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Social Scientific Inquiry Into Genocide and Mass Killing: From Unitary Outcome to Complex Processes

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Abstract

This article reviews social scientific research on the occurrence of genocide and mass killing, focusing on the underlying, contributing processes. Relevant studies are grouped by their primary analytic focus: (a) macro-level state and institutional processes, (b) political elites and policy decisions, (c) nonelite perpetrator motivation and participation, (d) social construction of victim group identity, and (e) local and regional variation within larger episodes. We also discuss issues relating to the conceptualization and definition of genocide, the utilization of different sources of data, methodological tendencies, and general analytic trends. Although recent studies show a promising move toward greater analytic disaggregation and engagement with various causal processes and outcomes at the meso and micro levels, genocide scholars must broaden their theoretical engagement with parallel fields of inquiry, continue to be creative in locating original data sources, and account for both positive and negative cases.

INTRODUCTION

Episodes of genocide and mass killing have been relatively rare but persistent throughout human history, with no signs of decline in the twenty-first century (Chalk & Jonassohn 1990, Harff 2003, Kiernan 2007). Such instances of mass violence are a major subject of historical research and include important case-specific studies (e.g., Bloxham 2005, Browning 1992, Gross 2001, Hilberg 1985, Kiernan 2002, Madley 2008, Robinson 2010), comparative studies (e.g., Kiernan 2007, Melson 1992, Naimark 2001, Weitz 2003), and edited volumes (e.g., Gellately & Kiernan 2003, Totten et al. 2004). However, the subject remained largely outside the boundaries of social scientific research until the late 1970s and has been slow to enter the mainstream. Indeed, several scholars of genocide have admonished their colleagues for failing to treat the subject as a specific phenomenon worthy of focused study (for critiques relevant to sociology's oversight, see Bauman 1989, Horowitz 1997; for criminology, see Hagan & Raymond-Richmond 2009; for anthropology, see Hinton 2002). Whatever the underlying reasons for this previous lack of engagement, a large and diverse body of social scientific inquiry into genocide and mass killing has accumulated over the past three decades. In this article, we review and assess this expanding body of social scientific research.

Given the range of literature in the social sciences that references genocide and mass killing, either theoretically or empirically, it is necessary to clarify the focus of our review. Some researchers have used episodes of genocide and mass killing as a backdrop for more general theoretical and substantive explorations (e.g., Einwohner 2003, Olick & Levy 1997). Such studies are undoubtedly important; however, a full accounting of this more peripheral genocide literature is beyond the scope of this review. Rather, we intend to evaluate Fein's (1993b) contention that genocide and mass killing should be situated within social science as a specific explanandum worthy of dedicated

analysis. Our review thus focuses upon studies that attempt to explain the occurrence, timing, or severity of genocide and mass killing, but with an emphasis on the processes that directly contribute to their occurrence. By social scientific inquiry we mean research that aspires to construct theoretical models of causal explanation, both deductive and inductive. Hence, our review will privilege studies that generate or test explicit hypotheses and that amass systematic and original data that bear on these hypotheses, while also including historical studies that provide evidence and hypotheses that help shed light on social scientific models.

Within our review, we note several analytic trends that we find promising for the continued advancement of inquiry into genocides and related mass violence. First, we argue that there is a promising recent movement in the literature away from explaining episodes of genocide and mass killing as holistic events and toward the disaggregation and explanation of different causal processes and mechanisms at various levels of analysis that play a role in constituting such episodes. Genocides are massively complex social phenomena that incorporate many moving parts at all levels of analysis. Analytic disaggregation of these varied components helps to account for this complexity. We also find promising studies that utilize original and detailed data sources, such as interviews, firsthand accounts, surveys, and primary historical records. The use of such data generally allows for more fine-grained analyses of causal processes than does reliance on secondary historical materials, which sometimes gloss over this complexity. This focus is particularly important because episodes of genocide and mass killing span a continuum of organization, from state-directed violence to collectively organized massacres and pogroms. Furthermore, distinct forms of collective victimization often coexist within larger episodes, such as the co-presence of state-directed mass murder and pogroms during the Holocaust (Gross 2001, Kopstein & Wittenberg 2011). Explanation of causal interrelations between these different

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forms of victimization is essential for continued theoretical advancement of this literature.

We must also make a brief proviso: In our review, we adopt an explicitly comparativist perspective on genocide and mass killing. By this, we mean that we conceptualize genocide not as a historically singular event, but rather as a more general type of social phenomenon that has occurred within various historical contexts and against various groups throughout human civilization (Chalk & Jonassohn 1990, Kiernan 2007). Although all episodes of genocide and mass killing are inevitably unique in many ways, they also incorporate more general social processes that are inherently comparable. Comparative analysis of how unique and contingent historical circumstances interact with more general social processes and mechanisms holds the promise of advancing general knowledge about why and how genocides occur (for relevant debates on uniqueness and comparability among genocides, see Rosenbaum 2009).

CONCEPTUAL, ANALYTIC, AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The scholarship of genocide studies has been marked by an endless quest for a consensual definition.¹ Treating genocides as holistic events, scholars often compare oranges with apples: The deaths due to famine in China may be treated as a genocide along with the wholesale slaughters in Rwanda. Although these diverse events share one common characteristic—large numbers of deaths—they may, in fact, result from very different social arrangements and processes. Hence, copious

writing is devoted to issues of definition. Legally, definition is required to identify genocide and to enable international intervention. Politically, to call a contemporary practice or situation a genocide is a rousing cry for mobilization, and to identify a historic event as a genocide may undercut the legitimacy of entire regimes. Accusations of genocide are also an important matter of identity and history for some ethnic and national groups.

Social scientific studies have proceeded without first achieving an overarching definition. Most studies marshal their own definitions and produce cases that match them. The logic behind this practice is not hard to discern: The social scientist (as opposed to, say, the jurist or the politician) is less interested in dispensing labels than in explaining how things happen and why. However, definition is critical for assembling a universe of cases for study as well as for achieving general analytic clarity. Our review cannot hope to resolve such important debates, but we believe that genocide and mass killing should be bounded as sustained killing of massive numbers of one or more noncombatant groups. Some issues, such as the identification of intent or the required number of deaths, are too complex to settle but should be treated as empirical questions to be answered. Nonetheless, we find certain elements necessary for any workable definition. First, killing must include all acts that directly bring about physical destruction, such as systematic violence and starvation. Second, victimization must follow directly from actions by perpetrators that are sustained over time (Fein 1993b, p. 24). Third, the group-based nature of killing is essential: Victims are killed primarily because of their real or purported membership in some collectivity. What is important is how victims are defined and bounded by perpetrators, not the specific content of their “groupness” (Chalk & Jonassohn 1990, p. 23). Normally, victims of genocide are defined by ethnic, religious, class, or national boundaries. For events in which large numbers of one or more noncombatant groups are killed but are not

¹Important areas of definitional debate include the advantages and shortcomings of the United Nations’ definition (particularly with regard to the victimization of political groups; see Fein 1993a, Harff & Gurr 1988), the distinction between genocide and various forms of ethnic cleansing (Lieberman 2010, Mann 2005), recognition of genocides of indigenous peoples (Madley 2008, Moses 2002, Smithers 2010), and the relationship between genocide and violence against civilians during war (Shaw 2003; Valentino 2004). Some even question the utility of genocide as an analytic concept (Gerlach 2010).

necessarily the target of elimination, we use “mass killings.” Victimized groups may include armed combatants or members of resistance groups, but victimization must also extend beyond such elements to noncombatants as well (Valentino 2004). While genocide and warfare often coexist, the two must remain analytically distinct.

When we consider most cases of genocide and mass killing at a broad level of analysis, we can readily note many similarities and differences between them. For instance, many episodes have occurred under the cover of war, both international (the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, Kurdish genocide in Iraq, Bosnia) and civil (Rwanda, Darfur), or directly after its resolution (Cambodia). However, other cases have occurred in objectively peaceful times, with the state attempting to create a war-like political environment to punish its alleged enemies (Stalin-era USSR, Mao-era China, Indonesia). Many cases occurred under totalitarian regimes of various sorts and utilized elaborated ideologies of ethnic, racial, or class difference and superiority (e.g., Holocaust, Stalin-era USSR, Cambodia). However, other cases have taken place in newly democratizing states (e.g., Bosnia, North American indigenous peoples; see discussion of Mann 2005 below), and in some cases perpetrators have had to manufacture victim group differences and boundaries, rather than rely on preexisting belief systems (e.g., Cambodia, Mao-era China, Stalin-era USSR; see Hinton 2005). The Nazi case is perhaps the prime example of a bureaucratically organized genocide, but other cases feature grassroots killings that occurred without a central command of the state (e.g., Su 2011). Inevitably, all cases of genocide have their own unique historical characteristics and contingencies that defy simple generalization.

Such broad similarities and differences present unique challenges for social scientists, who seek to identify common patterns and processes that work across multiple events. However, we find that this challenge has been met by a growing movement of scholarship away from broad and generalized analyses of geno-

cidal events toward analytic and theoretical engagement with variation in associated processes and mechanisms across many levels of analysis. In this review, we identify five areas of analytic focus regarding genocidal processes: (a) macro-level international, state, and institutional dynamics that affect entire societies; (b) policy decisions made by political elites; (c) issues of motivation and participation regarding nonelite perpetrators; (d) the construction of victim group boundaries; and (e) local and regional sources of variation within larger episodes. In presenting this framework, we acknowledge that many studies show considerable diversity in their analytic approaches and models that are difficult to summarize neatly. We therefore have organized studies by their primary causal statements or arguments for why genocides occur. Also, different analytic approaches are by no means mutually exclusive: Many studies combine two or more.

In reviewing the literature, we note the clustering of particular data sources within certain areas of inquiry. Data sources have importantly shaped scholarship on genocide and mass killing, scholarship that has been defined by a general difficulty in assembling reliable and systematic data. Early studies, particularly those at a macro level of analysis, often involved little original empirical research and broad levels of theoretical speculation, relying selectively upon secondary analyses by others. More recent studies, especially those focusing on local and regional variation (e.g., Fujii 2009, Hagan & Raymond-Richmond 2008, Su 2011) and perpetrator motivations (e.g., Hinton 2005, Klusemann 2010, Mann 2000), have dug deep to locate or generate original data, generating innovative analyses and important new findings. Some sources, such as interviews and surveys, may be limited to more recent episodes, whereas historical and archival sources have the potential to be strengthened by further efforts toward collection and analysis (e.g., Mann 2000). Because ideal original data on genocide and mass killing are often rare, flexibility, creativity, and analytical rigor are necessary for the continued advancement of scholarship.

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Notably, some areas of analytic focus are more densely populated than others, and also more theoretically diverse. By far the most theoretically diverse area is the study of perpetrators, which bridges broadly generalizable macro- and meso-level models of participation with innovative study of micro-level interactions. The most densely explored analytic areas are those that utilize macro-level explanatory frameworks; meso- and micro-level processes have received far less attention and are thus in need of further empirical study (see also Finkel & Straus 2012, Verdeja 2012b). In general, we find encouraging evidence that the social science of genocide and mass killing is moving from initial engagement with genocide as a holistic dependent variable toward considerable analytic disaggregation and engagement with a diversity of contributing dynamics, processes, and outcomes. But continued analytic disaggregation, as well as work that builds causal connections between different levels of analysis (e.g., Hagan & Raymond-Richmond 2008, 2009), will provide the strongest path forward for the field.

The important issue in the literature of bias toward explanation of positive cases can be addressed not only through increased attention to internal sources of variation within genocide events (Finkel & Straus 2012), but also through an assessment of the relationship between genocide and other forms of state and nonstate repression (Davenport 2007, Earl 2011), as well as violence and restraint at the meso and micro levels (Straus 2012). Toward this end, genocide studies would also benefit from closer theoretical integration with parallel fields such as political violence and contentious politics (Tilly 2003, Verdeja 2012a). Because of the numerous linkages between genocide and social movement mobilization (Owens & Snow 2013), assessing patterns of interaction between states, challengers, and bystanders would also help to explain both positive and negative outcomes in a variety of episodes.

In terms of general design, empirical research can be divided into variable-centered and process-centered studies. Variable-

centered approaches generally take the form of quantitative studies that use statistical methods to identify correlate associations between hypothesized explanatory factors and the incidence, timing, and severity of genocide and associated outcomes (e.g., Hagan & Raymond-Richmond 2008, Harff 2003). Process-centered approaches are generally qualitative and emphasize the radical contingency of genocidal events, constructing comparative models that note various turning points at which violent outcomes become more or less likely (e.g., Mann 2005, Midlarsky 2005). This methodological divide is notable in light of the fact that genocide and mass killing are generally conceptualized as dynamic products of interaction between multiple social factors. Both direct effects and contingent interaction patterns are analytically important. We thus find it surprising that few researchers have utilized recent advances in comparative configurational methods (Ragin 2008, Rihoux & Ragin 2009) to parse out the causal complexity of genocide and mass killing. Comparative configurational methods would allow researchers to identify the precise concatenations of forces that either encourage or inhibit genocidal outcomes, refining understanding of both variable- and process-oriented models (Owens 2012). Mixed methods strategies, such as those leveraged by Straus (2006) and Su (2011), also hold considerable promise in untangling this complexity.

MACRO-INSTITUTIONAL STUDIES

Much of the early theoretical engagement with genocide and mass killing in the social sciences tended to explain genocide and mass killing as holistic outcomes that occurred at the level of an entire society or state (Fein 1993b). Analytic strategies were largely speculative and involved identification of common ideological, structural, and cultural characteristics of societies and the construction of typologies based on characteristics and motives.

Many early works focused on particular types of regimes or societies as creating the



necessary structural or political preconditions for genocide to occur. Perhaps the foremost example of such an approach is Arendt's (1958) influential study of totalitarianism, which argued that genocide was structurally concomitant with the external expansion and internal consolidation of the totalitarian state. Although more recent studies have shown that totalitarianism is not a necessary condition for genocide to occur, the general notion that genocide and mass killing are more likely to occur in extremely repressive, autocratic, or divided societies has remained a popular and persuasive thesis. Kuper (1981, 1985), for example, identifies genocide as being the result of "plural societies" created primarily through political legacies of decolonization, arguing that plural societies create the "structural basis" for genocide because they often institutionalize power in the hands of one group at the expense of another, creating sharply opposed political identities (see also Hovannisian 1994, Mamdani 2001). Horowitz (1997, p. 21) similarly indicts the state and constructs a typology of repressive state systems. "Genocidal societies" are those in which "the state arbitrarily" and systematically "takes the lives of citizens for deviant or dissident behavior," and stand in contrast to "tolerant" and "permissive" societies, where norms and practices can be openly questioned and debated (Horowitz 1997, pp. 152–53). Rummel (1994) closely echoes Horowitz by causally linking authoritarian and totalitarian regimes with state-sponsored mass murder, which he terms "democide." Harff & Gurr (1988) conduct an important synthesis of this early research and produce a typology of genocides defined by state motive: "Hegemonial" genocides are those perpetrated by states to force groups to submit to central authority, whereas "xenophobic" genocides are committed "in the service of doctrines of national protection or social purification" (Harff & Gurr 1988, p. 363). Other more recent studies identify the communist state or regime as perhaps the most structurally predisposed toward genocide and mass killing, owing either to the magnitude, speed, and scope of their revolutionary goals (Valentino 2004) or

to perceived factionalism and dissent that tend to be framed as categorical betrayals of an organic concept of the nation (Mann 2005).

Quantitative studies that explicitly test these state-level hypotheses using cross-national data are relatively rare, but those that exist have found strong support for the contention that genocide and mass killing are importantly linked with social upheaval and warfare, autocratic regimes, preexisting social divisions, extremist ideology, and state economic marginalization (Fein 1993a, Harff 2003, Krain 1997; see also Melson 1992). Importantly, Harff (2003) also uses her findings to assess risks of future genocides in 11 countries that exhibit high levels of identified risk factors. However, the strong association of such factors with genocide and mass killing does little to unravel the complex processes through which these factors interact and combine to produce genocide and genocidal policies within different state trajectories. Better prediction of future episodes at the international level will require both process- and variable-centered methods of study, as well as use of innovative new methods that bridge these analytic divides.

More recent comparative studies that utilize developmental approaches problematize the linkage between divided or autocratic societies and genocide by demonstrating that such events can occur along multiple trajectories of state development and response to unforeseen crises. A particularly powerful rejoinder to the "democratic peace" theory of genocide has been advanced by Mann (2005). In a sweeping historical synthesis, Mann presents a step-by-step model showing that genocide, defined as "murderous ethnic cleansing," has occurred in a wide variety of societies, including newly democratic states, and emerges out of competing ethnic claims to sovereignty. In both democratic and autocratic societies, genocide emerges out of a contingent escalation and radicalization process (see also Browning 2004). Similarly, Levene (2005) argues that genocide, rather than being an aberrance of modern social and political development, is tightly connected with the rise of the nation-state as a

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normative form of political organization, which creates the danger of equating full rights and recognition with a particular nation (see also Wimmer 2002). Attention to how genocide and mass killing can occur through diverse and contingent trajectories of state development has important ramifications for the state-level literature, directing attention away from simplistic equations between genocide and repressive or divided societies and toward diverse processes of power, ideology, and political development. It is inevitable, however, that these macro-level models generally explain some events better than others and would benefit from further hypothesis testing within specific cases.

Viewing genocide and mass killing as primarily a crime of state means that intentions, or at least responsibility, are critical. Who then are the bearers of genocidal intentions or responsible agents? Social science has addressed this question in two directions: the study of political elites and that of nonelite perpetrators. We turn first to the social science scholarship on political elites.

POLITICAL ELITES AND GENOCIDAL POLICY

Although closely related to the state-level literature, the political elite scholarship focuses specifically on explaining genocidal policies as outcomes and the decision-making processes through which elites arrive at such policies. The study of political elites thus forms an analytic bridge between the study of state-level dynamics and that of nonelite perpetrators, with genocide and mass killing viewed as direct outcomes of strategic decisions.

Fein (1979, p. 8) defines genocide as “a rational function of the choice by a ruling elite of a myth or ‘political formula’...legitimizing the existence of the state as the vehicle for the destiny of the dominant group.” Such political formulas necessitate the exclusion of victim groups from the “moral universe of obligation,” arise in response to elite experiences of loss and defeat, and help to justify future efforts toward expansion and domination. Fein’s model is in-

ductive, based upon her study of the Holocaust in Europe. More recent elite studies generally adopt a cross-national comparative and inductive approach. Valentino (2004) argues explicitly against the importance of contextual factors from the state-level literature, such as regime type or preexisting divisions. Rather, “mass killing is most accurately viewed as an instrumental policy...designed to accomplish leaders’ most important ideological or political objectives” (Valentino 2004, p. 3). Valentino differentiates between “dispossessive” killings, which aim to strip people of their belongings and way of life, and “coercive” killings, which are intended to defeat opponents in armed conflict by targeting the civilian populations suspected of giving them support. Midlarsky (2005) argues that genocide depends specifically on elite experiences of loss: Such experiences make states more likely to take risks to preserve their own power. Experiences of loss, when combined with the use of *realpolitik* (the exemption of state interests from outside political norms), can lead to the danger of genocidal policy through the application of “imprudent *realpolitik*.” Gagnon (2004) utilizes the most indirect strategic theory of genocide, providing evidence against the notion that violence in Serbia and Croatia during the 1990s was motivated primarily by deep-seated ethnic hatred. Rather, Gagnon argues, elites strategically deployed frames of ethnic antagonism to demobilize domestic political opponents and redefine political space, such that it became primarily organized around ethnically based grievances.

Perhaps the central finding that unites this cluster of the literature is that the real or attempted elimination of a collectivity is rarely an explicit policy goal in and of itself. Rather, it emerges more often as an indirect outcome of other strategic goals that state leaders seek to accomplish. However, as Straus (2012) notes, better comparative models are needed to explain why elites choose genocidal policies in some situations but restrain themselves in others (see also Chirot & McCauley 2006, pp. 95–115). Also, some elite studies treat

issues of nonelite participation as relatively unimportant (Valentino 2004) and view genocide and mass killing as emerging directly from policy. We find such arguments to be questionable, especially in light of important new findings on variation in how state policies are enacted at the local level. Furthermore, the inductive nature of the above studies points to the importance of operationalizing scholarly models so that hypotheses regarding elite decisions can be tested more explicitly.

BECOMING PERPETRATORS

Research on perpetrators of genocide and mass killing dates back to post-World War II debates on the motives and behavior of Nazi killers. Key questions first raised in those debates have been highly influential in later scholarship. Perpetrator studies focus on how individuals become involved in the killing process, the very core of genocidal events. In this section, we review theorization surrounding several major research themes and their use within important empirical studies.

One major theme is the ordinariness of perpetrators. A prevalent notion in the postwar reflections on Nazi perpetrators, especially the leaders, was that their participation primarily resulted from psychological pathologies (e.g., Adorno 1950). Against this backdrop, other works sought to demonstrate that some participants were relatively ordinary people compelled to become perpetrators through various social norms and group pressures (e.g., Arendt 1976, Browning 1992, Lifton 1986). The same ordinariness of perpetrators is confirmed in more recent accounts (e.g., Gourevitch 1998, Yi 1993). This theme has also found support from influential experiments on authority and group pressures by social psychologists (Asch 2004, Haney et al. 1973, Milgram 1974). Many have interpreted the results of these experiments, which demonstrate the power of situational influences over human behavior (see also Ross & Nisbett 1991), as showing how ordinary people might become genocidal perpetrators. Hinton's (2005) field

research in Cambodia shows that ordinary people are also more susceptible to recruitment into participation when elites manipulate and exploit existing cultural beliefs and practices.

Although this theme finds considerable empirical support, it has also been challenged by works pointing to the social and political standings of perpetrators. Some individuals may have been subject to greater exposure to violent motivations by virtue of being government officials and party activists (Mann 2000, Yi 1993). In addition, although some killers are ordinary, others are social outcasts or hardened killers—what Tilly (2003) refers to as “violence experts” (see also Su 2011, pp. 1–2; Valentino 2004, pp. 39–60).

Explicit tests of the “ordinary men” hypothesis are rare but important. Brustein (1996) represents one such study based on the systematic collection and analysis of 40,000 Nazi membership files. Although not directly focused on perpetrators, his research question is germane: Why did ordinary people join the Nazi Party between 1925 and 1932. Brustein finds that the millions of supporters did so in large measure for their own material self-interest, as they saw that the party offered sensible economic policies. He also finds that the backbone of Nazi membership prior to 1933 was drawn from widely divergent class backgrounds. Overall, the analysis highlights economic reasons for recruitment, a counterpoint to previous Nazi studies that emphasize irrational appeals, lower-middle-class reaction, or political confessionism (Brustein 1996, pp. 2–8). In another ambitious project, Mann (2000) surveys the biographies of 1,581 men and women involved in the Nazi genocide. He finds that these perpetrators resemble “Real Nazis” more than they do “Ordinary Germans.” The majority were long-term Nazis, and close to a third had been prewar extremists. That is, the perpetrators came disproportionately from “core Nazi constituencies.” The more committed Nazis were of higher rank and longer experience—bringing the pressures of hierarchy and comradeship to bear on newer recruits. Although previous scholars have shown how the Nazi

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movement was radicalized into genocide, biographies of its participants illustrate the social processes, institutional cultures, and power relations involved.

Other influential works locate the source of participation in hierarchical and bureaucratic structures of obedience (e.g., Arendt 1976, Bauman 1989, Hilberg 1985). Seen in this light, participation is a product of formal institutional incentives, official authorization of killing, and the banal routinization of action within hierarchical institutions. Specifically, official authorization channels responsibility away from the individual and toward abstract social structures, whereas official routinization habituates perpetrators toward violent action (Browning 1992, Kelman & Hamilton 1989, Waller 2007).

Though important, exclusive analytic focus on situational pressure and obedience risks ignoring factors of individual conviction and initiative. Scholars such as Mann (2000) focus squarely on perpetrator ideology and personal initiatives (see also Chirot & McCauley 2006, Goldhagen 1996). Some studies focus on how variation in participation is contingent on opportunities presented by local political leaders (Straus 2006, Su 2011). Bringing extensive fieldwork to bear on the specific role of social pressures and obedience, Fujii (2008, 2009) explores the specific role of interpersonal networks and pressures on participation in the Rwandan genocide. She finds that that social ties and immediate social context help to explain contradictory patterns of behavior among individual perpetrators (see also Campbell 2010), who sometimes killed when local government leaders were present but other times saved their friends from possible victimization when leaders were absent. Other studies have noted that exclusive focus on bureaucratic and state institutions risks overlooking the collective elements of some genocides and mass killing. Reviewing these and other similar accounts, Su (2011) concluded that obedience in bureaucratic machinery is a very poor fit in explaining most of the genocide and mass killing events in history, perhaps save the Holocaust, and emphasizes the importance of

local conditions. In a highly innovative study, Klusemann (2010) presents an analysis of video recordings showing micro-situational events that preceded the 1995 Srebrenica massacre. The article focuses on the sequential unfolding of micro interactions and the achievement of emotional dominance by perpetrators over victims. Micro interactions constitute important situational turning points toward, or away from, atrocities. They reveal the emotional developments that transformed individuals into perpetrators, particularly emotions regarding the nature of the target (as weak), and the sense of dominance of the Serbians' own group (Klusemann 2010, pp. 280–84). Further focus on micro-level interactions between perpetrators and victims, particularly with regard to emotional dynamics of violence (Collins 2008), are a potentially fruitful new direction in the empirical study of genocidal participation.

Processes of perpetrator motivation and participation are closely intertwined with the construction of victim group identities and boundaries. Simply put, in order for mass violence and victimization to become possible, participants minimally require a “them” that is counterposed to an “us” (see also Shibutani 1973). We thus turn to studies that focus on processes associated with the construction and avowal of victim group boundaries.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF VICTIMS

Beginning with Kuper's (1981) concept of “plural society,” several theorists have focused on group dynamics and ethnic antagonism in accounting for the outbreak of genocide (e.g., Fein 1993a, Horowitz 1997). However, this focus is confronted with two seemingly contradictory observations. On the one hand, genocide and mass killing are often rooted in preexisting group divisions and antagonism; on the other hand, genocide is rare despite the ubiquity of group divisions in human society. As Valentino (2004, p. 17) argues, “preexisting social cleavages are neither sufficient nor universally necessary conditions for mass

“killing” (see also Fearon & Laitin 2003). Over time, scholars have moved from an early focus on existing group divisions to social processes involved in the construction of victim groups. Analytic importance lies in how potential victims are collectively categorized into a monolithic group by perpetrators, rendering individual-level differences irrelevant (Chalk & Jonassohn 1990, Straus 2006). A primary area of emphasis is the state’s role in rendering a pre-existing social division as salient. In cases such as the Holocaust and Rwanda, state action is critical in converting preexisting belief in group differences or dominance into murderous practice (Fujii 2004, Hilberg 1985). In other cases, difference may be manufactured using ideological or cultural models, such as revolutionary Communist belief in class enemies (Hinton 2005, Su 2011). Victimhood may also arise from strategic considerations, such as the elimination of civilian support for insurgents (Valentino 2004, pp. 81–84). Social crises are generally the necessary condition for such boundary reactivation or transformation to occur, whereby real or imagined collectivities become linked with emergent social problems. After other attempts to alleviate crises fail, a final solution may emerge (Mann 2005, Valentino 2004).

Empirical studies have demonstrated how state-level boundary constructions become actionable as collective scripts or frames that are disseminated to nonelite perpetrators through various media channels (Fujii 2004, Oberschall 2000). Other studies question the dissemination of violence through media, such as radio, by pointing out the importance of local contexts in how media messages are negotiated (Straus 2007). In addition, more recent studies focus on how such boundary constructions translate into collective action in local contexts, and they find that various initiatives by local actors, collective framing processes, and contextual effects have important influence on how victim group boundaries are perceived (see next section). The construction of victim group boundaries by the state is generally essential as an authorizing force (Kelman & Hamilton 1989, Waller 2007), but

it does not guarantee that such constructions will be received equally in different locales.

In redefining existing victim group boundaries, many theorists focus on the necessity of the dehumanization of victims: redefining a group as worthless or subhuman, and thus outside of the “moral universe of obligation” (Chalk & Jonassohn 1990; Fein 1979, 1993b; Waller 2007). However, exclusive focus on dehumanization sometimes glosses over other important aspects of victim identity construction. Goldhagen (2009, pp. 319–28) importantly distinguishes between dehumanization, in which the victim is often seen as feeble and subhuman, and demonization, in which victims are perceived as dangerous and an imminent threat to society. Lang (2010) also contends that exclusive focus on dehumanization masks the potential importance of the humanity of victims, demonstrating the perpetrator’s power over another human being. These insights suggest the importance of further empirical research on the complex and multivalent processes of victim group identity construction and their effects on meso- and micro-level dynamics of participation.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN GENOCIDAL PROCESSES

The most recent and promising analytic trend in the study of genocide and mass killing is the emergence of a comparative perspective dedicated primarily to explaining variable patterns of genocide across various subnational contexts. Despite the numerous important insights of previous studies, they tend to be analytically ill-equipped to explain internal sources of variation within a particular episode. The literature on local and regional variation addresses itself to historical questions of the relation between larger state-level processes and emergent local and situational factors, and generally focuses on collective, meso-level aspects of genocide. Such variation is analytically important because, as Bartov (2003, p. 86) notes, “we cannot understand certain central aspects of modern

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genocide without closely examining the local circumstances in which it occurs” (see also King 2004, Tilly 2003). Because of the diversity of data sources brought to bear, these studies also provide a more detailed under-the-hood view of how specific genocides unfold. By and large these studies focus on more recent episodes of genocide, such as Darfur and Rwanda.

Straus (2006) leverages field interviews and survey data to compare patterns of collective mobilization across different regions of Rwanda. Although macro-level factors such as war, political upheaval, and collective categorization of victims were important factors, killing was facilitated at the local level through social pressure and opportunity. Areas where local leaders adopted extremist goals created opportunities for individuals to gain power and prestige in an emergent social order through violent participation. In contrast, where extremist leaders did not gain power, opportunities for violence remained relatively low. Fujii (2008, 2009) also utilizes fieldwork conducted in two rural Rwandan communities and focuses on neighborhood-level variation in participation. Although genocidal participation relies on the diffusion of a state-sponsored “script” for violence (Fujii 2004), local ties and contexts mediate its adoption by perpetrators. Specifically, local leaders of violence exploited family connections and group pressures to mobilize participation. But when leaders were out of sight, some Hutu participants were able to use preexisting ties of friendship with Tutsi neighbors and save them from violence.

In the case of Darfur, Hagan & Rymond-Richmond (2008, 2009) utilize “unprecedented” survey data collected by the US State Department. Focusing on correlate association between mass killing and collective framing processes, they find that in some areas local militia leaders acted as “ethnopolitical entrepreneurs” by using dehumanizing racial frames of “black” Darfurians as inherently servile and inferior [e.g., “You donkey, you slave; we must get rid of you” (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond 2008, p. 882)]. These dehumanizing frames, when manifested as

racial epithets shouted during militia and army attacks, aggregated individual violent intent into collective genocidal intent and produced more severe levels of victimization than in areas where they were not invoked. The frames reflected state-level Arab supremacist ideology and are an example of how macro-level phenomena may have important impacts at the meso and micro levels.

Other studies use historical data and focus on episodes of community-level, collective mass killing. Kopstein & Wittenberg (2011) utilize polling data from interwar Poland to explain the variable occurrence of anti-Jewish pogroms in different communities. Focusing on group polarization, they find that areas that possessed stronger Jewish support for minority political parties that advocated for cultural autonomy created collective perceptions of Jews as outside the community of nation-state solidarity, making pogroms more likely to occur. This demonstrates that war and social upheaval provide contexts in which preexisting group antagonisms, nurtured through a lack of interethnic civic engagement, can manifest into mass violence. In the case of China during the Cultural Revolution, Su (2011) utilizes interviews, local newspapers, and internal government documents to analyze collective mass killings in rural areas. Like Kopstein & Wittenberg, Su employs a community-level model and demonstrates that greater isolation from the central state made collective killings more likely. In such areas, local leaders initiated collective killings through their appropriation of a state-sponsored frame of war against class enemies. Similar to Straus (2006), Su finds this appropriation was motivated by the opportunities presented by an emergent and violent social order. Violence was thus a product of the breakdown of state control over rural areas and emerged as an indirect outcome of central state policy.

The findings of this literature point out important shortcomings in other analytic areas. For instance, several studies critically examine processes that occur between elite genocidal policy and its enactment by local actors, showing how local leaders may take their own

initiatives that affect collective participation (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond 2008, Straus 2006, Su 2011). In the latter two studies mentioned above, mass killings were a collective outcome. Although genocide and mass killing are generally considered a “crime of state” (Fein 1993b), this literature demonstrates that they may occur along a continuum of organization, from highly bureaucratized state-directed killings to collectively organized massacres and pogroms, with such varieties of participation often coexisting within single episodes. Whether state-directed or not, analytic emphasis on the collective and local aspects of genocide and mass killing shows that such events do not arise mechanistically from macro-level forces but are mediated by various collective processes. State-level forces matter, but their effects are not isomorphic across different contexts.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR INQUIRY

The development of social scientific inquiry into genocide and mass killing over the past 30 years shows considerable promise. Scholars have moved from an initial macro-level engagement with genocide and mass killing as holistic events, speculating on which states and societies might be more genocidal than others, to a broad and diverse analytic engagement with various processes and outcomes at the macro, meso, and micro levels. The use of new and original data sources has supported this growing diversity. Importantly, scholars have also begun to explore local and regional variability that occurs within larger episodes of genocide, helping to develop a truly collective action-oriented perspective on genocide and mass killing. Notably, these developments caution against lumping together a diverse set of cases—such as Bosnia, Cambodia, Darfur, and Rwanda—and treating them as though they were a single phenomenon. This is not because case comparisons are inappropriate but because they must be conducted in terms of the multifaceted processes and mechanism discussed herein. How, for example, do they compare

with respect to the role played by political elites, or by the construction and identification of victims, or in terms of local and regional variations in the timing and scope of killings?

There are other important challenges as well. The most formidable obstacle for scientific inquiry continues to be the paucity of up-close data on genocide and mass killing events. Most studies to date rely on event narratives compiled by historians, and many studies focus repeatedly on better-known cases. The new approach of documenting regional variations has opened up innovative new means of processing historical data, and we would expect a new generation of studies to follow.

Scholarly focus on the meso and micro levels of genocide has drawn attention to important oversights in macro-level research, especially regarding the collective nature of genocidal participation, but such studies will eventually need to reintegrate with the study of state-level dynamics and processes. This is especially important if scholars are to address causal linkages between genocidal processes at different levels of analysis, such as coexistence of collective and state-directed killings. While analytic disaggregation of genocide has proved extremely helpful, a corresponding reintegration may also be equally helpful.

Another sticking point concerns overreliance on ideology as an explanatory factor (e.g., Goldhagen 1996, Weitz 2003) for motivation and participation and corresponding insufficient attention to the role of collective meaning work through associated framing processes. The motivating power of political belief systems such as Nazism should not be underestimated, but neither should they be treated as entirely static, coherent, and durable over time (e.g., Bloxham 2005). Ideologies may hold different levels of salience and scope for different actors and contexts and must also be negotiated in light of unforeseen and contingent events. In contrast to ideologies, framing processes direct attention to the ways in which ideological elements are understood, negotiated, and transformed by individual and collective agents (Benford & Snow 2000, p. 613 fn. 2; Snow &

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Benford 1988). Framing and ideology work together: Contingent events are often rendered meaningful using existing ideological building blocks. Furthermore, framing directs important attention to the ways in which official ideologies are invoked by local actors across different subnational contexts (Hagan & Raymond-Richmond 2008, Straus 2006, Su 2011).

More generally, the field of genocide studies would benefit from closer integration with the study of repression, political violence, and contentious politics. Rather than drawing from the insights of these parallel fields, genocide studies has developed in relative theoretical

isolation. As a corrective to this tendency, we suggest that genocide and mass killing might be more usefully conceptualized as an extreme form of political claims-making that exists within a broader “repertoire of contention” and is available to both states and collective challengers (Tilly 2003). Assessing patterns of interaction between states, challengers, and bystanders relative to the use of genocide and other forms of state and nonstate repression, as well as the relationship between genocide and various types of social movements, will provide greater theoretical insight to an already burgeoning field of study.

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