murdered a whole family:

This was no out-and-out murderer. This was not someone who killed for revenge, for greed, or in a fit of madness. This was a man who had ardently performed an act that was quite uncharacteristic of him. Moreover, he would be sincerely astonished to hear the word killer, the word murderer, applied to him. He did not murder; he executed – an operation as natural as smoking out a wasps' nest, carried out because it was useful. Nothing in that to trouble a man's conscience. I heard him say: "You mustn't go on thinking about it." (Langfus, 1962, p. 159)

Such depictions shake our instinctive wish to see perpetrators as just "mad" or somehow entirely different from "us," and thus begins the need to study such people.

Recently, there have been criticisms of attempts to study Holocaust perpetrators, along the lines that such studies represent a morally dubious position and that a “correct” approach would be to focus on the victims (Garbarini, 2012, pp. 81-90). This argument is at best confusing and at worst devious. One should certainly encourage studies of victims, whether recreating the worlds that were lost before the Holocaust, especially Jewish life in Eastern Europe, or explaining varieties of resistance, or undertaking micro-histories of inter-ethnic relationships, as in Omer Bartov’s recent work. A study such as Simone Gigliotti’s on the experience of deportation is especially valuable, for the evidence she highlights, which derives mostly from survivor testimonies, presents information which not only explains the victims’ sensory experiences in ways that would remain otherwise inaccessible, but flatly contradict the image of the murder process presented by the Nazis, as “efficient,” “clean” or “smooth.”

All such studies enrich our understanding of the Holocaust. But unless we want to give up on such questions as how and why the Holocaust could occur, we have no choice but to study perpetrators. It is necessary to study perpetrators, not—it should hardly need to be said—because doing so encourages some sort of identification with them, but because only this way can we think about the conditions which are necessary for genocide to take place. As Federico Finchelstein, one of the most penetrating analysts of fascist ideology, has noted: “Only fascists can explain to themselves the meaning of victimization. For non-fascists in general, and their victims in particular, the Holocaust makes no sense.” The Holocaust is, in this understanding, “a meaningless event from the standpoint of reason. However, it was also the objective outcome of meaningful mythical formations rooted in unreason ... fascism embraces imaginary politics and produces radical events that are beyond the limits of rational representation and justification” (Finchelstein, 2011, pp. 278-279). We are thus condemned to study the perpetrators.

## 2. Holocaust Perpetrators

First I will briefly survey some of the work on perpetrators that has been done by other scholars, and which I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Stone, 2010). The general aim here is to show first, that there is no single, homogeneous perpetrator type; indeed, one can go so far as to say that there is even no ideal-type of Nazi except insofar as the perpetrators’ actions demonstrated in practice what it meant to be a Nazi. Rebecca Wennberg calls this “ideological incorrectness,” that is, we should not look a single definition of Nazism, derived perhaps from intellectual history, for there is none to be found. Instead, we see that even those who were in many respects not ideal Nazis (from the point of view of party discipline, perhaps, or inclination) could go on to become archetypal perpetrators

of genocide, e.g., Arthur Greiser or Odilo Globocnik. This is especially true of Scandinavian collaborators such as those in the Ragnarok circle in Norway, who were committed Nazis but often out of sorts with the Nazi leadership. Examples can be found across Europe, whether in the Netherlands or Croatia, of indigenous fascists who saw themselves as representatives of a local Nazism that was in no way simply a form of collaboration with the Germans – this notion that they were protecting the nations’ interests was often their preferred form of postwar defence. Second, this survey shows that irrespective of the heterogeneous nature of the perpetrators, perhaps even because of it, the end-result of their actions was strikingly homogeneous. That is, whatever their reasons for participation, the result was the same: none blinched at the task of killing the Jews.

If there was such a thing as a typical perpetrator, one might look to men like Werner Best, Alfred Six, or Paul Werner Hoppe, the commandant of Stutthof, whom Orth identifies as the typical perpetrator: imbued with radical *völkisch* ideas and able to act according to objective, rational calculations; an ideal “political soldier” (Orth, 2004, pp. 217-221; Orth & Dieckmann, pp. 755-786). It is worth noting Miroslav Kárný’s comments in that volume’s next chapter, “Waffen-SS und Konzentrationslager” (Orth & Dieckmann, pp. 787-99), that the ideal-type of “political soldier” broke down into something altogether more shabby and brutal in the face of the reality of the camps – which these same “political soldiers” created). The Camp-SS, the Gestapo and the “Judenberater” (Jewish advisors) all conform to this model of educated men carrying out mass murder, as do the men on the next rung down the hierarchy, the SSPF and HSSPF like Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, Friedrich Jeckeln, Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger, Otto Ohlendorf, Fritz Rauter, and Odilo Globocnik (Smelser & Syring, 2000). Even the somewhat unusual Erich Koch, Gauleiter of East Prussia and Reich Commissar of Ukraine, more a highly competent administrator than a Nazi fanatic, followed a familiar trajectory of radicalization during World War I, the Freikorps and the struggle for National Socialist dominance. His success in East Prussia meant that he was one of the very few leaders of the Third Reich whom Hitler was prepared to back against Himmler (Meindl, 2007). Not very many perpetrators fit the stereotypical bill, like Christian Wirth, who was described as a man “who had no feelings or consideration, who treated people—whether Germans, Jews or Ukrainians—as numbers, or even worse,” who had “an exceptional talent for organization,” who “despised and abused people” and “was a Jew-hater on an unimaginable scale” (Tregenza, 1993, citing Franz Suchomel).

Claudia Steur writes in her study of “Eichmann’s emissaries” that “one can say that the Judenberater’s way of working was marked by an increasing radicalization and perfectionism” (Steur, 2000, p. 431). The emissaries can, according to Steur,

be divided into two groups: those with close links to Eichmann and those without. Among the first group were Theodor Dannecker, Dieter Wisliceny, Alois Brunner, Fritz Boßhammer and Franz Abromeit. In second group were Kurt Asche, Wilhelm Zoepf, Heinz Röthke, Anton Burger, Gustav Richter, Hermann Krumei and Otto Hunsche. All were born between 1905 and 1913, lived through World War I as children, and came to maturity in the post-war period. They constitute classic examples of those who had the ground pulled out from underneath their feet by the Weimar crises: “Almost all the Judenberater came from the middle class, which had been especially hard hit by the crisis.” Most were businessmen who joined the NSDAP between 1930 and 1933. A combination of opportunism and craving for social status seems to have been central to their participation: “The main reasons for their later participation in the murder of the Jews lie in their striving for power, respect and social ascendancy.” Boßhammer, for example, found the measures being taken against the Jews “terrible and inhuman” and was shocked, that he “should find himself employed in the Judenreferate.” But he still took the job: “Only with ‘unconditional obedience’ could one get the chance to rise to the position of Regierungsrat.” “In the face of their superiors,” writes Steuer, “these men made blind belief and obedience the order of the day and identified themselves completely with Hitler’s state” (Steuer, 2000, p. 431, p. 432, p. 433, p. 434; Steuer, 1997).

Globocnik, the subject of a recent biography, is perhaps exceptional, for he allowed his fanaticism to override any notion of dispassionate bureaucratic administration; indeed, it was his demotion from Gauleiter of Vienna (because of corruption) to SS Police Chief in Lublin that gave his violent antisemitic instincts free rein, as he became closely involved in the activities of the Einsatzgruppen in the USSR in 1941 and shortly afterwards the key figure in Operation Reinhard. (Rieger, 2007; unfortunately, the author seems more interested in Globocnik’s personal life than in the broader context necessary for a “political biography”). The empirical evidence provided by Orth, Herbert, Steuer and others seems to confirm the cliché of the perpetrators as “cultured demons.” On the other hand, recent research takes us back to Christopher Browning’s claim that not all perpetrators were radical ideologues; with reference to the Einsatzgruppen, for example, below the leadership level, and especially once conscription and local collaborators had to be used to bolster numbers, one sees a rather heterogeneous group (Mallmann, p. 304).

Current research, then, seeks to balance organizational and situational factors against ideological ones. But of course the two overlap, especially when an organization such as the police was heavily impregnated with ideological training. Still, most historians agree that an emphasis solely on ideology, as if comes from nowhere and has no organizational setting, is inappropriate. Edward Westermann, for example, writing about Order Police battalions in occupied Eastern Europe,

writes that “it is a grave oversight to dismiss the organizational culture of the Uniformed Police in a search for the motive force behind their participation in the conduct of genocide.” Still, they acquitted themselves as expected, with police chief Daluge congratulating Himmler that “For Adolf Hitler, this corps of the SS and the police represents his struggle for a greater Germany, Europe and the world. Its [the SS and police corps’] task is the annihilation of the eternal enemies of all völkisch and racially conscious nations” (Westermann, p. 145). Westermann still arrives at the conclusion that ideology was important, but tries to present it as the outcome not of an innate national belief system, but of deliberately-organized institutional frameworks to which the men willingly subscribed; he thus seeks to avoid “focusing on the ideological forest at the expense of losing sight of the individual trees of human causation” (Westermann, 1998, p. 42).

The same sense of complexity—and hence greater adherence to human behaviour—informs recent discussions of “desk killers” versus “active murderers.” The dominant image of the desk killer, prevalent from the 1960s until the 1990s, cohered largely with the functionalist notion of “industrial genocide” and reluctance to confront the brutality of the events. We now know that the division is unjustified, for the men most often identified as “desk killers” – Eichmann and his staff – were actively involved in implementing murderous policies on the ground throughout occupied Europe (Safrian, 1993; Lozowick, 2002. Lozowick is somewhat out of step with most perpetrator research, seeing his subjects as “monsters” in the manner of postwar stereotypes; see the review by George Browder (Browder, 2003, pp. 403-24). For an excellent example of a man who was both a desk killer and an actual murderer, see (Matthäus, 2004, 115-25)). Similarly, according to the RSHA’s policy of rotation, two-thirds of Gestapo leaders—with their middle-class upbringings, humanist schooling (almost half of them with doctorates in law) and narrow avoidance of military service in 1914-18—were “actively involved as leaders of Einsatzgruppen and –kommandos as well as leaders of Stapo- and Sipo-posts in the mass murder of the Jewish population of the occupied regions” (Paul, 2002). (See also (Steuer, 2000), for similar comments on the “Judenberater,” especially Dannecker and Brunner, who combined bureaucracy and ideological commitment with particular brutality.) Clearly, it is wrong to focus only on bureaucratic efficiency or on radical racist passions, when Nazism in action combined them so successfully. As George Browder neatly puts it: “‘Committed ideologue’ versus ‘banal bureaucrat’ may even be a false dichotomy; they are at best two extremes on a multidimensional spectrum of perpetrators” (Browder, 2003, p. 495).

This research, whilst placing greater stress than Browning on ideology, appears to confirm a neo-functionalist perspective for two reasons. First, it places

considerable emphasis on decisions made at the periphery rather than in Berlin. Second, it suggests that policy developed zig-zag fashion rather than following a pre-ordained blueprint. However, these points are counterbalanced by the fact that many of these studies strongly reassert the primacy of ideology, in that these heterogeneous “ordinary men” (as well as the smaller number of less ordinary, committed careerist Nazis) operated in a framework suffused with antisemitism as a result of which their actions did not need to be directed, for it was already clear to them who their targets were. Whether they were committed ideologues or criminal “Exzeßtäter,” their generational, social, religious, educational and ideological heterogeneity did not get in the way of the production of a homogeneous victim group: “In the final instance, the Shoah proved to be a collective deed carried out by division of labour on a European scale, to which the most varied perpetrator groups contributed with total devotion” (Paul, 2002, p. 62). Irrespective of the fact that the men of the Einsatzgruppen came from diverse backgrounds, “Nevertheless, the Einsatzgruppe developed a horrifyingly ‘homogeneous’ murderous effect, so that an end neither to their lust for conquest nor to the possibility of realizing it appeared foreseeable from a geopolitical or military standpoint in the winter of 1941-42” (Angrick, 2003, p. 450). This is a conclusion at which Browning also arrives in a later study of the Order Police: “Clearly the German Order Police was not monolithic,” writes Browning, “but in the end the diversity of attitudes and motives made little difference” (Browning, 2000, p. 169). When we add in other groups of perpetrators—female SS auxiliaries, nurses and doctors, local collaborators across Europe, who had very many different reasons to become involved—this conclusion (i.e., that a heterogeneous group committed a homogeneous crime) seems even more self-evident.

These considerations reveal that the historiography of Holocaust perpetrators has become complex and mature; it leads us to consider a question which arises out of this scholarly literature: what is the most insightful way of trying to explain the perpetrators’ actions? In order to try to answer this question, this essay will henceforth broaden its scope beyond the Holocaust to think about genocide perpetrators more generally. I hope that the justification for doing so – analytical clarity – will become evident along the way.

My aim is to examine one of the most intractable separations in the historiography on perpetrators with the aim of reconciling the competing interpretations, thus providing a meaningful synthesis of them, with the hope of explaining that scholarly divide to a non-specialist audience and encouraging further research on genocide that takes a new, wider approach to the subject. The divide in the literature to which I refer is that between those who study the Holocaust (and genocide in general) as a structural phenomenon—the outcome of major international pressures such as competition between states and the radical decision-making of states in crisis—and those who study it as a voluntaristic

phenomenon, with a focus on the actual killing process, often examining perpetrators as individuals in a quasi-anthropological fashion as meaning-producers in moments of crisis but with less focus on elites and the decision-making processes that brought about a genocidal situation in the first place (Bloxham, 2008, pp. 203-245; Stone, 2004, pp. 45-65). I will refer to these two approaches as “structure” and “fantasy” for convenient shorthand, though it is of course the case—as with all ideal types—that scholars who fall into one or other category rarely ignore altogether the other factors. All historians are familiar with these concepts since debates about individuals and structures have underpinned many paradigmatic debates in modern historiography, from the Annales School’s focus on large-scale structures in the *longue-durée* of human affairs, English Marxist historiography’s version of social history, the Bielefeld School’s inversion of (what they perceived as) individualistic German historicism in favour of “structures” when explaining the Sonderweg (special path) of the Kaiserreich, or competing assessments of Daniel Goldhagen’s Hitler’s Willing Executioners (1996), which returned the reader’s attention to the role of individuals and their scope for moral choices even in the face of structural frameworks not of their own making (Lorenz, 2007, pp. 113-116; Moses, 1998, pp. 194-219). I seek to demonstrate that, whilst both approaches have contributed greatly to our understanding of genocide, bringing them together allows us to perceive genocide as a part of “normal” human behavior insofar as it derives from and exacerbates social crises that require the institutions and structures of the modern state in order to function, but that also require fantasy-thinking in order to be thought of as permissible in the first place and in order that the context of crisis in which genocide takes place can be made manifest, with the consequence that perpetrators feel the necessity of their action.

### **3. Structure and Fantasy**

Genocide is often regarded as a crime of state, which therefore relies on the agencies, institutions, bureaucracies and power of the state. Although the UNGC does not specify that genocide must be committed by states (Article IV speaks, rather, of “persons committing genocide ... whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals”), in the twentieth century (and beyond) it was the case that states were indeed the major perpetrators of genocide. In a world divided into nation states, few other actors have the kind of control over the means of violence and the bureaucratic and technological capacity for such organized attacks on whole population groups. From the destruction of the Armenians in the dying days of the Ottoman Empire to the systematic attacks on



“Black” (as opposed to “Arab”) Sudanese in Darfur a century later, genocide has achieved its dreadfully spectacular results thanks to state-led organizations, from access to weapons to local bureaucracies’ ability to separate in-groups from out-groups, thanks to censuses and the workings of local administration, such as the burgomaster system in Rwanda. Given the nature of IR discourse on states, which employs vocabulary such as “the state system,” we should not be surprised that the focus in much genocide scholarship tends to be on rational decision-making processes, bureaucratically-driven dynamics which follow their own course in an almost deterministic fashion, and a tendency to portray elites as driven less by ideology than by perceptions of *raison d’état*.

Yet the decisions of elites, and the participation of their subordinates, in genocide, do not rest at the level of objective social relations: warfare, insurgency, threats to territorial integrity, treasonous contact with foreign powers, and so on. Rather, whilst these are often the settings for genocide, to make the jump from the conflicts involved in any of the above scenarios to genocide, a fantasy about the nature of the enemy collective as such must exist. To take one obvious example: when the Young Turks felt the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire to be threatened by the actions of small groups of Armenian nationalists—who they believed were fifth columnists, in league with the Russians and thus the Triple Entente—they responded not by disarming such groups but by deporting and massacring Armenians in general. What possible logic can have led them to believe that the group as such was a threat to the security of the Empire? Even the context of warfare and the unfortunate timing of the Van uprising just as the Empire was being invaded at Gallipoli are insufficient to explain the series of events that became genocidal. Only a sense of paranoia and resentment at the humiliation of the Empire at the hands of the Western Allies can help in explaining the otherwise incomprehensible leap from countering a few (from the Ottoman state’s point of view) terrorist groups to destroying a whole population group. Similarly, the perception of Stalin and the leading circle of communists around him that the Soviet Union’s security and territorial integrity was threatened not just by actual military enemies but by potentially traitorous national groups all the way along the country’s vast borders led to the order to deport so-called ‘punished peoples’: half a million Chechens and Ingush were deported in 1943-44 as Nazi collaborators, as were large numbers of Kalmuks, Karachais, Crimean Tartars and others; and in the few years before the war, many other national groups arrayed along the borders, from Poles or Finns in the west to Koreans in the east, found themselves shipped off from places where fifth columnist activities could be harmful to places in the interior where, as the regime saw it, such schemes would be rendered impotent, such as Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan or Siberia. Whether or not these actions constitute genocide—as Norman Naimark argues—one has to account for the fact that, apart from the problem of the groups that fell victim to Stalinist criminality

not always fitting the UNGC (“kulaks”), it is hard to establish an attempt to destroy the group “as such,” even in the case of the Koreans, which saw a whole population group (172,000 people) deported from the Soviet Far East to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan because they were suspected (highly improbably, it need hardly be said) of being Japanese collaborators (Naimark, 2010; Weitz, 2002, pp. 1-29; Werth, 2008, pp. 400-419; Werth, 2013, pp. 386-406). The question of definition aside, however, such actions clearly owed less to any empirical evidence that non-Russian national groups were undermining the Soviet Union than to fears of being swamped by enemies without, aided by their national compatriots within.

We are reminded here that genocide is a group crime. It is committed by groups against individuals only insofar as they are members of another group, as defined by the perpetrators – and people exist in societies, so the decision to participate or not in genocide is rarely, if ever, purely a matter of individual moral choice; nor is it explicable simply via individual psychology. Nevertheless, we can perhaps take some psychoanalytical categories that apply most obviously to individuals and adapt them to group situations. The argument is not that there is such a thing as a “group mind” in a literal sense. But there are such things as group dynamics and shared narratives of history and identity, and individual being in the world is always experienced in society – one’s sense of selfhood is defined partly in opposition to one’s daily life as part of one or more collectives.

Thus, we are dealing here not with fantasies at the level of individual psychologies – although these may be highly influential through writings, speeches, charismatic leadership, propaganda, education, terroristic control of society, and so on – but with fantasies that are always already built into the structures of society and of rule-making. Marvin Hurvich’s notion of “annihilation anxieties” is perhaps the most productive psychoanalytical approach here, although one also needs to pay attention to theories which deal with emotions such as fear, hatred and humiliation, as well as the fantasies of revenge and retaliation which such emotions engender, often in the process creating cycles of hatred and violence that span generations and geographical setting, making these cycles very hard to break. My argument is that these fantasies are not found in a separate sphere of human experience from the rational, structural factors that make genocide operational, but that they are themselves constitutive of those very structures. What appear to be—and often are—“modern,” technological, even rational processes of categorization, collection and deportation of “enemy” groups are underpinned not by rational calculation in the narrow sense, but an instrumental rationality that is based on a non-rational understanding of what is taking place (“non-rational”, not “irrational”). It is not that some genocides are driven by rational calculation—e.g., competition for land, food or other resources—and others by pure fantasies—such

as the notion of a Jewish world conspiracy—but that all genocides involve a combination of the two.

The fantasies in question are of course often rooted in actual experiences of ethnic violence or other forms of group division, but they need not be: the case of the Holocaust is the prime example here, for the heartfelt notion that Germany was being colonized by Jews or that the Aryan race was deliberately being destroyed by Jewish plots for miscegenation and racial degeneration, had no basis in fact, no matter how hard the Nazis tried to convince themselves and the German people of the existence and meaningful agency of “world Jewry” (Moses, 2011, pp. 553-83). The point is that, no matter what histories of actual conflict might exist, genocide demands a kind of thinking (“thinking with the blood”) that advocates “final solutions” far removed from the actual conditions which led to the conflict in the first place. Thus, even in a case like Rwanda, where the RPF invasion made sure that a genuine conflict provides the background for the genocide in 1994, a purely military strategy would not have involved attempting to hunt down and kill every last Tutsi as if they were all in league, or potential fighters for, the RPF.

Genocide scholarship tends to hold these two fields of human existence apart for heuristic reasons: on the one hand explaining either the workings of bureaucracies or elites’ decision-making processes; on the other hand, explaining the “carnavalesque” dimension of enjoyment or frenzy in killing. The two approaches derive largely from two separate methodological traditions and sets of assumptions about how societies function, with the former (more social scientific in orientation) looking more towards “objective” social relations and networks of power, the latter (inclined more towards anthropology or history of ideas) focusing on moments of transgressive behavior, especially among individual perpetrators or small groups of grassroots killers – mobs, instead of elites (Mueller, 2000, pp. 42-70).

But the two are in fact inseparable: both focus on moments of crisis when the norms of society are turned upside-down, or when rules that normally control “civilized” (for want of a better term) behavior legitimize “barbaric” behavior, often in the name of being civilized, or defending civilization. What we have said so far argues that the decision-making processes of elites—which is the really key factor in bringing about genocide as a policy—are suffused with fantasy-thinking. By the same token, the frenzy or “licence” with which individuals or groups of killers operate during genocide are not simply driven by bloodlust; they too derive from structural factors as much as from “voluntaristic” motives (Kallis, 2009). It is also the case, in other words, that “There is always a danger when detailing structural factors in history of seeming to absolve individual actors of decision-making power and moral responsibility” (Bloxham & Müge Göçek, p. 367). I want to bring these two approaches together, not just because they are in fact always simultaneously present in genocide, but in order to challenge some common

methodological assumptions. The first is that genocide is a “modern” phenomenon, in the sense that it requires the state and its bureaucratic and technological capacities to become a widespread and successful policy. This has the consequence of making the Holocaust the paradigmatic case, even at the cost of ignoring aspects of the murder of the Jews which do not fit the bill of “factory-line genocide,” such as the ghettos and face to face killings in Eastern Europe (Snyder, 2009; Stone, 2013, pp. 15-24). And the second, no less damaging assumption is that massacres or frenzied attacks take place among more “primitive” societies; indeed, the condescending term “communal violence” which is commonly used to describe events in India/Pakistan carries with it unmistakable colonial undertones of “restless natives,” completely occluding the role played by officialdom, the military or the state, and seeing only passion-fuelled hatreds between groups divided along primitive ethnic or religious lines – passions to which “we” in the civilized world are, of course, not subject (Das, pp. 93-127).

My basic assumption then is that all modern genocides (from nineteenth-century colonial genocides onwards), and probably all cases of genocide before that involve a combination of power relations and structures that can be analyzed using tools of political science or political economy, and a form of fantasy thinking that defines the enemy and makes perpetrators feel that their actions are required and justified. Genocide does not occur solely as a slide, without human agency, of structures into genocide, i.e., a radicalization of social structures that is built into the system (à la Bauman); but nor can fantasy alone (antisemitism, racism, fear of pollution or being “swamped,” for example) account for why genocide occurs at one moment but not another. Rather, the combination of the two factors, to varying degrees, is a necessity if we are to understand the meaning of the “dark side of modernity.”

The example of Holocaust historiography is instructive here, with its language of networks, competencies, inter-agency cooperation and competition, as well as a scientific vocabulary of eugenics, racial hygiene and medicalizing technology all offer an image of the Holocaust as a rationally-planned, efficiently-executed murder process. By contrast, the language of the carnivalesque, Rausch, jouissance, licence, frenzy and transgression all appear on the face of it to be inapplicable. It is relatively straightforward to speak, as LaCapra does, of the Holocaust being characterized by a combination of these elements; “perhaps,” he writes, “only this disconcerting conjunction helps to explain the incredible excesses of brutality, cruelty, and at times carnivalesque or ‘sublime’ elation in Nazi behavior towards Jews” (LaCapra, 1997, pp. 268-269).

The difficulty is to demonstrate in detail how these two aspects of genocide worked together in the Holocaust. Can the Holocaust as such can be understood as

a moment of “effervescence,” “elation” or “transgression,” including the “rational structures” and planning processes that went into realizing it (and which seem a long way from the frenzy of a massacre)? Is it possible to show that the face to face killings carried out by the Einsatzgruppen and their accomplices, the authorized pogroms in eastern Europe, the vicious and degrading treatment of Jews in Transnistria, Yugoslavia and elsewhere on the part of the Nazis’ local collaborators, and the mocking and jeering crowds that accompanied deportations in Germany itself were all not simply the actions of mobs acting out their “licence,” but were part of a broader network of perpetration, centrally directed and controlled and subject to administrative planning?

Here the notion of “transgression” or “elation” might be useful, insofar as they apply not only to the behavior of rampaging mobs, but to the decisions of elites – an aspect of state planning that is commonly missed in structural accounts. Certainly, one can helpfully demonstrate that political movements such as the Muhajir Quami Movement (MQM) in Pakistan, or Zdravko Primorac’s Bosnian Croat “violence formation” are characterized by what Oskar Verkaaik calls the “aesthetics and ethics of transgression” and the “effervescence of collective violence” (Verkaaik, 2003, pp. 3-22). And, as Mart Bax notes, describing collective violence only as directed carefully from above implies “an uncritical acceptance of a central or national leader perspective, dismissing as deviant anything that does not go according to plan and denying the significance of specific local and regional circumstances or at any rate failing to problematize and examine them” (Bax, 2000, p. 28). Nevertheless, what is often figured as a bureaucratically-organized, managerially efficient and division-of-labor based state-led operation—which genocide might well be—is always already suffused with a sense of elation, borne from the “necessity” of directing a great project, one which will possibly save a nation, race or other group from the putative predations of another. For grassroots violence to be effective, we still need to see, as Jacques Semelin reminds us, opinion leaders who will affirm: “this is what is happening to us, this is who is responsible for our misfortune. It is they who are the cause of our suffering. We absolutely must get rid of them. We promise that afterwards everything will be better. Just give us your support, or better yet, join in the fight to rid ourselves of this scourge” (Semelin, p. 13). To this extent, the historical analysis of the networks and bureaucracies of genocide, though vital, are only partial explanations unless they can also account for this non-rational premise which informs elites’ decisions to embark on what we might henceforth call (in clear breach of the term’s meaning in theorists such as Georges Bataille) “organized transgression.” It is this “organized transgression” which brings about genocide. Tasteless though it is, this is why we must study perpetrators.

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