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From Perpetrators to Perpetration

Definitions, Typologies, and Processes

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Introduction

In the past two decades, research on mass atrocities and genocides has shifted its perspective from the study of *perpetrators* to *perpetration*. Whereas the former term refers to the agency of individuals who have perpetrated forms of mass violence against civilians, the latter concept refers to the process of collective commission of mass violence. The advantage of taking a processual view is that it enables us to address the complexity of the process of perpetration: different layers of authority, different motives of involvement, different intentionality, and most importantly, the changes in these factors over time.

This shift from perpetrators to perpetration has coincided with the emergence of Perpetrator Studies as a nascent sub-discipline. Recent research ranges from anthropological and oral historical "thick description" (Hinton 2005; Jessee 2017) to sensitive micro-historical and political studies (such as Bergholz 2016; Fujii 2009; McDoom 2008; Straus 2006). We will not delve here into the possible reasons for the relative historical absence of perpetrators from genocide studies, except to say that perpetrator research can be conceptually, normatively, and empirically challenging.

This chapter surveys the state of perpetrator research in the social sciences and history by examining the definition of perpetrators, typologies of perpetrators, and the process of perpetration. We approach perpetration from three distinct analytical perspectives: top level (architects), mid-level (organizers), and bottom level (killers). Through this framework, we also delve into key debates with the field such as: What types of people become perpetrators? Are individual perpetrators pathological, or are they shaped by their social context? Is perpetration driven by hate, economic factors, or obedience to authority?

Contemporary research emphasizes the complexity, fluidity, and contingency of perpetration. This has important implications for the ways in which we define perpetrators and approach perpetrator research.

Defining the "Perpetrator"

For our purposes, a perpetrator can be defined as any individual who contributes directly and substantially to genocide (or other mass atrocities). While this definition is informed by

substantive international criminal law concepts of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes (such as those found in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998), we choose not to be strictly limited by legal taxonomies. Genocide, as defined in the Genocide Convention and Rome Statute, emphasizes that perpetrators must have specific intent, *the intent to destroy* the group, yet many of those who contribute directly to genocide may lack this intention (Anderson 2018, 238–243).

International legal definitions are largely the product of treaty negotiations between states, thus these definitions are shaped by political compromise. Ethnic, racial, religious, and national groups are included in the Genocide Convention, ostensibly because they are "permanent and stable," yet it is debatable that any of these groups is permanent or stable. Furthermore, there is often a divergence between socio-historical and legalistic concepts of perpetrators, as lawyers undertake the categorization of perpetrators according to the logic and boundaries of criminal law, while social scientists and historians often favor broader interpretations that encompass all socially similar cases, as defined by the researcher and the research objectives.

Our definition also goes beyond direct perpetrators to encompass categories of complicity (those who substantially contribute to atrocities) while still excluding notions of "collective responsibility."[1] In defining perpetrators, we must also consider that perpetrators perform diverse acts with diverse motivations. High-level perpetrators, such as leaders, often do not "get their hands dirty" through direct perpetration. Accordingly, one might expect different considerations to apply to indirect perpetration (i.e., planning or ordering atrocities). Moreover, different forms of mass atrocities involve different types of perpetration and perpetrators. Perpetrators of genocide, for example, can range from Nazi bureaucrats to Rwandan farmers to (arguably) teachers in Canadian residential schools. The farther one gets from killing, the less likely individuals are to self-identify, or be characterized by others, as perpetrators.

Bearing this diversity in mind, we will focus herein on perpetrators who directly and substantially contribute to mass killing. Our point of departure is that perpetrators remain a vital category for social, legal, and historical analysis. The emergence of Perpetrator Studies has rightfully challenged static views of "the perpetrator" as being a social category with fixed boundaries, yet it would be equally misleading to study genocide or mass atrocities without differentiating between the agents of genocide and their victims. Who are the perpetrators, and how and why do they perpetrate?

Who Are the Perpetrators?

Genocide and mass atrocities involve, by their very nature, atrocious behavior. In a narrow sense, genocide only requires killing, the prevention of births, or other acts that directly effectuate the crime. Yet, perpetrators often go beyond mere killing to act with entrepreneurial cruelty: their victims are humiliated, dehumanized, and tormented as part of the destruction of the victim group. This "excessive" violence is not incidental to the crime of genocide; rather, it arises from its very nature as a crime involving the destruction of an ethnic, religious, national, or racial group. Such a far-reaching social project requires ideological justification: the victims must be destroyed because of *who they are*, their fundamental essence. What kinds of people perpetrate these acts of extreme cruelty?

The idea that criminals are different from "ordinary" people goes back to Cesare Lombroso and the roots of criminology (1891). Criminologists have advanced a broad range of explanations for criminal behavior, which, broadly speaking, can be grouped into theories positing that criminal behavior is inborn (*nature*), and theories arguing that criminal behavior

is learned (*nurture*). Many contemporary theories of crime combine these two paradigmatic perspectives in nuanced ways to show that some individuals may have inborn characteristics that predispose them to criminal behavior, but that most individuals will not become criminals without an element of socialization (Wikström 2004). Yet, it is questionable how well these traditional criminological explanations relate to genocide, where perpetration is systematic, politicized, and generally endorsed by legitimate authorities. The nature of genocide as a state crime challenges many criminological presumptions, which assume that crimes and criminal behavior are deviant acts, thus that the perpetrators themselves are deviant.

This apparent paradox of genocide perpetrators as non-deviant criminals is a thread running through Perpetrator Studies. While popular perceptions and representations of perpetrators are often villainous caricatures, researchers have long grappled with the seeming ordinariness of perpetrators. At the Nuremberg Tribunals, two men were tasked with psychological examinations of the accused: psychologist Gustave Gilbert and psychiatrist Douglas Kelley. While both Gilbert and Kelley concluded that the defendants were psychologically fit for trial, they reached quite different conclusions regarding the psychological bases for their acts. In interpreting the same set of Rorschach Tests, Gilbert classified all the defendants as psychopathic personality types: schizoid, narcissistic, and paranoid (Joyce 2009, 18). He argued that the defendants were raised in a kind of pathological German culture, emphasizing blind obedience to authority (a theme that was later picked up by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford in their book *The Authoritarian Personality* 1950). Kelley, on the other hand, emphasized the ordinariness of the Nuremberg defendants; he argued that authoritarian governments and genocide were possible even in the United States, because genocide was neither cultural nor a result of insane leaders; rather, it was a social phenomenon.

In the long run, Kelley's view seems to have predominated, not only in the case of the Nuremberg defendants, but also in Perpetrator Studies more generally (see, for example, Zillmer et al. 1989). Hannah Arendt, in her touchstone analysis of the trial of Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann, wrote of "the banality of evil" when reflecting on Eichmann's apparent lack of individual pathology or ideological commitment (Arendt [1963] 2006). Similarly, Christopher Browning concluded, in his study of the Holocaust perpetrators in Reserve Police Battalion 101, that most perpetrators were "ordinary men" (Browning 1998, a view that was contradicted in Daniel Goldhagen's controversial book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 2001).

More recent studies of perpetrators tend to eschew the ordinary/pathological dichotomy to emphasize the multidimensionality of perpetrators and perpetration. They argue, as we do here, that there is no single paradigmatic genocide perpetrator. Rather, perpetrators perpetrate for a variety of reasons, and their acts of perpetration are often contingent rather than rooted in enduring circumstances or personal characteristics. Social psychological experiments, such as the Stanford Prison Experiment, further reinforce the conclusion that "power of the situation" is more important than the pathology of individuals (Zimbardo 2007).

As an outgrowth of this recognition of the variability of perpetrator motivations, researchers have sought to develop typologies of perpetrators. Rather than identifying paradigmatic general perpetrator characteristics, these typologies group perpetrators according to characteristics and motivations.

These tend to focus on the motives and motivations of perpetrators, including, for instance, economic gain, ideological commitment, sadism, conformism, or fear. As an example, sociologist Michael Mann's typology includes:

1. *Ideological killers* [who believe in the "righteousness of murderous cleansing"]
2. *Bigoted killers* [who "share the prejudices of their social environment"]
3. *Violent killers* [who "experience violence as a release"]
4. *Fearful killers* [who kill out of fear]
5. *Careerist killers* [who work for organizations involved in atrocities and participate to further their career interests]
6. *Materialist killers* [who are motivated by economic gain]
7. *Disciplined killers* [who kill to conform with directives]
8. *Comradely killers* [who kill to conform with their peer group]
9. *Bureaucratic killers* [who are situated within bureaucracies and motivated by "habitual obedience"]

(Mann 2005)

Mann's distinction here between ideological and bigoted killers (types one and two) is interesting, distinguishing in some sense between those motivated by "high" or "low" ideology. Smeulers takes a similar overall approach, while also emphasizing the importance of leaders (criminal masterminds) as a distinct category (2008). Genocide and crimes against humanity are atrocity crimes, yet it is important to remember that other kinds of crimes may also involve leaders and followers, some of whom may be predisposed to lead violence, and others who follow out of a sense of duty or coercion. McDevit, Levin, and Bennett's typology of hate crime perpetrators (2002), for example, also includes "leaders" (who initiate violence), "fellow travelers" (who go along with violence), and "unwilling participants" (who may be passively involved in violence yet do nothing to stop it). Interestingly, their typology also includes "heroes" (what genocide scholars might term "rescuers"), illustrating the need for typologies to also consider the relationships between perpetrators and other actors.

Despite these common conceptions of "types" of perpetrators, there is still a relative lack of research into how perpetrators come to exhibit the various distinguishing characteristics. Are individual dispositions inborn? Alternatively, if they are a product of an individual's experience and socialization, what factors produce each type of perpetrator? Smeulers approaches this issue by arguing that pre-perpetration types also influence types during perpetration. For example, "law-abiding citizens" may become "conformist" perpetrators, while borderline types (those who are marginalized but not criminals) may be "profiteers," and "criminals" (those with a record of violence) may become "sadist" perpetrators during mass atrocities. Further research is certainly needed in this area, although there is evidence that genocide perpetrators tend to be men in their thirties without prior criminal records. This means that genocide perpetrators are atypical, when compared to perpetrators of other violent crimes, who tend to be younger men, and who may have a history of violence (Brehm et al. 2016).

There may be a more general concern with typologizing perpetrators: individuals do not always neatly fall within the boundaries of a given type. In our daily lives, our motivations are not singular. For example, we may take a job because it is lucrative, while also finding it interesting. The motivations of individual perpetrators are not fixed; rather, they shift in response to changing perspectives and circumstances. Individuals may be sadistic ideologues or greedy conformists. They may join genocide because they feel obligated, but they may also seek material enrichment. For example, wealthy Tutsis were often attacked first during the Rwandan Genocide (Anderson 2018). Thus, the selection of these individuals by the perpetrators was likely based on both their ethnic identity and the prospect of looting their wealth. Individual motivations are multiple, layered, and fluid.

Accordingly, Anderson's perpetrator typology names "pathways" to perpetration rather than unchanging types, while Williams has developed a complex model based on individual actions, rather than enduring motivations or fixed roles (Anderson 2018; Williams 2018). Ultimately, typologies provide us with a useful but limited framework for understanding why perpetrators perpetrate.

From Perpetrators to Perpetration

Genocide perpetration is a complex process (Üngör 2019). As perpetrator typologies are limited in the ways indicated above, we propose shifting the focus from perpetrators to perpetration. Whereas the former term refers to the agency of the individuals who have perpetrated forms of mass violence against civilians, the latter concept refers to the process of collective commission of mass violence. This processual view enables us to address the complexity of the process of perpetration: different layers of authority, different motives of involvement, different rules of engagement, and changes in these factors over time. This section approaches perpetration as a socio-ecological model containing three distinct analytical levels—top level (architects), mid-level (organizers), and bottom level (killers)—and develops a temporal processual approach focusing on the power relations between groups of people, especially between perpetrators and victims, but also within the perpetrator group. Viewed in coherence, these three contextual layers are not simply piled on top of each other, but the largest contexts are often preconditions for the smallest ones. Without the macro context of the radicalization of the political elites, the violent measures against the victims would not have been conceived by mid-management, and ultimately countless individual perpetrators would not have murdered innumerable individual victims in micro situations of killing. In other words, in addition to the complexity of each level in itself, we must bear in mind the relevant connections among the three levels over time. Historically, the top level was studied extensively at first, to the exclusion of the low level, but this has changed as more fine-grained research has appeared on the mid level and micro level.

The temporal complexity of genocide is a main concern in the study of genocide perpetration. Only fairly recently have historians begun to examine how perpetration processes begin, develop, and end. Also, most importantly: how can we understand the transitions from crises to mass murder to aftermaths? These transitions are often turning points, where critical moral and political transgressions occur in a rapid progression of violent polarization. Comparative research on mass political violence suggests that once unleashed, it can develop its own dynamic and become nearly unstoppable by internal forces—reaching "relative autonomy." How this process has functioned in different genocides, and how we can draw responsible comparisons between them, should be a priority in mass violence research. We will now turn to a discussion of perpetration, starting from the macro level.

Macro-level Perpetration Processes

The macro level refers to the structures and the context of the political helm that wields authority inside a state and is responsible for the decision-making processes that launch genocide. At the macro level, two issues are key to understanding the beginnings of perpetration: power and ideology. To understand a period in which mass violence is perpetrated, it is important to understand how the political elite has been able to wield the state's apparatus(es) of coercion: police, army, militias, etc. The increasing concentration of power among political elites can be either the result of a creeping, long-term process, or, more

often, a swift revolution. Once such bureaucratic overtake is that successful, political elites can be seduced by the very prospect of extreme power in carrying out political objectives with or without consent of the political and social groups in society. A broad research landscape deals with this level of analysis, and a plethora of publications has explored the motives of Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, and others (Ezrow & Frantz 2011). Since perpetration of mass violence against civilians is the near-exclusive monopoly of authoritarian, dictatorial, and totalitarian regimes, the motives and moves of authoritarian leaderships are extremely important to understand. One theme that has sparked debates in this literature is extreme ideology: Communism, Fascism, Nazism, ethnic nationalism, and their syncretic forms. Scholars have argued that extreme ideologies have a penchant for mass violence due to their anti-liberal nature, flirtations with utopia, development of sharp in/out group dynamics, and permissiveness to the use of violence (Weitz 2005). Comparative volumes on Nazism and Stalinism, but also studies of ethnic nationalism, *Juche*, or Ba'athism, have advanced this sub-field (Geyer & Fitzpatrick 2009; Sassoon 2011; Sŏ & Suh 2013). Indeed, no understanding of the motives of top-level perpetrators would be complete without deep analyses of their ideological worldviews. Two important sub-topics at the macro level that relate to extreme power and extreme ideology are polarization and out-grouping.

First, the polarization of political elites is a good indicator of lower-level political violence. Whether we are dealing with an authoritarian state or a democratic one, the polarization of political elites, under specific conditions, often boils over into violence (Rapoport & Weinberg 2013). The polarization between Turkish and Armenian political elites before 1914 or between Serbian and Croatian elites before 1991, and the polarization of the Rwandan political landscape in the period 1990–1994 are somber but instructive examples of this process. As crisis struck these societies, it sparked the deterioration of relations between antagonistic political parties, which carried especially deadly potential because politics were ethnically polarized (Bieber & Galijaš 2014; Der Matossian 2014; Guichaoua 2015). Radicals on either sides, but especially those in positions of public office, came to perceive the leaders of the other political parties and movements as security liabilities for their own positions. As violent incidents grew, at some point political elites made a set of fateful decisions to arrest, detain, and ultimately murder the entire membership of these opposition parties, from top to bottom. These types of violent initiations are critical junctures that define the course of the macro level and thereby the entire genocide.

Furthermore, events at the macro level trickle down fast: as a result of political polarization at the macro level, citizens locally can come to imagine themselves as part and parcel of an overarching, bigger conflict, and in-groups/out-groups rapidly form. Jacques Sémelin has underlined the importance in genocidal processes of the construction of an imagined "internal enemy" (Sémelin 2007, 22–33). How is "out-grouping" constructed in the various cases we study? One line of thought places it in the context of long-term identity formation processes, in which the definition and demarcation of the in-group occur under serious inter-state and intra-state pressures, frequently causing crises of identity. During such crises, external enemies can be equated with internal groups accused of disloyalty by virtue of their supposed ethnic, religious, or political proximity to the outside force (Mylonas 2013). A second body of knowledge focuses on identity politics, especially on how collective identity entrepreneurs can purposefully construct an out-group as a dangerous, treacherous, deeply alien, and ultimately dehumanized enemy. Once in power, the Nazis rapidly and very effectively out-grouped German Jews; Ottoman Armenians went from the "loyal nation" to backstabbers within one turbulent year; Soviet citizens in the 1930s would wake up every morning to a different category out-grouped by Stalin; the rise and mainstream

normalization of Islamophobia in the post-9/11 era is a good contemporary example (Wilmsen & McAllister 1996).

Once these conditions are in place, a (civil) war generally facilitates the transition into perpetration. The macro-level actors now move from the pre-genocidal phase into the genocidal phase. Two key issues here are the decision-making process and the emerging attitude of criminal conspiracy among the elites. Decision-making processes are deeply complex phenomena and much more detailed research is needed, since these events might well constitute the critical turning points in the entire process. What are top elites thinking of, and planning for, when they cross that threshold into massacre? We may infer a few generalizations from the research. First, decision-making on mass murder is without exception a secret process (e.g., all relevant Nazi, Soviet, and CUP documentation is shrouded in profound secrecy). There are reasons for this secrecy (Bergen 2009, 191–192), and it has at least two consequences: secrecy obstructs research, even decades after the killings, and secrecy becomes "visible" or understandable to the outside world only once the killings are well under way. A second allowable generalization would be that we have prudently stopped looking for smoking guns: explicit orders authorizing mass slaughter will not be found. Genocidal elites are generally intelligent enough not to compromise themselves in such written decrees, with very rare exceptions emanating from hubris (e.g., Stalin and Saddam Hussein). Macro-level analyses of perpetration demonstrate that political elites can get quite "comfortable" with their orchestration of mass murder. After the initial transgressions, organizing the killings becomes a routine that requires some special attention, some adaptations and innovations—but the killings nevertheless continue unabated.

There can be little debate that most genocidal regimes are those based on deeply authoritarian structures—all backed by the fist of enormously expansive violent apparatuses.[2] In the genocidal phase, regime type is important to analyze: How do genocidal elites manufacture compliance? How does complicity perpetuate the process of perpetration? The CUP dictatorship from 1913 to 1918 is a case in point. Although scholarship on it is developing rapidly, we know relatively little about it compared to other genocidal regimes. A series of studies by Şükrü Hanioğlu has sketched a compelling portrait of a ruthless, clandestine revolutionary cabal, an uncompromising party that visualized politics mostly as a dichotomy of friends versus enemies, applying terror, threats, and assassination to its "enemies." As time passed, all of this violence bore heavily on the party and radicalized it further (Hanioğlu 1995, 2001). Many of these analyses hold true for the Bolsheviks, the Khmer Rouge, or the Ba'athists in Iraq. The enormous concentration of executive power in the hands of these parties, from the moment of coup d'état on, made the exercise of violence on a mass scale possible. But these studies also offer a window into the *internal* dynamics of these elites. Milovan Djilas's classic *Conversations with Stalin* or Saddam Hussein's audio-taped meetings offer a glimpse into the world of the genocide-perpetrating elite (Djilas 1969).[3] It is a grim, suffocating universe of existential uncertainty, dark suspicion, mutual complicity, and utter misanthropy. We require greater depth (comprehensive empirical recreations) and breadth (implicit and explicit comparisons) of this particular phenomenon regarding macro-level perpetrators during genocides.

What happens to a genocidal elite after the killings end? Often there is a transition, peaceful or violent, and sometimes there is "normalization." More often, there is impunity and no punishment. Stalin, Hafez al-Assad, and Suharto presided over unprecedented mass murders in their respective countries but lived on unperturbedly and died natural deaths. It is likely that they got rid of incriminating evidence—documentary or forensic. In some cases, secret, compromising agreements are made and genocidal elites receive golden parachutes.[4] There is

circumstantial evidence suggesting that Radovan Karadzić was offered immunity from prosecution at the Dayton Accords if he stepped down as President of the Republika Srpska. Idi Amin lived comfortably for decades in Saudi Arabia, and so did Mengistu in Ethiopia. The chances that contemporary criminal leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi, Bashar al-Assad, Kim Jong-Un, let alone American war criminals such as George W. Bush or Henry Kissinger, will ever be held accountable are very slim. Those who are held accountable, such as Slobodan Milošević or Charles Taylor, ultimately go through problematic trials that do not seem to deter future genocidal elites (Bloxham & Pendas 2010). The entire process of macro-level perpetration, from incipience to orchestration to post-violence life, requires particularly close attention to the transitions between phases and their relations with the lower levels.

Meso-level Perpetration Processes

The meso level consists of those developments right below the highest level: mid-level political and administrative elites, the internal agencies that assume the tasks to divide labor and organize the machinery of killing, the (para-)military bosses who press buttons, and the mechanisms of mass mobilization for the destruction of the victim group. It concerns the intra-societal context of the actual organization of mass violence. These processes are decisive for the deadly outcomes. Accordingly, not only does this level link the macro with the micro, but also it is here that the macro-level dynamics are interpreted and transformed within a society by various political actors and groups. It refers to the perpetrating agencies, including the culture and practice of organizing mass murder. How do previously non-genocidal and technocratic institutions, organizations, and agencies in a given state and society collaborate in genocide? How do otherwise politically uninvolved families make decisions, conduct business, and comport themselves in a genocidal process? How are city administrations taken over and steered towards genocidal destruction of some of their fellow citizens? And, how can we better understand the changing sociological and political relationships among different perpetrating clusters?

The scholarship on this level is scant but developing. Most monographs on perpetrators focus on the micro-level contexts of the actual killers. For example, Scott Straus defined perpetrators as "those who directly killed or assaulted civilians and those who participated in groups that killed or assaulted civilians" (Straus 2006, 102). The studies by James Waller, Roy Baumeister, Steven Baum, Dick de Mildt, Donald Dutton, and Dinah Shelton's *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*, to name a few, largely concur with this view. With a few excellent exceptions, scholarship has largely neglected to examine the mid-management contexts, the intermediary agencies, and institutions that translate macro-level orders to the micro-level destruction. Books that deal with this level are gradually appearing. There is a rich literature on the meso-level Nazis, from economically minded arguments in Susanne Heim and Götz Aly's *Vordenker der Vernichtung* (1991) to Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul's panoptic *Karrieren der Gewalt* (2004) and Mary Fulbrook's detailed *A Small Town near Auschwitz* (2013). Scholars working on other genocides, too, are beginning to deal with mid-level perpetrators, such as Thierry Cruvellier and Alexander Hinton who wrote books on the Cambodian prison director Duch (Cruvellier 2011; Hinton 2016).

A close look at most work on mass violence clearly identifies patterns of interaction between the macro and meso levels (e.g., in the recruitment of perpetrators, the coordination of murderous efforts, civil society initiatives towards assisting the genocidal apparatus, and the manufacturing of broad-based indifference towards the plight of the victims). On

the other hand, an over-focus on the macro level may blind us to the autonomy and agency of these mid-level bureaucracies. Perpetration of mass violence is co-produced by a vast network of collaborating ministry officials, military officers, government functionaries, gatekeepers and caretakers, committees, civil servants, police commissars, career diplomats, party bosses, provincial judges, urban regulators, militia bosses, and many others. In principle, these men do not get their hands dirty.[5] The macro-level overseers are well aware they need these people to manage the many necessary tasks. Before the killings, the civil-bureaucratic and military takeover deeply polarize and purify this level of officials. Some stay in their positions if they reconcile the vague (but unmistakably murderous) designs of the new regime; others are either purged or leave on their own volition. This partly self-regulating and self-reinforcing process paves the way for the macro-level organizers to push through their plans and bolsters the political polarization mentioned in the previous section.

Genocides develop in shocks and fits, which the macro-level elites visit upon the meso-level agencies. The transition from the pre-genocidal to genocidal phase ushers two distinct processes for the meso-level perpetrators: practical organization and regional variation. The organization of perpetration requires a clear, functional, and effective division of labor, between the state's civil service system and its military industry—but also between the military and paramilitary actors in the state (Feldman & Seibel 2005). Throughout the perpetration process, these tensions remain pertinent and have a profound impact on the outcome of the genocide. Examples abound: whereas the various German agencies did not cooperate well during the invasion of France, they did much better during the invasion of the Soviet Union. The frequent conflicts between the Army of the Republika Srpska and the various Serb paramilitary groups in Bosnia are well documented in Ratko Mladić's diaries.[6] Whether these tensions are resolved or not, the meso-level officials have to deal with real constraints during the perpetration of the violence, such as shortages of resources and manpower, inter-agency competition, and conflicting priorities. Whoever resolves these problems most effectively is often granted benefits and rewards by the top brass.

The meso level is also confronted with a very common problem: regional variations in the perpetration of violence. After all, genocides are not undifferentiated campaigns in which simultaneous mass killing evolves the same everywhere in a country. Genocide is not an isomorphic phenomenon. Scholars have examined the relationship between central decision-making processes and the implementation of mass murder at the local level. In-depth research on how genocidal processes evolve at the meso level (province, district, city) has proven most fruitful. These studies can teach us a great deal about how local power shifts influence the course and intensity of genocidal processes, since we know that some genocides are more regionally varied than others. Local political or social elites can anticipate, expedite, intensify, or delay and resist processes of genocidal destruction directed from above. A micro focus can also follow the deterioration and ultimate disintegration of inter-communal relations in the face of external pressures, amidst drastically worsening security and life conditions for the victims. Possible explanations include the personal whims of the local power holders, the geographic conditions, the conduct of local elites, and structural factors such as proximity to the front, social stratification, settlement patterns, poverty and unemployment, population density of victim group, opportunity structures, etc. But which combination of factors accounts for what kind of variation in genocidal processes? For example, why did the eastern Drina valley (roughly along the line Bijeljina-Zvornik-Višegrad-Foča) see much higher levels of violence than the central-northern Tuzla region during the genocide in Bosnia? Why did the genocide in Rwanda's southern provinces develop at quite different speeds than in the northern provinces? Why did violence develop

so quickly on Bali compared to Sumatra during the 1965–1966 Indonesian genocide? Only by addressing these meso-level issues comparatively can we aggregate our theoretical debates.

Regionally varying outcomes of mass violence are never mono-causal phenomena, but depend on a combination of factors. Discussions of regional heterogeneity have serious implications because they prompt us to reconceptualize "diversity" in genocide perpetration. For example, Henri Zukier identifies four important polarities in the scholarship on explaining Holocaust diversity: personal versus situational factors, center versus periphery, ideology versus pragmatism, and long-term planning versus short-term reactions. He argues that diversity is often seen as outcome, but diversity can also be part and parcel of the very process of genocide, especially in the complex interactions between center and periphery. Zukier concludes rightly: "The diversity of triggers still led to a uniformity of outcomes" (Zukier 2013). Most genocides do not have an equivalent of the Wannsee Conference, to resolve the pervasive divergence in the local implementation of state policies. It is often up to the Interior Ministry to coordinate the operations and synchronize the violent measures against the victims. These ministries or specialized agencies delegate the daily implementation of the destruction to its officials and officers, as well as civil administrators. Time and again, *provincial governors* seem to be highly relevant in steering policies, as many fine-grained provincial case studies demonstrate. A similar argument can be made for generals in military districts, as Jess Melvin convincingly demonstrates for Aceh during the 1965 Indonesian genocide (Melvin 2018). Much can be gained from the comparative examination of provincial and local factors that interfere in the process of perpetration. But it also confirms Zukier's point that even if genocides unfold on a twisted course, the result is generalized destruction—sooner or later.

How does a regionalized conceptualization of a genocide relate to its temporal understanding? This question requires a closer analysis than these pages allow, but suffice it to state here that there seems to be a certain conception of "communicating vessels" at play. Provincial studies on the Armenian and Rwandan genocides suggest that when a genocide is more intensive and extensive in one province, other provinces emulate those other provinces' violence bottom-up or are ordered to do so top-down. A breakdown of perpetration per province demonstrates "above-norm performers" and "under-norm performers." The underachieving provinces are often stimulated to emulate the best practices or benchmarks of the overachievers, leading perpetrators to move from their own provinces to other provinces and the victims to flee from the deadliest to less deadly areas. Regionalization is not simply a matter of territorial differentiation. It is closely related to the morphology of the organization, coordination, and implementation of the crime. Recent studies challenge the convention that genocides have uni-polar pyramidal structures. Increasingly, genocides are conceived as multi-polar processes: radicalization comes from within and without and emanates from different perpetrating *clusters*, such as civil and military organizations, the ruling cabals themselves, and local elites (Üngör & Polatel 2011). Competition and conflict among these sectors shape genocides.

One common, almost universal tension in genocide perpetration is that between military authorities and paramilitary structures. Perpetration is usually carried out by well-equipped, specialized, often paramilitary forces. Paramilitarism refers to clandestine, irregular armed organizations that carry out acts of violence against clearly defined civilian individuals or groups. It has immense importance for understanding the processes of violence that play out during ethnic conflicts, which often see the formation of paramilitary units that conduct counter-insurgency operations, scorched earth campaigns, and violence against civilians including genocide. Many studies of genocide have convincingly demonstrated the central

role of paramilitaries in the perpetration of genocide (Alvarez 2006). Whether in democratic or authoritarian states, throughout the twentieth century paramilitaries have been responsible for widespread violations of human rights against civilians. States orchestrating mass violence spawn paramilitary units as a covert augmentation of state power for special purposes such as mass murder. Some key questions to ask in this context are: How and why were paramilitary forces organized and deployed? Why did they emerge, and what is the relationship between paramilitaries and other meso-level perpetrator clusters? The role of paramilitary groups has been studied extensively for some of the major cases of mass violence (Campbell & Brenner 2000). The SA and SS, for example, have extensive historiographies. There are good studies of the Rwandan *Interahamwe*, Serb paramilitary groups, the *Janjaweed* in Sudan, or the Hindu-extremist militias in Gujarat. A comparative reading of these studies offers unique insights into the "nuts and bolts" of perpetration, and studies of new conflicts should focus on these types of paramilitary groups, not as individual killers but as perpetrating clusters.

After the violence ends, examining the meso level is relevant for understanding the "perpetrator society." How did Turkey after 1915, Germany after 1945, Indonesia after 1966, and Serbia after 1995 fare? What happened to the perpetrating agencies? How did the state transform them, and how did they transform the state? The fate of the post-genocide perpetrator society depends on whether the perpetrating regime remains intact and continues to hold on to power, or whether it is toppled, deposed, and vetted. Joshua Oppenheimer's remarkable documentaries *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* show how these mid-level perpetrators ended up being promoted to governors, bureaucrats, and influential politicians with comfortable socio-economic positions (Oppenheimer 2012, 2014). A recent investigative journalism piece by *Der Spiegel* illustrated how, at the time of writing, this process is ongoing in Syria: those paramilitary groups who were most loyal to Assad since the beginning of the uprising in 2011 now enjoy immense privileges of political, economic, and military power (Schaap 2017). The prospects for vetting, punishment, or reconciliation are slim, in case the perpetrating regime gains the upper hand in the conflict and manages to remain an acceptable partner in the international community.

Micro-level Perpetration Processes

The micro level is the lowest socio-ecological level: the individuals who become involved in the genocidal process. At the micro level, motivations are often immediate and situational, rather than rooted in grand political projects. When we consider the role of ideology, we must examine the reasons an ideology has resonance for individual perpetrators. Individual radicalization (individual alignment with radical beliefs involving the use of violence to achieve political ends) occurs for myriad reasons, including self-interest, perceived marginalization, and, especially, fear. Fear is a force for the transformation of the social order. The individual perpetrator may be persuaded by propaganda demanding the upending of social rules (such as the prohibition on killing) if they believe that they personally and communally face an existential threat. Fear is generated primarily by projecting dangerous traits onto the victim group. Propaganda may transform individual worldviews; more importantly, it communicates expectations from the macro level, to the group, to the individual perpetrator.

Perpetration at the micro level is characterized by the coming together of diverse motivations in contribution to the collective enterprise of genocide. The key question then is how individual interests align with (or diverge from) collective policies.

Our knowledge of the micro dynamics of genocide has increased greatly in recent years. This turn to the micro level encompasses archival studies of genocide at the local level, as

well as interview-based research with perpetrators, victims, and bystanders of genocide. Through a variety of methodological approaches, researchers have shed light on the complexities and nuances of genocidal processes.

Works like Browning's *Ordinary Men* show us that perpetrators do not uniformly accept orders to commit genocide. This is perhaps the most important insight of micro-level research: individuals do not uncritically act based on clear orders; rather, they operate in contexts of limited information, often interpreting orders and exhortations in ways that advance their own interests. Both Kalyvas, in his work on civil war, and Fujii, in her work on genocide, argue that the mobilization of mass violence involves substantial scope for local interpretation (in Fujii's metaphor, scripts are provided by the center, which are then interpreted by local-level power holders) (Fujii 2009, 124). Violence from below is more likely to occur where power is decentralized (e.g., where local control is greater). As Bergholz notes, local control also brings about unexpected consequences for the central power, such as massacres and atrocities in times and locations not ordered, and the killing of the wrong categories of people (Bergholz 2016, 319). Erroneous targeting or reluctance to participate in genocide at the local level is sometimes overridden by national authorities. For example, a Hutu in the Rwandan genocide received orders from his local mayor to "watch over" a group of Tutsis. He was later admonished by a soldier from outside the district who said, "Are you crazy? You don't have to watch them; Tutsis are your enemy. You kill them, not just watch them" (Anderson personal interview, 2009). The greater the degree of local autonomy, the more room there is at the local level for improvisation, but such improvisation will always occur within problematic principal-agent relationships (Anderson 2018, 153; Mitchell 2004, 45).

Micro-level accounts are important in restoring agency to perpetrators and victims alike (Frydel 2017, 22). Low-level perpetrators do not necessarily share the motivations and intentions of leaders. Blattman's research on "death marches" during the Holocaust and Grabowski's research on the "hunt for the Jews" both demonstrate that individual perpetrators may participate in a hateful campaign without being primarily motivated by ideological radicalization (Blatman 2011; Grabowski 2013). Brehm and Fujii both question the importance of ideology as a determinant of participation in the Rwandan Genocide (Brehm 2017; Fujii 2009), while Bergholz, similarly, draws from the case study of Kulen Vakuf in Bosnia to argue that "ethnic hatred" is not always a prerequisite of genocide, rather violence itself generates such hatred (Bergholz 2016). Moreover, individuals who lack ideological commitment may still act against their neighbors out of feared consequences (Frydel 2017, 14; Kalyvas 2006, 330–364).[7]

The primary micro-level processes involved in perpetration are the desensitization of the perpetrators and the dehumanization of the victims by the perpetrators. These dualistic processes produce the social distance necessary for genocide. Perpetrators are desensitized through gradual habituation to violence (what James Waller terms "escalating commitments"), as well as the transformation of the normative landscape by legitimate authorities (Waller 2002, 205–207). The repetition of perpetration is facilitated by perpetrator habituation, positive reinforcement, and other coping mechanisms (Anderson 2018, 199–209). Both during and after perpetration, perpetrators will reframe their behavior in ways that minimize the moral wrongfulness of their acts (Alvarez 1997; Anderson 2017).

Perpetrators, like other persons, interpret their options based on their position within society and their individual experiences and characteristics. The interaction between positionality and perceived options has three facets: the *social margin of discretion* (the range of

perceived options based on the society in which the perpetrator lives, particularly in terms of the level of coercion and mass participation in perpetration), the *role margin of discretion* (the individual's range of options according to roles within society, such as occupation, gender, and age), and, finally, *the immediate margin of discretion* (the individual's options based on factors in the immediate environment of perpetration). These immediate factors include things like group dynamics (the individual is more likely to perpetrate in a supportive group), the presence of authority figures compelling violence, and the use of intoxicants (Anderson 2018, 133–138). Perhaps most fundamentally, there must be a power differential between perpetrator and victim.

A multilevel approach is required to fully address the complexities of genocide. Saul Friedlander rightfully calls for an "integrated history" bringing together micro-level accounts and macro-level political developments (Friedländer 2010). An integrated history would explain how macro-level political developments relate to the behavior of groups and individual perpetrators.

Conclusion: The Extraordinary Perpetrator Revisited

In the popular imagination, including media representations, perpetrators are often, if not exclusively, understood as extraordinary either by virtue of the acts they committed, or because of one or another disorder attributed to them. In these representations, the acts of perpetration are seen as having changed these human beings from ordinary to extraordinary. Slow-motion close-ups of their eyes accompanied by ominous music often set the stage for explicit characterization. The scholarship on perpetration has soundly criticized these approaches and debunked the myths surrounding the former killers. But we also seem to have taken a step beyond this refutation. As research on the post-genocidal lives of perpetrators increases, we see that their lives *are* often fundamentally and irreversibly changed by those extraordinary years, months, weeks, or days during which they were putting an end to the lives of defenseless human beings. Perpetrators may feel apart in knowing what it means to kill, even where their acts continue to be endorsed by the state. Yet, this apartness is rooted more in experience than in inborn characteristics. Killing is doubtlessly an extraordinary act, yet perpetrators are often not visibly marked by their extraordinary experiences; rather, they contend with their pasts in complex and contradictory ways. For example, Anderson interviewed a former Khmer Rouge prison guard and executioner in his home while he bounced a baby on his knee. This man signed an order to kill seven pregnant women and is accused of killing hundreds of individuals with a farm implement. Yet, on that day, in his house, he was a grandfather, a farmer, and a kindly man, seemingly no different from any other Khmer peasant. In that context, he felt uncomfortable speaking of his crimes and instead emphasized that he was a mere accomplice. However, on other days, such as when he was confronted by victims from the prison he guarded, he expressed shame over his killings. As an interviewee, he presented himself as an "ordinary" person, yet the victims knew him as a perpetrator.

Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi perpetrator responsible for the coordination of the Holocaust, was "an extremely sensitive violinist who displayed a tenderness and sentimentality that deeply impressed his audiences" (Gerwarth 2012, 37). A painstaking biography of Saddam Hussein argues that the former Iraqi dictator "could be crying over his children while at the same time signing a death warrant for the execution of fifty people" (Coughlin 2005, 165–166). These examples are not to show an apparent puzzling tension between "barbarism" and "civilization" but to point out that much like every other

human being, perpetrators have complex identities, both at one particular time and as a changing aspect of their lives, across time. "Killer" is only one dimension of their identity; perhaps "father," "sportsman," "musician," and "vegetarian" are others. There is an emergent consensus over the complex perpetrator—for example, recent and forthcoming edited volumes on perpetrators by Williams and Buckley-Zistel (2018), Smeulers, Hola, and Weerdestijn (2019), and Anderson and Jessee (2020) all highlight the tensions between victim and perpetrator identities. Just as individual pathways to perpetration vary, so do the effects of perpetration on the individual. The role they play as perpetrator is one of many, and it is precisely in that multifaceted identity that they are "ordinary men."

Notes

1 While there is a well-established body of philosophical literature focused on the design, ontology, agency, and moral responsibility of group agents, we are focused in this chapter on perpetrators as individuals.
2 But massacres in Indonesia, Turkey, Russia, Kenya, India, and Mexico do point out that we cannot dismiss these events so easily and must take seriously the occurrence of violence in fledgling democracies or societies in transition.
3 For a selection of transcripts from Saddam Hussein's meetings, see http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/168/saddam-hussein-s-iraq/2 or http://crrc.dodlive.mil/collections/sh/
4 For a set of arguments on how genocides end, see http://howgenocidesend.ssrc.org (accessed May 7, 2017)
5 But there are examples of relatively high-ranking Nazis performing executions, like Theodor Eicke who executed Ernst Röhm.
6 *Untitled diary of Ratko Mladić*, 16 volumes (June 29, 1991–November 28, 1996), International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadzić, exhibits P01476-P01490.
7 See Kalyvas (2006) on what he calls "the sociology of denunciation."

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