Group Offending in Mass Atrocities: Proposing a Group Violence Strategies Model for International Crimes

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Abstract

Most research in mass atrocities, especially genocide, is conducted at the macro level exploring how mass violence is instigated, planned and orchestrated at the level of the state. This paper on the other hand suggests that more research of the individual perpetrator is needed to complement the understanding of mass atrocities. The author develops therefore a new model, the *group violence strategies model*. This model combines various traditional criminological models of group offending and proposes a three stage analysis, looking at the individual aggressor, the actions within the offender group and the actions between offender group and victim group to understand better the phenomenon that ordinary people commit unspeakable crimes.

Key words

Genocide; mass atrocities; group offending; neutralisation techniques; emotional energy dominance; patterns of violence; group violence strategies models

Resumen

La mayor parte de las investigaciones sobre atrocidades en masa, especialmente genocidio, se desarrollan a nivel macro, analizando cómo se instiga, planea y orquestra la violencia de masas a nivel de estado. Este artículo, sin embargo, sugiere que es necesaria una mayor investigación del criminal individual, para complementar la comprensión de las atrocidades en masa. Así, se desarrolla un nuevo modelo, el *modelo de estrategias de violencia en grupo*. Este modelo combina diversos modelos criminológicos tradicionales de violencia en grupo y propone tres etapas de análisis, mirando al agresor individual, las acciones dentro del grupo criminal y las acciones entre el grupo criminal y el grupo de víctimas, para entender mejor este fenómeno por el que personas corrientes cometen crímenes atroces.

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Palabras clave

Genocidio, atrocidades en masa, crímenes en grupo, técnicas de neutralización, dominio de energía emocional, patrones de violencia, modelos de estrategias de violencia en grupo

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1. Introduction

When Sartre (1971, p. 534) noted that '[t]he fact of genocide is as old as humanity' he stated a truth not only in relation to genocide in the legal sense but also to mass atrocities in general. These unimaginable crimes are so difficult to grasp not only because of the sheer number of victims but also the huge number of perpetrators. Under normal circumstances we cannot understand how anybody could participate in killing let alone in mass killings. Further, not only are the victims civilians (frequently the most vulnerable members of the group) but the slaughter is often carried out by persons who previously were law-abiding citizens. Anybody who has not experienced mass violence will find it difficult to comprehend how a group of ordinary people are willing and capable to commit murder, let alone on such a large scale and with such barbaric cruelty. Even the thought of being part of an encouraging audience rather than attempting to stop the violence seems inconceivable.

Much research attempts to explain genocide and comparable atrocities by looking at them from a holistic approach as one coherent phenomenon, such as "the Holocaust" or "the 1994 Rwandan genocide" and tries to identify the political, historical and sociological causes for the violence. Most of this work focuses subsequently on the macro level, namely the role of the state in planning, instigating and ordering of the atrocity. This paper on the other hand argues that one must not lose sight of the fact that these massacres consist of individual acts committed during individual events and that it is important to examine not only those who plan and orchestrate the attacks but also looking at the low rank trigger-pullers who carry out the violence. As these individuals are however nearly always acting in groups, it is equally necessary to understand the phenomenon of group offending in this context. My research will therefore draw on traditional group offending theories, which have been developed in the context of ordinary crimes at national level, such as juvenile delinquency and gang crime. The situation of mass atrocities in the context of an armed conflict is, of course, too different to simply apply traditional criminological models. Instead I argue that a number of traditional theories and models need to be combined into a new framework, which I call the *group violence strategies model*. While the details will be explained elsewhere, the aim of this article is to briefly set out the basic structure of this new approach.

2. Gaps in current criminological studies

In spite of the magnitude of mass atrocities there are surprisingly few criminological theoretical approaches dealing with these crimes (Pruitt 2014).[1] A direct call for more criminological involvement in the study of genocide and in international criminal law in general was made Hagan and Rymond-Richmond (2009) in response to the atrocities in Darfur. They argued that genocide is a natural criminological concern and compared Darfur to a 'crime scene' and the Atrocities Documentation Survey to a 'victimization survey'. Although it is acknowledged that this important work is a significant contribution to the understanding of mass violence, the authors concentrate on organised processes, what Gould (1999) would call the 'supra-individual focus'. Indeed, a number of theories have been developed which help to understand large-scale violence in the field of *state crime*, often drawing on theories of organisational crime (Pruitt 2014). However this research is increasingly criticised for over-emphasising the role of ideologies, as well as racial and ethnical prejudices (Karstedt 2012). Gerlach (2006, p. 465) argues that this limited focus is due to the agenda of researchers, and the

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[1] A noteworthy example of criminological engagement in the studies of genocide is Brannigan and Hardwick (2003) who applied Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime to genocide, adding to the concept of lack of self-control the factor of opportunity as social circumstances that either restrain or advance participation in the crime.

"posthumous ethnicization of history in the post-1989 bourgeois triumphalism have reinforced this trend".

Another criticism of current criminological research in the field is that it focuses too much on the atrocities in the Second World War. While this body of work is welcome because of its contribution to the knowledge and understanding of these specific historical events, it has to be noted that contemporary acts of atrocities are often very different from the state-orchestrated atrocities within Nazi Germany or Stalin's Russia. Today's massacres often occur on a smaller scale as part of an internal conflict, and very often the role of different groups change between perpetrator and victim.

> Contemporary mass violence is often embedded in trajectories of long-term conflict, and the majority of mass killings since the Second World War have been part of civil wars and ethnic conflicts […]. They typically occur beneath the level of the nation state and independently of its boundaries, and they evolve in the environment, social formations and complex actor configurations of 'extremely violent societies' (Karstedt 2012, p. 500).

It is important to note that the present paper does not attempt to explain the underlying motives and reasons for the enmity between groups but rather how this hostility manifests itself in horrendous violence. How is it possible that human beings not only deny the right of existence to another group but that they can overcome their natural tendency not to attack their own species? Furthermore, why is the violence carried out with such cruelty which goes far beyond killing members of the other group?

3. Understanding group violence

It is one of the shortcomings of traditional explanations of mass atrocities that they focus on polarisation of the groups and a strong command structure, and assume that once there is sufficient motivation (usually based on religion, race or ethnic hostility) this can easily manifest as violence. Research has shown instead that no matter how strong somebody's motivations for aggression are, there is always a physiological confrontational barrier to violence which needs to be overcome (Collins 2013a).

Therefore, the first step to understand the attacks is to examine the state of the offender at the time of the violence. Grossman (2009) has explored how a potentially violent situation influences a person on a physiological and emotional level and identifies a number of changes in the attacker:

> People's facial expressions and body postures show a high level of tension; physiologically, heart beats often accelerate to 160 beats per minute, as cortisol and adrenaline flood the body; at these levels, fine motor coordination is lost, and people cannot easily control their fingers, hands, or feet (Collins 2013a, p. 135).[2]

Based on these findings Grossman (2009) developed his theory of *confrontational tension or fear* which holds that irrespectively of their intent, human beings face a physiological and psychological barrier of committing violence against a fellow human being.

> Advances in the micro-sociology of violence show that violence is not easy but difficult, especially in close-range face-to-face confrontations, and that most people shirk the performance of it even if the motivation exists and antagonists are very angry or vengeful. Most conflicts and the most typical expression of anger consist of dramatic bluster and bluff, threatening a distant enemy but not actually doing much to violently attack someone (Klusemann 2009, p. 2).

In the context of military massacres there are countless example of soldiers who experienced mass executions as disgusting and stressful (Blom and Romijin 2002)

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[2] See also Mazur (2009) on hormonal interpretations of this theory.

without their behaviour before or after the event showing any evidence of moral scruples to the killings. Surprisingly, violent confrontations cause considerable stress not only on the victims but also on the attackers. The inherent historical enmities between different groups fostered by propaganda and polarisation are therefore not sufficient to explain the commission of actual violence. Rather, an additional component is needed to overcome the physical barrier.

This component can be found in Collin's *emotional energy model*. According to this model the natural barrier to violence can be overcome by the attacker if they manage to raise their emotional energy above that of the victim.

> Winning or losing in a violent conflict is first of all a matter of who establishes emotional dominance; that side wins which holds together better, keeping up greater solidarity, and taking the initiate away from its opponent (Collins 2013b, p. 10).

In the case of atrocities, one can observe that the mass killing erupt at the moment when the offending group establishes emotional energy dominance over the victimised group. Collins goes so far as claiming that "emotional dominance comes first and makes possible physical dominance" (Collins 2013b, p. 10). Where the emotional energy remains balanced, no mass violence breaks out even though one group might be stronger in relation to weapons or number.

It is argued here however that in addition to the physiological barrier to violence, other barriers such as internalised values, morals, accepted social norms and the law are also operating. Emotional energy dominance can only be established if these ethical barriers are also overcome. For this reason the model proposed in this paper, also draws on the neutralisation strategies developed by Sykes and Matza. Analysing juvenile crime Sykes and Matza (1957) identified different techniques individual offenders use to neutralise the inner condemnation of their own actions and thus overcome ethical barriers. The *group violence strategies model shows how* in groups committing mass atrocities we can observe various group behaviours which support neutralisation strategies of the individual (see below).

Another important theory for the *group violence strategies model* is the theory of *patterns of violence* by Klusemann (2012). Analysing the Srebrenica massacre Klusemann found recurrent patterns of how the violence developed throughout the atrocity. These patterns can be explained by the need of the offending group to employ a number of strategies to create and sustain emotional dominance over the victim group. These group dynamics however cannot be sufficiently explained without taking the strategies of the individual into consideration. An analysis of both individual and group strategies is therefore necessary.

The aim of the paper is therefore to show that the combination of *neutralisation* and *emotional energy models* can contribute significantly to the understanding of mass atrocities. In developing this new model I argue that the mesa-level of the group cannot be separated from the micro-level of the individual. The reason for this is that in order to comprehend the individual perpetrator's decisions, the dynamics of the offending group as well as the interaction between offending and victimised group need to be understood.[3] The *group violence strategies model* therefore attempts to explain what strategies the offending group employs to enable the individual to overcome his or her barrier to violence. In order to do this the model combines conventional criminological theories into a new three-stage analysis, proposing three distinct but inter-related levels of examination: At the first level of analysis, the model focuses on the individual, drawing the attention to the diversity of possible motives as well as the different neutralisation techniques. The second level examines group dynamics within the offending group, which facilitate the individual's neutralisation techniques and at the same time raise the emotional energy of the group. The third level looks at how the offending group engages with

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[3] Further research is the needed to examine how these processes are facilitated on the macro-level.

the victimised group in order to create and maintain emotional dominance. In the following three sections I will explore how *neutralisation* and *emotional dominance* strategies are employed on individual, inter-group and intra-group levels and how this explains regular *patterns of violence*. Of course these strategies can overlap and different actions often fulfil functions on different levels.

First, however, an explanation of the terminology is required. The concept of 'group' is difficult to define in the context of genocide and similar mass killings for two reasons. Firstly, there is a lot of debate as to what constitutes a group and how its membership can be identified. Secondly, the categorisation of groups in either 'offenders' or 'victims' constitutes an oversimplification of historical events. For example the Kurdish tribes, who were so violently persecuted in the Ottoman Empire, committed numerals acts of violence themselves against the marching Armenians (Gerlach 2006). Likewise the Hutus have repeatedly been massacred by Tutsis and *vice versa* in the decades after Rwanda gained independence (Karstedt 2013). Furthermore, each atrocity is shaped by a number of very different circumstances such as the causes and history of the animosity, the size and armament of the involved groups, the military or civilian constitution of the group, the context of the overall armed conflict and so on. Rather than referring to the group at macro-level, such as a certain religion or ethnicity, the *group violence strategies model* uses the term 'group' to describe the collective of people who are present at the specific event, i.e. a specific atrocity which is committed on the stated day or days. The 'offender group' is understood as the collective of all those individuals who participate in the violence against the 'victim group' which is understood as all those who suffer from the attack in this specific event.

4. Individual strategies

The *group violence strategies model* begins the analysis at the micro-level to explain the violence from the level of the individual perpetrator. As Mattani and Strickland (2006, p.502) point out:

> only individuals behave: the dynamics of collective action the therefore depend on understanding the contingencies that shape and maintain individual acts, as well as how those contingencies interlock and interact to produce emergent collective and cultural processes.

Much research focusses on the origin of polarised group identities and the causes for one group attacking the other. When looking however at the individual perpetrator who is carrying out the violence, it has to be recognised that there are a plethora of different motives in addition or even instead of the intent to eliminate the group. One of the possible individual motivations is personal revenge for crimes which the attacker has previously suffered at the hands of members of the other group. In the case of Srebrenica for example, Serbs living in the villages nearby who had previously been targeted in Muslim raids now asked the attacking soldiers to target specific individuals (Klusemann 2009). Another individual motivation for participation in the violence is simply material gain. Gerlach (2006) points out that part of the motives for the persecution of Armenians was the looting of the Armenian property which supported the development of the new Muslim commercial elite and the new nation-state. Staub (1999) even argues that the root of mass violence always lies in the "frustration of basic human needs and the development of destructive modes of need fulfilment" (Staub 1999, p. 181). In addition, atrocities are often connected with the trafficking of weapons and drugs and the illegal exploitation of natural resources (Karstedt 2013).

The diversity of motives shows the complexity of the phenomena and the short-comings of monocausal macro-level explanations. It does not however explain the immense cruelty in which these massacres are carried out and why very similar patterns can be observed in very different atrocities. It is argued that the *group violence strategies model* can fill this gap.

4.1. Neutralisation

The first step when analysing perpetrators of mass atrocities is to explore the *individual neutralisation strategies*. This theory argues that delinquent behaviour is not so much a rejection of certain norms but rather an "unrecognised extension of defences to crimes" (Sykes and Matza 1957, p. 666) in which the offender believes that the concrete situation justifies their acts. In this way, non-acceptable behaviour is rationalised and the condemnation of the behaviour by social, legal and moral rules is neutralised.

> Social controls that serve to check or inhibit deviant motivational patterns are rendered inoperative, and the individual is freed to engage in delinquency without serious damage to his self image (Sykes and Matza 1957, p. 667).

The five neutralisation strategies Sykes and Matza identified are: 1) the denial of responsibility, 2) the denial of injury, 3) the denial of the victim, 4) the condemnation of the condemners and 5) the appeal to higher loyalties.

In the context of mass atrocities two of these mechanisms, namely the denial of responsibility and the condemnation of the condemners, can often be observed after the violence took place. First, denial of responsibility means that the perpetrators view themselves as an object rather than subject of their actions. Sykes and Matza (1957, p. 667) speak of a 'billiard-ball conception where the individual "sees himself as helplessly propelled into new situations". In the case of mass killings, this can be observed where the individual attacker claims to have been part of a group which they could not leave and whose demands they could not have rejected, describing themselves thus as helpless members overcome by the power of the group. Through the second mechanism, the condemnation of the condemners, the wrong-doing is neutralised by denying legitimacy of the sources for condemnations such as society, the state or the courts. This can frequently be seen in international criminal law where the relevant court is accused of victors' justice and lack of legitimacy. In the context of armed conflict however, this usually happens only after the event when a new court system is set up or the proceedings of the International Criminal Court are triggered. Thus both of these techniques are post-event neutralisation strategies and can therefore be neglected in the *group violence strategies model*, which is interested in the question of how the violence arises and less focused on subsequent justifications. To what extent the post-event strategies have an impact on the behaviour during the attack itself needs to be explored elsewhere.

The three neutralisation strategies which are closely related to the *group violence strategies model* are 1) the denial of injury, 2) the denial of the victim and 3) the appeal to higher authorities. These techniques are used to overcome the moral dilemma of violating one of the most universal laws, namely the prohibition to kill. All three of these neutralisation strategies are facilitated by macro level polarisation, such as media campaigns against the victim group or long-term persecution by the government, which seem to tolerate or even condone attacks on members of the victim group. Nevertheless it is unlikely that an individual could build up such a high level of neutralisation that he or she would be able to participate in mass violence. It is argued here that only through the facilitation of neutralisation at the mesa-level through the different inter- and intra-group interactions, neutralisation of participating in mass atrocities can be achieved. Neutralisation is inseparably intertwined with the group's objective of achieving emotional dominance. The three relevant neutralisation strategies will therefore be explored in Part V as part of the inter-group strategies.

4.2. Self-entrainment

Another explanation for individual gross violence can be found in the phenomenon of what criminologists call *self-entrainment* (Collins 2013b). In violent crimes,

especially in domestic violence, the assailant often continues the attack even though the victim is already overpowered and beyond offering any resistance. Once the victim is completely helpless the intensity of the physical attack even increases. Collins speaks of a 'tunnel' in which the attacker is only focused on him- or herself and loses awareness of the victim and the initial reason for the attack.

> The violent abuser has become entrained with him/herself; his consciousness narrows to his own anger, caught up in his own bodily rhythms of heavy breathing, shouting, hitting (Collins 2013a, p. 141).

This tunnel perception can only be upheld when and as long as the victim remains passive and does not distract the attacker through resistance. In the situation of armed conflict, the senseless slaughter of defenceless enemy combatants or unarmed civilians occur at the point when the attackers have established absolute dominance and there is no need for further violence (Collins 2008). Collins (2013b) describes this state as an 'emotional high', which sometimes the attacker even tries to prolong. He cites the experience of a US Marine lieutenant in Vietnam who recalls that "I could not come down from the high produced by the action. The fire-fight was over, except for a few desultory exchanges, but I did not want it to be over" (Collins 2013b, p. 141). This state of self-entrainment is fostered by the encouragement of the offender group, especially by the cheering audience, but is also enabled by the passivity of the overwhelmed victim group. Once the self-entrainment has ended, the killings stop and the remaining victims are spared. After the My Lai massacre, US soldiers shared their lunch with Vietnamese children only hours after the slaughter when they tried to make sure that not even children would survive (Kelman and Hamilton 1989). In Srebrenica, once the main killings were over, soldiers expressed reluctance to the further executions and would start arguing over who would have to kill wounded victims. Many Muslim men who were captured later were imprisoned rather than killed (Klusemann 2009).

5. Inter-group strategies

The core of the *group violence strategies model* is the claim that the massacre are only possible if and as long as the attacking group has established emotional dominance. The violence is therefore carried out in a way that serves maximising emotional energy rather than military victory. Thus, the pattern of violence is not dictated by the intended end result of the destruction of the group but rather by the offender group's aim to create and maintain emotional energy dominance over the victim group in order to enable the violence in the first place. Micro- and mesa-level interact here very closely and cross-fertilise each other's aims. While the group can only raise emotional energy where there is sufficient neutralisation on the individual level, it is the group dynamics which strengthens the individual's neutralisation to such a level where emotional energy reaches sufficient force. This is achieved through a number of dynamics within the group as well as in relation to the other group (see Part VI). Strategies within the group aimed to achieve emotional dominance are 1) polarisation and solidarity rituals, 2) denial of the victimhood and injury, and 3) appeal to higher authorities.

5.1. Polarisation and solidarity rituals

It has often been demonstrated that the categorisation of groups is created outside the relevant population sections themselves. Hagan *et al.* (2005) for example strongly argue that comparatively fluid ethnic identities in Darfur preceded the state's emphasis on a conflict between races and that the Sudanese government fostered the racial and ethnic divisions between Arabs and Black Africans, building on the competition for land and water resources. In general, different acts of polarisation, often maintained throughout the months or even years before the main massacre, not only help organising the attacks because the victim group can be easier identified (Pruitt 2014), they also establish emotional dominance of the

offenders, because they foster the identification of the victims with the defeated and the offenders with the dominating group. It is therefore essential for the offender group to maintain the polarisation and to enforce the solidarity among the offending group through solidarity rituals like visual signs such as painting faces or distinguished cloth items, or chanting songs during the killings. The denial of victimhood and injury (discussed below) also serve as solidarity rituals (Klusemann 2012).

5.2. Denial of victimhood and injury

The creation of separate group identities is closely linked to the portrayal of the victim group as an adversary to the offending group. This depiction of the victim group as the enemy has a number of functions in the build-up of emotional dominance. On the one hand this enforces polarisation into "us" and the "the other" and strengthens further solidarity within the group. On the other hand, it fosters the neutralisation strategy of denial of victimhood. "They had it coming" is an often-used individual neutralisation strategy which denies the attacked individual the status of the victim. The targeted person is not seen as innocent but rather as one deserving the violence (Harrendorf 2014). "By a subtle alchemy the delinquent moves himself into the position of an avenger and the victim is transformed into a wrong-doer" (Sykes and Matza 1957, p. 668). The attack is seen as legitimate revenge or punishment. This understanding fits well in the general genocide propaganda, which usually blames the other group for previous attacks, low living standard or shortage of resources. "The minority group becomes the scapegoat for the dominant group and the problems of the state" (Pruitt 2014, p. 9). Thus the offender does not deny the general prohibition of killing but sees here the target as the aggressor who needs to be punished. For example in Srebrenica the Serbs felt betrayed by the NATO bombing and thus justified attacking the Dutch NATO troops in the UN safe haven. Likewise the US soldiers who committed the My Lai massacre were in a state of revenge after losing many of their comrades in booby trapped mines and not being able to find any enemy combatants (Dutton *et al.* 2005).

Related to the concept of denial of victimhood is the denial of injury. This occurs where the perpetrator is conscious of the illegality of the act but denies its moral wrongfulness. The victim group is portrayed as posing a threat which needs to be averted. Thus the perpetrators see themselves as acting in defence of the survival of their own group and the attack is justified as a necessary act of protection from future attacks by the victim group (Harrendorf 2014). For example, the Armenians were presented as the "fifth column" of the Russian Army (Levene 1998) and in Nazi Germany Jews were described as part of a Zionist conspiracy (Dutton *et al.* 2005). In Rwanda, where there had been many mass killings on both sides, the fear of revenge killings by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) was consistently promoted by the Hutu (Dutton *et al.* 2005) and pamphlets were distributed which depicted "Tutsis in Rwanda as a fifth column of the RPA that posed a threat and needed to be exterminated" (Klusemann 2012, p. 472). Pol Pot even exclaimed "if we wait any longer, the microbes can do real damage" (Chandler *et al.* 1988). In El Salvador the guerrillas were often referred to as cancerous, an infection or a virus which justified killing the whole family of a suspected guerrilla (Dutton *et al.* 2005). "If we don't kill them now; they'll just grow up to be guerrillas. We have to take care of the job now" (Danner 1994, p. 75).

The self-defence argument alone is of course not sufficient to explain atrocities which are aimed at the extinction of the group, rather than only at controlling the group or expelling it from the region (so-called ethnic cleansing). Moreover, the individual attacker must realise that weaker members of the group such as children cannot be blamed for past crimes or old people are unlikely to be threat in the future. The notion of revenge and self-defence are however vital in neutralising the barriers to violence as well as creating a feeling of justification which contributes to emotional dominance. Furthermore, the individual often has additional motives

which will also strengthen his or her resolve. For example the rationalisation that a civilian village needs to be attacked because it allegedly supplies the enemy with food and shelter, is strengthened by personal material gain when looting the village.

5.3. The appeal to higher loyalties

In this neutralisation technique offenders rely on their obligation to honour their duties towards the group and prioritise it above law and social norms.

> Deviation from certain norms may occur not because the norms are rejected but because other norms, held to be more pressing or involving a higher loyalty, are accorded precedence (Sykes and Matza 1957, p. 669).

This can reach such an extent that the deviant behaviour is not only justified, but it actually becomes the "right thing to do" (Dutton *et al.* 2005, p. 456); what Staub (1999, p. 183) would call the "reversal of morality".

With regards to massacres this would mean that the loyalty for the state or the larger group, such as race or religion, prevails over the values of the international community, such as recognition of fundamental human rights. While international humanitarian law and human rights law were created to supersede distorted national laws, these international norms cannot overcome techniques of neutralisation. The reason for this is that the neutralisation technique of appeal to higher loyalties does not reject the norms themselves, but rather develop justified exceptions or defences to these norms. The appeal to the group interests as higher loyalties is of course closely linked to a strong identity with the group and thus overlaps with the polarisation and solidarity rituals.

6. Intra-group strategies

In order to achieve emotional dominance the offender group not only acts in ways that raise their own emotional energy but are also aimed at lowering the emotional energy of the victim group. If successful, this creates such a strong feeling of helplessness, powerlessness and inferiority that the victim group becomes paralysed and unable to offer any resistance. The three main intra-group strategies are 1) building up the degrees of violence, 2) dehumanisation of the members of the victim group and 3) de-individualising of the victims.

6.1. Dehumanising

A crucial part of lowering the emotional strength of the victim group is the dehumanisation and degradation of its members. Describing the victims as sub-human also removes the killing from the idea of homicide. As Erikson explains:

> People lose the sense of being one species and try to make other people into a different and mortally dangerous species, one that doesn't count, one that isn't human . . . You can kill them without feeling that you have killed your own kind (Waller 2002, p. 244 cited in Hall 1983).

The massacres are therefore described in euphuisms such as 'cleansing', 'work', 'finishing the job' (Human Rights Watch 1999) or 'bush clearing' (Feigenbaum 2012, p. 179) and the victims are compared to animals and vermin. Jews for example were called "bacteria" and Tutsis "cockroaches" (Pruitt 2014, p. 7). Chang reports on a soldier who explained, when recounting the Nanking atrocities, "When we killed her, we just thought of her as something like a pig" (Chang 1997, p. 50). In addition, the violence is accompanied by shouting abuses against the group identity (i.e. insults of race or religion). This is even true where the underlying motives are not rooted in racial or ethnical prejudices against the other group. For example Straus (2006) has shown that most perpetrators in the Rwandan genocide had no racial ethnic prejudices but nevertheless engaged in racist abuses of the victims during the killings. This can only be explained by the fact that these insults

are part of the emotional build-up in order to overcome the physiological barrier against killing a fellow human being.

The total dominance over the victims is also demonstrated by commanding them to make self-denigrating and derogatory comments about themselves and their group (Collins 2013a), and thus forcing them to lower their own emotional energy. Similarly, intra-group strategies to create emotional dominance include forcing the victims to do degrading acts which demonstrate their subservience. In addition, victims are ordered to declare that they blame themselves for their suffering (Collins 2013a), as part of the neutralisation strategy of denying injury and depicting the victim as the aggressor. The widespread sexual violence also functions to lower the emotional energy, as it not only violates the individual victim but also the self-perception of the victim group, which in many traditional communities is understood as a direct attack on the honour of the male in his role as the defender. This is also true for attacks on the most vulnerable members of a group such as elders and children.

6.2. Building up the violence

Interestingly, even in cases where the offender group is clearly stronger in either numbers or weapons, or both, there is rarely an immediate outbreak of mass violence. Instead, the violence builds up from oral assaults, destruction of property, killings of animals and single assassinations to the outbreak of the full-blown mass killings. The reason for this is that in order to commit the atrocity, military dominance is not sufficient if it is not also accompanied by emotional dominance. At the beginning of the confrontation, the offender group has not yet established the necessary emotional energy to overcome the tension and fear of its members. At the same time the emotional energy of the victim group is still so high that they would offer full resistance to any immediate attack. The small skirmishes, raids and sniping attacks between Serbs and Bosnian Muslims throughout the two years before the Srebrenica atrocity are examples for a situation in which the emotional energy of both groups are tested out and neither has achieved emotional dominance yet. The incremental building up of violence before the main killing is therefore needed for both strengthening the emotional energy of the own group and at the same time lowering the emotional energy of the victim group.

The lowest form of violence are verbal abuses. From hindsight of the mass killing even the strongest insults seem to be negligible to the violence committed later, but at the beginning these verbal abuses go far beyond what would be acceptable in ordinary life. 'Fuck your Turkish mothers!' (Klusemann 2009, p. 7) is such an offensive insult that it signifies the break-down of the ordinary. The initial insults tear down the barriers of respect and acknowledgement of the honour of the other person. The oral violence is the first step of breaking the physical barrier of violence as well as the first steps in the struggle for emotional dominance. Thus insults and taunting should not simply be taken as an expression of genocidal intent, rather they serve various functions at the individual as well as at the intra-group level.

The next step in the build-up of the violence is a number of initial minor attacks, such as killing cattle or destroying outhouses. These initial acts of violence intimidate the victim group and thus help to establish dominance of the attacking group. Where these acts can be committed without serious repercussions or resistance of the victim group, they help create a triumphant atmosphere raising high emotional energy levels. In addition these individual minor acts constitute to a further step towards the killing of human beings for which still the *confrontational tension/fear* barrier exists. The initial acts against objects rather than human beings or against cattle help to gradually overcome the general barrier against killing members of the own species.

Once the emotional dominance is achieved, the violence only lasts as long as this dominance can be maintained. One strategy to maintain emotional dominance, in

addition to the continuing humiliations of the victims, are the so-called killing games. These are actions that combine the act of killing with humiliating rituals, such as running the gauntlet. These cruel games are not simply an expression of hatred of the victim group. First of all, these rituals make the killing as such much less effective, as they unnecessarily slow down the progress. Secondly, it has been observed many times that these killing games start only after the mass killing has already gone on for some while (Klusemann 2012, Chang 1997). This seems to show that the killing games are not simply an expression of loathing towards the victims but rather fulfil a function in the group violence strategies, namely prolonging the state of dominance. The same is true for the mass rapes which start only after the mass killings have begun. Related to the killing games are other forms of extreme violence, which break universal taboos of human interaction. One is sexual violence committed in front of family members or forcing victims to commit incestuous acts with each other. Another is the cruel killing of children (including babies) in front of the parents (Hersh 1970) as well as mutilations of the corpses.

6.3. De-individualisation of the victims

In addition to dehumanising the victim and building up the violence towards the main killing, another function of intra-group actions are aimed at de-individualising the victims, which enables individuals overcoming their physiological barrier to violence.

The first strategy of de-individualisation is to avoid looking the victims in the face. The face and eyes are the most direct expression of humanity and facing them increases the confrontational stress. Collins argues that this is the reason why most victims of professional assassinations are shot from behind (Collins 2008) and most knife killings are committed by stabbing in the back (Collins 2013a). Likewise Grossman (2009) found that both in prisons as well as in police raids, there is more violence where the faces of either the attackers or the victims are hidden under hoods. In mass atrocities the victims are very often rendered 'faceless' through being blindfold or shot from behind or lying face down (Klusemann 2012). Browning (1992) compares different examples of executions of Polish Jews by the Nazis and found that where the victims were lying face down and shot in the back of the head, the killers were much less likely to try to avoid the order to execute compared with cases where they could see the faces. This fits also within the neutralisation strategy of denial of injury. When the attacker stands in front of an individual it is more difficult to hold up the myth that this particular person is an aggressor, guilty of past crimes and a dangerous threat for the future.

Another strategy of de-individualisation is to avoid facing the victim on a one-to-one basis. Most killings are committed by groups against groups rather than by individuals against individuals. Very often the victims are herded together even though this is not always the most effective way of killing. Both in the My Lai massacre as well as in many mass killings in Rwanda, rather than killing the victims in the buildings where they were found, they were first dragged out and then killed in groups (Dutton *et al*. 2005). Thus a group of victims was killed by a group of offenders rather than individual victims by individual offenders. In this way both attackers and victims became de-individualised.

All three main intra-group strategies, dehumanising, building up the violence and de-individualisation of the victims, serve a number of functions both in fostering individual neutralisation techniques as well as creating and maintaining emotional dominance over the victim group. In addition, the audience too plays a crucial role in both inter-group as well as intra-group strategies to build up the necessary emotional dominance both by encouraging the offenders and by harassing the victims (Klusemann 2012). This can, for example, be observed in Srebrenica where "Bosnian Serb civilians from surrounding villages provided an audience for the

perpetrators and helped to maintain a triumphant atmosphere by harassing/taunting victims or calling for particular people to be executed" (Klusemann 2012, p. 472). Klusemann (2012) argues that this encouragement by the audience was necessary for the mass killings to occur, even though the Serbs had enough weapons to kill the unarmed victims anyway. The applauding and encouraging audience is not only helping to raise emotional energy but also help the offender to create the impression that their actions are condoned and thus strengthen the individual's neutralisation strategies. This is also true for the by-standing audience themselves, who have to overcome the fact that they are committing the crime of incitement to murder.

7. Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated that when looking at mass atrocities neither the forms of violence nor the extent of cruelty can be sufficiently explained by conventional motives such as ethnic hatred and group polarisation. In order to be able to understand how individuals overcome both physiological and ethnical barriers to violence against their own species and participate in the most gruesome acts, the *group violence strategies model* explores the interactions between micro- and mesa-levels. It has been shown that the traditional neutralisation model can be translated into acts of mass killings but on its own it is not enough to explain the behaviour of individual perpetrators. Rather it is at the group level where the individual neutralisation is strengthened to the necessary degree and where emotional energy dominance is established and maintained. Indeed, this paper argues that the extent of the violence, which goes beyond only taking life, is not rooted in propaganda fuelled polarisation and orchestrated hatred, rather it is needed to enable the individual to commit the killings in the first place. Thus mass atrocities cannot be explained without taking the group violence strategies into consideration. For this purpose the *group violence strategies model* combines traditional criminological theories and restructures them into a three level analyses, examining the strategies employed at individual inter-group and intra-group level.

Encompassing the level of the individual perpetrator and the group dynamics on the ground at the time of the atrocity, it is hoped that the *group violence strategies model* offers a new approach of analysis which will complement current genocide studies and make a contribution to a more complex and nuanced understanding of mass atrocities.

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