

### Structural and psychological perspectives on the perpetrator of genocide

Marin, Roxana

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

**Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:**

Marin, R. (2012). Structural and psychological perspectives on the perpetrator of genocide. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 12(2), 235-258. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-445686>

**Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>

**Terms of use:**

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

# Structural and Psychological Perspectives on the Perpetrator of Genocide

ROXANA MARIN

"Any broad historical examination of the phenomenon of genocide cannot fruitfully proceed without engagement with issues of collective human psychopathology."

MARK LEVENE<sup>1</sup>

"Understanding genocide requires probing the minds of those who commit it, and those who seek to prevent or limit it."

ADAM JONES<sup>2</sup>

There is a statutory contention that violence and killing is some sort of irreducible mark of the human being, an inseparable trait encrypted within the human nature. Interhumane violence is a biblical manifestation, Elie Wiesel would sententiously argue about one of the introductory scenes of the Bible whose protagonists are brothers Cain and Abel: "Two men [and] one of them became a killer"<sup>3</sup>. From the slaughter of Abel to mass killings the Holy Book of Judeo-Christian tradition counts only several pages. Inspiringly, Chirot would cite from it, when illustrating the episode of the extermination of the Midianites by the Israelites led by Moses:

"[The Lord said:] 'Avenge the people of Israel on the Midianites [...]. And Moses said to the people, 'Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian, to execute the Lord's vengeance [...]. They warred against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and slew every male [...]. And the people of Israel took captive the women of Midian and their little ones; and they took as booty all their cattle, their flocks, and all their goods. All their cities [...] they burned with fire [...] And Moses was angry with the officers of the army [...] [He] said to them, 'Have you let all the women live? Behold, these caused the people of Israel, by the counsel of Balaam, to act treacherously against the Lord in the matter of Pe'or, and so the plague came to the congregations of the Lord. Now, therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves'"<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark LEVENE, *The Meaning of Genocide, Volume 1: Genocide in the Age of the Nation State*, I.B. Tauris, London & New York, 2005, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Adam JONES, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 383.

<sup>3</sup> Elie WIESEL *apud* Lance MORROW, "Evil", *Time Magazine*, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1991, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Numbers 31:3 *apud* Daniel CHIROT, Clark McCAULEY, *Why Not Kill Them All. The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (New Jersey) & Oxford (UK), 2006, pp. 29-30 [adds in original].

Nevertheless, among countless irrefutable proofs that violence is historically part of the human nature, *homo violens*<sup>1</sup> reached his climax only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – a veritable “Age of Genocide”<sup>2</sup> –, along with what Bauman and Arendt referred to differently as some sort of alienation of the modern life, a bureaucratic *dementia* and the development of a killing-designed technology. The statistics, exposing the abnormal magnitude of killings perpetuated during modern history, display a picture of aberration and terrifying human disaster:

“Wars erupt naturally everywhere humans are present. Since the Napoleonic Wars, we have fought an average of six international wars and six civil wars per decade. The four decades after the end of World War II saw 150 wars and only 26 days of world peace – and that does not even include the innumerable internal wars and police actions. Buried in the midst of all of our progress in the twentieth century are well over a hundred million persons who met a violent death at the hands of their fellow human beings. That is over five times the number from the nineteenth century and more than ten times the number from the eighteenth century”<sup>3</sup>.

Waller further insists that the debut of total wars, those 20<sup>th</sup> century world conflagrations to be waged regardless of the *medium* and against whatever population each of this *medium* contained, either military or civilian population, marked the coming of some “inhumanity age” in human history:

“The persistence of inhumanity in human affairs is incontrovertible. The greatest catastrophes occur when the distinctions between war and crime fade; when there is dissolution of the boundary between military and criminal conduct, between civility and barbarity; when political and social groups embrace mass killing and genocide as warfare [...] As collectives, engaged in acts of extraordinary evil, with apparent moral calm and intensity of supposed purpose, which could only be described as insane were they committed by an individual”<sup>4</sup>.

While the collocation “war crime” is peculiar indeed to the murderous atmosphere of the last century, as a new form of perpetrating mass killings, it

---

<sup>1</sup> Roger DADOUN, *La violence: essai sur l' 'homo violens'*, Hatier, Paris, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “age of genocide” attributed to the past century is found in Roger W. SMITH, “Human Destructiveness and Politics: The Twentieth Century as an Age of Genocide”, in Isidor WALLIMANN, Michael N. DOBKOWSKI (eds.), *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse (New York), 2000, pp. 21-40/p. 21 (initially published in 1987, by Greenwood Press, Westport (Connecticut)).

<sup>3</sup> James WALLER, “Perpetrators of Genocide: An Explanatory Model of Extraordinary Human Evil”, in IDEM, *Children of Cain: How Ordinary People Commit Extraordinary Evil*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001, p. 5 [italics in original]. Waller draws, in the construction of this appalling statistics, from Arthur H. WESTING, “Research Communication: War as a Human Endeavour: The High-Fatality Wars of the Twentieth Century”, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 19, no. 3, September 1982, pp. 261-270, and William ECKHARDT, “War-Related Deaths Since 3000 B.C.”, *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, vol. 22, no. 4, December 1991, pp. 437-443.

<sup>4</sup> James WALLER, “Perpetrators of Genocide...cit.”, p. 6.

seems yet unadvisable to treat the diverse species of "mass political murder"<sup>1</sup> as "inhuman": since these recurrent species were perpetrated by man alone and appear dissimilar to any other version of killing developed within the vast animal *regna*, it is a simple matter of semantic confusion the perspective on genocide and other related mass political murders as "inhuman". They are all but "inhuman". It might be argued that mass political killing is a facet of human speciesism, by no means inhuman. If one endeavors in understanding such occurrences, one of the preliminary steps is particularly to refute their alleged "inhuman" nature. Otherwise, understanding becomes inaccessible to the human mind, as long as it appears as inhuman, unconceivable and unimaginable. Since "people are the weapons by which genocide occurs"<sup>2</sup>, a discussion on perpetrators of massive violent occurrences in recent history is instrumental in devising a partial, lacunary explanatory scheme for generic mass criminal violence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sociological, economic, political, cultural-anthropological, but most frequently psychological accounts on the *status* of perpetrator filled tomes of literature; the central question remained the one linked to the motivations and reasoning behind the abject actions of both leadership and ordinary individuals: how come people commit such reprehensible acts against their fellow citizens? Regardless of the extension of the scientific work, the large majority of the studies on the motivational background of genocidal perpetrator is based on presuppositions, ideal types, assumptions, since, as Benjamin Valentino has aptly pointed out:

"[U]nfortunately, direct evidence of the personal beliefs and motives of such persons is exceedingly rare. Perpetrators seldom record their inner thoughts and feelings about their deeds. Outside observers are rarely in a position to provide personal information of this kind. Moreover, the few existing accounts from perpetrators are of questionable reliability, since perpetrators usually have strong incentives to diminish their personal responsibility for any atrocities and portray their actions in the best possible light"<sup>3</sup>.

The large majority of this vast and comprehensive *compendium* tends to distinguish perpetrators based on a three-layered classification, sometimes associated with a subsequent gradation of responsibility: (a) the leadership or the "higher echelons", responsible for the design of the entire mechanism behind the killings (from sporadic, sometimes inconsistent ideology to fully-fledged policy), the bearers of "big decisions" in the terrible process of mass murder; (b) the bureaucrats, the "middle echelons", the representatives of Arendt's "banality of evil", usually "faceless" and "anonymous", the

---

<sup>1</sup> "Mass political murder" is an umbrella term employed by Daniel CHIROT and Clark McCauley, *Why Not Kill Them All...cit.*, p. 12: "extreme examples of attempts by a politically dominant group, typically claiming to represent a majority of the people in a given political entity, to get rid of specific ethnic or racial groups viewed as enemies".

<sup>2</sup> James WALLER, "Perpetrators of Genocide...cit.", p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin A. VALENTINO, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (New York) & London, 2004, p. 39. Valentino distinguishes between two processes transforming individuals into perpetrators: (1) "the concerted recruitment or self-selection of sadistic or fanatic individuals into the organizations responsible for mass killing", and (2) "situational pressures [...] to induce otherwise ordinary human being to participate in acts of extreme violence".

simple followers of orders coming from the top of the infamous hierarchy, and (c) the ordinary men, the "lower/lowest echelons" involved in the practical implementation of orders, the killers *per se*, more frequently outside the military structures – therefore, not soldiers, trained and licensed to kill during wartime. While often high-ranked killers are difficult to be spotted – because often a written and clear order is missing –, the ordinary killers are easier to spot, though collective guilt is more often than not the fashion in which they are dealt with: the "structural (system) criminality"<sup>1</sup>. Historian Tim Mason fundamentally discriminates between two conceptions – later to become traditions – on the allegedly paradigmatic case of the Holocaust, two schools of thought that might be extended to the entire corollary of violent ethnic cleansing and genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: (1) "intentionalists" and (2) "functionalists"<sup>2</sup>. The scholarly scientific divide is clearly distinguishable: the "intentionalist" camp contends that, for the specific case of the Holocaust, one can identify a clear, direct and comprehensive association between a mobilizing and energizing ideology and careful planning at the top, accompanied by subsequent policy-making. In this construction, the central role is occupied by the chief perpetrator, the *Fuehrer*, who emanates both ideological debilitations and decision-making, acting as a coherent glue for the two. As expected, the functionalist stance is antagonistic, arguing that a serious, overreaching connection between ideology as a basis for genocide and policy as an implementation of the said cannot actually be established and accounted for. Friedländer explains the complexities put forward by the functionalists within the logic of the genocide:

"It holds that decisions are functionally linked to each other and to a given state of the political context, that through the constant interaction of various semi-autonomous agencies the role of the supreme decision-maker may sometimes be quite limited, and that his decisions often take on the aspect of planned policy only from the vantage of hindsight"<sup>3</sup>.

The mechanisms espoused by the functionalist perspective seem to coincide with the multi-layered decision-making scheme devised in the case of most recent genocides. From this standpoint, the most significant aspect that suffers serious

---

<sup>1</sup> Alette SMEULERS, "Punishing the Enemies of All Mankind. Review Essay to Mark A. DRUMBL, *Atrocity, Punishment, and International Law*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007", *Leiden Journal of International Law*, vol. 21, no. 4, December 2008, pp. 971-993.

<sup>2</sup> A first distinction is made by Saul FRIEDLÄNDER, "De l'Antisémitisme à l'Extermination. Esquisse historiographique", *Le Débat*, vol. 21, no. 4, September 1982, pp. 131-150 (later to be included as "De l'Antisémitisme à l'Extermination. Esquisse historiographique et essai d'interprétation", in François FURET (ed.), *L'Allemagne nazie et le génocide juif*, EHESS-Gallimard-Le Seuil, Paris, 1985, pp. 13-38, translated in English in 1989, by Schocken Books in New York, as *Unanswered Questions*). Friedländer differentiates between "those historians who stress the continuity of Nazi policies" [*i.e.* the "intentionalists"] and "those who place the accent on their discontinuous character" [*i.e.* the "functionalists"]. However, Mason is the historian to consecrate the "intentionalist" – "functionalist" distinction (Tim MASON, "Intention And Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National-Socialism", in Gerhard HIRSCHFELD, Lothar KETTENACKER (eds.), *Der Fuehrerstaat, Mythos und Realität. Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart, 1981, pp. 23-41).

<sup>3</sup> Saul FRIEDLÄNDER, "From Anti-Semitism to Extermination: A Historiographical Study of Nazi Policies Toward the Jews and an Essay in Interpretation", *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 16, 1984, pp. 1-50/p. 17.

transformations in interpretation is the planned character of those attempts to exterminate or annihilate a certain minority group: in Rwanda, though the planned nature seemed obvious from the prior issuance of lists with Tutsi houses by the state officials, the local initiative and the overwhelming popular contribution to the killings are illustrative in contending that decision-making was by no means a top-down practice. In the Balkans, the tradition of a strong statism might lead to the conclusion that an intentionalist explanation proves its instrumentality in the case of the Sarajevo siege and Srebrenica. Nevertheless, one should not exclusively associate the validity of an intentionalist stance with genocides occurring during wartime: the complicated puzzle of the genocide in Bassarabia, Bukovina and Transnistria perpetrated against the Jewish population during the Second World War appears as a mixture of both intentionalist and functionalist interpretations. Though orders from the high military echelons did exist, the initiative and the innovation in conducting genocidal acts were left in the hands of the lower ranks. The same holds true for the local violence unleashed within the communities, until then fairly peaceful, comprising significant proportions of the targeted group.

Therefore, an inquiry into the motivational *stimuli* of the genocide perpetrators ought to shed some light on the representations of the "Other". Regardless of the fashion in which the killer unleashes his anger or frustration, in which the aggression is carried on, the motivations are channeled and oriented against an opposable group, a human collectivity that bears distinctive features, different or incompatible with those of the perpetrators. This is partly so: for instance, the literature<sup>1</sup> has addressed the problem of difference in the case of Tutsis and Hutus, who were presumably different in terms of physical appearance (Tutsis being allegedly tall and thin, while Hutus being shorter and rounder); actually, they were virtually undistinguishable after centuries of mixed marriages and communal living – speaking the same language and practicing the same religion – and, consequently, preparatory steps (identification by identity cards, by a preliminary survey of Tutsi houses, by denunciation by neighbors or close friends, etc.) were taken by the perpetrators to ensure the spotting of the victims prior to April 6<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the manner in which the "other" is conceived and perceived by the perpetrator is illuminating in identifying the motivations behind the decision to kill. Group tensions are seen to escalate, and once the motivational interplay is actuated, the path towards mass political murder based on group differentiation is paved. Historical experience has taught, it seems that only when the "the other" is represented as possessing those characteristics – either physical (racial, gender), social, religious, economic or political – that are seen as clearly incompatible with the attributes of the dominant group embarked on murderous undertakings, the latter is actually going on the road of genocide. As Chirot and McCauley aptly put it, "the fear of pollution"<sup>3</sup> is tightly associated with the representations of the "otherness": in this logic, one can understand the insistence on racial or ethnic "purity" of the (ideological) perpetrator, for instance.

---

<sup>1</sup> See, Daniel CHIROT, Clark McCAULEY, *Why Not Kill Them All...cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Famously, Gérard Prunier coins the two Rwandan groups, employing Weberian vocabulary, as two "status groups", *i.e.* groups that are distinguishable by their position on the socio-political hierarchy. Prunier's book is virtually the standard reference when discussing the origins and development of the Rwandan genocide. (Gérard PRUNIER, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*, Colombia University Press, New York, 1997.)

<sup>3</sup> Daniel CHIROT, Clark McCAULEY, *Why Not Kill Them All...cit.*, pp. 36-44.

In the intentionalist vein, one of the most appealed-to lines of argumentation is what has been convincingly labeled by German sociologist Theodor W. Adorno as "the authoritarian personality"<sup>1</sup>, associating the central image of the leader and its propelled ideology to some sort of mass psychology of fascination towards the fascist *desiderata*. Similar roads have been taken by Wilhelm Reich<sup>2</sup> and Erich Fromm<sup>3</sup>, who constructed entire explanatory models in which the individual is physically and mentally damaged as a resultant of an extreme paternal authoritarianism and repressive behavior and his own deviant and brutal adult behavior is the reflection of terrible childhood experience and the expression of a form of law of compensation or psychological projection, in which the psychologically bruised individual reedits the childhood suffering on other humans, marked by either a sense of "hysterical narcissism" or a lack of self-esteem. Profoundly entrenched into this psychological or socio-psychological perspective, Adam Jones, for instance, identifies four central elements in triggering and motivating murderous acts: (1) narcissism, (2) greed, (3) fear, and (4) humiliation. The most potent mobilizing and motivating element remains, nonetheless, the fear:

"Greed reflects objective material circumstances, but also, like narcissism, the core strivings of ego. Greed is never satiated; but when it is fed, one feels validated, successful – even omnipotent. Perhaps the only force that can truly match it as a motivator for genocide is *fear*"<sup>4</sup>.

Hence, while greed can be assimilated into a "materialistic" or "careerist", more pragmatic killer in Mann's classification, and narcissism acts as psychological catalyst, the veritable sentiment that leads more easily in turning an ordinary person into a perpetrator is fear. Quoting Burke, Jones will conclude that, eventually, "[n]o power so effectively robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear"<sup>5</sup>. The postulate has its contingencies in practice: while reasoning might be indeed blurred and paralyzed by fear, action is not: under the impulse of fear, the would-be perpetrator is willing to engage in a sort of "preemptive strike" towards his perceived enemy. Jones stresses on two forms of largely complementary human fear: (1) "mortal terror" (or "animal fear", close to simple reflect gesture, *i.e.* the rather "animal" response to an actually existing or perceived imminent threat to "physical survival and integrity"; *N.B.* exacerbated at humans, for the very reason they have the ability of foreseeing dangers easily) and (2) "existential dread" (*i.e.* a feeling presupposing a

---

<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. ADORNO, Else FRENKEL-BRUNSWIK, Daniel J. LEVINSON, R. Nevitt SANFORD, *The Authoritarian Personality*, Harper, New York, 1950.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm REICH, *Character Analysis*, transl. by Theodore P. Wolfe, Orgone Institute Press, New York, 1933; IDEM, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, transl. by Vincent. R. Carfagno, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Erich Seligmann FROMM, *Escape from Freedom*, Farrar & Rinehart, London & New York, 1941; IDEM, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud*, Holt and Rinehart, New York, 1962. Both Reich and Fromm put forward radical psychological (rather psychiatric) interpretations of the fascist *phenomenon* and the Holocaust and its perpetrators.

<sup>4</sup> Adam JONES, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 389.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund BURKE, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Part II. ii), ed. by James T. Boulton, Routledge, London, 2008, p. 57 (initially published in 1757).

significant degree of personal identity, destiny, mission, "social place", and, therefore, bringing forth shame, increased frustration, dishonor, humiliation, in the presence of a perceived threat).

In his renowned *The Dark Side of Democracy*<sup>1</sup>, Michael Mann presents surely one of the most comprehensive multilayered, multifaceted typologies of the perpetrator, so close to exhaustiveness in his approach. Employing various *criteria* and founding on previous categorizations, the American scholar distinguishes between the commonsensical dichotomy "whole ethnic groups" vs. "state elites" and the threefold distinction "elites" – "militants" – "core constituencies". Based on these simplest differentiations, Mann constructs a complex typological scheme that discusses the diversity of perpetrators of mass killing, from ordinary people, variously motivated, to fanatics, bearing intrinsic rationality for the importance of their acts, from "authoritarian elites" to "nationalist masses", going beyond the classical, rational choice theory-inspired, distinction among "rational", "emotional" and "normative" perpetrators. Following Stanley Milgram's persuasive study<sup>2</sup>, Mann identifies nine motives that

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy. Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 18-30.

<sup>2</sup> Milgram is famous for having conducted a series of experiments in the mid-1970s – the so-called "Milgram obedience experiments" – in which he isolated the importance of "authority" and "obedience" in determining the individual to infringe physical suffering on the other. Concretely, the subject-individual takes part in a "learning experiment", allegedly helping the experimenter in the learning process of another subject, a "confederate" in the "learner"'s role. In the experiment, the subject is asked – rather instructed – by the experimenter to play the role of the "teacher", i.e. the one who asks questions and gives an electric shock for each wrong answer, increasing the shock level for each successive wrong answer, successively from 15 to 450 volts (close to a fatale shock). Since the "learner" is repeatedly mistaken, the "teacher" (the selected subject), following the instructions of the experimenter, goes along with the experiment to the point in which the "learner" shows visible signs of physical injury. The results of the experiments demonstrate that up to two thirds of the subjects were willing to cause serious injuries to the "learner" by increasing shock levels, being motivated by the external pressure exerted by and under the "authorization" of the experimenter, perceived as a responsible expert. Milgram experiments are an application of both "authorization" and "cognitive theory" for the study of the motivational drive of the genocide perpetrator. See Stanley MILGRAM, *Obedience to Authority*, Harper and Row, New York, 1974, and Thomas BLASS, "The Milgram Paradigm after 35 Years: Some Things We Now Know about Obedience to Authority", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 29, no. 5, May 1999, pp. 955-978.

Milgram's experiments on human capabilities to unleash violence against its peers are by no means singular. Philip Zimbardo, teaching at Stanford University, experimented similarly on his students who played the role of prison guards and prisoners (August 1971). As the experiment went on, the students, experiencing a process of "deindividuation", entered their roles so fully – displaying mind-blowing passiveness, in the case of the prisoners and sadistic tendencies, in the case of the guards – that Zimbardo was obliged to stop the experiment. His leading observations refer to the identification of three types of behavior in the case of perpetrators (the guards): (1) "cruel and uncompromising" behavior, proving both imagination in humiliating and torturing the victim (prisoner) and pleasure in putting into practice the results of that imagination, the zealous, enthusiastic perpetrators, the "volunteer-perpetrator"; (2) "strict but fair" behavior, limited to enforcing the rules and orders received, without any "imaginative" additions, the "follow-my-leader" type of perpetrator; (3) "good" behavior, restraining from brutality and even trying to help the ones supervised, the "reluctant perpetrator", the perpetrator of resistance. Zimbardo's results are discussed and applied in *Ordinary Men*, for the typology of perpetrators in the German police in Battalion 101. See,



would transform individuals and various societal *strata* into perpetrators of genocide-like acts; nine motives are to produce nine types of perpetrators: (1) "ideological killers", (2) "bigoted (or disgusted) killers", (3) "violent killers", (4) "fearful killers", (5) "careerist killers", (6) "materialist killers", (7) "disciplined killers", (8) "comradely killers", and (9) "bureaucratic killers", *i.e.* what Arendt would coin the exponents of the "banality of evil". Chirot and McCauley would favor a rather simpler framework, inspired by Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn<sup>1</sup> and comprising only a fourfold, though almost exhaustive, motivational scheme: (1) "convenience", (2) "revenge", (3) "simple fear" and (4) "fear of pollution". Although at least two of the four motivational *stimuli* tend to intermingle in order to eventually generate the criminal action against the distinct "Other", the identification of four major justifications to perpetuate what the two scholars coined as generic "mass political murder" is exact and is to express fully the portrait of the perpetrator: either opportunistic or submissive, weak and materialistic, or vengeful, either scared, frightful or pathologically xenophobic, the killer in Mann's extensive typology always finds his motivation in at least one of Chirot' and McCauley's fourfold discrimination. More psychologically inclined studies explaining the perpetrator's behavior converge into the point of the "neutralization theory", *i.e.* a conception that seeks to account for the killer's conduct by arguing that the killer finds ways of constructing the situation and the setting of his crime in such a manner that his internal, long-acquired, normative value system generally impeding crime, is neutralized. Any normative, axiological obstacle is removed with the support of five types of psychological mechanisms: (1) "denial of responsibility", (2) "denial of injury", (3) "denial of victim", (4) "condemnation of the condemners", and (5) "appeal to higher loyalties"<sup>2</sup>. As opposed to *a posteriori* rationalizations, neutralization happens prior to the crime itself, making possible the criminal act at the psychological level, making it humanly bearable, by excluding any axiological, moral barrier in the preparation of the act. But excluding axiological limitations in the eve of the crime cannot exhaustively justify the participation in the criminal act or the criminal act itself. Rather, it is the "crime of obedience"<sup>3</sup> an ordinary man is capable of that might explain the commitment to a crime against the other. A "crime of obedience" is to be facilitated by three subsequently acting factors: (1) "authorization", (2) "routinization", and (3) "dehumanization". If the term "dehumanization" is highly contested, since killing is by no means an inhuman action, but rather an act characterizing human nature *tout court*, the concept of "authorization" refers to the context in which an ordinary individual is commanded by authority to perpetuate crimes against "the other" and he does so by reference to some sort of a "license to kill"

---

for instance, Philip George ZIMBARDO, Craig HANEY, W. Curtis BANKS, "Interpersonal Dynamics in A Simulated Prison", *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, vol. 1, no. 1, March 1973, pp. 69-97.

<sup>1</sup> Frank CHALK, Kurt JONASSOHN, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies*, Yale University Press, New Haven (Connecticut), 1990, pp. 29-32.

<sup>2</sup> Gresham MCCREADY SYKES, David MATZA, "Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 22, no. 6, December 1957, pp. 664-670; IDEM, "Delinquency and Subterranean Values", *American Sociological Review*, vol. 26, no. 5, October 1961, pp. 712-719; David MATZA, *Delinquency and Drift*, Wiley, New York, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> The collocation is employed by Herbert C. KELMAN and V. Lee HAMILTON, in their *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility*, Yale University Press, New Haven (Connecticut), 1989.

granted by the statist authorities. Receiving and respecting orders have generically a major mobilizing impact on the individual; moreover, the fear of authority and how the authority can punish disloyalty towards it have the effect of wiping out any remorse or inner moral reservation an individual can still preserve. Nevertheless, authorization bears a feeble ability of justifying perpetrator's acts. Routinization comes as a complementary and partial response, as well: the individual becomes immune to the normative impediments of his criminal undertakings once he acquired a sort of routine, some form of customary cold-heartedness: "*malum quo, communius eo peius*". One dilemma remains, as best expressed, once again, by Chirot:

"How do feelings get hardened ? How is it that so many can be found to commit mass murder? What are the psychological mechanisms that overcome the horror most people feel when confronted by such spectacles ?"<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, while for some perpetrators, routinization acts as a preventing factor for any sense of horror and disgust, for hampering any feeling of guilt, for those perpetrators transformed from "ordinary people into butchers", routinization can explain even less than authorization might explain. Routinization has the capacity of desensitizing the killers, but this is particularly so either in the case of state officials or of extremely brutal killers. Since perpetrating genocide or other forms of mass murder is not necessarily a remarkably violent, bloody occurrence, routinized bureaucrats can perform successfully the function of a crude killer. In addition, in spite of alleged routinization, the decision-makers undertaking genocidal measures gradually renounced to those initial mass shootings at close range – a method which would necessitate the direct, face-to-face contact between the killer and his victim – in favor of more impersonal, indirect, less bloody, rather "chemical" or "scientific" methods. The soldier-killer was slowly replaced by the technocratic killer, the scientific killer. A resurrection of the "soldier-killer" was to be seen during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s: with the practice of systematic rape as means to ethnic cleansing, the perceived drive towards the perpetuation of genocidal acts through impersonal, bureaucratic or technological fashions, registered a lapse in the last decade of the century, the contact between the perpetrator and his victim being once more essential for genocide to occur. Similarly, in Rwanda, the Hutus used machetes extensively in annihilating around 800 000 Tutsi in an impressive period of time (April 6-mid-July 1994), while systematic rape being perpetrated as well.

The "intellectual perpetrator" occupies a rather privileged place in this scheme. Generally, he provides the ideological, *i.e.* intellectual, foundations for justifying and rationalizing subsequent acts of violence of what Mann labels the "violent perpetrator" against the targeted enemy. One could include Charles Darwin's evolutionist theory or Auguste Comte's positivist sociology among the intellectual basis underpinning the fascist ideology to emerge some decades afterwards and to provide the setting and the climate for the genocide against the Jewish population. Mann, moreover, sees incipient fascist elements even in Rousseau's "*volonté générale*", by further assessing and concluding that democracy itself bears the seeds of genocide for it presupposes the constitution of majorities in opposition to minorities, the first element in the outburst of political mass killing. Though his contentions might be perceived as far-

---

<sup>1</sup> Daniel CHIROT, Clark McCAULEY, *Why Not Kill Them All...cit.*, p. 51.

sided, based exclusively on a minimalist, rather philosophical, understanding of democracy<sup>1</sup>, the problem of intellectual bases for genocidal acts remains central to the discussion on the perpetrator's image. Most probably, the phrasing "intellectual perpetrator" is hazardous, especially fragments from the *oeuvres* of great thinkers are isolated and reinterpreted just to fit the purpose of a subliminal, intrinsic genocidal *manifesto*. Even so, the role of ideologues is worth surveying, since ideology is often designed to mobilize and energize the apathetic or confused masses, to offer the necessary rationalization, a set of ideas to which ordinary people resonate, for whom killing makes sense and is ultimately considered indispensable to the survival and future development of a certain dominant group. In this sense, one can distinguish between two types of (happily complementary) approaches regarding the actual role of ideology in motivating future perpetrators of mass murder: (1) the classical, perennial rational choice theory, and (2) the theory of "utopianism"<sup>2</sup>. Concerning the ideological content of killings in genocidal fashion, "utopianism" provides a rather philosophical device in studying the matter of the perpetrator's motivation. Ideology exercises a multifold motivational functionality: for one, it tells a "story" of Manichaeism, in which the targeted group is depicted as the historical enemy, to be encumbered once and for all. Secondly, it designs the portrait of the "new men", out of whom the future perpetrator will be selected, surely not in terms of killing<sup>3</sup> (the attribute of "killer" remains a strong word independent of the spirit of the epoch in which the genocide is to occur, being morally sanctioned by the society at least at the rhetorical-discursive level), but according to an ideal of vitality, activeness, youth, virility, spontaneity, strength, dynamism, expansionism, independence, of exacerbated desire to fight (in

---

<sup>1</sup> After all, democracy offers countless forms of observance, protection and promotion of minority groups, developing more than the simple antagonism between the majority (generically, the "*demos*") and the minority at the level of decision-making. Hence, what Mann seems to neglect is the fact that, although clearly dominated by all types of majorities – including, most importantly, ethnically and nationally associated ones –, the minorities are not completely defenseless in a democracy; though democracy is founded, procedurally, on the "will of the majority", the complete semantic overlapping between the "*demos*" and the "*natio*" – a synonymy that was consecrated in exemplary France of 1789, to be afterwards considered the epitome of "contractual nationalism" (Brian C.J. SINGER, "Cultural versus Contractual Nations: Rethinking Their Opposition", *History and Theory*, vol. 35, no. 3, October 1996, pp. 309-337) – is obsolete in the contemporary, liberal democracy. In contemporaneity, after the terrible experiences of fascism and communism, the general conception about democracy has definitely suffered a series of transformations: the accent falls on the virtues of liberty, rather than on the benefits of equality, "*demos*" is detachedly perceived in respect to the "*natio*", due to the clear distinction between "polity" and "society" (multiculturalism, for instance, becomes rather a matter of freedom, the result of the many liberties and responsibilities an individual can fully exercise, instead of a difficult reality asking for group-differentiated rights, equality among ethnicity, etc.). Mann misses the point of a changing conception on democracy stressing not necessarily on majorities, but rather on the freedom of the individual citizen; mass killing-associated acts are less prone to occur in a contemporary democracy.

<sup>2</sup> A brief discussion of the two "schools" in the study of mass murder is produced in Manus I. MIDLARSKY, *The Killing Trap. Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) & New York, 2005, pp. 64-81.

<sup>3</sup> It is easily observable and, eventually, commonsensical that the channels conveying the ideology leading to genocide never employ the appellative of "killer", but "fighter", "fatherland's defender", "protector of the nation", "bearer of purifying mission", etc., hence diffusing the content of the act *per se* and, subsequently, its responsibility.

effect, to exterminate, since the one against whom the perpetrator presumably fights is left with no means to fight back and defend himself). Thirdly, these abilities should be pondered by a sense of duty and sacrifice that might be better expressed in the annihilation of the enemy, as a mission owed to the "nation"/the dominant group. It is necessary to notice that ideology does not simply brainwash individuals to miraculously metamorphosize them into killing machines; rather it employs inherent weaknesses (not necessarily psychological ones, but socio-economic, cultural<sup>1</sup> and political ones) in order to allegedly transform them into potentialities, *i.e.* murderous potentialities. One can wonder, for course, whether the one putting into place a more or less coherent, though total and significantly mobilizing, ideology might be scrutinized as an "ideological perpetrator", intentionally disseminating a set of ideas and perspectives that is prone – actually, is intended, is desired – to produce the slaughter of the vulnerable minority group by the dominant one.

The "authorization" – "routinization" – "dehumanization" scheme might provide some partial answers, some starting points for Chirot's legitimate, perennial interrogations:

"How do feelings get hardened? How is it that so many can be found to commit mass murder? What are the psychological mechanisms that overcome the horror most people feel when confronted by such spectacles?"

Chirot and McCauley add to the mechanism described above other motivational *stimuli* and impulses – intense fear, anger, hate, the sense of humiliation and frustration, the desire for revenge, the potentiated sense of duty, training and good organization, etc. –, in order to conclude that "it is not so difficult to explain why this [*i.e.* mass political murder] happens" and that "many normal individuals can quite easily be turned into brutal killers"<sup>2</sup>. Though the conclusions drawn by the two American scholars are unfortunately pertinent and correct, they themselves find that the transformation from "ordinary people" to "butchers" should be contextualized, circumscribed to specific cases (their insistence is, expectedly, on the Holocaust). In this sense, one of the most compelling *addenda* to the existing "motivational" model of the perpetrator the two historians provide is a peculiar process that can be coined as the "ritualization" of killing: following Paul Rozin's contention that humans confront generally a feeling of total disgust in the face of anything that is reminiscent to their animality, from birth to death, and consequently they proceed at imagining and constructing rituals around them for neutralizing the memory of the animal nature and the initial repelling sentiment<sup>3</sup>, Chirot and McCauley argue that some sort of accompanying ritual and preparatory procedures were designed to reduce the discomfort and the repugnancy of the gesture for the individual-turned-killer.

---

<sup>1</sup> When adding "cultural weaknesses", the present paper takes into consideration the recently espoused, still increasingly dangerous, theory of "cultural relativism" or cultural differentiation and hierarchization. For a short introduction in the implications of a problematic concept, see Adamantia POLLIS, "Cultural Relativism Revisited: Through a State Prism", *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, May 1996, pp. 316-344.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel CHIROT, Clark McCAULEY, *Why Not Kill Them All...cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Paul ROZIN, Jonathan HAIDT, Clark McCAULEY, "Disgust", in Michael LEWIS, Jeanette M. HAVILAND-JONES (eds.), *Handbook of Emotions*, Guilford Press, New York, 2000, pp. 637-653.

Their contribution is particularly remarkable in respect to the nature of the reciprocity principle and the legitimacy of the kill. Hence, while it becomes natural for humans to react according to a reciprocity instance (from an axiological point of view, good deeds are responded to with good deeds, and conversely), murders in genocidal events happen usually outside the logic of this "categorical imperative", when helpless, defenseless and innocent victims are killed by angered perpetrators, infused with hatred, whose victims had not caused them any significant personal harm. Thus, the logic of reciprocity could only be twisted and deliberately inverted, deviated, in order to serve the purposes of the act *per se*. The kill becomes legitimate, since it is conceived as a form of reciprocity, carried out not against an innocent victim, but against a virtual enemy, propagandistically perceived as powerful, diligently working for the destruction of the perpetrator's nation, racial purity, familial *equilibrium* and integrity, socio-economic wellbeing, personal security, etc. What results from this, *a posteriori* of a scapegoating, is the legitimation of murderous acts on the basis of the reciprocity principle in reference to a terribly dangerous enemy (the future victim of the genocide), one that has constantly undermined the existence of the would-be perpetrator. If such a logic fails to be put into place by the leading perpetrator, by the ideologist, by the decision-maker, the reciprocity scaffolding licensing the killing cannot generate the turning of ordinary people into coldhearted assassins<sup>1</sup> and it becomes highly questionable to the masses to mobilize. The perpetrator mobilizing these masses is concerned with maintaining the inter-group fear and antagonism, but also the disproportionate prominence of a group over the other(s), a situation which would favor the unleashing of violence of the prominent group against the other. He has to construct the cronotop, the context, the *locus* in which killing is acceptable, with the destruction of the future perpetrator by the future victim being perceived as imminent. The reciprocity principle is inverted in an unusual form of "preemptive strike", in which fear acts as the principle mobilizing factor in the killing drive.

Christopher Browning's inspiring study appears of paramount significance when inquiring into the logic of the perpetrator in genocide-like events. His functionalist *Ordinary Men*<sup>2</sup> is a demonstration of how individuals outside the immediate circle of power and decision-making can actually participate actively in the genocidal process. Browning provides both an accurate and painful application of the psychological model and an exemplification of Rozin's "ritualization" of killing, by storing about the alcohol abuse specific to the Nazi killers, practiced in order to overcome the mental burden of the slaughters and their imprinted image. Moreover, it is interesting the fact that massive killings in Ukraine and the Baltic regions, leading to the extermination of 90% of the Latvian and Lithuanian Jews and of about 60% of the Ukrainian Jews<sup>3</sup> were carried out extensively by the locals – Ukrainians, Latvians, Lithuanians –,

---

<sup>1</sup> After revising the present text, the phrasing "coldhearted assassin" appeared inappropriate in faithfully describing the actual process of turning simple men and women into killers in the context of a genocidal endeavor. Rather, it appears from the literature (Browning, Chiro, Valentino, Sémelin, Jones, etc.) that the future perpetrators at the lower level of the terrible pyramid have had their hearts and psyche infused with hatred, anger, disgust at the sight of their victims. They were virtually hypnotized by a "hot" ideology.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher BROWNING, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, HarperCollins, New York, 1992, pp. 52, 80, 163.

<sup>3</sup> Lucy S. DAWIDOWICZ, *The War Against the Jews: 1933-1945*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1975, p. 403.

who were themselves imbued with alcohol and constantly threatened with their lives: it was perceived that local perpetrators can perform killings of their fellow inhabitants or neighbors more efficiently, bearing the pieces of information regarding the Jewish population of the targeted regions. What Browning advances is the theory of "peer pressure" as foundational for the drive to kill among ordinary people. In a crowded situation – commonplace in times of extreme violence –, individuals who are supposed to kill but refuse to do so or protest against killing are prone to face the victim's fatal fate. But other, milder, non-violent forms of peer pressure might count as well in the motivational equation of genocide and mass killing: Sémelin identifies "the fear of being rejected by the group and, in a broader sense, of being ostracized by society"<sup>1</sup> for those unwilling to commit murder of the "enemies". The fear of shunning and anathematization by the group can work as mobilizing factors to become involved in the killing, acknowledging the fact that in times of warfare and generalized violence the individual can survive more safely only within his dominant group, able to offer protection and security, if only by initiating and conducting killings against the perceived enemy. Browning's remarkable observations are to be easily extended to other notorious cases of genocide: in Rwanda, in the majority of cases, the perpetrators were ordinary people ventured to kill their neighbors, their fellow villagers. The chief organizers of massacres were mayors or local officials, the Hutu gangs, formed immediately after the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, were composed of youngsters and adult males, themselves ordinary people with only scarce knowledge of using a rifle, for instance. The "*interahamwe*", the Hutu genocidal militia, frequently exerted exactly what Browning described as "peer pressure". The large scale usage of machetes demonstrates once more the blunt fact that the killers were ordinary individuals, commoners. In Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, the perpetrators were largely Serbian soldiers of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), but also members of the *militias* of Serbian factions operating within the three countries (e.g. Army of Republika Srpska in Bosnia, Army of Republika Srpska Krajina in Croatia, Kosovo Liberation Army); on the other hand, Milan Babić and Milan Martić in Croatia, Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić in Bosnia were top decision-makers and army men, perpetrators belonging to the high echelons, to be subsequently trialed by the *ad hoc* established International Tribunal. Browning's *magnum opus* is instrumental as well in illustrating the process of diffusing the very burden of killing and the responsibility for the murders, since collective responsibility or collective guilt are irrelevant for the customary legal practice and cannot be subsequently prosecuted. Since up to 10-15% of the men in *Ordinary Men* did disobey orders to kill, the "peer pressure" coupled by a sense of "authorization" can, Browning himself shows, be overcome by disobeying the murderous orders, by openly admitting the personal "weakness" the individual carries with him, in effect the intrinsic "sensitivity" to human suffering which is perceived as lack of strength by his peers (in fact, individual autonomy and powerful personality, free from orders and authority that usually transform commoners into killers). Imprinted with the *stigmata* of humiliation in front of the peers, the disclosure of personal "weakness" at the face of human killing, of sheer "cowardice", remains quite dangerous for the very existence of the one thusly refusing to commit murder: Browning's "peer pressure" or Sémelin's "group conformity" (or, generally, some

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacques SÉMELIN, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide*, transl. by Cynthia Schoch, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, p. 262.

twisted form of "*l'esprit de corps*", some viral camaraderie into killing) does indeed have a quite powerful motivational significance in the transitional process from "ordinary men into butchers".

For the specific case of the Holocaust, one can contend that this type of camaraderie among men willing to kill was inherited from the traumatic experience of the "Great War", an experience that marked the existence of an entire generation, justifiably perceived as a "lost", exhausted one. Studies on the membership of extreme groups and militias helping the "effort" of exterminating Jews *en masse* showed that these organizations were composed of a large proportion of World War I veterans, bearing a previous experience in targeting and killing the enemy (though it should be stressed that this experience is one of fighting against a more or less, surely armed, enemy, not one of sheer extermination of a defenseless "enemy"), but also viciously caught within a post-war society that offered too little to the former soldiers. Profoundly infuriated by having fought in a war whose stakes remained largely beyond their direct interests and comprehension, increasingly disenchanted with an instable democracy and a lagging economy, mobilized and energized by a "hot" ideology, propagandistically asking for their support in furthering radical, overarching societal and political change, angered by what they came to perceive as the dangerous influence and role of the "enemy from within" (undermining national prominence and pride, national economy and development, national purity, etc.), easily and comprehensively organized by an authoritarian regime that somehow resonated with their primary grievances and claims, the generation of soldiers of the First World War sadly reconfigured itself into the chief perpetrators of the Jewish population during the Second World War<sup>1</sup>. The conjecture that a "history of aggression", *i.e.* past experiences of widespread violence (*e.g.* the previous experience of war, a political culture encapsulating violence as one of chief traits, etc.), is conducive to more, exacerbated violence or, at least, makes violence normal, more acceptable, is validated by the Turkish case, as well as in the situation of the Cambodian<sup>2</sup> and Rwandan<sup>3</sup> genocides<sup>4</sup>. Surely, in times of war or in the period immediately following the war, desperate measures are permissible for

---

<sup>1</sup> For an interesting perspective on the role of World War I veterans in the Holocaust, see Leonard S. NEWMAN, Ralph ERBER (eds.), *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 2002, especially p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> David P. CHANDLER, *A History of Cambodia*, Westview, Boulder (Colorado), 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Alison des FORGES, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, Human Rights Watch, New York, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> The same applies to Latin America (especially Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Guatemala, El Salvador, etc.), where the reality of "*los desaparecidos*", killed in the Operation "*Condor*" and during the "*Guerra Sucia*", is swept under the rug and not referred to as "genocide" (due to the unfair rules of a "*reforma pactada*" (Juan J. LINZ, Alfred STEPAN, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, the Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1996, p. 356), of a negotiated transition to democracy that proclaimed "forgive, but not forget" for the perpetrators and victims, respectively, during the defunct bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes). Naturally, no official condemnation as "genocide" of the gross breaching of basic human rights practiced during the *ancien régime* was made by the successor, transitional governments, since accusations of "genocide" and "crimes against humanity" have to be prosecuted. See, for the state of violence in Latin America, Ervin STAUB, *The Roots of Evil*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989.

the security of the nation and the "fatherland"<sup>1</sup>. The special situation of war seems to explain and excuse every action of both the military and the civilian population, even killing of groups found on a defenseless position, with no leverage to counter violence deployed against them. Needless to say that the youth of perpetrators counts significantly in the process of intentionally exterminating a group/population, since the high echelons of perpetrators can profit from the strength, vitality, willingness of such individuals forming the lower echelons, previously energized by an extreme ideology, conveniently appealing to their age and state of mind.

Another way to go in the explanation of the transition from ordinary man to brutal killer is famously referred to as the "dissonance theory". Briefly discussed by Chirot and McCauley, the theory has its origins in the psychological studies of John Sabini<sup>2</sup> and explains the said transition in terms of the coherence between attitudes and beliefs and behavior: in order to reduce the incoherence between positive, moral, "Christian" beliefs and reprehensible behavior, to decrease the level of psychological dissonance, thusly to excuse the behavior and to reduce responsibility for the act of killing, the perpetrator – even in the presence of an excusing external pressure – ventures in a process of changing beliefs and attitudes in order to justify and pardon his acts. Dissonance theory – explaining such attitudes as the killing, abuses, torture practiced with "for their own good"-type of excuse – introduces another form of distorted, inversed logic in the mind of the killer: the behavior does not follow the attitude, but the attitude is changed by the behavior. The attitude and the perceptions suffer mutations in order for the killer to find means to excuse himself and to maintain his self-image as decent, moral individual. Once the first killing is rationalized, justified somehow and the initial attitude is gradually changing – Chirot and McCauley perceptively observe – the excuses multiply countlessly, paving the way to numerous other murders, to "routinization": "I have been ordered to do this; those being killed are doing something wrong; they stand in my way; they deserve it; they are a threat to my own people; they are not quite human; they are polluting"<sup>3</sup>, I was not properly informed, I did not know; they would have died anyway, probably in a more torturous and painful manner, etc. Any remorse or the possibility for the perpetrator to identify himself with the victim in the reciprocity circularity are thusly eliminated almost completely.

Arendt<sup>4</sup> and Bauman are prominent in arguing that modernity – along with its alienation of daily life and with the unprecedented development of technical and technological drive – is the only era to foster the genocide, *i.e.* the intentional attempt to totally exterminate a group seen by the perpetrator as otherness from an ethnic, national, racial, religious, gender, political, social or whatever standpoint. The genocide is uniquely modern<sup>5</sup> because it aims at totality; in this scheme, the perpetrator himself appears in a different light. Bauman develops:

---

<sup>1</sup> The importance of war, as catalyst for unleashing violence and for making mass killing acceptable is discussed in Mark MAZOVER, "Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 107, no. 4, October 2002, pp. 1158-1178.

<sup>2</sup> John SABINI, *Social Psychology*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel CHIROT, Clark McCAULEY, *Why Not Kill Them All...cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, revised and enlarged ed., Viking, New York, 1964.

<sup>5</sup> See Eric D. WEITZ, "The Modernity of Genocides: War, Race, and Revolution in the Twentieth Century", in Robert GELLATELY, Ben KIERNAN (eds.), *The Specter of Genocide. Mass*



"Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's sufficient condition; it was, however, most certainly its *necessary* condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable. The Nazi mass murder of the European Jewry was not only the technological achievement of an industrial society, but also the organizational achievement of a bureaucratic society"<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, what the Polish-born sociologist suggests is that either routinization or authorization is insufficient in explaining the final stage of "dehumanization" in the perpetrator's psychological evolution if both of the two explanatory paths are lacking the overall context in which they are to take place and be concurrently described: modernity itself. It is modernity to create and reshape the rationale of ethnic differentiation and discrimination among groups on national, racial, religious or socio-political lines; it is modernity to consecrate the slogan of "To each nation, a state; to each state, a national being" and it is with the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the nationalist ideology diverted from a liberal-democratic, liberating message to a deviant xenophobic, racial, chauvinist, hatred-like, resentment-styled, eminently ethnic-collectivist case. It is in the setting of a "solid" modernity, with fixed structures (e.g. the nation-state) and pillarized societies, that mass killing managed to be put into play. No wonder that – Bauman carries on – the European Jewry became the target of the most extensive and debated-upon genocide, since it represented free-floating, "pan-European" *nuclei* of cosmopolitanism and "liquid" modernity, running counter the trend of rigid, structuralized nation-states, of exact and often Manichean-ly dichotomous differentiations. It is in the same all-encompassing logic of the "solid" modernity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the modern state joined with science and its latest fulfillments in order to serve the horrifying purpose of genocide: science provided, Bauman will contend, the rationale in accordance with which the modern state would find it suitable and beneficial to "weed out [those] elements detrimental to 'the vision of good society, a healthy society, an orderly society'"<sup>2</sup>, those elements that would impoverish, sicken and, eventually, destroy the "nation" of the pure ones<sup>3</sup>. Interpreting the Holocaust – as the paradigmatic genocide and as a lived experience

---

*Murder in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge & New York, 2003, pp. 53-74.

<sup>1</sup> Zygmunt BAUMAN, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> IDEM, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> There is no surprise that Bauman, having lived the experience of the Holocaust and of the interwar "solid modernity" of the modern (nation-)state, would find the virtues of postmodernism as exemplary for the new, "liquid", particularly relativistic, multicultural and cosmopolite, modernity he envisaged in his writings. Constructing on the renowned contributions of Freud, Kafka and Simmel, Bauman will conclude that each of them constituted a landmark to the path of post-modernity: "[P]sychanalysis transformed the human world [...] into a text to be interpreted [...] By asking questions, it sapped the *structure* whose substance was the prohibition of asking [...] [Kafka's] namelessness precedes, and ushers into, the *modern* world; one in which names are not received but made, and, while being made, fail to offer a fixed date and a settled place and abrogate the very hope of such an offer [...] [S]ociology had no room for 'society'; Simmel was after the mystery of *sociality*. Simmel's sociology is about the art of building – rather than grand, harmony-conscious, architectural designs" (*Ibidem*, pp. 175, 184, 187 [italics in original]).

for Bauman –, the Polish sociologist argues that the “marginality” of the European Jewry, displayed and understood as “modernity’s feet of clay” favored the targeting of this particular group and the outburst of death and uncertainty in the genocidal drive of the late modernity:

“Death was an emphatic denial of everything that the brave new world of modernity stood for, and above all of its arrogant promise of the indivisible sovereignty of reason. The moment it ceased to be ‘tame’, death has become a guilty secret; literally, a skeleton in the cupboard left in the neat, orderly, functional and pleasing home modernity promised to build”<sup>1</sup>.

Not surprisingly, Bauman aligns to the never-ending row of scholars postulating axiomatically the exhaustive failure of “reason” – as conceptualized and centralized by modern philosophy – and the most clear-cut illustration of this epochal failure in the occurrence of Holocaust and in the genocides and mass killings that subsequently happened in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Reading Bauman, the “terrible” century – started in distant Africa, with the German extermination of Hereros, and ended in the Balkans and in Darfur – can be explained sociologically and psychologically only from the prism of the exhaustion of a late, “solid” modernity that exerted a complete, all-encompassing alienation on the human *physic* and spirit. The modern individual appears caught in a pressing, continuously demanding society, he is exposed as alienated by a highly industrialized, highly developed nation-state, in the logic of which he customarily thinks; he constructs his reality in the context of a “solid modernity”, according to the challenges posed by a polarized nation-state:

“[M]odernity appears to be a continuous yet ultimately inconclusive drive towards rational order free from contingency, accidents, things that can get ‘out of hand’. It is to maintain such an artificial order, forever precarious and always stopping short of its ideal, that modernity needed enormous quantities of energy the animate sources could not possibly supply”<sup>2</sup>.

Add to this the fears, frustrations and the alleged threats of a propagandistically constructed “enemy from within” or of “the foreigner inside”<sup>3</sup>. Such an artificially maintained scenario would appear to Bauman quite favorable to the relapse of the individual into killing the other. Therefore, the “energies” of modernity necessary to sustain its artificial construct eventually erupted to produce massive human loss. The observations drawn by the author of *Liquid Modernity* seem compatible to the concluding remarks of French historians Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, in their *History of the Private Life*:

---

<sup>1</sup> IDEM, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> IDEM, *Postmodern Ethics*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1993, p. 211.

<sup>3</sup> For the usage of the two collocations in the specific discussion of mass political killing (on ethnic, racial, religious or national grounds), see Rémi SAVARD, “L’étranger venu d’ici”, in Simon HAREL (ed.), *L’étranger dans tous ses états. Enjeux culturels et littéraires*, XYZ, Montréal, 1992, pp. 99-102.

"The one born at the beginning of the century, whose conscious life covers our entire period (he or she would have had fourteen years old at the beginning of the First World War), what could he or she have possibly seen? The Massacres of 1914-1917, the Russian Revolution, Hitler and the Auschwitz camp, Stalin and the gulag, Hiroshima, Mao Tse-Tung and the cultural revolution, Pol Pot and the Cambodian genocide, the drift of Latin America with its bloodthirsty *caudillos* and its disappearances, the famished Africa, the Islamic Revolution and the reinstalment of the Islamic canonic law. But Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot could not have done anything if the mimetism had not generated numerous look-alikes at small scale"<sup>1</sup>.

Their enumeration of awful episodes recorded by a bloody recent history is instrumental in the analysis of both the failure of "modern" reason and the mutations this failure generated on the individual, in explaining the latter's willingness to be part in genocidal episodes, ultimately to kill. Indeed, the man born in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed or, more clearly, was historically contemporaneous with the first "modern" attempt to complete annihilation in the case of the Hereros by the Germans in South-West Africa in 1904, with the Armenian Genocide by the Young Turks, between 1915 and 1923, with the Ukrainian Holodomor by the Soviets in 1932-1933 and subsequent massive deportations in Siberia practiced by the Soviets, with the Holocaust under the command of Nazi Germany in the period 1939-1945, with the mass murder of about half a million people in Indonesia in 1965-1966, with the genocides in Bangladesh of 1971, in Burundi of 1972, in Cambodia of 1975-1979, perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge, in East Timor of 1975-1979, in Rwanda of 1994, in former Yugoslavia of 1991-1995 and 1995-1999. It seemed that genocide and mass killing were the spirit of the epoch and a large proportion of the globe's population got caught in this spirit and its murderous and ignoble manifestations.

Either contextualized and circumscribed by an alienating and exhausting late modernity or shaped according to an explanatory progressive model of "authorization" – "routinization" – "dehumanization", the image of the perpetrator of genocidal acts or mass political killing viciously pendulates between moral-judgemental stances (altered self-consciousness) and psychological, rational-choice oriented perspectives. Surfing around that image as it is developed in countless, more or less accurate, artistic emanations, one should pause a while on the vivid and illuminating description of Hanna Schmitz, delivered in Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*. Disturbing as it may arouse, the portrait of a woman working as an SS guard, serving in Auschwitz until early 1944 and being found guilty of refusing to open the gates of a church in fire filled with people of Jewish origins is illustrative for the analysis of the perpetrator's psyche and his motivational mosaic<sup>2</sup>. Somehow opposable, the portrait Arendt depicts in her

---

<sup>1</sup> Philippe ARIÈS, Georges DUBY, *History of the Private Life*, vol. 5 *Riddles of Identity in Modern Times*, Antoine Prost, Gérard Vincent (eds.), Arthur Goldhammer (transl.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 1992-1998, p. 377 (initially published as *Histoire de la vie privée*, 5 volumes, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1985-1987).

<sup>2</sup> What is contingently (*i.e.* keeping the proportion of an otherwise mediocre literary, fictional emanation) illustrated in Bernhard SCHLINK, *The Reader* (*Der Vorleser*, Diogenes Verlag, Zürich, 1995) is comprehensively explained in Jon ELSTER, "Retribution", in Jon ELSTER (ed.), *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 33-56, under the form of counterfactuals (*e.g.* "if I hadn't done it,

famous *Eichmann at Jerusalem* uncovers the variant of the bureaucrat as perpetrator: Eichmann is, Arendt postulates, the indubitable expression of the "banality of evil". Perfectly inserted in the setting of a state conducting, sponsoring and coordinating the killing of a group living on its territory – a state that developed an administration conducive to its murderous purposes –, the bureaucrat is the one issuing the administrative death of the targeted group. By no means a simple pawn, allegedly incapable of independently thinking outside the administrative mechanisms of the officialdom, the bureaucrat in a perpetrator state is himself caught in a more subtle form of "authorization", working under the supervision of and according to the high echelons of authority. As Saul Friedländer famously observed:

"The bureaucratic machinery is the most efficient instrument of totalitarian power and terror; bureaucracy with its banal servants whose only ambition is to fulfill their task as efficiently as possible; bureaucracy which, once set in motion, can lead from the most elementary identification measures to total extermination"<sup>1</sup>.

Though the insistence in the literature has been so far on the ordinary killer in the Holocaust – most probably due to its magnitude, its pretence to totality, the diversity of methods deployed and employed to annihilate the European Jewry, etc. –, one should not overlook and neglect the inquiry into the perpetrator's rationale and motivations involved in the most recent genocides. Hence, while the laborious sociological explanations in Arendt, Adorno and Bauman regarding the alienation of the modern world and its exercise upon the human individual might provide a hint in accounting for the preliminary steps of transforming ordinary men into killers, for the climate, the mood leading to the Holocaust, these explanations become futile in surveying the image of the perpetrator in Rwanda or the in Balkans. The pressure exerted by the modern life, the unimaginable development of industrial realm, the essentialized modern cultural evolution have no relevant explanatory force for the construction of the context and the events in 1994' Rwanda and in late 1990s in Bosnia. Even abandoning the logic of backwardness – by now an essentially obsolete one –, it appears commonsensical to observe that the settings and the societies mentioned above did not reach an exhaustion of modernity, being marked actually by modernity in its infancy. Thus, the perpetrator in the Holocaust is clearly differently motivated as compared to the one in Rwanda or Bosnia. Indeed, what all these events have in

---

somebody else would have"; "if I had stepped down, somebody else, worse than me, would have taken my place"; "if we hadn't been rigorous in repressing opposition, the Soviets would have intervened, with much worse results"; "if I had refused to do it, I would have been killed"; the futility counterfactual excuses; the "mens rea" excuse, etc.).

<sup>1</sup> Saul FRIEDLÄNDER, "From Anti-Semitism to Extermination...cit.", 14. The insistence on the bureaucratic perpetrator is central to Raul HILBERG, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1961, but Friedländer mentions in this respect Christopher R. BROWNING, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland 1940-43*, Holmes & Meier, New York, 1978, and Joseph WALK, *Das Sonderrecht für die Juden im NS-Staat. Eine Sammlung der gesetzlichen Massnahmen und Richtlinien – Inhalt und Bedeutung*, C.F. Müller Juristischer Verlag, Heidelberg, 1981. For instance, Walk counts approximately 2000 decrees and ordinances regarding the German Jewish population between 1937-February 1945. The recent genocides would gradually lose this sophisticated, bureaucratic facet.

common is a statist authoritarian context, *i.e.* genocides (understood as an appanage of modernity) are foreign to democracy, being associated, as a rule, with authoritarianism and autocracy. Infused with hatred and prejudice, the individual in an unfree regime, oriented towards acts of violence against minorities, lives according to and adopts a certain set of institutional and cultural practices, a specific type of political culture, he internalizes a series of socio-political orientations. This is not to assume that the citizen (euphemistically referred to) in an authoritarian rule is generally inclined towards acts of violence against various minority groups within the society; nevertheless, it becomes apparent that, living in an atmosphere of unleashing arbitrary violence against groups treated as inferior by the state and coordinating harsh discriminatory propaganda would undoubtedly have an imprint on the existence and perspective of the ordinary citizen. On the other hand, the authoritarian, *i.e.* unfree, framework, the illiberal setting is only "the means of destruction, not its basic explanation"<sup>1</sup>. Historical experience proved, repeatedly demonstrated that, even though democracy might appear internally, intrinsically incompatible to genocidal acts, democracy indeed helped authoritarian governments to foster mass killing undertakings<sup>2</sup>.

Psychological complexities of the human being as a violent entity *par excellence* constitute an intriguing and interesting lecture. Aside from the pleasure of reading, one cannot explain the occurrence of genocide and of related forms of mass killing by the simple reference to humanly immanent "mortal terror", for instance. The present paper focuses on the individual perpetrator, but psychological accounts abound in respect to "collectivities as perpetrators" as well<sup>3</sup>. It is hazardous and reckless to conclude that contemporary human history is the expression of natural, near-animal instincts, manifested at the fullest, though the case of Rwanda, for example, might appear thusly explainable. Mann gives compelling hints in respect to the larger picture of perpetuating mass killing in the modern age, an epoch in which the killer is not psycho-biologically bound of a basic feeling, but his motivational *spectrum* and his rationality form an inextricable construction, including: material and careerist motivations or bigot and ideological reasoning. Sémelin, as well,

---

<sup>1</sup> Saul FRIEDLÄNDER, "From Anti-Semitism to Extermination...cit.", p. 16, with the mention that the historian referred specifically to the "totalitarian paradigm" explaining the extermination of the Jewish population.

<sup>2</sup> It is the case of the United States which, under the Cold War rationale, supported the "bureaucratic-authoritarian" regime in Latin America, those regimes sadly famous for their huge number of "*desaparecidos*". See, in this respect, David W. DENT (ed.), *U.S. – Latin American Policymaking. A Reference Handbook*, Greenwood Publishing, Westport (Connecticut), 1995, pp. 397-500. It wasn't the first time when the North American democracy – through its Central Intelligence Agency – escaped from prosecution high-ranked perpetrators of genocide: after the conclusion of war, the high echelons of Nazi German bureaucracy were helped to reach U.S. (See Christopher SIMPSON, *The Splendid Blonde Beast. Money, Law, and Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, Grove Press, New York, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> The book of French sociologist and journalist Gustave Le BON, *La Psychologie des Foules*, Felix Alcan, Paris, 1896 [transl. into English as *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, N.S. Berg, Dunwoody (Georgia), 1968] is notorious in this perspective, by arguing that groups are intrinsically immature, egoistic, uncaring, and frequently they turn brutal and, even, sadistic. His theory seems anticipatory (or inspirational?) for the future "peer pressure" hypothesis: "By the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual: in a crowd, he is a barbarian – that is, a creature acting by instinct" (p. 32).

favors a multi-faceted approach – “the tipping mechanism” – when dealing with the genocidal rationale and its motivational background, taking into consideration both “rationalization” and “cognitive dissonance” theories, but also “divine legitimation” conception and the “crime of obedience”, and even the “profiteering” dimensions of massacres and the “socializing” role of violence. Chirot and McCauley acknowledge the contingencies of the biological- and social-psychological explanations and, as a consequence, stress on the importance of organization in carrying on a genocidal episode: indifferent of the motives that lead a man to kill and of the strength of these motives, without proper organization and sponsorship, such killings would remain singular, isolated murders. Genocide is, after all, “death by government”<sup>1</sup>, though, indeed, executed by individuals. Basic feelings and reflex actions concluded in the outburst of extreme violence can only emerge in a certain conjuncture, when their manifestation is somehow encouraged and fostered by a political arrangement. Those ordinary people turned into perpetrators do not appear hazardously, accidentally, but they are the products of a specific type of political regime, an eminently authoritarian one; no wonder genocide is foreign to liberal democracy<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the motivational inextricabilities suffer changes as the study of the perpetrators oscillates up and down the hierarchical structure of decision-making: ideological motivations usually stand at the top, while materialistic and psychological rationales tend to become dominant at the bottom. For instance, in times of war, the higher representatives of local authority (including civilian administration) might appear as if they were acting hastily, in a disordered, unorganized fashion, the actions coordinated by them might have been hierarchically imposed on them from above, in an “authorization” spin-over. Therefore, their responsibility seems conveniently limited, no wonder they are, for example, conspicuously reluctant in signing an order of returning a Jew from his pathway to death in Iași<sup>3</sup>. Their posture generally reveals overwhelmed men in

---

<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Joseph RUMMEL, *Death by Government*, Transaction Publishers, Brunswick (New Jersey), 1994. Rummel referred to “democide” as an umbrella term to cover “genocide, as well as politicide, mass murder” (IDEM, *Democide: Nazi Genocide and Mass Murder*, Transaction Publishers, Rutgers [New Jersey], 1992). Briefly, in this respect, the semantic imagination is fruitful and laudable: “genocide” was divided by the recent scholarly into: “cultural genocide” (“culturicide”) and “ethnocide” (both used by Raphael Lemkin – *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laus of Occupation – Analysis of Government – Proposals for Redress*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., 1944 – in 1944 and, most recently, by the “UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” of 2007, but not clearly defined), “linguicide”, “classicide” (concept used by Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy...cit.*, pp. 17 and 320), “gendercide” (coined by Mary Anne WARREN, in *Gendercide: The Implications of Sex Selection*, Rowman & Allanheld, Totowa (New Jersey), 1985, to include both “femicide” and “androcide”) “autogenocide” (employed for the Cambodian genocide, by Karl D. JACKSON (ed.), *Cambodia, 1975-1978: Rendezvous with Death*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (New Jersey), 1989). For a partial corollary of the terminology, see George J. ANDREOPOULOS (ed.), *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf J. RUMMEL, *Power Kills: Democracy as a Method of Nonviolence*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick (New Jersey), 1997.

<sup>3</sup> This type of attitude of the local authorities in times of genocide is beautifully and magisterally described in Radu Gabrea’s movie *Gruber’s Journey* (2008), remarkably depicting the days around the Iași pogrom, based on a loose adaptation of Curzio Malaparte’s *Kaputt* (Casella, Napoli, 1944). In *Gruber’s Journey*, the protagonist, Italian journalist and army captain Curzio Malaparte, is prominently said that the country in which he seeks a certain Jewish

physician is in war and, consequently, desperate measures are acceptable and required in such times. The representatives of the local authority, bearing responsibility for the killing in their city, are shown to hold attitudes subtly proving a common denominator (*i.e.* impatience, anxiety, cynicism), otherwise they manifest gradually (particularly towards an ill, disoriented, virtually narcotized foreigner, though technically a "friend" of the nation, an Italian, an ally), from exaggerated politeness and obsequious condescension to escalated verbal aggressiveness and conspicuous nervousness. In front of the profoundly confused, though increasingly impatient Italian journalist, an unconvincing *qui-pro-quo* is played, while the high-ranked whom he meets tacitly agree that the best solution for camouflaging the realities of the pogrom (conscientiously washed up and cleaned in the front of the Police site) is what could be labeled as the "politics of adjournment", of postponement. When the impatience of the foreigner reaches the climax, "alternative" methods, evading the initial postulated orders that are breached and eventually disregarded. Therefore, in the implementation of fascist policies of discrimination and ethnic cleansing conducive to genocidal episodes, all these *personnages* (otherwise amusing, even laughable by their very ridicule posture, if the storyline and the circumstances were different) are mere "authoritarian doers"; it becomes virtually irrelevant both for the movie and for the overall discussion about the Iași pogrom whether these high-ranked, though local (*i.e.* with local resources, with local implementation, with local rationale, subordinating them irreducibly and allegedly indisputably to the central authorities) administrators bore antisemitic sentiments or not: after all, they seemed humble, mere executors. Moreover, it is debatable to what extent these individuals were guided by anger and hate as political motivational incentives, rather than by a maniacal submission to rules and procedures, to orders and resolutions coming "from above", without the rational internalization, morally glanced, implications and repercussions of such infamous norms and decisions. There remained, of course, room for innovation, simply due to the precarious resources in dealing with the "Jewish question", particularly in Iași. The orders had to be fulfilled, but the fashion in doing so was puzzling for the local authorities, who resorted to provincial operations in order to cleanse the city of a significant number of Jews. Others were particularly imaginative (*e.g.* scapegoating the theft of the Roznovanu bottles of wine). Hence, what was eminently an exhaustive and demanding endeavor during the period was rather the imaginative process of pursuing with the crimes against the Jews, not necessarily the moral burden of the monstrous killings themselves.

The movie presents its subtleties, it only allows for the historical event of the Iași pogrom to transpire from the banal story of approximately two days of Malaparte's search for the Jewish doctor Josef Gruber. The ravages of the war are the sole conspicuous facet the city displays: the evidence of the killings are rapidly and poorly cleaned out, proving once more that the operation was unintentional and totally spontaneous. The death trains with its sealed wagons, out of which suggestive calls for help are heard, are guarded only by two soldiers, one of whom proves imperturbable in his observance and execution of received orders, similarly to Zimbardo's "strict, but fair" perpetrator's type of behavior; therefore, the same unconscious, maladaptive, blinded, extremely dangerous attachment to the resolutions and orders received from above is to be reproduced up to the lowest levels of the administrative and military hierarchy. Nevertheless, the point which is probably unnecessarily repeatedly made is the bureaucratic shaw Malaparte undergoes and the insistence on the *ad litteram* observance of procedures and orders (These characteristics are to be perennial for the Romanian society, they are not differently operated with in the particular case of the Holocaust – or in the more particular one of the Iași pogrom –; the "*Caragialesque*" scent that imbues them is not to be specific in whatever sense to the period 1940-1944). Matias Carp, probably in a yet reductionist vein, argues in respect to the said event: "Iași, the horrifying symbol of persecution, robbery and bloodbaths has no equivalent; Odessa, Golta, Katyn, Kiev, Maidanek, Auschwitz, Belsen, etc. could be listed as comparisons, but Iași preceded these by months or even years. If we were too look for parallels of sorts in the past we would have to turn back a large number of pages in the history books; we would have to take a giant leap back in time" (Matias CARP, *Holocaust*

power, incapable or unwilling of providing records of their terrible implementations of genocidal policies. Partially abandoning purely psychological inquiries into the perpetrator's mind, Manus I. Midlarsky, Professor of International Peace and Conflict Resolution at Rutgers University (New Jersey), develops an interesting, compelling structural theoretical framework in his attempt to answer the central question "[H]ow so many perpetrators could be induced (of their own will or otherwise) to commit mass murder"?<sup>1</sup> The causal scheme the American scholar identifies starts from the historical reality of grave economic hardships in post-World War I Germany and it is extended to illustrate a general context of socio-economic difficulties, followed by immanent, increasingly vocal, popular grievances and disenchantment, at the societal level, and by conspicuous and deepening economic inequalities, at the social level. It is this economic inequality to generate not only the general context for the employ of violence, but also, most importantly, the easiness to unleash violence against the wealthy, educated, cosmopolite "other", once the socio-economic inequality translated into the inability of groups to identify with each other, into the absence of identification. Though the "vulnerability in the minds" of ordinary men becoming perpetrators<sup>2</sup> is discussed as well, the problem of insurmountable socio-economic inequalities seems deprived of the immediate, facile (biological-)psychological postulates (even if determining other endless flow of psychological interpretations based on social class determinants). Moreover, the lessons taught by the 20<sup>th</sup> century' genocides should attempt to provide an answer for the problematic questions Theodor Adorno raised in *The Authoritarian Personality*:

---

*in Romania. Facts and Documents on the Annihilation of Romania's Jews, 1940-1944*, ed. by Andrew L. Simon, Simon Publications, Safety Harbour [Florida], 2004, p. 79). One could only wonder, if the crimes against the Jews were perpetuated by months and years, how come the anxiety, impatience and ridicule displayed by the characters of Gabrea's film?

It is significant to mention that, while vividly contested up to the moment in which physical evidence was publicly revealed (as the entire genocidal period of the Holocaust in Romania was), the Iași pogrom of June 1941 and that in Bucharest of January 1941 were present not only in Malaparte's *Kaputt*, but in other witness accounts as well (e.g. Robert St. John's *Foreign Correspondent* of 1957). They were nonetheless differently pictured and recounted. St. John's account is quoted extensively in Ion C. BUTNARU, *The Silent Holocaust: Romania and its Jews*, Greenwood Press, Westport (Connecticut), 1992, p. xvii. Here, a more ideologically-imbued perspective is put forth, which would explain the "righteous anger" of the perpetrators, as main feature of motivational scheme: he speaks of the doers as men "exposed to the Christian precepts of humility, gentility and non-violence", committing racially-motivated crimes "with prayers on their lips and crosses and crucifixes in their hands or hanging around their necks". No such account on the religious facet of the perpetrators is to be found in Malaparte who analyzes primarily the reaction of the officialdom.

<sup>1</sup> Manus I. MIDLARSKY, *The Killing Trap. Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) & New York, 2005, p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> Refreshing hypotheses include: (1) the burden of killing eased by the sense of "validation", i.e. the acknowledgement of the fact that serious consequences for murder are absent, and (2) "continuity of killing", i.e. prior experience with extreme violence or identification with the aims and purposes of specific episodes of mass murder or the acknowledgement of the fact that the targeted population has been previously subject of massacre, thus the acknowledgement of the victim's vulnerability. (Manus I. MIDLARSKY, *The Killing Trap...cit.*, pp. 43-63.)



"Today the world scarcely remembers the mechanized persecution and extermination of millions of human beings only a short span of years away, in what was once regarded as the bastion of Western civilization. Yet the conscience of many men was aroused. How could it be, they asked each other, that in a culture founded on right, order and reason, there should have survived the irrational vestiges of ancient religious and racial hatreds? How could they explain the willingness of great masses of individuals to tolerate the mass extermination of their fellow citizens? Which of the cells of the modern social body are still affected by this cancer and, in spite of our assumed enlightenment, show the incongruous atavism of ancient peoples? And what within the individual organism responds to certain *stimuli* in our culture with attitudes and acts of destructive aggression?"<sup>1</sup>.

The figure of the perpetrator, more than those of the victim and of the bystander, can irrefutably provide a more comprehensive *compendium* of answers and explanations for the treatment of genocide.

---

<sup>1</sup> Theodor W. ADORNO *et al.*, *The Authoritarian Personality*, Norton, New York & London, 1982, p. vii.