

IDEOLOGIES AND MASS VIOLENCE

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The Justificatory Mechanics of Deadly Atrocities

Jonathan Leader Maynard
University College, University of Oxford

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DPhil in Politics
in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford.

July 2014

Word Count: 99,059

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to provide an account of the role played by ideologies in acts of mass violence against civilians, such as genocides, murderous state repression, war crimes, and other 'atrocities'. Mass violence of this kind has already received extensive study, with scholars frequently emphasising their belief that ideology is important. Until now, however, discussions of ideology have been held back by a lack of conceptual and theoretical development, leading to narrow portrayals of ideology's role, vagueness over its relevance, and dubious assumptions about its theoretical implications.

This thesis addresses these problems by building a more focused and integrative theoretical framework for analysing the ideological dynamics of atrocities. I engage in an extensive conceptual and methodological discussion, to establish the best way of defining and utilising the concept of ideology. In doing so, I emphasise how ideology can be important even for that majority of atrocity perpetrators who do not meet classic but misleading stereotypes of fanatical killers driven by burning hatred. I then detail my actual account of the ideological dynamics of deadly atrocities, which centres around the identification of six 'justificatory mechanisms': dehumanisation, guilt-attribution, threat-construction, deagentification, virtuetalk, and future-bias. These justificatory mechanisms describe sets of ideological processes that recur across different cases of violence against civilians, and which make that violence look permissible or even desirable to those who, in a variety of roles, carry it out. I then substantiate this account through three case studies: of Nazi atrocities, Stalinist oppression, and Allied area bombing in World War II. These cases demonstrate the cross-case applicability of the six justificatory mechanisms, and illustrate how the framework I offer allows us to construct more causally explicit, psychologically plausible, and comprehensive pictures of the way key ideologies feed in to the most destructive campaigns of violence against civilians.

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Acknowledgements

A brief note of thanks to several people, without whom this thesis would either not have existed in the form it has taken, or would never have been written at all. First, to Elizabeth Frazer, for being everything I could have wished for in a supervisor, and for making me a far better researcher than I would ever have become otherwise. Second, to Lewis Turner, Alex Worsnip, Lise Butler, and my parents, Carol Leader and Michael Maynard, for reading earlier drafts of the thesis, offering a wealth of helpful feedback and suggestions, and for shaping and reshaping my thinking, on this topic and others, more times than I can count. Third, to Thomas Homer-Dixon, Jennifer Welsh, Martin Ceadel, Alan Cromartie, Susan Benesch and Sidney Tarrow, for their generous and invaluable advice, support, inspiration and encouragement. Fourth, to Jonathan Glover, for his book *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, and to Lars Fischer, for teaching me in a single undergraduate paper eight years ago: together, they got me definitively hooked on the questions in this thesis, and made me think about them deeply for the first time. Finally, to Bengü Ezgi Aydın, for more contributions than I can name, and for making this all worthwhile.

The research for this thesis was made possible by a full doctoral research grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and was completed in the first months of a Junior Research Fellowship at New College. Both institutions also have my deep gratitude.

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“The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”

- John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

1. Introduction: Ideology and the Explanation of Mass Violence

1.1 Questioning Violence

In 1945, Hannah Arendt predicted that “the problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe”.¹ As the world came to terms with the Holocaust, Japanese war crimes in East Asia, and the deracinating consequences of ‘total war’, it seemed natural that humanity’s apparently escalating propensity for horrifying violence would form a central topic of study and reflection. As the historian Tony Judt has pointed out, however, “Arendt was wrong, at least for a while.”² Sincere efforts to explain the worst crimes of humanity took time to appear in significant numbers, and in some quarters the very idea of ‘explaining’ events as horrific as the Holocaust seemed implausible, even unconscionable.³ For at least three decades, there was little systematic effort to understand how such acts of evil, as Arendt and others have labelled them,⁴ happen.

But over time this has changed, and Arendt’s prediction has been increasingly realised. As our capacity for great evil has only been re-emphasised with the passage of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the demands for explanation have grown.⁵ Between sixty million and one hundred and seventy million civilians were killed between 1900 and 2000 in purposeful, targeted attacks – whether genocides, massacres, military abuses or acts of terrorism.⁶ Such abstract numbers can be dehumanising – we could alternatively say that if all the 20th Century civilians who died from organised violence could line up, hand-in-

¹ Arendt, 2005, p. 134.

² Judt, 2008. See also: Waller, 2007, p. 11; Hinton, 2002a, pp. 2-3; Fein, 2002, pp. 74-5; Bartov, 1998, p. 788.

³ Fein, 2002, p. 76; Postone and Santner, 2003, p. 4.

⁴ Eagleton, 2011; Staub, 1989; Vetlesen, 2005; Waller, 2007, pp. xiii & 10-14; Kekes, 2005; Tismaneanu, 2010, p. 79.

⁵ Waller, 2007, p. 11; Fein, 2002, p. 75; Bellamy, 2012b, p. 1.

⁶ Dutton, 2007, p. 16; Valentino, 2004, p. 1. See also: Rummel, 1994, pp. 1-27.

hand, that line would encircle the Earth four times over. These victims dwarf the thirty four million who died in the battlefield violence of conventional warfare.⁷ Standing aside in respectful but uncomprehending memorialisation looks increasingly inadequate, even complicit, in the face of such monstrous suffering. There is now a widespread consensus that if the mass killing of innocents is ever to come to an end, it has to be studied and understood. If we are to have a chance of preventing the worst of humanity's crimes against humanity, we must seek to explain how they occur.⁸

In popular discourse, three rough-and-ready explanations tend to be offered, predictably resurfacing whenever new atrocities reach public attention. The first is that the perpetrators of evil are simply evil by nature.⁹ Whether comic book villains or somewhat more believable moral monsters, they are enthusiastic embodiments of malevolence, and thus utterly unlike ordinary members of society. This, for some, is all the explanation we require. Frequently, as when Anders Behring-Breivik shot sixty-nine Norwegian teenagers in July 2011, a second explanation is a convenient alternative or supplement for the first: the ascription of insanity to the killer(s).¹⁰ It is commonly assumed that perpetrators of atrocities are 'deranged', and commit their crimes through a lethal combination of a pathological and sadistic psychology, and a deluded disconnect with the 'real world' as ordinary people are able to see it. In a subtle variation on this theme some commentaries, though not portraying individual perpetrators as clinically insane, characterise atrocities as a sort of social madness – an abandonment by whole groups of reason and reflection in favour of wild rage and atavistic bloodlust.¹¹ Finally, and more mundanely, it is often simply assumed that the perpetrators of great crimes acted under coercion. As members of

⁷ Valentino, 2004, p. 1. See also: Waller, 2007, p. xv & 15.

⁸ Goldhagen, 1997, p. 4; Semelin, 2005, p. 2; Waller, 2007, pp. xi, xiii, xv & 9; Fein, 2002, p. 88; Valentino, 2004, pp. 1 & 30-1.

⁹ Eagleton, 2011, pp. 1-5; Waller, 2007, p. 106.

¹⁰ Orange, 2011; BBC News, 2011.

¹¹ For a critique, with examples, see Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 32-4. For an additional example, see: Wilshire, 2006.

totalitarian societies or harsh military/paramilitary organisations, they killed because they themselves had the threat of death hanging over them should they disobey.¹²

If any of these explanations were accurate, there might be no need for this thesis. However, one of the outcomes of over half a century of research into violent atrocities has been a recognition that they are all quite radically inaccurate. Inherent pathological wickedness or mental abnormality amongst perpetrators of large atrocities is extremely rare. On the contrary, “it is ordinary people, like you and me,” writes the social psychologist James Waller, “who commit genocide and mass killing.”¹³ This is not to deny the appropriateness of calling atrocities ‘evil’ *in some sense*. But as an explanatory cause, both inherent evil and psychopathology are untenable – most perpetrators of atrocities are simply not abnormal in this way.¹⁴ This is now a point of almost universal consensus amongst analysts of genocide and other forms of mass violence – and I shall refer to it throughout this thesis as the ‘ordinary killers consensus’. It should not be so surprising on reflection. *Mass* violence – my focus in this thesis – involves the widespread participation or acquiescence of substantial sections of societies.¹⁵ Hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands of participants are often involved, and they cannot all be psychologically abnormal in a meaningful manner.¹⁶ Indeed, the organisations that perpetrate great atrocities, such as secret police departments, militaries, and terrorist networks, have often gone to extensive efforts to weed *out* psychopathic and bloodthirsty individuals.¹⁷

There is a little more truth in the common assumption that mass killers operate under coercion – this is sometimes the case, and prominent examples can be found in atrocities in Rwanda, Yugoslavia and Cambodia. Nevertheless, the vast majority of atrocity

¹² See also: Bartov, 1998, p. 794.

¹³ Waller, 2007, p. 20. See also: *ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴ See: *ibid.*, 59-91 & 105-6; Browning, 2001; Stanton, 2007, p. vii; Browning, 2007, p. xii; Staub, 1989, p. 67; Dutton, 2007; Arendt, 2005, p. 134.

¹⁵ Weitz, 2003, pp. 86, 90, 112, 114 & 243; Waller, 2007, p. 15; Bartov, 1998, pp. 783, 785 & 794. This claim is partly denied by Valentino, John Mueller and Stathis Kalyvas – a position I will respond to in section 3.1.2. See: Valentino, 2004, pp. 2-3; Mueller, 2000; Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 21 & 102-3.

¹⁶ Stanton, 2007, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁷ Waller, 2007, p. 71; Valentino, 2004, pp. 42-44 & 57-8; Baum, 2008, p. 77; Dutton, 2007, p. 136.

perpetrators do not reluctantly obey orders issued ‘on pain of death’. Indeed, many killers pass up on opportunities to avoid participation,¹⁸ many participate enthusiastically,¹⁹ and many voluntarily go *beyond* the orders they receive from superiors.²⁰ In over a hundred years of modern genocides and massacres, very few cases can be found which were perpetrated principally out of fear for the killer’s life.²¹ And even for those which were, coercion remains at best a partial explanation. One cannot have an apparatus of human destruction which is coercive all the way up. At some point someone decides that atrocities, or policies which lead to atrocities, need to be enacted. Coercion leaves such decisions unexplained, just as it fails to account for why the intermediate followers who actually generate the coercive power of leaders choose to obey.²² As with inherent evil and insanity, it is now widely accepted that ‘coercion’ cannot satisfactorily account for the commission of mass atrocities.²³

It is the fundamental inadequacy of these three commonplace explanations which modern analysts of mass violence and deadly atrocities have to respond to. If the killing of civilians is not principally perpetrated by the insane, the inherently evil, or the coerced, how and why does it occur? *Why do large numbers of ordinary people voluntarily participate in the mass killing of unarmed, defenceless, innocent people?* Efforts to answer this foundational question have spawned a vast literature crossing many disciplines, and resulted in a wide range of different theories and explanations. At the most basic level, this thesis aims to make a significant contribution to that literature.

But I do not seek to address this question in its totality. Instead I focus on one causal dimension of vital but not exclusive significance. At the most basic level, mass violence perpetrated against civilians occurs when individuals pick up weapons and use

¹⁸ Hinton, 1998b, p. 9.

¹⁹ Waller, 2007, p. 253.

²⁰ Ibid., 105; Valentino, 2004, pp. 47-8.

²¹ Browning, 2001, p. 170; Valentino, 2004, p. 48; Burleigh, 2001, p. 603.

²² Valentino, 2004, p. 2; Crawford, 2002, p. 31.

²³ I critique all three explanations more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

them against other human beings. And in most cases, those individuals do not act spontaneously, but as part of planned social action – organised campaigns of killing initiated and managed by leaders. It is my contention that most of the people involved in such campaigns are able and willing to participate in atrocities because they see the violence in question as permissible and/or desirable. As Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley have written, genocides and atrocities typically occur because “the perpetrators believe that mass killing is the right thing to do.”²⁴ Why do they believe that? How can ordinary people perceive unarmed civilians – typically including children, women and the elderly – as permissible or even desirable targets of lethal force?

This thesis aims to answer such questions, and provide a general theory of what I shall term the ‘justificatory mechanics of deadly atrocities’. My intention is to identify and analyse common sets of processes which generate the perception of violence against civilians as permissible or even desirable. I call these sets of processes “justificatory mechanisms”, and shall crucially claim that they recur across different cases of atrocity. This should not suppress awareness of differences between cases, nor imply that case-specific examinations, which stress the unique justifications used in a particular context, are without value – indeed, comparative analyses like mine must usually rely on such studies. But there are a range of reasons for agreeing with Alex Bellamy’s contention that: “whilst the precise contours of justification shift from case to case, it is important to recognise the family resemblances between them”.²⁵ This thesis offers an account of the recurring justificatory mechanisms of mass violence against civilians, substantiated through three main case studies: of Nazi atrocities, of Stalinist oppression in the Soviet Union, and (more controversially) of Allied area bombing in World War Two.

²⁴ Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 5. See also: du Preez, 1994, p. 3.

²⁵ Bellamy, 2012a, p. 180.

1.2 Talking About Ideology

In examining the ways in which mass violence against civilians comes to be seen as justified, I frame my analysis in terms of *ideology*. I believe that when defined and used carefully this term offers the most powerful way of talking about the issues I seek to investigate – and indeed, genocide and atrocity theorists already make frequent reference to ideology.²⁶ I also use it because a core aim of this thesis is to connect current research on violent atrocities with the specialist academic literature on ideology, a literature scholars of mass violence have thus far largely ignored. Some will fear that a focus on ideology is misplaced. But I hope to convince them that they are either substantively mistaken or (and I think this is more often the case) are sceptical because they believe that ideology denotes something that, for the majority of contemporary theorists of ideology, it does not.

Nevertheless, using the word ‘ideology’ creates challenges. Though it is a concept utilised by a wide range of academics, it is infamous for its status as, in the words of one prominent theorist, “the most elusive concept in the whole of social science”.²⁷ I address this problem in the main through a definitional, methodological, and theoretical discussion of ideology in Chapter Two. But since different initial attitudes to an emphasis of ideology are so often rooted in varying understandings of what it means, I wish to provide a very general sense of what I am trying to *get at* in talking of ideology right away.

My use of ideology is rooted in the aforementioned specialist academic literature on the topic, one which has developed over the last twenty years. Like most theorists in that literature, I use the term broadly, to denote the distinctive systems of ideas which shape people’s perceptions of their political world and their behaviour in that world.²⁸ I do not attach to ideology a wide range of implicit or explicit connotations, whether descriptive or evaluative, that result in it having a much narrower meaning. Attaching such implicit or

²⁶ See section 1.4.

²⁷ McLellan, 1995, p. 1. See also: Gerring, 1997, pp. 957-9.

²⁸ This is a simplified version of the full definition provided in Chapter Two.

explicit connotations has been a feature of the concept's usage in the social sciences down the years but, in my view, a very damaging one. In my preferred usage, 'the ideological' denotes a broad sphere of phenomena in the same way that 'the cultural', the 'psychological' or the 'economic' does – a field for study, a large category of 'stuff'. I talk of ideology because I am interested in trying to understand the complex and varying ways in which individuals perceive and think about themselves and the world around them, the ways those perceptions and thoughts tend to be organised into idiosyncratic interconnected systems, and the ways those systems influence behaviour. Specifically, I am interested in how people perceive and think in contexts of mass violence against civilians. So in the conceptual tradition I follow, ideology is not a highly discrete sort of thinking like dogmatism, fanaticism, or false consciousness. This was once a popular way of talking about ideology, but it has fallen out of favour over the last few decades. For me, and the majority of other contemporary theorists of the concept, ideology is ubiquitous and inescapable.²⁹ It defines the general systems of ideas, the broad political worldviews, which individuals possess and which shape their understanding of social and political reality. There are few if any circumstances in which an individual can be *totally* untouched by ideology, just as there are few if any circumstances where an individual is totally untouched by 'psychology', 'culture' or 'economics'.

Such a broad use of the word ideology will seem problematic to some. I shall defend it extensively in Chapter 2, and try to convince sceptics that it is in fact narrower conceptions of ideology which are debilitating. I will also suggest that the explicit and consistent use of a broad conception of ideology is at least superior to the present tendency of works on atrocities and mass violence to leave ideology undefined. But ultimately, one could use terms other than ideology to frame the argument of this thesis: some people talk of 'worldviews', or 'belief-systems', or 'mentalité' or 'culture' to refer to a similar realm for

²⁹ Norval, 2000; Freedman, 2000; Žižek, 1994; van Dijk, 1998.

investigation.³⁰ If readers want to substitute another word every time I say ideology, they can do so, provided they heed my specification of what I am denoting. What is more important is *why* I wish to talk of ideology, and *what* I am attempting to highlight in doing so.

Talking of ideology should focus attention on two important facts about the way human beings think and behave. First, it recognises that human thinking is *systemic*.³¹ Human beings do not encounter and engage with each new situation in life through some idealised form of “disembodied reflection”, absent of preconceptions and informed only by the situation and information in front of them.³² Instead, individuals constantly perceive, interpret and reflect on the world in light of a host of preconceptions, meanings, assumptions, conceptual frameworks, associations, predispositions, expectations, past experiences and beliefs about matters of fact which already exist in their mind.³³ In other words, their thoughts and perceptions are thought and perceived as parts of wider *systems of mental representations*, and are meaningful and plausible largely because of those wider systems.³⁴ Individual thoughts and decisions often cannot, therefore, be adequately understood or described in isolation – their meaning, their function and their content is heavily constituted by their explicit or implicit relations with the swamp of other mental elements present in a person’s mind. They are, to borrow a phrase from David Apter, “drenched in symbolic density”.³⁵ And although this is a major reason why human beings are subject to problematic biases and unvocalised assumptions, describing human thinking as systemic is pejorative only by comparison with a mythical ideal of perfectly rational and free-standing reflection on a self-evident reality, reflection motivated solely by the desire for truth and conducted by an individual who has no history. Humans are incapable of that

³⁰ See, for example: Converse, 1964; Waller, 2007; Hinton, 1998a.

³¹ Gerring, 1997, p. 961.

³² Geertz, 1964, p. 47.

³³ Crawford, 2002, pp. 19-28; Apter, 1996, pp. 11-15; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 4-5.

³⁴ van Dijk, 1998.

³⁵ Apter, 1996, p. 13.

form of cognition: our cognitive reliance on systems of ideas is an inescapable fact of how real people think.³⁶

Second, talking about ideology encourages us to recognise that these systems of ideas vary considerably across different individuals, different groups of individuals, and different historical and spatial contexts.³⁷ People do not all ‘see the world the same way’, do not all use the same sorts of conceptual frameworks to think about the world around them, do not all approach situations under the same sorts of preconceptions, factual assumptions, or evaluative predispositions, and do not all mean the same things by the same terms, concepts or values. Indeed, what seems *obvious* and mere *common sense* to those operating under some systems of ideas looks incoherent and delusional to those under others. So whilst we tend to see our ways of viewing the world as uncontroversial and even necessary, they are in fact typically more contingent than we assume, and are in large part a product of our socialization, our particular life histories, and our personal choices and idiosyncrasies. Rarely, or in only small part, are they derived purely from the uncontroversial and straightforward apperception of how things are as everyone else also sees them.

Neither of these two broad claims about how human beings think should be very contentious – indeed, if purely a description of how human beings do in fact think, almost no one explicitly rejects them. They are supported by a wide array of research in modern psychology and sociology, and also by numerous theoretical paradigms across political science, philosophy, social theory and intellectual history.³⁸ But in asserting them, I do not wish to be presumed to be implicitly affirming a number of other positions with which they have frequently been associated – such as a naïve idealism about the power of high-minded

³⁶ Skinner, 2002, pp. 16-17. The contents of this paragraph draw in a general way on all of the following: van Dijk, 1998; Edelman, 1977; Jost and Major, 2001; Freeden, 1996; Freeden, 2007; Freeden, 2003; Freeden, 2008; van Dijk, 1995; Skinner, 2002; Mannheim, 1940; Baumann, 2007; Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Goldhagen, 1997; Wittgenstein, 2001; Gramsci, 1971; Geertz, 1964; Boudon, 1989; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974; Kahneman, 2012.

³⁷ Skinner, 2002; Tully, 1983; Freeden, 1996; Bodley, 2002, p. 137; Heywood, 2007, p. 13; Goldhagen, 1997.

³⁸ See Chapter 2.

moral principles, a relativist or post-modernist epistemology which asserts that all truth is either subjective or meaningless, or an anti-rationalist standpoint which sees all efforts to explain behaviour 'rationally' as futile nonsense.³⁹ The claims I have made about how people think do not necessitate any of these postures.

This picture of human thinking generates a basic initial case for studying ideology. Ideologies matter because they provide or shape the basic mental representations and processes which influence human decision-making: perceptions of the world; assumptions about the outcomes of different actions; commitments to projects, norms and values; frames of situations and courses of action; preconceptions of other actors; interpretations of facts and data; and so forth. That is the methodological starting point of this thesis. I seek to investigate how mass violence comes to look justified in the eyes of those who carry it out by examining the ideologies which appear to have influenced them. Ideological difference is particularly visible in cases of atrocities where, if we pay close attention to what key actors said, particularly in private settings where we have reasons to find their comments credible, we can often see that they held beliefs and perceptions fundamentally different from those outside observers for whom such atrocities remain unthinkable and horrific. We must analyse those beliefs and perceptions to make sense of what occurs when thousands of people pick up guns, machetes, gas pellets or explosives, and use them to kill unarmed men, women and children.

1.3 The Scope of Mass Violence

1.3.1 Why 'Mass Violence'?

Throughout this thesis I focus on a specific sort of violent event: *the deployment of lethal and non-accidental mass violence against civilians*. A wide variety of terms have been proposed to

³⁹ See also: Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996, pp. 65-6.

encapsulate such acts – including “genocide”,⁴⁰ “mass killing”⁴¹ and “massacre”⁴² – but whatever analysts’ preference, there is a consensus that *lethal* and *non-accidental* violence against *civilians* is the definitional core of such terms.⁴³ In this thesis I shall generally abbreviate ‘lethal and non-accidental mass violence against civilians’ to ‘mass violence’, though I will also use the somewhat normatively sharper terms ‘atrocities’ and ‘mass killing’, as these have become established in the contemporary academic and policy literatures.⁴⁴ But I use all three – mass violence, atrocities, and mass killing – interchangeably. There are important differences between different forms of mass violence against civilians, but here I cast the net broadly.⁴⁵

‘Mass violence’, ‘atrocities’ and ‘mass killing’ do not have some indisputable appropriateness as terms which other possibilities lack. I choose them essentially as a compromise between such alternatives. ‘Genocide’ has enormously widespread usage, but is bedevilled by conceptual difficulties that problematise it as the central orientating object of research. More idiosyncratic terms, such as ‘politicide’ or ‘democide’, by contrast, can be defined extremely tightly to serve the analyst’s needs, but have less of an established presence in the academic literature.⁴⁶ ‘Mass violence’, ‘mass killing’ and ‘atrocities’, represent a middle ground – broadly amenable to definition optimal for research requirements, and relatively established in the existing literature.⁴⁷

But why not simply focus on the concept of genocide, as many theorists do, and as the common disciplinary moniker of ‘genocide studies’ would suggest? The term is defined in the literature with rather disturbing variance – but given that I talk of ideology, which is even more famous for such ‘semantic promiscuity’, I can hardly invoke that as my

⁴⁰ Shaw, 2007.

⁴¹ Valentino, 2004.

⁴² Semelin, 2005. See also: Straus, 2012a, p. 552.

⁴³ Straus, 2012b, p. 351; Semelin, 2005, pp. 4, 309-22 & 341-7; Valentino, 2004, pp. 6 & 9-15; Kalyvas, 2006; Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008, p. xxii & 74; du Preez, 1994, pp. 8-10. See also: Straus, 2010, p. 172.

⁴⁴ Bellamy, 2011; Harff, 2009; Raymond, Bernath, Braum and Zurcher, 2012; Doris and Murphy, 2007.

⁴⁵ For distinctions between types of mass violence against civilians, see: Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 26-31.

⁴⁶ Shaw, 2007, pp. 63-78.

⁴⁷ See: Bellamy, 2012b, p. 14; Bellamy, 2011.

objection. My problem with using the term genocide as a concept around which to frame academic investigation is that, like William Schabas, I believe that “genocide is first and foremost a legal concept”,⁴⁸ and to a lesser extent, a political and moral one.⁴⁹ There is therefore, as Leo Kuper argues, at least a reasonable presumption that it is not “helpful to create new definitions of genocide, when there is an internationally recognized definition and a Genocide Convention”.⁵⁰ And this is barely to mention the heavy emotional, memorial and political significance the term carries for many, generating some unpleasant and unproductive debates over its appropriate extension or limitation to certain cases.⁵¹ The term can be used in academic enquiry, but its exceptionally weighty legal, political and moral connotations impose real costs on making idiosyncratic definitional alterations to suit one’s research purposes (which do not exist with ‘ideology’).

This makes genocide a problematic concept around which to frame our enquiries, since its legal conceptual boundaries do not map onto any *prima facie* desirable way of apportioning our investigative focus. The legal definition is infamous for being both overly restrictive and overly vague: only including acts targeted against “national, ethnical, racial or religious groups”, but incorporating a range of measures, such as restrictions of births or forced migration, with dynamics quite distinct from organised killing.⁵² As a result, scholars who confine themselves to the concept of genocide are forced to choose between substantially revising this concept away from its legal usage,⁵³ inventing related neologisms that in fact take the study beyond genocide,⁵⁴ or rather arbitrarily restricting the relevance of their theories to only those cases which meet the burden established in the Genocide

⁴⁸ Schabas, 2010, p. 123. See, however: Shaw, 2007, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Shaw, 2007, p. 5; Gerlach and Werth, 2009, p. 138; Valentino, 2004, p. 10; Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008, pp. xxi-xxii. See also the examples of ‘misuse’ listed in Fein, 2002, p. 74.

⁵⁰ Kuper, 2002, p. 67.

⁵¹ Shaw, 2007, pp. 38-45.

⁵² Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, United Nations. See also: Valentino, 2004, pp. 12-13.

⁵³ See: Shaw, 2007, pp. 34-6; Butcher, Goldsmith, Semenovitch and Sowmya, pp. 4 & 27-8. See also: Harff, 2009, p. 512; Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008, pp. xxi-xxii.

⁵⁴ Harff, 2009, pp. 514-5; Harff, 2003, p. 58.

Convention. None of these options strikes me as desirable.⁵⁵ Genocide, in other words, carries too much conceptual baggage to be used as the core delimiting term for research, baggage which I am not convinced can be easily removed.

This is not to say that we should not talk of genocide at all, since I am not claiming that the legal definition of the concept fails to delineate *any* coherent set of violent phenomena: we can meaningfully talk about violence aimed at the destruction of national, ethnic, racial or religious groups. My argument is simply that this set of violent phenomena is not sufficiently distinct to justify generally demarcating its study from other forms of violence. Genocides do contain dynamics which other forms of violence lack, but since this is true of different types of genocide too (violence directed at religious groups has differences from that against ethnic groups, for example), it is too weak a burden. Surely, as Martin Shaw suggests, the much more fundamental property of genocide which makes academics, and people more generally, morally and theoretically interested in it is the fact that it involves the organised destruction of civilian life.⁵⁶ Why not use that core feature, then, to define our research field? Unlike genocide, the category of cases encompassed by this criterion really does have radically different dynamics from other categories of violence: whether smaller-scale violence (such as conventional crime), genuinely accidental violence (like some forms of ‘collateral damage’) or conventional military warfare (see 1.3.2 below).

From this point forward, then, I shall use the term genocide to refer only to a specific subset – that defined by the Genocide Convention – of the ‘top-level’ concepts of ‘mass violence against civilians’, ‘atrocities’ and ‘mass killing’. And in parallel, I shall use the

⁵⁵ See also: Valentino, 2004, p. 15.

⁵⁶ Shaw, 2007, pp. 4, 13. Shaw is, however, keen to detach his preferred concept – genocide – from an over-exclusive focus on killing, since all genocides rest on a much more wide-ranging assault on their victims than merely the deployment of lethal violence, as Raphael Lemkin, the originator of the term, recognised. See: *ibid.*, 33-6 & 46-7. This is importantly true, and this thesis illustrates Shaw’s observation that ideological assaults on victims’ legal and moral status were necessary prerequisites for violence. Nevertheless, lethal violence is still a vital component of genocide and other atrocities – such that if lethal violence is not present at all, we are talking about a quite different sort of process.

terms ‘atrocities studies’ and ‘atrocities theorists’ to include but go beyond the more conventional terms ‘genocide studies’ and ‘genocide theorists’ in referring to the body of academic research and researchers focused on mass violence against civilians.

1.3.2 Excluding conventional warfare

Since theorists of genocide and other atrocities are generally united in focusing on mass violence *against civilians*, they also uniformly exclude another important form of mass violence: that which might be loosely labelled ‘conventional warfare’, i.e. combat between military forces.⁵⁷ “The most meaningful distinction between war and mass killing,” writes Valentino “is not the purpose of its violence but the nature of its victims. War merges with mass killing when its intended targets become unmanned civilians rather than soldiers.”⁵⁸

I agree, and follow this principle of inclusion and exclusion in this thesis. Mass violence against civilians, including in warfare, is part of my subject matter, but conventional warfare targeted against fellow combatants is not. This is not because I think that ‘ordinary’ wars do not also require ideological analysis in order to explain fully, nor because I deny that conventional warfare is a salient moral problem requiring explanation. But in most conventional warfare, individuals deploy violence principally targeted at those who present some sort of relatively imminent, clear, and serious threat to their lives. This is importantly distinct from, and less puzzling than, cases where the victims of violence do not or cannot fight back, and manifestly present no imminent threat (at least as far as an outside observer can perceive).⁵⁹ Though there are, of course, cases that sit in a difficult grey area between these two forms of violence (see next sub-section), I believe the distinction is generally a usable one.

⁵⁷ Fein, 2002, pp. 82-3.

⁵⁸ Valentino, 2004, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Midlarsky, 2005, p. 7; Valentino, 2004, p. 14. See also: Shaw, 2010, p. 160; Straus, 2010, p. 171; Shaw, 2007, pp. 13, 113, 117 & 156.

1.3.3 Including aerial bombing of civilians

Around two-thirds of all instances of mass violence against civilians occur in wartime,⁶⁰ so military atrocities – such as the Rape of Nanking; or the series of civilian massacres perpetrated by the US army in Vietnam, most famously but not uniquely at My Lai – are clearly within the scope of this thesis. So too are aerial bombardments of civilians, of the kind conducted in World War Two and the Vietnam War, since whilst there may be many arguments to be had about whether such bombardments were justified, the deaths of civilians which ensued were not accidental, as the orchestrators of the campaigns frequently made clear.⁶¹ In the absence of a satisfactory analytical reason to exclude it I, like Bellamy, Benjamin Valentino, Leo Kuper and Ruth Blakely, see aerial bombing as within the necessary scope of a focus on mass violence conducted against civilians.⁶²

But this is a controversial move, and most theorists of atrocities have not included aerial bombardment in their analytical frame. Shaw, Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, Helen Fein and Lucy Dawidowicz are amongst those who explicitly exclude aerial bombardment from their work on *genocide* (and many others exclude it without comment).⁶³ Like them, I certainly do not want to claim that Allied bombing in World War Two was genocidal since it does not meet the legal burden required for this conclusion.⁶⁴ But, as I have said, this seems a poor and arbitrary reason to exclude it from our focus. Moreover, these theorists generally wish to focus on *a broader set of cases* than those defined by the

⁶⁰ Bellamy, 2011, p. 2.

⁶¹ See Chapter 6.

⁶² Valentino, 2004, p. 11 & 85; Kuper, 2002, p. 52; Blakely, 2009, p. 22; Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 132-59. See also: Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 25.

⁶³ See also: Shaw, 2007, pp. 31 & 111-12; Valentino, 2004, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Contrary to the serious but controversial conclusion of Markusen and Kopf, 1995.

Genocide Convention,⁶⁵ and the arguments they deploy to exclude aerial bombing from such an expanded focus do not, I believe, stand up.

Sometimes such arguments are flawed at the empirical level. Chalk and Jonassohn cite Telford Taylor's claim that:

“Berlin, London and Tokyo were not bombed because their inhabitants were German, English or Japanese, but because they were *enemy* strongholds.”⁶⁶

Though convenient for classic just war theorising, this claim is belied by the available evidence. If one examines the justifications offered by British and American policy makers regarding the aerial bombing of Germany and Japan, one can find numerous statements which clearly indicate destructive intent, and even hatred, directed towards the German or Japanese people *as such*, and not just towards the impersonal enemy.⁶⁷ Similarly, Shaw contrasts aerial bombing with genocide on the implication that only the latter “constructs unarmed civilian populations as the objects, in their own right, of the types of armed violence normally applied only to armed enemies.”⁶⁸ But this is an extraordinarily apt description of Allied bombing in World War Two, which did not merely kill civilians as accidental ‘collateral damage’, but explicitly attempted to justify the reconstitution of German and Japanese civilians as objects deserving of violence.⁶⁹ The U.S. Air Force General Ira Eaker even justified bombing on the basis that, in his estimation, 90% of the

⁶⁵ Aerial bombing appears to meet, for example, Shaw's three elements of genocide – the identification of a social group as an enemy in an essentially military sense, the intention to destroy the real or imputed power of the enemy group, and the deployment and threat of violence to destroy the power of the enemy group. See: Shaw, 2007, pp. 35-6.

⁶⁶ Quoted in: Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 25.

⁶⁷ Slim, 2007, p. 139.

⁶⁸ Shaw, 2007, p. 111.

⁶⁹ See, in general: Overy, 2005b; Davis Biddle, 2002; Schaffer, 1988.

American public would happily see the military kill every last Japanese person.⁷⁰ Although wrong, this was much less absurd than it seems.⁷¹ We might like to believe that Allied militaries reluctantly targeted German and Japanese cities in the pursuit of mere instrumental strategic objectives, and were untouched by unsavoury motives of vengeance, racism and hatred. But this is a wishful re-telling of history falsified by the available evidence.

Chalk and Jonassohn also justify the exclusion of aerial bombing on some dubious claims about the norms of war. They write:

“In this age of total war belligerent states make all enemy-occupied territory part of the theatre of operations regardless of the presence of civilians. Civilians are regarded as combatants so long as their governments control the cities in which they reside.”⁷²

This last sentence is false, if it is intended to have any legal or ethical meaning. It is broadly accepted amongst international legal scholars and ethicists of war that civilians, even if there are circumstances under which they may legitimately be targeted, are by definition non-combatants.⁷³ If this sentence is not intended to have legal or ethical force, then, like the rest of this argument, it is no more than a contentious statement about the way in which states behave, and it is difficult to see what force it can have as a reason for excluding cases of aerial bombing from the analyst’s focus. Perhaps most importantly, if ‘civilians are regarded as combatants so long as their governments control the cities in

⁷⁰ Schaffer, 1988, p. 154.

⁷¹ See section 6.2.

⁷² Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 24.

⁷³ Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court, 1998; Valentino, 2004, pp. 13-14; Bellamy, 2012b, p. 376. See also: Kalyvas, 2006, p. 54.

which they reside,' it is unclear why this does not *also* rule our cases of military massacre, or even some genocides, from our study of atrocities.

Chalk and Jonassohn further argue that it “seems unfair to single out the Allies for their bombings without mentioning Guernica and Warsaw, Rotterdam and Brest, and Rouen and London.”⁷⁴ This is quite true, but irrelevant – the simple solution is to accept that *all* non-accidental mass violence against civilians is part of the analyst’s remit. It seems no less ‘unfair’ to focus on the long list of violence conducted by explicitly racist, communist and authoritarian powers, and never consider whether there are at least some parallels in the behaviour of our own liberal states.⁷⁵ Chalk and Jonassohn’s own preferred term for their subject matter is “one-sided mass killing”.⁷⁶ None of the arguments just listed provides good grounds for not applying that label to the aerial bombing of civilians. There are differences between aerial bombing and more widely recognised ‘atrocities’, but this doesn’t itself demonstrate that those differences constitute a good reason for conceptual or investigative separation. As Valentino writes: “While the causes of events such as the Holocaust and the strategic bombings of the Second World War are surely distinct, this fact alone does not mandate that a separate term be used to describe each of them.”⁷⁷

So choosing to leave aerial bombing campaigns out of the study of mass violence seems misguided. It ejects an important category of twentieth century violence against civilians from comparative analysis, and smacks too much of self-exceptionalism to be analytically palatable. Perhaps most damagingly of all, hiving off aerial bombing from other acts of mass violence against civilians helps to obscure a crucial point which I emphasise in this thesis: that most atrocities are possible precisely because those who carry them out perceive such acts in a similar way to western bomber pilots’ and military planners’

⁷⁴ Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 24.

⁷⁵ Blakely, 2009.

⁷⁶ Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 23. See also: Shaw, 2007, pp. 31-2.

⁷⁷ Valentino, 2004, pp. 14-15.

perception of their aerial bombing of civilians. World War Two bombing campaigns demonstrate vividly that ordinary people, and not merely the inherently evil, the insane, or the coerced, can be induced to see acts of massive violence against unarmed civilians as justified. If we are seriously concerned to understand how people come to kill *en masse*, I think it is vital to comparatively analyse mass violence conducted by both illiberal and liberal states.

However, none of this is to deny that there are large and important moral and empirical differences between ‘liberal’, ‘fascist’ and ‘communist’ forms of violence. As Valentino writes, “referring to two distinct events as mass killing does not imply any moral equivalency between them.”⁷⁸ Participants in Nazi violence themselves analogised their actions to Allied bombing, both during the killing⁷⁹ and in subsequent trials.⁸⁰ I do not think we should dismiss this analogy out of hand, but it is an argument I reject. My comparison of Allied bombing with Nazi and Soviet violence is not bound up with a claim that they were morally equivalent – they were not. My argument is simply that the moral differences do not provide good grounds for eschewing comparative analysis. Including liberal and illiberal forms of violence against civilians in my focus acknowledges an important reality: that adherents of all these ideologies have killed very large numbers of innocent civilians over the course of the last hundred years. World War Two bombing is a crucial case of such mass violence against civilians conducted by liberal states. For this reason, it occupies a central place in this thesis.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15. See also: Russell, 1996, p. 1510; Shaw, 2007, pp. 42-5.

⁷⁹ Goldhagen, 1997, p. 212. See also: Hinton, 1998b, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Mann, 2005, p. 242.

1.3.4 A brief note on terrorism

The other concept closely implicated by talk of mass violence against civilians is that of *terrorism*. The cases I examine in this thesis do not include any incidents classically described as terrorist atrocities, and some important differences exist between most acts labelled as terrorism and the sort of mass atrocities I am principally concerned with here.⁸¹ Most obviously, atrocities like the Holocaust or campaigns of aerial bombing involve very large numbers of perpetrators, whereas terrorist attacks typically involve relatively few killers.⁸² Most (though perhaps not all) large scale atrocities are also bound up with state-based violence, whilst most (though perhaps not all) terrorist attacks are conducted by non-state actors.⁸³ However, I do not wish to assert any firm line between the sorts of mass violence against civilians I focus on here and terrorist attacks, since I see a progressive scale of increasing organisation and mass participation between conventional terrorist attacks and larger atrocities. My relative neglect of terrorism is thus a matter of focus rather than scope – and I believe that much of my account applies to terrorist atrocities as well as non-terrorist ones, though that is not a claim I defend here. Ultimately, I would hope to integrate the analysis of the ideological dynamics of terrorism into my account, but that is a task beyond the confines of this thesis.

1.4 The Existing Study of Ideology and Mass Violence

My aim in this thesis is to construct a theory which addresses one core question: *how do ideological phenomena contribute to occurrences of lethal and non-accidental mass violence against civilians?* This is not a new question, and its implicit premise – that ideological phenomena do indeed play some significant role – is one with widespread support amongst atrocity theorists.⁸⁴

⁸¹ See: Bellamy, 2012b, p. 14; Schmid, 2004; Blakely, 2009.

⁸² Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 8-9.

⁸³ Though for a deployment of the concept of ‘state terrorism’, see: Blakely, 2009.

⁸⁴ For example: Bartov, 2003b, p. 82 & 85; Fleming, 2003, p. 102; Kühne, 2012, p. 140.

“Few scholars,” writes Valentino, “have failed to comment on the central role that ideology has played in some of the twentieth century’s bloodiest mass killings.”⁸⁵ Indeed, in a recent theoretical survey Scott Straus identifies ideology as one of the two most important factors (alongside armed conflict) emphasised in contemporary explanations of mass political violence;⁸⁶ in parallel, Chalk and Jonassohn argue that almost all modern genocides must be classified as ‘ideological’.⁸⁷ Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan have even explicitly called for a project of the kind I am attempting in this thesis, arguing that “the ideological notions and inimical preoccupations of groups must be studied and compared from one case to another, if we are to understand the political conditions for acts of genocide.”⁸⁸

And several serious investigations of the role of ideology already exist. Five scholars – Bellamy, Eric Weitz, Ben Kiernan, Hugo Slim and Jacques Semelin – have produced particularly impressive accounts of recurring ideological patterns across cases of atrocity, which this thesis draws on and supports far more than it critiques.⁸⁹ Other theorists – such as Geoffrey Scarre, Karl Jackson, Isabel Hull, Alexander Hinton, Daniel Goldhagen, Paul Hagenloh and John Weiss – have produced important studies of the ideological backgrounds to individual atrocities.⁹⁰ And many others – including Shaw, Waller, Michael Mann and Ervin Staub – provide further insights on the significance of certain sorts of ideological phenomena across different cases of atrocity.⁹¹ The place these theorists accord to ideology varies – and there is real disagreement over why and to what extent it is relevant. But there is also real agreement that it is, *in some way*, relevant. The efforts of all these theorists have produced a wealth of compelling evidence and powerful conclusions to which I am indebted.

⁸⁵ Valentino, 2004, pp. 71-2.

⁸⁶ Straus, 2012a, pp. 548-50.

⁸⁷ Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 37.

⁸⁸ Gellately and Kiernan, 2003a, p. 375.

⁸⁹ Bellamy, 2012b; Bellamy, 2012a; Weitz, 2003; Kiernan, 2003; Kiernan, 2007; Semelin, 2005; Slim, 2007.

⁹⁰ Hagenloh, 2000; Jackson, 1989; Hinton, 1998a; Hinton, 2002b; Melson, 2003; Goldhagen, 1997.

⁹¹ Mann, 2005; Staub, 1989; Waller, 2007; Shaw, 2007; Shaw, 2010.

The problems

Nevertheless, this thesis is centrally motivated by a series of concerns about existing efforts to theorise the role ideology plays in mass atrocities. Whilst the theorists just listed have significantly increased our understanding of that role, I believe that a fundamental lack of theoretical development has held back existing work, resulting in a number of recurring problems.

The clearest weakness is conceptual. Usually atrocity theorists either do not define how they are using ideology at all,⁹² or specify an idiosyncratic definition, seemingly of their own invention, with little attempt to explain or justify it.⁹³ Even then, it often becomes clear that authors' actual understandings of ideology are bedraggled with various implicit connotations not specified in their criteria. Some studies, such as those by Waller, Barbara Harff, or the Genocide Prevention Task Force, also attach ideology to other descriptors – 'exclusionary' ideology or 'extraordinary' ideology – without complete clarity on what these delimit (what marks extraordinary apart from ordinary ideology, for example?) or an explanation of how and whether non-exclusionary and ordinary forms of ideology might still be relevant to mass atrocities.⁹⁴

Indeed, atrocity theorists do not appear to actually share a common understanding of what ideology means, let alone how it relates to other closely implicated phenomena such as "myths", "worldviews", "cultural models", or "hate speech". Goldhagen thus talks of an ideology of "eliminationist anti-Semitism" as a broad cultural worldview – an extreme, widely internalised, and encompassing system of ideas which influences its

⁹² Chirot and McCauley, 2006; Melson, 2003; Kiernan, 2003; Dutton, 2007; Mueller, 2000; Kalyvas, 2006.

⁹³ Semelin, 2005, p. 22; Waller, 2007, p. 185; Mann, 2005, p. 30; Staub, 1989, p. 50; Bellamy, 2012b, p. 11 fn.25.

⁹⁴ Harff, 2003; Straus, 2012b, p. 351; Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008; Waller, 2007, pp. 40-53 & 185.

adherents' entire political perspective and behaviour.⁹⁵ This also appears to be what Waller has in mind when he refers to 'extraordinary ideology', though he denies that such extraordinary ideology explains most atrocity perpetrator behaviour, and ideology makes little appearance in Waller's own theory of atrocity perpetration.⁹⁶ But, confusingly, another concept – 'worldviews' – does, though Waller does not explain how this concept is distinct from or related to ideology.

Goldhagen and Waller's uses of ideology seem radically different from those of Bellamy and Slim. Both these theorists tend to use 'ideology' to refer to much smaller-scale phenomena: doctrines, logics, or even individual ideas. Bellamy identifies two such "anti-civilian ideologies" – "necessity" and "selective extermination" – whilst Slim identifies eleven, including "dualistic thinking", "utility", "asymmetric necessity" and "profit".⁹⁷ But this is an unusual way of talking about ideology, compared to most social scientific discourse. Surely "necessity" or "utility" are claims, arguments, or rhetorical devices, rather than whole 'ideologies' in their own right? And surely they are also ones which recur across a wide range of different atrocity justifying ideologies, *including* an ideology of selective extermination, and therefore do not themselves comprise distinct ideologies of their own?⁹⁸ Certainly this use of ideology to label particular doctrines or logics seems different to the more common tendency to use ideology to describe larger scale and fairly complex political belief systems or intellectual traditions – such as fascism, communism, conservatism, liberalism, and so forth. It is in this sense that both Harff and Aristotle Kallis talk of ideology.⁹⁹ Whilst none of these uses is definitively 'right' or 'wrong' per se, it is extremely unclear how these different senses of 'ideology' should interact.

⁹⁵ Goldhagen, 1997.

⁹⁶ Waller, 2007.

⁹⁷ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 11; Slim, 2007, pp. 121-179.

⁹⁸ Bellamy himself sometimes implies this, see: Bellamy, 2012b, p. 130.

⁹⁹ Harff, 2003, p. 63; Kallis, 2009.

A second problem with existing work on ideology in atrocity studies is the failure to integrate the many impressive analyses of *individual* ideological phenomena together to form overarching and *holistic* pictures of the role ideology plays in mass atrocities. ‘Dehumanisation’, ‘nationalist myths’, ‘narratives’, ‘hate propaganda’, ‘hate speech’, ‘fascism’, ‘identities’, ‘purity’, ‘racism’, ‘revolutionary visions’, ‘scapegoating’, ‘militarism’, ‘moral exclusion’, ‘utopias’, ‘virtue’ – all of these and more have been suggested as relevant aspects of the ‘worldviews’, ‘belief-systems’, ‘cultural models’, ‘normative mobilisations’ or ‘ideologies’ that lead to atrocities. But no integrative account of how these different elements fit together has, to my knowledge, been proposed. This undermines the utility of even the most impressive comparative accounts of the ideological patterns of atrocities, since it is hard to know how their insights are to be related to one another. Weitz focuses on “utopias of race and nation”,¹⁰⁰ Kiernan on “racism”, “territorial expansionism”, “cults of cultivation” and “purity”;¹⁰¹ Semelin on “purity”;¹⁰² Mann on appeals to conceptions of democracy as “ethnos”;¹⁰³ Slim on his eleven “anti-civilian ideologies”, and Bellamy on three “basic pathways” for the justification of atrocities – “denial”, “necessity”, and “selective extermination”.¹⁰⁴ These various terms do not all refer to like-phenomena, which may helpfully suggest that these different accounts are not in competition but also reinforces the difficulty of knowing how their insights are to be pooled. To put it metaphorically: whilst a strength of existing research on mass atrocities is its identification of many potential pieces of the ideological jigsaw surrounding mass atrocities, we have few overarching frameworks for putting these pieces together to build a complete picture.

Another problem is that the extent to which these individual pieces of the jigsaw have been examined is uneven. An abundance of research has been conducted on

¹⁰⁰ Weitz, 2003.

¹⁰¹ Kiernan, 2003.

¹⁰² Semelin, 2005.

¹⁰³ Mann, 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Bellamy, 2012a, pp. 160-1.

‘dehumanisation’, for example, with the result that this concept is used fairly consistently across the literature, and with a high degree of sophistication and empirical understanding.¹⁰⁵ The same cannot be said of ‘nationalist myths’, ‘militarism’ or ‘utopias’ – these pieces are definitely in the box, but are picked up in an erratic range of circumstances and without any clarity on what they depict or how they connect to the wider set of ideological phenomena. Without a more comprehensive effort to examine the range of ideological phenomena relevant to atrocities, and develop some account of how they fit together, we cannot know how much of the ideological dynamics of mass atrocities current research encompasses, and whether we are currently missing some of the pieces needed to complete the picture. It has rarely been noted, for instance, that atrocity theorists have focused overwhelmingly on the ways atrocity-justifying ideologies depict *victims* in ways that encourage violence (portraying them as inhuman, dangerous, or guilty, for example). Much less consideration has been given to the ways atrocity-justifying ideologies represent *perpetrators*. Similarly, as Straus has recently argued, theorists have also devoted almost all their efforts to studying ideological vectors *towards* atrocity, and under-examined ideological sources of *restraint*.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, this lack of a more holistic or comprehensive analysis of ideology is not just a question of failing to examine the full variety of ideological phenomena themselves, but also the full *range of causal roles* those phenomena might play. Individual works on ideology in mass atrocities tend to stress one or two possible roles for ideology, and background other possibilities. Mann, for example, appears principally concerned with the ways that ideological conceptions of the national community actively generate the desires for

¹⁰⁵ See: Haslam, 2006; Jones, 2010, p. 393 & 437; Stanton, 2007, p. ix; Weitz, 2003, pp. 105-6, 222-3 & 239; Straus, 2010, p. 169; Shaw, 2010, p. 153; Shaw, 2007, p. 137; Melson, 2003, p. 333; Kiernan, 2003, pp. 32-33; Hull, 2003, p. 143; Fleming, 2003, p. 109; Bartov, 2003b, p. 84; Mann, 2005, pp. 74-5, 172 & 322; Semelin, 2005, pp. 38-9 & 253; Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, pp. 27-8; Noakes and Pridham, 1988, p. 616; Fein, 2002, p. 84; Stanton, <http://www.genocidewatch.org/genocide/8stagesofgenocide.html>; Selden, 2009, p. 89; Bandura, Underwood and Fromson, 1975.

¹⁰⁶ Straus, 2012b, pp. 343-4 & 350-1. For exceptions, see: Chirot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 2, 97 & 103-48; Bellamy, 2012b; Slim, 2007.

violence.¹⁰⁷ Waller, by contrast, tends to represent ideology as a rationalising resource for dealing with violence principally perpetrated for other reasons (such as situational pressures to conform to authorities and peer-groups).¹⁰⁸ Bellamy, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with ideology's role in providing resources for justifying violence to outsiders: securing legitimacy in a community of international actors who could potentially intervene.¹⁰⁹ Such specialised study isn't necessarily a problem, provided that it is explicit in focusing on only some aspect of ideology's role. But this is generally not the case, and it is not clear whether these theorists a) are actively rejecting the importance of other roles for ideology, b) believe that their theories of the roles just listed also describe ideology's other roles, c) are indeed advocating only specialised theories for some specific ideological dynamic, or d) have simply not considered whether other roles for ideology might matter.

More broadly, many though not all invocations of ideology in the literature on atrocities are bedevilled by a certain crudity. Rather than being attuned to complex distributions of ideological belief across groups and societies, assessments of ideology's relevance have tended to be binary, with theorists simply concluding that certain atrocities, groups or individuals 'aren't' ideological whilst others 'are'.¹¹⁰ Such firm divisions often rest on an overly narrow conception of what ideology denotes: if killers are not found to match stereotypes of the "raving ideologue"¹¹¹ acting on the basis of "insane ideological commitment",¹¹² it is commonly assumed that they were relatively uninfluenced by ideology *in general*. And descriptions of actual real world ideologies or atrocity-justifying ideological beliefs in theoretical work on atrocities have also tended to be simplistic. Rather than incorporating the rich and complex pictures of ideology developed by specialised work on individual cases, theorists and international actors often just deploy brief references to

¹⁰⁷ Mann, 2005, pp. 27-9.

¹⁰⁸ Waller, 2007, pp. 53 & 121-122.

¹⁰⁹ Bellamy, 2012a; Bellamy, 2012b.

¹¹⁰ Harff, 2003; Mann, 2005, pp. 27-9; Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 29.

¹¹¹ Waller, 2007, p. 102.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 185.

“hate ideologies”, which, if described at all, are usually boiled down to a couple of bizarre ideas about a certain enemy group or a few commitments to grandiose revolutionary projects.¹¹³

In 1964, Clifford Geertz influentially characterised the study of ideology in the social sciences as being characterised by a fundamental “theoretical clumsiness”.¹¹⁴ I suggest that this remains the best summary of current discussions on the role ideology in the literature on mass atrocities. I believe this clumsiness has two underlying causes.

The first is simply a lack of foundational theory-building. Atrocity theorists have rightly rejected the pursuit for all-encompassing, inflexible and partisan macro-theories. But this does not mean we should eschew foundational frameworks for organising the analysis of key questions – and, indeed, atrocity theorists have devoted considerable efforts to developing such frameworks for many other dynamics of atrocities. But there is still a lack regarding ideology. A range of questions that should be at the core of the study of this phenomenon have been considered only briefly or with largely presumptive and unspoken answers. What is meant by ideology? What is the full range of causal roles it might play? How do the many different ideological elements identified by theorists in atrocities fit together? How are they disseminated in specific contexts of atrocity? Why do perpetrators buy-in to them? What underlying mindsets, psychological dispositions, or cultural forces might they play upon? How are they differently internalised (or not) amongst different sorts of perpetrator? How do they interact with other ideological forces which may intensify or restrain them? Such questions have certainly not been ignored by atrocity theorists, but they have not been considered in a systematic or comprehensive fashion.

The second underlying problem is a general disconnect between the field of atrocity studies and the specialist academic literature on ideology, ideas, and related phenomena.

¹¹³ Simon, 2012, pp. 6-9; Dutton, 2007, pp. 96-113; Akhavan, 2001, pp. 9-13; Raymond, Bernath, Braum and Zurcher, 2012, p. 13.

¹¹⁴ Geertz, 1964, pp. 48-9. See also: *ibid.*, 52.

Despite their frequent affirmations of ideology's importance, atrocity scholars have largely ignored this literature, and leading ideological theorists of recent decades – such as Michael Freedman, Teun van Dijk, Quentin Skinner, John Jost, Raymond Boudon or John Thompson – make almost no appearance in texts on atrocities.¹¹⁵ I intend no aggressive attack on existing atrocity theorists to be implied in observing this. Ideological analysis is a sprawling, interdisciplinary and fragmented field of research, difficult to visualise in its totality.¹¹⁶ It is thus no surprise that, whilst a large number of academics find use for the concept of ideology, few of them have more than a passing familiarity with those modern thinkers who theorise it in depth. But, though this state of affairs is understandable, it is still a serious problem. Thirty years of research by intellectual historians, discourse analysts, political psychologists, political theorists and sociologists have produced an extensive deepening in the theorisation of how ideology, and ideas more generally, should be studied. In neglecting specialist work on ideology, research on genocides and other mass atrocities is thus left conceptually, theoretically, and methodologically behind the times. A central aim of this thesis is to remedy this state of affairs.

In levelling the criticisms I have, there is a danger of suggesting a broader negative evaluation of the theorists they target, and this is not my aim. My criticisms are not intended to suggest that existing work is irredeemably flawed, but that it has been held back by a lack of conceptual, methodological and theoretical development. A dedicated and comparative investigation of the ideological dynamics of mass atrocities, which integrates relevant research from across the field of atrocity studies, and connects it to the specialist ideology literature, is still lacking.

¹¹⁵ Bellamy is an exception, though he still only references Skinner's work, and not the wider ideology literature. See: Bellamy, 2012a, pp. 162-3; Bellamy, 2012b, p. 31. In case-specific research, Ryan's study of Leninist violence more thoroughly engages with Freedman's work, and some other theorists of ideology. See: Ryan, 2012, pp. 10-15. In more general work on violence, Siniša Malešević is one of the few theorists to engage seriously with the specialist ideology literature, see: Malešević, 2010.

¹¹⁶ See: Leader Maynard, 2013.

The sceptics

There are, I have suggested, many sympathisers towards such a project, but not everyone is so enamoured. Some theorists either explicitly or implicitly downplay ideological explanations of atrocities (though usually they do not reject the relevance of ideology entirely). A range of reasons have been offered for doing so. Some theorists assume that a focus on ideology must involve the (erroneous) implication that perpetrators of atrocities were wild-eyed ideological fanatics rather than ordinary members of society.¹¹⁷ Several theorists argue that, since most killers do not display membership in ideological movements prior to their involvement in mass violence, ideology must not have been a core motivation; killers were not ‘sincere believers’ in the rightness of what they are doing.¹¹⁸ Others view ideologies as generally post-hoc rationalizations, and conclude from this that they can have little causal or explanatory power.¹¹⁹

This thesis aims to convince such sceptics that these arguments are fundamentally in error. Again, the problem is often simply semantic: the theorists who advance these sceptical arguments suppose that ideology denotes things which it need not. They assume, for example, that to call perpetrators ‘ideological’ or influenced by ‘ideology’ must be to claim that they were fanatical or explicit devotees of the ideology in question, driven by a few burning and fantastical goals at the neglect of other interests or motives.¹²⁰ But this is not, as I shall demonstrate, how any major modern theorist of ideology uses the term. But though a semantic disagreement, this is not a moot point, or an issue where we can ultimately only conclude ‘to each her own definition’. I aim to show, in Chapter 2, that such assumptions about ideology’s meaning are methodologically damaging and have been

¹¹⁷ Waller, 2007, pp. 40-53.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72 & 124. See also: Hinton, 1998b, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Waller, 2007, pp. 49, 53 & 121-3; Valentino, 2004, pp. 55-6.

¹²⁰ Waller, 2007, pp. 40-53, 102, 124 & 185; Valentino, 2004, p. 24 & 55; Mueller, 2000; Straus, 2007a, pp. 259-64; Shaw, 2007, p. 110 & 138.

rejected by analysts of ideology for good reason. Theorists of mass violence would likewise profit from abandoning them.

A further set of concerns express not scepticism of the causal or explanatory power of ideology per se, but worries about the *way* in which it has typically been studied. Donald Bloxham and Dirk Moses, in their introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, caution against a tendency to “overemphasize the role of narrow political ideology in genocide”.¹²¹ They see two interrelated dangers in such a practice. First, they worry that it hives the analysis of individual atrocities off from each other, by placing the explanatory emphasis on case-specific ideologies.¹²² The *Oxford Handbook*, they elaborate, “seeks not simply to examine particular cases or ideologies of genocide, but to reflect in a more rounded way upon the relationship between genocide and broader historical trends, periods and structures.”¹²³ Second, Bloxham and Moses outline their suspicion for “a classically liberal understanding of genocide, where the crime results above all from aberrant political ideologies and oppressive political systems, and where the problem of genocide can be solved by the reassertion of the healthy norms of international democratic society.”¹²⁴ Although Bloxham and Moses acknowledge the seriousness of such claims, they highlight the danger of a form of western-centric complacency, which sees mass violence as distinctly ‘other’, and not the kind of thing ‘developed’ states would ever come close to perpetrating. Waller raises the same concern: “it is too easy”, he argues, to focus on “*only* an extraordinary culture, like Germany, and *only* an allegedly extraordinary ideology, like eliminationist anti-semitism”.¹²⁵ Like Bloxham and Moses, Waller worries that this sort of focus on ideology detracts from the important point of consensus in modern analysis of

¹²¹ Bloxham and Moses, 2010, p. 10.

¹²² Valentino, 2004, p. 16.

¹²³ Bloxham and Moses, 2010, p. 8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²⁵ Waller, 2007, p. 53 [emphasis in original].

mass violence: that it is performed by ‘ordinary people’, and is therefore a constant threat in societies across the globe.¹²⁶

As should by now be obvious, I share these sentiments, and my focus on ideology not only does not entail these dangers, but is in large part an effort to counter them. I have already noted how existing research has indeed often been confined to individual case-studies – and it is also true that it has tended to focus on the unique features of specific ideologies, typically illiberal ones, in encouraging violence.¹²⁷ But this is not the only way one can conduct an investigation which focuses on ideology. This thesis takes precisely the opposite approach, by attempting to uncover the ideological processes which *recur* across different contexts of mass violence, including liberal ones, and which are central to ‘ordinary people’ participating in atrocities. As noted earlier, mass violence has been perpetrated against civilians by all sorts of state, and under all sorts of ideologies, across history. That is a reason to conclude that no unique feature of any specific ideology is necessary for atrocities to take place. But in no way does it suggest that phenomena at the ideological level are unimportant.

1.5 Overview of the Argument

1.5.1 The Justificatory Mechanics of Mass Violence

I construct a theory based around the following argument: despite the different contexts in which atrocities occur, and even the different ideologies which underpin them, the ways in which mass violence against civilians is justified within those ideologies (i.e. made to appear justified to perpetrators) are *strikingly similar across cases*. I model these similarities through a framework of six common ‘justificatory mechanisms’, which I label (with varying degrees of originality):

¹²⁶ See also: Browning, 2007, p. xi.

¹²⁷ Midlarsky, 2005, pp. 12-13. See, for example: Goldhagen, 1997; Jackson, 1989; Melson, 2003.

- i) Dehumanisation
- ii) Guilt-attribution
- iii) Threat-construction
- iv) Deagentification
- v) Virtuetalk
- vi) Future-bias

Each of these describes a range of ideological elements – arguments, assumptions, frames, beliefs about matters of fact, conceptual frameworks, normative claims, values and so forth – which we can empirically observe in discourse across a range of different cases and which portray mass violence against civilians as permissible, and even desirable.

I wish to argue that these justificatory mechanisms are more than just features of discourse, they are features of the way perpetrators actually thought about mass violence, i.e., they are features of their ideologies. This move, from observing justifications in *talk* to the assumption that they actually operated in *thought*, cannot be made automatically. But I intend to show that there are good reasons to believe that the discourse in which the justificatory mechanisms are visible does indicate the actual influence of those mechanisms over perpetrator behaviour. That is not to say that they were always believed by perpetrators with a hundred percent conviction or a hundred percent consciousness – they were often not. But neither of these conditions is necessary for an idea to influence behaviour. It is because the justificatory mechanisms reveal some sort of common features of how perpetrators genuinely perceived and thought about the world – features of their “actual political thinking”¹²⁸ – that they are of explanatory significance. When individuals – both the policy makers who decide that atrocities should occur and the killers who actually

¹²⁸ Freedden, 2008, p. 197.

carry out the violence – buy-in to these justificatory mechanisms, it is predictable that the commission of atrocities will come to look like a legitimate, beneficial and perhaps necessary course of action.

Not everyone is going to be comfortable with this sort of ‘cognitive’ account. But I believe one of the advantages of the six justificatory mechanisms framework I outline is that the framework itself can still be valuable for analysts unconvinced about the explanation of atrocities I attach to that framework. If, for example, one believes that talk of “ideas” causing people’s behaviour is philosophically dubious, or that making guesses about what is going on in the unobservable world of peoples’ minds is a dangerous breach of scientific parsimony, one will not endorse the overarching theory I offer. Nevertheless, one could still accept that the six justificatory mechanisms identify empirically verifiable patterns in the discourse surrounding atrocities, and may thus have useful predictive power. Or, to take another example, one might be convinced that these justificatory mechanisms are “merely” political rhetoric: sophistic fodder to legitimate one’s actions in front of a wider audience, but which tell us nothing about killer’s ‘real motivations’ or ‘actual thinking’. I think this is a misguided view, but a theorist wedded to it could still find my six-fold framework an important account of the patterns of legitimating claims deployed by atrocity perpetrators to domestic or international audiences. So the six justificatory mechanisms framework does not stand or fall on the broader claims I wish to make about what it tells us.

As I have suggested, my aim is to be both more comprehensive and integrative than existing studies. I draw on, and aim to speak to, a wide range of approaches towards the study of violence across different disciplines. The theory I present utilises accounts of ‘epistemic dependence’ taken from social epistemology,¹²⁹ theories of ‘motivated social

¹²⁹ Hardwig, 1985; Rydgren, 2009, pp. 83-7; Rydgren, 2004, pp. 125, 133, 139 & 141-2.

cognition' currently prominent in psychological approaches to ideological analysis,¹³⁰ core methodologies deployed by intellectual historians,¹³¹ and sociological and psychological research on violence and aggression.¹³² I also draw extensively on case-specific research. Atrocity theorists have frequently emphasised the necessity of such interdisciplinary foundations for the investigation of mass violence,¹³³ but it carries difficulties. Not all of these approaches utilise the language of 'ideology', even though they may be interested in the same sorts of phenomena, and answering the same sorts of questions, as I am.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, I have drawn on them extensively in what follows, and believe that my theory can and should feed back into them.

This means that my theory does not fit neatly into any single discipline – beyond the emerging sub-disciplines of atrocity/genocide studies and ideological analysis. One thing that it is generally not, however, is an exercise in *primary historical research*. I look to the three episodes of mass violence that I have already mentioned as central case-studies: Nazi Germany, Stalinist oppression in the Soviet Union, and Allied bombing of German and Japanese civilians in World War Two. When I lay out my theory in Chapter 3, I also utilise illustrative examples from a wide range of other cases, including the Herero and Rwandan genocides, Japanese and Chinese atrocities in East Asia, and the Cambodian 'auto-genocide'. But whilst archival sources and original research do play some role in what I offer, my project is not fundamentally aimed at challenging or revising historical interpretations of the cases I discuss.

¹³⁰ Jost and Major, 2001; Jost and Hunyady, 2005.

¹³¹ Skinner, 2002; Tully, 1983.

¹³² Collins, 2008; Grossman, 2009.

¹³³ Waller, 2007, p. 10; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 205; Midlarsky, 2005, p. 10; Browning, 2001, p. 216; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008, pp. 429-30.

¹³⁴ Crawford, 2002; Hinton, 2002b.

The Justificatory Mechanisms

One aim of talking of justificatory mechanisms is to get away from the tendency to assume that ideology can only play a single narrow role in encouraging atrocities. I distinguish three causally proximate roles, which are rarely fully and explicitly recognised in existing work. As I have already suggested, when many theorists talk of ideology, they focus almost exclusively on ideological *motives* for violence.¹³⁵ Others, by contrast, talk of or implicate ideology in processes that in some sense *legitimate* violence – mechanisms by which violence is made to seem permissible, rather than providing the original motives behind it.¹³⁶ And other theorists tend towards the view that ideology (merely) provides post-hoc *rationalisations* and has little bearing on the original commission of violence.¹³⁷ Most are simply vague on whether they are, at any particularly moment, talking about ideological motivation, legitimation, rationalisation, or some combination of the three.

But ideology may fulfil any and all of these functions, and may vary in the role it plays between different individuals, between different types of perpetrator, and between different atrocities as a whole. Our generalisations about ideology's role may therefore need to remain presumptively neutral between these three roles, and as such I collectively refer to processes of motivation, legitimation and rationalisation as ideological *justification*. Within my analysis of the different justificatory mechanisms, I then specify when I am discussing effects related to motives, legitimations, rationalisations or all three. I believe this helps to clear up a lot of the confusion about when, how and why ideology might be relevant to atrocities. It illustrates, for example, that the many on-the-ground 'ordinary killers' who perpetrate atrocities but are found to lack explicitly ideological *motives*, may still be crucially enabled to kill by ideology, thanks to the legitimations and rationalisations it provides.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Mann, 2005, pp. 27-9.

¹³⁶ Hollander, 2008; Bellamy, 2012a.

¹³⁷ Waller, 2007, pp. 49, 53 & 121-2; Valentino, 2004, p. 55.

¹³⁸ Even post-hoc rationalisations can play a causal role in atrocities, since killing is frequently reiterative – see section 2.2.3.

Some of the justificatory mechanisms I describe – most obviously dehumanisation – have been widely commented on before. Others – such as deagentification and virtuetalk – have been much less noticed. Indeed, there is a tendency amongst both existing atrocity theorists and relevant international organisations to focus so heavily on processes like dehumanisation that they crowd out other ideological processes vital to the perpetration of atrocities.¹³⁹ Atrocity perpetrators can, in theory and practice, acknowledge the humanity of their victims yet still conceive of them as guilty and threatening enemies, and still see killing them as a virtuous activity, an act they are not responsible for, and/or an act ultimately justified by some massive future benefit. Liberal states in particular, have frequently perpetrated violence against civilians through ideological processes much less dominated by visceral dehumanisation, and much more by the denial that any alternative options exist or the assurance that the deaths are necessary for some vital future gain.¹⁴⁰

This point is critical for prevention efforts. Focusing only on ideological processes of dehumanisation can lead to the mistaken belief that efforts to humanise the enemy might be enough to prevent atrocities, or at least, to negate the ideological causes of atrocities. Thus, for example, a recent Stanley Foundation policy brief by David J. Simon places particular emphasis on what I have labelled dehumanisation and guilt-attribution.¹⁴¹ Simon correspondingly advises that:

“At the most fundamental level, the norms required to overcome the propagation of mass atrocity impulses are those of humanism and nondivisionism...the idea that all people possess a core set of rights...[and] that these rights obtain regardless of ethnic, religious,

¹³⁹ Simon, 2012; Stanton, 2007, p. ix; Bandura, 1999; Stanton, <http://www.genocidewatch.org/genocide/8stagesofgenocide.html>; Genocide; Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2012.

¹⁴⁰ Dehumanisation is still present in liberal violence, however, see section 6.2.2.

¹⁴¹ Simon, 2012, p. 3 & 6.

political or other subnational identities and allegiances.”¹⁴²

It is laudable that Simon calls for such a focus upon norm-building and there is no doubt that his proposal should have positive effects. But there are serious problems in thinking that, even “at the most fundamental level”, such a narrow conception of anti-atrocity norms will provide any secure ideological bulwark against atrocities.¹⁴³ One can promote humanistic norms and the perception of universal rights all one wants, but if a society is still permeated by a martial glorification of machoistic harshness, and a compelling narrative of threat-construction asserting the existence of hidden enemies within, then mass atrocities will remain more than a theoretical possibility. Humanism and nondivisionism frustrate some avenues of atrocity justification, but leave others open, and we need a full awareness of the justificatory mechanisms for atrocity in order to prescribe comprehensive efforts to resist them.

The justificatory mechanisms do not only describe processes which are necessarily explicit ‘justifications’. Any process which makes mass violence against civilians look justified can count. Sometimes this will involve explicit arguments: “these people are our enemy, they threaten the state, and must be destroyed.” Other times the claims will be more indirect: “we must exercise vigilance”, “we are at war” and “nature is cruel” are all claims that have been crucial parts of the ideological worldviews which make mass violence against civilians possible, yet may not be offered as explicit justifications of such violence. And, many ideological elements may encourage violence in even more implicit or semi-conscious fashion. Mapping out a broader range of both the ideological elements that lead to violence and the pathways through which they do so is a central aspect of the approach I am advancing here.

¹⁴² Ibid., 6. Alex Bellamy has similarly suggested that the promotion of “universalism” is the best ideological strategy for preventing atrocities. See: Bellamy, 2012a, p. 180.

¹⁴³ See also: Stanton, <http://www.genocidewatch.org/genocide/8stagesofgenocide.html>.

1.5.2 The limits of the argument

The argument I am making has limits that deserve emphasising. This thesis offers a focused theory regarding one dimension of atrocities and their causal architecture, and does not posit that ideological analysis *alone* can adequately explain why atrocities occur.¹⁴⁴ Atrocities, it is frequently affirmed, need to be explained by multi-causal models,¹⁴⁵ and what I offer should thus be seen as one major part of a more comprehensive analysis of atrocities, which would focus not only on ideological factors, but also psychological, personal, institutional, situational, economic and political ones. And whilst I focus on cross-case patterns and talk at quite general levels of contextualisation, this should not be read as a denial of the fundamental need for localised, deeply contextual, single-case studies. Indeed, a focus on local dynamics and the opening up of previously under-researched cases is one of the great strengths of much recent research on genocides and atrocities.¹⁴⁶ The approach offered here complements rather than competes with such research.

I wish to particularly emphasise my openness to the claim that certain darker and deeper causes of atrocities may exist and be amenable to analysis. Mass killing is often accompanied by excessive violence and cruelty in the process of killing (what Lee Ann Fujii has labelled ‘extra-lethal violence’),¹⁴⁷ including the gratuitous mutilation of dead bodies,¹⁴⁸ as well as themes of sexual anxiety and perversion.¹⁴⁹ There is a danger that my theory can make atrocities look rather too conscious and reasoned, failing to capture the fundamental

¹⁴⁴ Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 215.

¹⁴⁵ Stanton, 2007, p. vii; Waller, 2007, pp. 10, 52 & 138-9; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 205; Waldorf, 2007, p. 267.

¹⁴⁶ Kühne, 2012, pp. 139 & 141-2; Kalyvas, 2006; Bartov, 2003b.

¹⁴⁷ Fujii, 2013; Browning, 2001, p. 208.

¹⁴⁸ Semelin, 2005, pp. 299-304; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 37-8; McKinney, 2002, p. 124; Kalyvas, 2006, p. 8; Weitz, 2003, p. 180; Slim, 2007, p. 146.

¹⁴⁹ Chirot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 42 & 69-70; Burleigh, 2001, p. 603; Weitz, 2003, pp. 47-8 & 106.

darkness, horror and surreality which frequently pervade actual experiences of mass violence. Psychoanalysts and actual survivors of atrocities are two prominent groups who have engaged in deep thinking regarding these dimensions of atrocities.¹⁵⁰ Their work suggests the importance of human fantasies, insecurities, and dark desires in the perpetration of evil, and the frequently uncertain relation in which killers stand to reality as social scientists conventionally choose to represent it.¹⁵¹ Some features of ideology may even draw on such darker phenomena.¹⁵²

I am fundamentally sympathetic to the value of these accounts of mass violence. But, usually for understandable reasons, they remain somewhat speculative explanations at early levels of theoretical development. I also fear that they are sometimes in danger of tending towards mystification – rooting human evil in subterranean fantasies and drives barely comprehensible after years of clinical therapy, let alone to a detached social scientist. I think work in this vein is important, but a more verifiable explanation, which speaks directly to the bulk of the existing literature on mass violence and to the needs of atrocity prevention seems more urgently required. Certainly it is all I am capable of offering.

In addition, I cannot purport to offer a totally comprehensive account of the ideological dynamics of atrocities. Some ideological phenomena might not justify or cause violence directly, but strengthen or broaden the scope of the justificatory mechanisms I analyse. We might think of these as ideological ‘intensifiers’ – and highly polarised group identities might be an illustrative example of such an intensifier. Such polarised identities do not justify violence on their own, and as both Valentino and Harff have pointed out, measures of divided social identities are on their own poor predictors of violence.¹⁵³ Polarised identities need to be converted into a reason for violence through the justificatory mechanisms, but when this happens, we might expect the resulting violence to be broader

¹⁵⁰ Covington, Williams, Arundale and Knox, 2006. See also: Dutton, 2007; Miller, 1983.

¹⁵¹ See: Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 24-28.

¹⁵² Žižek, 1996.

¹⁵³ Harff, 2003, pp. 66-8; Valentino, 2004, pp. 16-22.

and more extensive than when the justificatory mechanisms are deployed in a social context without high identity polarisation.

The justificatory mechanisms also do not account for the ideological dynamics of *restraint* in any particular case.¹⁵⁴ But just as the justificatory mechanisms operate under the potential influence of intensifier mechanisms, so they also operate in dynamic interaction with various obstacles to violence (not all of which are ideological). For example, Bellamy's *Massacres and Morality* traces the development of a significant and gradually strengthening source of restraint on atrocity perpetration – the norm of civilian immunity.¹⁵⁵ I see norms as at least partly ideological (as they comprise internalised attitudes and beliefs embedded in the minds of social actors)¹⁵⁶ and the relative presence or absence and strength or weakness of the civilian immunity norm alters the operation of the justificatory mechanisms, by changing the sources of resistance they have to overcome and the relative credibility and effectiveness of different sorts of claims they might make.

Intensifiers and restraints matter, therefore, and I do not neglect these aspects of the ideological dynamics entirely. But my focus here is on processes of ideological justification, which I take to be the most causally proximate element of ideology's role in deadly atrocities. Again, an even broader and more integrative account is desirable, but beyond the confines of this thesis.

1.6 Thesis Outline

The rest of this thesis is organised into two parts: the first theoretical and the second evidential. In the theoretical part I first discuss, in Chapter 2, my understanding of ideology and how it is analysed, and clarify the implications of this for the study of atrocities. In Chapter 3, I then sketch the theory of the ideological dynamics of mass violence which I

¹⁵⁴ Straus, 2012b.

¹⁵⁵ Bellamy, 2012b.

¹⁵⁶ Elster, 2009.

seek to validate in the second, evidential part of the thesis. That second part is divided between my three central case studies: Nazi Atrocities (Chapter 4), Stalinist Oppression (Chapter 5) and Allied Area Bombing in World War Two (Chapter 6).

2. Analysing Ideology

A central argument of Chapter 1 was that contemporary theorists of atrocities have lacked an effective conceptual, theoretical and methodological framework for analysing ideology, and in particular one which draws upon the contemporary specialist literature on this topic. This chapter aims to address and remedy these problems, in two main parts. In section 2.1 I engage in a conceptual discussion over the *meaning* of ideology. In section 2.2 I engage in a methodological discussion regarding the *analysis* of ideology. Without clear thinking about ideology's meaning and the appropriate methods for studying it and its effects, it is impossible to effectively analyse the role ideology plays in mass atrocities.

2.1 The Meaning of Ideology

As has been noted all too often, the term 'ideology' has been defined and used in an enormous variety of ways.¹ This "semantic promiscuity"² persists, and the literature on mass atrocities is an illustrative example of it. Nevertheless, theorists of ideology have made real progress in thinking about how the concept should be used. Two impressive and influential definitional investigations, one by John Gerring and the other by Malcolm B. Hamilton, have systematically examined the many criteria that have been explicitly or implicitly attached to ideology, and exposed the vast majority of them as analytically unhelpful.³ Their conclusions are supplemented by the conceptual and methodological work of others, including Aletta Norval, Kathleen Knight, Michael Freeden, and Teun van Dijk.⁴ Whilst disagreement certainly remains on how ideology ought to be defined, these

¹ Eagleton, 1991, pp. 1-2; Freeden, 1996, p. 13 & 47; van Dijk, 1998, p. 1; McLellan, 1995, p. 1; Humphrey, 2005, p. 225 & 227; George, 1987, p. 1.

² Gerring, 1997, p. 957.

³ Ibid.; Hamilton, 1987.

⁴ Knight, 2006; Norval, 2000; Freeden, 2007; Freeden, 2003; van Dijk, 1998.

theorists have converged on certain conclusions, and produced an established literature which can guide definitional efforts.

Unfortunately, atrocity theorists have not looked to this literature for guidance in their use of the concept of ideology. As noted in chapter one, most works on atrocity do not define how they are using the concept of ideology at all, and those which do generally just stipulate their own usage without justification or reference to existing academic definitions. As a result, even that limited conceptual convergence which has occurred in ideological analysis has not been mirrored in discussions of atrocity, where clear and sustained thinking about the term remains lacking.

This creates real theoretical problems, beyond the confusing diversity in the use of ideology discussed in Chapter 1. There has been a common tendency, for example, to construct typologies where ‘ideological’ killers, motives or atrocities are hived off from notionally ‘non-ideological’ types which, from the perspective of contemporary ideology theorists, actually look deeply bound up with ideology. There may well, for example, be *some* distinction between what Michael Mann calls “ideological”, “bigoted”, “disciplined”, “comradely”, and “bureaucratic” killers.⁵ But the use of ‘ideological’ only to describe the first category implies that it has little role to play in the others, which most theorists of ideology would dispute – bigotry and comradeship can certainly be ideologically rooted, for example. The same could be said of Barbara Harff’s contradistinction of “ideological” and “retributive” genocides, Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn’s separation of genocides which “implement...an ideology” from those which “eliminate a real or potential threat...spread terror among real or potential enemies... [or] acquire economic wealth”,⁶ or Robert Zajonc’s typology in which “ideological” imperatives are contrasted with “eliminationist”,

⁵ Mann, 2005, pp. 27-9.

⁶ Harff, 2003, p. 61; Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 29. For similar false dichotomies between ideology and supposedly non-ideological motives, see: Waller, 2007, p. 204; du Preez, 1994, pp. 66-78; Hull, 2003, p. 161; Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 4-5.

“supremacist”, “segregationist”, and “nationalist” ones, among others.⁷ But retribution, elimination of threats and enemies, a desire for supremacy or segregation, and the pursuit of economic wealth can all be *deeply* ideological activities. The United States’ massacres of Native Americans, Belgium’s murderous exploitation of the Congo, and Germany’s annihilation of the Herero were, for example, variously motivated by economic interests and the perceived need to repress or punish dangerous ‘rebels’. But they were also, as Alex Bellamy points out, inextricably bound up with European colonialist ideology.⁸ Such typologies encourage a problematically compartmentalised view of ideology’s potential relevance, and rest on narrow, unspoken, and contestable assumptions about what the concept denotes.

The remainder of my discussion on the meaning of ideology makes two central appeals. First, atrocity theorists need to explicitly define their usage of ideology, and should heed the increasing agreement amongst ideological analysts that *broad* and *non-pejorative* definitions are the most analytically productive ones. Following van Dijk, I characterise such definitions as enjoying increasing endorsement amongst contemporary theorists.⁹ But they are not universally supported. Some theorists believe that such a conception is “too broad” to be functional or that it abandons a “negative”, “critical” or “pejorative” meaning for ideology which the term cannot do without. I thus begin by refuting these arguments in 2.1.1, before ultimately offering a definition of ideology in 2.1.2. But a theorist’s actual ‘sense’ of ideology, their broader understanding of the phenomenon, is not solely produced by definitional criteria. As such, 2.1.3 moves on to my second central appeal: that atrocity theorists also need to develop a more substantive appreciation of ideology as a *rich and multifaceted* phenomenon. I finally conclude this section in 2.1.4 by highlighting the implications of these appeals for the study of atrocities.

⁷ See: Waller, 2007, p. 204.

⁸ Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 81-95.

⁹ van Dijk, 1998, p. 3.

2.1.1 Defending a broad definition of ideology

Numerous critics of broad definitions have worried that, without restrictive definitional criteria, ideology spreads to encompass everything, losing its functional value for analysis. Willard Mullins summarises this concern elegantly:

“In many conceptualizations, ideology is so all-inclusive that other symbolic forms are encompassed by it; because ideology is too comprehensive, it lacks ‘discriminating power’; and, lacking the power to discriminate among various, often similar, phenomena, the concept fails to achieve empirical relevance.”¹⁰

Plenty of other examples of this argument can be found,¹¹ and it is clearly true that, in principle, definitions of concepts can be too broad and insufficiently discriminating. But when this oft-repeated accusation has been levelled against ideology, it has typically been weakly substantiated. Jorge Larrain, for example, assures us that broad “worldview” conceptions of ideology “can only impoverish their analytical power.”¹² But why this should be assumed, why such conceptions cross the threshold of acceptable conceptual breadth, is never explained. Mullins, Larrain, and those of a similar disposition appear to ignore the fact that the degree to which a concept’s functionality is impaired by its breadth depends on its intended function – an open question with ideology.¹³ There is no *a priori* ‘correct breadth’ for concepts, and, despite implications to the contrary, it is obvious that

¹⁰ Mullins, 1972, p. 498.

¹¹ Larrain, 1979, p. 15; McLellan, 1995, p. 50 & 72; Heywood, 2007, p. 11; Eagleton, 1991, p. 7; Rosen, 2000, p. 395.

¹² Larrain, 1979, p. 129; Leonardo, 2003, p. 212.

¹³ Hamilton, 1987, p. 19.

no definition of ideology literally covers ‘all things’. Every concept discriminates to some extent: the question is what we need it to be able to discriminate between, and this question has no ‘natural’ answer.¹⁴ Plenty of ubiquitous social science concepts (consider “psychology” or “culture”) are far broader than even the most encompassing definitions of ideology. But they continue to be useful because their purpose is not to attach thick tranches of evaluative conclusions onto their referents, but to denote broad categories of forces, factors and phenomena.¹⁵ While it is important that their conceptual borders are relatively *clear*, it is not necessarily problematic that they encompass a large area. As Matthew Humphreys writes, “the thought that everything on Earth is atomic matter does not make the job of classifying that matter into a periodic table an unhelpful endeavour – quite the opposite.”¹⁶ Similarly, conceiving of a vast range of human thinking of as ideology is not a problem if it delineates a sphere within which we then categorise and analyse various types of ideology.

Some theorists pose a more targeted objection to broad conceptions of ideology: their particular abandonment of *pejorative connotations* to ideology. Quite what those pejorative connotations are, of course, varies considerably: most often ideologies are held to be false/dissimulative, believed on non-epistemic grounds, and/or bound up with relations of power and domination. But whatever theorists’ preference, two arguments are typically put forward to advance the claim that ideology must retain *some sort* of negative connotation: first, that ideology cannot so easily be stripped of its history of such connotations, and second, that such stripping enervates ideology of its critical power. These two arguments are advanced most clearly by John Thompson, in his *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*,¹⁷ but both appear to have many adherents, and recur throughout works on

¹⁴ Humphrey, 2005, p. 230.

¹⁵ van Dijk, 1998, p. 1.

¹⁶ Humphrey, 2005, p. 230.

¹⁷ Thompson, 1984, pp. 4, 12 & 82. See also: Gerring, 1997, p. 982.

ideology.¹⁸ Michael Rosen claims that his conception of ideology as false consciousness “corresponds to the historical career of the concept”,¹⁹ and David McLellan criticises Lenin’s account of ideology because “his ‘neutral’ conception of ideology robbed it of any critical analytic power”.²⁰ Raymond Boudon characterises negative conceptualizations as more “traditional”, and maintains that a neutral, non-negative understanding of ideology is a “modern” and problematically vague invention.²¹ And Larrain laments that when ideology loses its negative connotations, “the value which the concept had in Marx’s work as a tool of analysis and critique has almost disappeared.”²²

I find the ubiquity of this sort of reasoning puzzling, because both these arguments are seriously flawed. The first rests on a partial and misleading historical narrative. Ideology has long been a polysemic term, and non-pejorative meanings, such as that deployed by the term’s originator, Destutt de Tracy,²³ or by Karl Mannheim in his non-evaluative “general” conception,²⁴ or by Vladimir Lenin, Antonio Gramsci and Georgy Lukacs in their use of the term to denote a “class Weltanschauung”,²⁵ or by Clifford Geertz in his understanding of ideologies as broad cultural systems,²⁶ have persistently sat alongside pejorative definitions.²⁷ As McLellan acknowledges, the “oscillation between a positive and negative connotation [is] characteristic of the whole history of the concept of ideology.”²⁸ It is therefore a loaded presentation of that history to imply that some traditional or historically ‘correct’ meaning can be found.²⁹

¹⁸ See: Larrain, 1979, pp. 13, 15 & 52; Eagleton, 1991, p. 8; Boudon, 1989, pp. 28-9.

¹⁹ Rosen, 2000, p. 395.

²⁰ McLellan, 1995, p. 23.

²¹ Boudon, 1989, pp. 24-30.

²² Larrain, 1979, p. 77.

²³ Eagleton, 1991, pp. 66-9.

²⁴ Mannheim, 1940, pp. 74-8; Larrain, 1979, pp. 101-22; Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 9.

²⁵ Larrain, 1979, pp. 76-7; McLellan, 1995, pp. 22-5.

²⁶ Geertz, 1964.

²⁷ See also: *ibid.*, 47; Knight, 2006, pp. 622-3.

²⁸ McLellan, 1995, p. 5.

²⁹ See: Gerring, 1997, pp. 962-3.

I find Thompson's second concern, echoed by Larrain, Boudon, McLellan, and others, similarly misplaced. There is simply no reason *at all* why a concept needs to be *defined* pejoratively in order to be able to *do* "critical" work.³⁰ Van Dijk has made this point forcefully:

"Does [the] more general conception of ideology take away the critical edge of the enterprise, as is sometimes suggested, or prevent ideological critique? Of course it does not. No more than that the use of the general concept of 'power' precludes a critical analysis of power *abuse*, as well as solidarity with the forms of counter-power we call resistance."³¹

It is not clear how advocates of a negative conception of ideology would respond to this argument, since their contrasting claim that ideology must indeed be defined pejoratively to do critical work is rarely explained. Thus McLellan writes:

"Since ideologies are, according to Geertz, 'most distinctively, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience', they are not, as ideologies, open to criticism."³²

This is a non-sequitur. As van Dijk points out, a broad non-pejorative conception of ideology like Geertz's in no way prevents us from showing how ideologies might, in many circumstances, be exploitative, dissimulative, dominance-legitimizing, and so forth. Michael

³⁰ Steger, 2008, pp. 4-5; Freedon, 2005a, p. 262.

³¹ van Dijk, 1998, p. 11.

³² McLellan, 1995, p. 82.

Rosen is even more blasé – a “looser definition of ideology,” he writes “is, of course, possible. But, so far as the construction of social theory with real explanatory power goes, I think it is obvious that such definitions are useless.”³³

Yet the only thing that is lost by a non-pejorative definition – and this may be what is denoted by McLellan’s ambiguous phrase “not, *as ideologies*, open to criticism” – is the ability to condemn something *simply through labelling it as ideology*. I can only assume that this is what Thompson, Larrain, Boudon, McLellan, Rosen and others mean when they talk in vague terms of ideology “losing its critical capability” or being robbed of its “critical edge”.³⁴ But this is a lame argument. Why is such a crude form of terminological smearing what a project of critique needs to come down to? For sure, we need *some* evaluative terms to evaluate things, and therefore some critical terms to critique things – but why need ideology be such a term? As Gerring argues: “What is lost, one wonders, in calling domination *domination*, repression *repression* and hegemony *hegemony*? What is the special status of ideology that it must be imported to serve as the universal signifier of injustice?”³⁵

Indeed, my fundamental argument is that a broad definition is not only unproblematic but *more* useful than narrow or pejorative definitions. Parsimonious in its criteria, it minimises the prejudicial evaluation of belief-systems by the very categories we use to refer to them. Instead, a broad definition allows us to conduct a form of analysis in which “ideological forms are not presupposed but emerge through careful empirical analysis of thought instantiations.”³⁶ It also encourages different sorts of belief-system to be analysed in tandem, rather than drawing firm but rather arbitrary lines between certain familiar (and therefore supposedly ‘unideological’) political desires – such as acquiring national wealth or maximising security – from notionally radical or extremist ones like redistributing property or swearing loyalty to a national leader. And as academics are never

³³ Rosen, 2000, p. 395.

³⁴ Larrain, 1979, p. 118; McLellan, 1995, p. 82; Heywood, 2007, p. 11.

³⁵ Gerring, 1997, p. 982.

³⁶ Humphrey, 2005, p. 237.

going to all agree on a single highly specific conception of ideology, a broad definition is also the most feasible way to avoid assertions of ideology's relevance or irrelevance in particular cases being produced by the semantic idiosyncrasies of the individual analyst. Nor does it really involve any costs – we can always specify narrower subtypes of ideology. For most contemporary ideological analysts, therefore, ideologies need not be wrong, oppressive, dogmatic, fanatical, opposed to self-interest, in service of self-interest, fantastical or irrational. These are all connotations that lurk in the background of many uses of ideology, but are all best left for empirical determination, not definitional pre-judgement.³⁷

This is obviously not to claim that pejorative or narrow concepts should never be utilised – I use the term 'myth', for example, in a way that denotes the falsehood of the beliefs it describes. But to legitimately criticise an instance of political thinking, one needs to understand it. These two processes cannot be pulled apart completely – the effort to understand will, I accept, only be possible through the deployment of an interpretive schema which cannot be purged of evaluative elements entirely. But a sound methodology for examining any kind of thought keeps the two processes as far apart as possible.³⁸ By stripping ideology of needless implicit or explicit connotations, we make it a considerably better placed tool for the investigation of the complex systems of ideas which underpin the violence involved in mass atrocities.

2.1.2 My definition of ideology

I can now provide my own definition of ideology:

³⁷ Hamilton, 1987, p. 24.

³⁸ Freedman, 1996, pp. 27-8 & 133.

A political ideology is a distinctive system of normative, semantic and/or reputedly factual ideas, typically shared by members of groups or societies, which underpins their understandings of their political world and shapes their political behaviour.

I attach to this definition two ‘operating principles’. First, these definitional criteria should be used as scalar rather than binary metrics. Things may be more or less ideological the more distinctive and systematised they are, for example, and less ideological (without being entirely un-ideological) when more mundane and disorganised. This enables more nuanced assessments of the relevance of ideology in particular contexts compared to rather blunt binary assessments which declare it to simply be present or absent. Second, whilst any network of two or more ideas can be described as a ‘system’, I broadly count only an individual mind’s total system of politically relevant ideas as an ‘ideology’ in its own right.³⁹ So whilst there may be many key doctrines, arguments or sets of ideas below this level (consider Bellamy’s concept of ‘selective extermination’, or Hugo Slim’s ‘asymmetrical necessity’) which are certainly *ideological* and form critical *parts of ideologies*, that is exactly how I suggest talking about them: as ideational sub-systems within an individual’s or group’s overarching ideology. This ensures that the different things we label as full ideologies remain roughly similar phenomena of comparable scale, rather than potentially denoting any set of two or more ideas. Whilst I don’t want to entirely rule out the possibility that it might sometimes be appropriate to call ‘smaller-scale’ systems of ideas ‘ideologies’,⁴⁰ I feel this operational principle maximises clarity and consistency in how we talk about ideational systems of different scale, without really losing anything in the process.

³⁹ Though obviously, and as my definition suggests, when we talk of ideologies we are often in fact referring to systems of ideas shared (at some level of abstraction) between individual minds, and not solely referring to one individual’s personal ideology. But this operating principle defines the individual phenomena that such talk is generalising over – when we talk of ‘fascism’ as ‘an ideology’, for example, we are describing the full systems of political ideas roughly shared between individual fascists.

⁴⁰ Ben Stanley has deployed a distinction between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ ideologies, for example, whilst Boudon delineates ‘general’ from ‘local’ ideologies. See: Stanley, 2008; Boudon, 1999.

My definition is broad but not radically so – indeed it is very similar to those offered by several leading theorists of ideology.⁴¹ I think it is useful to detail the thinking that has motivated my criteria:

“political ideology...”: In this thesis, I shall use the terms ‘ideology’ and ‘political ideology’ interchangeably, since in both the general usage of the concept of ideology in the social sciences, and in the specialist literature on ideology, ideology is overwhelmingly assumed to have a deep and definitive connection to politics and organised social life. I do not want to foreclose the possibility, however, that analogous uses of ideology in apolitical or less political spheres (such as ‘corporate ideology’ or ‘academic ideology’) might be legitimate. My focus on political ideology, and the later clauses of my definition specifying that ideology pertains to the “political world” and “political behaviour”, makes my definition parasitical on one’s definition of the political – itself a vexed and far from trivial question, but one I lack space to investigate thoroughly here. For now I shall simply specify loosely that by politics I mean anything related to decisions over the actions of the state, or the actions of similar institutional structures which exercise overarching power over a social group.⁴²

“...a distinctive system...”: It seems universally accepted that ideology denotes an idea *system*, such that there is little controversy in affirming that if political thinking was totally disconnected, there would be little sense in talking about ‘ideologies’.⁴³ As Gerring writes: “Ideology, at the very least, refers to a set of idea-elements that are bound together, that

⁴¹ Hamilton, 1987, p. 38; Freedden, 2003, p. 3; Hall, 1996, pp. 25-6. For a similar broad definition in International Relations scholarship, see: Engerman, 2010, p. 20.

⁴² For a small fragment of the literature on the boundaries of politics, see: Frazer, 2008; Freedden, 2008; Crick, 2005, pp. 1-17; Freedden, 2005b.

⁴³ Hamilton, 1987, p. 22; Gerring, 1997, p. 961 & 974. See also: Larrain, 1979, p. 155.

belong to one another in a non-random fashion.”⁴⁴ This is not to fall into the trap, frequent amongst invocations of ideology in American quantitative political science, of confusing what Leon Festinger calls “consonance”⁴⁵ – the ways ideas perceptually ‘hang together’ – with the stricter and less appropriate burden of logical coherence and consistency. Ideologies frequently, as Freedman, Hamilton, and Terry Eagleton have all emphasised, do not meet strict standards of logical consistency, but this in no way prevents them from appearing satisfactorily consonant to those that hold them, or from having a strongly systemic structure which follows internal patterns and logics.⁴⁶ These may frequently be logics of association and metaphor, of anecdote and intuition, or of myth and magical thinking, rather than of philosophical logic or rigorous empirical induction. But they still have understandable relationships which can be mapped and causally analysed.

The adjective ‘*distinctive*’ is intended to highlight my usage of ideology as a tool for identifying and analysing the particular political worldviews of different groups or individuals. These groups may be very large – including whole societies or even groups of societies (I am quite happy, for example, in talking about the major ideologies of the capitalist and communist blocs during the cold war). But they are bounded entities with ideology denoting the particular idea-systems they share. By contrast, highly generic or universal ideas or interests can be thought of as less ideological.⁴⁷

“...of *normative, semantic and/or reputedly factual*...”: It is often emphasised that ideologies are evaluative, prescriptive, and thus *normative* in content, and there is a widespread tendency to characterise ideologies according to their specific hierarchies of values, or their commitments or attitudes towards particular policies.⁴⁸ This is reinforced, amongst atrocity

⁴⁴ Gerring, 1997, p. 980.

⁴⁵ Festinger, 1957, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁶ Freedman, 1996, p. 37; Hamilton, 1987, pp. 22-3; Eagleton, 1991, pp. 45-6.

⁴⁷ Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996, p. 60.

⁴⁸ Jost, 2006, p. 654; Haidt, Graham and Joseph, 2009.

theorists, by the use of terms like “ideology of hate”⁴⁹ or claims that “the engine of ideology is hatred”.⁵⁰ But I worry about this heavy focus on the normative-emotional dimension of ideology, and the consequent characterisation of atrocity-justifying ideologies as primarily packages of extremist emotional attitudes towards victim groups. An important component of my approach in this thesis is to highlight how ideologies are more than just bundles of extremist values, hate-filled passions, and radical revolutionary ambitions. They are just as importantly comprised of basic but idiosyncratic factual or *descriptive* beliefs and theories about the world, and of subtle *semantic* framings which inject meaning into parts of that world.⁵¹ Liberalism is not solely distinguished by its prioritisation of freedom and individuals rights, but by distinctive factual beliefs about, for example, the likely outcomes of market forces and democratic processes, about the risks of abuse generated by certain government powers, and about the likely challenges that will emerge to face politics in the 21st century. Unless we excavate and endeavour to understand the full range of normative, descriptive and semantic components of ideologies, they are likely to appear little more than irrational and emotional madness.

Two further points need to be emphasised here. First, by “purportedly factual ideas” I mean to include more than explicit empirical claims. The purportedly factual dimension of ideologies includes the impressionistic and semi-conscious descriptive foundations of human thought, such as background narratives and images of reality which the individual presumes to be broadly accurate characterisations of the world, often without much thought. Second, I do not mean, in drawing this distinction between the normative, semantic and factual components of ideology, to deny that the normative, semantic and factual are fundamentally entangled.

⁴⁹ Weiss, 1997, p. ix; Hinton, 2002a, p. 10.

⁵⁰ du Preez, 1994, p. 123.

⁵¹ Hochschild, 2001; Nafstad and Blakar, 2012, p. 285; van Dijk, 1998, pp. 20, 33-6 & 38; Hamilton, 1987, pp. 25-6; Freedon, 1996, p. 97; Steger, 2008, p. 6; Mirels and Dean, 2006.

“...*ideas*...”: I follow theorists like van Dijk and Paul Thagard in thinking that ideologies are definitively ideational phenomena which exist in peoples’ minds – they are systems of *mental representations*.⁵² This contrasts with a tendency to sometimes talk of ideology as existing somewhere other than minds, such as ‘in’ discourses or symbols. Like van Dijk, I feel that such talk confuses matters, failing to delineate expressions of ideology from ideology itself. Discourse is central to all analysis of ideology, since it is the primary way in which we can actually ‘see’ ideology in action.⁵³ Ideology is constantly *expressed in* discourse, is *shaped by discourse*, and is built from components which are often mental counterparts of discourse (such as concepts).⁵⁴ Still, if by discourse we refer to the actual practices of communicating via speech, text and other means, then I think ideology should be classified as itself being a mental rather than discursive phenomenon.

The choice of ‘ideas’ rather than ‘beliefs’ is motivated by the concern that to some readers ‘belief’ will carry too many connotations of committed and explicit ‘foreground’ thoughts, things avowedly ‘believed’. It is not helpful to limit the vocabulary of ideological analysis in this way. The broader concept of ‘ideas’ more appropriately includes thoughts which are “at best semi-articulate in people’s minds”⁵⁵ but which still may play a central role in shaping behaviour. Van Dijk makes explicitly the reverse terminological choice – using ‘belief’ as his very general term for the fundamental building blocks of ideologies because he feels that ‘idea’ contains too many other connotations. I find this a little peculiar, but it is a thoroughly uninteresting difference in perspectives, and I shall simply use idea in the way Van Dijk uses belief, to denote “anything that can be thought”.⁵⁶ Conversely, in this thesis, I tend to use ‘belief’ to denote the more committed foreground elements of thought within the overall umbrella of ‘ideas’.

⁵² van Dijk, 1998; Thagard, 2012; Thagard, 2010.

⁵³ See section 2.2.1.

⁵⁴ Fairclough, 2001, pp. 2-3; Norval, 2000.

⁵⁵ Freedon, 1996, p. 34.

⁵⁶ van Dijk, 1998, p. 18.

“...typically shared by members of groups or societies...”: Almost all theorists make some reference towards the group-character of ideologies.⁵⁷ “Ideology,” writes Freedden, “more than other kinds of political thought, is a phenomenon squarely located within group activity.”⁵⁸ But talk of systems of ideas being shared by members of groups might provoke concerns. Does such an idea rest on the proposition of mysterious ‘group minds’? Does it suggest that all individuals within a group think in identical ways, sharing an identical set of ideas?

Of course the answer to both of these questions is no. To talk of individuals sharing a commonly labelled ‘ideology’ no more implies that they possess a shared mind than talk of individuals sharing a commonly labelled language implies that they possess a shared mouth. A claim that phenomena are ‘shared’ across individuals doesn’t need to implicate that those phenomena are replicated identically in each case, only that the unique versions of the phenomena held by each individual are sufficiently similar for it to analytically productive to identify them as joint or like phenomena. Every English-speaking person speaks in a unique way, just as every Liberal thinks in a unique way. But we are still happy identifying different English speakers as all speaking a common language, and can similarly think of Liberals as thinking in a common (albeit broadly specified) political ideology.

“...which underpins their understandings of the political world and shapes their political behaviour”: Alongside the concept of an *idea-system*, this criterion is amongst the most common elements in the definition of ideology, and it is a genuinely restrictive one. Individuals have plenty of other idea-systems in their head – I have systems of ideas governing how I write, how I teach, how I think the human body works and how I ought to behave to my friends. But these only become ideological to the degree that they shape political understandings

⁵⁷ Eagleton, 1991, p. 29; Knight, 2006, p. 620 & 624; Freedden, 1996, p. 24; van Dijk, 1998, p. 3 & 9.

⁵⁸ Freedden, 1996, p. 105.

and behaviour.⁵⁹ And of course they may well do – ideas about friendship, the body, teaching and so forth can all be *politicised*. Ideas from non-ideological systems then become ideas in our ideological systems.

The choice of words here – ‘*shapes* political behaviour’ – is also very deliberate, specifically designed to avoid two misleading claims about ideologies. One is that talking of ideologies needs to imply some form of determinism. Ideologies *shape* political behaviour in all kinds of ways but observation of this fact can coexist with a belief that individuals make choices about how they behave politically. A second common claim I wish to avoid is that which requires ideologies to explicitly *prescribe* political behaviour.⁶⁰ I think this is a serious mistake. Plenty of recent critical theory has sought to demonstrate how ideologies shape political behaviour in many ways other than direct prescription.⁶¹ Indeed, the power of ideologies may precisely be at its strongest when they shape behaviour in implicit, unconscious or seemingly neutral ways.

2.1.3 A rich understanding of ideology

A fleshed-out understanding of ideology, I have pointed out, is not derived solely from definitional criteria like those just presented. Beyond its use of a broad conception of ideology, a second central feature of contemporary ideological analysis is its general depiction of ideologies as rich and multifaceted phenomena. They are not presented as just a handful of core principles or beliefs, capable of concise summary in a couple of sentences.⁶² Instead, ideologies are recognised as elaborate and burgeoning cultural edifices: historically sculpted networks of values, meanings, narratives, theories,

⁵⁹ Gerring, 1997, pp. 961, 967-8 & 982.

⁶⁰ See: *ibid.*, 972-4.

⁶¹ Žižek, 1994; Howarth, Norval and Stavrakakis, 2000; Barthes, 2000.

⁶² Although some of the quantitative political science literature on ideology is a regrettable exception. See: Leader Maynard, 2013, pp. 310-11.

assumptions, concepts, expectations, exemplars, past experiences, images, stereotypes, and beliefs about matters of fact.

Only by taking this complexity of atrocity-justifying ideologies seriously can we hope to understand how perpetrators of mass violence come to believe in them. One cannot, for example, fathom the relevance of Nazism to the Holocaust simply by talking of ferocious anti-Semitic hatred. One has to get to grips with the idealised representation of military life and ethnic community embedded in the legacy of the World War I *kampfsgemeinschaft*, the long legacy of Christian anti-Semitism in Central Europe, the centrality of racial ‘science’ authorised by the German medical and academic professions, the distinctively Nazi virtue-systems of obedience and merciless toughness, their quasi-deterministic conceptions of historical time, and much more besides. So too with all other ideologies.

In other words, ideologies are compositionally diverse: comprised of a wider diversity of components than is typically appreciated.⁶³ So with reference to atrocities, this thesis does not only discuss the oft-noted role of ideology as a provider of violent values, hate-filled attitudes of certain out-groups, or revolutionary commitments to the forceful creation of a utopia. These are important – especially given that violence frequently (though not always) requires high levels of individual and group emotionality.⁶⁴ But ideologies are vitally built on forms of reasoning *and* on forms of emotion.⁶⁵ I place at least equal emphasis on notionally ‘scientific’ theories, military doctrines, consequentialist calculations, rhetorical frames, and beliefs about efficacious action.⁶⁶ And ideologies are not only rich in that they are composed of many different sorts of elements, these elements may also be comprised of ideas held at many different levels of consciousness and

⁶³ Howarth, Norval and Stavrakakis, 2000; Finlayson, 2012; Tully, 1983, p. 491; van Dijk, 1995, pp. 147-57.

⁶⁴ Collins, 2008; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 58-80.

⁶⁵ Freedon, 2013; McDermott, 2004; Frazer and Hutchings, 2007.

⁶⁶ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 355.

sophistication.⁶⁷ Individuals' behaviour is not only shaped by ideologies through explicit political commitments or moral principles, but also through semi-conscious assumptions, habitual patterns of thinking, unconscious drives, background narratives, received wisdom, unquestioned 'knowledge', implicit memory and so forth.⁶⁸

An awareness of this ideological richness is a necessary component of any effective understanding of the ideological dynamics of mass atrocities. And specialist analysts of individual atrocities often *do* display such awareness, resulting in detailed, sophisticated and comprehensive pictures of the ideological backgrounds to violence.⁶⁹ My argument is not, therefore, that ideological richness has never been appreciated. But rich pictures have rarely extended beyond specialist studies of individual cases to the level of comparative or overarching theories of genocide and other atrocities. Here ideologies are still often portrayed as merely providing a burning hatred towards some particular out-group, a single monolithic narrative, or a handful of peculiar principles or ambitions.⁷⁰ Benjamin Valentino writes, for example, that:

“The fact that excessive cruelty by German troops during the Second World War was not limited to actions against Jews... strongly suggests that gratuitous brutality can occur in the absence of ideological convictions or passionate hatreds.”⁷¹

This argument is a non-sequitur unless one assumes – as Valentino seems to – that the “ideological convictions” that might have motivated German troops could *only* have been exterminatory anti-Semitism. But this is a crude caricature of Nazi ideology. Nazism had

⁶⁷ Freedman, 1996, pp. 33-5; van Dijk, 1998, p. 20 & 38; Gerring, 1997, p. 979; Tower Sargent, 2009, p. 1; Steger, 2008, pp. 6-7; Nafstad and Blakar, 2012, p. 285.

⁶⁸ On implicit memory and implicit cognitive processes, see: Amodio and Ratner, 2011.

⁶⁹ For example: Hagenloh, 2000; Jackson, 1989; Hinton, 1998a.

⁷⁰ For example: du Preez, 1994, pp. 122-4; Valentino, 2004, p. 31; Waller, 2007, pp. 40-53.

⁷¹ Valentino, 2004, p. 55. See also: *ibid.*, 51.

long demanded racial war against Slavs and other inferior races, not just Jews, and incorporated a wide range of other “ideological convictions” – militarist virtues, the need for violent acquisition of lebensraum – clearly implicated by German troop behaviour in Eastern Europe.⁷² The failure to thoroughly appreciate ideological richness, and the tendency to conceptualise atrocity-justifying ideologies as crude assemblages of a few implausible narratives and hate-based principles thus undermines efforts to actually grapple with the beliefs, perceptions and motives underpinning the perpetration of atrocities.

2.1.4 Implications for the study of atrocities

Beyond the ideological/non-ideological dichotomy

First and foremost, the definition I provide aims to move theorists away from the widespread tendency to dichotomously divide motives, individuals or entire atrocities into firmly separated ‘ideological’ and ‘non-ideological’ categories. This tendency, resting on the assumption that ideology must denote only a narrow (but often unspecified) sort of thinking or type of motive, implies that key atrocity-justifying ideas cannot be present in degrees. Perpetrators are assumed to either entirely imbibe ideological claims and motives or act entirely uninfluenced by them. The understanding of ideology I have advocated abandons these tendencies. My argument is that no firm lines can be legitimately drawn between ideological and non-ideological thinking, and that when they are drawn they risk reflecting little more than the covert cultural and ideological biases of analysts themselves.

Some may object that this guarantees some relevance to ideology by definitional fiat. But this objection fails to appreciate that this is exactly the outcome I am advocating as beneficial, and which characterises modern ideology studies. As Norval writes: “It is this

⁷² Weiss, 1997, pp. 201-5; Slim, 2007, p. 126. See also: Burleigh, 2001, pp. 87, 571-3 & 604.

emphasis on the ubiquity of ideology... that is at the heart of contemporary approaches to the question of ideology.”⁷³ Such approaches recognise that the binary question of whether ideology “matters or not” is not productive: given that its answer will be dictated by the idiosyncratic, contestable and semi-arbitrary definition of the individual analyst. A more effective investigation broadens the concept of ideology in order to side-line such a question, instead asking *in what way* ideology influenced behaviour and thought, and interacted with other factors, in any given instance.

Nevertheless, this emphasis on ideological ubiquity does not mean that everything becomes equally and indistinguishably ideological – on the contrary, it allows us to make nuanced judgements about more or less ideological phenomena, and the complex ways in which they interact. As I have made clear, near-universal or generic ideas might be less interestingly or meaningfully ideological to the degree that they do not rest so heavily on distinctive worldviews. But it is misleading to treat even generic motives like fear, material self-interest or revenge as completely non-ideological. As I shall emphasise repeatedly throughout this thesis, the ‘threats’ which provoke fear rarely speak for themselves, and are rarely if ever directly experienced by the individuals who fear them.⁷⁴ Actual instances of fear almost always rest on distinctive idea-systems and are connected by those idea-systems to particular programmes of political action. In other words, the threats that provoke the fears that underpin much mass violence against civilians are ideologically constructed, typically by state elites and national security apparatuses. The pursuit of material interest is similarly often underpinned by ideological conceptions of legitimate behaviour, of valued commodities, and of efficacious action. And revenge is frequently not merely a personal affair, but built on ideological representations of certain groups of people as ‘guilty’, and distinctive conceptions of certain injustices as particularly grievous and demanding certain forms of recompense. Theorists thus err when they assume that demonstrating the

⁷³ Norval, 2000, p. 316.

⁷⁴ Shaw, 2007, pp. 30-1, 86 & 111.

dominance of motives like fear or vengeance, or even base self-interest, indicates the weakness of ‘ideological’ factors.⁷⁵

Ideology without fanaticism

Abandoning firm lines between the ideological and non-ideological highlights how scepticism of ideology’s importance has typically been rooted in misguided assumptions about what the concept should denote. Several eminent theorists, including Waller, Valentino, Scott Straus, John Mueller, Charles Tilly and Stathis Kalyvas, display a soft scepticism⁷⁶ of ideology’s importance, on the shared perception that most atrocity perpetrators were not ‘true believers’ in official ideologies but were, on the contrary, “passive, apathetic, and indifferent”.⁷⁷ These theorists are united in sensing (correctly) that most atrocity perpetrators do not match stereotypes of the “raving ideologue”⁷⁸ who is “caught up in the throes of bloodlust”⁷⁹ and acts on the basis of “insane ideological commitment”.⁸⁰ They conclude from this that killers were therefore either uninfluenced or weakly influenced by ideology, and in notional contrast with this, repeatedly emphasise the “ordinariness” of killers.⁸¹

But as should by now be clear, an explanation which emphasises ideology *need not deny such ordinariness*.⁸² The influence of ideologies is not limited to only ‘extraordinary’ fanatics or firmly committed intellectuals, and ideological beliefs do not need to be held pathologically, with one hundred percent conviction, with explicit and self-conscious

⁷⁵ Such assumptions seem implicit in: Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 91-104.

⁷⁶ I say soft scepticism since none of these thinkers rejects the importance of ideology entirely. See, for example: Waller, 2007, p. 185.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 46. See also: *ibid.*, 40-53, 102-4, 124 & 185; Valentino, 2004, p. 24 & 55; Mueller, 2000; Straus, 2007a, pp. 259-64; Tilly, 2003, pp. 141, 175 & 237; Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 44-48; Shaw, 2007, p. 110 & 138; Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 116-8; Burleigh, 2001, p. 615.

⁷⁸ Waller, 2007, p. 102.

⁷⁹ Alexander, 2009, p. 18. See also: Drumbl, 2005, p. 591.

⁸⁰ Waller, 2007, p. 185.

⁸¹ Valentino, 2004, p. 31; Waller, 2007, pp. 8, 47 & 98-106; Straus, 2007a; Waldorf, 2007; Roth, 2004.

⁸² Freedon, 2008.

emphasis, or on the basis of many years of prior commitment. As a result, someone does not have to be a card-carrying member of an explicitly ideological movement for ideology to influence their behaviour.⁸³ A perpetrator might be conflicted, lack visible hatred, and participate in atrocity in part for non-ideological motives. Yet they may still have internalised ideological beliefs – even if only to a certain extent and with a low level of advanced theoretical understanding – about the nature of their actions, and the moral status of their victims, which are *vital* in making them able to kill.⁸⁴ Ideologies of all stripes can clearly still have substantial influence, whether blatant and acknowledged or subtle and unconscious, over many who are not card-carrying followers.

So these soft sceptics hold an image of perpetrators I broadly think is accurate: they do indeed act from a wide range of motives,⁸⁵ often lack formal membership in explicitly ‘ideological’ movements,⁸⁶ and do not match the stereotypes of murderous fanatics motivated by fervent hatred and a long-standing commitment to some elaborate ideology.⁸⁷ But the soft sceptics err in their exceptionally narrowing assumptions regarding what ideology might denote, and their consequent framing of perpetrators’ ordinariness and variety in opposition to ideology. As a consequence, these theorists unwarrantedly downplay the importance of ideological processes in explaining perpetrator behaviour, by implying that the absence of *fanatical* ideological convictions equates to the absence of ideological convictions *in toto*.⁸⁸ This is unhelpful for any effort to understand perpetrator behaviour, given the existence of so much space for important ideological dynamics between these extremes.

⁸³ Somewhat contra the suggestion of: Valentino, 2004, pp. 48-53.

⁸⁴ Slim, 2007, pp. 121-2.

⁸⁵ Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 95-102; Hull, 2003, p. 159; Valentino, 2004, pp. 37-9; Shaw, 2007, p. 84; Hinton, 1998b, p. 12. See also: Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 17 & 29; Waller, 2007, p. 73.

⁸⁶ Waller, 2007, p. 72 & 76; Valentino, 2004, p. 56.

⁸⁷ Straus, 2007a, p. 261.

⁸⁸ Valentino, 2004, p. 53.

Ideologies in denial: pragmatism, realism and identities

The abandonment of firm lines between the ideological and the non-ideological also highlights the problematic tendency of atrocity theorists to oppose ideological motives to ‘pragmatic’, ‘practical’ or ‘realist’ ones.⁸⁹ Almost all contemporary theorists of ideology reject such a divide.⁹⁰ Both the pragmatist and realist/realpolitik schools of political argument are systems of ideas, with their own assertions of value, favoured modes of political argument, theories about the world, and generative currents of intellectual history. It is true that these political standpoints typically deny the normative, political or ideological character of their claims, masking them as ‘necessity’, the need to be ‘realistic’, or the supposedly neutral demand for ‘compromise’. But this is a tactic also deployed by more obvious ideologies, including Conservatism, Marxism and Liberalism, and it is now widely recognised that the claim to be non-ideological and merely ‘pragmatic’ is often itself a paradigmatic move of ideologies.⁹¹ As Slavoj Žižek summarises: “the very gesture of stepping out of ideology pulls us back into it.”⁹²

So the tendency to conceive of ‘ideologies’ as very abstract, theoretical systems of thought, whereas pragmatism or realism are assumed to denote just “seeing the world as it is”, is wrong – even dangerous. The ‘requirements’ of pragmatism and realpolitik do not speak for themselves and are not some default way of seeing the world or making political decisions. They encode particular assertions of political value that are open to political and ethical contestation, and make prescriptions for action in light of distinctive assumptions about the nature of the world and the efficacy of certain means of action.⁹³ The importance of, say, maintaining security by repressing an insurgent movement, does not have some

⁸⁹ See: Kiernan, 2003, p. 31; du Preez, 1994, pp. 66-78; Kalyvas, 2006, p. 130.

⁹⁰ See also: Gerlach and Werth, 2009, p. 135.

⁹¹ Žižek, 1994, pp. 3-4, 10 & 15; Freedman, 2005a, pp. 247-62; Laclau, 1997, pp. 297-9; Engerman, 2010, p. 20.

⁹² Žižek, 1994, p. 10.

⁹³ Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996, pp. 39-40.

default matter-of-factness about it as a political goal which the desire to create an ethnically homogenous state lacks. This is not to deny that pragmatism and realpolitik are, in many ways, different from other ideological systems. They have unusually high levels of strategic flexibility, are much ‘thinner’ than most other ideologies,⁹⁴ and may therefore require other ‘full’ or ‘thick’ ideologies to provide them with the important content they need to shape political action successfully. But this is not a reason to think that they are non-ideological.

Of course this is predicated on my broad conception of ideology – if theorists persist with a narrower understanding of ideology, pragmatism and realpolitik can be labelled non-ideological. But again, such understandings of ideology create theoretical problems, generate confusion, and ultimately rest on arbitrary and overly rigid separations between different forms of thinking. For example, a purported distinction between ‘ideological’ and ‘pragmatic’ genocides leads Peter du Preez (explicitly following a path set out by others), to cash out the characteristics of the two categories as follows:

“An ideological form of genocide [includes] the concept of ideological xenophobia as in the Nazi and the Armenian cases, where the purpose was to purify the nation by eliminating all alien elements... What of pragmatic genocides, driven by fear, hatred, material needs and the desire to dominate? Theory is rudimentary, though some mimicry may occur. Noticeably absent though is the influence of intellectuals... There are no theorists writing books or treatises for discussion... Where the ideologues write massive romances about the destiny of the people, the nature of the enemy and the course of history... the pragmatists reduce things to the self-evident. There are enemies. They are dangerous... For the

⁹⁴ See: Stanley, 2008; Freedman, 1998.

ideologue, the main question is: What kind of story could be told about the world which would make it worthy of my presence? For the pragmatist, the main question is: How do I get by in the kind of story the world is.”⁹⁵

This is wrong – as any examination of the genocides which du Preez slots into the two categories will reveal. I have already argued that motives such as fear, hatred, material needs and the desire to dominate cannot be automatically assumed to be non-ideological. But it is, in any case, false that fear, hatred, material needs and the desire to dominate play a greater role in ‘pragmatic genocides’ than they do in ‘ideological genocides’. Any close study of the cases du Preez classifies as ideological (including the Nazi Holocaust, Stalinist dekulakization or Armenian genocide) will find the same sorts of dynamics of fear and hatred found in those he describes as pragmatic (such as the Herero Genocide, and Cold War-era violence in Rwanda). It is also false to suggest that in colonialist violence, as in the Herero genocide, or violence between ethnic groups, the influence of intellectuals and ‘theory’ is absent. What of the crucial racial theories and ideological doctrines which underpinned colonialism?⁹⁶ What of the invented foundation myths of modern Rwanda, fostered and encouraged by Belgian colonial masters in order to facilitate their hegemony?⁹⁷ These are not just “self-evident” features of the how “the world is” – they are ideological constructs central to the motivation, legitimation and rationalization of violence. Indeed, as du Preez acknowledges at many other points, ‘pragmatic’ genocides are not usually wars on

⁹⁵ du Preez, 1994, pp. 69-70. I acknowledge that, later, du Preez waters down the tightness of this categorisation considerably, observing that “pragmatic genocides are really just debased forms of ideological genocide” (see: *ibid.*, 80). But why then divide up the genocides in this way? It leads to du Preez having to cash out the difference even more problematically, by appealing to differences in the level of ideological “elaboration” and “correctness” – both concepts du Preez leaves undefined and without any comments as to how we can measure them. Why not just avoid this muddle? If both ideological and pragmatic genocides are really pretty ideological, we would do better to come up with a typology using different descriptors, which do not falsely suggest the restriction of ideological factors to only one category.

⁹⁶ Which du Preez emphasises at other points.

⁹⁷ Melson, 2003, pp. 326-9.

‘real’ enemies who present a genuine threat, but imagined enemies constructed through the distinctive worldviews of the perpetrators. In what sense, then, do “pragmatists reduce things to the self-evident”? This effort to carve up genocides into ideological and pragmatic types is spurious and leads to misleading assumptions about specific cases.⁹⁸

Again, this demonstrates my central argument – that narrow definitions of ideology are not just randomly going out of fashion, but are doing so because they are practically deleterious, encouraging arbitrariness and confusion in theoretical classification and error in empirical assumptions. Broadening our conception of ideology does not impair our ability to meaningfully categorise atrocities, or even different ideological types of atrocities. It just means that these categories are not built around a firm but unsustainable contrast between ideological and non-ideological atrocities.

It is also worth emphasising that ideologies include identity-based systems of belief organised around ethnicity, religion, nationhood or something else. Several theorists, such as Mary Kaldor and Samuel Huntington, imply some fundamental distinction between ideological and identity-based politics.⁹⁹ Again this rests on a poorly formulated understanding of what ideology denotes. Such a distinction would imply that the classic ‘big ideologies’ of the 20th Century, like conservatism, socialism, liberalism or communism, did not utilise identity-appeals or identity-categories. That is not so. Perhaps even more counterintuitively, it would suggest that blatantly identity-based ideologies, like German Nazism or Italian Fascism, are in fact not ideologies at all. Such paradoxes lead to Kaldor’s confusing conclusion that whereas identity-politics are “inherently exclusive” (as if no efforts to form inclusive political identities had ever been attempted), “the politics of ideas...are open to all and therefore tend to be integrative” (as if systems of racism,

⁹⁸ Gerlach and Werth, 2009, p. 135. Parallel if weaker problems apply to related distinctions, like du Preez’ contrast of ‘means-end’ and ‘transcendental’ genocide. See: du Preez, 1994, pp. 11-12. See also: Malešević, 2010, p. 326; Shaw, 2007, pp. 40 & 88-9.

⁹⁹ Kaldor, 2012, pp. 7-8; Huntington, 2002, p. 21. See also: Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008, p. 45. For a critique of Kaldor, see: Malešević, 2010, pp. 325-6.

discrimination, oppression and identity-conflict did not depend on ‘ideas’).¹⁰⁰ Above all else, this is a thoroughly arbitrary line to draw: as Siniša Malešević points out, the big and notionally more ‘theoretical’ ideologies of the mid-20th century and the supposedly ‘recent’ identity-based systems of political thinking all “invoke group labels as a part of a concrete ideological project to justify a specific political course of action, including warfare”.¹⁰¹ Identity and ideology are not the same thing, but they are inextricably interrelated, and forms of identity politics rely on complex underlying systems of ideas just as much as the notionally more conventional politics of left and right.¹⁰²

2.2 The Analysis of Ideology

I have defended an understanding of ideology as a broadly defined concept which specifies a rich phenomenon requiring detailed analysis. But how do we actually study ideologies, examining them and using them to explain events? Having operationalized the concept of ideology in 2.1, in this section, I outline a basic methodology for studying it, in three stages. In 2.2.1, I explain how I collect data and interpret that data in this thesis. In 2.2.2 I provide a ‘basic model’ for thinking about the causes of ideology – the factors which influence people’s political worldviews and their attachment to those worldviews. In 2.2.3 I provide a parallel framework for thinking about the effects of ideology – the impact it has on individuals’ behaviour, especially with reference to mass violence. Through all three subsections, my comments are schematic rather than deep. Whole books can, and have, been written on these subjects, and I cannot hope to synthesise such works in detail. Ultimately, the proof of methodological soundness lies in the product of what is produced. My aim here is simply to concisely summarise the key features and assumptions of my analytical method.

¹⁰⁰ Kaldor, 2012, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ Malešević, 2010, p. 325.

¹⁰² Though this is also an unhelpful schema, see: Haidt, Graham and Joseph, 2009; White, 2011; Leader Maynard, 2013.

2.2.1 Examining Ideology

Sceptics of efforts to study ideas have sometimes argued that ideational phenomena are “unobservable”, and hence either impossible or challenging to subject to “scientific” analysis.¹⁰³ Such scepticism can be debilitating. As van Dijk points out, “if ‘observability’ were a criterion, neither commonsense nor theoretical analysis of action, discourse or society would be possible”.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, most ‘observable’ human behaviour can only be rendered meaningful in light of some assumptions about underlying mental states. As such, the refusal to study ideational phenomena does not usually result in the refusal to make assumptions about them,¹⁰⁵ but the refusal to specify or substantiate such assumptions, instead imposing by unspoken fiat those mental processes the analyst presumes more ‘natural’, ‘rational’ or ‘default’.

Nevertheless, it is certainly the case that the examination of ideas and ideologies is challenging, and no single self-evident means for such examination exists. Since the study of ideology spans a wide number of different disciplines, a correspondingly large number of different methodologies are utilised in extant research.¹⁰⁶ I suggest that they can be grouped into four broad categories: (i) *Behavioural inference* (the positing of individuals’ ideas in light of the ways they behave);¹⁰⁷ (ii) *Textual analysis* (the analysis of ideas expressed in any forms of communication, including non-verbal works, which exist independent of the analyst); (iii) *Inquiry* (the attempt to directly solicit ideas or beliefs out of individuals through questioning - including qualitative methods like interviewing and quantitative methods such

¹⁰³ Kalyvas, 2006, p. 92. See also: van Dijk, 1995, pp. 43-4.

¹⁰⁴ van Dijk, 1998, p. 44.

¹⁰⁵ As Kalyvas, amongst others, attempts to – see: Kalyvas, 2006, p. 101. Kalyvas acknowledges the need to make some “minimal, yet sensible, assumptions” about the support given to violence – but these necessarily drag one into the business of inferring likely motives. If one can legitimately do this from, for example, perpetrators’ environment (see: *ibid.*, 116-17) it seems unreasonable to exclude the effort to do so from discourse and testimony.

¹⁰⁶ For overviews, see: Leader Maynard, 2013; Mildemberger, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ But see: Kalyvas, 2006, p. 93. for some concerns with this approach. See also: *ibid.*: 24 & 101.

as surveying); and (iv) *Neuroscientific methods* (the study of neurological processes in individual's brain and wider nervous system).¹⁰⁸

This thesis relies overwhelmingly on methods of textual analysis, largely out of necessity. The three case studies of atrocity used in this thesis are all historical, presenting an abundance of textual data but impeding survey methods or interviews. I will, however, rely on some interviews conducted by historians, as well as a handful of surveys conducted at the time.¹⁰⁹ I also inevitably resort to behavioural inference at points, and draw on some very basic neuroscientific research. But in the main this thesis relies on textual analysis.

Texts may tell us things about ideology in three essential ways. First, and most obviously, they can tell us something about the ideology of the author – revealing ideas which influenced them. Second, they can tell us about discourse received by an audience – whether through listening, reading or some other form of ideological consumption. Third, they can tell us something about the broader ideological environment in which authors and audiences operated, in terms of the available cognitive and discursive resources that were thinkable or speakable in a particular context, and the way such resources were taken to interrelate.¹¹⁰ Methodological soundness in my project rests, therefore, on making *reliable inferences* from texts to the three sorts of information just identified. There are three essential foundations which help generate such inferences reliably.

1. *A Large-N Corpus*

This thesis rests on analysis of over two thousand individual ‘texts’ or ‘discourse fragments’. The claims I make rest on the aggregate picture built up by this mass of discourse fragments, and rarely place great weight on individual texts. It is possible that I

¹⁰⁸ See: Mildenerger, 2013.

¹⁰⁹ For example: Figes, 2002.

¹¹⁰ Skinner, 1974; Skinner, 2002, pp. 158-174; Tully, 1983.

have interpreted some of the discourse fragments I cite erroneously. But I believe that, even accounting for the possibility of such error, the weight of data I have analysed offers a sufficiently solid ground for the claims I make. Critiquing my interpretation of that data remains, nevertheless, an eternally open avenue for challenging the argument presented in this thesis.

2. *Source Reliability*

The discourse fragments I examine are drawn from a number of different sources, all of which are open to some query regarding their reliability or ease of interpretation. Perhaps most obviously, as a comparative scholar – rather than an historian – I am not conversant in the languages of all the discourse examined in this thesis, and for two of my three case studies, I am reliant on the competence and neutrality of translators. Nevertheless, many of my sources benefit from two substantial strengths regarding their reliability.

First, a large proportion are drawn from leading, well scrutinised, and well regarded documentary collections, such as Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham's *Nazism 1939-1945: A Documentary Reader*, or John Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov's *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks 1932-1939*.¹¹¹ Such collections are not infallible, but are authoritative and rigorous. The specific interpretations I make are also informed by, and broadly consonant with, the analysis of ideology by case-specialists on Nazi, Stalinist and Allied violence.

Second, many of the sources I have examined carry particular potency as sources of genuine ideological meaning, in offering a blend of both public and private discourse. I have drawn considerably on *internal* government discourse, in the form of memoranda, briefing papers, reports and orders, as well as some private diaries. I have also drawn

¹¹¹ Noakes and Pridham, 1988; Getty and Naumov, 1999.

considerably on discourse produced after the atrocity itself whose content runs counter to what we might believe to be the obvious post-hoc self-interest of the utterer. Interviews with leading World War II airmen, for example, or the memoirs of senior Holocaust perpetrators like Rudolf Hoess, often testify to motives or beliefs which are far from flattering to the subject. Of course strategic motives often exist in such testimony or texts in ways which are difficult to discern, and all discourse produced after the event suffers from the risk of rationalization, dysfunctional memory, and reconstruction in light of subsequent knowledge.¹¹² Alertness to such problems is a feature of any sound hermeneutic method (see below). But whilst all sources remain in need of scrutiny, we have access to a wealth of private, original and plausibly sincere data on all three of the case studies examined in this thesis, which provides the basis for effective ideological analysis.

3. *Sound Hermeneutic Method*

Above all else, I place faith in the conclusions about ideology advanced in this thesis because they are based on a hermeneutic method of interpreting texts which is relatively sophisticated and alert to potential sources of interpretative error. Formulating such a method is no trivial matter, and neither atrocity studies nor the broader social sciences are free from crude and shoddy interpretative practices.

Foremost amongst the mistakes made is what I term ‘the fundamental hermeneutic error’. I use this label to refer to that tendency, common in both academic and lay analysis of historical and contemporary events, to assume that individuals across cultures, spaces, and times, generally hold a set of basic perceptions, beliefs, values and interests pretty close to our own, and interpret what they say in light of such presumed commonalities. To some, the unjustifiability of this tendency may seem obvious, and many academics – most

¹¹² Kalyvas, 2006, p. 46.

famously Quentin Skinner – have critiqued it with vigour.¹¹³ Nevertheless, it is a common error, and one that recurs throughout the analysis of atrocities.

As an illustrative example, consider Robert Jay Lifton's explanation of the behaviour of doctors in Nazi Germany offered in his *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*. This is, in many ways, an outstanding book – and my following comments do not indicate scepticism of the worth of Lifton's research and analysis in general. But a central element of Lifton's argument concerns the phenomenon of what he calls “doubling”. How, Lifton seeks to explain, can doctors – people committed to the preservation of life and who have to swear a Hippocratic oath extolling that commitment – have participated in such extraordinary levels of abuse and violence to so many victims? Lifton answers in part by approvingly citing the view of a “Dr. B.” that:

“Each SS doctor could call forth two radically different psychological constellations within the self: one based on ‘values generally accepted’ and the education and background of a ‘normal’ person; the other based on ‘this [Nazi] ideology with values quite different from those generally accepted.’”¹¹⁴

Whilst not devoid of valuable insight, this is an unnecessary and flawed explanation. Why posit a mysterious ‘double self’ to doctors when a much simpler answer exists: that Nazi doctors actually believed that what they were doing was justified? Why assume that the abundant evidence of such belief must be explained away as a repressed, second, abnormal psychological mindset, buried in the unconscious, which comes out only under the peculiar circumstances of the Nazi death camps and T-4 euthanasia centres?

¹¹³ See, in general: Skinner, 2002.

¹¹⁴ Lifton, 1986, p. 211.

One would only feel the need to make this explanation by committing the fundamental hermeneutic error – assuming that the beliefs we would expect of doctors in *our* cultural context are some *default* beliefs that ought to be expected to arise in every cultural context, and deviation from which must be explained by some special psychological process through which the ‘real doctor’ is overtaken by an abnormal ‘Nazi’ doctor. This is bad history, bad sociology, and bad psychology. The “values generally accepted” and the “education and background of a ‘normal’ person” which Lifton assumes shaped doctors’ real selves are not a cross-cultural constant. Plenty of ordinary Germans, and plenty of ordinary German doctors, really did believe that Jews were sub-human, and threatening to the Aryan race, and needed to be removed or even killed to protect Germany. And it is unsurprising that they would believe that, since such ideas had been prevalent in Germany and many other European countries in the first half of the 20th Century for some time – a feature of the ‘education and background of a normal person’.¹¹⁵ As Skinner points out: “what is rational to believe depends in large measure on the nature of our other beliefs” and as a result, we should “interpret specific beliefs by placing them in the context of other beliefs [and] interpret systems of belief by placing them in wider intellectual frameworks”.¹¹⁶ There is no reason to expect that the default ‘values generally accepted’, ‘education and background’ or ‘ordinary’ ideological beliefs of a German doctor in the 1930s and 40s would necessarily be values, education, or beliefs antipathetic to Nazism.

Indeed there are strong reasons to believe the opposite: as Lifton himself notes, the German medical profession was singularly pro-Nazi – almost half of all doctors became Nazi Party members, the highest ratio of all professions.¹¹⁷ And leading orchestrators of the Nazi euthanasia programme expressed clear and conscious commitments to its aims and

¹¹⁵ Pulzer, 1988; Haas, 2008; Madley, 2005; Weitz, 2003, pp. 32-48.

¹¹⁶ Skinner, 2002, pp. 4-5.

¹¹⁷ Waller, 2007, p. 116; Weiss, 1997, p. 132; Burleigh, 2001, p. 388.

justifications.¹¹⁸ One can invoke the contrast between Nazi behaviour and the pro-life humanism of the Hippocratic oath as much as one wishes, but “even the Hippocratic Oath,” as Michael Burleigh points out, “was subject to creeping reinterpretation, with medical historians redefining ethics away from concern with the individual in favour of the health of the biological collective. One could still subscribe to the Hippocratic Oath after a fashion.”¹¹⁹ Nazi doctors simply did not conceptualise the role of a “good doctor” in the same way as most liberal societies do today. So whilst atrocities often change those who perpetrate them, “there is no credible reason,” as Waller argues, “to believe that we *temporarily* become wholly different people, with different ways of thinking, feeling and behaving when we commit evil.”¹²⁰

Taking ideology seriously allows us to avoid the fundamental hermeneutic error, and engage in the sophisticated effort to understand why perpetrators of mass violence believe their actions to be justified. A sound hermeneutic method roots interpretations of texts, as far as possible, not on what the author would seem to be saying if they were assumed to hold a worldview broadly similar to the analyst, but on a) what it appears that the author was *doing* in authoring the text in the context in which they were writing,¹²¹ and b) what it is feasible to assume they were expressing given the intellectual resources and dominant ideological environment in which they were writing/speaking. Such an approach incorporates what Skinner calls the “golden rule” of interpretation: “however bizarre the beliefs we are studying may seem to be, we must begin by trying to make the agents who accepted them appear as rational as possible....we must initially be prepared to take whatever is said, however bizarre it may seem, as far as possible at face value.”¹²²

¹¹⁸ Burleigh, 2001, pp. 385-6. See also: Weitz, 2003; Madley, 2005; Haas, 2008.

¹¹⁹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 388.

¹²⁰ Waller, 2007, p. 126.

¹²¹ Skinner, 2002, pp. 2-4.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 40. See also: Boudon, 1999.

The avoidance of the fundamental hermeneutic error does not itself ensure a sound hermeneutic method. As already mentioned, a naïve swallowing of the superficial claims of a text without interrogating underlying motives or strategies is a similar danger to successful interpretation. Moreover, inattentiveness to discursive devices (such as sarcasm, irony, hyperbole, analogy and metaphor) is also likely to send interpretation awry. The best defence against these errors remains, however, a contextualist hermeneutic method, since the investigation of what authors of texts were *doing* in authoring them forces us to examine likely underlying motives and strategies, and search for discursive devices. Beyond this, we need a method for analysing not just the original intentional content of texts, but the second and third pieces of ideological information I mentioned: the impact of texts on audience ideologies, and what they tell us about the broader ideological environment. These questions begin to touch on the questions of ideology's causes and its effects.

2.2.2 The Causes of Ideology

Motivated Cognition

Contemporary research on ideology and ideas has suggested a vast range of likely causes for the adoption of certain ideological beliefs and overarching ideologies. Some theorists stress the importance of genetics or basic physiology,¹²³ some focus on underlying psychological drives (such as cognitive dissonance minimisation, protection of self-esteem, or deep ontological insecurity),¹²⁴ some on the key role of social institutions,¹²⁵ some on the power of rhetorical or discursive devices,¹²⁶ and some on the importance of the existing ideological landscape, whether in terms of the personal beliefs of individuals or the

¹²³ Mildenberger, 2013, pp. 14-16.

¹²⁴ Festinger, 1957; Jost, Federico and Napier, 2009; Jost and Hunyady, 2005; Glynnos, 2001.

¹²⁵ Simonds, 1989.

¹²⁶ Wodak and Meyer, 2009b; Finlayson, 2012; van Dijk, 1995; Laclau, 1997.

intellectual resources contextually available/dominant in wider culture.¹²⁷ In my view, all of these causes do indeed exert some sort of force in shaping individuals' ideological worldviews and no definitive claims about primacy can be made for one set of causes over the other since this is likely to vary at the individual level. The analysis of ideas needs a basic but integrative model of the causes of ideology based on empirical research.

I offer a basic model starting from some key assumptions about individuals' *ideation drivers* which depart from idealised models of rational agents (though I accept that such models may be justified heuristically in some circumstances). Following Raymond Boudon, I reject any assumption that individuals form their beliefs motivated by epistemic-optimisation, i.e. the overriding desire to maximise the chance that their beliefs are true or valid according to relevant epistemic criteria.¹²⁸ There is little reason to believe that most individuals hold such a strong epistemic-optimising motive and much evidence to show that they do not.¹²⁹ After all, to be genuinely truth-optimising about any substantial portion of our overall beliefs requires infeasible investments of time, energy and material resources.¹³⁰ Instead almost all of us, for at least the large bulk of our beliefs, are epistemic-*satisfiers*, adopting beliefs which look satisfying – good enough – given a range of underlying psychological motives. But those motives are not simply a matter of trite self-interest. Individuals have powerful drives towards cognitive dissonance minimisation, meaning that 'satisfying' beliefs must generally not involve palpable dissonance with other beliefs or experiences.¹³¹ They may also serve a range of other underlying drivers, such as self-esteem needs,¹³² system-justifying tendencies (the demonstrable trend of people rationalising the status quo as being just),¹³³ needs for cognitive closure (the desire, which varies in intensity

¹²⁷ Skinner, 2002; Tully, 1983; Freedman, 1996; Koselleck, 1982.

¹²⁸ Boudon, 1999.

¹²⁹ Varki and Brower, 2013; Boudon, 1989; Boudon, 1999; Baumann, 2007; Festinger, 1957; Rydgren, 2009.

¹³⁰ Hardwig, 1985.

¹³¹ Festinger, 1957.

¹³² Jost and Major, 2001, p. 5.

¹³³ Jost and Hunyady, 2005.

between individuals, to eliminate uncertainty and ambiguity in their perception of the world),¹³⁴ interests in cognitive efficiency,¹³⁵ and a range of other emotional and material interests.¹³⁶ Ideological analysts influenced by psychoanalysis have also suggested further drivers, such as destructive impulses, ontological anxiety, and sexual arousal and repression which may be thought to motivate ideological uptake.¹³⁷ And a focus on such psychological features which are assumed to be shared by most people, should not downplay the additional importance of idiosyncratic personality and personal experiences in shaping ideological attachment.¹³⁸ All of these reasons may contribute to individuals' internalisation of atrocity-justifying ideas which, though dangerous, factually inaccurate, and morally reprehensible, can nevertheless come to look desirable within a certain set of existing ideas and given the sorts of drivers just listed.

Indeed, the exact balance between such psychological drivers varies considerably from person to person, and the overriding model of 'epistemic-satisfaction' should not be equated with 'happiness' – if individuals are more cognitively attached (and I believe many are) to motives like dissonance avoidance coupled with a firm commitment to certain epistemic rules, they may end up holding beliefs which make them very unhappy but which they nevertheless believe to be true given the epistemic rules they hold faith in. Many people are genuinely more motivated to believe in what looks true to them than in what they would like to be true, though many are not. But all are, to some degree or another, influenced in their pursuit of a satisfying set of beliefs by a wide range of psychological drivers like those just listed, and are not simply motivated by a crude monolithic desire for happiness, truth, certainty or anything else. To use the language of the political psychologist

¹³⁴ Zavala, Cislak and Wesolowska, 2010.

¹³⁵ Rydgren, 2009, pp. 74, 77 & 83; Kahneman, 2012.

¹³⁶ Rogers, Schröder and Scheve, 2013; Freedman, 2013.

¹³⁷ Laclau, 1997; Žižek, 1994; Žižek, 1996; Howarth, Norval and Stavrakakis, 2000.

¹³⁸ Block and Block, 2006; Eagleton, 1991, pp. 14-15; Jost, Federico and Napier, 2009, p. 309; Caprara and Zimbardo, 2004; Caprara, Francescato, Mebane, Sorace and Vecchione, 2010. See also: Overy, 2005a, p. 14.

John T. Jost, individuals think about politics through various forms of *motivated* social cognition.¹³⁹

Social Cognition

That influential phrase, however, points to a second key feature of ideological formation: it does not occur in isolation, but in individuals who are socially situated and embedded in broader social networks. This generates a plethora of causal channels into ideology rooted in human sociality. I will place emphasis on three key dynamics: (i) provision of cognitive and linguistic resources, (ii) epistemic dependence, and (iii) discursive interaction.

That individuals are not capable of “disembodied reflection”¹⁴⁰ on the real world absent of socially acquired cognitive and linguistic resources – concepts, frameworks, arguments, theories, terms and so on – is now a familiar claim of contemporary social theory and ideological analysis, one alluded to several times in this thesis already.¹⁴¹ As Skinner, following Putnam, puts it: “there can be no observational evidence which is not to some degree shaped by our concepts and thus by the vocabulary used to express them.”¹⁴² Whilst there is real disagreement about how radical are the implications of this for notions of truth (and I am inclined to think the implications are much less radical than is often claimed),¹⁴³ it is now widely recognised that the material and social worlds can rarely if ever be perceived, described or thought or talked about without any kind of interpretative schema.¹⁴⁴ Individuals are enabled and encouraged to think and talk in certain ways and in certain directions by the cognitive and linguistic resources they have access to in their social

¹³⁹ Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski and Sulloway, 2003; Jost, 2006.

¹⁴⁰ Geertz, 1964, p. 47.

¹⁴¹ See section 1.2.

¹⁴² Skinner, 2002, p. 46.

¹⁴³ Even Skinner, who I cite extensively, goes a little further than I would in: *ibid.*, 45-6.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-26 & 44-6.

context.¹⁴⁵ At the extremes, it is often argued that the cognitive and linguistic resources available to individuals make some thoughts simply unthinkable or certain meanings ineffable – individuals are constrained by what Michael Dillon and Julian Reid call their “grids of intelligibility”.¹⁴⁶ But I think the implication here is a little too strong: the eternal process of ideological and intellectual change, sometimes radical,¹⁴⁷ illustrates that at the edges of the currently thinkable or effable, innovative and creative actors are always developing new cognitive and linguistic resources or deploying existing resources in novel arrangements to open up new possibilities. But such individuals – whether exceptional intellectuals or pathbreaking activists – are achieving something difficult. Most of us, most of the time, are constrained by the cognitive and linguistic field of possibilities constituted by the existing resources available in our social context.

A second un-radical but nevertheless central dynamic of human sociality I take from work in social epistemology regarding “epistemic dependence”.¹⁴⁸ As the sociologist Michael Baurmann explains:

“Almost all of our knowledge is acquired, not by our own autonomous exploration, but by relying on information from others... the quality of our beliefs is [dependent] on the quality of collective knowledge acquisition.”¹⁴⁹

People therefore absorb prominent ideological discourse not because they are unusually gullible but in part because they are dependent on key “epistemic authorities” (political leaders, intellectuals, church and community elders, news media, or simply other

¹⁴⁵ Kay and Kempton, 1984; Ryan, 2012, p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Dillon and Reid, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Kuhn, 2012; Homer-Dixon, Leader Maynard, Mildenerger, Milkoreit, Mock, Quilley, Schröder and Thagard, 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Hardwig, 1985.

¹⁴⁹ Baurmann, 2007, p. 151.

individuals) for the vast majority of their political knowledge.¹⁵⁰ And atrocity-justifying ideologies are no different: they are most influential when they operate through such epistemic dependence: when they can be founded on top of factual claims and narratives circulated by significant epistemic authorities who are deemed trustworthy by members of a social group.¹⁵¹ This raises the question of why ordinary people, who are not mindless, psychotic, or already committed ideologues, deem disseminators of atrocity-justifying ideologies to be credible epistemic authorities. But this is not a difficult question to answer. Disseminators may have strong reservoirs of status and credibility in the eyes of those they influence, at least compared to (potentially limited) alternatives.¹⁵² Or the ideological beliefs they peddle may look plausible in light of the broader ideological environment of an audience's specific historical context.¹⁵³ Or perhaps the beliefs are simply amenable to the audience's basic self-interest or the psychological needs outlined above.¹⁵⁴ Finally, epistemic authorities may be able to make their claims plausible through a variety of discursive techniques.

This brings us to the third dynamic – the fact that a primary mode of individuals' interaction is through discourse, so that various discursive techniques influence the thinking of those subject to them, and arguably also those who deploy them. Different portions of the research community on ideology have explored a wide range of such discursive techniques, and such research deserves to be integrated. Advocates of a rhetorical approach to the study of ideology, such as Alan Finlayson, have persuasively argued for a greater focus on key rhetorical devices – such as *paradiastole* or the use of historical figures to 'embody' and add symbolic legitimacy to ideological claims – in

¹⁵⁰ de Tocqueville, 2003, pp. 498-500; Rydgren, 2009, pp. 83-7; Hardin, 2002; Boudon, 1999, pp. 157-8; Simonds, 1989. See also: Leader Maynard, 2014.

¹⁵¹ Baurmann, 2007, pp. 150-1; Gagnon, 2004, p. 189.

¹⁵² Benesch, 2012, p. 3 & 5; Baurmann, 2007, p. 154 & 161; Hinton, 2002a, p. 8; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008, p. 423.

¹⁵³ See: Skinner, 2002; Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Boudon, 1989.

¹⁵⁴ Baurmann, 2007, p. 152 & 160; Edelman, 1977, pp. 3 & 11-12; Jost and Major, 2001; Boudon, 1999, p. 160; Staub, 1989, p. 48.

examining ideological propagation.¹⁵⁵ Proponents of ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’ have explicated a range of syntactic and rhetorical devices which shape belief-formation: Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, for example, call for a focus on strategies of “nomination”, “predication”, “argumentation”, “perspectivization” or “framing”, and “intensification and mitigation”.¹⁵⁶ Political psychologists have, similarly, placed considerable emphasis on ‘framing effects’, the imputation of meaning into situations by the concepts and terms used to define them (such as the representation of a social context as a ‘crisis’), as central to shaping declared attitudes and behaviour.¹⁵⁷ Discourse analysts more influenced by post-structuralism, meanwhile, have emphasised the discursive power of less formal devices, such as those ambiguous, open-ended terms like ‘order’ or ‘justice’ which lack defined meanings but which nevertheless mobilise legitimacy for certain ideologies or policies - Ernesto Laclau has termed such terms “empty signifiers”.¹⁵⁸ And these post-structuralists are but one research community who also stress the significance of “narrative” and “myth” in shaping ideological attachment.¹⁵⁹ Both post-structuralists and Michael Freedén’s morphological approach place emphasis on the central ideological process of decontestation: the imposition on contested concepts of certain notionally definitive meanings.¹⁶⁰ Finally, a range of approaches acknowledge that ideological beliefs can be effectively inculcated simply by discursive *saturation*. Sufficiently suffuse an ideological environment, so that a belief becomes something ‘everybody says’, and it is liable to receive wide endorsement even if never properly substantiated.¹⁶¹ Saturation maximises ‘peer-to-peer’ ideological dissemination, which, in light of personal relationships and a lack of obvious political or ulterior motives, can generate epistemic trust equal to or greater than

¹⁵⁵ Finlayson, 2012.

¹⁵⁶ Wodak and Meyer, 2009a, p. 29.

¹⁵⁷ Goffman, 1986; Benford and Snow, 2000. See also: Edelman, 1977.

¹⁵⁸ Laclau, 1997; Laclau, 2007.

¹⁵⁹ See: Howarth, Norval and Stavrakakis, 2000; Shenhav, 2006.

¹⁶⁰ Norval, 2000; Freedén, 1996.

¹⁶¹ Benesch, 2012, p. 5; Edelman, 1977, pp. 1-21; Boudon, 1999, pp. 156-8.

traditional religious, scientific or journalistic authorities.¹⁶²

This discussion certainly does not provide a comprehensive account of the causes of ideological belief, but it does offer a basic model, which will underpin the ideological analysis conducted in the remainder of the thesis. It also emphasises the fundamentally *recursive nature of ideology*: though individuals do occasionally undergo ideological conversion and are constantly undergoing ideological change, a central determinant of such ideological change is the *existing* ideology of individuals and the broader ideological culture in which they live.¹⁶³ And the model also thereby allows us to conceptualise the relationship between ideas and interests in a way which does not place a deterministic emphasis on one or the other but fleshes out the insight of International Relations social constructivists that interests and ideas exist in a dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship. It is apparent, then, that one of the most crucial *effects* of ideology is to be a determinant of future ideology. A remaining question is how it actually shapes behaviour.

2.2.3 The Effects of Ideology

The picture of ideology outlined in section 1.2 and in this chapter points to the broadest effects of ideology: shaping individuals' experience of the world around them, and providing them with the intellectual resources used to think about that world.¹⁶⁴ My concern in this section is not to offer a comprehensive account of all the further effects of ideology, but to establish a framework for thinking about how ideology feeds into individuals' behaviour in atrocities.

This framework is based on a distinction between three main proximate causal pathways alluded to in Chapter 1. Ideology may a) generate or shape active *motives* that

¹⁶² See: Burleigh, 2001, p. 104.

¹⁶³ Skinner, 2002, p. 35.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 5.

create the desire to commit violence; b) create *legitimizing* perceptions or beliefs which make violence seem permissible prior to/during commission; and c) provide *rationalising* resources for retrospectively dealing with the commission or permission of violence after the fact.¹⁶⁵ We should not underestimate the significance of the latter two pathways, since legitimisation and rationalisation are vital for human activity at both a psychological and social level. Though they do not distinguish legitimisation and rationalisation as I do, Jost and Brenda Major rightly argue that:

“Legitimacy is crucial to impression management as well as to developing a meaningful sense of the self as a worthwhile and valid individual... People are required...to justify their attitudes and behaviours and to demonstrate that they are acting in a legitimate manner. Even privately, we seek to develop rationalisations for our own thoughts, feelings and actions...”¹⁶⁶

With particular relevance for our subject matter, Jost and Major conclude: “the carrying out of extreme acts of exploitation, violence and evil is socially and psychologically feasible only to the extent that perpetrators are able to make their actions seem legitimate.”¹⁶⁷

Wolfgang Bialas similarly observes that most people “are not ready to act with the bad conscience of doing evil, but have to make their deeds appear moral.”¹⁶⁸

There is also no reason to assume, as some appear to,¹⁶⁹ that a weak role along one pathway necessitates an equally weak role along the others. It may be the case, for example, that many atrocity perpetrators do not possess strong ideological *motivations*, yet do

¹⁶⁵ Hinton, 1998b, p. 13.

¹⁶⁶ Jost and Major, 2001, p. 5. See also: Burleigh, 2001, p. 617.

¹⁶⁷ Jost and Major, 2001, p. 5.

¹⁶⁸ Bialas, 2013, p. 8.

¹⁶⁹ Valentino, 2004, p. 67 & 100; Waller, 2007, pp. 53 & 121-2; Chirof and McCauley, 2006, p. 56; Shaw, 2007, p. 116.

participate in part due to ideological *legitimations*. Equally, the fact that ideological claims may serve as post-hoc rationalisations of perpetrators' actions does not demonstrate that they might not *also* serve to motivate or legitimate those actions prior to commission. We must also avoid the intuitive but wrong assumption that post-hoc rationalisations are causally irrelevant. Atrocities are hardly ever single isolated acts of killing, but organised campaigns of violence involving *reiterative* participation on the part of killers. As such, successful rationalisation of violence may well be a key requirement for large scale atrocities to occur. And critically, whilst successful rationalisation is often forthcoming, it is not guaranteed and may be facilitated or obstructed by ideological forces.

We can unpack the behaviour-shaping effects of ideology further. Ideology may serve to motivate, legitimate, and rationalise for a committed core of atrocity perpetrators themselves, but it may also serve as a means for the committed core to mobilise (or demobilise) others, providing *them* with ideological motivations, legitimations or rationalisations.¹⁷⁰ Such efforts will generally aim to convert the less enthusiastic into active participants, but ensuring that they remain passive bystanders may be enough. Moreover, since ideology involves ideas and processes operating at multiple levels of cognitive complexity,¹⁷¹ it is vital to excavate motivating, legitimating and rationalising processes occurring at varying degrees of consciousness and sophistication. We must attend to background assumptions, subtle frames and underlying value hierarchies as well as to explicit arguments, blatant imagery, and overt moralised principles.

As noted in Chapter 1, whilst there is an important distinction between motivation, legitimation and rationalisation, most ideological components can serve all three pathways, and which pathway is more or less important will vary at the individual level. It is for this reason that I talk predominantly, throughout this thesis, in terms of ideological *justification* – collectively referring to processes of motivation, legitimation and rationalisation. I believe

¹⁷⁰ Mayer, 2001.

¹⁷¹ See section 2.1.3

our foremost task in understanding ideology's role in atrocities is the identification of the recurring mechanisms by which ideologies justify (motivate/legitimate/rationalise) mass violence against civilians across different cases. How do ideologies enable so many perpetrators of atrocities to see violence against civilians as permissible and even desirable? The account I provide of recurring justificatory mechanisms seeks to answer this question, and is the subject of the next chapter.

3. The Ideological Dynamics of Deadly Atrocities

Having specified, in Chapter 2, the general approach to ideology upon which this thesis is built, in this chapter I now outline my account of the ideological dynamics of mass atrocities. This account focuses on processes of *justification*. The distinctive ideologies of atrocity perpetrators, I argue, are characterised by certain justifications which make violence against civilians look permissible or even desirable. Crucially, six broad clusters of justificatory arguments and techniques – *justificatory mechanisms*, as I call them – recur across different cases of mass atrocity. I believe that my account and analysis of these six justificatory mechanisms might ultimately enable us to predict and prevent atrocities in the future, since, as Hugo Slim argues, “if we do not understand anti-civilian ideologies and take them seriously as moral and political positions then we cannot hope to argue against them effectively.”¹ But demonstrating such predictive or preventive utility for my framework is not my primary objective in this thesis. Instead, my core concern is to demonstrate that this account provides a more comprehensive and theoretically deeper understanding of the role of ideology in mass violence against civilians than presently exists.

The aim of this chapter is theoretical – evidence for my account is offered in the three case studies which follow in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Throughout this chapter I do, however, offer a variety of citations from cases of atrocity other than my three main case studies. These are not intended to offer firm supporting evidence for my claims – I recognise that they are too few, too anecdotal, and too decontextualized for this. They instead serve two purposes. First, I use them to illustrate my meaning at various points and avoid the confusion generated by a mass of abstract theorising without example. Second,

¹ Slim, 2007, p. 3.

they are intended to offer some *plausibility* to my claim that the justificatory mechanisms recur not just across the three cases I examine in depth, but across the broader sweep of modern atrocities – to suggest some external validity to my account beyond the cases I look at in depth. Systematic proof of that claim, and precise identification of its limits, is a task for future research.

This chapter proceeds in three sections. In 3.1, I lay out three core premises on which my account is based. By ‘premise’, I do not here mean *a priori* axioms assumed without evidence, nor principles from which the rest of my theory is deductively generated. My three premises are based on extensive empirical evidence and theoretical analysis, and form background postulations which underlie my broader account of the ideological dynamics of deadly atrocities. In 3.2 I offer a brief schema for distinguishing different sorts of atrocity perpetrators, since the ideological dynamics I describe do not apply to all sorts of perpetrator in the same way. Finally, in 3.3, I engage in a full discussion of my six justificatory mechanisms.

3.1 Three Premises

3.1.1 Killing is hard

There may appear to be something paradoxical in the claim, made in a thesis focused on some of most horrific and destructive acts ever committed by humankind, that humans are essentially bad at killing. The portrayal of human beings as naturally aggressive and destructive, and therefore liable to break out into violence and slaughter whenever the fragile restraints of law, morality and social monitoring are removed, has become common in received wisdom. It is a portrayal that is generally reinforced by the enormous violence of the 20th Century observed in Chapter 1, and clearly this thesis in no way denies the fact of human destructiveness: that horrifying levels of violence have been deployed by humans against fellow humans. What it does deny, however, is the popular belief that this

destructiveness reflects a core and innate propensity towards violence in the human animal. This belief – that killing is ultimately easy for humans – now appears dubious. It has been falsified by a considerable body of research across different disciplines, and is critiqued most forcefully and expansively through the work of the sociologist Randall Collins, and the influential American military psychologist David Grossman.² Both demonstrate, in contrast to the myth, that *killing is hard*.³

The most powerful evidence for this claim lies in the remarkable phenomenon of soldierly nonparticipation in killing. In wars across history (with some important exceptions in the second half of the 20th Century), the *majority* of soldiers fighting in front-line battles simply failed to engage in lethal combat with the enemy. Such nonparticipation was most famously described in Brigadier-General S.L.A. Marshall's study of infantrymen at the end of World War II, which found that of all the soldiers on the very front line of combat, only 15-25% "would take any part with their weapons".⁴ This was not a simple matter of cowardice. As Grossman explains:

"Those who would not fire did not run or hide (in many cases they were willing to risk great danger to rescue comrades, get ammunition, or run messages), but they simply would not fire their weapons at the enemy, even when faced with repeated waves of banzai charges."⁵

The sociological studies of Collins, Grossman and Charles Tilly also demonstrate that this pattern, of most participants in violence busying themselves with battle-related but non-violent tasks, is repeated in lower-salience forms of violence like mob riots. Here again,

² Grossman, 2009, p. xv.

³ See also: The Seville Statement on Violence, 1989.

⁴ Cited in: Grossman, 2009, p. 3. See also: Collins, 2008, pp. 44-6.

⁵ Grossman, 2009, p. 4.

only a tiny minority of the mob actually prove willing or able to engage in direct violence against police or other ‘enemies’.⁶

Marshall’s study was not without its methodological flaws, and the exact percentages of participation have been subsequently revised upwards.⁷ But across the research, the general pattern observed by Marshall has been verified. As Grossman summarises:

“Ardant du Picq’s surveys and observations of the ancients, Holmes’s and Keegan’s numerous accounts of ineffectual firing, Holmes’s’ assessment of Argentine firing rates in the Falklands War, Griffith’s data on the extraordinarily low killing rates among Napoleonic and American Civil War regiments, the British Army’s laser reenactments of historical battles, the FBI’s studies of nonfiring rates among law-enforcement officers in the 1950s and 1960s, and countless other individual and anecdotal observations all confirm Marshall’s conclusion that the vast majority of combatants throughout history, at the moment of truth when they could and should kill the enemy, have found themselves unable to kill.”⁸

So even in conditions with overwhelming imperatives to fire at the enemy, including the need to defend one’s life, the majority of soldiers the majority of the time fire into the air, into the ground, into solid structures like walls and buildings, or even not at all. Again, this is not the product of cowardice, but the product of being human, and not being given the

⁶ Ibid., 5-12; Tilly, 2003; Collins, 2008.

⁷ See: Collins, 2008, pp. 50-54.

⁸ Grossman, 2009, p. xviii.

extremely desensitising military training and indoctrination of the later 20th Century. Because whilst it is not true that killing is easy, it is true that individuals can be trained and conditioned (a partly ideological process) in ways that make killing much easier. It is largely through such training and conditioning that modern militaries managed, from the 1960s onwards, to substantially raise the participation of soldiers in wartime violence, though still not to the levels most might expect.⁹ There is, Grossman concludes, “a powerful, innate human resistance toward killing one’s own species”.¹⁰ Lethal violence may be pervasive throughout human history. But, at least for most people, it is neither ‘easy’ nor ‘the norm’.

This all adds to the puzzle posed by atrocities. Because in contrast to battlefield violence, atrocities do appear to evoke high levels of participation (see 3.1.2 below). This contrast cannot be explained solely by reference to ideology. After all, most soldiers view battlefield killing as justified, but still fail to engage in it. But, as the power of dehumanisation and indoctrination in late-20th Century military training indicates, ideology is a significant part of the story. A lack of animosity for victims appears to be major obstacle to killing – with such animosity a central element of atrocity-justifying ideologies.¹¹ My key point here, however, is not to positively argue for the importance of ideology, but to demonstrate that atrocities cannot simply be explained away by platitudinous references to human biology, in-group versus out-group hostility,¹² or, as I shall discuss further under 3.1.3, automatized conformity to situational pressures and authority figures. All of these explanations wrongly predict high participation in battlefield violence. Atrocities, in sum, do not simply fall out of facts about human biology or psychology. Killing is generally not that easy. And even atrocities themselves provide evidence of this fact, in the frequent

⁹ Ibid., xxii, 13; The Seville Statement on Violence, 1989, p. xv.

¹⁰ Grossman, 2009, p. xxxi.

¹¹ Ibid., 14-17.

¹² A thesis also undermined by the fact that civil wars, superficially ‘in-group’ conflicts, are bloodier than ‘normal’ interstate wars. See: Kalyvas, 2006, p. 3; Grossman, 2009, p. 26.

vomiting, mental breakdown, and absurdly inaccurate firing found amongst their perpetrators.¹³

None of this is to deny the existence and importance of some biological, neurological and psychological underpinnings to human violence.¹⁴ Indeed, it is hard to imagine how such underpinnings could not exist. Many neurological and biological forces, such as the shift from forebrain to midbrain neural processes,¹⁵ or the persistence of mimicry and what Collins terms “entrainment” in group emotional states,¹⁶ or the brain processes underpinning ideology discussed in Chapter 2,¹⁷ do shape individual behaviour during the commission of violence. So this premise rejects the claim that atrocities can be explained by reference to some innate human propensities to violence, but is not a denial of the relevance of biology, psychology and related disciplines to atrocities.

Relatedly, it is worth emphasising that atrocities themselves are also not normal features of human behaviour. They are, for sure, tragically recurrent throughout human history. Raphael Lemkin was right when he said that “genocide is not an exceptional phenomenon, but...occurs in intergroup relations with a certain regularity like homicide takes place between individuals.”¹⁸ But whilst atrocities are historically recurring, they are nevertheless socially unusual.¹⁹ As Leo Kuper writes, “conflict of a potentially genocidal character is not the normal pattern of interaction between social groups”²⁰ and Scott Straus similarly notes how “rather than being common, genocide and similar forms of mass organized violence against civilians are rare political phenomena.”²¹ Such events are not just unsurprising and straightforward consequences of humanity’s innate destructiveness and hostility towards outsiders. They therefore require deeper explanation.

¹³ Burleigh, 2001, p. 327 & 604; Browning, 2001, pp. 62-8, 74 & 76; Collins, 2008, p. 79; Waller, 2007, p. 73.

¹⁴ The Seville Statement on Violence, 1989, p. xiv.

¹⁵ Grossman, 2009, pp. xxi-xxii & 8.

¹⁶ Collins, 2008, pp. 19-20 & 93-4.

¹⁷ See 2.2.2.

¹⁸ Quoted in: Jones, 2010, p. 426.

¹⁹ Mann, 2005, pp. 9-10, 18; Midlarsky, 2005, p. 16; Simon, 2012, p. 6.

²⁰ Kuper, 2002, p. 67.

²¹ Straus, 2012b, p. 343.

3.1.2 The Ordinary Killers Consensus

The killing is hard premise demonstrates that we cannot explain away atrocities as just the expected product of universal human nature. The ordinary killers consensus demonstrates that we also cannot explain atrocities as the expected product of abnormal individuals – sadists, the insane, fanatics, or some otherwise inherently violent or evil person.

I mentioned, in Chapter 1, the broad degree of consensus that exists among theorists of genocide that most perpetrators of atrocities are *relatively ordinary people*. James Waller has done the most to emphasise the empirical and theoretical basis for this consensus. It is efficient to cite his basic conclusion at length:

“Except for a small number of the architects of the extermination process and a few sadists who enjoyed taking part in it... most of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and other cases of mass killing and genocide were extraordinary only by what they did, not by who they were. They could not be identified, a priori, as having the personalities of killers. Most were not mentally impaired. Nor were they identified as sadists at home or in their social environment. Nor were they victims of an abusive background. They defy easy demographic categorization... In short, the majority of perpetrators of extraordinary evil were not distinguished by background, personality, or previous political affiliation or

behaviour as having been men or women unusually likely or fit to be genocidal executioners.”²²

Various bodies of evidence support this picture. The first consists of testimony from victim groups on killers. Waller quotes Tzvetan Todorov, who reports: “Camp survivors seem to agree on the following point: only a small minority of [death camp] guards, on the order of five or ten percent, could legitimately be called sadists (and thus abnormal).”²³ Primo Levi’s famous personal account of life in the Nazi death camps likewise stated of camp guards:

“They were made of the same cloth as we, they were average human beings, averagely intelligent, averagely wicked: save the exceptions, they were not monsters, they had our faces.”²⁴

Second, broader psychological studies on violent and abusive behaviour tend to find that few individuals who engage in such behaviour correlate to criteria of sadism. An influential qualitative study of violent men by Hans Toch found that only 6% felt pleasure in harming others, a separate study of rapists came up with a figure of 5%.²⁵ The central conclusion of Stanley Milgram’s famous experiments on those willing to shock others under orders from an authority figure was that there were no distinguishing basic psychologies for those who would shock compared to those who wouldn’t – both categories appeared quite ordinary.²⁶ Philip Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment, which randomly assigned subjects to be ‘guards’ or ‘prisoners’ in a simulated prison environment,

²² Waller, 2007, pp. 7-8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁴ Levi, 1989, p. 202, cited in: Waller, 2007, p. 75.

²⁵ Dutton, 2007, p. 138; Toch, 1972.

²⁶ Milgram, 2010.

reached the same conclusion about those prone to violence and seemingly sadistic behaviour: they were ultimately psychologically normal.²⁷

Third, dedicated studies of individual groups of atrocity perpetrators frequently emphasise the ordinariness of their subjects. The title of Christopher Browning's hugely influential work on German Police Battalions involved in mass shootings of Jews in Poland under the Nazis – *Ordinary Men* – emphasises this point.²⁸ But other works, such as Robert J. Lifton's examination of *The Nazi Doctors*,²⁹ or Jean Hatzfield's and Lee Ann Fujii's respective studies of perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide,³⁰ or Karl Jackson's analysis of the Khmer Rouge elite,³¹ reach similar conclusions.³² And indeed, the body of research which underpins my three case studies in this thesis supports this consensus: the discourse of perpetrators broadly suggests normality and sanity rather than sadism or underlying madness. As Israel Charny summarises: "the mass killers of humankind are largely everyday human beings – what we have called normal people according to currently accepted definitions by the mental health profession".³³

Fourth, there is considerable evidence to demonstrate that many atrocity-perpetrating organisations, such as the Nazi *Einsatzgruppen*, terrorist organisations, or military forces ordered to kill civilians, go to some effort to *weed out* sadists, psychopaths and the otherwise abnormal from their membership.³⁴ There are partial exceptions,³⁵ but as a broad pattern this weeding-out should not be especially surprising. Atrocity-perpetrating organisations have to sustain memberships and an institutional existence over relatively lengthy periods of time, and sadists and psychopaths are frequently both unpleasant to be around, and ill-disciplined implementers of institutional rules and policies.

²⁷ Zimbardo, 2007.

²⁸ Browning, 2001. See also: Browning, 2007.

²⁹ Lifton, 1986.

³⁰ Hatzfield, 2005; Fujii, 2009.

³¹ Jackson, 1989, p. 38.

³² See also: Staub, 1989, p. 67.

³³ Cited in: Mann, 2005, p. 9.

³⁴ Waller, 2007, p. 71; Valentino, 2004, pp. 42-44 & 57-8; Baum, 2008, p. 77; Dutton, 2007, p. 136.

³⁵ Valentino, 2004, pp. 39-42; Mueller, 2000.

Fifth, there is the sheer number of participants in most mass atrocities. Estimating such numbers is difficult, and subject to highly contestable judgements about who counts as a ‘perpetrator’. But the total number of people involved in some meaningful fashion in the Holocaust has been estimated as between 100,000 and 500,000 – it was not, as John Weiss emphasises, “the arbitrary decision of Hitler and a few leaders.”³⁶ Other major atrocities consistently involve perpetrators numbering in the tens or even hundreds of thousands, and in Rwanda estimates range from around 75,000 to three million.³⁷ Even greater numbers have to either tacitly support violence or remain apathetic bystanders. Such numbers preclude any realistic possibility that all perpetrators could be extreme sadists or psychopaths. As Waller puts it: “roughly the same proportions of sadists and psychopaths, useful for genocide work, exist across cultures. However this proportion is not high enough to successfully carry out a mass killing or genocide.”³⁸

This ‘mass perpetrator’ feature of mass atrocities can be overstated. Mass atrocities rarely involve numbers close to an actual majority of the society in which they occur. Valentino, James Mueller and Stathis Kalyvas have all prominently argued that atrocities can often involve relatively small groups of people, and that as a consequence we should focus more on the leaders and elites behind atrocities rather than the direct killers, as the former will almost always be able to recruit the few thousand of the latter necessary.³⁹ As Valentino puts it:

“My research... suggests that society at large plays a smaller role in mass killing than is commonly assumed. Mass killing is rarely a popular enterprise in which neighbour turns against neighbour. On the contrary, the impetus for mass killing usually originates from a

³⁶ Weiss, 1997, p. ix.

³⁷ Waller, 2007, p. 16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 51-3.

³⁹ Valentino, 2004, pp. 2-3; Mueller, 2000; Kalyvas, 2006, pp. 21 & 102-3.

relatively small group of powerful political or military leaders... the active support of a large portion of society is usually not required to carry out mass killing. The violence itself is typically performed by a relatively small group of people usually members of military or paramilitary organizations.”⁴⁰

This debate is muddled by the vagueness of phrases like “relatively small group of people”, but if only as a matter of tone and emphasis, I find this position too strong. Valentino is right to refocus attention on leadership, and as a counterweight to the occasional impression that almost everyone in a context of atrocity is directly complicit, this may be a useful corrective. But, I do not believe such an impression is widespread in serious scholarship. And bearing in mind the killing-is-hard argument of section 3.1.1, perpetrator groups numbering in the tens of thousands, let alone hundreds of thousands, represent a major campaign of collective violence. Such mobilisation does not automatically follow from a state leader deciding atrocities would be a good idea – forces of state coercion are neither that powerful nor actually resorted to often enough in atrocities for this to be true.⁴¹ Furthermore, in most occurrences of mass violence there is substantial evidence of direct killers in the ‘periphery’ going beyond the orders of the leadership at the ‘centre’, by seeking out new targets to kill and using especially brutal means of doing so.⁴² So whilst there may be some exceptions, mass atrocities generally rely on the direct participation of large numbers of people, and the collusion and passivity of hundreds of thousands more.⁴³ Such numbers can rarely be filled from the ranks of the psychologically unbalanced or uniquely evil.

⁴⁰ Valentino, 2004, pp. 2-3.

⁴¹ Kühne, 2012, p. 141.

⁴² Weitz, 2003, pp. 121, 132 & 177; Gerlach and Werth, 2009, pp. 134-5, 150 & 164; Burleigh, 2001, pp. 316 & 319-22.

⁴³ Overy, 2004, p. 211; Valentino, 2004, p. 32 & 38; Gerlach and Werth, 2009, pp. 172-3.

These five arguments can all be caveated,⁴⁴ but together they have supported the emergence of a general consensus. Perpetrator participation in mass atrocities cannot generally be explained by their innate sadism or psychopathology. Instead, perpetrators, as Wolfgang Bialas writes, “often appeared to be average, normal human beings, who would have neither had the opportunity nor been tempted to take part in crimes and mass murder under different circumstances.”⁴⁵ This conclusion must be decoupled, as I have emphasised, from the belief that demonstrating the ordinariness of killers indicates that they were not influenced by ideology. This rests on the unsustainably narrow conception of ideology critiqued in Chapter 2, and fails to delineate between the many different forms and degrees that ideological belief can take. Recognising that perpetrators are ordinary in terms of their basic psychological makeup, but that they are *therefore* susceptible to being influenced and even ‘captured’ by justifications for violence that look plausible within certain sets of widely disseminated ideas, is the approach I advance.

None of these observations about the ordinariness of killers should be taken to deny that many perpetrators of atrocities are in various ways thoroughly unpleasant. All cases of atrocity are replete with examples of extreme and mundane human vices, including meanness, brutality, bullying, selfishness, sadistic impulses, pomposity, self-righteousness, busy-bodying, petty vengefulness, cold-heartedness, and a willingness to exploit the vulnerable for personal gain.⁴⁶ But recognition of the role for such unpleasant individual traits must be accompanied by awareness of three key rejoinders. First, such defects remain part of the flawed psychological ensemble of ordinary people all over the world – they are not the definitive make-up of ‘extremists’, but ubiquitous flaws which most are capable of displaying. Second, such defects do not define some immutable landscape of human personality which is causally prior to ideas and behaviour. Propensities to nastiness, like all

⁴⁴ For some concerns see: Dutton, 2007, p. 140; Baum, 2008.

⁴⁵ Bialas, 2013, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Many examples can be found in: Goldman, 2011.

aspects of personality, exist in a co-evolutionary relationship with ideology and social interaction. A key process in the occurrence of atrocities, as I discuss under the justificatory mechanism of virtuetalk, is the promotion and mobilisation of these mundane faults in ways conducive towards passive or active participation in violence. Even the nastiest atrocity perpetrators, as Weiss remarks of the Nazi SA, “were not merely brutes, they were brutes with an ideology.”⁴⁷ Finally, and most importantly, the relevance of individual nastiness or other aspects of personality must not lead to the thought that, at the end of the day, innately bad people commit atrocities whilst innately good people resist them. As common as the instances of nastiness in atrocities are the superficially ‘decent’ perpetrators, who may eschew excessive savagery, display occasional kindness or empathy, and who evince countless remarks from others on how they were good and loving ‘family men’ back home. ‘Good people’ can engage in acts of appalling human destructiveness in the right contexts and with the right beliefs.⁴⁸ A range of character traits, such as compassion, reflectiveness, criticality, bravery and generosity can act as restraining factors on violence, but none are sure-fire obstacles to participation in atrocity.

3.1.3 Beyond the Banality of Evil

Different portrayals of mass atrocity perpetrators (and of ‘evil’ more generally) can be visualised as straddling a continuum between two poles. On one half of the continuum, we find perspectives that stress perpetrators’ beliefs, ideologies, and active thought processes, and which suggest that perpetrators tend to willingly endorse the violence they participate in. As two adherents of this perspective put it:

⁴⁷ Weiss, 1997, p. 28.

⁴⁸ Zimbardo, 2007.

“People do great wrong, not because they are unaware of what they are doing but because they consider it to be right. This is possible because they actively identify with groups whose ideology justifies and condones the oppression and destruction of others”.⁴⁹

On the other half of the continuum lie perspectives that, by contrast, emphasise largely unthinking conformity to outside pressures, such as authority, group-dynamics, or institutional practices. Such a portrayal of atrocity perpetrators was advanced most famously in Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*,⁵⁰ but it is also frequently espoused in a renowned body of research in social psychology. Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiments demonstrated that decent ordinary people could become thuggish and abusive once they entered a simulated prison environment and adopted the institutionalised roles of prison guards.⁵¹ Milgram’s experiments similarly showed how the majority of people, when put in a laboratory environment and told to inflict increasingly severe (though, unbeknownst to them, actually simulated) electrical shocks on a test subject, would simply comply with orders to do harm.⁵² And Solomon Asch’s group-conformity experiments showed that individuals would affirm the correctness of self-evidently false observations if surrounded by people who stated that they were correct.⁵³ For several theorists, such experiments demonstrate that evildoers, such as the perpetrators of mass atrocities, are not marked out by any deep convictions in the rightness of their actions, but participate through thoughtlessness and the tendency to conform to the demands of the groups and situations they find themselves in.

⁴⁹ Haslam and Reicher, 2008, p. 19.

⁵⁰ Arendt, 2006. See also: Waller, 2007, pp. 98-106.

⁵¹ See: Zimbardo, 2007.

⁵² Milgram, 2010.

⁵³ Asch, 1956.

These two perspectives can be given different labels – and strongly parallel, for instance, the traditional dichotomies between intentionalists and functionalists in historical study and between dispositionists and situationists in psychology. But I conceptualise them as forming a sliding scale between ‘endorsement-models’ and ‘conformity-models’ of mass atrocities.

Both sides of the continuum include strong advocates whose theories are genuinely incompatible with each other. At the far end of the endorsement pole, for example, we can find Daniel Goldhagen’s depiction of “Hitler’s Willing Executioners” and his claim that almost all Germans under the Nazis actively adhered to a form of “eliminationist anti-Semitism” which involved the fervent desire that the Jews be removed from Germany, even if this involved mass murder.⁵⁴ At the other end of the continuum, the philosopher Paul Roth has advanced an all-encompassing conformity-model based on his faith that research in social-psychology “accounts in all essentials for the number of perpetrators and their otherwise incomprehensible brutality.”⁵⁵ In general, however, theorists cluster towards a more central section of the continuum, where disagreements are often a matter of emphasis rather than incompatible differences. The work of, for example, Jackson,⁵⁶ Alex Bellamy,⁵⁷ Michael Mann,⁵⁸ or Jacques Semelin,⁵⁹ places an emphasis on ideas, ideology and norms but in a manner which can accommodate the relevance of conformity pressures. Conversely, Browning,⁶⁰ Waller,⁶¹ Valentino,⁶² Zimbardo, Leonard Newman,⁶³ and Zygmunt Bauman⁶⁴ all emphasise the relevance of conformity process whilst acknowledging a role for ideology. There are real differences between those on different

⁵⁴ Goldhagen, 1997.

⁵⁵ Roth, 2005, p. 206.

⁵⁶ Jackson, 1989.

⁵⁷ Bellamy, 2012b; Bellamy, 2012a.

⁵⁸ Mann, 2005.

⁵⁹ Semelin, 2005.

⁶⁰ Browning, 2007; Browning, 2001.

⁶¹ Waller, 2007.

⁶² Valentino, 2004.

⁶³ Newman, 2002.

⁶⁴ Bauman, 1989.

sides of this continuum, but they do not, therefore, constitute two clearly distinct and radically opposed camps.

In emphasising ideology, this thesis clearly offers a portrayal on the ‘endorsement model’ side of the spectrum. In many ways my position is a moderate one. I do believe that the human tendency to conform highlighted by social psychologists is real and of significant relevance in explaining the behaviour of many atrocity perpetrators. And in talking of ideology, I place stress on the role of semi-conscious ideas and background assumptions as well as active desires and explicit convictions. Ideology is often, in my view, important precisely because it deflects thought and attention and underpins conformity – there is thus a sense in which I can agree that atrocity perpetrators can sometimes be described as ‘thoughtless’. Above all else, I stress (see section 3.2 below) variety amongst perpetrators of mass atrocities. Semelin’s comment on conformity-models is apt for endorsement-models also, since both do “not seem sufficiently all-embracing when it comes to grasping all the different faces the perpetrators of massacre can show.”⁶⁵ Perpetrators themselves, in other words, straddle a continuum between ‘endorsement’ and ‘conformity’, and may engage in different psychological processes in relation to violence at different times.⁶⁶ My account of the ideological dynamics of mass atrocities is thus compatible with many of the claims of conformity models.

However, my focus on the recurring justificatory mechanisms of mass atrocities rests on a fundamental principle that, for *almost all perpetrators*, ideological processes of explicit and/or implicit justification matter – there is more to evil than just ‘banality’. To the degree that conformity models imply otherwise, and suggest that atrocity perpetrators are uninfluenced by ideology or are genuinely ‘unthinking’, they are in error. Stronger conformity models of this form – like that of Roth – radically over-estimate what social psychology experiments actually tell us about mass atrocities, relying on them rather than

⁶⁵ Semelin, 2005, p. 285.

⁶⁶ Waller, 2007, p. xvii & 51.

actual empirical scholarship on real perpetrators. Roth suggest that the experiments simply explain all the relevant questions we could possibly ask in explaining mass participation in violence: “research in social psychology,” he assures us, “has already answered the question of ‘perpetrator production’”⁶⁷ so that “no need exists for positing ‘deeper’ reasons”.⁶⁸ Such an argument rests on two broad errors.

The first is Roth’s foundational assumption that rates of conformity in experiments where subjects administer electric shocks, engage in prison brutality, or affirm empirical falsehoods, can be carried over straightforwardly to cases of *killing*. Roth does not provide any justification for this assumption. It has a certain prima facie implausibility, but more importantly, it is falsified by the evidence discussed under the ‘killing is hard’ premise in section 3.1.1 above, evidence that has been widely ignored by social psychologists and proponents of conformity-models. If individuals conformed to orders to kill as easily as they conformed to orders to press buttons that inflict electric shocks, rates of battlefield shooting by soldiers ought, under conformity-models’ logic, to be at least as high as the rates observed in Milgram’s or Zimbardo’s experiments. I say ‘at least as high’, because one would think that a battlefield situation is in fact a far more powerful inducer of violence than a scientist in a lab, given that a) battlefield violence is far more socially normalised than pressing electric shock switches, b) soldiers are far more embedded in military hierarchies of obedience than are test subjects in a one-off experiment, and c) soldiers on the battlefield are being asked to kill under very real threats to their lives. There are few situations in which the ‘situational’ pressures to kill ought to be stronger than on a battlefield. Yet remarkable numbers of soldiers simply fail to engage in killing. They do not conform to the apparent ‘demands of the situation’, but resist in large numbers. In Collins’ and Grossman’s view, at least, this is because killing – or at least, visceral killing – is a vastly

⁶⁷ Roth, 2005, p. 199.

⁶⁸ Roth, 2004, p. 237.

more difficult activity to engage in than merely inflicting harm.⁶⁹ It is an activity that, in spite of the factors Roth believes universally ensure conformity – such as enormous peer pressure and vociferous commands from superiors – vast numbers of people prove deeply unwilling to do. Roth’s claim that “people simply comply”⁷⁰ is simply false when we are talking about killing.

The second error made by strong conformity-models like Roth’s is a miscalculation in the rate of conformity predicted by social-psychology experiments, by completely forgetting one of the key findings of those experiments – the ‘Ally effect’. Roth writes:

“If one, in the spirit of [Christopher] Browning, merely asks what percentage of people simply (for whatever reason) choose to go along in specific situations, the Asch paradigm looms into view as a perfectly adequate and appropriate explanation. Given that one could expect 30-40% of people to fully comply (for all intents and purposes) *for no particular reason*, this would give one all the perpetrators one needs to carry out exterminationist policies.”⁷¹

Obviously this argument commits the first error outlined above – Asch’s experiments demonstrate that people will comply, for no particular reason, in false judgements about the lengths of two lines they are shown on pieces of card. To think that demonstrates that they would also kill if ordered to do so is not a reasonable inference. But this argument also only works if one ignores the fact that, in exterminationist policies, individuals do not participate as lone individuals in single experimental situations, but *en masse*.⁷² As such, if there are 30-40% of a group willing to fully comply, the remaining 60-70% should be *present*

⁶⁹ See also: Waller, 2007, p. 73.

⁷⁰ Roth, 2004, p. 232.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Weitz, 2003, p. 247.

and *not willing to fully comply*. This is doubly fatal to Roth's reasoning – for a start, one would want to inquire as to what the 60-70% of present non-conformers do, and whether they can really be assumed to have no impact upon the success of exterminationist policies. But more importantly, the 'Ally effect', described by Asch's own experiments, but forgotten by Roth, finds that this 30-40% rate of conformity itself drops enormously when subjects have an 'ally' within a group in their refusal to conform.⁷³ So even the power Roth himself ascribes to situational conformity is, properly calculated, massively underdetermining actual levels of violence.

Roth's is an especially strong conformity-model, but these two problems present obstacles to any attempt to translate social psychology's research on conformity into claims about mass atrocities – and go unaddressed by more moderate theorists such as Waller, Valentino or Zimbardo. Again, I emphasise that my argument here is not that such research is *irrelevant* – conformity effects are in operation in atrocities as in most other social circumstances. But they should be expected to predict much lower rates of conformity in situations of mass killing than actually appear to occur, emphasising the need for their integration with other explanatory factors – notably ideology.

Two other problems with strong conformity-models are worth exploration. First, such models suffer from a consistent ambiguity over what is really encompassed in the 'experimental situation', particularly regarding ideology (Roth notes this ambiguity but suggests, without justification, that it "does not prove crucial").⁷⁴ As Newman, a moderate advocate of conformity-models, recognises, 'situations' are not self-evident pre-existing phenomena which act on individuals uninfluenced by those individuals' cognitive constructions. Situations are perceived, mediated, and rendered meaningful through mental models and schemas, including ideology.⁷⁵ There is a tendency to present the subjects in

⁷³ Baum, 2008, p. 89; Browning, 2001, p. 172.

⁷⁴ Roth, 2004, p. 217.

⁷⁵ Newman, 2002, pp. 51 & 60-62.

the classic social psychology experiments as a blank slate, since they did not receive particular ideological priming or preparation as part of the experiment. But of course they have been socialised into a variety of ideas and ideologies throughout their lives, many of which might be pertinent to behaviour in the experimental situation by, for example, constituting mental understandings of a doctor in a lab coat, or of the role of a prison guard, or of the disreputability of dissenting amongst a group of strangers. Describing such internalised social ideas as part of the ‘situation’ seems a contrived classification – they are internalised ideas in the worldview of the experimental subject. As such, the dividing line between the immediate situation and the ‘deeper’ subjective worldviews of the participant is, at best, unclear. And it seems far more plausible to argue that it is the synthesis of internalised ideas and ideologies combined with situational pressures to conform which produce behaviour. Sophisticated thinkers who have contributed to research on conformity recognise this – indeed, both Milgram and Zimbardo have correspondingly asserted the importance of ideology.⁷⁶

To think otherwise, and equate conformity processes with thoughtlessness or the absence of ideology leads to a confused understanding of perpetrator mindsets, one which existed in Arendt’s original banality-of-evil thesis and runs through its contemporary adherents. Consider the following passage by Waller:

“Contrary to expectations, Eichmann also was *not* a man without a conscience. As a matter of fact, it was his ‘good’ conscience (although certainly not one that valued all of human life) that compelled him to follow what he felt to be his duty toward his superiors... He did his job simply, and thoughtlessly, because he was a person duty bound to a social hierarchy committed to such

⁷⁶ Zimbardo, 2007, pp. 9-11, 226-8 & 273-4; Milgram, 2010, pp. 146-7.

extraordinary evil... Arendt wrote, 'He would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to do...'"⁷⁷

This seems muddled. As Waller says, Eichmann *did* have a conscience, and as Arendt says, he *would* have felt bad about failing to do his "duty". This is in tension with the claim that Eichmann was a morally unthinking, cognitively dead individual who did his job, "simply, and thoughtlessly".⁷⁸ Eichmann's commitment to "duty" reveals that, rather than operating under an empty or non-existent normative system, he operated under a powerful but *different* conception of right behaviour – an active "Nazi conscience".⁷⁹ Why would Eichmann have felt he had done wrong if he had disobeyed orders, but not if he participated in the mass murder of millions? This crucial question focuses us back onto ideology: it is the fact that Eichmann did have a "conscience", in the sense of a normative worldview (what Geoffrey Scarre calls a "moral phenomenology"⁸⁰), which means that the nature of that worldview, and its ideological underpinnings, need to be studied. As Didier Pollefeyt expresses it: "The executioners of the Nazi genocide failed to suffer a bad conscience, not because they were perverted completely by evil (immorality), nor because they were thoughtless machines (amorality) but because they devoted themselves consciously, creatively and with passion to the meaning that the Nazi ethic gave their (camp) behaviour."⁸¹ Thoughtlessness might not be entirely irrelevant to atrocity perpetration but my research ultimately reaches the same conclusion as that arrived at by Mann, that "there were few banal, bureaucratic killers."⁸²

⁷⁷ Waller, 2007, p. 102.

⁷⁸ A presentation that has also been subsequently refuted by several historians. See: Lozowick, 2000; Burleigh, 2001, p. 634; Mann, 2005, pp. 244-5.

⁷⁹ Koonz, 2003.

⁸⁰ Scarre, 1998.

⁸¹ Cited in: Bialas, 2013, p. 9.

⁸² Mann, 2005, p. 278.

A final problem with strong conformity-models is that they jar with much actual empirical research on perpetrators. Browning's work on the *Ordinary Men* who made up Nazi police battalions is often taken to demonstrate that atrocity perpetrators are fairly 'unideological' and lack endorsement – but I believe this portrayal relies on a comparison with extremely strong endorsement positions like Goldhagen's. Browning himself acknowledges the importance of ideology and, under a broad understanding like that proposed in Chapter 2, his work does little to show why ideology should be thought of as unimportant (though I do think it is more central than he does).⁸³ In any case, we should also remember that *Ordinary Men* is not a study of all Nazi perpetrators but a specific group of drafted reserve policemen – *one subset* of the perpetrators from *one case* of mass atrocities. They tell us little about the SS *Einsatzgruppen* and Wehrmacht units also involved in the Holocaust. Historical studies of these units, like Omer Bartov's *Hitler's Army*,⁸⁴ often emphasise the key role played by ideology, as do many broader historical works on Nazi Germany. Michael Burleigh, for example, portrays perpetrators of the Holocaust as generally: "men in control of themselves, and with vestigial moral anchorings, rather than... antisemitic automata, dyspeptic human wrecks, or missionary zealots who needed no rationalisation at all."⁸⁵ As a consequence, he argues, "most of these men had to be convinced of the necessity for what they were doing".⁸⁶ A significant range of research on other atrocities, like John Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov's documentary compendium on Stalinist atrocities, Jackson's or Alexander Hinton's analysis of Khmer Rouge violence, and Bellamy's or Ben Kiernan's cross-case studies, all likewise emphasise dynamics which may

⁸³ Browning, 2001, pp. 184-6, 194 & 216.

⁸⁴ Bartov, 1994. See also: Bartov, 1998, p. 785.

⁸⁵ Burleigh, 2001, p. 617.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 604.

be called ideological.⁸⁷ They all reinforce the fact that, in Slim's words: "People do not kill civilians mindlessly. They have reasons to kill them."⁸⁸

3.2 Types of Perpetrator

There has been a propensity, in existing scholarship on atrocities, to limit the presumed relevance of ideology to only certain specific sorts of actor. Some imply, for example, that ideologies can only influence those who are actually members of ideological organisations, or who receive explicit propaganda and indoctrination sessions, or who display manifest brutality towards their victims.⁸⁹ Other theorists suggest that ideology generally only matters for (some members of) the public, duped into killing by the legitimating manipulations of self-interested leaders.⁹⁰ Or the reverse, Valentino has influentially suggested that mass publics are largely apathetic masses induced to participate through conformity pressures, self-interest, and coercion – it is the leaders and elites who are genuinely motivated by ideologies in initiating mass violence.⁹¹

Such portrayals are not wholly in error, but their restriction of ideology to certain groups often rests on the sort of conceptual confusion described in Chapter 2. I have emphasised that, since it is not productive to conceptualise ideology only as denoting forms of thinking taken to be false, abstract, fanatical, insane, moralised, irrational or possessing some other needless narrowing connotation, we need to be making nuanced distinctions between different forms of ideology or ways in which it is relevant to different perpetrators,⁹² rather than dichotomously declaring some sorts of perpetrator to be

⁸⁷ Getty and Naumov, 1999; Jackson, 1989.

⁸⁸ Slim, 2007, p. 121.

⁸⁹ Waller, 2007, pp. 40-53 & 104; Valentino, 2004, pp. 31 & 48-9; Mann, 2005, pp. 26-30 & 214.

⁹⁰ Gagnon, 2004; Akhavan, 2001, p. 7 & 10; Chirof and McCauley, 2006, p. 34 & 59; Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008, p. 36 & 42.

⁹¹ Valentino, 2004; Chirof and McCauley, 2006, pp. 90-1; Straus, 2012a, p. 549; Harff, 2003, pp. 62-3; Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008, p. 42 & 82.

⁹² Slim, 2007, p. 121.

ideological and others not. But to make such distinctions, we need to unpack the category of perpetrators.

In terms of their causal relationship to violence, I draw a loose distinction between four categories of actor relevant to the perpetration of atrocities: *policy makers* (who make the key decisions which lead to the commission of atrocities); *direct killers* (who do not issue the original orders to kill, but carry out the acts of physical destruction); *indirect killers* (staffing the bureaucracies linking policy makers and direct killers); and *bystanders* (who do not actively participate in killing, but possess potential unused power to frustrate it, making their passivity a key enabling condition). These categories are not completely clear cut: sometimes policy makers may serve as direct killers as well, for example, and in relatively spontaneous acts of atrocity there may be no discretely identifiable policy makers. In certain circumstances, we may also want to talk about the relevance of ideology to a further category – *victims*. One major reason for this is the tragic but important role of complicity in their own destruction played by some victims in some atrocities, most famously in the case of the Jewish Sonderkommando who facilitated Nazi killing in the Holocaust.⁹³ In addition, the line between perpetrators and victims is much blurrier in many atrocities than often assumed, or at the very least does not map perfectly onto the pre-existing identities (such as Hutu and Tutsi, Serbs and Bosnians, Turks and Armenians) around which popular narratives of atrocities are often conducted.⁹⁴ This doesn't eliminate any perpetrator-victim divide, but warrants caution in presumptively targeting ideological analysis along preconceptions of clear and fixed perpetrator-victim identities. Nevertheless, whilst remaining alert to this danger, I will in this thesis largely bracket the potential role of ideology for victims and focus on policy makers, direct killers, indirect killers, and bystanders.

⁹³ Semelin, 2005, pp. 277-8; Shaw, 2007, p. 95; Waller, 2007, p. 216; Valentino, 2004, p. 38. See also: Slim, 2007, p. 124.

⁹⁴ Kalyvas, 2006, p. 21 & 338; Shaw, 2007, p. 5; Waller, 2007, p. 225 & 276; Weitz, 2003, p. 220; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 172-3.

A successful account of the ideological dynamics of atrocity should consider ideology as at least potentially relevant to all four of these categories. But it should also avoid the temptation to treat them as homogenous blocks, with members all sharing the same motives and mind-sets. As many theorists emphasise, perpetrators of violence participate for a variety of reasons and in a range of dispositional states – and many do not match classic stereotypes of perpetrators suffused with hate towards their victims.⁹⁵ Again, they may therefore be influenced by ideological beliefs held with varying levels of conviction and consciousness.⁹⁶ As Thomas Kühne writes:

“Not all [perpetrators] may have embraced mass murder unanimously. Carrying out mass murder meant integrating different individuals and social entities, varying degrees of willingness to participate, different perpetrators, collaborators and accomplices, sadists, fanatics, cold-blooded killers, occasional doubters, more serious dissenters, and unwilling yet submissive collaborators”.⁹⁷

Indeed, there are many examples of atrocity perpetrators patently distressed and appalled by what they are being asked to do – yet who declared beliefs that the violence was ultimately necessary, and participated in spite of their antipathy.⁹⁸ Even the Gestapo, for example, one of the most infamous tools of oppression and atrocity in history, recruited a

⁹⁵ Chirot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 20-44; Mann, 2005, pp. 26-9; Staub, 1989, pp. 38-43; Dutton, 2007, pp. 115-122; Straus, 2007a, p. 261; Waldorf, 2007, p. 267.

⁹⁶ McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008, p. 416.

⁹⁷ Kühne, 2012, p. 141.

⁹⁸ Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009.

wide range of different employees, and Burleigh argues that below the apex “fanatical Nazis were uncommon.”⁹⁹

So whilst we do want to highlight likely differences in the role ideology plays for the four categories I have identified, these remain rough generalisations about broad categories. We might expect atrocity-justifying ideologies to be endorsed with greater conviction amongst policy makers than direct or indirect killers – especially given that it is often the former who first articulate the relevant ideological justifications for violence.¹⁰⁰ We might also expect ideology to play a more active motivational role for the former, and a more passive enabling role for the latter. As we shall see, in the three major case studies examined in this thesis, there is evidence to support such presumptions. But theorists err when they move from such arguments to the claim that ideology is only therefore relevant for ‘elites’ and not ‘ordinary perpetrators’, for example.¹⁰¹ This is a double error, in that a) the notionally ‘less ideological’ categories will still include many members who are highly ideological, and b) the weaker forms of ideological commitment still constitute an important role for ideology. Another easy homogenising move has been to portray indirect killers as overwhelmingly uncommitted pen-pushers mindlessly participating in an abstract institutional process of civilian destruction, rather than being ideologically influenced. There is a kernel of truth in this portrayal, as bureaucratic and institutional dynamics do have a role to play in explaining participation in atrocities for many.¹⁰² But once again, this should not become more than a rough generalisation, since cases of atrocity are replete with acts of enthusiastic initiative and conviction by indirect killers.

Actual assessments of ideology’s role should, therefore, ultimately be attuned to complex distributions of ideological belief across members of participant categories, rather

⁹⁹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 182.

¹⁰⁰ Slim, 2007, p. 121.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 123-4. For examples, see: Valentino, 2004; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 90-1; Straus, 2012a, p. 549; Harff, 2003, pp. 62-3; Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008, p. 42 & 82.

¹⁰² Zimbardo, 2007; Bauman, 1989.

than reaching binary conclusions to the effect that some groups of killers ‘are ideological’ whilst others ‘aren’t’. In the rest of this chapter I will comment on differences in the role of the six justificatory mechanisms for different perpetrator categories where relevant. But I consider all six mechanisms to be ultimately relevant to all four categories.

3.3 The Justificatory Mechanics of Mass Atrocities

I argue that mass atrocities occur in part because perpetrators’ ideologies contain certain ideas or sets of ideas which make violence against civilians look permissible or even desirable. Those ideas can be categorised into six distinct clusters which recur across different cases of mass atrocity. These idea-clusters are visible in discourse, which serves both to express them and to communicate them to others, and they generate the perception of violence against civilians as permissible or desirable. As previewed in Chapter 1, I label these six justificatory mechanisms:

- (i) Dehumanisation
- (ii) Guilt-attribution
- (iii) Threat-construction
- (iv) Deagentification
- (v) Virtuetalk
- (vi) Future-bias

These divide broadly into two halves: the first three mechanisms are primarily *victim* characterisations, the second three primarily *perpetrator* characterisations. There is, however, considerable overlap between all six mechanisms and the effects they create. For example, the ideological processes which depict victims as threatening and guilty also serve to frame perpetrators as acting in self-defence and as being, themselves, the ‘real victims’. And the

virtue talk which holds up atrocity perpetrators as laudable may also depict victims as repellent because they are, by contrast, dishonourable and vicious characters lacking all virtue.¹⁰³ Portrayals of victims and perpetrators are thus entangled.

It is vital to stress that the six mechanisms are not collectively a necessary condition for atrocities – atrocities can occur without *all* of them being present. But ideological justifications of some sort are, I believe, a necessary condition – and the mechanisms offer a framework for thinking about the dominant forms such justifications take. In general, atrocities emerge as the product of an escalating *process* of incremental stages towards the intense destruction of civilians – what Ervin Staub has influentially termed a “continuum of destruction”.¹⁰⁴ This applies to the justificatory mechanisms as to most other causal drivers of atrocity, and as the justifications become increasingly pervasive and prominent in the discourse and thinking of a potential perpetrator group, the capacity to perceive of mass violence as justified increases, and, consequently, so does the risk or intensity of atrocity (all other things being equal).

I also, at this stage, make no definitive judgement on the scope of this six justificatory mechanisms framework. I believe the mechanisms recur across all major cases of 20th and 21st Century mass violence against civilians, though of course I only conclusively demonstrate this for my three central case studies. They may well also be applicable to earlier incidents of atrocity, and from the limited research I have conducted on pre-20th Century cases thus far, the justificatory mechanisms certainly appear to recur in many incidents of 19th Century colonial violence, especially in the atrocities against the Native American peoples by the United States.¹⁰⁵ But a more precise determination of the historical scope of the justificatory mechanisms is a task beyond the confines of this thesis, requiring an extensive multi-case comparison. My argument here is thus limited to relatively

¹⁰³ E.g. Weiss, 1997, p. 177.

¹⁰⁴ Staub, 1989. See also: Shaw, 2007, p. 40 & 84; Dutton, 2007, pp. 44-5 & 107-8; Midlarsky, 2005, p. 6; Newman, 2002, pp. 22-4; Straus, 2012b, p. 344; Valentino, 2004, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example: Cass, 1830; Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 42-98.

‘modern’ atrocities, from the start of the twentieth century onwards.

As suggested in section 3.2, all the mechanisms may be relevant for policy makers in positions of power who decide that mass violence is desirable, indirect and direct killers who carry out the policy of atrocity, and bystanders who do not intervene.¹⁰⁶ This should be borne in mind throughout what follows.

3.3.1 Dehumanisation

A wide range of theorists have observed the consistent manner in which proponents of mass atrocities, and many other forms of violence, engage in discursive, material and symbolic efforts to dehumanise their victims, with such efforts documented in Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Japanese occupation of China and numerous other atrocities.¹⁰⁷ Ben Kiernan notes how:

“Democratic Kampuchea referred to its enemies as ‘microbes’, ‘pests buried within,’ and traitors ‘boring in’. The Germans had talked of ‘vermin and lice’... they prefigured biological depictions by Bosnian Serbs of the ‘malignant disease’ of Islam threatening to ‘infect’ Europe.”¹⁰⁸

Dehumanisation encompasses all ideological representations of victims as inhuman, less human or otherwise intrinsically and contemptibly inferior – an inherently lesser form of

¹⁰⁶ Gellately and Kiernan, 2003b, pp. 10-11. See also: Mann, 2005, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ See: Bandura, Underwood and Fromson, 1975; Haslam, 2006; Jones, 2010, p. 393 & 437; Bartov, 2003b, p. 84; Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, pp. 27-8 & 339; Dutton, 2007, pp. 71-2 & 82-4; Fein, 2002, p. 84; Fleming, 2003, p. 109; Hinton, 1998a, p. 111; Hull, 2003, p. 143; Kiernan, 2003, pp. 32-3 & 45-51; Kuper, 2002, p. 68; Melson, 2003, p. 333; Mann, 2005, pp. 66, 74-5, 79, 85, 92, 172 & 322; du Preez, 1994, p. 61; Semelin, 2005, pp. 38-9, 243 & 253; Straus, 2010, p. 169; Shaw, 2007, p. 33 & 137; Straus, 2012a, p. 546; Stanton, <http://www.genocidewatch.org/genocide/8stagesofgenocide.html>; Weitz, 2003, pp. 105-6, 222-3 & 239; Valentino, 2004, p. 17; Zimbardo, 2007, p. 14 & 307; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 37.

¹⁰⁸ Kiernan, 2003, p. 33. See also: Fleming, 2003, p. 109.

humanity.¹⁰⁹ It is worth distinguishing three principal pathways by which such dehumanisation encourages atrocity.

First, like ‘guilt-attribution’ and ‘threat-construction’ (see below), dehumanisation is a form of what Susan Opatow has influentially labelled “moral exclusion” – the exclusion of individuals from a society’s ‘normal’ domain of moral consideration.¹¹⁰ Individuals and societies possess historically variant ideological understandings of those to whom behaviour is subject to moral regulation, definitions of who is a member of their “moral order”,¹¹¹ or what Helen Fein terms their “universe of obligations”.¹¹² But importantly, victims in atrocities are typically from groups that *have* traditionally been members of the moral order/universe of obligations – either living alongside perpetrators for long periods of time (as with Jews in Germany, Bosnians, Croats and Serbs in Yugoslavia and Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda), or at least having a historically established and stable location within society, if a segregated one (as with Armenians in Turkey, or certain nationalities subjected to Soviet violence).¹¹³ Even in cases where victim populations were arguably never part of the universe of obligations (as with Native Americans in North America, or the Herero people of German South West Africa), their excluded status is not ‘given’ by the mere fact of ethnic difference. Many ethnically different peoples have coexisted without lethal dehumanisation and, as noted in section 1.5.3, mere difference is a weak predictor, on its own, of mass violence.¹¹⁴ So the moral ‘otherness’ of victims is almost always an ideological construction,¹¹⁵ and hardly ever the result of eternal ‘ancient hatreds’ or a threatening ‘first

¹⁰⁹ Mann, 2005, pp. 74-5.

¹¹⁰ Opatow, 1990. See also: Semelin, 2005, pp. 97-8; Melson, 2003, p. 326; Browning, 2001, p. 162; Collins, 1974, pp. 416-418.

¹¹¹ Melson, 2003, p. 326; Tileagă, 2007, pp. 719-20.

¹¹² Fein, 1979, p. 4.

¹¹³ Waller, 2007, p. 252 & 254; Midlarsky, 2005, p. 165; Hinton, 2002a, pp. 10-11; Valentino, 2004, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Genocide Prevention Task Force, 2008, p. 24; Krain, 2005, p. 373; Valentino, 2004, pp. 17-21; Harff, 2003, pp. 66-8.

¹¹⁵ Valentino, 2004, p. 17 & 20; Hinton, 2002a, pp. 5-6 & 9-12; Tileagă, 2007, pp. 721-2; Dutton, 2007, p. 33 & 37.

encounter' with an alien society.¹¹⁶ The definitions of Jews as “parasites” and “blood-suckers”, Tutsi as “*inyenzi*” (cockroaches),¹¹⁷ Bosnian Muslims as “yellow ants”¹¹⁸ or “dogs”,¹¹⁹ or any of the thousands of other terms with which victims are denigratingly drenched in atrocities across history, push victims beyond the protection of moral (and potentially legal) norms.

Moving beyond moral exclusion, an obvious second effect of ideological dehumanisation is the basic fear and revulsion it can cause victims to elicit, a response unsurprisingly conducive towards violence and supportive to processes of threat-construction.¹²⁰ I largely identify this as a distinct justificatory mechanism (see 3.3.3), but there is obviously a strong link between the ideological construction of victim groups as inhuman/revolting and as threatening. In more fantastical or quasi-religious dehumanisation, the victim is constructed as a dark, terrifying, alien entity: Hutu propaganda depicted the Tutsi soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Front as “creatures from another world, with tails, horns, hooves, pointed ears, and red eyes that shone in the dark.”¹²¹ An officer in the US marines similarly found it helpful to argue: “The enemy has got a face. He’s called Satan. He lives in Fallujah.”¹²² In more biologised variants of dehumanisation, on the other hand, victim-constructs evoke different visceral fears – of parasites, infections and life-forms “buried inside”. Accompanying such biologised dehumanisation is the oft-noted ideological obsession with “purity” and the language of “cleansing” which seems to surround atrocities.¹²³ In Khmer Rouge atrocities, “perceived enemies and their associates were referred to as ‘microbes’... that needed to be identified

¹¹⁶ Contra the erroneous thesis of, for example: Wilshire, 2006. For a very limited exception see Taussig, 2002.

¹¹⁷ Midlarsky, 2005, p. 60; Semelin, 2005, p. 38.

¹¹⁸ Semelin, 2005, p. 243.

¹¹⁹ Weitz, 2003, p. 222.

¹²⁰ Chiro and McCauley, 2006, pp. 36-44 & 80-1.

¹²¹ Ibid., 80. See also: Hinton, 2002a, p. 8.

¹²² Bellamy, 2012b, p. 377.

¹²³ Semelin, 2005; Weitz, 2003, p. 239; Chandler, 2000, p. 101; Kiernan, 2003; Chiro and McCauley, 2006, pp. 84-7.

and eradicated to cleanse Khmer society, or as a ‘sickness’ or ‘infection’ that should be ‘treated’ or ‘cut out’.”¹²⁴ A Khmer Rouge report thus read:

“If we wait any longer the microbes... will rot us from within... The old ones who remain in place give birth to new ones, one or two at a time, and so it goes on... This is a life and death contradiction which must be firmly grasped.”¹²⁵

Typically fantastical and biological dehumanisation are deployed alongside one another – in massacres in Mao’s China, capitalists were likened to snakes and poison, and youth instructed by Mao to “sweep away monsters and demons”.¹²⁶

Revulsion is further encouraged by means beyond discourse – notably ‘material dehumanisation’, where impoverished standards of living imposed on victims reinforce dehumanised conceptions.¹²⁷ Relating his experience of the death camps, Levi noted how, in the words of Browning, “the total debasement and humiliation of the victim facilitated the victim’s dehumanization so essential to the actions of the perpetrator.”¹²⁸ Likewise, at the infamous S-21 prison, one of the major facilities where the Khmer Rouge tortured and killed its victims, “prisoners...were dehumanised from the moment they arrived”¹²⁹ so that they “lost their right to be treated as Cambodians or as human beings.”¹³⁰ Many atrocity perpetrators prove willing to ignore their own complicity in the policies responsible for such degradation in victims’ physical appearance, instead finding the debased condition of victims a validation of their ideological conceptions of them. Imagery and film are also

¹²⁴ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 267; du Preez, 1994, p. 61.

¹²⁵ Weitz, 20023, p. 156.

¹²⁶ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 240 & 254.

¹²⁷ Mann, 2005, pp. 202 & 273-4; Hinton, 2002a, p. 8; Hinton, 1998b, p. 14.

¹²⁸ Browning, 2001, p. 208.

¹²⁹ Chandler, 2000, p. 114. See also: *ibid.*, 118 & 150-3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

frequently used to add visual realism to those conceptions.¹³¹

Third, an ideology's dehumanised conception of victims opens the door to an important reservoir of euphemism – once dehumanised, killing can be referred to as “pest-control”, “cleansing”, or “surgery”,¹³² victims noted as “logs” or “packages”.¹³³ Such euphemism supports psychological processes of moral evasion – individuals can escape the pressing horror of atrocities through such sanitised placeholder terms, which provide the necessary official lexicon to communicate about and organise killing without constantly eliciting pangs of moral discomfort.¹³⁴ We have already noted two distinct strains of dehumanising rhetoric – the fantastical and the biological – and in this more euphemistic causal pathway, a third strain often comes to the fore: the numericising or abstracting variety. Such dehumanisation transmogrifies victims into mere numbers (such as the intentionally high body counts of the Vietnam War or the required quotas of arrests and killings in many Communist atrocities) or concepts (‘the insurgency’, ‘dissenting elements’, ‘enemy labour’, and so forth).¹³⁵ Such abstracting dehumanisation is reinforced by perpetrators methodological relationship to killing, with oft noted processes of ‘distancing’ and ‘bureaucratisation’ encouraging abstract conceptions of victims, and of perpetrators actions.¹³⁶ Indeed, dehumanisation often allows perpetrators to appropriate familiar mind-sets from more mundane activities in order to psychologically handle mass killings. Semelin observes, for example, that “one of the most recurring lexicons [in atrocities], often common to different cultures, is that of animals and hunting.”¹³⁷ Such rhetoric can be found in Rwanda, Yugoslavia and the infamous Nazi *Judenjagd* (‘Jew Hunts’) in Poland. Whatever the terminology, the use of these mundane semantic frames for mass killing eases

¹³¹ Keen, 1986.

¹³² Kiernan, 2003, pp. 33-4 & 46-50; Weitz, 2003, pp. 154-5. See also: Semelin, 2005, p. 253; Kuper, 2002, p. 68.

¹³³ Newman, 2002, p. 64; Semelin, 2005, p. 274; Weitz, 2003, p. 222 & 227.

¹³⁴ Semelin, 2005, pp. 79, 91 & 252-3; Dutton, 2007, p. 22; Burleigh, 2001, p. 582.

¹³⁵ Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 184, 241 & 243; Semelin, 2005, pp. 273-4.

¹³⁶ Browning, 2001, p. 85 & 162; Semelin, 2005, p. 276; Hinton, 2002a, p. 7; Bauman, 1989.

¹³⁷ Semelin, 2005, p. 253.

entry into the sort of morally unproblematised, routinized, and sometimes (as with 'hunts') emotionalised mind-sets which are highly conducive to violence.¹³⁸

All three avenues of dehumanisation can ease atrocities at both the explicit and reflective and the more habituated and pre-reflective levels of cognition. In the former, relatively conscious beliefs about victims seem to rationally justify violence against them. Here, leading epistemic authorities often play a crucial role, in getting ordinary people to conceive of their fellow humans as subhumans. News media are a major example: aside from the infamous role played by TV and Radio propaganda in Nazi Germany, the RTLM media station was a major disseminator of dehumanising rhetoric during the Rwandan genocide,¹³⁹ whilst Serbian Radio and Television (SRT) was a parallel source of ideology in the wars in Yugoslavia.¹⁴⁰ A second major set of epistemic authorities for dehumanising conceptions are military officers and institutions. Beyond the dissemination of basic information pertaining to soldiers' missions, military commanders have tremendous capacity to frame the meaning of violence and the status of its targets, and to define the broader normative environment of an operation or campaign. It should not therefore be surprising that when, for example, General von Trotha, senior commander of all German forces involved in the Herero genocide in German South West Africa, declared that: "No war may be conducted humanely against nonhumans," many German soldiers acted accordingly.¹⁴¹ Third, intellectuals, doctors and scientists have often played a major role in rendering dehumanised and revolting conceptions of victims authoritative and credible in the eyes of wider audiences. As one German doctor at Auschwitz wrote: "Of course I am a doctor and I want to preserve life. And out of respect for human life, I would remove a gangrenous appendix from a diseased body. The Jew is the gangrenous appendix in the

¹³⁸ Kuper, 2002, p. 68. See also: Collins, 2008; Grossman, 2009.

¹³⁹ Although see: Straus, 2007b.

¹⁴⁰ Price, 2000.

¹⁴¹ Hull, 2003, p. 154; Haas, 2008, p. 333.

body of mankind.”¹⁴² In strikingly similar fashion, a senior Ottoman doctor stated: “Armenian traitors had found a niche for themselves in the bosom of the fatherland; they were dangerous microbes. Isn’t it the duty of a doctor to destroy these microbes?”¹⁴³ But dehumanisation does not always rest on these sorts of consciously internalised conceptions of victims. Frequently the process is much more a matter of subtly and progressively eroding feelings of empathy, and of the perception of certain individuals as having worth, integrity and moral or legal status. At this level, dehumanisation operates through framing effects, escalating devaluation and denigration of certain individuals, and the euphemistic redefinition of victims and killing described above.

Many perpetrators of atrocities subsequently highlight dehumanisation as an explanation of their behaviour. “We thought of them as things, not people like us,”¹⁴⁴ reported one Japanese General regarding Chinese victims in the ‘Rape of Nanking’, whilst a junior Japanese soldier stated: “perhaps when we were raping her, we looked at her as a woman, but when we killed her, we just thought of her as something like a pig.”¹⁴⁵ A former member of a Hutu killing militia from the Rwandan genocide likewise reported how: “We no longer saw a human being when we turned up a Tutsi in the swamps”.¹⁴⁶ Aside from such testimony, controlled psychological experiments by the social psychologist Albert Bandura found that a single utterance of a single dehumanising word would significantly increase individuals’ propensity to violence against targets.¹⁴⁷ Even such minimal discourse changes what Zimbardo calls perpetrators’ “mental construction of...others”,¹⁴⁸ and it should be unsurprising that the far more extensive dehumanisation

¹⁴² Goldhagen, 1997, p. 269. See also: Gellately, 2003, p. 246; Haas, 2008.

¹⁴³ Mann, 2005, p. 172.

¹⁴⁴ Zimbardo, 2007, p. 307. See also: Dutton, 2007, pp. 62-8.

¹⁴⁵ Dutton, 2007, p. 65.

¹⁴⁶ Hatzfield, 2005, p. 42.

¹⁴⁷ Bandura, Underwood and Fromson, 1975, pp. 253-9. See also: Zimbardo, 2007, pp. 13-14 & 307-13;

Tileagă, 2007, p. 720; Staub, 2002, pp. 15-16.

¹⁴⁸ Zimbardo, 2007, p. 18. See also: Hinton, 1998a, pp. 113-4.

that accompanies atrocities can do so with lethal consequences.¹⁴⁹

3.3.2 Guilt-attribution

Dehumanisation is the most infamous form of moral exclusion, but not the only one. An effective alternative mechanism is ‘guilt-attribution’: the assertion that victims have committed moral or legal crimes, and thus moved out of the universe of obligations by their own actions. Like dehumanisation, guilt-attribution moves victims into a social category in which conventional moral restraints on how a person can be treated are not perceived to apply.

But guilt-attribution is usually an easier process, because most societies have established norms of moving criminals towards the periphery of the universe of obligations.¹⁵⁰ As such the burden for successful moral exclusion is merely to provide sufficiently plausible claims that victims are guilty, usually of particularly heinous crimes, and thus not deserving of morally restrained treatment. Such claims are often at the core of atrocity-perpetrating ideologies, and elites go to extensive efforts to cement such conceptualisations in the minds of direct killers. Conditions of epistemic dependence are key: credible information on the guilt of victims is typically lacking, so rumours, unsubstantiated assertions by authorities, and the incessant repetition of isolated anecdotal cases are often sufficient to create a confident social perception of victim guilt. As the Rwandan Hutu nationalist magazine *Kangura* stated: “The unspeakable crimes of the Inyenzi of today... recall those of their elders: killing, pillaging, raping girls and women, etc.”¹⁵¹ Similarly, in recent events in Syria, “security services and official media [have] spread blood-curdling, often exaggerated and sometimes wholly imaginary stories of the

¹⁴⁹ Valentino, 2004, p. 50; Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 28.

¹⁵⁰ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 17.

¹⁵¹ Midlarsky, 2005, p. 177.

protesters' alleged sectarian barbarism".¹⁵² 'Framing effects' may again do a lot of the work here: guilt-attributing categories used by authorities to define and refer to victims constitute perpetrators' perceptions of them – victims become 'criminals', 'enemies of the people' and 'traitors'. Perpetrators frequently testify genuine belief in such portrayals – in circumstances (such as private correspondence) where we have good reasons to presumptively trust their sincerity.¹⁵³

Of course the attributions are often consciously cavalier.¹⁵⁴ Probabilistic or presumptive rules and procedures often give a fictive appearance of due process and authority to attributions that are entirely false. The 'show trials' and 'troika' of the Soviet Union (and their parallels in other Communist atrocities) are famous examples of such procedures (see Chapter 5). But quite basic guilt-attributing rules are often enough to convince perpetrators – as with the U.S. Air Force pilots in Vietnam who appear to have had considerable confidence in their judgements that peasants working the fields below them were Vietcong, and therefore legitimate targets of bombing, "if they run away" from American planes.¹⁵⁵ Critically, victims are often deemed guilty as a collective or a race, deserving collective punishment for the specific crimes of some 'members'.¹⁵⁶ Such processes expose the enormous atrocity-justifying potential of the collective noun – once real or imagine crimes committed by specific human beings are repeatedly discussed in terms of "Jews", "Tutsis", "Muslims", "Japs" or whatever, perpetrators prove remarkably willing to pliantly conceive of all members of the referenced category as equally and uniformly complicit. As a Hutu militia member in Rwanda put it: "we thought all Tutsis at fault for our constant troubles... That's how we reasoned and that's how we killed at the

¹⁵² International Crisis Group, 2011, p. 2.

¹⁵³ Bartov, 1998, p. 784; Semelin, 2005, p. 250; Mann, 2005, p. 255.

¹⁵⁴ Semelin, 2005, p. 248.

¹⁵⁵ Young, 2009, p. 158.

¹⁵⁶ Mosse, 1990, p. 357; Hinton, 2002a, p. 11; Slim, 2007, pp. 143-. See also: Schaffer, 1988, pp. 153-5; Straus, 2012b, p. 353; Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 111-12; Slim, 2007, p. 125 & 142.

time.”¹⁵⁷ And such collective guilt-attribution often reflects deeper ideological views about the necessarily guilty nature of categories of people. A common component of racist ideologies is the belief that inferior races are biologically inclined towards criminality, and the classist conceptions of extreme communist ideologies similarly deemed entire classes necessarily criminal in light of their inescapable relationship to the means of production. The tendency of people to engage in ‘just-world thinking’ – the assumption that individuals tend to deserve what they get – has been well documented and further reinforces guilt-attribution.¹⁵⁸ Even perpetrators and bystanders who don’t possess passionate convictions in victim-guilt often adopt a no-less permissive attitude approximating the adage ‘there’s no smoke without fire’, and go along with definitions of victims as guilty criminals.

Like dehumanisation, guilt-attribution is not solely a mechanism of moral exclusion, but can also emotively generate willing participation in violence.¹⁵⁹ Isabel Hull says of the Herrero genocide that “the most lethal factor... was the desire to punish”,¹⁶⁰ and Véronique Nahoum-Grappe remarks on the way that historical memories of past massacres are frequently used to evoke “the desire, the obligation, the *duty toward the dead* to seek revenge”.¹⁶¹ The importance of vengeance and punishment abounds throughout the ideological discourse of atrocities – whether as a relatively cool justification for violence, like General William Sherman’s declaration that: “we must act with vindictive earnestness against the Sioux, even to their extermination, men, women and children”¹⁶² or an emotionally whipped up exhortation, as with the Khmer Rouge chant: “BLOOD AVENGES BLOOD! BLOOD AVENGES BLOOD!”¹⁶³ More or less passionate desires for vengeance underpin a recurring ‘reprisal logic’ that is frequently invoked to justify

¹⁵⁷ Zimbardo, 2007, p. 15.

¹⁵⁸ Furnham, 2003; Jost and Hunyady, 2005; Bénabou and Tirole, 2006.

¹⁵⁹ Chirrot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 25-31 & 66-71; Dutton, 2007, pp. 73-84.

¹⁶⁰ Hull, 2003, p. 158.

¹⁶¹ Semelin, 2005, p. 43. [emphasis in original]

¹⁶² Bellamy, 2012b, p. 86.

¹⁶³ Mann, 2005, p. 343.

violence against victims.¹⁶⁴ Provided some crime, perhaps even ancient mythical crimes,¹⁶⁵ can be blamed on victim groups, no matter who it was by, how assuredly it really occurred, or how little evidence exists to substantiate it, perpetrators often then argue that the ‘gloves are off’. Through this ‘they did it first’ logic, atrocities become framed as a response, even a righteously just one, which has been forced on perpetrators.¹⁶⁶ The killers are therefore, in their self-conceptions, the ‘real victims’.¹⁶⁷

As with dehumanisation, then, guilt-attribution provides multiple mutually-reinforcing justificatory pathways towards violence. It often makes powerful emotive pulls on direct killers, with lurid descriptions of the crimes and outrages conducted by victims working perpetrators up into righteous and/or furious mental states conducive to killing.¹⁶⁸ But it also offers potentially reflective arguments justifying atrocity – defining victims in ways that strip them of moral/legal protections, ascribing ‘real’ responsibility for violence onto them, offering moralised appeals to avenge past injustices. And in addition it operates through subtler frames of victims, not only as guilty but as brutal, nasty and malicious characters who, whatever the precise nature of their involvement, deserve what they get. Saturated into a society’s or killing-institution’s discourse, such frames allow the typically non-existent factual basis of guilt-attributing claims to be masked under the appearance that victim-guilt is well-established common-sense. Individuals never presented with evidence of victim guilt all-too-easily come to think of victims as either specifically guilty or assuredly members of guilty categories of people.

3.3.3 Threat-construction

¹⁶⁴ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 70 & 79.

¹⁶⁵ Chirof and McCauley, 2006, p. 34.

¹⁶⁶ Slim, 2007, pp. 139-151.

¹⁶⁷ Benesch, 2012, p. 5; Shaw, 2007, p. 5; Slim, 2007, p. 139; Dutton, 2007, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶⁸ Browning, 2001, p. 2. Bellamy, 2012b, p. 207.

Barry Posen has famously analysed how scenarios of state collapse force ethnic collectives into a sub-state security dilemma, often exacerbated by hate-filled historical narratives.¹⁶⁹ Rival groups are perceived of as threatening, and measures taken to maximise security further entrench such perceptions on both sides. As Posen's attention to historical narratives of hate suggests, however, the apparent threat is not simply read directly off objective reality, but is (at least partly) socially constructed.¹⁷⁰ Atrocities offer strong evidence of this fact, because it is notable that atrocity perpetrators display similar dynamics of threat and mobilisation to those noted by Posen, but in contexts without state collapse or security-dilemma-style responses from other groups. Even without such 'objective' causes of insecurity, ideological constructions of threat motivate violence,¹⁷¹ and an extensive literature has emphasised how perceptions of dangerous enemies are thereby 'manufactured'.¹⁷² Violence, argues Zimbardo, "requires a 'hostile imagination,' a psychological construction embedded... by propaganda that transforms those others into 'The Enemy.'"¹⁷³ This is particularly visible in cases of atrocity, where the gap between the 'objective' harmlessness of victims and their perceived threat by killers is so striking to an outsider.¹⁷⁴ Martin Shaw, Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn have done the most to demonstrate how it is therefore not the objective reality of victim groups that matters in atrocities, but how they are conceptualised and defined by those who perpetrate violence against them.¹⁷⁵ As Shaw argues: "it is what the target group represents *socially* that constitutes the rationale for destroying it"¹⁷⁶ and atrocities are therefore accompanied by a "construction of civilian groups as enemies, not only in a social or political but also in a

¹⁶⁹ Posen, 1993. See also: du Preez, 1994, p. 23; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 31-6.

¹⁷⁰ Owen, 1997, pp. 12-20.

¹⁷¹ Werth, 2003; Shaw, 2007, pp. 35, 41, 105, 114 & 131; Midlarsky, 2005, p. 148; Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 196; Keen, 1986; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 61; Straus, 2012b, p. 350; Harff, 2003, p. 61; Whitlock, 2009, pp. 12-13.

¹⁷² O'Neill, 2010, pp. 190-2; Hinton, 2002b, Part III; Keen, 1986. See also: Zimbardo, 2007, pp. 312-13; Valentino, 2004, p. 19.

¹⁷³ Zimbardo, 2007, p. 11.

¹⁷⁴ Midlarsky, 2005, p. 7; du Preez, 1994, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Shaw, 2007, pp. 30-31; Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, pp. 10, 23 & 27-8.

¹⁷⁶ Shaw, 2007, p. 86.

military sense, to be destroyed.”¹⁷⁷ This is the heart of ideological threat-construction. As one Hutu militia member stated: “We no longer looked at [Tutsi] one by one, we no longer stopped to recognise them as they had been, not even colleagues. They had become a threat greater than all we had experienced together...”¹⁷⁸

Such threat-construction is easier in wartime since, as Browning notes, “war, a struggle between ‘our people’ and ‘the enemy,’ creates a polarized world in which ‘the enemy’ is easily objectified and removed from the community of human obligation.”¹⁷⁹ It is important, though, not to overstate the importance of war – and theorists err if they conceive of conventional militarised conflicts, even intrastate ones, as a necessary or pre-eminent cause of atrocities.¹⁸⁰ Fully one third of mass atrocities since 1945, have occurred in the absence of any such wartime context,¹⁸¹ and prominent earlier cases include the enormous violence in the Soviet Union under Stalin analysed in Chapter 5. War encourages and eases threat-constructions of enemies, but the central fact that these are ideological constructions means that they need only appear plausible and epistemically satisfying in light of a broader set of disseminated beliefs, and not necessarily any actual militarised threat.

Both in and out of war, powerful epistemic authorities are mobilised to render ideological threat-constructions credible to perpetrators at various hierarchical levels. The state security and military apparatuses are principal sources, as with the Rwandan army memorandum from September 1992 which asserted a threat from: “Tutsi inside or outside the country, extremist and nostalgic for power... and who wish to reconquer power by all means necessary including arms.”¹⁸² But media, intellectuals and other authorities tend also to participate in threat-construction. The Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 111. See also: *ibid.*, 105; Semelin, 2005, p. 293.

¹⁷⁸ Zimbardo, 2007, pp. 15-16.

¹⁷⁹ Browning, 2001, p. 162.

¹⁸⁰ For example: Semelin, 2005, p. 246.

¹⁸¹ See: Bellamy, 2011, Appendix 1.

¹⁸² Valentino, 2004, p. 182; Straus, 2012b, p. 353. See also: Zimbardo, 2007, p. 13; Dutton, 2007, p. 106.

Sciences, often cited as laying the ideological foundations for Serbian violence in the 1990s, similarly affirmed that: “Except for the period of the existence of the NDH, Serbs were never so endangered as they are today.”¹⁸³ Other influential institutions and individuals – not least, the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church – also provided authoritative epistemic endorsements of such portrayals.

As with guilt-attribution, threat-construction can be most effective simply through saturating the discourse of reference to victims with labels and categories that presumptively assign them threatening status. Atrocity-perpetrating regimes typically develop a stable lexicon for defining their victims: Suharto’s anticommunist policies in Indonesia consistently targeted “gangs of security disruptors”,¹⁸⁴ the Nazis fought “Judeo-Bolsheviks”¹⁸⁵ or “International World Jewry”,¹⁸⁶ Stalinists targeted “socially harmful elements”.¹⁸⁷ More recently, the Syrian government has likewise vehemently and consistently described rebel forces as “terrorists”.¹⁸⁸ Browning and Lewis Siegelbaum have emphasised the significance of such processes of categorisation and classification, and such *definitions of the enemy* are crucial to the process of constructing them.¹⁸⁹ These categories form the often quite complex conceptual apparatus perpetrators have for thinking and talking about the world around them, becoming embedded in the jargonised vocabularies and administrative practices of atrocity perpetrating organisations.¹⁹⁰ Such labels are never conjured out of thin air, but draw upon ideological underpinnings that give them plausibility, richness, and significance.¹⁹¹ And critical to their lethal potential is their typical elasticity – fuzzy semantic boundaries allow them to be applied to almost any individual in

¹⁸³ Weitz, 2003, pp. 195-6. The NDH was the fascist Croatian Ustaše state established by Nazi Germany.

¹⁸⁴ Kiernan, 2003, p. 47.

¹⁸⁵ Weitz, 2003, pp. 105, 107-8, 125 & 139. See also: Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 332; Mann, 2005, p. 301.

¹⁸⁶ Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 337.

¹⁸⁷ Werth, 2003, p. 219; Hagenloh, 2000. See also: Harff, 2003, p. 61; Chandler, 2000, pp. 6 & 93-4.

¹⁸⁸ BBC News, 2012c; BBC News, 2012b; BBC News, 2012a; International Crisis Group, 2011, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009.

¹⁹⁰ Chirof and McCauley, 2006, pp. 82-3; du Preez, 1994, pp. 48-9 & 52. See also: Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p. 139.

¹⁹¹ Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009, pp. 231-2.

order to convert them into a legitimate target for killing.¹⁹² Their persistent use creates the threat as a social fact, a feature of the institutional environments to which individuals face such powerful pressures to conform.

Of course, threat-construction is not only important as a characterisation of the victim. It also transforms the *meaning of killing itself* from mass-murder to self-defence, from a criminal act to a heroic one as “massacre takes on the appearance of an act of war”.¹⁹³ This is perhaps the easiest way for violent atrocities to be ideologically justified.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, the priming of individuals with threat-constructions has been linked with a range of psychological and behavioural responses further conducive to violence, as Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley summarise: “an increased feeling of [in-group] togetherness...increased respect for leaders, increased idealization of in-group values, and increased readiness to punish deviates from in-group norms.”¹⁹⁵

3.3.4 Deagentification

By ‘deagentification’, I refer to the ideological portrayal of killers as lacking meaningful agency or responsibility in causing atrocities to occur. Such deagentification is not usually total: perpetrators rarely claim that their *individual* actions lacked any agency. But the overall atrocity – the *fact that violence is occurring* – is typically presented as an ‘inevitable’ or ‘necessary’ result of irresistible forces or unavoidable circumstances beyond the control of human agency. Providence, the laws of class or racial struggle, technological progress, the nature of war, or simply the actions of others are held up as the real cause of atrocities, rather than the deliberate decisions made by policy makers, direct and indirect killers, and bystanders. A partial awareness of this phenomenon is present in social psychology, and in

¹⁹² Hagenloh, 2000, p. 289.

¹⁹³ Semelin, 2005, p. 145. See also: Straus, 2012b, p. 353.

¹⁹⁴ Hinton, 1998a, p. 112; Semelin, 2005, p. 246. See also: Weitz, 2003, pp. 124-32.

¹⁹⁵ Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 65.

certain sections of Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. And in the literature on ideology, theorists far removed from the study of atrocities have frequently emphasised how ideologies naturalise certain policies or outcomes so as to mask the human agency involved in creating them.¹⁹⁶ But deagentifying worldviews have received limited consideration from theorists of atrocities.

Deagentification operates, to borrow a phrase from Eric Gordy, through the “destruction of alternatives”.¹⁹⁷ By forcefully asserting that *no other option but violence exists*, and either perceptually destroying alternatives or tarring them with the trappings of implausibility or illegitimacy, perpetrators appear to just respond to the dictates of the situations or forces they find themselves subject to – doing as ‘necessity’ requires of them. This is one of the fundamental differences between contexts of atrocity and contexts in which atrocity seems unthinkable: the differing perceived terrains of possible action. A first step is obviously to put atrocity onto that terrain, to move it from a radical and ‘inconceivable’ solution to a conceivable one. But the second step is to then systematically undermine other options, until atrocity is all that appears left.

This deagentifying destruction of alternatives can take two broad forms. In a first, more grandiose, and more theoretically elaborate variety, quasi-deterministic conceptions of history rooted in beliefs in eternal and irresistible forces ground the deagentification. Nazism, as I examine further in Chapter 4, held that the extermination of inferior races was simply a requirement of the natural and eternal laws of racial struggle – unavoidable if any race wished to ensure its own survival. In parallel fashion Communist ideologies consistently depicted the destruction of whole economic groups or political opponents as an unavoidable consequence of historical development, a necessary component of the inevitably violent trajectory of human societies towards communism.¹⁹⁸ And both these

¹⁹⁶ Wodak and Meyer, 2009a, p. 7; Fairclough, 2010, p. 107; Billig, 2008, pp. 783-800.

¹⁹⁷ Gordy, 1999.

¹⁹⁸ See also: Bellamy, 2012b, p. 239.

worldviews were preceded by colonialist ideologies, which similarly held that the destruction of inferior races was, in the words of one perpetrator, “as ultimately beneficial as it was inevitable”,¹⁹⁹ an unavoidable part of the necessary spread of Europeans around the world in their providential exploitation of new lands.²⁰⁰

Under such quasi-deterministic ideologies, as Arendt wrote, “the liquidation is fitted into a historical process in which man only does or suffers what, according to immutable laws, is bound to happen anyway.”²⁰¹ Perpetrators thereby evade moral regulation:

“All concerned are subjectively innocent...the murderers because they do not really murder but execute a death sentence pronounced by some higher tribunal. The rulers themselves do not claim to be just or wise, but only to execute historical or natural laws...”²⁰²

Even in more superficially down to earth ideologies like liberalism, such quasi-deterministic elements lurk – and beliefs in the inevitable march of technological and economic progress have frequently undergirded the complicity of liberal states in violence against civilians. I examine a major example in Chapter 6.

Much deagentification, however, is more mundane – in this form, atrocity-justifying ideologies deagentify violence by portraying it as dictated not by mysterious historical forces, but by the contingent circumstances in which perpetrators find themselves – often, those of war. Thus General William Sherman reasoned that: “War is cruelty and you cannot refine it... You might as well appeal against the thunderstorm as against these terrible

¹⁹⁹ Gellately and Kiernan, 2003b, p. 24.

²⁰⁰ See, for example: Cass, 1830.

²⁰¹ Arendt, 1976, p. 349.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 465.

hardships of war. They are inevitable.”²⁰³ Such assertions of inevitability and destruction of alternatives are more local, but no less effective: alternatives to violence are perceptually eliminated through a range of assertions about feasibility, fixed needs and interests, and situational constraints. Such moves are typically latent in the discourse of “military necessity”, especially when atrocities purported to yield some military benefit are asserted as ‘necessary’ without actual consideration of the full range of possible alternatives or any explicit justification as to why atrocity is preferable to them.²⁰⁴ Valentino rightly notes that “politics of extermination... usually emerge only after leaders have concluded that other options for achieving their ends... are ineffective or impractical”²⁰⁵ but that conclusion is frequently reached on only the most superficial examination of alternatives. Often – and here deagentification overlaps with virtuetalk (see 3.3.5) – alternatives are perceptually destroyed not on any serious ‘cost-benefit analysis’, but because they don’t ‘look good’ according to a range of pre-reflective evaluative criteria. Alternatives to violence are dismissed, either explicitly or implicitly, as ‘weakness’, ‘sentimental humanitarianism’, ‘rotten liberalism’, or some other denigrating frame.²⁰⁶ And unsubstantiated assertions that policies would be ‘unfeasible’, ‘risky’, ‘expensive’ or ‘impractical’ often prove sufficient to eliminate them from discussion, particularly within institutional policy making dynamics subject to groupthink and shared ideological assumptions.²⁰⁷ By becoming convinced that they operate under irresistible circumstantial constraints, ordinary people can thus see themselves as operating in “states of exception”, in which ordinary moral norms can no longer apply.²⁰⁸

Whatever the strategy, the destruction of alternatives occludes the role of human agency in causing the atrocity in question, shielding perpetrators from the perception of

²⁰³ Slim, 2007, p. 25.

²⁰⁴ See: Bellamy, 2012b; Bellamy, 2012a, p. 168 & 173; Weitz, 2003, p. 61.

²⁰⁵ Valentino, 2004, p. 3.

²⁰⁶ Noakes and Pridham, 2001, p. 462; Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 34.

²⁰⁷ See: Janis, 1982.

²⁰⁸ Agamben, 2005; Alexander, 2009, p. 29; Slim, 2007, p. 151.

responsibility for the death and suffering caused. Even when perpetrators recognise their individual freedom to participate or not, deagentification allows them to avoid any sense that such participation is a real producer of the violence, and thereby promotes a thoroughgoing moral disengagement from the deaths caused.²⁰⁹

3.3.5 Virtuetalk

The fifth justificatory mechanism I call ‘virtuetalk’: the use of ideological conceptions of attractive, admirable and praiseworthy character to portray killing as a laudable act. In general, virtuetalk references the character of people – significantly perpetrators – and their need to be tough, dutiful, loyal, vigilant, and so forth. But I take virtuetalk to also include appeals to the aesthetic-normative character of policies or actions: their efficiency, toughness, modernity, revolutionary soundness and so forth.

I suggest that distinctive hierarchies of virtue and vice are some of the most crucial elements in any ideological worldview, providing the basic, every-day, often pre-reflective evaluative schema guiding political thought and action.²¹⁰ It ought, by now, to be a banality to observe that ordinary politics is laden with the aesthetic and the rhetorical, and virtuetalk integrates normative with aesthetic valuations. Most ordinary political thinking is not intellectualised political philosophy, but is guided by vague but quick and often deeply felt impressions and intuitions regarding what looks or feels good or bad. This is a central reason why ‘framing effects’ are so powerful – the same policy can elicit opposite reactions from the same person according to whether it is *presented* in a manner that matches or clashes with their aesthetic-normative preferences.²¹¹ Conceptions of virtue and vice underpin the fuzzy auras of attractiveness and unattractiveness in which people and

²⁰⁹ See also: Bandura, 1999.

²¹⁰ See: Haidt, Graham and Joseph, 2009.

²¹¹ Goffman, 1986.

policies are blanketed in justificatory appeals. And they are also ineliminable elements of political *identities*, since conceptions of the prototypical in-group member (the ‘average’ Briton or American or German) and of historical and present-day heroes and enemies are all bound up with references to character,²¹² a fact most famously hinted at in Freud’s identification of nationalism as the ‘narcissism of minor differences’. But more generally, ideas about praiseworthy and contemptible character are fundamental to political discourse surrounding norms and transgressions, progress and regression, breakthroughs and scandals, modernity and primitivism, reliability and untrustworthiness. Politics, in sum, is saturated with more or less latent notions of virtue and vice.

Virtuetalk is especially powerful because it plays upon some of the most central psychological drivers of thought and action. Conceptions of virtue and vice play a key role in constituting socially propagated *ideal self-images* – rich pictures of how individuals would like themselves to be or like themselves to be seen by others. Conformity towards ideal self-images is a source of both social status and personal self-esteem. The pull of such drivers, as I suggested in Chapter 2, is crucial towards understanding individual behaviour: self-esteem is a tremendously powerful determinant of behaviour, and social condemnation, ridicule or exclusion an equally strong deterrent. These drivers – particularly when triggered by gendered appeals to machoistic ideals and sexual anxieties – might be thought *particularly* strong amongst relatively young men organised into groups, precisely the constituency which provides most (though not all) perpetrators of atrocities.²¹³ It should be distinctly unsurprising, therefore, that we find the ideological discourse surrounding atrocities suffused with appeals to duty, vigilance, hardness, manliness, courage, and discipline.

In its direct causal relationship with atrocities, virtuetalk fulfils three central functions. Its first is euphemistic – like dehumanisation, virtuetalk provides a discourse in

²¹² See: Finlayson, 2012.

²¹³ Dutton, 2007, pp. 32, 68 & 104; Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 37; Tilly, 2003, p. 1 & 109; Theweleit, 1989a.

which conscious confrontation with killing's visceral actuality can be evaded by framing killing in more palatable terms. Even rather insipid virtue phraseology is semantically preferable to 'killing'; individuals are far more receptive to orders to act "promptly and with determination,"²¹⁴ and contexts of killing abound with such 'light' virtuetalk.²¹⁵ Nevertheless, I think this euphemistic process can be overstated. Some direct killers offer positively effusive statements about their killing which make no effort to disguise its brutality. They are able to do so because they *perceive the brutality as laudable*, and why they do this is thus the more salient question.

So a second and more important function of virtuetalk is the active glorification of violence by persistently connecting it to heavily sedimented social values.²¹⁶ In describing the central role of the Rwandan RTLM radio station in instigating genocide, Semelin notes how "it acted out a prescriptive role... in giving Hutu listeners instructions ostensibly relating to vigilance and self-defence which in reality were public calls to murder."²¹⁷ Equivalent 'virtue authorities' to RTLM (like military commanders, religious leaders, media outlets, or intellectuals) can be found in most cases of atrocity. They enhance group-pressures to conform to practices of killing; to opt-out, to not kill, becomes framed as 'weakness' or 'cowardice', and moral or political opposition is portrayed as a lack of the requisite virtues, as a character defect rather than a conscientious stand.²¹⁸ As virtuetalk becomes an established part of the ideological worldview of most perpetrators at all levels of the machinery of destruction it fosters an internalised connection between the substantive activity of killing and commonplace, even banal, social values.

But virtuetalk also goes beyond this process of legitimation through existing social values. Its third function is to *shift* existing virtue-systems in a harsher direction, towards

²¹⁴ Valentino, 2004, p. 164.

²¹⁵ Dutton, 2007, p. 22.

²¹⁶ Mann, 2005, p. 200; Hinton, 1998a, pp. 96-7; du Preez, 1994, p. 130; Slim, 2007, pp. 25-6.

²¹⁷ Semelin, 2005, p. 190.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 242 & 263; Mann, 2005, p. 200; Hinton, 1998a, p. 116.

the valorisation of killing and a proud and explicit “ethos of violence”²¹⁹ built around the adulation of hardness and machoistic brutality and the castigation of restraint or moral reflection as sentimentality, naivety and stupidity.²²⁰ This occurred in all three of the cases I examine in detail in this thesis, but is visible in many other atrocities. Several scholars have noted the distinctly ‘military style’ of Communist regimes such as the Khmer Rouge, with their idealisation of strict military harshness and disapproval of humanitarian feelings.²²¹ Khmer discourse recommending “seething hatred and blood rancor against national and class enemies,”²²² and issued demands for the people “to be clean, to be good, to be rough, to be strong”.²²³ As Hinton has written, such discourse was part of an overarching glorification of harshness, in which “the ideal new communist citizen would be able to ‘cut of his or her heart’ from the enemy who was ‘not real Khmer.’”²²⁴ Mao similarly preached to Red Guards units launching the Cultural Revolution that they should “dare to be violent” and that “to rebel is good”.²²⁵ Those who call for mass murder thus aim to ‘harden’ perpetrators through creatively modified virtue-systems of brutality, viciousness and unsympathetic coldness. Again, such appeals are liable to be welcome to killers for self-esteem motives, and Semelin notes how Rwandan killers competed for acclaim in spiralling boasts of how many Tutsi they had killed.²²⁶ And they can also engender brutal or cold emotional states that significantly ease difficult participation in violence.

Such a process of harshening accords with a number of ideological analysts’ accounts of how powerful ideological change occurs. Both Quentin Skinner and Paul Thagard have emphasised how the alteration of the normative or emotional valences attached to political and moral concepts can produce crucial ideological changes – as

²¹⁹ Mann, 2005, p. 253. See also: Weitz, 2003, p. 52.

²²⁰ Hinton, 1998a, pp. 91, 112, 115 & 117.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 112. See also: Chandler, 2000, p. 101.

²²² Weitz, 2003, p. 153.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 155.

²²⁴ Hinton, 2002a, p. 15.

²²⁵ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 254.

²²⁶ Semelin, 2005, pp. 275-6.

Skinner puts it: “it is...essentially by manipulating this set of terms that any society succeeds in establishing and altering its moral identity.”²²⁷ Such processes of “revalencing”, as Thagard terms them, are more efficient than having to invent or introduce a new political or normative lexicon from scratch. Michael Freeden’s concept of decontestation expresses a closely related idea – though the emphasis is on the imposition of new semantic meanings onto concepts rather than changes in their valence (although clearly these are inextricably related processes).²²⁸ One can see such processes occurring in virtuetalk. And Ernesto Laclau’s notion of “empty signifiers” may similarly be relevant – for whilst Laclau and his followers have used concepts like “order” and “justice” as examples of such empty signifiers, I think classic virtues, particularly the most open-ended ones like ‘duty’ are equally apt instances. Such virtues carry enormous motivational attraction – duty seems strongly praiseworthy – yet their semantic content is deeply indeterminate (there is no fixed consensus over what one’s duties are or who they are owed to). This allows virtues, like other empty signifiers, to be easily captured and utilised to motivate action by imposing preferred decontestations onto them. Thus, as James Ryan notes, in the language of atrocity-perpetrating regimes: “‘Humanist’ and ‘compassion’ could become hidden insults, ‘destruction’ could become a term of immense praise.”²²⁹

The processes I group under virtuetalk have not been entirely overlooked by existing scholars of atrocity, but they have not been systematically studied or emphasised. This has led some theorists in erroneous directions, occasionally implying that atrocity-justifying ideologies reject morality or normativity entirely. Thus Chirot and McCauley write of “fascism and communism...for whom the issue of ‘honor’ was no longer relevant because they had history on their side and a vision of an ideal world to justify ruthless

²²⁷ Skinner, 1974, p. 294. See also: *ibid.*, 294-300; Tully, 1983, pp. 495-7; Thagard, 2012, p. 25.

²²⁸ Freeden, 1996, pp. 75-77.

²²⁹ Ryan, 2012, p. 22. See also: Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 34.

violence.”²³⁰ I can scarcely over-emphasise how wrong I think this is – a position substantiated in Chapters 4 and 5. It is of course fundamental to atrocity-justifying ideologies that they shift the normative environment of a social context, radicalising perpetrators towards violence: this is essentially what atrocity justification consists of. But to understand how this process is possible it is crucial to place front and centre the way atrocity justifiers *do not abandon* the terminology and concepts of traditional morality but actively mobilise them in the motivation, legitimisation and rationalisation of violence. Honour, like duty, vigilance, hardness and a host of other virtues, mattered just as much to fascists and communists as to anyone else. But in classic acts of ideological politics, they produced *partially new* contestations of those concepts so as to make killing seem fundamentally consonant with them. This is a process repeated constantly across different cases of mass atrocity.

3.3.6 Future-bias

Atrocity-perpetrating ideologies have frequently been described as utopian.²³¹ The label need not be limited to those atrocities which genuinely aim at reconstructing an entirely new society in the fascist or communist vein; more achievable visions of an ethnically pure society, a secure state, or the unification of all members of a nation, may also contain important utopian qualities.²³² Nevertheless, because of the ambiguity of the term ‘utopian’, and the desire to more genuinely get at the ideological workings of these justificatory visions, I instead use the term ‘future-bias’ to denote a key recurring theme in the ideological environments of atrocities.

Future-bias is a broad justificatory mechanism in which present harms of an action

²³⁰ Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 138.

²³¹ Valentino, 2004, pp. 92-3; Weitz, 2003; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 43.

²³² Tower Sargent, 2009, p. xvi & 10.

are outweighed by heavily emphasising future and, in truth, uncertain goods.²³³ This is not necessarily erroneous, but it is usually grounded in a particular fallacy: the skewing of cost/benefit evaluations towards the future by *the failure to discount future benefits for their uncertainty*. Atrocity perpetrating regimes justify their actions through a consequentialist calculus, in other words, but the calculus is loaded – often no means could prove sufficiently terrible as to be unjustifiable given the huge, even fantastical, ‘good ends’ which atrocity justifiers confidently multiply into the entire future of a people. Future-bias, in other words, defines a broad moral posture of reckless, speculative and unsubstantiated consequentialism encompassing the full gamut of specific ‘ends justify the means’ arguments deployed in individual cases. Many individuals can be persuaded that even seriously harmful moral acts can be justified in certain circumstances given a significant enough ‘need’ or benefit that flows from them. But scrutiny on the epistemic status of that moral benefit – how sure we are that it will happen, and what the foundation for that certainty is – is typically weak when the costs are borne by others. Actors become convinced that they ‘know’ that their actions serve certain ends, or produce certain benefits, often simply because their actions have been defined as aiming at those ends. And indeed this certainty does not simply derive from an egotistical bias – individuals are certain because the projected future benefits are ideologically cemented, an established part of the shared beliefs of perpetrators reinforced by mutual acceptance and by the warrant of significant epistemic authorities. And future-bias interacts with other justificatory mechanisms to create an extraordinarily permissive moral logic which recurs again and again across different cases of mass violence: deagentification makes harms in the present look essentially unavoidable, dehumanisation, guilt-attribution and threat-construction lessen the apparent size of those harms, and a future-biased posture makes them appear easily offset by tremendous long run benefits multiplied into the infinite future.

²³³ See also: Hinton, 2002a, pp. 7-8; Bodley, 2002; Chirot and McCauley, 2006, pp. 60-1.

There are varying degrees of grandiosity with which this fallacious futurist logic can function. Sometimes it is embedded in the whole normative structure of an ideology – Communists increasingly used the prophesised ‘certain’ revolution and advent to Communist society to effectively collapse the ethical regulation of revolutionary ‘means’ in the here and now.²³⁴ The same could be said of Nazism, French Revolutionary Republicanism, and some contemporary ideologies underpinning religious terrorism. More generally, sweeping discourses about ‘progress’ towards a prosperous future have underpinned colonial atrocities and, more recently, western complicity in violence in the developing world.²³⁵

But frequently future-bias is more mundane. It often becomes embedded in trivialising metaphors that can still satisfy the justificatory needs of some perpetrators: “you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs”, Bolsheviks would ritualistically retort, or “you can’t plane down wood without losing a few chips.”²³⁶ Perhaps most commonly, future-bias is invoked as a discrete justification of individual acts of killing: especially those committed under the rubric of ‘military necessity’. Military operations which are assured to kill civilians are frequently justified in terms of promised but weakly substantiated military benefits that, in the course of things, often fail to obtain. This is unsurprising, since the peddlers of appeals to ‘military necessity’ offer fail to offer sustained evidence that the asserted need is real or that the proposed policy will assuredly satiate it. It is thus often clear that the justificatory burden which atrocity perpetrators must satisfy is not a detailed consequentialist proof of the net worth of killing, but a rather tokenistic ‘lining-up’ of individual acts of killing with a purported military benefit. Substantiating that benefit is often not required, provided it looks plausible within the ideological worldview of policy makers and killers. This fundamentally fallacious future-biased means-ends reasoning might

²³⁴ Weitz, 2003, pp. 54-6; Lukes, 1985; Lukes, 2001; Figes, 2002, p. 92; Glover, 1999, pp. 252-6.

²³⁵ Waller, 2007, p. xv; Bodley, 2002; Blakely, 2009. See also: Dillon and Reid, 2009.

²³⁶ Glover, 1999, pp. 254-6.

justify actions that only kill a handful of civilians in individual military operations, but when it becomes engrained within an entire military apparatus, or other killing institution, its aggregate impact is considerable – as we will see in Chapter 6.

This capacity for weak or non-existent benefits to be asserted as outweighing known and often considerable civilian deaths is, again, reinforced by dynamics of epistemic dependence. Indeed, future-bias is a particularly potent tool for epistemic authorities. Once a formula of justification has been established in which the ‘costs’ of killing are weighed against future benefits undiscounted for their uncertainty, moral legitimacy becomes hijacked by whoever can articulate the relevant categories of ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’ with most authority. In societies with total claims on epistemic authority, or merely large information asymmetries (of the form that always exist between senior members of military hierarchies and ordinary soldiers) it should hardly be surprising that perpetrators accept the future validation of their actions as assured by their superiors. Nurses accept the health benefits asserted by doctors accruing from the Nazi ‘euthanasia’ of the mentally disabled, and soldiers accept the security benefits from ‘anti-partisan operations’ in Polish towns, Vietnamese villages, and Guatemalan provinces. Ordinary perpetrators, after all, rarely have sufficient information, status or institutional authority to plausibly challenge the promised benefits asserted by superiors. The corruption of means-ends calculations by future-bias thus becomes, like the other justificatory mechanisms, a central feature of the ideological conception of atrocities.

Whilst they do not encompass all the ideological dynamics of atrocities, these six justificatory mechanisms offer a more comprehensive and causally explicated account of how perpetrators come to see violence against civilians as permissible or even desirable. They recur through the different ideologies that underpin different atrocities – defining a basic structure of justification which is ‘filled in’ by those broader ideologies. Analysing

how this occurs, and showing in detail how the justificatory mechanisms manifest in practice, is the task of the second part of this thesis, containing my case studies of Nazi atrocities, Stalinist oppression, and Allied area bombing in World War II.

4. Nazi Atrocities

So ghastly were the crimes of the Nazi regime that the temptation to dismiss its ideology as a mad mass of contradiction and fantasy can be overwhelming.¹ But such an approach will never be able to furnish real understanding of how Nazism managed to take hold of tens of millions, instead funnelling us back towards the mythical pictures of atrocities discussed in Chapter 1. With a very small number of exceptions, Nazis were not mad in any clinical sense or monstrous in some predetermined manner. Vast numbers of ordinary Germans (and a fair few admirers abroad) were either strong supporters of Nazism or formed the no less important ranks of the sympathetic and the indifferent.² So abhorrence at Nazism is no excuse for visualising it only as a pantomime pastiche of self-conscious evil. In the words of one of the foremost recent historians of the Third Reich, “the *mélange* [of Nazi ideology] should certainly be taken seriously, however repellent we may regard it.”³ Millions were influenced by Nazism because ordinary people necessarily think ideologically, and can find the heights of evil and falsehood appealing and plausible given the right set of wider beliefs and assumptions.⁴ For all the theories and insights which must contribute to an overall understanding of the Holocaust, amongst the most straightforward of factors was the fact that people believed, to some degree, that what they were doing was permissible and desirable.

This argument should be nuanced – attentive to complex distributions of different sorts of beliefs across the many different participants in Nazi destruction. It should not be a crude and false portrayal of all Holocaust perpetrators as Nazi fanatics, nor a reductionist explanation which rejects all other causal factors as epiphenomenal. This reflects the overall

¹ Weiss, 1997, p. 271; Bialas, 2013, p. 12; Mosse, 1981, p. 1; Scarre, 1998, pp. 423-4.

² Mosse, 1981, p. 1 & 9.

³ Burleigh, 2001, p. 252.

⁴ Goldhagen, 1997, p. 7.

approach to ideology advanced in this thesis: to stress ideology's importance to atrocity perpetration whilst evading crude and sweeping descriptions of its role. I believe that almost all perpetrators of Nazi atrocities were influenced by ideology in important ways, but through many different sorts of ideological elements held with varying degrees of conviction and consciousness. If a focus on ideology can adhere to such nuance, there is no good reason to oppose it as central to any explanation of Nazi atrocities.

Foremost amongst Nazi atrocities were the set of murderous policies that comprised the Holocaust: the systematic extermination by the Nazi government of just under six million Jews from across the European continent, most intensely between March 1942 and February 1943. Despite the widespread focus on gas chambers and death camps, around half of the Nazi's Jewish victims were killed by more 'normal' methods of atrocity, mainly shot at the hands of SS *Einsatzgruppen*, German soldiers, and reserve police battalions. But the horror of the Holocaust should not crowd out other Nazi atrocities, including their genocidal campaign against the European Roma and Sinti gypsies, the murders of homosexuals, political opponents, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the disabled, and the enormous direct or indirect slaughter of Russians and other peoples deemed racially inferior to 'Aryans'. I shall not remedy the relative scholarly neglect of these non-Jewish victims of Nazism as much as I would like,⁵ but they are within the scope of my discussion.

In all three case-study chapters, my discussion will be split into two parts. The ideological justifications for atrocities never materialise out of nowhere, and their plausibility for those they influence is impossible to appreciate without locating those justifications in a broader intellectual-historical context. For this reason, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 all begin by discussing some of the important antecedent intellectual roots of the justifications deployed in the atrocities I examine. I then proceed to spend the bulk of each

⁵ See also: Gerlach and Werth, 2009, p. 172.

chapter examining the actual atrocity-justifying ideology of the violence under examination, describing its central components relevant to the mass killing of civilians.

4.1 The Nazis' Ideological Inheritance

In light of the intense propaganda with which the Nazi regime inundated Germany for the duration of its hold on power, it is easy to assume that all the attitudes and ideas which served to justify the Holocaust were essentially the product of the Nazi party. If large numbers of Germans were influenced by them, it might be thought, this simply reflected the awesome brainwashing power the Nazis had, perhaps undergirded by the 'mass hysteria' of Nazi rallies. But this is an erroneous understanding. The exact causal balance between ideological changes under the Nazi regime and ideological currents rooted deeper in German history remains a subject of debate between historians.⁶ Those like Daniel Goldhagen, John Weiss and George L. Mosse have emphasised the very deep roots Nazism had in earlier German history and wider German culture.⁷ Such explanations can lean towards suggesting that the Nazis did not have to do much more than mobilise hatreds and conceptions already widespread amongst ordinary Germans. Critics of this view suggest that it radically underestimates the importance of Nazi policies and propaganda, and overestimates how universal and intense anti-Semitism was prior to Nazi rule.⁸ They also tend to call on 'conformity-models' from situationist social psychology, as discussed in section 3.1.3, to argue that ordinary Germans did not need the intense ideological convictions Goldhagen proffers in order to participate in mass killing.⁹ As suggested by my (partial) critique of conformity-models, I have sympathy for the focus of Goldhagen, Weiss and especially Mosse. Many ideas which would be key components of

⁶ Browning, 2001, pp. 191-223.

⁷ Weiss, 1997; Goldhagen, 1997; Mosse, 1981.

⁸ See: Browning, 2001, pp. 191-223; Kren, 1997.

⁹ Newman, 2002.

Nazism had been held by millions, including a large and influential section of the German elites, for over a century prior to Nazi rule.

At the same time, however, I share the sense of Weiss's and Goldhagen's critics that they downplay ideological changes under the Nazis (Mosse does not). It should also be obvious that the argument of this thesis, in tracing recurring justificatory patterns across cases, rejects an emphasis on some *unique* lethality to German history, and is comfortable acknowledging the role of non-German perpetrators in Nazi atrocities. Some believe that such non-German perpetrators suggest the unimportance of ideology. They do not, since they were not themselves free of (other) ideological influence. Nazism was the overwhelming ideological influence for most participants in Nazi violence, but other available ideologies or doctrines – such as Romanian Fascism or the complex of anti-Semitic myths present in eastern Europe – were also capable of making atrocities look justified. They are not my focus here, but they also appear to confirm my six justificatory mechanisms framework.¹⁰ My emphasis on the varying nature and extent of ideological uptake amongst different perpetrators is also indicative of my agreement with almost all Goldhagen's critics, including Weiss, in thinking that he vastly exaggerates the universality and strength with which Nazi ideas were held.¹¹ Goldhagen's claim that "a near universal acceptance of the central aspects of the Nazi image of the Jews characterised the German people"¹² erases from history the many millions who did not support, who dissented from, or who actively resisted both historical anti-Semitism and the Nazi regime.¹³ Again, this is not a necessary component of a focus on ideology.

This section focuses on the ideological roots of Nazism in three parts. First, I briefly examine the early development of anti-Semitism and racism in Central European Christian thought up until the end of the 18th Century. Second, I examine developments in

¹⁰ See: Burleigh, 2001, pp. 606, 610, 620-1 & 625; Mann, 2005, p. 66.

¹¹ Browning, 2001, pp. 191-223; Weiss, 1999, pp. 257-8; Burleigh, 2001, p. 73.

¹² Cited in: Weiss, 1999, pp. 257-8.

¹³ Weiss, 1997, pp. 143-55 & 362-8; Weiss, 1999, pp. 258-; Burleigh, 2001, pp. 291-2 & 308.

the 19th and early 20th Century, in particular the interrelated rise of ‘*Volksisch*’ ideology and racial science. Finally, I examine the more proximate evolution of proto-Nazi and Nazi ideology in the 20th Century, especially during the First World War and the Weimar Republic before Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933.

4.1.1 The Development of Anti-Semitism in Christian Europe

The oldest intellectual tributary feeding into Nazism was the culture of anti-Semitism embedded in European Christianity. This was an animosity of religious division (racial anti-Semitism came later) rooted in the awkward refusal of Jews to recognise Christ as the messiah and exacerbated by some of the early myths of the Christian church.¹⁴ Selective retellings of the biblical account of Christ’s crucifixion encouraged large numbers of Europeans – heavily dependent on priests and Church sermons for epistemic and moral guidance – to adopt a conception of Jews as murderers of Christ and broader embodiments of evil.¹⁵ The fourth century church father Saint John of Chrysostom, still remembered today for his bold proclamations against abuses of Church authority, declared of the Jews: “God hates them, and so also should all good Christians.”¹⁶ His contemporary, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, presaged later Nazi dehumanisation and guilt-attribution in labelling Jews “companions of the devil, a race of vipers, informers, calumniators...demons, accursed, detested” and “murderers of the Lord, assassins of the prophets, rebels and detesters of God”.¹⁷ Peter the Venerable of Cluny, generally recognised as a pioneer in reappraising Church understandings of Islam, echoed St. Gregory’s dehumanisation of Jews, albeit less virulently: “Really I doubt whether a Jew can be human for he will neither yield to human reasoning, nor find satisfaction in authoritative utterances, alike divine and

¹⁴ Goldhagen, 1997, pp. 49-51.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50; Weiss, 1997, p. 4.

¹⁶ Weiss, 1997, p. 8. See also: Goldhagen, 1997, p. 50.

¹⁷ Weiss, 1997, p. 8.

Jewish.”¹⁸ The crusades were accompanied, in both Palestine and Europe, by massacres of Jews, and later epochal disasters, notably the Black Death, provoked religious tirades declaring the Jews to blame, prompting pogroms and frequent expulsions.¹⁹ Such notions were kept alive in cultural festivals and folklore for centuries after, and such rituals were often subsequently praised and appropriated by the Nazis.²⁰

These loose assemblages of anti-Semitic ideas, by no means universally held, were elaborated and intensified by a succession of Christian intellectuals from the 16th Century onwards. Buoyed by the intense currents underpinning the Reformation and by access to new print technologies that allowed his thought to reach a larger proportion of Europe’s literate classes, Martin Luther took a decisive step in entrenching anti-Semitism within the new Protestant wing of Christianity that would become dominant in much of Germany. Luther’s writings and speeches castigated Jews as “spawn of the devil”, “poisonous, bitter, and desperate”, and a “plague and a pestilence.”²¹ And importantly, unlike most Christian anti-Semites before him, Luther rejected the possibility of Jewish redemption via conversion to Christianity, conceiving of Jews as *intrinsically* evil, not just religiously blasphemous.²² This conception was developed, and taken up by others. As Weiss writes:

“Luther’s anti-Semitism was no personal idiosyncrasy. A flood of widely circulated pamphlets and posters accompanied the spread of Protestantism in Germany and elaborated upon his vile attacks. ‘Studies’ described the obscene practices of the Jews in synagogues and ritual baths, their unholy lust to drink Christian blood, their ability to transform themselves into demons and serpents, their

¹⁸ Goldhagen, 1997, p. 53.

¹⁹ Ibid.; Chirof and McCauley, 2006, p. 40. See also: Overy, 2010, pp. 116-17.

²⁰ Weiss, 1997, p. 3.

²¹ Ibid., 23-4.

²² Ibid., 23.

secret crimes and vices and their bizarre sexual and toilet practices. Significantly, the evil and demonic qualities of the Jews were often not attributed to their failure to adopt Christianity; they were presented as inherent and ineradicable qualities of Jewish blood.’²³

This shift towards Jewishness as immutable evil would eventually be cashed out in concepts provided by the rise of ‘racial science’ (see 4.1.2) in the 19th Century, but the idea was rooted in these early-Protestant developments.

This brief discussion does not do justice to the complexity of these developments, however. Parallel strains of anti-Semitism persisted in Catholic thought, and many branches of Protestantism, such as Calvinism, were far less concerned with Jews than Luther.²⁴ Moreover, anti-Semitic ideas had varying degrees of success in different states in Europe, in something of an inverse correlation with commercial development. In the Netherlands, Northern Italy and Scandinavia, rising prosperity from the 16th Century onwards rooted in new modes of commercial speculation and trade broadened cultural horizons and undermined the appeal of invectives against ‘Jewish money-lending’.²⁵ Even in Austria-Hungary and the German states, numerous cities welcomed and protected Jewish communities when they perceived them as valuable to financial and more labour-intensive markets. Perhaps most importantly, rising commercial growth encouraged the expansion of an urbanised middle class with access to new and multiple sources of information and education, and attracted to emerging liberal ideas – a partial block on virulent anti-Semitism in the 19th and 20th centuries. One can overstate this story – these societies were not gripped by a gushing cosmopolitan-multicultural-globalisation-liberalism of familiar late 20th and early 21st Century fashion, and significant hotbeds of anti-Semitism and

²³ Ibid., 24.

²⁴ Ibid., 24-7.

²⁵ Ibid., 46-8 & 68.

authoritarianism remained strong. But influential communities of relative tolerance came to exercise an ever increasing hold over political and social change. In the rest of Germany and Austria-Hungary, and in France and Eastern Europe, such forces were weaker, and society was still largely comprised of conservative aristocracies and relatively uneducated peasantry – the latter still deeply dependent on Church sermons for socialisation into wider information and norms. Such contexts provided a more amenable environment for anti-Semitic ideas to incubate. But such processes were still unpredictable, and in France, for example, the ideological transformation of the French Revolution saw a rapid rise in liberal attitudes, culminating in the liberation of the Sephardic Jews in January 1790.²⁶ By the end of the 18th Century, anti-Semitism was commonplace, to greater or lesser extents, in much of Europe, but generally as a broad background of intolerance involving a melange of nationalist, racist, religious and classist prejudices.

4.1.2 *Volkisch* Ideology and Racial Science

The real link between this older tradition of anti-Semitism and Nazism therefore lies in 19th Century developments and two interrelated processes in particular: the emergence of *Volkisch* ideology in central European culture and mass politics, and the rise of ‘racial science’ amongst the German-speaking intellectual elite.

The Rise of Volkisch Ideology

As Mosse emphasises, tremendous social change was a critical feature of the central European experience in the 19th Century:

²⁶ Ibid., 54-5.

“Stimulated or shocked – depending upon one’s partisanship – by the recurring revolutions in France, surrounded by an encroaching industrial society, men and women looked for a deeper meaning in life than the transitory reality of their present condition. The rapid process of European industrialization was indeed bewildering to them, accompanied as it was by the dislocation of the population, by the sudden obsolescence of traditional tools, crafts and institutions, and by social maladjustment and political upheaval.”²⁷

There were many material losers in these developments, and many others dismayed by the changes new times were bringing. Such concerns, resentments and anxieties fed the development of new ideas often collectively referred to as Volkisch ideology. Emerging out of Romanticism and early German idealist philosophy, Volkisch ideology involved a complex synthesis of religiosity, mysticism, avowed irrationalism and conservative ruralism. As Mosse explains:

“‘Volk’ is a much more comprehensive term than ‘people’... [it] signified the union of a group of people with a transcendental ‘essence’. This ‘essence’ might be called ‘nature’ or ‘cosmos’ or ‘mythos,’ but in each instance it was fused to man’s innermost nature, and represented the source of his creativity, his depth of feeling, his individuality, and his unity with other members of the Volk.”²⁸

²⁷ Mosse, 1981, p. 13.

²⁸ Ibid., 4.

Volkisch theorists abhorred the transformations of modern industrialisation, and offered solace from them by asserting the importance of individual rootedness in a heroic national community, whose soulful essence was defined by its unique historical development in a particular natural landscape.²⁹ This was an ideology high on emotion and nostalgia, pregnant with admiration for ancient Germanic tribes, and integrally bound with extreme communitarianism, mystical notions of nature, and a profound scepticism of rationality and modernity.³⁰

Volkisch ideas did not have to become exclusivist and intolerant: “it was possible to think in Volkisch categories, and yet grant each people its own contribution to humanity, to accept the Volk, not as something that is eternally given, but as a step toward the unification of mankind.”³¹ But this was not the direction taken by most adherents to such ideas.³² Instead, two clusters of ideas crucial for later Nazism became inextricably entangled with Volkisch ideology. The first was a general hostility towards those deemed ‘outside’ the national community – whose restlessness and lack of roots in the rural authentic landscape and history of the Volk precluded them ever becoming members.³³ On all points, Volkisch ideology encouraged anti-Semitism: the Jews were seen as the ultimate ‘rootless’ peoples, alien to the Volk’s true soul, controllers of the degenerating cities, and profiteers and orchestrators of alienating economic growth.³⁴ Some Volkisch thinkers went as far as calling for the extermination of the Jews as “pest and cholera”.³⁵ But they also encouraged a wider racism – against Slavs, Poles, and all outside influences likely to corrupt the authentic spiritual essence of the Volk.

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰ Ibid., 15.

³¹ Ibid., viii.

³² For partial exceptions, see: *ibid.*, 46-8 & 52-63.

³³ Ibid., 16-24.

³⁴ Ibid., 22-3 & 36-9. See also: Pulzer, 1988.

³⁵ Mosse, 1981, pp. 38-9 & 44.

Second, Volkisch ideology came to valorise a virtuetalk orientated around martialism, physicality, and an anti-rationalist faith in intuition and inner emotions.³⁶ Indeed, as the 19th Century advanced, Volkisch writers increasingly shifted from more placid ideals towards what Mosse calls “a virtue of ferociousness”.³⁷ Idealisation of Germany’s origin in the ancient tribes that had defeated the Roman Empire supported a general glorification of the barbaric free spirit and a dichotomous preference for ancient and heroic ‘culture’ over modern and bourgeois ‘civilisation’.³⁸ Added into the mix was an adoration of Nietzsche (selectively interpreted), taken to add philosophical clout to a guttural admiration of strength, force and violent struggle.³⁹ Volkisch ideology thus became centrally orientated around a set of belligerent virtues.

Such ideas were not confined to a barmy fringe of German society. On the contrary, powerful engines of cultural production churned out novels, intellectual studies, artwork and theatrical performances communicating Volkisch ideas to a mass public. Works like *On the Endangerment of the Prosperity and Character of the Germans by the Jews* by Jakob Friedrich Fries in the early 19th Century offered a secularised and focused threat-construction of the Jew which informed Volkisch anti-Semitism.⁴⁰ Novels like Gustav Freytag’s *Debit and Credit* (1855) – the most popular work of German fiction in the 19th Century – Wilhelm Raabe’s *Der Hungerpastor* (1864) and Felix Dahn’s *Fight for Rome* (1867) all contributed to the evolving conception of the virtuous Volkisch Aryan, and advanced more or less overt anti-Semitism.⁴¹ So too did the occult runic mythologies of Guido von List, the novels and open-air plays of Ernst Wachler, and the early 20th Century writings and lectures of Ellegard Ellerbeck.⁴² And Ernst Moritz Arndt, an early 19th Century

³⁶ Ibid., 14, 25, 45.

³⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁸ Ibid., 6-7.

³⁹ Ibid., 64-6.

⁴⁰ Goldhagen, 1997, p. 54.

⁴¹ Mosse, 1981, pp. 69-70; Weiss, 1999, pp. 85-7.

⁴² Mosse, 1981, pp. 73-5 & 80-3.

Professor at the University of Bonn, and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, a high school teacher famous for his heroism fighting Napoleon's armies, played a central role in moulding Volkisch idolisation of ancient barbarians, war, and physicality, with Jahn forming a practical cult of gymnastic machoism.⁴³ Esteemed intellectuals such as Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, Paul de Lagarde, and Georg Fichte formulated key Volkisch ideas, and Eugen Dühring's *The Jewish Question* (1880) offered a combination of Jew-hatred with adulation of the Nordic gods as still-present forces in Germany.⁴⁴ Heinrich von Treitschke, a leading historian at the University of Berlin, played an even more influential role in fomenting a brand of virulent anti-Semitic Volkisch ideology amongst both students and respectable middle class society in the late 19th Century.⁴⁵

With the rise of parliamentary politics and new forms of mass agitation in German Europe in the mid to late 19th Century, a range of activists also recognised the opportunity to deploy anti-Semitic vitriol, and broader Volkisch ideology, as a means of popular mobilisation.⁴⁶ Figures such as Albert Wiesinger, Karl von Vogelsang and Georg Ritter von Schoenerer in Austria, and Otto Glagau, Adolf Stoecker and Bernhard Foerster in Germany utilised newspapers, magazines, and a range of political organisations to draw on and propagate anti-Semitic animosity.⁴⁷ Economic crises were blamed on Jews and the increasingly central symbol of "Jewish financiers" who, largely unseen, profited off the misery of ordinary folk.⁴⁸ Glagau's articles in the popular bourgeois magazine the *Gardenhouse* explained to readers how Jews "already dominate us...an alien tribe rules a truly great nation. All of World History has no comparable example of a homeless people – a physically and psychically degenerate race – commanding the globe by means of mere

⁴³ Weiss, 1997, pp. 74-5.

⁴⁴ Mosse, 1981, p. 71; Weiss, 1997, pp. 66-73.

⁴⁵ Weiss, 1997, p. 87.

⁴⁶ Goldhagen, 1997, p. 56.

⁴⁷ Weiss, 1997, pp. 84-95 & 160-164.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

cunning and slyness, usury and shoddy dealings.”⁴⁹ Vogelsang likewise warned that “the Christian social order is being dissolved by Jewry. Workers and craftsmen drift into the factories, landed property into the hands, houses into the possession, and the wealth of the people into the pockets of the Jews.”⁵⁰

Such agitators were crucial in bringing traditional anti-Semitism into emerging modern politics and integrating it with other elements of Volkisch nationalism: the Jews moved from being vague embodied devils in medieval superstition, to active threats to social order and prosperity. Political concepts and symbols that would become ubiquitous elements of later anti-Semitism were popularised: the Jews as parasites, as dirty and asocial, as sexually depraved, and as responsible for all social ills. Perhaps most importantly, a right wing habit of soldering Jewishness to all significant political opponents was emerging, most clearly in Constantin Frantz’ 1874 text *National Liberalism and the Rule of the Jews*.⁵¹ The right was not simply fighting ‘Liberalism’ or ‘Socialism’ but “Judeo-Liberalism” and “Judeo-Socialism.” To many conservatives and reactionaries, agitated by industrialisation, economic upheaval, and cultural change, “the Jew was seen as the enemy. He stood for modernity in all its destructiveness.”⁵²

These ideas had an uneven record of success. They were of overriding importance only for a minority, and when mass publics were able to exercise voting power in the late 19th Century, they frequently supported Social Democrats and Liberal Progressives in greater numbers than Conservatives and prominent anti-Semites. But those who were moved by anti-Semitism were still sizeable in number and passionate in their activism – they were a significant part of the political terrain, not an irrelevant fringe. At points, they propelled figures like Stoecker into elected office, and in 1897 helped Karl Lueger, head Austria’s Christian Social party, become Mayor of Vienna – one of the most powerful

⁴⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 163.

⁵¹ Ibid., 85.

⁵² Mosse, 1981, p. 7.

offices in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁵³ Even the mainstream German Conservative Party (the DNVP) adopted anti-Semitism formally into its political programme at the Tivoli conference of 1892.⁵⁴ But perhaps most importantly, anti-Semitic ideas became embedded in, and drove the expansion of, dozens of institutions and social movements across Central Europe, such as the Pan-German League, Agrarian Bund, the Anti-Semitic League, and the Society for the Protection of Artisans. They were but a part of a more widespread penetration of anti-Semitic and Volkisch ideas into the key institutional structures of civil society, with particular success on university campuses, student bodies, church organisations, trades unions and guilds.⁵⁵

Racial Science

Before the second half of the 19th Century, race was a largely inchoate concept – prominent in European colonialism but with limited ideational substance and minimal relevance to the home continent.⁵⁶ But its intellectual fortunes took a fundamental turn with the emergence of efforts to ground conceptions of race in developments in biology, anthropology and other life sciences. From its earliest origins, this ‘racial science’ was attached to conceptions of hierarchy – one of its forefathers, the eighteenth century Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus, described Europeans as “ingenious”, Asians as “melancholy” and Africans as “crafty, lazy, careless”.⁵⁷ But it was developments in the mid-19th Century that led to an explosion in the development of such thought. Carolus’ triadic hierarchy was replicated in Arthur de Gobineau’s asserted distinction between black, yellow and white races in his

⁵³ Weiss, 1997, pp. 164-72 & 178-81.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 115-16.

⁵⁵ Goldhagen, 1997, p. 60.

⁵⁶ Weitz, 2003, pp. 22-6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

Inequality of the Human Races (1855).⁵⁸ It took the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859 to really transform this field of interest, and de Gobineau's work did not receive the bulk of its attention until the end of the century.⁵⁹ But it was then significant in translating ideas that seemed legitimated by Darwin's (race-neutral) research into an intellectual form of racism. More forcefully than those who had come before him, de Gobineau issued dire warnings of racial mixing and degeneration, through which noble peoples would be reduced to "human herds...benumbed in their nullity."⁶⁰ His racism was given greater specificity and intensity in Houston Stewart Chamberlain's hugely successful *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, with its gushing adulation of German superiority and hyperbolic assertions of an existential threat posed by the biologically and metaphysically impoverished Jews.⁶¹ In Chamberlain's work, German-Jewish antagonisms were transformed into an apocalyptic millenarian struggle between Jew and Aryan, conceived of as *the* central theme of world history.⁶² It would directly influence Nazism – Chamberlain's theories were eagerly absorbed by members of the Bayreuth Circle, a coterie of artists, intellectuals and socialites devoted to the work of Rudolf Wagner that including Dietrich Eckart, a leading intellectual mentor of Hitler during his early days in the German Workers' (later Nazi) party in the 1920s.⁶³

To many in Germany, such ideas appeared to be the cutting edge of historical, biological and anthropological erudition: racial scientists and members of the Bayreuth Circle were leading public intellectuals, and therefore epistemic authorities, who "progressively cloaked racial theories in a scholarly and academically respectable mantle."⁶⁴ Advocates of the new discipline of eugenics, like Alfred Ploetz and Eugen Fisher, devoted

⁵⁸ de Gobineau, 1999.

⁵⁹ Mosse, 1981, pp. 90-1.

⁶⁰ Weitz, 2003, p. 35.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 37-8; Mosse, 1981, pp. 93-98.

⁶² Friedländer, 2003, pp. 18-19.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁴ Mosse, 1981, p. 94.

their research to analysing the genetic and hereditary sources of all manner of social problems. In prescribing methods of improving German “racial stock”, such theorists wrote and lectured widely on the need to halt “racial mixing”.⁶⁵ Eugenicists proposed sterilisation, restriction of births amongst criminals and inferior races, physical separation, and anti-miscegenation laws some time before the Nazis came to power. Even eugenic killing preceded, in concept, the Nazi regime – with Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, a distinguished academic lawyer and psychiatrist respectively, publishing *Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life* in 1920 (though the killing of ‘unworthy lives’ was still intended to be voluntary, albeit encouraged).⁶⁶

Hannah Arendt, François Haas, Benjamin Madley and Isabel Hull all emphasise the additional roots of Nazi atrocities in 19th and 20th Century colonialist ideologies and practices, and such ideologies’ conceptions of the inferiority of colonial natives were crucial foundations for much racial science.⁶⁷ In particular, the dehumanising and deagentifying notion that hierarchies of races were locked in an inevitably destructive struggle for existence was notably deployed during violence in the German colonies.⁶⁸ Thus, one German captain justified massacres of the Herero and Nama peoples in German South West Africa between 1904 and 1907 on the grounds that: “Our Lord has made the law of nature such that only the strong of the world have a right to continuity, while the weak and purposeless will perish in favour of the strong”.⁶⁹ Such views would be reiterated almost verbatim in Nazi atrocities. These important links between colonialism and racial science also generated other key notions for Nazism, notably, as Madley points out, that of *lebensraum* (living space).⁷⁰ Nazi uses of this concept were rooted in the theories of Friedrich

⁶⁵ Weitz, 2003, p. 41; Haas, 2008, pp. 333-4. See also: Madley, 2005, pp. 438-9.

⁶⁶ Burleigh, 2001, p. 350; Noakes and Pridham, 1988.

⁶⁷ Haas, 2008, pp. 334-5; Madley, 2005; Arendt, 1976; Hull, 2003. See also: Churchill, 1992; Bartov, 2003b, p. 84; Mann, 2005, p. 85.

⁶⁸ Mann, 2005, pp. 101-5. See also: Cass, 1830.

⁶⁹ Madley, 2005, p. 436.

⁷⁰ Madley also highlights the colonial roots of Nazi notions like *Rassenkampf* (race war) and *Vernichtungskrieg* (war of extermination). Ibid., 441-3.

Ratzel, a late 19th and early 20th Century geographer who built on Social Darwinistic assumptions to argue that:

“the difference between...those populations that fail and those that advance lies in spreading themselves... [T]he areas of the failed groups lie torn apart, lawless and poor. Advancing populations, in contrast, find the best places [through] colonization.”⁷¹

Ratzel's theories of lebensraum were crucial to later Nazi deagentification (since the murderous drive for territory was proclaimed unavoidable) and future-bias (since it would ensure future agricultural utopias).⁷² They would directly influence Rudolf Hess and through him Hitler, and provided, in tandem with broader Wilhelmine colonial practices, a model for Nazi policies against Poles and Slavs in Eastern Europe.⁷³

But a crucial if predictable development in German racial science was the admixture of anti-Semitism into conceptions of racial hierarchy. Those influenced by the earlier currents of anti-Semitism welcomed the opportunity created by the emergence of evolutionary biology and racial science to supplant classic religious Judeophobia with alluringly modern blood-trait theories of the Jewish danger.⁷⁴ Wilhelm Marr – originator of the term anti-Semitism – published his influential *The Victory of the Jews Over the Germans* in 1879.⁷⁵ Through Marr and those of a similar mind, a growing audience in the 1870s and 1880s were exposed to the idea that, as one pamphleteer wrote: “Even the most honourable Jew is under the inescapable influence of his blood, carrier of a Semitic

⁷¹ Ibid., 433.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 433-5. See also: *ibid.*:337-8; Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, pp. 183-4.

⁷⁴ Weitz, 2003, pp. 46-8.

⁷⁵ Weiss, 1997, pp. 97-8.

morality totally opposed to Germanic values...aimed at the destruction and burial of German values and traditions.”⁷⁶ Theodore Fritsch was another key figure – influenced by Ploetz’ eugenics and later eulogised by Hitler, his *The Handbook of Anti-Semitism* (1896), and prominent roles in the Deutschbund and German Anti-Semitic League, helped mobilise Germans against “Jewish and Slavic blood.”⁷⁷ And the Bavarian government also extended such biological language to the persecution of Gypsies, compiling a set of guidelines for battling the “Gypsy Plague”.⁷⁸ So Nazi racial science “did not arise *de novo* with the Nazis but had evolved over the previous 80 years from the related notions of eugenics and Social Darwinism.”⁷⁹ It was not for nothing that the Nazi Gauleiter Hans Schemm declared in 1934 that “National Socialism is nothing but applied biology.”⁸⁰

The development of Volkisch ideology and racial science emphasises that key Nazi, anti-Semitic and other racist ideas were not, in the early 20th Century, simply the province of stupid bigots.⁸¹ Across the biological and medical sciences, into literature, philosophy, history and economics, and down into the ordinary intellectual culture of educated classes in Germany and Austria, racist notions were advanced as scientific truth, as a mark of intellectual sophistication, and as an indicator of a mature understanding of historical and social forces. Those who propelled these intellectual currents were not peripheral cranks, but leading academics, professionals, and political actors, occupying some of the most senior posts in universities, hospitals, courts, theatres, museums, social movements and government agencies.⁸² Their sincere convictions are testament to the power of ideology. These intellectuals expressed tremendous moral recklessness, political bias, lack of critical reflection, methodological distortion, and epistemic arrogance, but they were neither mad

⁷⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁷⁸ Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 368.

⁷⁹ Haas, 2008, p. 336.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 332.

⁸¹ Weiss, 1997, pp. 141-2.

⁸² Burleigh, 2001, p. 346 & 352; Haas, 2008, p. 334 fn. 6 & 336 fn. 7; Weitz, 2003, pp. 38-41; Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 186 & 188.

nor stupid. They exercised their often considerable intellects within deeply embedded systems of ideas that made false, ill-founded, inhumane and dangerous beliefs seem reasonable, well-substantiated, progressive and authoritative. As leading epistemic authorities, they provided grounds for each other, and wider German society, to adopt and entrench those beliefs.

4.1.3 The Mobilisation of the Far Right in World War I and the Weimar Republic

Ultimately, it was the combination of this 19th and early 20th Century legacy with developments during and after World War I which defined the immediate ideological environment in which Nazism emerged. For anyone of right-wing sympathies (plus a fair few on the left), German defeat in World War I appeared horrifying and inexplicable. The complex breakdown of the German war machine was not a visible reality for most German citizens. The failure of the Ludendorff Offensive in the spring of 1918, the economic crisis caused by the British naval blockade, and the increasing numbers of American troops on the Western front made a German victory impossible, but no Allied soldiers had set foot on German territory. To large segments of the German population, the surrender and burning humiliation of defeat appeared out of nowhere, the certain victory of Germany's military prowess denied and snatched away by a mysterious unseen coup somewhere in the government machine. And as a consequence, the formidable German Reich had been replaced by the Weimar Republic (which governed Germany from 1919 to January 1933) – a regime antithetical to every impulse of Volkisch ideology. Weimar was an unstable liberal republic (whose constitution was drafted under the leadership of the Jewish constitutional lawyer Hugo Preuss),⁸³ which brought, in right-wing eyes, a licentious degeneration of

⁸³ Weiss, 1997, p. 218.

morals and a collapse of German unity and national glory.⁸⁴ From this unhappy conglomeration of circumstances arose the *Dolchstoßlegende*, the “stab in the back” myth: that leftists, liberals and, above all, Jews had orchestrated the armistice despite the fact that Germany had been about to win the war. This guilt-attributing myth touched an astonishingly sensitive nerve in the right wing worldview, and was a central ideological element fuelling the febrile atmosphere of post-war German politics.

But right-wing ideas were not simply combined with the *Dolchstoßlegende* and otherwise reiterated under Weimar as they had been in pre-war Germany. The Great War had itself effected considerable cultural change, most notably in its impacts on attitudes towards death and violence. Whilst the enormous destruction of the war had encouraged further anti-militarism amongst liberals and social democrats, for large sections of society it had brutalised morals and encouraged dismissive or even glorifying attitudes towards violence and death.⁸⁵ As Eric Weitz writes, “World War I...created an aesthetics of violence that reverberated through the postwar period”, reflected in politics, social attitudes and popular literature.⁸⁶ One of the most important elements of this change has been highlighted by Omer Bartov – the emergence of a mythologised conception of the *kampfgemeinschaft* (battle community).

This conception was, as Bartov describes it, a “complex subculture” authored by German troops themselves, offering a way of tolerating the near-unbearableness of front-line experience:⁸⁷

“Exemplified in frontline journals for their own consumption, a vocabulary only they could understand, and a new kind of sarcasm and black humour, this was a state of mind that combined a good

⁸⁴ See: Burleigh, 2001, pp. 29-30.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 349; Madley, 2005, pp. 436-7, 443-5 & 458.

⁸⁶ Weitz, 2003, pp. 51-2. See also: Bartov, 2003a, pp. 124-5.

⁸⁷ Bartov, 2003a, pp. 119-20.

measure of self-pity with immense pride in their ability to endure inhuman conditions for the sake of a nation seemingly ignorant of and indifferent to their terrible sacrifice.”⁸⁸

The *kampfsgemeinschaft* depicted a community of soldiers and veterans, “united through sacrifice and devotion to a common cause, the comradeship of warriors, and the quest to extend its new found values to postwar civilian society.”⁸⁹ Most importantly, conceptions of *kampfsgemeinschaft* shifted over time – from a relatively confined veterans’ community it expanded to include those “who shared the front experience only vicariously by sheer force of conviction and imagination, racial qualities and ideological conformity” whilst contracting to exclude the wrong sorts of veteran – particularly Jews.⁹⁰ The postwar conceptualization of the *kampfsgemeinschaft* therefore became the core of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the national or racial community demanded by Nazism. A powerful public conception of the ideal German society thereby emerged, one which involved an intense glorification of violence, and racially exclusive rules of membership.⁹¹

Another key development was an extension of earlier right-wing habits. The Russian Revolution and rise of the political left were intensely alarming for the right, and just as Jews had been conceptually stapled to whatever enemies the right identified as being contemporarily relevant in the 19th Century, now leading authorities, activists and institutions sought to mobilise a public struggle against “Judeo-Bolshevism”.⁹² This mythical entity was a central feature of German and Austrian political battles in the post-war period (and, indeed, had many adherents in Britain and America).⁹³ Reinforced by the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 119.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 123. See also: Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 185.

⁹⁰ Bartov, 2003a, p. 124.

⁹¹ Bartov, 1998, p. 775 & 777; Burleigh, 2001, p. 50; Weiss, 1997, pp. 259-261; Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009, pp. 236 & 239-40.

⁹² Weiss, 1997, pp. 211-1.

⁹³ Ibid., 214; Burleigh, 2001, p. 37.

supposedly ‘expert’ testimony of German émigrés from Russia (including the leading Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg),⁹⁴ the linguistic synthesis of Jews and Communism in the phrase “Judeo-Bolshevik” was saturated into public discourse.

These core components of radicalising right-wing ideology were circulated most aggressively through the post-war proliferation of social movements and paramilitary organisations, some new and some of earlier origins. In the early years of the Weimar Republic, the combination of massive military demobilisation, resentment at defeat, the difficulty of soldiers reintegrating themselves into civilian life, and the urgent contest to define the contours of a new national identity and political system fuelled such movements’ expansion.⁹⁵ Much attention has been lavished on the paramilitary Freikorps, with its 300,000 irregular soldiers.⁹⁶ But other organisations included the Stahlhelm, a one million strong veterans’ movement, the German Racist League for Defence and Attack, with over 250,000 members, the Young German Order, the Pan-German League, the Escherich Organisation (or ‘Orgesch’), the Reichslandbund, the Thule Society, and many more.⁹⁷

These organisations, which provided large numbers of later Nazi party members and supporters,⁹⁸ were virulently anti-Semitic and characterised by a strong ethos of violence. They provided social networks in which a sense of belonging – longed for in the post-war anomie – was provided not just to actual veterans, but to new youngsters who had just missed out on ‘glorious’ service in the war.⁹⁹ But this sense of belonging involved integration into organisational ideologies through millions of interpersonal exchanges in which glorifications of war and a variety of Jew-hating rumours, anecdotes, jokes, and demands were disseminated.¹⁰⁰ The accumulation of such exchanges generated a

⁹⁴ Burleigh, 2001, p. 38.

⁹⁵ Bartov, 2003a, p. 122.

⁹⁶ Weiss, 1997, p. 224; Browning, 2001, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁷ Weiss, 1997, pp. 223-4, 232 & 234; Burleigh, 2001, pp. 52-3 & 65.

⁹⁸ Weiss, 1997, p. 225.

⁹⁹ Bartov, 2003a, p. 123; Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 185 & 187.

¹⁰⁰ Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, pp. 184-6.

hegemonic ‘common sense’ amongst their participants: Jews seemed clearly guilty, threatening and subhuman, and a violent struggle needed in order to defeat their machinations. As the official program of the Stahlhelm declared in 1919: “The Stahlhelm fights for the renewal of the Germanic Volk and therefore of the Germanic race; it fights... so that foreign racial influences will be eliminated from the nation.”¹⁰¹ It hardly needed emphasising who those foreign racial influences were in “this republic of Jewish traitors”.¹⁰² Such views were elaborated more extensively by Rudolph Kanzler, second in command of the paramilitary Orgesch. He explained how:

“Paid Jewish villains stabbed the army in the back... Jewish charlatans made the revolution; they promised us bread, work, and order; none of the promises have been kept... We must unite on a racial basis and eliminate the international Jewish rabble which is sucking the last drop from our veins. The Bolsheviks are advancing against us from all sides so as to unite with the misled brethren of our own race, who are paid by Jewish money...”¹⁰³

Incubators of anti-Semitism, these far right movements were also foundries for the machoistic and martial virtue-system which would become a central component of Nazi ideology. As Ernst von Salomon, a leading Freikorps member, wrote: “The task required [of the warrior is]... that all ballast, all sentimentalism, all other values must be ruthlessly cast aside so that his whole strength could be set free.”¹⁰⁴

But the right-wing ideological core developed in the 19th Century also received articulation from more ‘moderate’ sources. Leading members of the Austrian Christian

¹⁰¹ Weiss, 1997, p. 223.

¹⁰² Ibid., 224.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 232. See also: *ibid.*, 223-4.

¹⁰⁴ Burleigh, 2001, pp. 36-7.

Social party endorsed the *Dolchstoßlegende*: “The debilitating disintegration of the German people by Jewish poison is solely responsible for the Allied victory in the war.”¹⁰⁵ Church authorities likewise continued to preach anti-Semitism. For Easter 1928, the leading Evangelical Bishop in Germany, Otto Dibelius, wrote to his pastors: “I have always regarded myself as an anti-Semite. The fact cannot be concealed that the Jews have played a leading part in all the symptoms of disintegration in modern civilisation”.¹⁰⁶ And in 1932 the Bishop of Linz wrote a pastoral letter declaring that:

“It is not only the undisputed right, but the strict and conscientious duty of every devout Christian to fight the harmful influence of Judaism, and it is much to be desired that the dangers and damages arising from the Jewish spirit should be ever more strongly combated by the Aryan and Christian side.”¹⁰⁷

And, as in the pre-war period, novelists and intellectuals lent their weight to radical opinion – whether in the form of Arthur Dinter’s *The Sin Against Blood* (1921) a best-seller depicting Jewish violation of an innocent Aryan woman, Hans Grimm’s *Volk Without Space* (1926) with its demands for German living space, Martin Heidegger’s celebration of paramilitary movements and unquestioning devotion to a national leader, or economist Werner Sombart’s call for a racially pure national economy purged of the damaging influence of Jewish finance capitalism.¹⁰⁸ All such ideas fed into the rise of the ideology and movement of Nazism.

4.2 Nazi Ideology and Mass Violence

¹⁰⁵ Weiss, 1997, p. 220.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 295.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 330.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 250-4; Madley, 2005, p. 434.

4.2.1 Natural Laws and Racial Science

Drawing on the racial science discussed in section 4.1.2, much of Nazi ideology rested on the confident belief that an unavoidable and all-encompassing Darwinian struggle between different, necessarily opposed, races conditioned all human action and social change. A hint of the earlier Volkisch awe of nature and its unbridled power was relevant here – and faith in these principles went beyond science.¹⁰⁹ Hitler explained the Anschluss (union) with Austria as a product of God’s intention, concluding: “There is a divine will, and we are its instruments.”¹¹⁰ But Nazi ideology was powerful above all because of the integration of divinity with science.¹¹¹ As Martin Bormann’s memorandum on the ‘Relationship of National Socialism and Christianity’ stated: “The more accurately we recognize and observe the laws of nature and life...so much the more do we conform to the will of the Almighty.”¹¹²

This Nazi doctrine regarding natural laws and racial science was important to the justification of atrocity in a number of ways – clearly it was one of several ideational conduits feeding into visions of Jews and others as *untermensch*, as I discuss under 4.2.2 below, and it was also a premise in many Nazi conceptions of virtue and of the utopian future they were working towards. But its most direct role in atrocity justification was as a tremendously seductive and powerful form of deagentification. As Weitz argues: “Hitler naturalized history by making its course an unmediated result of the laws of nature – of racial purity, racial conflict, and the struggle for existence.”¹¹³ Extermination of other races was necessary if the Aryan race was to ensure its own survival, since the laws of racial struggle reduced the field of possible alternatives to a simple dichotomy: kill or die out. No

¹⁰⁹ Burleigh, 2001, pp. 253-4.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 277.

¹¹¹ Bialas, 2013, p. 23. See also: Friedländer, 2003, p. 30; Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 186.

¹¹² Arendt, 1976, p. 346.

¹¹³ Weitz, 2003, p. 109.

one could really be held responsible – as Hitler explained to his guests at one dinner during the war: “In any case, is it we who created nature, established its laws? Things are as they are, and we can do nothing to change them.”¹¹⁴ If Aryan racial suicide was to be avoided *Vernichtungskrieg* – wars of extermination – *had* to be undertaken. As Hitler put it on another occasion: “Necessity will force us to be always at the head of progress. All life is paid for with blood.”¹¹⁵ Martin Bormann likewise wrote privately:

“What is it we Nazis want? We want to adapt our people to the laws of nature... we want to make it fit for the ineluctable struggle for existence. This struggle exists, whether we like it or not, whether we reject or accept it... Just as the individual – as every individual creature, be it animal or plant – must assert and maintain his existence, so must the nation as a whole.”¹¹⁶

As a justification of atrocity, this doctrine was first articulated regarding Nazi eugenic killings of the disabled. Informed by the ideological claims of those like Walther Darré, a Nazi agricultural expert, that “all eugenic progress can begin only by eliminating inferior...blood”¹¹⁷ as well as vague platitudes that “everything that is weak for life will ineluctably be destroyed”¹¹⁸ Nazi policy makers deemed the murder of the disabled a natural diktat. And as in earlier racial science “scientists and doctors were frequently used to lend eugenic claims an element of irrefutable authority”¹¹⁹ with leading professors like Karl Brandt, Werner Catel, Werner Heyde, Max de Crinis, Paul Nitsche and Carl Schneider pushing euthanasia ahead with the apparently firm conviction that they were advancing

¹¹⁴ Trevor-Roper, 1953, p. 134.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 261-2.

¹¹⁶ Trevor-Roper, 1954, p. 54.

¹¹⁷ Weiss, 1997, p. 272.

¹¹⁸ Burleigh, 2001, p. 361.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 360-1.

medical health and science.¹²⁰ And the public were prepared for eugenics policies with deagentifying propaganda films that, Burleigh observes, “were designed to make these policies seem like the fulfilment of the inevitable.”¹²¹

Indeed, Nazi deagentification was disseminated through the full panoply of mechanisms available to the regime. One pamphlet from the war informed SS men that “the laws of nature are subject to an unchangeable will that cannot be influenced. Hence it is necessary to recognise these laws”.¹²² SS soldiers involved in killing Russian Jews were thus able to believe that: “the more one thinks about the whole business the more one comes to the conclusion that it’s the only thing we can do to safeguard unconditionally the security of our people and our future... what we are doing is necessary.”¹²³ In an army manual of instruction, dehumanisation and the deagentifying destruction of alternatives went together:

“[The Jew] wants to live among us as a parasite who can suck us dry... Who can believe it possible to reform or convert a parasite (a louse for example)? Who can believe in a compromise with the parasite? We are left with one choice only, either to be devoured by the parasite or to exterminate it. The Jew must be exterminated wherever we meet him!”¹²⁴

Foremost amongst the deagentifying rhetoric was Hitler’s infamous ‘prophecy’ made in a speech to the Reichstag on 30 January 1939:

¹²⁰ Ibid., 385; Noakes and Pridham, 1988, pp. 1005-9.

¹²¹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 361.

¹²² Arendt, 1976, p. 346.

¹²³ Valentino, 2004, p. 47.

¹²⁴ Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 48.

“Today I want to be a prophet again: If international finance Jewry inside and outside Europe again succeeds in precipitating the nations into a world war, the result will not be the Bolshevisation of the earth, and with it the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”¹²⁵

As Burleigh elucidates, Hitler “was shaping the contours of what he might do, with the prophetic mode he adopted subtracting his personal responsibility from what might happen. What he would undoubtedly commission was being divorced from human agency. It was a prophecy; things would just happen.”¹²⁶ This was not mere rhetoric, but reflected the consistent Nazi belief that their atrocities were simply mandated by laws of nature and history.

4.2.2 *Untermensch* and Racial Threats

As in all atrocities, those who saw Nazi violence against civilians as justified did so in large part because of ideological constructions of those victims as subhuman, guilty and threatening. A collision of multiple intellectual and cultural traditions made such constructions look plausible to many Germans, but crucial to their success was the intersection of both visceral and scientific methods of justification, of the guttural and the intellectual.

This was clearest in Nazi dehumanisation of Jews. Much of this was visceral – a Nazi election leaflet of 1927-29 declared: “When we have the power of the state in our hands [we] will thoroughly annihilate this international racial parasite,”¹²⁷ whilst Nazi

¹²⁵ Burleigh, 2001, p. 341.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Weiss, 1997, p. 271.

posters consistently depicted Jews as rats and other vermin.¹²⁸ Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, widely read by enthusiastic Nazis, was inundated with the most savage forms of such imagery,¹²⁹ and during Nazi rule itself, propaganda described Jews as "the tape-worm in the human organism, [which it is] our duty to exterminate"¹³⁰, military officers called them "this murderous plague"¹³¹ and the "bacillus-carrier of the plagues",¹³² Himmler concluded late in the Holocaust that "we have exterminated a germ"¹³³, while Goebbels asserted that "the Jews have to be killed off like rats".¹³⁴ Members of the Nazi elite evidently bought into such representations of Jews enthusiastically. But the saturation of society with such discourse – bearing in mind the experimental evidence described in 3.3.1 of even the most minimal dehumanisation increasing propensities to violence – also eroded concerns about Jewish suffering, even amongst those who were not especially eager adherents of Nazi ideology.¹³⁵

Consequently, at the extremes Germans could conceive of anti-Semitic policies as akin to mundane routine, as "exactly the same as delousing...a matter of cleanliness",¹³⁶ and "in the end," one killer later reported "it was exactly like treading on a beetle on the ground".¹³⁷ Primed with dehumanisation, many soldiers saw Jews they encountered through the ideological lenses Nazism provided. One German police sergeant operating in the Ukraine wrote:

"I am grateful for having been allowed to see this bastard race
close up. If fate permits, I shall have something to tell my children.

¹²⁸ Keen, 1986, p. 61.

¹²⁹ Hitler, 2009; Weitz, 2003, p. 106; Slim, 2007, p. 126.

¹³⁰ Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 14.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹³² Doc.784, Noakes and Pridham, 1988, p. 1065.

¹³³ Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 46.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹³⁵ Browning, 2001, p. 162; Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 50.

¹³⁶ Haas, 2008, p. 336; Shaw, 2007, p. 57.

¹³⁷ Burleigh, 2001, p. 637.

Syphilitics, cripples, idiots were typical of them... They were not men but monkeys in human form.”¹³⁸

Biological metaphors also allowed the Jews to be de-individualised. One does not distinguish any meaningful differences between individual bacteria or insects, similarly, the Nazis asserted that “there are no decent Jews, just as there are no decent lice”.¹³⁹ Robert Ley, head of the Nazi Labour Front, asked “[how is it] enough to destroy one louse and let the brood live?”¹⁴⁰ and Goebbels likewise declared: “you don’t say there are decent fleas after all and decent bugs – you kill the lot!”¹⁴¹ C.C. Aronsfeld describes Hitler similarly defending Nazi policy against the Jews with the contention that “even innocent creatures such as deer and hares had to be killed off to prevent damage – ‘Why be more lenient with the raving beasts that want to bring us Bolshevism?’”¹⁴²

Consistent with my analysis of dehumanisation, such conceptions of Jews were also encouraged by their material degradation through Nazi policies. “As the [concentration] camps expanded,” observes Michael Mann, “conditions worsened, exaggerating the social distance between well-fed, smartly uniformed perpetrators and emaciated, filthy, shivering, lice-infested victims incapable of self-defence. They became deindividualized, dehumanized in the sight of the guards.”¹⁴³ The death camp commandant Franz Stangl noted how he “rarely saw [victims] as individuals. It was always a huge mass... they were naked, packed together, running, being driven with whips.”¹⁴⁴ After a visit to the Warsaw ghetto in 1941, Rosenberg, the Nazi Party’s senior ideologue, reported that “if there are any people left who still somehow have sympathy with the Jews then they ought to be recommended to

¹³⁸ Doc. 912, Noakes and Pridham, 1988, p. 1202.

¹³⁹ Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 28.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁴³ Mann, 2005, p. 202. See also: *ibid.*, 273-4.

¹⁴⁴ Bartov, 1998, p. 785. See also: Browning, 2001, p. 153.

have a look at such a ghetto. Seeing this race en mass... decaying, decomposing, and rotten to the core, will banish any sentimental humanitarianism.”¹⁴⁵ That what Rosenberg was seeing was the effect of Nazi policies did not occur to him, as it didn’t to the mayor of one German town who tried to get permission for citizens to visit a Russian prisoner of war camp and see “these animals in human form”.¹⁴⁶ Because dehumanisation was not, of course, limited to Jews – the ranks of *untermenschen* included Poles, Slavs and Gypsies who were likewise described as “inhuman”, “beasts”, and “Polish dogs”.¹⁴⁷ “More animals than human beings,” noted Goebbels during the war, “the filth of the Poles is unimaginable.”¹⁴⁸ And as with the Jews, a mass of disturbing war time posters and films encouraged such mental representations of Germany’s ‘enemies’.¹⁴⁹

But alongside such visceral dehumanisation, scientific conceptions of Jews fed off the racial science described in 4.1.2 to construct a more intellectual devaluation of non-Aryan life. A panoply of authorities encouraged such views: a German High Court stated, “Nationalist Socialist philosophy...takes an entirely negative view of the human worth of the Jew”,¹⁵⁰ an SS party paper told soldiers that “the Jew is a thing that only zoologists will recognise as a human being”¹⁵¹, and Walter Buch, a Supreme Party Judge, likewise announced at one Nuremberg Rally that “the Jew is not a human being”.¹⁵² More generally, doctors explicitly conceptualised their eugenicist actions as targeting “worthless life”.¹⁵³ Such frames were eventually carried over to Jews, with one camp doctor affirming that he saw no difference “between Jews and guinea pigs”.¹⁵⁴ And they bled into the wider discourse and mental representations of concentration camp officers, guards, and killers

¹⁴⁵ Doc. 787, Noakes and Pridham, 1988, p. 1069. See also: Burleigh, 2001, p. 575.

¹⁴⁶ Gellately, 2003, p. 260. See also: Newman, 2002, pp. 58-9.

¹⁴⁷ Mann, 2005, pp. 272-3; Burleigh, 2001, p. 512; Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 190.

¹⁴⁸ Mann, 2005, p. 208.

¹⁴⁹ Keen, 1986, pp. 44-5 & 115.

¹⁵⁰ Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 40.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., 32.

¹⁵³ Doc. 732, Noakes and Pridham, 1988, pp. 1013-14.

¹⁵⁴ Mann, 2005, p. 235.

until they, in Rudolf Hoess' words, "did not regard the prisoners as men".¹⁵⁵ Even those who did not endorse the substantive claims of scientists and Nazi intellectuals may have had participation in atrocities eased by the technicalised and dehumanising language developed by such people to manage killings, initially of the disabled. The mountain of official documentation generated by the 'euthanasia' programme makes constant reference to "ballast existences", "portions", "patient material" and "pats".¹⁵⁶

Clearly, Nazi notions of their victims as *untersch* moved them out of the perceived universe of obligations. Their subhumanity was a fundamental foundation of the Nazi conception of moral obligations owed solely to one's racial community – as Hans Frank, Hitler's governor of occupied Poland, put it: "We will principally have pity on the German people only and nobody else in the whole world."¹⁵⁷ But Nazi beliefs in subhumanity were also intimately bound up with the motivating Nazi threat-construction of subhumans, especially Jews, *as a racial-threat*.¹⁵⁸ I have observed that dehumanisation is typically supportive of threat-construction, but in no ideology was this link deeper than in Nazism. *Untersch* were not simply inferior, but dangerous because of their biological inferiority.¹⁵⁹ Here a seemingly rational and scientific motivation for atrocity as overcoming a threat overlapped with atavistic anxieties regarding infection and pollution, and the consequent desire for purifying and cleansing solutions. As early as 1931, one Nazi agitator enthused:

"For us the Jewish problem is merely a question of personal hygiene, the cleansing of the body politic from vermin. Because fleas and bugs bite you and suck your blood, you kill them. The

¹⁵⁵ Hoess, 1959, p. 79. See also: Burleigh, 2001, p. 202.

¹⁵⁶ Burleigh, 2001, p. 381 & 403.

¹⁵⁷ Bialas, 2013, p. 20.

¹⁵⁸ See also: Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009, pp. 256-7.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 245-6.

same you do with the Jews.”¹⁶⁰

Such dehumanising threat-constructions were pervasive. The Nazi Gauleiter Wilhelm Kube gave a speech in 1934 which asserted that the Jews presented “the same threat to humanity’s well-being as plagues, TB and syphilis”,¹⁶¹ Goebbels called the Jews “the embodiment of the demon of decay,” an “infectious phenomenon”¹⁶², and a German News Agency broadcast likewise described the “Jewish Question” as “not a question of humanity nor a question of religion but solely a question of political hygiene...killing the Jewish microbes”.¹⁶³ Rosenberg likewise applauded “the war which is being waged today [that] exterminates directly all those racially infecting germs of Jewry and its bastards”.¹⁶⁴ In a report on the Warsaw ghetto, Waldemar Schön wrote that “the German Army and population must at all costs be protected from the immune bacillus-carrier of the plagues – the Jew.”¹⁶⁵ And Hitler told Himmler in 1942:

“The discovery of the Jewish virus is one of the greatest revolutions that has taken place in the world. The battle in which we are engaged today is of the same sort as the battle waged, during the last century, by Pasteur and Koch. How many diseases have their origin in the Jewish virus!... We shall regain our health only by eliminating the Jew.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 17.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶² Ibid., 44.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Doc 6.3, Stackelberg and Winkle, 2002, p. 337.

¹⁶⁵ Doc.784, Noakes and Pridham, 2001, p. 458.

¹⁶⁶ Weitz, 2003, p. 108.

This belief in the existence of racial threats was not only encouraged by explicit ideological discourse, since a range of laws and official guidelines subtly reinforced such ideas. Bans of Jews swimming in rivers or public baths gave apparent legal authority to images of Jews as dirty and diseased subhumans,¹⁶⁷ official signs with the blunt equivalence “Jew-Louse-Typhus” adorned the fences of Nazi concentration and death camps,¹⁶⁸ whilst the Nuremberg Laws’ prohibition on Jews employing Aryan servants under the age of forty-five reinforced racist conceptions of Jews as sexual perverts.¹⁶⁹ Such non-discursive sources of atrocity-justifying ideology deserve attention in all mass atrocities. They further entrenched threat-constructions which actively motivated, as well as legitimated and rationalised, mass killing.

4.2.3 Criminals and Enemies

One did not need, however, to find visceral Nazi dehumanisation appealing, or the body of racial science convincing, to conceive of Nazi atrocities as legitimate. Such elements of Nazi ideology coexisted with more mundane, though no less important, understandings of Jews and other victims of Nazi violence as criminals and enemies. They were guilty of great crimes against Germany – whether one thought that these were the consequence of an eternal racial struggle or not. And as well as being a degenerative racial influence, they were more conventional threats, whether partisans, Bolsheviks or agents of a conspiratorial “World-Jewry” controlling America, Britain and other enemies of Germany.¹⁷⁰ As officials at a 1944 conference of German foreign policy experts declared:

“Jewry [occupy] a leading position in the countries of the enemy-

¹⁶⁷ Burleigh, 2001, pp. 288-9.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 589.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 294-5.

¹⁷⁰ Bartov, 1998, p. 785.

powers in their fight against National-Socialism and against the German people... [T]he Jews are the instigators of this war. They drove the nations into the war, because they are interested in it. The Jews are the misfortunes of all peoples – A Jewish victory would mean the end of all culture”.¹⁷¹

So biologically rooted dehumanisation and threat-construction coincided in Nazism with non-biologically rooted threat-construction and guilt-attribution to produce a synergistic whole in which Jewry was “in its very nature criminal...the annihilation of Jewry [is] not a loss to humanity but just as useful as capital punishment or protective custody against any other criminals.”¹⁷² Such ideas informed the Nazi state’s basic conception of its security, and illustrate how extensively such security conceptions can be constituted by distinctive ideologies, rather than just reliably tracking a purportedly self-evident reality.

Nazis were convinced that Jews had a role in all of the myriad injustices they perceived the German nation having suffered over recent history. This was a central argument of *Mein Kampf*, in which Hitler asserted that “the Jew wriggles his way in among the body of the nations and bores them hollow from inside.”¹⁷³ The Nazis relentlessly sought to convince the broader German population over the reality and gravity of this threat and the nature of Jewish criminality. “The Jew is responsible for our misery,” Goebbels wrote in a 1930 campaign leaflet, “and he thrives on it!”¹⁷⁴ Other electoral materials asked Germans to recognise how they had been “driven from hearth and home while international money and Jewish capital take possession of the land!”¹⁷⁵ Farmers, one of the Nazis earliest and most consistent bases of support, were warned of “the insatiable

¹⁷¹ Doc. 3319-PS, Office of the United States Chief of Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, 1946, pp. 12-14.

¹⁷² Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 47.

¹⁷³ Hitler, 2009, p. 590.

¹⁷⁴ Weiss, 1997, p. 272.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 274.

Jewish race lust and fanaticism... the driving forces behind the satanic attempt to break Germany's backbone through the annihilation of the German farming community."¹⁷⁶

In power, such representations of Jews intensified, especially in the later 1930s. On 9 November 1938, the infamous date of the campaign of anti-Semitic violence and vandalism across German cities known as *Kristallnacht*, Himmler told his senior SS leaders that Jews intended to "burn out and annihilate" Germany, and that "if we are the loser in the struggle...not even a reservation of Germans will remain, but rather everyone will be starved out and slaughtered."¹⁷⁷ The SS journal *Das Schwarze Korps* declared on 24 November 1938 that:

"The German people are not in the least inclined to tolerate in their country hundreds of thousands of criminals... We would be faced with the hard necessity of exterminating the Jewish underworld... The result would be the factual and final end of Jewry in Germany, its absolute annihilation."¹⁷⁸

And once World War II was underway, Hitler consistently – in a remarkable act of mental projection – blamed both it and World War I on the Jews. "This race of criminals," he told dinner guests, "carries the guilt of the two millions of dead of the World War and now already that of hundreds of thousands [in this war]."¹⁷⁹

Hitler's guilt-attributing and threat-constructing notions were echoed at all senior levels of the Nazi regime. Internal government documents abounded with references to

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 275.

¹⁷⁷ Burleigh, 2001, p. 336.

¹⁷⁸ Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 33.

¹⁷⁹ Friedländer, 2003, p. 24. See also: Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 51.

“the disintegrating and destructive activity of Jewry.”¹⁸⁰ Arthur Seyss-Inquart, responsible for organising Jewish killings and deportations in the Netherlands, likewise declared that:

“The Jews are the enemy of national socialism and the national socialistic Reich. From the moment of their emancipation, their methods were directed to the annihilation of the common and moral worth of the German people... The fatal meaning of Judaism became completely clear to the German people during the years of the world war. It was really they, who stuck the knife in the back of the German army which broke the resistance of the Germans... *They are the enemies with whom we can neither come to an armistice nor to peace...*”¹⁸¹

While we will never know exactly what proportion of the broader German public found such portrayals of Jews compelling, clearly many bought into them to some degree. Conditions of epistemic dependence were common – newspapers propagated official conceptions of Jews frequently, in accordance with government instructions like that of 29th April 1943: “In the discussion of every subject it must be hammered home: The Jews are to blame! The Jews wanted the war!”¹⁸² As a consequence of such propaganda, many Germans appear to have accepted such concepts at least in the abstract, allowing them to function as legitimations of discriminatory or even murderous policies. The former Nazi Melita Maschmann recalled how, in youth:

¹⁸⁰ Doc. 3319-PS, Office of the United States Chief of Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, 1946, p. 11.

¹⁸¹ Doc. 3430-PS, *ibid.*, 136.

¹⁸² Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 45.

“We still went on believing in the ‘wicked Jews.’ They never appeared before us in bodily form, but it was our daily experience that adults believed in them. After all, we could not check to see if the earth was round rather than flat – or to be more precise, it was not a proposition we thought necessary to check. The grownups ‘knew’ it and one took over this knowledge without mistrust”.¹⁸³

This is a particularly lucid summary of the phenomenon of epistemic dependence – but it need not have been limited to parent-child relationships. Adults also rarely check if the earth is round, and many took the directives and reports of German media, officials and state institutions without mistrust. Kurt Möbius, a member of German police battalions involved in massacres of Jews in the East, likewise professed sincere belief in Nazi guilt-attribution and threat-construction:

“I would like to say that it did not at all occur to me that these orders could be unjust... I know that it is also the duty of the police to protect the innocent, but I was then of the conviction that the Jews were not innocent but guilty. I believed the propaganda that all Jews were criminals and subhumans and that they were the cause of Germany’s decline... The thought that one should disobey or evade the order to participate in the extermination of the Jews did not therefore enter my mind at all.”¹⁸⁴

Rudolf Hoess, later commandant of Auschwitz, similarly described how his former superior, Commandant Eicke, “had drummed the notion of ‘dangerous enemies of the

¹⁸³ Goldhagen, 1997, p. 88.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 179.

state' so firmly and persuasively into the heads of his SS-men, and had been preaching this for so many years, that any man who knew no better believed in it. I also believed."¹⁸⁵

Not all responded this way. But even where strong convictions of substantive Nazi ideology were lacking, the conceptual apparatus Nazi discourse constructed for defining and communicating about enemies subtly encouraged atrocity-justifying perceptions of Jews. Continuing the aforementioned right-wing tendency to staple Jewishness to all opponents, the concept of the "Judeo-Bolshevik" was ubiquitous in Nazi talk and thought.¹⁸⁶ Nazi election leaflets asked: "Do you want your beloved priest to be murdered by the Jews?... Do you want to lose control over your own harvest to the Jew in the Bolshevik Party Office?"¹⁸⁷ But perhaps more important than such overtly political propaganda was the embedding of Nazi threat-constructs in military discourse and orders. The initiation of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, brought the Judeo-Bolshevik concept to the fore and made it a central recurring element of Holocaust discourse. In his order of the day to German soldiers on 2 October 1941, "Hitler made quite clear who was the 'horrendous, beast like' enemy intent on 'annihilating not only Germany, but the whole of Europe... Jews and only Jews!'"¹⁸⁸ Göring framed the war thus: "This war is not the Second World War. This is the great racial war. In the final analysis it is about whether the German and Aryan prevails here, or whether the Jew rules the world, and that is what we are fighting for out there."¹⁸⁹ Rademacher, head of the Jewish desk at the Foreign Ministry, likewise argued that "the present war has a double face: one is imperialistic – the securing of political, military and economic space necessary

¹⁸⁵ Hoess, 1959, p. 78.

¹⁸⁶ See also: Weitz, 2003, p. 105.

¹⁸⁷ Weiss, 1997, p. 277.

¹⁸⁸ Friedländer, 2003, p. 17.

¹⁸⁹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 571.

for Germany as a world power, one supra-national – liberation of the world from the chains of Jewry and Freemasonry.”¹⁹⁰

With troops epistemically dependent on superiors, the willingness of the *Wehrmacht* to authorise and propagate these Nazi definitions of enemies and frames for atrocities was critical. Field Marshal von Reichenau issued directives on 10 October 1941 stating:

“In the eastern sphere the soldier is not simply a fighter according to the rules of war, but the supporter of a ruthless racial ideology and the avenger of all the bestialities which have been inflicted on the German nation and those ethnic groups related to it. For this reason, the soldiers must show full understanding of the need for the severe but just atonement being required of the Jewish subhumans.”¹⁹¹

General Hermann Hoth’s instructions similarly stated:

“Every sign of active or passive resistance or any sort of machinations on the part of Jewish-Bolshevik agitators are to be immediately and pitilessly exterminated... These circles are the intellectual supporters of Bolshevism, the bearers of its murderous organisation, the helpmates of the partisans... Their extermination is a dictate of our own survival.”¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 591.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 522.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Again, such beliefs achieved uptake amongst direct killers. Official reports from Eastern Europe and Russia habitually invoked this definition of the enemy, listing the killing of “9 Bolshevik Jews”, “36 Bolshevik Jews...shot in the villages”¹⁹³ and so on. An SS perpetrator interviewed later declared his enduring belief that “Jewry was the bearer of Bolshevism, in so far as the entire Bolshevik leadership was occupied by Jews”¹⁹⁴ another affirmed during the war that in the Soviet Union “the whole leadership of every institution were Jews. And that means they bear a tremendous guilt; it’s impossible to believe the misery they’ve caused; their murderous activities are devilish. It can only be expiated through annihilation.”¹⁹⁵ Even those who were not committed Nazis could come to hold such perceptions, with General Carl-Henrich Stülpnagel, generally opposed to Hitler, still asserting the need to fight “against Bolshevism...and above all against...Jewry, which works for its objectives.”¹⁹⁶

Even where the particular concept of the Judeo-Bolshevik was lacking, German soldiers in the east were primed to see Jews as partisans, and partisans as Jews – a more anodyne but no less effective threat-construction. Briefings and orders from superiors to inferiors reiterated: “The Jews are the reservoir of the partisans; they support the latter”¹⁹⁷ and “Partisan bands operate with the support of the Jewish population”.¹⁹⁸ Erich van dem Bach-Zelewski, liaison between various anti-partisan elements of the German war effort, deployed the repeated phrase: “Where there is a partisan, there is also a Jew, and where there is a Jew, there is also a partisan.”¹⁹⁹ Reports back up the chain of command dutifully reflected the euphemistic official lexicon, recording massacres as having targeted, for example, “232 Jews who afforded the bandits assistance”.²⁰⁰

¹⁹³ Ibid., 565.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 604.

¹⁹⁵ Doc. 912, Noakes and Pridham, 2001, p. 621.

¹⁹⁶ Burleigh, 2001, p. 604.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 563.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 564. See also: Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 190.

¹⁹⁹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 565.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

The construction of Nazi victims as guilty and threatening was not limited to Jews. Obviously in a war-time environment, sweeping animosity towards Russians was encouraged. As one German Private's letter home from Russia asked "what would have happened to cultural Europe, had these sons of the steppe, poisoned and drunk with a destructive poison, these incited sub-humans, invaded our beautiful Germany?"²⁰¹ Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted on the grounds that, in the Gestapo's words, they were working for "the destruction of all existing forms of state and governments and the establishment of the kingdom of Jehovah, in which the Jews as the chosen people shall be the rulers."²⁰² Persecution of the Roma and Sinti was likewise underpinned by constant references to criminality, dirtiness and disorder. The racial hygienist Heinrich Wilhelm Kranz described 'gypsies' as "Nomads...of another race, who because of their vermin, filth and stench remain foreign to us to this day."²⁰³ As with Jews, war brought a radicalisation of such views, with German authorities killing gypsies on the grounds that "general experience" taught that they often operated as spies for the enemy.²⁰⁴

4.2.4 Nazi Virtuetalk

But Nazism was more than a system of hate-engendered beliefs about its enemies – it was a substantive moral worldview, in which a distinctive hierarchy of virtues (and vices) governed the conscious and semi-conscious appraisal of actions, policies, and people.²⁰⁵ Propagated through Nazi discourse, imagery, practices, and rituals, Nazi virtuetalk gradually reshaped the moral landscape of German society and influenced many beyond the

²⁰¹ Bartov, 1994, p. 156.

²⁰² Burleigh, 2001, p. 173.

²⁰³ Ibid., 372.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 562.

²⁰⁵ See: Koonz, 2003.

committed core of Nazi fanatics.²⁰⁶ It embedded intuitions and frames in which participation in atrocities came to be seen as a virtuous demonstration of good character – proof that one was the sort of “new man” that would characterise the reborn German *Volksgemeinschaft*.²⁰⁷ Like other aspects of Nazi ideological dissemination, it “created,” Aronsfeld writes, “and was intended to create, an atmosphere in which the murder of Jews was to be regarded as not only not a crime but, on the contrary, as a meritorious deed performed in the service of the human race”.²⁰⁸ As a member of one of the Nazis’ *Einsatzgruppen* put it: “We believed in those times that we had achieved new higher values... That this brought about an inversion of values, that one retreated even further from humanism, was by no means clear to me at the time.”²⁰⁹

Exerting influence over the ethical language of societies is always a contested process, and Nazi ideology did not operate on a moral *tabula rasa*, but in a society with numerous existing virtue-systems, deemed inferior and outdated by the Nazis, but constituting a source of ideological competition needing neutralisation or co-optation. As Burleigh writes:

“Nazism represented a sustained assault on fundamental Christian values, regardless of any tactical obeisance to the purchase it had on most Germans. Compassion, humility or love of one’s neighbour were dismissed as humanitarian weakness by an organisation which regarded hardness, sacrifice and self-overcoming as positive virtues.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Theweleit, 1989a; Theweleit, 1989b

²⁰⁷ Bartov, 2003a, pp. 124-5 & 127; Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009, p. 239.

²⁰⁸ Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 59. See also: Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009, p. 263.

²⁰⁹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 614.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

Nazi virtuetalk, like all virtuetalk, therefore rested on a double process: the positive glorification of its virtues, and the negative denigration of competing virtue-systems, or of deficiencies independently deplored by Nazis.

Like most virtuetalks, Nazism's involved dozens of individual concepts. For purposes of exposition I orientate the following discussion around two broad sets: the 'duty' set, revolving around notions of service, loyalty and obedience to the racial community and the Führer; and the 'hardness' set, involving Nazi glorification of martialism, strength and brutality and the denigration of compassion, sentimentality and humanistic moral reflection. But these two sets were deeply intertwined with each other, and with the other elements of Nazi ideology discussed in this chapter.

The 'Duty' Set

The thought that Nazism encouraged unquestioning obedience from its followers is a familiar one, but this reflected much more than a self-serving authoritarian dictate of the leadership or a convenient plank on which to rest post-war excuses about 'following orders'. Nazi exhortations for duty and loyalty rested on a much deeper set of ideological precepts and intuitions, and drew on a lengthy tradition of valorised authoritarianism in Germany. Prussian militarism, with its instinctive attraction to military-style hierarchy, was complemented by Volkisch ideology, which consistently expressed an admiration for elitist, patriarchal and dictatorial leadership structures and – despite its superficially populist emphasis – despised democracy as divisive and unheroic.²¹¹ Such traditions, intermingled with newer fascist ideas, fed into an elaborated Nazi conception of duty to the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

²¹¹ See: Mosse, 1981, pp. 21, 35, 45 & 61.

Since race was the foundational law of historical development in Nazism, individuals of the same race shared a common spirit, identity and interests, and owed loyalty to their race and none other.²¹² The struggle for racial survival was an existential and eternal one and individuals had to serve the needs of the Volk devotedly if it and they were to survive. The ideal Nazi citizen was consequently a “racial warrior” wholeheartedly fulfilling their supreme duty to serve their racial community,²¹³ and in Nazism, as in other fascist ideologies, *Der Führer* was not a conventional autocrat, but the embodiment of the will of the Volk. As such, absolute loyalty to him was the practical manifestation of loyalty to the Volk.²¹⁴ To obey the directives of the state leadership vigorously, courageously, and unquestioningly was amongst the most praiseworthy behaviour possible in Nazi society, especially when targeted at racial threats. In this manner, Nazi virtuetalk provided an evaluative schema, reinforced through institutional and interactional conformity pressures and individual needs for positive self-image, in which atrocity could be valorised. As a contemporary Jewish newspaper observed as early as 1931, Nazi propaganda “fosters feelings of hatred among the young, incites the blood instincts of unsettled characters and whips criminal minds into committing acts of violence which will be surrounded with an aura of patriotism”.²¹⁵

This Nazi conception of duty to the *Volksgemeinschaft* was reinforced in the 1930s by the gargantuan network of activist organisations which the Nazis developed at the grey zone between the state and voluntary sector. Entities like the Nazi People’s Welfare Association (NSV), were sustained in large part to foster a sense of solidaristic loyalty to an exclusivist national community through participation in mass charity campaigns.²¹⁶ The NSV grew to encompass the bulk of organised charitable welfare in Germany, in the

²¹² Bialas, 2013, p. 5.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Burleigh, 2001, p. 165; Mann, 2005, p. 199.

²¹⁵ Quoted in: Aronsfeld, 1985, p. 17.

²¹⁶ Burleigh, 2001, pp. 223-5; Bialas, 2013, p. 20; Gerlach and Werth, 2009, p. 146.

process redefining charity as owed only to racially pure and healthy Germans. Hitler opened the October 1935 'Winter Aid' campaign by stating:

“We hold that, by such visible demonstrations, we are continually stirring the conscience of our Volk and making each of you once more aware that you should perceive yourself as a national comrade, and that you should make sacrifices!... We want to show the whole world and our Volk that we Germans regard the word ‘community’ not as a hollow phrase, but as something that for us really does entail an inner obligation.”²¹⁷

Nazified understandings of duty were further inculcated through policies like censoring ‘selfish’ childless couples who had not bred the children the national community needed, or providing postnatal recuperation homes for mothers involving Nazi rituals and education.²¹⁸ Perhaps most ghastly of all was the systematic inculcation of brutal conceptions of good character and unquestioning loyalty to the national community and Führer amongst legions of German youth via participation in Nazi youth organisations from infancy to adulthood.²¹⁹

Nazi virtuetalk intensified predictably and massively in war-time. Military structures provided the opportunity to spread Nazi conceptions of duty to the vast mass of those involved in the German war effort. Many who might otherwise have been apathetic towards Nazism were susceptible to its virtuetalk in this context – it could seem plausible as a war-time code even to those who might find it uncomfortable as a universal doctrine. It seemed, in any case, only a ‘thicker’ and more intense version of traditional Prussian

²¹⁷ Burleigh, 2001, p. 223.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 229-31.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 235-8.

military values. Official orders stated: “only [by destroying the Bolsheviks and Jews] will we fulfil our historic duty of liberating the German people once and for all from the Asiatic-Jewish threat”.²²⁰ Duty-laden rhetoric could frame even the most horrific killings as praiseworthy service to the race. Police Regiments 25 and 101 were told by the Police Commander of the Lublin District, where they had been shooting large numbers of Jews: “I feel bound sincerely to thank you all...for your indefatigable work, as well as your proven loyalty to me and willingness to sacrifice. You have all given your best for Führer, Volk and Fatherland in the tenacious, hard, and bloody partisan fighting.”²²¹ The SS leader of Warsaw likewise wrote privately to his superiors, after the killing or capture of 56,065 Jews in the destruction of the city’s ghetto, to suggest that: “High credit should be given [to the Waffen SS] for the pluck, courage, and devotion to duty which they showed”.²²²

Nazi virtuetalk was most intensely deployed, and found its deepest adherents, in the self-consciously elite structures of the SS, amongst whom “loyalty was a primary virtue... focused exclusively on the person of Hitler.”²²³ Basic iconography, slogans and oath-giving rituals contributed to individuals’ indoctrination in such a virtuetalk system. The SS oath read:

“I swear to you, Adolf Hitler, as Führer and Reichschancellor, loyalty and bravery. I vow to you, and to those you have named to command me, obedience unto death, so help me God.”²²⁴

Reinforced by peer-pressure, such elements of SS identity generated deep and enduring emotional attachments amongst members of these elite militaristic groups in which many

²²⁰ Doc.819, Noakes and Pridham, 2001, p. 495.

²²¹ Goldhagen, 1997, p. 262.

²²² Doc 6.13, Stackelberg and Winkle, 2002, p. 368.

²²³ Burleigh, 2001, p. 195.

²²⁴ Doc. 3429-PS, Office of the United States Chief of Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, 1946, p. 134.

had found vital senses of self-worth and belonging. And they were referenced incessantly by the SS leadership, one pamphlet reading:

“You know it is the duty of every German to be and prove himself to be a soldier... That so many young Germans have volunteered for the Waffen SS is a living testimonial to the confidence of today’s young generation in the Waffen SS, its spirit, and above all, its leadership... So will be emblazoned on your belt-buckle, too, the motto that the Führer himself on the 1st of April 1931 granted to his SS – ‘Loyalty is my Honour’.”²²⁵

As Michael Mann writes, such ideological instruction “resonated amid commonplace virtues like loyalty, obedience, comradeship, dutifulness, honour and patriotism, which were especially strong among the SS core recruitment constituency of ex-soldiers, policemen, civil servants, and educated professionals.”²²⁶ It should not be surprising that thousands were won over by the justificatory potential of such virtuetalk, which created powerful motivational impulses to obey and conform to lauded behaviour, and euphemistically reframed atrocities as dutiful service. And, of course, it is worth noting that such virtuetalk also carries deagentifying implications. A focus on the unquestioning fulfilment of one’s duty displaced responsibility for atrocity onto the leadership or even the abstract Volk itself.²²⁷ Cognition in atrocity could thereby be filled with notions of loyal obedience, and consciousness of causal or moral culpability evaded.

The ‘Hardness’ Set

²²⁵ Doc. 3429-PS, *ibid.*, 133-4.

²²⁶ Mann, 2005, p. 200.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

Perhaps even more pervasive than Nazi appeals to duty and loyalty, however, was the extreme glorification of a set of characteristics surrounding the concept of ‘hardness’, including strength, toughness, machoism, brutality, ruthlessness and belligerence, and a corresponding denigration of compassion, kindness or empathy. Such virtuetalk gained much of its potency from the way it exacerbated and fed off forms of deep-seated masculine insecurities predictable amongst the relatively young – a major constituency amongst Nazi (and most other) atrocity perpetrators.²²⁸ Nazi society was suffused with images, both visual and verbal, of the *ideal man* – muscular, heroic and warlike.²²⁹ The desire of young German men to live up to such ideas constitutes an important motivational driver behind the virtuetalk of hardness, which the Nazis were able to channel into participation in mass killing.

Such virtuetalk was deployed from the very earliest stages of the Nazi movement to define ideal members. Hitler emphasised his interest in those “swift as greyhounds, tough as leather, and hard as Krupp steel”,²³⁰ and “the young man who can stand all weathers, the hardened young man.”²³¹ “My pedagogy,” he stated, “is hard. What is weak must be hammered away... I want the young to be violent, domineering, undismayed, cruel... They must be able to bear pain. There must be nothing weak or gentle about them.”²³² As early as 1933, such conceptions were being used to justify violence, with the commander of the Dachau concentration camp reminding his guards:

“Comrades of the SS! You all know what the Führer has called upon us to do. We haven’t come here to treat those swine inside

²²⁸ Ibid., 254. See also: *ibid.*, 198; Chandler, 2000, p. 33.

²²⁹ Theweleit, 1989a.

²³⁰ Weitz, 2003, p. 111.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

²³² Miller, 1983, p. 142.

like human beings... Any man in our ranks who can't stand the sight of blood doesn't belong here... The more of these bastards we shoot, the fewer we'll have to feed."²³³

This rhetoric of harsh brutality suffused top-down directives to kill. Perhaps most indicative of this was the revalencing of 'merciless' and 'brutal' in Nazi virtuetalk as terms of approval. Field Marshal von Reichenau, Hitler's principal general on the Russian front, sent instructions to all SS troops emphasising their duty to participate in the "merciless extermination of degenerate treachery and cruelty, thereby ensuring the security of the Wehrmacht".²³⁴ A Nazi police battalion instruction manual likewise stated that "he behaves correctly who, by setting aside all possible impulses of personal feeling, proceeds ruthlessly and mercilessly."²³⁵ And General Erich Hoepner expressed his conviction that:

"The war against Russia is an important chapter in the struggle for the existence of the German nation. It is the old battle of the Germanic against the Slav people, of the defence of European culture against Moscovite-Asiatic inundation, and the repulse of Jewish-Bolshevism... Every military action must be guided in planning and execution by an iron will to exterminate the enemy mercilessly and totally."²³⁶

Such virtuetalk influenced large numbers of German soldiers: "as their own letters and diaries, frontline journals, and memoirs clearly indicate, they were strongly motivated by an

²³³ Mann, 2005, p. 200.

²³⁴ Noakes and Pridham, 2001, p. 495. See also: Mann, 2005, p. 195.

²³⁵ Browning, 2001, p. 183. See also: Mann, 2005, p. 209.

²³⁶ Burleigh, 2001, p. 521.

image of battle as a site of glory precisely because it was harsh, pitiless, and deadly.”²³⁷ Fear of not living up to group standards was correspondingly high, with former Nazi *Einsatzgruppen* members testifying that refusing to participate in killing risked being shamed for “cowardice”, an inability to conduct “tough action”, or for being “not as hard as an SS-Mann ought to have been.”²³⁸ Explaining his administration of Auschwitz, Rudolf Hoess similarly emphasised how: “I wished to appear hard, lest I be regarded as weak”.²³⁹ Motivated by such concerns, Nazi institutions like the SD and the Gestapo “competed in evincing hardness, implacability and ruthlessness”, fuelling radicalisation of policies.²⁴⁰

Central to the virtuetalk of hardness was its reverse side – the denigration of “weakness”, misplaced “humanitarianism”, and “sentimentality”.²⁴¹ In this, Nazism engaged in its most open war with those moral constraints that might undermine the justification of atrocity and call the permissibility and desirability of violence into question. As with other atrocity-justifying ideologies, Nazism rested, not on a rejection of normative claims entirely (which would render virtuetalk impossible), but a selective vilification of certain sorts of ‘moralistic’ impulses which might restrain violence. Such ‘victetalk’ was advanced through various media. Military officers were ordered to counteract “all the petty personal, human weaknesses” amongst their troops.²⁴² Objections to the killing of Russian prisoners of war were mocked as a naïve desire for “chivalrous warfare”.²⁴³ Erich Koch, Nazi Gauleiter of East Prussia, and Reichskommissar of the Ukraine, told Nazi occupation forces that: “All sentimental reservations have to be set aside. The [Ukraine] must be ruled with an iron fist so that it assists us in winning the war.”²⁴⁴ It also abounded in conventional ‘propaganda’, with Goebbels writing in an article in *Das Reich* entitled “The

²³⁷ Bartov, 2003a, p. 129.

²³⁸ Mann, 2005, p. 269.

²³⁹ Hoess, 1959, p. 82.

²⁴⁰ Burleigh, 2001, p. 191. See also: Gerlach and Werth, 2009, p. 178.

²⁴¹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 195.

²⁴² Ibid., 564.

²⁴³ Ibid., 521.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 544.

Jews are guilty” that “the fate of the Jews that is being fulfilled is harsh, but no more than deserved. Pity or regret is completely out of place here.”²⁴⁵ A crucial entry in Goebbels’ diary for 17 December 1941, shortly after Hitler’s decision to exterminate all the Jews, expresses the same sentiment in private:

“The Führer is determined to proceed consistently in this matter and not be stopped by bourgeois sentimentality. [The Jews] have asked for this fate; they brought about the war, now they must also pay the bill... It is comforting that despite the burden of military responsibility the Führer still finds the time... for these matters and mainly has a clear view about them. He alone is in the position to solve this problem definitively, with the necessary hardness.”²⁴⁶

But to overcome still significant alternative virtue-systems, Nazis frequently had to not simply lambaste feelings of sentimental humanity, but recontest them in Nazi terms. Thus, those helping Jews after the Kristallnacht pogrom were berated by a regional paper for their “feeble sentimentality” and “humanity”, on the grounds that “in this question there is only one true humanity: the eradication of this world plague.”²⁴⁷ More elaborately, a reader’s letter to the SS journal *Das Schwarze Korps* of 18 March 1937 anticipated later killings of the disabled, arguing:

“[This] has nothing whatever to do with Christian love of one’s neighbour. For under the term ‘neighbour’, we can only understand our fellow human beings who are capable of

²⁴⁵ Friedländer, 2003, p. 25.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 27.

²⁴⁷ Burleigh, 2001, p. 334.

responding to the love which we give them... Nature would let this unviable creature starve to death. We can be more humane and give it a painless mercy death. That is the only humane act which is appropriate in such cases, and it is a hundred times more noble, decent and humane than that cowardice which hides behind a sentimental humanitarianism and imposes the burden of its existence on the poor creature, on its family and on the national community.”²⁴⁸

Similar representations of atrocity as a ‘humane’ solution recurred in the Holocaust itself, as when one SS-Sturmbannführer in Posen wrote to Adolf Eichmann in July 1941, stating: “Serious consideration is required on the question of whether the most humanitarian solution would not be to finish off those Jews who are unfit for work by some expedient means. In any case that would be less unpleasant than allowing them to die from hunger.”²⁴⁹

Denigration of weakness, sentimentality and misconceived humanitarianism was sometimes attached to a more thorough-going rejection of conventional morality, in favour of an open-ended, rubber-stamp ethics which reduced moral right to whatever the Nazi leadership deemed pragmatically useful. “The ruling power must recognise that subjects have no rights,” Hitler explained frankly, “Who has, has – that is the sum of human morality in politics”.²⁵⁰ Here, virtuetalk interacted with both historical and situational deagentification – since historical laws and wartime situational circumstances simply *mandated* extreme policies of atrocity in Nazi ideology, talk of moral limits on violence was meaningless. Any criticism of the legality or morality of Nazi policies, Hitler dismissively

²⁴⁸ Doc. 720, Noakes and Pridham, 1988, pp. 1003-4.

²⁴⁹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 611.

²⁵⁰ Trevor-Roper, 1953, p. xxi.

pointed out, simply “cannot understand that in exceptional times new laws become valid.”²⁵¹ Or as Himmler told senior SS officers: “In this confrontation with Asia we must get used to condemning to oblivion those rules and customs of past wars which we have got used to and prefer.”²⁵² This conception was disseminated throughout the organisations involved in the Nazi military presence in the East. Field Marshal Keitel relayed Hitler’s view to military officers engaged in the fight against ‘partisans’:

“The troops must have the right and the duty to use, in this fight, any means, even against women and children, provided they are conducive to success. Scruples, of any sort whatsoever, are a crime against the German people and against the front-line soldier...”²⁵³

The virtuetalk of hardness thus both encouraged violence directly, and undermined the potential sources of moral restraint that might frustrate efforts to legitimate or rationalise it. In the evaluative scheme inculcated by Nazi ideology, atrocity came to look admirable, manly and heroic, whilst resisting atrocity was framed as contemptible weakness.

4.2.5 Nazi Futures: Utopia or Extinction

Whilst Nazism involved a wide range of reactionary, ‘backward-looking’ elements, this must not obscure the way in which promises and dire warnings about the future fed its policies of atrocity.²⁵⁴ The bloodiest war in human history, involving the extermination of millions of Jews, Russians and other Nazi victims, was deemed a harsh but just necessity in

²⁵¹ Ibid., 30.

²⁵² Doc. 910b, Noakes and Pridham, 2001, p. 618.

²⁵³ Burleigh, 2001, p. 560. This quote re-emphasises the inextricably ideological nature of most ‘pragmatic’ appeals.

²⁵⁴ See also: Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009, p. 248.

Nazi ideology due to the catastrophic future it would prevent, and the utopian future it would usher in. As in other atrocities, Nazi violence was thus built on the promise of speculative benefits, multiplied across vast temporal horizons, that could make present harms appear minor by comparison. Racial struggle was a matter of life or death, and in a war to decide ‘for a thousand years’ whether the Aryan race would be triumphant or not, atrocities brought vast German prosperity, whilst eschewing them meant extinction. Future-bias was thus heavily bound up with threat-construction. At a meeting of ‘old party fighters’ in November 1941, Hitler told his audience: “This struggle, my dear Party comrades, has really become not only a struggle for Germany, but for the whole of Europe, a struggle... between existence and annihilation!”²⁵⁵ The greatest danger, of course, was associated with the survival of the Jews – and their destruction above all else was justified by its consequent avoidance of disaster, since Nazis were sure that “if [the Holocaust] is not carried out now, then the Jews will later on destroy the German people”.²⁵⁶ Key Nazi institutions, like the SS, indoctrinated members with such notions. As Burleigh writes: “Mere links in big biological time or cosmic space, the SS had been granted a one-off opportunity to save future generations of their nation and race from chaos, subversion and oblivion...”²⁵⁷ After all, Himmler warned his SS-Gruppenführern in 1938, “if we are the losers in the struggle, not even a reservation of Germans will remain but rather everyone will be starved out and slaughtered.”²⁵⁸ Hoess reported Eichmann likewise telling him that “any compromise, even the slightest [in the extermination of the Jews] would have to be paid for bitterly at a later date.”²⁵⁹ Officers told Wehrmacht troops in Russia:

²⁵⁵ Friedländer, 2003, p. 25. See also: Burleigh, 2001, p. 491.

²⁵⁶ Stackelberg and Winkle, 2002, p. 372.

²⁵⁷ Burleigh, 2001, p. 196.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 336. See also: Midlarsky, 2005, p. 181.

²⁵⁹ Mann, 2005, p. 244.

“We are now embarked on a risky enterprise, with no assurance of safety. We are advancing an idea of unity which is neither rich nor readily digestible, but the vast majority of the German people accept it and adhere to it... This is where we are now risking everything. We are trying... to change the face of the world, hoping to revive the ancient virtues... We shall be suffering not only in the interests of ultimate victory, but in the interests of daily victory against those who hurl themselves at us without respite, and whose only thought is to exterminate us... I would burn and destroy entire villages if by so doing I could prevent even one of us from dying of hunger.”²⁶⁰

As this suggests, though, violence was not only a matter of avoiding a catastrophic future. Since Nazi policies were creating the racially healthy national community, and all social problems were ultimately rooted in Jewish subversion and racial degeneration, the alternative to extinction was a positively *blissful* future, validating the difficult choices made in the here and now. In the mid-1930s, grass roots Nazi supporters expressed their faith that “some day the world will recognize that the Reich we established with blood and sacrifice is destined to bring peace and blessing to the world.”²⁶¹ They reflected hopes affirmed in Hitler’s first speech as Chancellor: “I cherish the firm conviction that the hour will come at last in which the millions who despise us today will stand by us and with us hail the new, hard-won and painfully acquired German Reich we have created together, the new German kingdom of greatness and power and glory and justice. Amen.”²⁶² This future-biased faith continued into the war, and would prove a dangerously open-ended

²⁶⁰ Midlarsky, 2005, pp. 189-90.

²⁶¹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 116.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 153.

justification for all manner of Nazi atrocities. As one soldier reasoned, after the war “the great peace will come for which all peoples are hoping. Fighting for that, no sacrifice is too great.”²⁶³

Often, the future consequences taken to justify killing were not so fantastical. Utopian visions were complemented by rather more specific, though still speculative and empirically untethered, consequentialist claims. On 30 March 1941, Hitler’s briefed 250 senior officers, coupling threat-construction, guilt-attribution and virtuetalk to future-biased consequentialism:

“Communism is a tremendous danger for the future. We must get away from the standpoint of soldierly comradeship. The Communist is from first to last no comrade. It is a war of extermination. If we do not regard it as such, we may defeat the enemy, but in thirty years’ time we will again be confronted by the Communist enemy. We are not fighting a war in order to conserve the enemy... The troops must defend themselves with the methods with which they are attacked. Commissars and the GPU people are criminals and must be treated as such... In the East toughness now means mildness in the future. The leaders must make the sacrifice of overcoming their scruples.”²⁶⁴

And at the more micro level, individual atrocities were frequently justified with more mundane future-biased consequentialism. Incarceration of Jews in concentration camps were justified to victims on the grounds that: “You must remain here as hostages so that

²⁶³ Coates, 1997, p. 149.

²⁶⁴ Burleigh, 2001, p. 518.

world Jewry carries out no more murders.”²⁶⁵ Mass killings of anyone deemed part of the Russian educated classes were authorised by Hitler on the confident claim that: “ideological ties do not really hold the Russian people tightly together. It will collapse if one gets rid of the functionaries.”²⁶⁶ And killing the Jews was also claimed to “hasten the military collapse of the Soviet Union and secure German hegemony.”²⁶⁷ Elsewhere, Jews were executed in expectation that this would create a deterrent effect against future partisan attacks,²⁶⁸ and some expulsions of Jews were even motivated or rationalised by the claim that this would tackle German housing shortages.²⁶⁹ In all these lines of reasoning, confidently predicted outcomes that ultimately never obtained appeared to justify the infliction of all too real suffering in the here and now.

The killing of over 70,000 disabled victims in the Nazi’s euthanasia programmes, and murder of many others during the war in various secret experiments and killings, was particularly prone to be conceptualised in future-biased terms by those most intimately involved. Clearly, as already discussed, the programme rested on a grotesque devaluation of the moral value of the lives of those killed, but this was coupled with the narcissistic conviction of leading doctors that they were producing tremendous benefits for medical science and German society. Dr. Carl Schneider wrote, in his research plan for experiments on handicapped children in the spring of 1942, that these acts would produce results:

“...reaching far beyond other scientific discussion and research in the field of psychiatry, at last the most practical and immediate questions affecting the health of the nation can be most comprehensively resolved because thanks to the programme

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 330.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 518.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 602.

²⁶⁸ Browning, 2001, p. 19.

²⁶⁹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 580.

[euthanasia] a rapid anatomical and histological clarification can be achieved.”²⁷⁰

Other doctors applauded euthanasia killings because they were projected to save the nation three quarters of a billion Reichsmarks by 1951.²⁷¹ Considerable efforts were undertaken to convince all who participated in the euthanasia programme in a senior capacity of such justifications. It was even argued, presumably for those doctors who retained some feeling for their patients, that euthanasia would free up resources for other inmates in the asylums, ensuring better care.²⁷² A panoply of speculative future benefits, from the mundane to the utopian, were thus deployed to make Nazi atrocities look, to their perpetrators, like a fundamentally just act. They were tragically successful.

And as with most instances of future-bias, they operated in tandem with the other justificatory mechanisms. In October 1943, Himmler gave an address in Posen, now in Western Poland, to an audience consisting largely of senior SS officers. Some parts of the speech are worth citing at length, as they provide an effective summary of the interacting justificatory mechanisms in Nazi ideology and the perception of atrocities they encouraged:

“We Germans, who are the only people on earth to have a decent attitude towards animals, will adopt a decent attitude towards these human animals, but it is a crime against our own blood to be concerned about them or to give them ideals, whereby things will be made still more difficult for our sons and grandsons. If someone comes to me and says: ‘I can’t build an anti-tank ditch with women or children. That is inhuman because they’ll die doing

²⁷⁰ Doc. 728, Noakes and Pridham, 1988, p. 1009.

²⁷¹ Burleigh, 2001, p. 404.

²⁷² Doc. 736, Noakes and Pridham, 1988, pp. 1016-17.

it' – then I have to reply: 'You are a murderer of your own blood, for if that anti-tank ditch is not built, then German soldiers will die, and these are sons of German mothers. That is our blood?... Most of you men know what it is like to see 100 corpses side by side, or 500, or 1,000. To have stood fast through this and – except for cases of human weakness – to have stayed decent [is what] has made us hard... If the Jews were still lodged in the body of the German nation, we would probably have reached by now the stage of 1916-17... We had the moral right, we had the duty towards our people, to destroy this people that wanted to destroy us... We have exterminated a bacterium because we did not want in the end to be infected by the bacterium and die of it... All in all, however, we can say that we have carried out this most difficult of tasks in a spirit of love for our people. And we have suffered no harm in our inner being, our soul, our character.'²⁷³

These claims illustrate how Nazism was not an ideology of wilful amorality, self-conscious evil, or unthinking 'banality'. On the contrary, policy makers, and many direct and indirect killers, explicitly conceived of what they were doing as just. As Omer Bartov writes: "for those who ordered, organized and perpetrated the killing, depravity was transformed into morality, guilt into honour, atrocity into heroism, and genocide into redemption."²⁷⁴ Nazi ideology was a multi-faceted and seductive system of ideas, enriched by long ideological and cultural traditions, incorporating seemingly authoritative understandings of how the world worked and appealing to the deep seated psychological (and sometimes material)

²⁷³ Burleigh, 2001, pp. 660-1.

²⁷⁴ Bartov, 2003a, p. 131.

interests of those to whom it was propagated. It proved tragically effective, in presenting the mass murder of millions as permissible and even desirable.

5. Stalinist Oppression

Alongside Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union under Stalin looms large as one of the most violent and murderous regimes in world history. At a bare minimum around 1.8 million (and probably well over 2 million) died at the hands of state security alone between 1930 and 1953,¹ and this figure excludes the vast numbers of Soviet citizens who died from famines substantially orchestrated by the Soviet state and frequently involving state violence. Some 1.45 million Kazakhs, and several million Ukrainians died by such methods.² And this is still not to mention the many millions violently forced from homes and resettled over the course of the 1930s, often with fatal consequences.³ As the prominent historian Norman Naimark has put it, the Soviet regime under Stalin “killed systematically rather than episodically”.⁴

Unlike the Nazi atrocities discussed in Chapter 4, Stalinist violence was not organised into one discrete campaign or single period of intensity. Nazi atrocities went beyond the Holocaust of the European Jews, but they were overwhelmingly confined to a clear period of radicalisation and intensification: roughly between 1940 and 1945. Stalinist violence, by contrast, was constantly ebbing and flowing in intensity across the years (roughly 1928 to his death in 1953) when Stalin dominated Soviet politics. So instead of a single major campaign of genocidal annihilation, the atrocities examined in this chapter comprise, in the words of Christian Gerlach and Nicholas Werth, “a number of interrelated repressive lines and policies, divergent in scope, character and intensity; implemented through legal and extralegal means; and aimed at different categories of ‘enemies’.”⁵ Two particular waves of violence are most famous: the dekulakisation drive against purported

¹ Overy, 2004, p. 196. See also: Gerlach and Werth, 2009, p. 176; Nove, 1993; Goldman, 2011, p. 12.

² Naimark, 2010, pp. 75-6.

³ *Ibid.*, 57; Goldman, 2011, p. 148.

⁴ Naimark, 2010, p. 3.

⁵ Gerlach and Werth, 2009, p. 135. See also: Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 191; Goldman, 2011, pp. 16-17 & 307.

‘rich peasants’ between 1929 and 1932, and the Great Terror of 1937-8. But these were not easily bounded campaigns which exhaust the range of important Stalinist violence. As Naimark (amongst many others) emphasises, dekulakisation itself was not one policy but several, and took on distinct dynamics in relation to the USSR’s non-Russian nationalities – with the Ukrainian campaign in particular often described as a genocidal ‘Holodomor’.⁶ And Paul Hagenloh highlights how the Great Terror, whilst typically seen as a radical internal purge by the Communist party against its own members, actually fed off and overlapped with other campaigns of police violence against broader categories of “socially harmful elements”.⁷ These “mass operations”, as they were termed, also coincided with “national operations” against suspect ethnic minorities. And since lower levels of lethal violence preceded and followed the peak periods of 1929-32 and 1937-8, atrocities were an almost constant, if fluctuating, feature of Stalinist rule.

Given this character of Stalinist violence, the scope of this chapter essentially encompasses the full gamut of lethal violence against civilians perpetrated in the USSR between 1928 and 1953. My research, however, has focused primarily on the ‘long 1930s’ from 1928 to the outbreak of war with Nazi Germany in June 1941. There are two related reasons for this: first, the bulk of total Stalinist violence was in this period (even though there were notable atrocities during the war and in the opening years of the Cold War) and second, most existing specialist historical research consequently also focuses on this period. Far more sources and secondary literature exist on dekulakization, the Holodomor, the Great Terror, and the mass and national operations than any other wave of Stalinist violence. Given my broad dependency on such specialist research, and the confines of a doctoral thesis, the makeup of my discussion follows the established distribution of academic study, but this should not obscure the existence and relevance of later waves of violence under Stalin.

⁶ Naimark, 2010. The term Holodomor roughly means ‘hunger-extirmination’ in Ukrainian.

⁷ Hagenloh, 2000.

As with other atrocities, Stalinist violence cannot be understood without a concerted effort to understand what individuals were saying and thinking when they decided to engage in the various sorts of acts that comprised the slaughter. New evidence from the Soviet archives and the testimony of former Soviet citizens underpins the broad degree of consensus amongst leading historians that belief in Stalinist ideology was considerable, if varied. “A number of memoirs,” Sarah Davies notes, “usually written by members of the intelligentsia, imply that the propaganda relating to the terror was effective, that citizens believed in the existence of ‘enemies of the people,’ and considered it justified.”⁸ Orlando Figes similarly concludes that: “some were appalled by the brutal violence. Some were even sickened by their role in it. But they all knew what they were doing...and they all believed that the end justified the means.”⁹ And Gábor Rittersporn argues that: “everything points to the assumption that Soviet citizens of the epoch were inclined to lend credit to the regime’s propaganda about the subversive activities of plotters and foreign agents.”¹⁰ Perhaps most critically, documents in the archives reveal the degree to which Stalinist ideology was not, as ideology-sceptics suggest, merely a public face presented by elites to domestic or international audiences. In one of the largest documentary collections on Stalinist violence, John Arch Getty and Oleg V. Naumov emphasise how “the Stalinists said the same things to each other behind closed doors that they said to the public.”¹¹ As always in atrocities, there is importance variance in the extent and form of belief between individuals that deserves mapping. But a sweeping cynicism, unable to recognise that Stalinist ideology was sincerely internalised by many, and defined the political worldview of the Stalinist regime’s leading figures, is no longer sustainable.

But in emphasising pervasive and vital ideological belief, it is important not to ‘crowd out’ less ideological motives and mindsets. Stalinist atrocities were especially reliant

⁸ Davies, 1997, p. 113.

⁹ Figes, 2002, p. 92. See also: Rittersporn, 1993, p. 100.

¹⁰ Rittersporn, 1993, p. 100. See also: Inkeles and Bauer, 1959, p. 161.

¹¹ Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 22. See also: Gould-Davies, 1999, p. 92.

on massive participation by ordinary members of society, not as direct killers, but as indirect perpetrators who intensified and drove on violence through various means – most centrally denunciation. Most waves of Stalinist violence can be understood only if the key dynamic of spiralling denunciations in factories and other workplaces, party organisations, housing blocks, village communities, professional associations, and state structures can be appreciated.¹² The motives underpinning denunciation were many and various: there was sincere and often self-righteous ideological conviction, but also petty local rivalries and animosities, economic failures and frustrations, careerist ambitions, and, perhaps most importantly, escalating strategic calculations fuelled by fear, as individuals found themselves in prisoner's dilemmas with enormous incentives to pre-emptively denounce to maximise their own chances of survival.¹³ But all these motives became vitally clothed in the ideological language of the Bolshevik regime, a language capable of prompting the deployment of violent force by the state security apparatus. In most contexts, pay disputes between workers and managers, blame-games surrounding mechanical malfunctions, rural animosity towards outsiders, ambitions about one's career, and resentment rooted in personal relationships do not trigger violent state repression. Stalinist ideology legitimated and rationalised acts of denunciation prompted by more mundane motives for masses of the Soviet population, and motivated violent responses by the more ideologically convicted. In other words, the often highly local dynamics of violence in Stalin's Soviet Union offer some of the clearest instances of the need to break down crude ideological/non-ideological dichotomies – they were a synthesis of relatively non-ideological, mundane motives with the sincere ideological convictions of many, and the deployment of ideological concepts and discourses even by those who may not have been 'true believers'.

¹² See, in general: Goldman, 2011, pp. 49-52; Viola, 1993; Thurston, 1993; Fitzpatrick, 2000b, pp. 135-6.

¹³ Viola, 1993, pp. 97-8.

5.1 The Stalinists' Ideological Inheritance

As with Nazism, Stalinist ideology did not spring out of nowhere, and as with Nazism, I cannot provide a comprehensive account of Stalinism's intellectual roots in the confines of this thesis. But meaningful understanding of the content and appeal of Stalinism does, as with most ideologies, require some awareness of those roots. This section briefly notes some sources of influence on Stalinism rooted in the 19th Century, and then examines in more detail the development of Marxist thought, especially regarding violence and ethics, in the early 20th Century as a foundation for the particular character of Stalinist ideology.

5.1.1 A note on 19th Century Legacies

Some of the roots of Stalinism predate or originate outside the development of Marxism in Russia. Erik van Ree points out the potential relevance of Russian Orthodox Christian traditions on Bolshevism,¹⁴ and particularly on Stalin – bearing in mind Josef Djughashvili's (Stalin's birth name) early life educated as a priest in a Georgian seminary.¹⁵ In keeping with the general tendency for totalitarian ideologies to resemble “political religions”,¹⁶ Bolsheviks made notable reference to religious rhetoric and imagery, Stalin especially so. His use of phrases like “holy of holies” and “order of swordbearers” to describe the Bolshevik party, and regular use of biblical language in his writings, suggests the enduring influence that the trappings of religious institutions, if not actual theism, had on his worldview.¹⁷ Such religious imagery fed into the valorisation of righteous violence against not religious but class sinners, and may explain, in part, the particularly dogmatic and monolithic attitude towards Communist precepts and the ‘party line’ characteristic of the Stalin-era, and the treatment of dissent as a form of ideological heresy (see 5.2.4).

¹⁴ The Bolsheviks were the ‘majority’ faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party.

¹⁵ van Ree, 1993, pp. 44-6.

¹⁶ See: Burleigh, 2001, pp. 4-14.

¹⁷ van Ree, 1993, p. 45.

Elements of Tsarist political culture have also been identified as holding relevance to Soviet violence. An entrenched tradition of complaining to officials and asking for higher intercession to settle local disputes and punish wrongdoers was a powerful feature of both Tsarist and Soviet Russia, and drew on sedimented cultural archetypes of corrupt and self-interested local bureaucrats easily blamed (and not always without foundation) for a host of local problems.¹⁸ Such practices fed into denunciations and local participation in terror during the Stalin era, and Rittersporn suggests that peasant traditions of ascribing misfortune to ‘evil spirits’ also produced mindsets conducive to blaming malfunctions and accidents in Soviet economic modernization on shadowy enemies and conspiracies.¹⁹ Lynne Viola similarly stresses the role of established, pre-Soviet rural political cultures of repression and victimizing outsiders in providing a fertile ground for Stalinist doctrines of persecution,²⁰ and James Ryan likewise emphasises the influence of autocratic Tsarist state practices in shaping Bolshevik rule.²¹

The 19th Century left legacies in terms of intellectual thought too. Like most 20th Century ideologies,²² Bolshevism did not escape the influence of the Social Darwinist ideas which played a much more famous role in Nazi violence.²³ They did not exert the same level of influence in Bolshevik thinking, which was generally hostile to the idea of groups or individuals having fixed biological natures, but ethnic differences in the Soviet Union were subjected to weaker forms of the biological reification seen in Nazi Germany and European colonial empires.²⁴ Some historians also suggest the relevance of a distinctive Russian moral-intellectual tradition that tended to emphasise absolutism, one which melded with a similar tendency in Marxist thought to imbue a righteous, dogmatic and inflexible

¹⁸ Goldman, 2011, p. 28.

¹⁹ Rittersporn, 1993, p. 115. See also: Manning, 1993, p. 141.

²⁰ Viola, 1993, pp. 78, 90, 92 & 95.

²¹ Ryan, 2012, p. 16. See also: Fitzpatrick, 2000a.

²² van Ree, 1993, p. 46.

²³ *Ibid.*, 46-9.

²⁴ Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, pp. 201-2.

quality to Bolshevik ideology under Lenin and Stalin.²⁵ And perhaps most directly, Marxist revolutionaries in Russia were highly influenced by non-Marxist brands of revolutionary thought and activism. The leading nihilist revolutionary Sergey Nechaev summarised the normative perspective of his followers in a manner that, as we shall see, could have been lifted from Bolshevik theory, in explaining how the revolutionary terrorist:

“Despises and hates the present day code of morals with all its motivations and manifestations. To him whatever aids the triumph of the revolution is ethical; all that which hinders it is unethical and criminal.”²⁶

But more generally, as Ryan notes, late 19th and early 20th Century opponents of Tsarist autocracy from across the Russian political spectrum saw violence as a legitimate and necessary response to such a brutal regime – the willingness of Bolsheviks to resort to it was not, in and of itself, exceptional.²⁷

Above all, of course, Stalinism finds its roots in the 19th Century advent of Marxism. For all the modifications (and perhaps subversions) introduced to Marxism by Lenin, Stalin, and other Russian Bolsheviks, both Marxist-Leninism and Stalinism were centrally and self-consciously forms of Marxism. Key tenets of Marx’s thought, as well as key lacunae or areas of ambivalence, shaped the character of Bolshevik ideology, providing core beliefs and an overall structure of ideas and assumptions within which Bolshevik innovators like Lenin and Stalin operated. Throughout this chapter, there is an evident role played by central Marxist notions in the justificatory mechanics of Stalinist violence, especially Marx’s quasi-deterministic account of historical development and the coming

²⁵ Ryan, 2012, p. 18.

²⁶ Tower Sargent, 2009, p. 18. See also: Derian, 2009a, p. 75.

²⁷ Ryan, 2012, pp. 25-6.

revolution; his conceptions of class struggle and conflict; the purportedly ‘scientific’ nature of his theory; and his denigration of existing morality and ideology as a mere legitimating superstructure supervening on exploitative capitalist relations.

I will not dwell, however, on a focused discussion of Marx’s own ideas. One mundane reason for this is that the literature on Marx and his role in influencing 20th Century Communism is already vast, and I can add little of value here.²⁸ But there are also two more substantive reasons to focus, as I shall, on ideological developments by Marx’s intellectual successors. First, Marx’s own writings rarely display the justificatory mechanisms of violence against civilians I have identified as critical. Whilst Marx provided many ideas which were mobilised to encourage violence, that mobilising process was largely conducted by others.²⁹ Second, on several core ideological topics – notably the status of morality, the extent of determinism, and the need for violence – Marx left his followers with profoundly ambiguous or partially formulated ideas. As a consequence, the key intellectual foundations of Stalinist violence lie in the development of revolutionary Marxism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – when the ambiguous legacy left by Marx was converted into a revolutionary ‘orthodoxy’ by several key figures in Marxist intellectual history. This period involved critical ideological moves that would form the more immediate and fertile foundation for the emergence of a highly violent Marxist-Leninist Bolshevik state in Russia after 1917. In particular, an interrelated set of notions were established that formed a critical component of revolutionary Marxism – what we might think of as its core ‘normative framework’. Following the claim, made by Georg Valentinovich Plekhanov in his speech to the 1903 congress of the Russian Social

²⁸ For a mere slice of this literature, see: Kolakowski, 2008; Lukes, 1985; Fromm, 2004; Churchich, 1994; McLellan, 2000; DeGeorge, 1963.

²⁹ See also: Ryan, 2012, p. 3.

Democratic and Labour Party that “the success of the revolution is the highest law”,³⁰ I term that normative framework the ‘revolution is the highest law’ doctrine.

5.1.2 The Revolution is the Highest Law Doctrine and the Rise of Marxist-Leninism³¹

The revolution is the highest law doctrine describes a set of ideas which were central to (though not exhaustive of) the shift from 19th Century Marxism to a more militant Marxist-Leninism – an ideology rather positively inclined towards violence, though generally without the passionate adulation more characteristic of Fascism. These ideas emerged in part out of early 20th Century debates amongst Marxists on the proper role of ethics and revolutionary violence in Marxist thought which sat alongside, but were not identical too, the broader schisms in European Socialism associated with Eduard Bernstein’s Revisionism.³²

In particular, I use the revolution is the highest law doctrine to denote the product of four important intellectual developments in the late 19th and early 20th Century. The first was a significant entrenchment of ‘historical materialism’ – which lost its more ambiguous elements in Marx and became interpreted in a strongly deterministic fashion, one which permitted a substantially deagentified view of revolutionary activities, including violence. Secondly, many Marxists also came to actively affirm the need for violence, justifying its likely benefits, asserting its necessity, and even glorifying its conduct. Third, key thinkers intensified Marx’s contempt for ‘morality’, asserting the irrelevance of conventional moral limits on revolutionary action, and (as in the other case studies I examine in this thesis) promoting dismissive attitudes towards those sentiments (like empathy and compassion)

³⁰ Plekhanov, *Speech to the 1903 Congress*, quoted in Cliff, 1975, p. 106.

³¹ This section draws upon (though heavily revises) research conducted for my undergraduate dissertation, see: Leader Maynard, 2008.

³² See: Bernstein, 1993.

which might restrain violence. Finally, several leading Marxist intellectuals developed a theoretically subtle conception of ends and means which further eroded the capacity of any arguments or claims to hold back violence, and substantially enabled extreme violence to be justified by the speculative future ends that it aimed at. Collectively, these four clusters of ideas led to a revolutionary Marxist view that the revolution was the highest law – i.e. that any act which furthered (or was framed as furthering) the revolution was justified, since the success of the revolution overrode all other normative claims.

Entrenching Historical Materialism

The erosion of agency in orthodox revolutionary Marxism is a process that develops over the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Marx's own legacy on the degree to which individuals possess free will in the historical process is unclear – as Nicholas Churchich puts it: “Marx vacillates between extreme and moderate determinism”.³³ Yet what is apparent when reading the work of many early 20th Century Marxist revolutionaries is their tendency to take historical materialism to its most hard-line interpretation and substantially eliminate any meaningful conception of individual free will.

This move to a more hard-line deterministic interpretation of historical materialism occurred in large part through responses to those Marxist or Marxian voices which argued that Marxism needed a new ‘ethical’ dimension, so as to articulate to workers the need to participate in revolution and the importance of siding with socialism.³⁴ ‘Neo-Kantian’ Marxists like the German philosopher Karl Vorländer argued that:

“Precisely because Marxism...as a social historical theory must necessarily exclude the ethical standpoint, it is, in our opinion, all

³³ Churchich, 1994, p. 61.

³⁴ Bauer, 1978, p. 81.

the more essential for the foundation and justification of socialism to take into account this complementary standpoint”³⁵.

But to an orthodox Marxist mainstream which remembered that “the moment anyone started to talk to Marx about morality, he would roar with laughter”³⁶ such arguments were not palatable. In rejecting them, orthodox theorists increasingly drove themselves to harder deterministic ground – arguing that Marxism did not need an ethical dimension to tell individual workers why they *should* participate in revolutionary action (including violence) since historical materialism guaranteed that they must necessarily want to participate in such action. As the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer stated, Marx had “demonstrated that, in capitalist society, the proletariat was bound to *want* socialism as the only possibility of escaping exploitation”.³⁷ His fellow Austro-Marxist Karl Adler likewise emphasised that Marxism:

“aims to deduce the development of socialism from capitalism as a matter of causal necessity. According to the Marxist conception, socialism does not come about because it is ethically justified, but because it is causally produced”.³⁸

And such arguments were elaborated most extensively by the leading orthodox theorist Karl Kautsky, in his *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History* (1906). Explicitly targeting Neo-Kantians like Vorländer, Kautsky castigated:

³⁵ Lukes, 1985, pp. 14-15.

³⁶ Vorlander, 1904 – quoted on the back cover of *ibid*.

³⁷ Bauer, 1978, pp. 80-1.

³⁸ Adler, 1978, p. 64.

“those elements who could not escape the influence of Marxian thought, but to whom nevertheless the consequences of the economic development are extremely awkward, who in the manner of Kant would like to smuggle in the spirit as an independent driving power in the development of the social organism... [who hold that] our wills and wishes can at least occasionally break through the hard economic necessity of their own strength and can change it”.³⁹

But these efforts to rebuff ‘ethical socialism’ had important ideological consequences. Aside from encouraging dismissive attitudes towards moral claims or moral restraints on revolutionaries (which I discuss in more detail below), they latently encouraged an ever more deterministic account of revolutionaries’ actions, in which their interests, and the form their revolution took, were increasingly presented as unavoidable products of material causes, rather than the product of individual wills or choices. As Kautsky suggested:

“The setting up of aims is not... anything which exists outside the sphere of necessity, of cause and effect...the act of setting up aims itself...can thus in its necessity be recognized as the result of distinct causes...the world of conscious aims is thus not the world of freedom”.⁴⁰

This position was replicated in the work of Georg Valentinovich Plekhanov’s, an early intellectual influence on Lenin. In his *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, published in 1908,

³⁹ Kautsky, 2002, p. 185.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 61-2. See also: *ibid.*, 69.

Plekhanov follows Kautsky in entrenching interpretations of Marxist theory as positing agency-free historical development, writing:

“The task of materialism...as Marx understood it, [is] precisely in explaining in what manner ‘circumstances can be changed by those who are themselves created by them.’ This problem was solved by reference to the relations of production that develop under the influence of conditions independent of the human will... The character of the ‘economic structure’ and the direction in which that character changes depend, not upon human will, but on the state of the productive forces...here human activity is itself defined as being not free, but necessary”.⁴¹

So as with Kautsky, Plekhanov saw material forces as largely eliminating the role of human will, at least in shaping the character and occurrence of the inevitable socialist revolution. Such deagentifying notions substantially undermined the possibility of their being ethical limits of revolutionary action – after all, as Plekhanov wrote in his earlier *Anarchism and Socialism* (1906), if revolutionaries’ motivations and tactics were not chosen but determined by material forces: “the man is not therefore responsible.”⁴²

In the theories of historical development elaborated by these theorists, then, revolutionary actions, including violence, acquired a deagentified character. The interpretation of Marxist historical materialism as a rather thoroughgoing determinism allowed revolutionary activity to be presented as rooted not in meaningful choices by revolutionaries, but by the dictates of impersonal material forces. Moreover, Marxists increasingly presented this form of historical materialism as fundamentally *uncontestable* – as

⁴¹ Plekhanov, 1998, pp. 469-470.

⁴² Plekhanov, 1906, p. 66.

a sort of ‘settled ground’ within the ideology.⁴³ The works of the thinkers studied in this section consistently framed historical materialism as the “great discovery” of Marx,⁴⁴ and argued that ignorance of this discovery was the basic error behind deviant forms of socialism or other revolutionary thought. This belief bred contempt and dismissive attitudes to ideological rivals – as Plekhanov put it, “if among the Anarchists, there are workmen who sincerely desire the good of their class, and who sacrifice themselves to what they believe to be the good cause, *it is only thanks to a misunderstanding* that they find themselves in this camp”.⁴⁵ Similar attacks against ‘misunderstandings of Marx’ run throughout Rosa Luxemburg’s refutation of Bernstein,⁴⁶ Plekhanov’s response to neo-Kantianism,⁴⁷ and Lenin’s attacks on ethical socialism.⁴⁸ And it encouraged revolutionary Marxists to adopt increasingly dogmatic, uncompromising forms of belief, with Lenin writing in 1913: “The Marxist doctrine is omnipotent because it is true... It is comprehensive and harmonious, and provides men with an integral world outlook.”

The Need for Violence

For revolutionary Marxists, then, historical materialism demonstrated that revolutionary activity was necessary, inevitable, and did not require some special ‘ethical’ justification to convince people to take part. But for many Marxists, especially those Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin, historical materialism not only guaranteed that a revolution would occur, but also necessitated that it would be *violent*. This was not a point of consensus: Marx himself gave contradictory signals on the necessity of violence to the revolution, and

⁴³ See also: Freeden, 1996; Glover, 1999, pp. 265-273.

⁴⁴ See, for example: Bauer, 1978, pp. 78-9.

⁴⁵ Plekhanov, 1906, p. 96 [my emphasis].

⁴⁶ Luxemburg, 1971, pp. 52-135.

⁴⁷ Plekhanov, 1998, pp. 481-487 & 490-493.

⁴⁸ See: Lukes, 1985, p. 21.

the issue divided Marxists in the early 20th Century too,⁴⁹ not least between Kautsky on the one hand, who over time became an increasingly committed defender of a peaceful parliamentary road to Communism, and Plekhanov, Georgy Lukacs, Luxemburg, Lenin and Leon Trotsky on the other. They, like the majority of Marx and Engel's own writings,⁵⁰ presented violence as a necessary component of the revolution, at least in almost all circumstances.

Violence was seen as necessary principally because the bourgeoisie would never allow workers to overthrow the existing capitalist system voluntarily,⁵¹ so “naturally enough,” wrote Luxemburg, “all measures of pressure were exerted against it...in order to break their resistance with an iron fist.”⁵² Given the absolute certainty of bitter and unyielding bourgeois resistance to revolutionary ambitions, violence was an ineluctable component of the revolution. Contra Kautsky and the ethical socialists, Luxemburg exhorted revolutionaries to recognise:

“The basic lesson of every great revolution, the law of its being, which decrees: either the revolution must advance at a rapid, stormy and resolute tempo [and] break down all barriers with an iron hand...or it is quite soon thrown backward behind its feeble point of departure and suppressed by counter-revolution”.⁵³

This was not necessarily something revolutionary Marxists welcomed happily. The Hungarian Marxist Lukács, who elucidated orthodox Marxism from the late 1910s

⁴⁹ Ibid., 109; Ryan, 2012, pp. 17-22.

⁵⁰ Churchich, 1994, p. 245; Slim, 2007, p. 26.

⁵¹ Churchich, 1994, p. 245.

⁵² Luxemburg, 1961, p. 65.

⁵³ Ibid., 36.

onwards, reached the same conclusion as Luxemburg, but in much more regretful language:

“There are situations – tragic situations – in which it is impossible to act without burdening oneself with guilt...the idea [for which guilt is incurred] represents an imperative of the world-historical situations, a historico-philosophical mission”.⁵⁴

Lukács’ reflections on violence illustrate how varying can be the underlying attitudes of those who endorsed revolutionary violence – as he concluded: “murder is not allowed, it is an absolute and unpardonable sin; it ‘may’ not, but yet it ‘must’ be committed”.⁵⁵

But the necessity of violence as part of the revolution was argued most influentially, consistently, and forcefully in the writings and speeches of Lenin. He conceived of violence as necessary in general – writing in 1905 that “major questions in life are settled only by force”⁵⁶ – again, thanks in large part to Marxism’s historical materialist analysis of change. As he reasoned:

“So long as society is divided into classes, so long as there is exploitation of man by man, wars are inevitable. This exploitation cannot be destroyed without war, and war is always everywhere begun by the exploiters themselves, by the ruling and oppressing classes...⁵⁷”

As such, he went on to write in 1906:

⁵⁴ Lukács, 1972c, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁶ Ryan, 2012, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 43.

“We would be deceiving ourselves and the people... if we concealed from the masses the necessity of a desperate bloody war of extermination, as the immediate task of the coming revolutionary action.”⁵⁸

But violence was also dictated by the specific conditions faced by Bolsheviks in Tsarist Russia, where the repressive nature of the regime meant that “there is no choice, all other ways are blocked.”⁵⁹ Lenin reminded readers that: “the reactionary classes themselves are usually the first to resort to violence, to civil war; they are the first to ‘place the bayonet on the agenda’, as the Russian autocracy has been doing systematically”.⁶⁰ Once the revolution was underway, Lenin thus presented Bolshevik violence as critical to the regime’s survival,⁶¹ and a form of self-defence: “our red terror,” he wrote, “is a means of protecting the working class from the exploiters”.⁶² On both lines of reasoning, as Lenin explained in 1920, “we realized that we could not emerge from the old society without resorting to compulsion as far as the backward section of the proletariat was concerned.”⁶³

Lenin’s attitudes to violence were not, as already mentioned, as positive as the truly adulatory views on violence found in fascistic ideologies – but he gave them a rhetorical effusion and ardour that went beyond earlier revolutionary Marxists. He asked: “how can you make a revolution without executions? ... It is a mistake, impermissible weakness, pacifist illusion...”⁶⁴ And he enthused: “Revolutions are festivals of the oppressed and exploited... We shall be traitors to and betrayers of the revolution if we do not use this

⁵⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁶¹ Churchich, 1994, p. 245.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ryan, 2012, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Quoted in: Glover, 1999, p. 255.

festive energy of the masses and their revolutionary ardour to wage a ruthless and self-sacrificing struggle for the direct and decisive path.”⁶⁵

Perhaps most significantly, in light of my theory of the justificatory mechanics of violence and given the institutionalisation of violent practices in the Soviet Union, Lenin repeatedly deployed dehumanising rhetoric in his orders for and justifications of violence. He asserted that Bolshevik executions were justified by “one general aim: the cleansing of the Russian land of any harmful insects, swindler-fleas, wealthy bugs and so on”.⁶⁶ And as Michael Mann summarises:

“From 1920 Lenin described enemies in terms eerily anticipating the SS: ‘bloodsuckers,’ ‘spiders,’ ‘leeches,’ ‘parasites,’ ‘insects,’ ‘bedbugs,’ ‘fleas,’ the language suggesting threatening and dehumanized enemies infecting the people requiring cleansing.”⁶⁷

This enthusiasm for violence was taken up by Lenin’s Bolshevik followers. Like Lenin, Trotsky would later argue that: “the life and death struggle [of the revolution] is unthinkable without military craftiness, in other words, without lying and deceit”.⁶⁸ And the Red Terror, according to Nikolai Bukharin, was “a method of creating communist mankind out of the human materials of the capitalist epoch”, another Bolshevik described it as “a source of great moral encouragement”.⁶⁹

Several Marxists of this period also argued that, since historical determinism demonstrated that all behaviour was determined by the underlying economic system of a society, socialist revolutionaries would necessarily be imbued with the characteristics of the

⁶⁵ Ryan, 2012, p. 35.

⁶⁶ Glover, 1999, p. 258.

⁶⁷ Mann, 2005, p. 322. See also: Semelin, 2005, p. 39.

⁶⁸ Trotsky, 1973, p. 37.

⁶⁹ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 23.

society which produced them. As capitalist society was inherently violent, revolutionaries could not escape the use of such violence even though it might violate traditional bourgeois morality (which was obviously therefore hypocritical – see below). Thus, Lukács suggested that “the greatest tragedy of the worker’s movement has always been its inability to pull itself completely free from the ideological matrix of capitalism.”⁷⁰ And Trotsky makes this argument particularly forcefully (and without Lukács’s tone of regret) in his later work *Their Morals and Ours*. Though written after his exile from the Soviet Union, this remains one of the clearest articulations of Marxist-Leninist attitudes towards morality and violence, and a valuable indicator of the attitudes of the early Bolsheviks. Trotsky reasoned:

“A society without social contradictions will naturally be a society without lies and violence, however there is no way of building a bridge to that society save by revolutionary, that is, violent means. The revolution itself is a product of class society and of necessity bears its traits”.⁷¹

This theme is also suggested in Lenin’s claim that: “to make the individual sacred we must destroy the social order which crucifies him. And this problem can be solved only by blood and iron.”⁷²

There is no doubt that this, aside from a theoretical position, was influenced by Marxist experience of revolutionary practice – perhaps most significantly by the failings of the 1905 revolution,⁷³ by both 1917 revolutions, and by the civil war in Russia. Foreign intervention, white armies encircling Bolshevik Russia and the emergence of numerous secessionist movements all entrenched the Hobbesian mood in the writings of these central

⁷⁰ Lukács, 1972a, p. 67.

⁷¹ Trotsky, 1973, p. 38.

⁷² Derian, 2009a, p. 77.

⁷³ See: Ryan, 2012, p. ch. 2.

Marxist theorists, and constructions of threats encouraged harsher and broader violence against those identified as enemies in the early Soviet Union.⁷⁴

Contempt for Morality

Alongside arguments that violence was a necessary and inescapable component of any socialist revolution, early 20th Century revolutionary Marxists also launched numerous attacks on norms and ideas which might restrain such violence. Orthodox and Bolshevik theorists varied considerably in the views they held regarding morality's place in actual Communist society, but they displayed broad agreement in their conclusions on moral restraints on violence prior to the realisation of communism: such restraints were invalid, and must be cast aside. This stance was adopted as a response to both non-Marxist moral criticism and the ideas of the ethical socialists: existing normative criteria could not, for revolutionary Marxists, exert any legitimate constraints on violence conducted in the name of the revolution. Marxists therefore came to espouse the contemptuous rejection of such codes as praiseworthy, a sign that one had attained a true Marxist 'understanding' of history and society. Attempts to articulate moral concerns about revolutionary tactics, by contrast, were instantly discredited by being mentally tarred with the accusation of 'misunderstanding' Marx and social reality, and espousing hypocritical bourgeois sentimentalism.

This conception drew heavily on the historical materialist theory of a deterministic relationship between ideas and their material 'base'. Moralities were system of ideas and as such, revolutionary Marxists argued, their content was socially contingent, determined by the economic base of the society in which they were founded, and not universally applicable – least of all to those who sought to overthrow the existing order. Revolutionary

⁷⁴ Luxemburg, 1961; Lukács, 1972c; Trotsky, 1973.

Marxists followed Engels in believing that “men...derive their ethical ideas in the last resort from the practical relations in which they carry on production and exchange”,⁷⁵ and this, Kautsky believed, put the lie to the Neo-Kantian project. “In reality Kant’s moral law”, he wrote, “is the result of very concrete social needs”.⁷⁶ Indeed all moral codes were rooted, as the early Soviet legal theorist Evgeny Pashukanis wrote, “in the social environment which produced the form of morality and law as they exist”,⁷⁷ so it seemed logical for such contingent prescriptions to crumble beneath the imperative of revolution in judging the permissibility of revolutionary violence. As Lukács argued:

“Every essentially revolutionary objective...denies the moral *raison d’être*...of both present and past legal orders; how far – if at all – they are to be taken into account is therefore an exclusively tactical question”.⁷⁸

Or, as Trotsky reasoned:

“Morality is a function of the class struggle...democratic morality corresponds to the epoch of liberal and progressive capitalism...the sharpening of the class struggle in passing through its last phase definitively and irrevocably destroyed this morality [and] in its place came the morality of fascism on one side, on the other the morality of proletarian revolution”.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Engels, cited in: Churchich, 1994, p. 51.

⁷⁶ Kautsky, 2002, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Pashukanis, 1980, p. 165.

⁷⁸ Lukács, 1972c, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁹ Trotsky, 1973, p. 26.

There are therefore no genuine moral truths to bind revolutionaries since, in Kautsky's words: "as all morality is relative, that which is called immorality is simply a deviating kind of morality".⁸⁰

Indeed, these Marxist theorists saw it as especially crucial to reject existing moral frameworks since historical materialism demonstrated that such frameworks were not only contingently constructed, but necessarily constructed *in the interests of the dominant class*: all conventional morality was 'bourgeois' morality. As such, moral objections to violence or other revolutionary actions were constantly tarred by their perceived necessary association with the capitalist order, as in Luxemburg's claim that: "every right... is not to be measured by some sort of abstract scheme of justice, or in terms of any other bourgeois-democratic phrases".⁸¹ Trotsky stressed this point extensively:

"Morality is one of the ideological functions in [the class] struggle. The ruling class forces *its* ends upon society and habituates it into considering all those means which contradict its ends as immoral. That is the chief function of official morality."⁸²

It was thus not only wrong but actively dangerous to listen to moral criticism of revolutionary action, since such criticism was an obstacle to the realisation of the true class consciousness of the proletariat. "All means which mystify such consciousness – as for example acceptance of the legal order...are to be rejected"⁸³ asserted Lukacs. Trotsky warned that:

⁸⁰ Kautsky, 2002, p. 192.

⁸¹ Luxemburg, 1961, p. 63.

⁸² Trotsky, 1973, p. 23.

⁸³ Lukács, 1972c, p. 6.

“The bourgeoisie...is vitally interested in imposing *its* moral philosophy upon the exploited masses. It is exactly for this purpose that the concrete norms of the bourgeois catechism are concealed under moral abstractions patronised by religion, philosophy, or that hybrid which is called “common sense”. The appeal to abstract norms is not a disinterested philosophic mistake but a necessary element in the mechanics of class deception. The exposure of this deceit which retains the tradition of thousands of years is the first duty of a proletarian revolutionist”.⁸⁴

Clearly, these ideological postures undermined the potential restraining force of conventional norms or practices of moral criticism on early 20th Century violence by Marxist revolutionaries. But perhaps most critical for my argument is that they were not only mobilised to defeat moral criticism, but fed into early Bolshevik virtuetalk, promoting the dismissive and sweeping rejection of moral restraints as proof of praiseworthy maturity, clear-sightedness and ‘realism’. A no-nonsense, firm and contemptuous rejection of moral criticism became constitutive, in other words, of images of the ideal revolutionary, the virtuous Bolshevik. As Lukács wrote: “genuine revolutionaries, and above all Lenin, distinguish themselves from such petty-bourgeois utopianism by their lack of illusions”.⁸⁵

Trotsky reminded revolutionaries that:

“Lenin refused to recognise moral norms established by slave-owners for their slaves and never observed by the slave-owners

⁸⁴ Trotsky, 1973, pp. 24-5.

⁸⁵ Lukács, 1972a, p. 67.

themselves; he called upon the proletariat to extend the class struggle into the moral sphere too.”⁸⁶

As Trotsky summarised at his most vitriolic: “We were never concerned with the Kantian priestly and vegetarian-Quaker prattle about the ‘sacredness of human life.’”⁸⁷

Such contempt for morality was part of a broader virtuetalk of harshness and brutality. As Trotsky suggested, Lenin had indeed vigorously rejected conventional norms and values in his exhortations for violence – exhortations which repeatedly invoked the justificatory mechanisms analysed in Chapter 3. Before the revolution, Lenin had talked approvingly of workers “striving to crush the reactionary forces without mercy”⁸⁸ and of the need, after power had been seized, to “mercilessly crush the counter-revolution.”⁸⁹ In 1918, he issued orders stating:

“Comrades! The revolt by the five *kulak volost*’s must be suppressed without mercy. The interests of the entire revolution demands this, because we have now before us our final decisive battle ‘with the *kulaks*.’ We need to set an example. 1) You need to hang (hang without fail, so that the public sees) at least 100 notorious *kulaks*, the rich, and the bloodsuckers... This needs to be accomplished in such a way that people for hundreds of miles around will see, tremble, know and scream out: let’s choke and strangle those blood-sucking *kulaks*... P.S. use your toughest people for this.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Trotsky, 1973, pp. 46-7.

⁸⁷ Derian, 2009a, p. 77.

⁸⁸ Ryan, 2012, p. 34.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁰ Doc. 4, Koenker and Bachman, 1997, p. 12 [all emphasis in original].

Such language could appear admirable and authoritative in an ideological context in which conventional moral norms and values had been relentlessly assaulted. As we will see, such virtuetalk would be replicated widely and consistently under Stalinism.

Ends and Means

Stressing the significance of the socialist revolution to Marxists can seem banal, but the vast, overriding, historical benefits that would be brought by revolution remain critical to the normative framework – the revolution is the highest law doctrine – formulated by revolutionary Marxists. So enormous were the benefits the revolution was thought to assuredly bring, that revolutionary means in the here and now were easily justified by the ends they would realise in the future.⁹¹ As Lenin summarised in his early writings: “the class struggle of the organized proletariat... will deliver humanity from the evils which now oppress it”.⁹² And he elaborated, in August 1905:

“Revolution...is a life-and-death struggle between the old Russia, the Russia of slavery, serfdom, and autocracy, and the new, young, peoples’ Russia, the Russia of the toiling masses, who are reaching out towards light and freedom, in order afterwards to start once again a struggle for the complete emancipation of mankind from all oppression and all exploitation.”⁹³

Indeed, the revolution was not merely a process of ushering in a prosperous utopia, but a radical break from *all* previous social orders, definitely ending injustice and want, and,

⁹¹ Ryan, 2012, p. 7.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 27.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

crucially, ending the very conditions of material determinism discussed at the start of this section. By bringing the forces of production under social control, the revolution would create the dominion of man over nature (as well as ending the power of man over man) – ending the deterministic unfreedom of earlier epochs.⁹⁴ As Lukács emphasised, the “the liquidation of the class structure will of itself create the beginnings of true human history”⁹⁵ since the “epoch of freedom begins with the seizure of power by the proletariat”.⁹⁶

Such enormous long-run benefits, which revolutionaries were certain would obtain as anticipated by Marx, combined with the belief that the possible paths to revolution were highly limited, created a permissive ends-means logic in the manner I have analysed under the justificatory mechanism of future-bias. As Trotsky would argue:

“That is permissible, we answer, which *really* leads to the liberation of mankind. Since this end can be achieved only through revolution, the liberating morality of the proletariat of necessity is endowed with a revolutionary character...it deduces a rule for conduct from the laws of the development of society, thus primarily from the class struggle, this law of all laws”.⁹⁷

Yet despite Trotsky’s emphasis on the word ‘really’, revolutionaries had little awareness of what actions actually would prove critical for the success of the revolution, and which would not – as a consequence, what mattered was whether something could be plausibly framed as ‘serving the revolution’, not whether it did, with the benefit of hindsight, actually do so. As with other forms of future-bias (like discourses of ‘military necessity’) the notionally strict means-ends logic was in practice enormously open-ended, since few

⁹⁴ Plekhanov, 1998, p. 486.

⁹⁵ Lukács, 1972b, p. 51.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁹⁷ Trotsky, 1973, p. 50.

violence practices could not be defended with the flat assertion that Trotsky provided for the Bolsheviks' hostage-taking decree of 1919: "it was a necessary measure in the struggle against the oppressors".⁹⁸ Or as Lenin promised his followers: in the future "the cruelty of our lives, imposed by circumstance, will be understood and pardoned. Everything will be understood, everything."⁹⁹

But in truth, these revolutionary Marxists went beyond seeing the ends of Communist utopia as justifying particular revolutionary means in the present. Given Marxist conceptions of history as a single largely deterministic process, the very separation of means and ends was a theoretical error in revolutionaries' eyes. As Trotsky argued:

"Dialectical materialism does not know dualism between means and end. The end flows naturally from the historical movement. Organically the means are subordinated to the end. The immediate end becomes the means for a further end."¹⁰⁰

Lukacs similarly reasoned that in revolutionary action "the means are not alien to the goal...instead they bring the goal closer to self-realisation"¹⁰¹ and as such "the means signify in themselves the progress towards that objective".¹⁰² In other words, in a context of determined necessity like that of pre-Communist history in the Marxist conception, it was false to portray multiple means existing towards a given end, of which revolutionaries need to choose between. History was a determined material process, means and ends were thus fused as a unit. Critically, therefore, there was simply no sense in which, in the revolutionary Marxist normative framework, specific means were in need of moral

⁹⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁹⁹ Lukes, 1985, p. 121.

¹⁰⁰ Trotsky, 1973, p. 51.

¹⁰¹ Lukács, 1972c, p. 5.

¹⁰² Ibid., 6.

justification, and Trotsky approvingly cited the Jesuit doctrine under which “the means in itself can be a matter of indifference, but...moral justification or condemnation of the given means flows from the end”.¹⁰³ Acts were not ethically judged by their inherent features – what in modern philosophical parlance we might call ‘deontic judgement’, but which Trotsky rather more colourfully portrayed as the view “in which each ‘means’ carries its own moral tag like merchandise with fixed prices in a department store.”¹⁰⁴ Instead, the justifiability of means could be assessed *only* by the end – revolution – to which they work. Hence Trotsky’s comment, “that is permissible, we answer, which *really* leads to the liberation of mankind” or as Lukács argued “adherence to correct tactics is in itself ethical”.¹⁰⁵ In short, all actions could be morally judged *only* according to the degree to which they advanced the ultimate end – revolution. Those acts which served the revolution were fused with the end of revolution, and in serving that end, were necessarily justified actions.

What I have analysed in this section, then, is the development of the normative framework of early 20th century revolutionary Marxism, one that would define the core understandings of morality and moral justification for the early Bolshevik and later Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union. This framework was theoretically sophisticated, but was fragile as a meaningful system of normative regulation, and proved highly permissive towards violence. Deagentifying claims about determinism and situational constraints gave the impression that violence was inevitable and necessary, and contemptuous attitudes towards conventional norms and values valorised a bullish disregard for moral concerns. Coupled with this, future-biased expectations of the Communist Utopia allowed large levels of violence to be justified by its confidently expected consequences. This was not a totally vacuous normative framework, and as we shall see, it supported a quite thick

¹⁰³ Trotsky, 1973, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁵ Lukács, 1972c, p. 6.

moralised code of correct action for ‘proper Bolsheviks’ in Soviet society under Stalin. But it was functionally a ‘rubber-stamp’ morality, one which could plausibly justify almost any action framed in the right language by those with the normative and epistemic authority to define what a policy aimed at and what its (often highly indirect) link to the ‘revolution’ was.

5.2 Stalinist Mass Violence and Ideology

The remainder of this chapter now charts the common ideological elements which motivated, legitimated and rationalised Stalinist violence, and shows how, as with other cases of atrocity, they rested centrally on the six justificatory mechanisms I have analysed.

5.2.1 The march of history

As suggested in section 5.1.2, violence in the Soviet Union was conducted in light of the central Bolshevik anticipation of the prosperous Communist society predicted by Marx – and the conception of all Soviet state action as working towards that Communist society is crucial to comprehending the self-conceptions of Soviet citizens and officials in orchestrating violence. Stalin’s Soviet Union saw itself as the vanguard of a socialist revolution that was ultimately assured to arise everywhere – the new policies, institutions, plans and norms of Soviet society was thus more progressive, more advanced, more modern and assured to bring more happiness and success than their counterparts in any other state. As Stalin announced in 1929:

“We are marching full steam ahead on the road to industrialization, to socialism, leaving behind our age-old Russian backwardness... We are becoming a nation of metal, motors, and

tractors, and when we have placed the Soviet man in an automobile and the peasant on a tractor, then let the capitalists of the West, who so proudly vaunt their civilization, attempt to catch up with us.”¹⁰⁶

This march of the Soviet Union towards Communism was awesome and unstoppable – guaranteed by Marxist economic science to transform standards of living and the power of the Soviet state. As Lev Kopelev, initially a passionate Bolshevik who later turned dissident against the Stalinist regime, wrote:

“The world revolution was absolutely necessary so that justice would triumph, all those incarcerated in bourgeois prisons would be set free, those starving in India and China would be fed... And so that Moscow, Kharkov and Kiev would become just as enormous, just as well built, as Berlin, Hamburg, New York, so that we would have skyscrapers, streets full of automobiles and bicycles, so that all the workers and peasants would go walking in fine clothes, wearing hats and watches... And so that airplanes and dirigibles would go flying everywhere.”¹⁰⁷

As Kopelev’s words suggest, such ideas possessed a plausibility and visual richness hard to appreciate with hindsight knowledge of the direction the Soviet Union took. They were the shared common sense of Soviet society, providing the core meaning to much involvement with politics at both the elite and mass levels. Again, this is not to imply uniform and universal ideological uptake – there were many non-believers, sceptics, or ambivalent

¹⁰⁶ Figes, 2002, p. 111.

¹⁰⁷ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 18.

members of the Soviet population. But they were politically marginalised and cowed into general silence or passivity by Soviet state institutions, and rarely if ever managed to alter the direction of state policy. Most political behaviour, including varying forms of participation in violence, was guided by this literally hegemonic definition of the place of Soviet society in a trajectory of progress. And many did believe. One of several disillusioned Soviet citizens who defected to the West and were interviewed in Munich after World War II declared, of the 1930s period:

“Neither I nor the young people around me had any anti-Soviet feelings. We simply found in the heroic tension involved in the building of a new world an excuse for all the difficulties... The atmosphere of undaunted struggle in a common cause – the completion of the factory – engaged our imagination, roused our enthusiasm, and drew us into a sort of front-line world where difficulties were overlooked or forgotten.”¹⁰⁸

These ideological understandings were heavily constituted by deagentifying and future-biased ideas. The march of history envisaged by Stalinist ideology was certain and unstoppable since it rested on the scientifically established iron laws of historical development discovered by Marx, and was sure to provide vast future benefits to compensate for difficulties and suffering in the here and now.¹⁰⁹ Deagentification and future-bias were thus inextricably intertwined in Stalinism – as Sheila Fitzpatrick summarises:

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁹ Kolakowski, 2008, p. 868.

“Soviet people could be confident that there *would* be rewards because of their knowledge of historical laws, derived from Marx... Socialism was the predetermined outcome of proletarian revolution. This prediction was visibly being fulfilled in the 1930s as the industrialization drive and the elimination of small capitalist enterprise laid the economic foundations of socialism. By abolishing exploitation and privilege and increasing production and productivity, socialism would necessarily bring abundance and raise the living standards of all. Hence, a radiant future was assured.”¹¹⁰

Of course, this was not to say that the revolution could not be stalled or even temporarily reversed by the relentless machinations of bourgeois and Tsarist counter-revolutionaries – hence the need for violent repression of such ‘enemies’ (see 5.2.2). But such violent repression was a necessary, ineradicable feature of this fixed path of historical development, a consequence of the class struggle that characterised all periods of history prior to Communism. And Stalinist justificatory conceptions drew upon this sense of historical necessity, as well as assertions of situational constraints on action, to successfully engage in the destruction of alternatives to violence. Alex Bellamy relates how the President of the Soviet Supreme Court argued that “the repression of the kulaks... and ‘terrorists’ witnessed in the 1930s were necessary, and thus lawful, elements of the second stage of socialist development.”¹¹¹ And Lazar Kaganovich, Stalin’s Commissar for Transport and then Heavy Industry, later stated: “The situation was such in the country

¹¹⁰ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, pp. 8-9.

¹¹¹ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 110.

and in the Central Committee, the mood of the masses was such, that there was *no thought of acting in any other way.*”¹¹²

Many ordinary citizens, including those who were not fanatical supporters of the Stalin regime and all that it did, also consciously structured their perceptions of repression in light of such ideas. Figes’ *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin’s Russia* provides an invaluable collection of interviews with such citizens, one of whom later recalled:

“I had my doubts about the Five Year Plan... But I justified it by the conviction that we were building something great...a new society that could not have been built by voluntary means... Today, I understand that it was very harsh...but I still believe that it was justified.”¹¹³

But this language of necessity and the absence of alternatives was built not just on deterministic frames and deagentifying accounts of historical progress, but future-biased confidence in the enormous benefits the revolution was bringing – benefits which seemed to justify even the most extreme measures that were ‘required’ parts of the historical path to communism. The novelist Boris Pasternak wrote in a letter in 1935:

“The fact is, the longer I live the more firmly I believe in what is being done, despite everything. Much of it strikes one as being savage [yet] the people have never before looked so far ahead, and with such a sense of self-esteem, and with such fine motives, and for such vital and clear-headed reasons.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² Goldman, 2011, p. 312 [my emphasis].

¹¹³ Figes, 2002, p. 111.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 190.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn likewise later recalled: “Twenty-year-olds, we marched in the ranks of those born the year the Revolution took place, and because we were the same age as the Revolution, the brightest of futures lay ahead.”¹¹⁵ And even during the peaks of Soviet repression, “the attitude Solzhenitsyn describes,” reports Fitzpatrick, “was common among – perhaps even typical of – young people, as long as their own families were not affected.”¹¹⁶ They were encouraged by a range cultural products and practices – including Soviet parades, social associations, and songs like the popular march ‘Even Higher’, in which singers would collectively declare: “We were born to make fairy tales come true.”¹¹⁷ It was not surprising that, in the words of another of Figes’ interviewees: “We were convinced that we were creating a Communist society, that it would be achieved by the Five Year Plans, and we were ready for any sacrifice.”¹¹⁸

Such Stalinist beliefs were most critical, however, amongst the Soviet elite who actually formulated and directed the policies of repression. Even many years after Stalin himself had died, members of his entourage frequently declared their sincere belief in what had been done. Kaganovich told his son: “These are unpleasant acts, granted, but we do not find any of this immoral. You see, all acts that further history and socialism are moral acts.”¹¹⁹ But actual claims that violence ‘furthered history and socialism’, as with most future-bias, were typically made sweepingly and presumptively, with little more than vague speculation on what would happen if violence were eschewed. Probabilistic metrics for evaluating violence were skewed severely towards the anticipated benefit of eliminating enemies, with even a very small chance of such a benefit accruing deemed to vastly

¹¹⁵ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 212.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹¹⁸ Figes, 2002, p. 91.

¹¹⁹ Glover, 1999, p. 256.

outweigh the known deaths of many innocents in the present. As the head of the NKVD during the Great Terror, Nikolai Ezhov, argued:

“There will be some innocent victims in this fight against fascist agents. We are launching a major attack on the enemy; let there be no resentment if we bump someone with an elbow. Better that ten innocent people should suffer than one spy get away.”¹²⁰

Stalinists did not deny, in other words, that many innocents died, but their calculations massively weighted the future possibility of preventing the guilty from committing more crimes over known innocent deaths. Figes writes:

“As Stalin said in June 1937, if just 5 per cent of the people who had been arrested turned out to be actual enemies, ‘that would be a good result’... According to Nikita Khrushchev...Stalin ‘used to say that if a report was ten per cent true, we should regard the entire report as fact.’ Everybody in the NKVD knew that Stalin was prepared to arrest thousands to catch one spy... ‘Better too much than not enough,’ [Ezhov] warned his NKVD operatives. If ‘an extra thousand people are shot...that is not such a big deal.’”¹²¹

5.2.2 Enemies without and enemies within

The future-bias and deagentification that inhered in the Stalinist conception of historical progress, coupled with a broader tendency to speculate on future outcomes in the

¹²⁰ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 110.

¹²¹ Figes, 2002, p. 239.

justification of violence and deny alternative possible courses of action, underlay all ideological justifications of Stalinist violence. But the most direct impetus for violence rested, as in most atrocities, on constructions of certain categories of people as threatening to society and guilty of great crimes against the Soviet people. At the very core of Stalinism in the Soviet Union was a deep-seated, hegemonic consensus that the regime was under a constant and severe existential threat – as Arch Getty and Naumov observe, “the Stalinists always believed themselves figuratively surrounded, constantly at war with powerful and conniving opponents”.¹²² The revolutionary march towards Communism was, in their eyes, imperilled by a hidden panoply of enemies both within the Soviet Union and outside it.

In light of the incalculable beneficence of the revolution detailed above, the fight against these enemies took on the character of a millenarian struggle between good and evil. I have already suggested how Bolshevik ideology took on a particularly rigid, dogmatic and quasi-religious character: scientifically authoritative and anticipating a utopian post-revolutionary society, it was viewed by many of its adherents as the purest and most unquestionable truth in human history, holding the highest prospects for human emancipation and wellbeing. Those opposed to it could, therefore, never be seen by Stalinists as political rivals deserving of some form of respect, but were virulently malign forces bent on restoring oppression and tyranny. The Soviet regime under Stalin required utter devotion to the Bolshevik leadership (see Stalinist virtuetalk in section 5.2.4), such that there was no room, in Stalinism, for loyal opposition (at least outside the narrowest confines of the highest elite). All those who criticised, frustrated, or actively opposed the regime, or were merely perceived to do so, thus constituted nothing more or less than committed threats to the revolution.

This was, it is no simplification to suggest, a truly paranoid vision – but it was one not entirely implausible given Bolshevik experiences and broader ideology. As discussed in

¹²² Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 16.

section 5.1, Marxist theorists had long suggested that the revolution would be beset by implacable resistance from counterrevolutionary elements, who were forced by their underlying economic and material interests to oppose the transition to socialism and ultimately communism. Such ideas continued to be referenced in Stalinist violence, with Central Committee member V.V. Kuibyshev asserting as early as December 1930:

“The enemy has been dislodged from many of his positions, but the enemy has not given up. He has become hardened. He will resist and oppose us fiercely. Sabotage within the country, the resistance of the kulaks who are in the process of being liquidated – all this expresses a bitter class struggle.”¹²³

But just as importantly, the actual historical experience of the Bolsheviks substantially reinforced such beliefs.¹²⁴ As soon as they seized power the Bolsheviks under Lenin had faced bitter opposition from ‘White’ elements of Russia (prominently involving Monarchists, elements of the old regime, and intervention by Western capitalist states, in accordance with Marxist expectations) in the civil war of 1917-1922. As Ryan notes: “the experience of the Civil War and foreign intervention was incorporated into the Bolshevik metanarrative, becoming the state’s ‘formative experience’.”¹²⁵ It, and particularly the intervention by Western forces in support of counterrevolutionaries, lent later assertions by the Stalinist leadership of an alliance between internal conspiracies and capitalist enemies abroad credibility.¹²⁶ As the 1930s progressed, fears of external threats naturally increased with the rise of Nazi and Japanese power, the continued hostility of the capitalist world

¹²³ Ibid., 51.

¹²⁴ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 10.

¹²⁵ Ryan, 2012, p. 9.

¹²⁶ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 10.

powers, and some genuine internal resistance.¹²⁷ The growing fear of war, as in many atrocities, stimulated a perceived need to strengthen the Soviet home front by ever more forcefully eliminating internal enemies, with James Harris noting how “the central leadership was panicked that in the event of war with ‘the fascists,’ legions of internal enemies would join with them against the Soviet Union.”¹²⁸ Indeed, it is critical to appreciate the sincerity and conviction with which senior members of the Stalinist state believed in this vision of an enormous, pervasive and malevolent threat towards their regime.¹²⁹ As Arch Getty and Naumov observe: “no one can read the discourse of the Stalinists throughout the 1930s without sensing their nervousness, even frequent panic”.¹³⁰

But this conception, in Stalinism, of the general threat faced by the regime only justified actual practices of violence via logics which connected concrete victims to the overarching danger by presenting them as specific threats and criminals complicit in anti-Soviet activities. In analysing the dynamics of how such guilt-attribution and threat-construction were deployed and disseminated, it is important to remember that the Soviet state was not formally dictatorial, and is better modelled as a narrow oligarchy of senior party figures, amongst whom Stalin exercised pre-eminent though not exclusive influence. As such, ideological justifications were not just issued, diktat-like, by Stalin to the millions of participants in violent practices across the Soviet Union. Instead, Stalin and his entourage, partly in response to crises and unplanned events (the still murky assassination of the senior party figure Sergei Kirov in December 1934 being one critical example), shaped ideology and disseminated it to each other and to the broader party elite. Goldman explains how, in early 1935:

¹²⁷ Ibid., 10-11; Goldman, 2011, p. 35; Manning, 1993, p. 136; Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 209.

¹²⁸ Harris, 2000, p. 279.

¹²⁹ Read, 2003, p. 102; Getty and Naumov, 1999, pp. 16, 24, 162, 572 & 584; Khlevniuk, 2003, p. 106; Goldman, 2011, p. 2.

¹³⁰ Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 580.

“Stalin reviewed the political situation in a secret letter that was circulated to all party organizations for discussion. Summarizing the leadership’s current thinking on the Kirov murder, the letter claimed that Nikolaev, Kirov’s assassin, had been a member of a ‘Zinovievite group,’ based in Leningrad, that was responsible for the crime. This ‘Leningrad center’ in turn reported to a ‘Moscow center,’ which had been unaware of the actual assassination plan, but was fully cognizant of the ‘terrorist moods’ of the Leningrad Zinovievites... While outwardly professing loyalty to the Party’s policies and leaders, they were really two-faced ‘double dealers’ (*dvurushniki*), ‘Judas betrayers with party cards in their pockets,’ who ‘masked’ their true intentions.”¹³¹

It was via such letters, as well as speeches to (and special sessions of) the Communist Party Central Committee, that Stalinist threat-constructing and guilt-attributing ideas took hold over the leading organisations and individuals in the Soviet state apparatus, especially in the mid-1930s period. Against those who thought that the prior violence of dekulakisation in the early 1930s had removed enemies of the Soviet regime, Stalin warned: “Wrong! Thrice wrong! Those people exist... we did not physically destroy them, and they have remained with all their class sympathies, antipathies, traditions, habits, opinions, world views and so on.”¹³² He asked the February-March 1937 Central Committee plenum, the main initiation point of the Great Terror, “why have our leading comrades been so naïve and blind that they could not make out the face of these enemies of the people?”¹³³ Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Commissar for Heavy Industry from 1932 to 1936, gave a speech to his

¹³¹ Goldman, 2011, pp. 33-4.

¹³² Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 137.

¹³³ Goldman, 2011, pp. 75-6.

immediate subordinates in February 1937, stating: “The criminals have been caught, they have been shot. If there are more criminals in the future, they too shall be caught. We shall shoot all the swine that we find... Unless there is a shake-up, we’ll all rust.”¹³⁴ And Kaganovich told the February-March plenum:

“We never imagined before 1936 to what depths Zinoviev and Kamenev... could have sunk... This is why we must no longer, in my opinion, continue this magnanimous [policy] of ours. Our party must be purged of these people... We must do away with these people in order to keep them from harming us. (Applause.)”¹³⁵

And these members of Stalin’s entourage mutually reinforced each other’s convictions, reciprocating and validating the group’s core assumptions and interpretations.¹³⁶ And in May 1935, Ezhov, soon to be made head of the NKVD, the Soviet Commissariat of Internal Affairs, sent a draft manuscript to Stalin entitled “From Factionalism to Open Counterrevolution” which reflected the dominant narrative of the elite in stating:

“A strong link has existed between the Zinovievites and the Trotskyists throughout this entire period. The Trotskyists and Zinovievists regularly inform each other about their activities. There is no doubt that the Trotskyists were aware of the terrorist side of the activities of the Zinovievist organisation as well, the testimony of individual Zinovievists during the investigation of the

¹³⁴ Getty and Naumov, 1999, pp. 292-4.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 389.

¹³⁶ See also: Janis, 1982.

Kirov murder and during the consequent arrests of Zinovievists and Trotskyists establish that the latter have also taken the path to terrorism.”¹³⁷

Later, in March 1940, Ezhov’s successor Lavrenti Beria proposed the execution of almost 26,000 Poles now in Soviet prisoner of war camps following the Nazi-Soviet pact, assuring Stalin that they were “sworn enemies of Soviet power, filled with hate against the Soviet order” and that “each and every one of them awaits release only such that they can actively participate in the fight against Soviet forces”.¹³⁸

A rhetoric of certainty and a lack of equivocation also saturated many of these threat-constructions and guilt-attributions at the elite level, in keeping with the general tenor of Bolshevik text and speech. As Fitzpatrick summarises:

“To insiders, [Marxist-Leninism] was a ‘scientific’ worldview that enabled its possessors to rid themselves and others of all kinds of prejudice and superstition – and incidentally master an aggressive debating style characterize by generous use of sarcasm about the motives and putative ‘class essence’ of opponents. Smugness and tautology, along with polemical vigor, were among the most notable characteristics of Soviet Marxism.”¹³⁹

The reality, that the establishment of facts about threats and guilt was an extremely unreliable process given the dependence of reports on torture and denunciation,¹⁴⁰ only seems to have encouraged Stalinists to assert that “we have dozens of testimonies and

¹³⁷ Starkov, 1993, p. 25.

¹³⁸ Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 217.

¹³⁹ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 16.

¹⁴⁰ Kolakowski, 2008, p. 852.

facts...”¹⁴¹ all the more. Persecution and oppression were framed as being based on “indisputable facts,”¹⁴² “incontrovertible documentary materials,”¹⁴³ and “incontrovertible facts”¹⁴⁴ illustrating how a critical component of Stalinism was a basic faith in the functional accuracy of torture and denunciation as intelligence gathering procedures. And in initiating the infamous 1937 purge of the Red Army, Stalin likewise told party leaders that “without a doubt a military-political conspiracy against Soviet power [has] taken place, stimulated and financed by German fascists”.¹⁴⁵ It should not be surprising that Communists around the world accepted this as true. It required extraordinary levels of scepticism about the very functionality of the Communist system to doubt such claims in light of who was asserting them, and the force and conviction with which they were doing so.

As a consequence of the success of Stalinist guilt-attribution and threat-construction at the elite level, such ideas were disseminated throughout Soviet society by state epistemic authorities – notably senior party bodies and key state institutions. Through their statements, orders and directives, Stalinist ideology’s narratives of threat and guilt evolved and escalated. Kaganovich authored a politburo directive of 20th September 1936 which read:

“Up until the present time, the Party Central Committee has viewed the Trotskyist-Zinovievist scoundrels as the advanced detachments of the international bourgeoisie. The latest facts indicate that these gentlemen have slid even further, and it is now

¹⁴¹ Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 317.

¹⁴² Ibid., 286.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 368.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 465.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 444.

necessary to view them as secret service men, as spies, saboteurs, and fascist bourgeoisie wreckers in Europe.”¹⁴⁶

The Central Committee itself issued directives to party bodies across the country repeating such threat-constructions and guilt-attributions, as with a January 1937 telegram asserting an “extraordinarily great level of contamination by Trotskyists... traitors and wreckers”.¹⁴⁷

Beyond senior party bodies, the state security apparatus was, naturally, another major epistemic authority. Its orders for violence, like those of the party, were replete with assertions of guilt and danger.¹⁴⁸ The critical NKVD order 00447, issued by Ezhov, launched the Great Terror with the words:

“The organs of state security are faced with the task of mercilessly crushing this entire gang of anti-Soviet elements, of defending the working Soviet people from their counterrevolutionary machinations, and finally, of putting an end, once and for all, to their base undermining of the foundations of the Soviet state. Accordingly, I therefore order... a campaign of punitive measures against former Kulaks, active anti-Soviet elements, and criminals...”¹⁴⁹

Other NKVD orders were similarly framed around asserted threats – 00485 was entitled: “On Fascist-Insurgent, Espionage, Sabotage, Defeatist, and Terrorist Activities of Polish Intelligence in the USSR”¹⁵⁰ and a group of secret police were dispatched to the far-east

¹⁴⁶ Starkov, 1993, p. 28.

¹⁴⁷ Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 353.

¹⁴⁸ Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 223; Kolakowski, 2008, p. 850.

¹⁴⁹ Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 474.

¹⁵⁰ Goldman, 2011, p. 217.

with the official aim of: “striking a crushing blow at rightist-Trotskyist, military-fascist, white guardist-insurgent, SR-ish, Menshevik, and nationalist organizations, in the secret service of Japan and other foreign countries, and also to purge the Far East of all elements hostile to Soviet power.”¹⁵¹ The security apparatus constantly accused its victims of being “the chief instigators of all kinds of anti-Soviet and diversionist crimes”¹⁵² or members “of a counter revolutionary anarcho-mystical and terrorist organization”.¹⁵³ As one former NKVD investigator later testified:

“Ezhov’s authority in the organs of the NKVD was so high that I, like the other employees, did not doubt the guilt of individuals who were arrested on his direct orders even when the investigator did not have any materials which compromised the given individual. I was convinced of the guilt of such an individual even before the interrogation and then, during the interrogation, tried to obtain a confession from that individual using all possible means.”¹⁵⁴

Other epistemic authorities like newspapers, educational institutions, and courts backed up these claims by the security apparatus and the party leadership. “The war motif,” notes Fitzpatrick, “was constantly elaborated in the press”¹⁵⁵ and the *Kirovets* factory newspaper told readers: “The parallel center has been unmasked by the NKVD. They organized spying, wrecking, and diversionary acts to weaken defence.”¹⁵⁶ It went on to advise: “We must not be calm. Every honest citizen should think about what these

¹⁵¹ Starkov, 1993, p. 31.

¹⁵² Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 127.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 204.

¹⁵⁴ Starkov, 1993, p. 33.

¹⁵⁵ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 10.

¹⁵⁶ Goldman, 2011, p. 98.

despicable traitors are preparing to do to us and our beloved country.”¹⁵⁷ On other occasions newspapers urged local party committees to purge the “enemy hidden among us”, the “degenerate bandit Trotsky and his hirelings.”¹⁵⁸ One of Figes’ interviewees reported how: “at school they said: ‘look how they won’t live under Communism – look how they blow up factories, derail trains, and kill people – all this is done by enemies of the people.’ They beat this into our heads so often that we stopped thinking for ourselves”.¹⁵⁹ Cultural institutions also played a role, with books by leading authors and popular plays reinforcing Stalinist narratives of guilt and threat. The 1936 play *Party Card* portrayed the dangers of factories and party organisations being infiltrated by hostile elements,¹⁶⁰ whilst the popular *The Confrontation* (1937) depicted an evil conspiracy against the Soviet Union which was successfully defeated by the courageous efforts of Soviet citizens.¹⁶¹ Local party organisations also played an important role in educating ordinary workers and citizens with Stalinist threat and guilt concepts, via meetings held “during special ‘politdeny,’ or ‘political days,’ to teach people ‘how to recognize the aims, methods, practical wrecking, and diversionist work of foreign espionage organs and their rightist-Trotskyist agents.’”¹⁶²

Perhaps most influentially, processes with the ritualistic trappings of judicial authority, like the three-man ‘troika’ courts which managed thousands of prosecutions involved in the Great Terror, or the major Stalinist show trials of 1928, 1930, 1936, 1937 and 1938, played a substantial role in credibly disseminating official definitions of victims as guilty criminals. The show trials convinced huge numbers, in the West as well as in the Soviet Union, that the Stalinists had uncovered very real conspiracies.¹⁶³ At the first of the largest Moscow trials in 1936, the Soviet Chief Prosecutor Andrey Vysinskii portrayed the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 98-9.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 59. See also: *ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵⁹ Figes, 2002, p. 274.

¹⁶⁰ Fitzpatrick, 2000a, pp. 31-2.

¹⁶¹ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 203.

¹⁶² Goldman, 2011, p. 58.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 47.

defendants as “underground terrorist groups” intending to “seize power at all costs” who “made use of the most detestable method of fighting, namely, terrorism.”¹⁶⁴ He detailed how “while preparing the assassination of Comrade Stalin and other leaders of the CPSU, the united center simultaneously strove by all means in its power to give assurances of its loyalty and even devotion to the Party.”¹⁶⁵ At the second Moscow show trial in 1937, he likewise framed the defendants as “a brigand gang,” “murderers”, “toadies and cads of capitalism” and:

“Not a political party...merely a gang of criminals...hardly to be distinguished from gangsters who use blackjacks and daggers on the high-road on a dark night... The roots of this gang must be sought in the secret recesses of the foreign espionage agencies which brought these people, which kept them, paid them for their loyal flunkey service.”¹⁶⁶

During the same trial, Nikita Khrushchev addressed several thousand workers at an open-air meeting in Red Square, and similarly presented the trial’s targets as “traitors to the toilers,” “agents of fascism,” “wreckers,” and “diversionists”.¹⁶⁷ In November 1936, managers and engineers from the Kemerovo coal mines were tried following an underground gas explosion, and were labelled a “counterrevolutionary wrecking group”. Goldman notes how “the testimony of the accused... was deliberately framed to enrage workers and mobilise their support for the state. The newspapers widely quoted one defendant as having said, ‘Soon our workers will perish in the mines like rats.’”¹⁶⁸ Again,

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 40.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁶⁶ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, pp. 194-5.

¹⁶⁷ Goldman, 2011, p. 75.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 45.

media authorities were crucial in circulating the ideological messages of the trials, which received “saturation coverage in the central press... as well as being broadcast on radio and filmed.”¹⁶⁹ The coverage appears to have been highly influential amongst ordinary communists and citizens across the Soviet Union, and proved critical in injecting political language into the management of basic economic accidents and breakdowns across the country. As one factory organizer reported: “The trial was a great lesson for us. We should now approach every accident, every breakage in a different way. It’s no secret that we sometimes overlook the facts after enemy hands have acted in the factory and the shop.”¹⁷⁰ Others wrote to factory newspapers, declaring their belief that the show trials had shown “that the enemy is hidden among us.”¹⁷¹

Critical to the operation of much of this guilt-attribution and threat-construction was a complex categorising discourse of Stalinist threat-concepts and guilty identities. In Chapter 3, I emphasised how the conceptual lexicon, the choice of certain labels used to define victims, is frequently central to these two justificatory mechanisms – playing as it does on the central role of concepts and political language in shaping ideology. There is perhaps no case of atrocities in which this is more apparent than the Stalinist one. As Goldman points out at length:

“Throughout the 1930s, the Party tightened its control over political speech. Language not only expressed the aims of power but attained a fierce power of its own. By 1937, certain words and phrases – including “Trotskyist,” “wrecker,” “lickspittle,” “Fascist hireling,” “hidden enemy,” “masking” and “unmasking,” “enemy of the people,” “party and union democracy,” and “suppression of

¹⁶⁹ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 203.

¹⁷⁰ Goldman, 2011, p. 47.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 99.

criticism” – were constitutive elements of political discourse even as they also dictated organizational practices and behaviour. Party members and ordinary people spoke publicly and privately in this new language, assimilating its most basic assumptions... these phrases became the common currency of exchange, a normal, fully accepted way to describe, interpret, and understand work, social relations, and daily life.”¹⁷²

Both elites and ordinary citizens thus had to master the complex activity which Stephen Kotkin has influentially termed “speaking Bolshevik”.¹⁷³ These ideological lexicons were disseminated downwards through the dense institutional apparatuses of the Soviet state, filtering into local political and economic conflicts which otherwise might have had a quite minimal ideological quality. And the definitions of victims and their actions which such labels provided framed violence in ways that made it seem justified. As a senior Bolshevik Central Committee member argued at the committee’s interrogation of Bukharin (a senior Bolshevik prosecuted at the second Moscow show trial and ultimately executed) and his ‘accomplices’: “they are enemies, and we must deal with them as we would with any enemy.”¹⁷⁴ Another retorted: “It seems to me that this can be called an uprising against the party, against Soviet power. And every uprising must be crushed.”¹⁷⁵ Thus did ideological definitions of victims prompt rule-like justifications of the state’s appropriate response to them. But they also, thanks to their fundamental elasticity and ill-defined boundaries, actively drove on the violence.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Ibid., 27-8.

¹⁷³ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 81.

¹⁷⁴ Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 381.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 391-2.

¹⁷⁶ Harris, 2000, p. 280.

The array of epistemic authorities espousing Stalinist justificatory mechanisms, the use of a particular political language, and the saturation of political discourse with the threat-constructs and guilt-attributions of that language, were thus crucial factors facilitating the apparently widespread (though not universal) uptake of Stalinist justifications by indirect and direct killers, and ordinary citizens.¹⁷⁷ But the spread of the ideology often rested on willing internalisation and even active endorsement by citizens in accordance with their own motivated cognition and the degree to which the appeals and ideas of the centre made sense of ordinary citizens' experiences. As one of Figes' interviewees later stated: "it was impossible to doubt the existence of a dreadful conspiracy [against the Soviet State]. Any doubts on that score were inconceivable – there was no alternative. I am talking of the spirit of those times: either [those killed] were guilty or it was impossible to understand."¹⁷⁸ Communists in regional boards and cells reciprocated the narratives and demands of the centre, enthusiastically reporting to have discovered counterrevolutionary organisations "the objective of [whom] was the overthrow of Soviet power, the dissolution of the kolkhozy [collective farms]...the organisation of Hitlerite pogroms."¹⁷⁹ There was, of course, a considerable degree of self-interest and even coercion in the production of such bottom-up responses to state initiatives, but these fused with more ideological motives and sincere convictions, since "many believed the state's warnings about an internal terrorist threat and considered it their patriotic duty to report suspicions about coworkers and comrades."¹⁸⁰

Indeed, one of the central characteristics of Stalinist violence was the extent of mass participation in relatively indirect contributions to violent practices – principally through denunciations and the initiation or endorsement of expulsions from the party through local committee meetings (which would typically lead to arrests by the NKVD).

¹⁷⁷ Goldman, 2011, p. 26.

¹⁷⁸ Figes, 2002, p. 278.

¹⁷⁹ Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 65.

¹⁸⁰ Goldman, 2011, pp. 300-1.

Especially in the early violence of agricultural collectivisation between 1929 and 1932, and the violent purges of the Great Terror in 1937-38, Stalinist ideology proved functional for interpreting and legitimating local political (and often simply self-interested) struggles, but in the process also intensifying them and taking them to lethal conclusions they otherwise could have avoided. Many had much to gain, materially and psychologically, by the denunciation and scapegoating of many victims.¹⁸¹ Stalinist language thus “entered the daily parlance of factory employees, lending import, purpose, and direction to daily resentments and workplace quarrels.”¹⁸² In the Great Terror in particular, this allowed the enormous economic and technical problems generated by the Soviet Union’s breakneck pace of industrialisation to drive on mass participation in oppression and violence.¹⁸³ As workers at the Serp I Molot factory wrote in a signed pledge reprinted in newspapers across the country:

“We know that production complexes do not stop themselves, machines do not break themselves, boilers do not explode on their own. Behind each of these acts lies some kind of hand. Is this not the hand of the enemy? This is the first question which should be asked in such cases by every one of us.”¹⁸⁴

Party members likewise wrote to local newspapers to assert: “The class enemy rules here with great energy. Not long ago we had repeated instances of oil-fueled explosions in the electric stove. Doesn’t this show that class enemies are doing their evil work?”¹⁸⁵ Factory

¹⁸¹ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, pp. 199-200.

¹⁸² Goldman, 2011, pp. 78-9.

¹⁸³ Eugene Zaleski cited in: Manning, 1993, p. 118.

¹⁸⁴ Goldman, 2011, pp. 47-8.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 48-9.

meetings to discuss breakdowns and accidents involved directors and party organisers telling the workforce that:

“There are facts indicating wrecking... We have a group of wreckers. This was a defence order that burned: magnets wrapped in rubber and then in linen. Someone unwrapped the linen, cut the rubber, and then rewrapped the magnets. We have wheels with shavings in the bearings... Now we need to look at certain people.”¹⁸⁶

Again, a rhetoric of certainty gave wild accusations the appearance of established fact, and the party committee collectively concluded: “The facts of the fire show that it was undoubtedly the act of class enemies... The fire started on the eve of the trial of the Trotskyists. It was unquestionably a demonstration by enemies in response to the trial.”¹⁸⁷

Thus, as Soviet citizens were increasingly taught to see in any mechanical problem a likelihood of criminal behaviour, the predictable and massive problems of rapid mechanisation enacted by a poorly trained workforce became a validation for the state’s narratives of guilt and threat.¹⁸⁸ But again, even at the local level, Stalinist ideology was not only a legitimisation or rationalisation for other motives. Many denouncers, reports Fitzpatrick, “expressed an apparently genuine fear and loathing of the class enemy”¹⁸⁹ and went beyond what was necessary for personal interest or conformity to orders from the centre. As Goldman efficiently explains:

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 85.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 86.

¹⁸⁸ Harris, 2000, p. 280.

¹⁸⁹ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 135.

“Many people were originally persuaded that real enemies threatened Soviet security. A potent mixture of truth, half truth, and lies, widely disseminated by newspapers, discussion circles, and party leaders, had considerable popular support. People’s fears were thus first created and then shaped by their faith in the Party and its message. They wrote numerous *zaiavleniia* [denunciations], reporting rumours, nonsense, and transgressions both large and small. Even at moments when everyone might have remained silent at no cost, a voice from the floor would invariably shout, ‘The punishment is too lenient!’ or ‘Exclude!’”¹⁹⁰

5.2.3 Stalinist Dehumanisation

Such patterns of guilt-attribution and threat-construction were the most explicit and vital ideological basis for Stalinist violence, but as in most other atrocities they were frequently accompanied by dehumanisation, inculcating the kinds of anti-empathic mind-sets conducive to violence.¹⁹¹ The portrayal of victims as subhumans, animals and vermin might seem a much more logical feature of Nazi ideology, with its core obsession with racial characteristics, than Marxist ideologies, with their rejection of race and the prioritisation of the environmental and economic conditioning of individuals. Yet Stalin, as suggested by van Ree, proved strongly inclined to view the Communist Party, and to some extent Soviet society as a whole, via organic analogies, with rather glaringly lethal implications. He told party members: “Our party is a living organism. As in every organism a metabolism takes place: old, obsolete stuff falls off (*applause*); new, growing things flourish and develop

¹⁹⁰ Goldman, 2011, p. 196.

¹⁹¹ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 110.

(*applause*).”¹⁹² Enemies within the party, Stalin declared, were “bloodsuckers, spiders and vampires”, and complacency in dealing with them drove “the sores inside of the party organism, and the party falls ill.”¹⁹³ Such language echoed Lenin’s propensity to dehumanisation noted in 5.1.2, and Stalin argued that if Lenin had not destroyed factions within the party, it would not have been “an organism, but a conglomerate of heterogenous elements [without] inner weldedness and closedness”.¹⁹⁴ In parallel to van Ree, Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel likewise note how:

“As far as leading Stalinist officials were concerned, mass terror against the population was nothing more than a social prophylactic. It cleansed society of spies, traitors, enemies of Soviet power, ‘parasites’, and ‘socially alien elements’ – all cancerous elements that destroyed society from within.”¹⁹⁵

Such claims support Hannah Arendt’s claim that in totalitarian ideologies there is a general tendency, not unique to Nazism, to treat political enemies as never merely “an individual whose dangerous thoughts must be provoked or whose past justifies suspicion, but a ‘carrier of tendencies’ like a ‘carrier of a disease’”.¹⁹⁶ And these metaphors were not only repeated by Stalin himself,¹⁹⁷ but were also endorsed by the wider ranks of the Soviet elite. Kaganovich expressed his view (with distinct echoes of the Nazi medicalised discourse analysed in Chapter 4) that:

¹⁹² van Ree, 1993, p. 56.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 53.

¹⁹⁵ Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 213.

¹⁹⁶ Arendt, 1976, pp. 423-4.

¹⁹⁷ van Ree, 1993, pp. 53-4 & 56.

“You must think of humanity as one great body, but one that requires constant surgery. Need I remind you that surgery cannot be performed without cutting membranes, without destroying tissues, without the spilling of blood? Thus, we must destroy whatever is superfluous.”¹⁹⁸

Ezhov assured the Bolshevik Central Committee “that we shall pull up this Trotskyist-Zinovievist slime by the roots and physically annihilate them.”¹⁹⁹ Frequently the rhetoric was used in performances to wider audiences, with Chief Prosecutor Vyshinsky showing a particular eagerness to utilise the Moscow show trials to whip up popular animosity. He variously labelled the defendants “alien elements”, “dogs”, “reptiles”, “predatory beasts”, “vermin”, and “lice”²⁰⁰ as well as a gang which “conceals its brutal claws and ferocious fangs.”²⁰¹ He concluded by raging against this “foul-smelling heap of human garbage” that “must be shot like dirty dogs! Our people are demanding one thing: crush the accursed reptile!”²⁰²

Such dehumanisation was replicated throughout the party and state institutions of the Soviet system. During the violence of collectivisation, rich peasants were smeared as “avaricious, bloated and bestial”, “leeches”, and “vampires” by party representatives,²⁰³ and Figes observes how “hatred of the kulaks had been drummed into [collectivisers] by their commanders and by propaganda which portrayed the ‘kulak parasites’ and ‘bloodsuckers’ as dangerous ‘enemies of the people’”.²⁰⁴ In later violence, Soviet judges ruled during court sessions that: “Enemies are not people. We’re allowed to do what we like with them.

¹⁹⁸ Glover, 1999, p. 256.

¹⁹⁹ Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 308.

²⁰⁰ Weitz, 2003, p. 73.

²⁰¹ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 195.

²⁰² Weitz, 2003, p. 94.

²⁰³ Mann, 2005, p. 323.

²⁰⁴ Figes, 2002, p. 91.

People indeed!”²⁰⁵ Newspapers proved particularly enthusiastic, calling on citizens to “exterminate enemies of the people like mad dogs, burn them out with a red-hot iron”²⁰⁶ and quoting members of the public who, echoing Vyshinsky, demanded “a dogs’ death to the dogs”.²⁰⁷ Goldman notes how, during the Great Terror:

“Metaphors about ‘snakes,’ ‘nests,’ ‘vile bands,’ and ‘reptiles’ abounded in newspaper articles as well as in official speeches delivered during party and union meetings. One factor newspaper noted, ‘The enemy, deeply masked, still continues to act, applying devilish methods of struggle against us, double dealing, twisting like a snake.’ Cartoons depicted strong hands wielding crowbars and swords, smashing and chopping off snakelike hands covered with swastikas.”²⁰⁸

Local party organisations similarly reported to the centre how they had “cleansed out enemies of the people and their supporters”, “unmasked the nest of a vile band of Trotskyist Bukharinite reptiles”,²⁰⁹ and destroyed “the asp’s nest”²¹⁰ in their midst. And such language appears to have been echoed by citizens relatively disconnected from the state. The Kazakh bard Dzhambul celebrated Ezhov as “a flame, burning the serpents’ nests” and a “bullet for all scorpions and serpents.”²¹¹ And workers themselves repeatedly issued demands, at factory meetings to discuss accused wreckers, to: “Shoot them like mad

²⁰⁵ Chandler, 2000, p. 122.

²⁰⁶ Goldman, 2011, p. 76.

²⁰⁷ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 202.

²⁰⁸ Goldman, 2011, p. 58.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 253.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 119.

²¹¹ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 24.

dogs!” “Wipe them from the face of the earth!” “The reptiles will not escape punishment!”²¹²

Like in most atrocities, such explicit, febrile language did not represent the full scope of dehumanising processes. More abstract dehumanisation inhered in what Gerlach and Werth call the “figure mania” of the Stalinist state – with the use of numerical quotas and targets in orders for persecutions, purges and arrests.²¹³ Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel likewise note how the use of ‘album procedures’,²¹⁴ where massive numbers of victims were simply compressed into albums of arrests or killings and approved as a collective, served to bureaucratise violence and allowed policy makers and indirect killers to detach themselves from any meaningful sense of their victims’ humanity. As in other atrocities, ideological dehumanisation was also reinforced by the material destitution of victims in frozen gulags and impoverished work camps. But the more explicit, biological dehumanisation noted above is indicative of the degree to which victims of Stalinist violence were incessantly denigrated and debased, and violence against them conducted in mindsets of casual contempt for any claims to moral status or protections, often combined with high aggression and vitriol. Dehumanisation may not have been as central as in the racially motivated extermination of Nazi atrocities, but it provided frames for victims and metaphors for campaigns of violence which eased endorsement and active participation.

5.2.4 Stalinist Virtuetalk

As in other mass atrocities, the perception of Stalinist violence as justified also rested on the ideological representation of participation in killing as in accord with highly valorised virtues, and the denigration of restraint or moral qualms as evidence of weakness and bad

²¹² Goldman, 2011, p. 266.

²¹³ Gerlach and Werth, 2009, p. 177. See also: Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009, p. 241.

²¹⁴ Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel, 2009, p. 214.

character. Stalinists preached the overriding importance of party unity and loyalty to the party leadership, demanded “vigilance” in fighting against dissidents, and idolised a certain hardness and harshness, with a parallel contempt for moral criticism or compassionate sentiments. These various virtues constituted the Stalinist image of the ideal “new man”, the prototypical Bolshevik, who citizens across the Soviet Union were relentlessly encouraged to emulate and become.²¹⁵

Central to Bolshevik ideology was a concept of the Communist party as a tightly bounded revolutionary vanguard, which demanded unwavering loyalty and obedience from its members towards the leadership. As Fitzpatrick writes: “Discipline and unity were high on the list of party values. They were spoken about in almost mystical terms even in the 1920s... every Communist was bound to obey unswervingly any decision of the party’s highest organs.”²¹⁶ Such ideas had their roots in Lenin’s contributions to Marxist revolutionary theory and his concept of “democratic centralism”, under which ‘democratic’ decision making within the party was limited to the very highest leadership, whose decisions, once made, had to be followed unconditionally and without dissent or “factionalism”. Lenin argued that:

“All large machine-driven industry...demands an unconditional and exceptionally strict *unity of will*, which directs the common work of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people [and which requires] submission of the will of the thousands to the will of the one.”²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Browning and Siegelbaum, 2009, p. 233.

²¹⁶ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 19.

²¹⁷ van Ree, 1993, p. 55.

Such demands were replicated in Stalin's writings. In 1905 he held up the "unity of views" as "the very basis upon which our party is built... If the unity of views falls apart, then the party falls apart."²¹⁸ As a consequence, any true member of the party, in Stalin's eyes, "considers it his duty to merge his wishes with the wishes of the party and to act jointly with the party."²¹⁹ Consistent with Lenin's principle of democratic centralism, Stalin argued that:

"Once the struggle of opinions is terminated, after criticism is exhausted and a decision is taken, the unity of will and the unity of action of all party members form that necessary condition without which a united party and iron discipline in the party is unthinkable."²²⁰

Under Stalin's own regime, this virtuetalk of loyalty and obedience to the party leadership only intensified. As Goldman summarises: "Party members in particular were constantly reminded that their first loyalty must be to the Party. Political activism and assignments took precedence over the needs of the family."²²¹ Ezhov told an audience of students at the Dzerzhinskii police academy: "We must train chekists [secret police] now, so that this becomes a close-welded, closed caste which will unconditionally fulfil my orders and be faithful to me, just as I am faithful to Comrade Stalin."²²²

This culture of unquestioning loyalty in the name of unity fulfilled a double function in Stalinist justifications for violence. First, it entrenched tendencies to suppress

²¹⁸ Ibid., 51.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid., 55.

²²¹ Goldman, 2011, p. 151.s

²²² Starkov, 1993, p. 33.

personal doubts about state policy, and participate in practices of violence under the ethos of party unity. As one mid-ranking Moscow communist confessed to his diary:

“How can I judge, a rank-and-file party man? Of course sometimes doubts sneak in. But I cannot fail to believe the party leadership, the Central Committee, Stalin. Not to believe the party would be blasphemy.”²²³

But in addition, it – like much virtuetalk – formed a foundation and intensifying mechanism for much guilt-attribution, with political opponents to Stalinism deemed heinously guilty in light of the heavy priority placed on unquestioning obedience. As Stalin wrote, dissidents within the party were not expressing legitimate disagreement with the leadership, but failing to “submit their ‘I’s to our sacred cause.”²²⁴ In the name of party unity, party members, and Soviet citizens more generally, were expected to swear boundless obedience to the leadership, taken to embody the will of the revolutionary movement.²²⁵

This hyper-intolerant attitude towards dissent, combined with the extensive threat-construction discussed in 5.2.2, fed into a separate cluster of Stalinist virtues surrounding the core, and endlessly reiterated, concept of “vigilance” – in Figes’ words, “the first duty of every Bolshevik”.²²⁶ Numerous senior authorities of the state, party and media machines relentlessly instructed party members and general citizens to display vigilance, making social esteem critically bound up with behaviours (such as denunciation and support for repressive violence) deemed indicative of it. A Central Committee letter of 29 July 1936 stressed to party organizations that: “The indelible mark of every Bolshevik under the present conditions should be the ability to recognise an enemy of the Party, no matter how

²²³ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 215.

²²⁴ van Ree, 1993, p. 52.

²²⁵ Ibid., 44.

²²⁶ Figes, 2002, p. 36. See also: Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 19.

well he may be masked.”²²⁷ Newspaper editors explained how “the task of every honest Soviet citizen is to know how to unmask enemies in any mask, to discern and to prevent their insidious, traitorous activities.”²²⁸ And the Bulgarian Georgii Dimitrov, head of the Communist International under Stalin, stated that a good Communist must “continually manifest the greatest vigilance in relation to the enemies and spies that secretly penetrate into our ranks.”²²⁹ Members at central committee meetings would repeat the party doctrine that “it is not complacency that we need but vigilance, a genuine revolutionary, Bolshevik vigilance”.²³⁰ And at the local level, officials in party organisations or editors of factory newspapers would warn workforces and committee meetings that: “Vigilance in everything is lacking.”²³¹

The absence of vigilance, in turn, provided the central explanation for many crises, and solemn criticisms on this account accompanied purges and repression against party members. The revelation of the worst ‘enemies’ of Soviet power were almost universally attributed to a “totally extraordinary blunting of Bolshevik vigilance”²³², “political myopia and loss of class vigilance”²³³, situations where “a proper Bolshevik vigilance is still lacking”,²³⁴ and to “self-complacency”²³⁵ and individuals “infected with carelessness and complacency”.²³⁶ Indeed, such virtuetalk was even endorsed by those who became victims of the regime’s persecution and violence. As part of the established rituals for acknowledging the party’s judgement upon officials accused of corruption, negligence or incompetence, the accused would reiterate the virtues of the party that they had failed to uphold: “there is no doubt” said B.P. Sheboldaev, dismissed leader of the Azov-Black Sea

²²⁷ Goldman, 2011, pp. 39-40.

²²⁸ Ibid., 59.

²²⁹ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 19.

²³⁰ Doc.58, Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 208.

²³¹ Goldman, 2011, p. 85.

²³² Doc.51, Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 194.

²³³ Doc.37, *ibid.*, 166.

²³⁴ Doc.78, *ibid.*, 269.

²³⁵ Goldman, 2011, p. 113.

²³⁶ Ibid., 114.

Territorial Committee, “that, had we exercised Bolshevik vigilance, had we checked on our people, we could have exposed them much, much earlier”.²³⁷ “If I had been more vigilant...”²³⁸ lamented Aleksei Rykov to the Central Committee during his lengthy persecution, alongside Bukharin, which started the Great Terror.

So as with exhortations to unity and loyalty, vigilance was not only a positive frame for denunciation, persecution and complicity in violence, it was also a foundation of guilt-attribution – with party members often denounced for their lack of “political vigilance”²³⁹ or “lack of vigilance, delay in reporting the information, and liberal attitude”²⁴⁰ prior to expulsion from the party, arrest, and often death. Goldman notes how:

“‘Complacency’ (*blagodushie*) became an epithet, signifying a conscious refusal to expose ‘wrecking’ and its fatal consequences. When a group of engineers in Dinamo were arrested as ‘Trotskyists’ and ‘enemies of the people,’ the factory newspaper blamed Dinamo’s former director for his lack of vigilance. Enemies flourished in the factory, the editor insisted, because he was ‘infected’ with carelessness and complacency.”²⁴¹

And this language of vigilance appears to have acquired a real resonance amongst low-level party members and Soviet citizens, with a factory resolution from early 1938 promising: “We will raise our revolutionary vigilance and root out and annihilate to the end all enemies of the people.”²⁴²

²³⁷ Doc.104, Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 342.

²³⁸ Doc.119, *ibid.*, 374.

²³⁹ Goldman, 2011, p. 235.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 266.

But, as in the other case studies examined in this thesis, perhaps the most critical element of Stalinist virtuetalk, with respect to the elicitation of violence, was the veneration of a basic hardness, harshness and mercilessness, and the parallel denigration of compassion, empathy towards suffering, and moral concern. As shown in 5.1.2, hardness had been adulated by Lenin, and his first chief of Bolshevik internal security, Feliks Dzerzhinsky, had followed him in calling for “the most determined, hard, and solid comrades, without feelings of pity, ready to sacrifice for the safety of the revolution”.²⁴³ But these appeals became progressively pervasive under Stalin. The praise of brutal attitudes, and condemnation of “sentimental humanitarianism”, normatively shifted the ideological environment so that support for, suggestion of, or participation in violence looked admirable. Figes’ interviewees remembered being told by their superiors:

“You must assume your duties with a feeling of the strictest Party responsibility, without whimpering, without any rotten liberalism. Throw your bourgeois humanitarianism out of the window and act like Bolsheviks worthy of Comrade Stalin. Beat down the kulak agent wherever he raises his head. It’s war – it’s them or us”.²⁴⁴

Orders from above would advise: “*Don’t be afraid of taking extreme measures.* The Party stands four-square behind you. Comrade Stalin expects it of you. It’s a life and death struggle; better to do too much than not enough.”²⁴⁵ And, Soviet security services were told by their instructors: “It is better to overstep the mark than to fall short... Remember that we won’t condemn you for an excess, but if you fall short – watch out!”²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Weitz, 2003, p. 61.

²⁴⁴ Figes, 2002, p. 85.

²⁴⁵ Glover, 1999, p. 259. [emphasis in original]

²⁴⁶ Figes, 2002, p. 84.

This adulation of maximum harshness and violence was buttressed by the party's widespread utilisation of military language, rituals, dress styles and symbolism. Fitzpatrick points out how "a lot of work was carried out in 'campaign' style, that is, in short bursts of concentrated attention to particular tasks... This made life at the factory resemble life at the front, justifying another military metaphor – 'storming'."²⁴⁷ The Soviet youth movement, the *Komsomol*, was a particularly intense site for such rhetoric and imagery, and their activists "proud of their militancy, were prominent in the collectivisation and anti-religious drives of the early 1930s, armed and outfitted in quasi-military uniform".²⁴⁸ As a consequence, many rural Russians, Fitzpatrick argues, "grew up venerating the Komsomol members from the city who 'literally took over the village' during collectivisation, wearing smart military-style uniforms and carrying guns."²⁴⁹ But such attitudes extended throughout the ranks of the party, since:

"Communist leaders projected themselves as tough guys, an image that generally corresponded with reality. They cultivated a peremptory style of command, barking orders, demanding instant obedience and no backchat, and insisting on the Soviet version of the bottom line, which was to meet targets at all costs. Consultation or lengthy deliberation was a sign of weakness; a leader must be decisive."²⁵⁰

Stalinist perceptions of desirable leadership style thus encouraged the resort to violent language and violent policies. Ezhov promised to: "get rid of all that scum which the revolution and the Civil War had sent sloshing into the organs of state security. People who

²⁴⁷ Fitzpatrick, 2000b, p. 32.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 35.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 31.

have come from the Central Committee Orgbureau will sweep out all of that grime with an iron broom.”²⁵¹ There was, in the eyes of these Soviet leaders, a basic instrumental functionality to such hard-line policies. As Kaganovich reported to Stalin:

“If we did not exert pressure for the grain procurements, they would not gather the harvest and would foul up the procurements. Most of the secretaries of district committees...are approaching the procurements like unprincipled pragmatists and do not see...that kulaks and White Guards are sitting in the collective farms pretending to be Partisans... On the scene in Siberia and the Cheliabinsk Region I had to lash out, of course, as harshly as I could against the opportunists and blind leaders. The results don’t seem to be too bad...”²⁵²

Much Stalinist violence was built, then, on the attitudinal predispositions of Soviet policy makers to favour harsh policies positively viewed as ‘cracking down’ on dissidents and enemies. But such attitudes were mirrored by many at the level of ordinary party members and citizens. Goldman notes how at meetings of factory party organisations, it was often the audience who were the most radical element, demanding harsher punishments than suggested by local party leaders. Ordinary members or workers in the factory would complain: “Too little, too light a punishment!”²⁵³ or “I think the decision of the party committee was too soft. We should exclude him.”²⁵⁴

This embrace of the virtue of harshness came with a corresponding drive to portray compassion or moral qualms as pathetic and contemptible weakness and stupidity. Those

²⁵¹ Starkov, 1993, p. 30.

²⁵² Stalin and Kaganovich, 2003, p. 286.

²⁵³ Goldman, 2011, p. 230.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 233.

who lobbied for rights to be restored to kulaks in Russia were ridiculed by Stalin as “jackasses among the petty bourgeoisie and the philistines”,²⁵⁵ and in party circles, Getty and Naumov argue, “concerns for legality and civil rights were seen as ‘rotten liberalism,’ which was dangerous to the revolution.”²⁵⁶ Bukharin, himself soon to be purged and killed as an enemy of the people, offers a stark illustration of the prevailing attitude in stating to the Central Committee:

“We are currently at war, and we must exercise the strictest discipline... Factions must be hacked off without the slightest mercy, without being in the slightest troubled by any sentimental considerations, concerning...respect for a person as such...These are all totally abstract formulations, which cannot serve the interests of an army that is storming the fortress of the enemy.”²⁵⁷

Workers were likewise urged to reject the “petty-bourgeois servility” and “passivity” which restrained them from denouncing possible wreckers,²⁵⁸ and in the factories “newspapers advised employees to resist the inclination to be kindhearted or soft in dealing with suspicious coworkers or comrades.”²⁵⁹ And these appeals appear to have received considerable internalisation by party members. Figes notes how, later in life, Kopelev:

“recall[ed] his efforts to subordinate his moral judgement (what he called ‘subjective truth’) to the higher moral goals (‘objective truth’) of the Party. Kopelev and his comrades were horrified by

²⁵⁵ Stalin and Kaganovich, 2003, p. 69.

²⁵⁶ Getty and Naumov, 1999, p. 34.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 96.

²⁵⁸ Goldman, 2011, p. 47.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 60.

what they were doing to the peasantry, but they deferred to the Party: the prospect of retreating from this position, on the basis of what they had been brought up to dismiss as the ‘bourgeois’ ideals of ‘conscience, honour [and] humanitarianism,’ filled them with dread.”²⁶⁰

In this ideology, as Ryan summarises: “‘Humanist’ and ‘compassion’ could become hideous insults, ‘destruction’ could become a term of immense praise.”²⁶¹ Conventional moral codes, and responses like empathy and compassion, had been successfully discredited – as one Bolshevik put it: “Like a good Communist, I am always ready to be sent to hell.”²⁶² As a consequence, some of the basic normative restraints on violence present in most societies were stripped of their motivational force amongst many Soviet citizens.

This, coupled with the other justificatory mechanisms discussed in this chapter, constituted the Stalinist representation of extreme violence against civilians as permissible and even desirable. As with Nazi crimes, the presence of dehumanised, guilty and threatening representations of victims, a deagentified account of the violence, a harsh and anti-humanitarian virtuetalk, and the promise of massive future benefits rendered plausible in light of the broader content of Stalinist ideology, motivated, legitimated and rationalised the killing of civilians on a vast scale in Stalin’s Soviet Union. Yet these mechanisms have not solely been the province of such conventionally ‘totalitarian’ or ‘evil’ ideologies. As I shall examine in the next chapter, they were no less critical to the way the ideology of liberal Allied states in World War II justified massive levels of violence against civilian populations.

²⁶⁰ Figes, 2002, p. 191. See also: Slim, 2007, p. 26.

²⁶¹ Ryan, 2012, p. 22.

²⁶² Figes, 2002, p. 18.

6. Allied Area Bombing in World War Two

As noted in Chapter 1, even talking about Allied area bombing in World War Two alongside events like the Nazi Holocaust and the horrors of Stalinist Russia will strike many as deeply controversial. Yet the Allied aerial campaign against urban areas in Germany and Japan constitutes one of the 20th Century's major instances of civilian destruction at the hands of organised state power. In addition, its broad techniques of ideological justification bear many similarities to Nazi and Stalinist violence against civilians, in line with the general account of the ideological dynamics of mass atrocities I have presented. This calls into question some assumptions of a vast and totally unbridgeable gulf between liberal and illiberal forms of violence against civilians. But it does not collapse those forms of violence into each other, and does not deny that there are many vitally important moral and empirical differences between these cases.¹

But the common perception of a total incomparability Nazi and Stalinist violence on the one hand and violence by liberal states on the other often rests on factual misconceptions about Allied tactics. It is still commonly assumed that Allied air forces in World War Two restricted their bombing to military objectives, and only killed civilians as accidental 'collateral damage'. But this is a mythical account of wartime bombing now falsified by archival sources and refuted by leading contemporary historians. Whilst much Allied bombing was targeted against military and industrial targets, a large proportion was directly targeted against civilians and urban populations in the hope of destroying 'morale' and killing civilian workers. The omission of this from some memorialisation of World War Two is the enduring effect of effective wartime propaganda by both the British and American governments, who consistently misled their publics over the nature of the

¹ For just a few important differences, see: Levene, 2008, pp. 58-65.

bombing campaigns, aided by compliant national media sectors.² In private, British and American officials explicitly declared their intention to kill civilians. Indeed, Arthur Harris, head of Britain's Bomber Command from February 1942 until the war's end and contemptuous of "sentimental" opposition to the bombing of city populations, demanded that the real aims of bombing be made explicit, writing:

"The aim of the Combined Bomber Offensive... is the destruction of German cities, the killing of German workers and the disruption of civilized community life throughout Germany. It should be emphasised that the destruction of houses, public utilities, transport and lives... on an unprecedented scale...are accepted and intended aims of bombing policy. They are not by-products of attempts to hit factories."³

Harris' emphasis was forthright but far from unique.⁴ His predecessor Sir Richard Peirse also affirmed that the bombing campaign against Germany should involve "the attack on the people themselves...there is no distinction between combatant and non-combatant."⁵ Sir Charles Portal, Chief of the British Air Staff, likewise wrote in a memorandum to British Bomber Command in 1942, that "the aiming points are to be the built-up areas, not, for instance the dockyards or aircraft factors..."⁶ And RAF bombers were explicitly authorised to attack civilian targets directly, and to take no efforts to avoid civilian

² On such efforts to mislead the public, see: Connelly, 2002; Schaffer, 2009; Schaffer, 1988, pp. 69-70; Schaffer, 1980, pp. 318-19; Overy, 2005b; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 255-60; Hastings, 2010, p. 44 & 397; Overy, 2012, p. 28; Bellamy, 2008, pp. 55-8 & 62 fn.34 & fn.40; Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 141-5.

³ Overy, 2005b, p. 290. See also: Overy, 2012, p. 32; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 219-20 & 235; Overy, 2005b, p. 290.

⁴ For example: Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 99; Hastings, 2010, p. 160.

⁵ Farr, 2012, p. 144.

⁶ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 139. See also: Overy, 2012, p. 23 & 27.

casualties when bombing Germany, Italy or Japan.⁷ Indeed, cities such as Hannover were given high priorities as bombing targets because of the size and density of their residential areas.⁸

American air force planners showed greater initial reluctance to engage in such targeting of city centres,⁹ although they had, as early as 1941, anticipated that in certain circumstances it might be “highly profitable to deliver a large-scale, all-out attack on the civil population of Berlin.”¹⁰ From 10 October 1943 onwards, they joined the British in attacking urban populations – that day targeting the city centre of Münster with 138 planes.¹¹ In May 1944, General Carl Spaatz sent orders to the commander of the Fifteenth U.S. Air Force explicitly rescinding any efforts to avoid civilian casualties in Germany,¹² and on 9 June of the same year, he ordered that plans be drawn up for psychological warfare bombing against “undefended” and “virgin” German towns.¹³ In Japan too, the catastrophic 9-10 March 1945 fire raid on Tokyo, which killed an estimated 87,793 people in one night, was targeted at a rectangle of the city which was predominantly residential.¹⁴ And Alex Bellamy notes that archival documents show that US air planners organising the bombing of Japan selected targets based on three factors, in orders of *descending* importance: (1) congestion/inflammability of the city; (2) incidence of war industry; (3) incidence of transportation facilities.¹⁵ Finding cities that could be destroyed effectively was thus considered more important than the strategic importance of those cities in terms of their industrial potential or military transportation capacity.

⁷ Hastings, 2010, p. 211.

⁸ Overy, 2012, p. 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-21. See also: Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 239-40 & 245.

¹⁰ Schaffer, 1988, p. 33.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 66-7.

¹² Schaffer, 2009, p. 39; Schaffer, 1988, p. 68.

¹³ Schaffer, 1988, p. 73.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 131-2.

¹⁵ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 151.

So despite limited but notable resistance to civilian targeting in some quarters,¹⁶ Allied bombing intentionally targeted civilian areas, and on the often explicit basis that civilian deaths and physical or psychological injury would be beneficial to Allied politico-military objectives. As a result, it killed civilians in enormous quantities, with between 300,000 and 600,000 German civilians and 268,000 to 900,000 Japanese dying as a direct consequence of aerial bombardment (plus, of course, several thousand civilian casualties amongst the peoples under Nazi occupation, as well as 56,000 Allied airmen).¹⁷ Such organised destruction of civilian life rested on ideology. Because the leading Allied participants in aerial bombing, Britain and the United States of America – as well as other major allies such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand – were far more open and democratic societies than Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia, they were not so hegemonically dominated by a single and rather tightly bounded ideology like Nazism or Stalinism. This chapter endorses the common assumption that we can productively talk, at some level, of ‘liberalism’ as a widely shared and dominant worldview amongst wartime politicians, military officers, and soldiers. But I will generally talk about ‘Allied ideology’ to denote the common sets of ideas which underpinned the British, American and broader Allied war effort, including key ideas about bombing.

6.1 Allied Area Bombing’s Ideological Inheritance

6.1.1 Ideas of Airpower in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

As with Nazism and Stalinism, the core elements of Allied ideology did not just fall into perpetrators’ minds at the outbreak of war. On the contrary, they were rooted in and rendered plausible by older ideas and patterns of thought. Stretching farthest back in antecedent history was the broad intellectual tradition of liberalism. I touch on the role of

¹⁶ Bellamy, 2008, p. 50; Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 145-7; Hastings, 2010, pp. 129-37; Schaffer, 1988.

¹⁷ Hastings, 2010, p. xi & 353; Schaffer, 1988, p. 148.

that tradition throughout this chapter – dedicated studies of it can be found elsewhere.¹⁸ In this section, I wish to focus on the more direct and less widely understood role played by ideological developments regarding air technology, military strategy, and ethics in the World War One and interwar period. “A preference for area bombing was pervasive,” Bellamy reminds us, “in the RAF and strategic circles well before the Second World War”¹⁹ and the ideas underpinning such preferences were crucial to understanding why area bombing in World War Two looked permissible and desirable. Such ideas, held by liberal leaders, soldiers, and publics, were centrally derived from the attempt to learn from and cope with the experiences of World War One, and the new military doctrines developed as a result.

But that war did not mark the first military use of air power. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had utilised small balloons to drop bombs on rebellious Italians in Venice in 1849,²⁰ and in the Italo-Turkish War of 1911-12, the Italians themselves used airplanes and airships against the Turkish army. Such events, and widely publicised developments in air technology, ensured that the major consideration of air power in World War One would not occur in an intellectual and historical vacuum. Indeed, Tami Davis Biddle highlights the role of wider cultural expectations about the devastating potential of future air power, expressed most clearly in an expanding lineage of futurist literature in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including Jules Verne’s *Clipper in the Clouds* (1886), William Delisle Hay’s *Three Hundred Years Hence* (1881), S.W. Odell’s *The Last War; Or, Triumph of the English Tongue* (1889), Roy Norton’s *The Vanishing Fleets* (1907) and H.G. Well’s *The War in the Air* (1908).²¹ Such stories (often involving strong themes of racism and xenophobia) consistently envisaged a future in which vast air fleets would appear over enemy cities

¹⁸ See, for example: Howard, 1978; Freedon, 1996; Dillon and Reid, 2009.

¹⁹ Bellamy, 2008, p. 50.

²⁰ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 19.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13; Hastings, 2010, p. 32.

during war and rain death upon their citizens.²² They were accompanied by parallel speculation and prediction in military and political circles which emphasised the tremendous ‘morale effect’ air power would have given the presumed weakness of civilians – with one British air officer in 1893 stating that when air power was properly developed “the arrival of the aerial fleet over the enemy capital will probably conclude the campaign.”²³ Such confident predictions that civilian urban populations would never be able to withstand aerial bombardment reflected, as Davis Biddle points out, a widely identified Victorian and Edwardian emphasis on élan and courage and the presumed superiority of the gentlemanly military officer over the urban-poor civilian.²⁴ So awesome was the anticipated power of the aircraft that many, perhaps motivated by a characteristically liberal optimism about new technology, predicted that it would ensure the end of war itself.²⁵ No less an authority than Orville Wright argued that “the aeroplane has made war so terrible that I do not believe any country will again care to start a war”.²⁶ One American newspaper was more poetic, arguing that “behind the images of carnage shines the light of universal peace.”²⁷

With the outbreak of World War One more systematic policies were formulated in light of these cultural expectations. Germany, France, Italy, Britain and the United States mobilised air forces and engaged in attacks on the enemy ‘rear’ – typically industrial targets in cities relatively near the front (though German zeppelins also conducted raids on English coastal cities). British policies were heavily influenced by the Smuts Report of 1917, which at its most dramatic (and speculative) had echoed the earlier futurist literature by claiming that: “the day may not be far off when aerial operations with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale may

²² Sherry, 1987, p. 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4. See also: Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 19.

²⁴ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 12-19.

²⁵ Sherry, 1987, pp. 5-8; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 12-13.

²⁶ Sherry, 1987, p. 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

become the principle operations of war”.²⁸ Foreshadowing the promises of World War Two,²⁹ claims that air power would save thousands of lives and end the war were increasingly articulated, and were supported by vociferous public demands for vengeful reprisal attacks on German civilians.³⁰ In Germany herself, the commander of the German Naval Airship Division declared that “airships offer a certain means of victoriously ending the war.”³¹

But by and large, these attacks were objectively ineffectual. Reports on the German bombing of England noted responses of anger more than panic or a desire to surrender,³² and a contemporary estimate suggests that Allied bombing of German industry in World War One caused damage equivalent to less than a tenth of one percent of German war expenditure.³³ Nevertheless, these limitations did not discourage confident claims that air power had been effective and that the moral/morale³⁴ effect of bombing had become central to war. Such claims were sustained by the skewed processing of available data created by existing ideological convictions and biases. Official British postwar bombing surveys between 1918 and 1920 dismissed available evidence that the effect of bombing was minimal,³⁵ and concluded with the deeply implausible claim that: “Had the war continued a few months longer, a more or less total breakdown of labour at several [factories] might have been confidently expected.”³⁶ An equivalent American survey was more cautious, but also concluded that: “It is certain that air raids had a tremendous effect

²⁸ Hastings, 2010, p. 33.

²⁹ Sherry, 1987, p. 18.

³⁰ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 30-1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

³² *Ibid.*, 23.

³³ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁴ In the first half of the 20th Century the addition of a final ‘e’ to form ‘morale’ had not yet become widespread; morale was conceptualised and pronounced as in modern discourse (in contrast to moral qua morality) but often spelt ‘moral’. See *ibid.*, 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 60. See also: *ibid.*, 35.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 59. See also: *ibid.*, 65.

on the morale of the entire people.”³⁷ And a British parliamentary paper from 1919 likewise asserted: “The effect, both morally and materially, of the raids on German territory carried out during the summer of 1918 can hardly be overestimated.”³⁸

Such surveys, and the wartime experience of leading air force officials, formed the core ideological vector into twenty years of postwar doctrinal and intellectual developments in military, political and public circles. The central product of these developments was a supreme confidence in many quarters that air power would prove revolutionary and unstoppable in future wars and – in Britain at least – the belief that area bombing of cities was the most effective way of exercising it. Given the assumed weakness of civilian populations and the enormous morale damage air power was expected to wreck, such area bombing was expected to be capable of winning wars without – and this was perhaps its most important attraction – the need for the catastrophic slaughter of trench warfare.³⁹

The Italian theorist Giulio Douhet is often accorded preeminent influence in the development of such ideas. His major work, *The Command of the Air*, published in 1921, was widely read in both Britain and America in the 1930s and offers the most extensive elaboration of the interwar picture of future air power.⁴⁰ It contained many claims which would later form central elements of Allied ideology’s portrayal of bombing civilians as justified, three of which are worth particular note. First, Douhet engaged in the threat-construction of civilians as no less dangerous than soldiers, since in modern war “the soldier carrying his gun, the woman loading shells in a factory, the farmer growing wheat, the scientists experimenting in his laboratory” all played an equally important part in the war effort.⁴¹ There was thus, Douhet asserted, no meaningful combatant/non-combatant distinction in modern war: everyone was an equivalent threat. Second, Douhet also offered

³⁷ Ibid., 66. The American report did, however, note that morale effects did not significantly impair German fighting forces, and favoured targeting industry.

³⁸ Ibid., 61.

³⁹ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 133; Bellamy, 2008, p. 49; Sherry, 1987, p. 24 & 27; Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Douhet, 1983.

⁴¹ Schaffer, 1988, p. 21.

one of the first future-biased consequentialist defences of area bombing, in arguing that the necessary civilian casualties which would result would be outweighed by the ultimate benefits he was sure would accrue: the shortening of war and avoidance of bloody land battles. In future wars, Douhet predicted, “bombers would terrorise the nation, breaking its physical and moral resistance” and under such conditions “how could a country go on living and working, oppressed by the nightmare of imminent destruction and death?”⁴² For this reason, Douhet presented the aerial bombardment of civilians as *more humane* than alternatives like trench warfare. “The more rapid and terrifying the arms are,” he wrote, “the faster they will reach vital centres and the more deeply they will affect moral resistance. Hence the more civilized war will become.”⁴³ Finally, in his emphasis on modernity, modern war, and the role of technological change in creating this form of war, Douhet laid the foundations for a form of modernist deagentification of bombing civilians. It was not a human choice to breach civilian immunity, Douhet suggested, but a necessary outcome of the *nature of modern war*.⁴⁴ As Ronald Schaffer summarises, he:

“...presented himself not as one who consciously willed the change, but as one who had come to understand that the military and technological evolution, particularly the evolution of strategic air warfare, had made the barrier [between civilian and combatant] obsolete. Douhet urged his readers to confront the brutal facts of the future war, to view them ‘without false delicacy and sentimentalism.’”⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Sherry, 1987, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 107; Schaffer, 1988, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Schaffer, 1988, p. 23.

But Douhet's arguments were mediated (or sometimes arrived at independently) by theorists and war planners in the emerging British and American air forces. Their contributions are worth examining in more detail.

6.1.2 The Development of Air Ideology in Interwar Britain

Hugh Trenchard had been the head of Britain's 'Independent Force' of front-line bombers during World War One, and became the country's first post-war Chief of Air Staff at the war's conclusion. No figure played such a central role in generating a widespread consensus amongst British airmen and political and intellectual leaders that a doctrine of massive aerial offensives against urban targets would provide the best prospects for victory in future wars. "His passionate belief in the potential of a bomber offensive against an enemy nation," Max Hastings writes, "was to dominate the Royal Air Force for more than twenty years."⁴⁶ In December 1918, three years prior to Douhet's *Command of the Air*, Trenchard had composed his final dispatch on his World War One command, which was reprinted in the *London Gazette* in January 1919. In it, he famously asserted that "at present the moral effect of bombing stands undoubtedly to the material effect in a proportion of 20 to 1", a formula that was to become axiomatic in large segments of political and military society in the interwar period despite having, in Davis Biddle's words, "no scientific or mathematical basis"⁴⁷ (it was also referenced repeatedly in America).⁴⁸ This overwhelming emphasis on the morale effect of bombing produced by targeting cities and civilians was combined, in Trenchardian thought, with a certainty that defensive air forces would never be able to stop a bomber offensive organised with determination and willpower. Bombing civilians was simply, in Trenchard's view, the best way to achieve a quick victory, and would save lives in

⁴⁶ Hastings, 2010, p. 34.

⁴⁷ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 48.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 132-4.

the long-run. As he suggested in a 1923 address: “if we could bomb the enemy more intensively and more continuously than he could bomb us, the result might be an early offer of peace.”⁴⁹

These beliefs were not self-evident madness. As noted, they reflected widespread expectations about the future of air technology, superficially plausible assumptions about the horror of being bombed, and contextually embedded ideas about the role of morale and the importance of will and national character.⁵⁰ But like the post-war surveys on which they drew, they were the product of faulty analysis, the selective use of information, and a resistance to acknowledge contrary evidence in favour of received wisdom.⁵¹ Trenchard and his followers failed to appreciate the enormous potential power of organised fighter squadrons in inflicting prohibitive losses on bombers.⁵² And they persistently exaggerated the impact of British and German bombing on civilian morale during World War One (often influenced by classist, sexist and racist attitudes which encouraged perceptions of civilian weakness)⁵³ whilst ignoring evidence of the actual steadfastness and resistance of civilian populations under attack.⁵⁴

Trenchardian thought thus formed a doctrinal foundation on which the targeting of civilians looked both necessary and effective. Such views were not universally endorsed, facing resistance from Army and Navy service rivals,⁵⁵ and notably from Winston Churchill,⁵⁶ but they were tragically influential. Formal training, RAF public statements, and internal memoranda in the 1920s and 1930s were saturated with Trenchardian

⁴⁹ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 76-7; Hastings, 2010, p. 45. See also: Sherry, 1987, p. 7.

⁵¹ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 69-81.

⁵² Hastings, 2010, pp. 35,38,40 & 51; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 27, 89-90 & 95; Sherry, 1987, p. 27.

⁵³ See: Slessor, 2009, p. 65; Sherry, 1987, p. 26; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 15-16, 64 & 109.

⁵⁴ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 31 & 78-9.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 82 & 95-6.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 79; Hastings, 2010, pp. 46-7.

conceptions.⁵⁷ They were endorsed by a substantial number of leading British strategists, including the influential Basil Liddell Hart and J.F.C. Fuller.⁵⁸ As Fuller argued:

“[P]icture, if you can, what the result will be: London for several days will be one vast raving Bedlam...the city will be in pandemonium... Then will the enemy dictate his terms, which will be grasped at like a straw by a drowning man. Thus may a war be won in forty-eight hours and the losses of the winning side may actually be nil!”⁵⁹

Such faith in aerial attacks against civilians was reinforced by evidence from air power’s use in the British colonies, the Spanish Civil War, and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, all systematically interpreted in ways that would not challenge received wisdom.⁶⁰ Bomber advocates, as Davis Biddle summarises, “found a range of ways to see what they wanted to see, and to avoid seeing what contradicted their views.”⁶¹

And the influence of Trenchardian thinking was not limited to the military. It coincided with a renewed spate of interwar futurist fiction predicting aerial armadas and widespread air-based chemical warfare.⁶² And it was picked up and propagated by a powerful air lobby with roots in Conservative sections of the press and public, whose efforts were aided by air power’s apparent potential for cost-effective maintenance of the British Empire in an interwar period of financial strain.⁶³ A pamphlet by the ‘Hands Off Britain Air Defence League’ distributed in 1933 called on the government to “create a new

⁵⁷ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 79. See also: *ibid.*, 92-3.

⁵⁸ Hastings, 2010, p. 37; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 24-5 & 104-5; Sherry, 1987, pp. 23-9.

⁵⁹ Sherry, 1987, p. 24.

⁶⁰ Tanaka, 2009a; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 82-3, 90-2 & 115-20.

⁶¹ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 91.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 105-6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 82-4.

winged army of long range British bombers to smash the foreign hornets in their nests!’⁶⁴

And in a famous statement to the House of Commons on 10 November 1932, Stanley Baldwin espoused a classic statement of Trenchardian theory:

“I think it is well for the man in the street to realize that there is no power on earth that can protect him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through. The only defence is in offence, which means that you have to kill more women and children more quickly than the enemy if you want to save yourselves.”⁶⁵

In its misplaced certainty, its deagentifying destruction of alternatives, and its framing of killing as assuredly bringing future benefits, this statement succinctly expressed several features of the ideological worldview which would ultimately underpin the campaigns against German and Japanese civilians in World War Two.

Flaws in Trenchardian doctrine would undermine preparation for war in the 1920s and 30s and, perhaps most damagingly, generated exaggerated fears of war in the build-up to the Munich conference in 1938 which were an important pressure for appeasement – as Churchill subsequently acknowledged.⁶⁶ It would have tragic consequences at the outbreak of World War Two, when British bombers proved entirely unable to inflict meaningful damage on Germany, and British fighter forces were sufficiently weak to make defeat at the hands of the Luftwaffe in British skies a real possibility in 1940.⁶⁷ “Bomber Command had only very limited effectiveness,” Davis Biddle summarises, “in any of the roles it attempted to undertake... the gap between rhetoric and reality proved to be nothing less than an

⁶⁴ Hastings, 2010, p. 39.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁶ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 2 & 126; Sherry, 1987, pp. 76-77.

⁶⁷ Hastings, 2010, pp. 41-3, 50-3 & 58-9; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 88-94.

abyss.”⁶⁸ Yet even in 1939, the retired Trenchard criticised efforts to build up those fighter defences which would ultimately prevent a German invasion of Britain, seeing them as a needless diversion caused by the clamouring of an ignorant public.⁶⁹ And, writing to congratulate Sir Charles Portal on his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command in April 1940, Trenchard noted that he was “sorry that you could not [yet use British air power] where I and others think it probably would have ended the war by now.”⁷⁰ The extreme detachment from reality expressed in such statements was not, by this stage, widely shared. But the general faith in the area bombing of civilians had been successfully sedimented. Leading organisers of bombing in World War Two, like Portal and his successor Harris, were firm believers in Trenchardian doctrine. They, and the senior military and political leaders around them, formed the vital conduits between interwar theories and Allied bombing practices in World War Two.

6.1.3 The Development of Air Ideology in the Interwar United States

The development of ideas about air power in the United States during the interwar years followed a less linear course towards bombing civilians than in Britain, for a variety of reasons, including the lack of US air-arm independence (they remained a section of the US Army until after World War II) and resistance from certain influential policy makers.⁷¹ As a result, American politicians, military officers and publics maintained ambivalent attitudes towards the area bombing of cities and industry right up to the final years of World War Two. US theories often emphasised the potential for aircraft to perform tactical roles and conduct precision-bombing against specific military and industrial targets, rather than

⁶⁸ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 183.

⁶⁹ Hastings, 2010, p. 51.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷¹ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 128-9 & 163. The resistance was usually on practical grounds, though moral objections were also raised by some.

advocating the targeting of large civilian areas. Early American documents on the use of air forces endorsed Trenchardian assumptions about the importance of morale effect and reproduced his 20-1 ratio with the same absence of substantiation.⁷² At the same time, however, they expressed more caution about such assumptions. A 1936 memorandum by the War Plans division of the War Department, still dominated by the Army and Navy, thus argued that: “The effectiveness of aviation to break the will of a well-organized nation is claimed by some, but this has never been demonstrated”.⁷³ Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a substantial segment of those who did discuss air power were either sceptical of or actively opposed to its use against civilian populations.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, as in Britain, core ideas on the power of aerial bombardment and the legitimacy of targeting civilians were increasingly widespread from the mid-1920s onwards, especially amongst Air Corps leaders, more optimistic about air power than their Army superiors. In this respect, and especially in the eyes of the general public, the flamboyant Billy Mitchell was the major influence as a campaigner for an independent Air Service and a general publicist for new visions of air power. As well as contributing early post-war operations manuals, Mitchell “assaulted the public with speeches, articles, books, and endless appearances before congressional committees”⁷⁵ and organised a famous demonstration of air attacks on stationary battleships in 1921. He echoed Douhet’s faith in the power of aerial attacks on civilian morale to bring wars to a swift, and thereby more humane, conclusion, and also mirrored Douhet’s conception of civilians contributing to war as directly as soldiers. In a 1921 book he argued that:

“Warfare today between first-class powers includes all of the people of the nations so engaged – men, women and children...

⁷² Ibid., 132 & 134.

⁷³ Ibid., 128.

⁷⁴ Sherry, 1987, pp. 62-75; Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 150-3 & 171.

⁷⁵ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 136.

We must expect, therefore, in case of war, to have the enemy attempt to destroy any or all of our combatant or industrial forces – his attacks being entirely controlled by the dictates of strategy, and the means of bringing the war to a quick conclusion... The personnel of entire cities – men, women and children – can be destroyed by gas attacks from the air”.⁷⁶

As with the core statements of Douhet and Trenchard, this passage displays several of the justificatory mechanisms which were to play such a crucial role in World War Two bombing. Attacks on civilians were deagentified, presented as “entirely controlled by the dictates of strategy”, as if the nature of modern war and technological advance simply mandated that civilians be attacked.⁷⁷ Their deaths were justified by promises that this would shorten war in the future, and by threat-construction to convert civilians into a target that seems actively engaged in “warfare”, and thus no different to soldiers. And, in a foreshadowing of the dehumanising occlusion of bombing’s victims that would later be a core element of Allied ideology in World War Two, Mitchell elsewhere offered the curious claim that air war would be a “benefit to civilization” since “air forces will attack centers of production...not so much the people themselves.”⁷⁸ As with Douhet and the British theorists, these justificatory mechanisms together constituted an ideological conception of bombing in which it could genuinely appear like a morally progressive development. As Mitchell would go on to argue in 1930, bombing would be “really much more humane than the present methods of blowing up people to bits by cannon projectiles or butchering them with bayonets.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 345 fn. 30 & 32.

⁷⁷ See also: *ibid.*, 147.

⁷⁸ Sherry, 1987, p. 30.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* See also: Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 136-7.

Mitchell's deviation from the official stance of the Air Corps was unacceptable to senior Army officers, and he was court martialled in 1925, and subsequently left the military. But his ideas reflected growing ambitions amongst US airmen. A 1926 Air Corps training text advocated air attack "as a method of imposing will by terrorizing the whole population" though also spoke of "conserving life and property to the greatest possible extent".⁸⁰ Air officers placed increasing emphasis on "morale effect" and the targeting of enemy "will", and confidently predicted the power of the bomber to end wars quickly.⁸¹ Like their British counterparts, such predictions were based in part on a radical underestimation of the power of organised fighter defences to frustrate bomber attacks. In an oft-repeated statement, the Air Corps Training School instructor Kenneth Walker stated: "a well-organized, well-planned and well-flown air force attack will constitute an offensive that cannot be stopped."⁸² And one umpire of air corps training exercises in 1931 concluded simply that "it is impossible for fighters to intercept bombers".⁸³

Such doctrinal evolution in military circles was supported by pervasive beliefs in the wider public that gas attacks and aerial bombardments would, in future wars, be able to wipe out whole cities and kill all their inhabitants.⁸⁴ Thomas Edison had declared in 1921 that aerial bombing with gas would destroy a large city in five minutes,⁸⁵ and such assertions about the lethality of gas attack were commonplace throughout the interwar period, though ultimately gas weapons played no significant role in World War II at all. Yet such destructive visions of air power coexisted, as Michael Sherry shows, with a much more positive image of airpower generated by its association with modernism, daring individualism, and economic efficiency – all consonant with the values and hopes of liberal

⁸⁰ Schaffer, 1988, p. 27.

⁸¹ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 139-42 & 157-9.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 142.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

society.⁸⁶ “Airpower,” Marilyn B. Young has observed, “embodies American technology at its most dashing”,⁸⁷ and the Air Corps itself played a leading role in ideologically propagating its doctrines through organised efforts to create an ‘airminded’ US culture, with leading officers producing books for popular consumption, and even children’s adventure series.⁸⁸ The dramatic and brilliantly publicised strides made by civil aviation (especially the stunts of those like Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart) were also particularly powerful in encouraging positive attitudes towards airpower. Thus, freed from any immediate prospects of air attack by another nation on American soil, and with actual programmes of air armament minimal, Americans would enter World War Two with widespread optimism about the powers of aircraft, and certain ideological resources for perceiving their use against civilians as justified.

6.2 Area Bombing in World War Two

At the outbreak of war in Europe, both the German and British air forces defied more enthusiastic predictions about the use of airpower by showing considerable restraint in the use of aircraft against civilian targets.⁸⁹ With a few exceptions, such as the infamous German attacks on Warsaw and Rotterdam, both sides used their heaviest bombers against military targets, at the insistence of civilian political leaders.⁹⁰ But with the defeat of France, the contraction of British military options, and the growing realization that bombing specific military targets was costly and having next to no impact, an area bombing campaign against German cities gradually took centre stage.⁹¹ After the Luftwaffe accidentally bombed London on the night of 24 August 1940, Churchill ordered a reprisal attack on Berlin, and both sides thereafter engaged in increasing attacks on civilian morale

⁸⁶ Sherry, 1987, pp. 34-8.

⁸⁷ Young, 2009, p. 156.

⁸⁸ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 149.

⁸⁹ Hastings, 2010, pp. 3-17, 54-7, 73 & 95-6; Farr, 2012, p. 136; Bellamy, 2008, pp. 46 & 50-1; Schaffer, 2009, p. 31.

⁹⁰ Schaffer, 2009, pp. 32-4; Hastings, 2010, p. 68 & 216; Connelly, 2002, p. 50.

⁹¹ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 176-7; Hastings, 2010, pp. 147-70.

and industry.⁹² When the United States entered the war they did so with different proposals – preferring daylight ‘precision’ bombing to night-time area bombing.⁹³ But as the challenges and costs of precision bombing became clear, they gradually joined the RAF in area attacks on civilian populations.⁹⁴

These bombing campaigns against civilians were justified through the same overarching mechanisms as in other cases of mass violence against civilians. Such mechanisms allowed policy makers, direct and indirect killers, and western publics more generally, to perceive massive violence against civilians as permissible and even desirable.⁹⁵ Indeed, they underpinned quite shocking levels and forms of support for such violence. A survey of US public opinion after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan found that only 5% of respondents opposed any use of atomic weapons, 14% wanted a warning demonstration first, 53.5% endorsed the use of two bombs “just as we did”, whilst 23% expressed regret that more atomic bombs had not been dropped.⁹⁶ A similar proportion of respondents in a December 1944 study – 20% – wanted to see Japanese citizens tortured, exterminated or otherwise harshly punished.⁹⁷ Most shocking of all are two surveys conducted in 1943 and 1944 amongst American infantrymen, which asked “What would you like to see happen to the Japanese after the war?” For the sample of four thousand infantrymen in the Pacific theatre, 43% responded “punish leaders but not ordinary Japanese”, 9% “make Japanese people suffer plenty”, and 42% answered “wipe out whole Japanese nation”.⁹⁸ In an identical survey amongst a thousand veteran infantrymen in the European theatre, the proportion supporting the genocide of the entire Japanese nation *rose to 67%*. Such attitudes were not confined to Americans – as Davis Biddle points out:

⁹² Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 188.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 228-9 & 243-5.

⁹⁵ Connelly, 2002, p. 55.

⁹⁶ Messer, 2005, p. 308.

⁹⁷ Schaffer, 1988, p. 154.

⁹⁸ Chirot and McCauley, 2006, p. 216.

“Reports of Home Intelligence indicated not only that the [British] public understood the nature of Bomber Command’s war, but that they wished to see Germany punished”.⁹⁹ Ordinary British and American citizens and soldiers and politicians proved quite able to see the direct destruction of civilian life on an enormous scale as justified. They did so in light of the presence in Allied ideology of the six justificatory mechanisms I have identified.

6.2.1 The explicit core: future-bias and saving lives

At the centre of Allied ideological understandings of bombing was a superficially plausible consequentialist argument involving some classic elements of future-bias. The known destruction of civilian life in the present was seen as justified because of a confidently expected future benefit: bombing would decisively end the war on its own and thereby avoid the need for a costly land invasion of Western Europe, or at least shorten the war and thereby outweigh the cost of civilian deaths involved. As Harris stated most succinctly:

“Attacks on cities like any other act of war are intolerable unless they are strategically justified. But they are strategically justified in so far as they tend to shorten the war and to preserve the lives of Allied soldiers.”¹⁰⁰

An expectation of bombing’s war-winning potential flowed directly from interwar theories of bombing and the morale effect. And from initial attempts at area bombing right through to the end of the war (and beyond), the confident assertion that bombing would win or considerably shorten the war and save thousands of lives was the principal keystone in framing acts of civilian destruction as permissible and, indeed, desirable.

⁹⁹ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 221.

¹⁰⁰ Overly, 2005b, p. 290.

It was most explicit in the repeated predictions by British and American policy makers, in justification of the hundreds of thousands of civilians being killed, that a collapse in German or Japanese morale and economic production was imminent. As head of Bomber Command in January 1941, Sir Richard Peirse justified focusing bombers against urban areas on the grounds that “we are likely to precipitate a crisis in Germany’s war economy this year.”¹⁰¹ In March 1942, Churchill’s chief scientific advisor, Lord Cherwell, authored an infamous memorandum to the Prime Minister arguing for a massive campaign to ‘de-house’ millions of German workers by bombing, on the grounds that “there seems little doubt that this would break the spirit of the [German] people.”¹⁰² And a Bomber Command report of that year claimed that Germany was already “strained to the limit”.¹⁰³ Harris was the most ardent predictor. In February 1943 he asserted that German surrender due to bombing was imminent,¹⁰⁴ in August he told Portal that “we can push Germany over by bombing this year”¹⁰⁵ and in November, declaring himself “certain that Germany must collapse”,¹⁰⁶ he told Churchill:

“We have not far to go, but we must get the USAAF to wade in in greater force... We can wreck Berlin from end to end... It will cost between us 400-500 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war.”¹⁰⁷

By December 1943, Harris was specifying even more precisely that victory could be achieved with bombing alone by 1 April 1944, through the “destruction of between 40% and 50% of the principal German towns.”¹⁰⁸ Such conceptions were typical. Indeed, in

¹⁰¹ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 192. See also: Hastings, 2010, p. 129.

¹⁰² Hastings, 2010, p. 154.

¹⁰³ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 221.

¹⁰⁴ Tanaka, 2009b, p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Hastings, 2010, p. 329.

¹⁰⁶ Overy, 2005a, p. 112.

¹⁰⁷ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 230. See also: Hastings, 2010, p. 232.

¹⁰⁸ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 230.

support of Harris in November 1943 the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Intelligence), F.F. Inglis, made the quite incredible claim to Churchill that “we are convinced that Bomber Command’s attacks are doing more towards shortening the war than any other offensive including the Russians”.¹⁰⁹

Such presentations of bombing shaped wider perceptions amongst the aircrews and general public, and were echoed in the media. As the air correspondent of the *Times* assured readers in June 1943: “If the present bomber offensive could be multiplied by four, [Germany’s] war production would be completely halted. That conclusion emerges from a deliberately conservative examination of the damage done by the big bombers.”¹¹⁰ Such arguments had been made in RAF public relations and the press for some time and the American air attaché in London consequently noted in April 1942 how “the British public have an erroneous belief, which has been fostered by effective RAF publicity, that the German war machine can be destroyed and the nation defeated by intensive bombing.”¹¹¹ And the repeated failure of airmen’s predictions did not deter the area bombing advocates. As late as March 1945 Harris wrote to Norman Bottomley, later to succeed him as head of Bomber Command, asking: “Japan remains. Are we going to bomb their cities flat – as in Germany – and give the armies a walk over – as in France and Germany – or are we going to bomb only their outlying factories and subsequently invade at a cost of 3 to 6 million casualties?”¹¹² In its reduction of all choices to a dichotomy between killing civilians and taking an utterly unacceptable alternative, and in grounding predictions of both in no more than speculative assertions of future consequences, this query followed a classic justificatory structure for making attacks on civilians look permissible.

On the American side, meanwhile, the same confident assertion of bombing’s future benefits made it look justified. US Senator Sheridan Downey declared in October

¹⁰⁹ Hastings, 2010, p. 330.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹² Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 261.

1943 that aerial bombing was going to “bring the Nazis to their knees in four months”, whilst General Eaker expressed his faith that “the German people cannot take that kind of terror much longer” in November 1943.¹¹³ Like the British, American air force reports emphasised that “all evidence points to the fact that conditions in Germany are resolving themselves into... a marked deterioration in morale” and sidestepped evidential substantiation by arguing that bombing was “likely to have produced...far in excess of the sum of the visible damage.”¹¹⁴ Even General Eisenhower, not a committed air-enthusiast, lent his support to Operation Thunderclap – a 1944 plan for a vast aerial raid on Berlin expected to kill over 100,000 civilians – with the reasoning that he was “always prepared to take part in anything that gives real promise to ending the war quickly.”¹¹⁵ Bombing, for its American advocates, would save lives sufficient to outweigh civilian deaths in the here and now. After the Allied Casablanca conference in 1943, General Arnold sent an aide to the Air Staff to explain that “this is a brutal war and... the way to stop the killing of civilians is to cause so much damage and destruction and death that the civilians will demand their government cease fighting.”¹¹⁶ And Colonel Ewell, a US expert on incendiary weapons, similarly wanted leaders to recognise that fire-bombing could be “the key to accelerating the defeat of Japan, and if as successful as seems probable...might shorten the war by some months and save many thousands of American lives.”¹¹⁷

This conviction, and the resultant framing of massive civilian destruction as a life-saving act, was affirmed most prolifically in relation to the use of the atomic bombs. As Truman would subsequently summarise:

¹¹³ Ibid., 224-5.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 222.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 239.

¹¹⁶ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 148.

¹¹⁷ Schaffer, 1988, p. 120. See also: *ibid.*, 93.

“I ordered the Atomic Bomb to be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was a terrible decision. But I made it. And I made it to save 250,000 boys from the United States and I’d make it again under similar circumstances. It stopped the Jap War.”¹¹⁸

US General Groves similarly claimed that “we were trying to perfect a weapon that, however repugnant to us as human beings, could nevertheless save untold numbers of American lives.”¹¹⁹ And Churchill likewise portrayed the atomic bombs as clearly justified since:

“To avert a vast, indefinite butchery, to bring the war to an end, to give peace to the world, to lay healing hands upon its tortured peoples by a manifestation of overwhelming power at the cost of a few explosions, seemed, after all our toils and perils, a miracle of deliverance.”¹²⁰

Such arguments were not solely a matter of future-biased consequentialism. I have tried to emphasise how different justificatory mechanisms overlap and reinforce each other, and – as these quotes suggest – the projected benefits of bombing also provided it with an aura of virtue since, making it possible for liberal governments to portray it as “the most humane of all weapons”,¹²¹ and “outstandingly effective, extremely economical and undoubtedly humane in the long run.”¹²² Harris felt able to claim in his postwar memoirs, in a perfect echo of arguments in the interwar years, that “bombing proved a comparatively

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 172.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 175.

¹²⁰ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 156.

¹²¹ Schaffer, 2009, p. 44.

¹²² Tanaka, 2009b, p. 2.

humane method...it saved the flower of the youth of this country and of our Allies from being mowed down by the military in the field, as it was in Flanders in the war of 1914-18.”¹²³

The falsehood of many of these consequentialist beliefs, such as the promise that the Nazis would surrender to bombing in 1943, is now self-evident. But most elements of the picture of area bombing’s effects in Allied ideology were proved wrong,¹²⁴ and post-war British and American bombing surveys, as well as later British and Canadian official histories of the air campaign, levelled considerable criticism at the area-bombing campaign.¹²⁵ Airpower did play a vital role in the Allied victory in both Europe and Asia. In Europe, however, this was overwhelmingly through tactical operations and the damage wrought against the economy through the direct bombing of industry, oil, and communications.¹²⁶ Area bombing did force the Germans to divert scarce resources into defences, and certainly inflicted some economic damage,¹²⁷ but this amounted to nothing like the impact claimed by senior bombers. Indeed, “the claims of Bomber Command,” concludes Richard Overy, “were clearly false.”¹²⁸ And the much vaunted impact of bombing civilians so as to crack German morale never delivered the ‘knock-out blow’ its advocates had promised – indeed it is hard to pinpoint any serious military benefit created by attacks on Germans’ civilian morale and the hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths that resulted. As the post-war British Bombing Survey Unit reported: “In so far as the offensive against German towns was designed to break the morale of the German civilian population, it clearly failed. Far from lowering essential war production, it also failed to stem a remarkable increase in the output of armaments.”¹²⁹

¹²³ Hastings, 2010, p. xii.

¹²⁴ See, in general: Schaffer, 1988; Schaffer, 2009; Bellamy, 2008; Overy, 2005a, p. 122; Davis Biddle, 2002; Hastings, 2010, pp. 452-9.

¹²⁵ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 274-88.

¹²⁶ Overy, 2005a, pp. 122-6.

¹²⁷ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 285-6; Hastings, 2010, p. 308.

¹²⁸ Overy, 2005a, p. 112. See also: Hastings, 2010, p. 324.

¹²⁹ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 281. See also: Hastings, 2010, p. 288.

In Japan, the line between the bombing of industry and the targeting of civilians was more blurred due to the dominance of firebombing strategies designed to wipe out entire urban areas (though these were often residential rather than industrial).¹³⁰ And the systematic destruction of Japanese cities, in both economic and human terms, did contribute to the Japanese government's surrender. Even here, however, bombing underperformed, relative to its proponents' confident expectations, and much of the war-winning damage to the Japanese economy may have been the product of naval blockade at least as much as aerial annihilation.¹³¹ Most importantly, despite the persistent post-war myth to the contrary,¹³² the atomic bombs did not play a decisive or necessary role in ending the Pacific War; and they certainly did not save the tens or hundreds of thousands of lives their proponents constantly invoked to justify them. Far from being a contentious critical interpretation, this is the position reached by the United States' own Strategic Bombing Survey conducted after the end of the war, which stated:

“The Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs did not defeat Japan, nor, by the testimony of enemy leaders who ended the war, did they persuade Japan to accept unconditional surrender...certainly prior to 31 December 1945 and in all probability prior to November 1945 Japan would have surrendered, even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated.”¹³³

¹³⁰ Selden, 2009, p. 83.

¹³¹ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 278-9.

¹³² Messer, 2005, pp. 308-9.

¹³³ Cited in: Messer, 1995, p. 14.

Most crucially for our purposes: this was not simply a product of hindsight. The atomic bombs were dropped despite awareness in the upper echelons of the Allied governments that imminent Japanese surrender was assured – a fact which Truman’s own diaries make explicit.¹³⁴ Instead, even more speculative future-benefits appear to have motivated the use of the atomic bombs, such as exerting some influence on future Soviet behaviour.

My point here is not to reinforce a dichotomy between ideology and reality, but error often indicates the power of ideologies as against the assumption that policy makers and executors just read their key beliefs off a self-evident reality. Allied ideology involved a massive overestimation of the impact area bombing would have on industry and morale. It also rested on a key and classically liberal assumption: that a transmission mechanism always exists between civilian suffering and government policy. Interestingly, the same error has been independently identified by scholars such as Daniel Drezner and Thomas Weiss as the problem with liberal states’ sanctions policies in the 1990s.¹³⁵ Like aerial bombing, these were linked directly or indirectly to several hundred thousand deaths in Haiti and Iraq,¹³⁶ and like aerial bombing, were justified on the assumption that suffering in the present would ultimately lead to substantial benefits when the targeted governments changed their policies. In fact, as both wartime studies of bombing and modern research on sanctions demonstrate, the opposite tends to be the case: civilians’ suffering only reinforces their dependence on authoritarian regimes.¹³⁷ But this was not how the organisers or executors of area bombing or sanctions saw it. Their existing ideology led the perpetrators of area bombing to cling to a perception of it as justified in light of benefits they felt sure would accrue. As Overy puts it, “because so many influential people said that

¹³⁴ Ibid., 19-20.

¹³⁵ Drezner, 2011; Weiss, 1999.

¹³⁶ Drezner, 2011, p. 97; Howlett, 2004, pp. 1219-20.

¹³⁷ Weiss, 1999, p. 502; Schaffer, 1988, p. 71.

bombing was important, the belief grew in political and military circles that it must be so.¹³⁸

I do not wish to imply that future-biased arguments were universally endorsed: as with all ideological justifications, there was criticism in some quarters. There was strong scepticism about area bombing amongst Army and Navy officers, and some intelligence divisions,¹³⁹ and Churchill himself displayed profound ambivalence, at certain moments, about the real contribution area bombing was making towards the war.¹⁴⁰ Such non-assent to the future-bias paradigm described here illustrates the importance of my earlier appeal: that ideologies are never held uniformly or monolithically across any substantial social group, but produce complex distributions of belief. But enough significant people endorsed the future-biased representation of bombing as ultimately saving lives and winning or shortening the war to justify a policy of bombing civilians. And dissenting positions were never successfully mobilised into effective resistance to bombing, either because they did not hold critical influence over the policy makers or indirect and direct killers crucial to the bombing campaign's execution, or – as in the case of Churchill – because they were not held with sufficient conviction or exclusivity to constrain behaviour. Churchill was not a bombing fanatic, but he found the consequentialist promises of bombing sufficiently plausible (and perhaps questioned them less at some times or in some contexts than others), and the appeal of *other* justificatory mechanisms sufficiently effective, as to still perceive area bombing as fundamentally permissible and desirable.

6.2.2 Downgrading the victims: dehumanisation, guilt-attribution and threat-construction

¹³⁸ Overy, 2005a, p. 118.

¹³⁹ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 194, 196 & 231; Hastings, 2010, pp. 130-7.

¹⁴⁰ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 1-2; Slim, 2007, p. 153. See also: Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 79 & 202-3; Hastings, 2010, pp. 143-5.

No efforts to justify Allied area bombing were as explicit as the consequentialist arguments just described. Yet they do not provide a sufficient account of Allied ideology's role in making the killing of German and Japanese civilians look justified. Even operating inside the future-biased assumptions described in 6.2.1, it is hard to see how many operations of the air war, such as the bombing of Dresden (a town with limited military or economic utility) or the dropping of the atomic bombs (when we know Truman thought the war already won) could have their vast human costs justified by their limited benefits, at least if one is according the lives of German and Japanese civilians moral weight comparable to other human lives. But Allied ideology did not accord such moral weight – as leading Allied officials sometimes stated quite explicitly. As Schaffer reports: “Lowell Weicker [a senior US organiser of the bombing campaign in Europe] suggested that enemy lives and Allied lives had wholly different values, for he maintained that if terror attacks saved just a few British and Americans, the price paid by the enemy should not be an object of serious consideration.”¹⁴¹ Harris, likewise, stated: “I would not regard the whole of the remaining cities of Germany as worth the bones of one British grenadier.”¹⁴² And a group of scientists lobbied for the use of the atomic bombs with the demand: “If we can save even a handful of American lives, then let us use this weapon – now!”¹⁴³

Such statements illustrate how Allied ideology involved a significant devaluation of the significance of German and Japanese civilian suffering, and few Allied policy makers or indirect/direct participants in area bombing appear to have had exerted much cognitive engagement with the reality of the human deaths it involved. Such a mind-set was produced by the same three victim-characterising justificatory mechanisms found in Nazism and Stalinism: dehumanisation, guilt-attribution, and threat-construction. I shall examine each of these three justificatory mechanisms in turn.

¹⁴¹ Schaffer, 1988, p. 106. See also: Slim, 2007, p. 167.

¹⁴² Hastings, 2010, p. 449.

¹⁴³ Schaffer, 1988, p. 158.

As I do so, it is vital to remember that such mechanisms operate at varying degrees of consciousness and conviction. In talking of Allied dehumanisation, guilt-attribution and threat-construction I am not trying to portray either the organisers of the bombing campaigns or their executors – genuinely heroic aircrews – as unusually nasty or bloodthirsty. But they were easily influenced by conscious, semi-conscious and unconscious ideological representations. Michael Sherry's comments about the US Generals Arnold and LeMay can be generalised to most who thought about bombing: "the limitations of these men were generally the product of the political, cultural, and intellectual environment in which they worked."¹⁴⁴ Bombing planners and crews could and did cheer as bombs exploded in German and Japanese towns, not because they loved the idea of German and Japanese children or old men and women dying, but because those actual civilian victims had been cognitively obscured or transformed – into 'Nazis', the 'enemy', 'military targets', 'railways', 'morale', and so forth – so that destruction looked permissible and even desirable.

Dehumanisation

It is disturbing, when revisiting Allied propaganda in World War II, to discover that it embraced the same visceral and bestial forms of dehumanisation that might be thought more uniquely characteristic of Nazi or Stalinist ideology. British and American propaganda repeatedly reduced Germans and Japanese to monkey-like, fang-toothed beasts or stunted primitive hominids.¹⁴⁵ As Schaffer writes, "during the war, hatred of the Japanese people was fed by accounts of enemy barbarism and by portrayal of the Japanese in American media as barely human creatures who were either comical, sinister, or grotesque."¹⁴⁶ It is

¹⁴⁴ Sherry, 1987, p. xi.

¹⁴⁵ See: Keen, 1986; Sherry, 1987. See also: Russell, 1996.

¹⁴⁶ Schaffer, 1988, p. 155.

hardly surprising, therefore, that the US General Haywood S. Hansell remembered a “universal feeling” that the Japanese were “subhuman”.¹⁴⁷ Several British officials held similar attitudes to the Germans, with the government’s chief diplomatic advisor, Baron Robert Vansittart, describing them as a “degradation of the human species”.¹⁴⁸ Harris, likewise, “regularly used the metaphor of insect extermination”.¹⁴⁹

Nevertheless, by comparison with Nazism and Stalinism, in which such ‘biological’ styles of dehumanisation dominated, Allied dehumanisation relied more centrally on the transmogrification of human victims into physical *objects*, abstract *concepts*, or *numbers*.¹⁵⁰ Aerial bombing was prolific in generating statements like that of Colonel John F. Turner (reporting the judgement of the United States Committee of Operations Analysis) that for the campaign of firebombing on Japanese cities, “an optimum result [would be] complete chaos in six cities killing 584,000 people.”¹⁵¹ Portal likewise approvingly predicted that Allied bombing would cause “civilian casualties estimated at about 900,000 killed and 1,000,000 seriously injured.”¹⁵² And this was unusually explicit: both high and low ranks in Allied military structures preferred to describe the targeting of “houses”, “cities”, the “enemy’s interior”, the “social body” or “morale”,¹⁵³ as if these entities could somehow be targeted without the human beings who necessarily lived in or constituted them being targeted in the process.¹⁵⁴

Such targeting circumlocutions were tremendously dehumanising. The constant, habituated repetition of abstract terminology in official discourse provided a stable lexicon for discussing area bombing, and cognitive apparatus for thinking about it, without

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 153. See also: Selden, 2009, p. 87.

¹⁴⁸ Farr, 2012, p. 138.

¹⁴⁹ Overy, 2005b, p. 284.

¹⁵⁰ See also: Young, 2009, p. 157.

¹⁵¹ Schaffer, 1988, p. 116.

¹⁵² Hastings, 2010, p. 225.

¹⁵³ As, for example, in the Aerial Bombing Directive of 14 February 1942 or the British and American Casablanca agreement on bombing – see: Farr, 2012, p. 144; Bellamy, 2008, p. 54. See also: Young, 2009, p. 158 & 163; Hastings, 2010, pp. 124 & 153-5; Schaffer, 1988, p. 67; Bellamy, 2008, p. 48; Overy, 2005b, pp. 278 & 283-4.

¹⁵⁴ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 136.

consciously confronting the massive destruction of civilian life involved. Air force leaders like Harris could talk casually about the systematic destruction of tens of thousands of individuals, long after it had become clear that the war was won, by asserting a need to “make a special effort to eliminate the few cities which remain more or less serviceable”¹⁵⁵ and expressing determination to maintain “our average of two and a half cities devastated a month”.¹⁵⁶ The effect was obviously reinforced by the particular *distancing effects* of aerial technology – with aircrews never forced to see the faces of their victims but instead seeing explosions of abstract structures thousands of feet below them.¹⁵⁷ There may be good grounds to find this form of dehumanisation as abstract objectification less deeply offensive and repellent than the visceral reduction of certain people to animals or germs. But it is no less a form of dehumanisation, and no less effective in enabling and even encouraging violence. As Overy concludes regarding the earlier evolution of bombing ideology: “The willingness to detach the language of air power theory from the reality of bomb attack by deliberate abstraction... is one explanation for the almost complete absence of any discussion about civilian casualties in the theoretical writing of the 1930s.”¹⁵⁸

It was also reinforced by a broader hierarchical thinking which treated certain categories of people as of lesser human quality or value. In particular, the Allied policy of predominantly targeting working class areas in both Germany and Japan, and frequently eschewing bombing opportunities in areas containing wealthier inhabitants or cultural artefacts, raises some uncomfortable questions for assumptions about liberal societies’ commitments to human equality.¹⁵⁹ We should be wary of over-reading here: such practices are explained at least in part by the view that working classes were more vulnerable targets

¹⁵⁵ Overy, 2005b, p. 294.

¹⁵⁶ Hastings, 2010, p. 430.

¹⁵⁷ Tanaka, 2009b, pp. 1-2; Selden, 2009, p. 88.

¹⁵⁸ Overy, 2005b, p. 284.

¹⁵⁹ Schaffer, 1988, pp. 45-52.

and made the most important contribution to the war-effort,¹⁶⁰ and need not be interpreted as proof of a vicious plutocratic class war. But such practices were underpinned by implicit hierarchical assumptions embedded in the ideological environment of liberal elites. In particular, latent preconceptions of “the crowd” and “the labouring masses” – widespread amongst the gentlemanly classes of military officers, politicians and civil servants that dominated (and to a large degree still dominate) the governing structures of liberal states – served to occlude the reality of individual human deaths and reinforced the expectation that ill-disciplined working populations would soon ‘crack’ when subjected to bombardment.¹⁶¹ And the rather intriguing campaign to protect cultural artefacts in Europe and Japan, organised by President Roosevelt, US Secretary of War Henry Stimson, and the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe, quite literally ranked various old buildings as worthy of greater protection than tens of thousands of human lives.¹⁶² My phrasing here is not intended to reject such a sense of cultural value out of hand – many would feel that artefacts can be worth fighting and dying for. But this still reflects an especially high value accorded to historical artefacts by Allied policy makers, juxtaposed with an extreme disregard for working class deaths.

Moreover, the potentially classist conception of enemy ‘workers’ was also interrelated with racist and xenophobic ideas. The future-biased consequentialism discussed in section 6.2.1 was reinforced by a range of stereotyped assumptions about German and Japanese weakness. A group of former US consular officials advised British strategists that bombing would exploit the particular vulnerabilities of “the German temperament” and the average German’s “lack of moral fibre”,¹⁶³ the British Ministry of Information likewise confidently claimed that “all the evidence goes to prove that the Germans...will not stand

¹⁶⁰ Farr, 2012, pp. 137-8.

¹⁶¹ Overy, 2012, pp. 12-13 & 33; Overy, 2005b, pp. 278-9. See also: Hastings, 2010, p. 271.

¹⁶² Schaffer, 1988, pp. 44-53. See also: Hastings, 2010, p. 217.

¹⁶³ Overy, 2012, p. 16.

a quarter of the bombing that the British have shown they can take”,¹⁶⁴ and Portal advocated heavy incendiary attacks on civilians on the grounds that the British “will prove themselves to be tougher than the Germans.”¹⁶⁵ These baseless claims were repeated frequently in the press, a *Daily Telegraph* correspondent arguing in 1941 that Bomber Command were showing too much restraint, since “they don’t seem to realise that what merely stiffens our backs flattens a German.”¹⁶⁶

Guilt-Attribution

Equally, Allied aerial bombing was buttressed by the widespread tendency to see German and Japanese civilians as ‘guilty’ and thus legitimate targets of violence. Crucial, here, was the common ideological tendency to think in terms of collectives and group categories. Area bombing’s organisers, executors, and supporting publics constantly generalised the crimes of Nazi and Japanese military and state organisations to the entire populations of Germany and Japan – “the Germans”, “the Japs” – such that justifications of bombing in terms of punitive justice constantly amounted to demands for indiscriminating collective punishment.¹⁶⁷ This is not to deny that many German and Japanese civilians may have borne some complicity in their state’s crimes – whether through passive acceptance or active support.¹⁶⁸ But this complicity cannot be generalised to all or even a large majority of the victims of bombing. John Weiss reminds us that “even at the height of Hitler’s popularity about half of all Germans... rejected the racist violence of the Nazis, though they could not halt it.”¹⁶⁹ The Japanese military regime, even less democratically grounded

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 15. As far as we can now tell, there was no such evidence.

¹⁶⁵ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 189. See also: *ibid.*, 191-3.

¹⁶⁶ Connelly, 2002, p. 48.

¹⁶⁷ Slim, 2007, p. 175.

¹⁶⁸ Though it should be pointed out that if one does believe in this line of complicity, the same sorts of connection exist between the British public and bombing. See: Connelly, 2002, pp. 54-6.

¹⁶⁹ Weiss, 1997, p. ix. See also: Burleigh, 2001, pp. 144-5 & 153.

than the Nazis, may have faced no less quiet dissent. Above all else, a vast proportion of civilian deaths from bombing were children, about whom no reasonable claim of guilt can be made.

But this was simply not how bombing was perceived in Allied ideology (despite a dissenting minority of British and Americans, who were roundly lambasted by the press of both countries).¹⁷⁰ For its organisers, executors, and supporting publics, a *logic of reprisal* was central to the perception of area bombing as justified. “Certainly,” Davis Biddle reports, the British Air Staff “believed that their own actions had been justified by German attacks on such places as Warsaw, Rotterdam, and Coventry – as well as the V-weapon attacks on British soil.”¹⁷¹ This logic of reprisal was vital because, for all the dehumanising effects of much bombing discourse, no-one involved could be completely oblivious to the civilian deaths involved in bombing. But they could believe that they were legitimate, even just, because – to invoke the ultimately childish impulses that underpin the logic of reprisal – the other side had started it. A young British navigator, en-route to Berlin, wrote to his girlfriend:

“I hope we knock the blazes out the target (which incidentally is the post office in the centre of the city). Before, I have always felt sorry for the people down below, but the other night I came over Portsmouth on the way home and saw it afire. I saw an explosion about 2,000 feet high. So now I feel different about it...”¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Connelly, 2002, pp. 52-55.

¹⁷¹ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 253.

¹⁷² Hastings, 2010, pp. 122-3.

Such *thinking-in-collectives* – as if the city this navigator was bombing actually contained the perpetrators of the bombing of Portsmouth – was typical of the time. As Churchill stated in a lunch speech in July 1941:

“If tonight the people of London were asked to cast their vote as to whether a convention should be entered into to stop the bombing of all cities the overwhelming majority would cry, ‘No, we shall mete out to the Germans the measure and more than the measure they have meted out to us’.”¹⁷³

Schaffer reports a telling interaction at the senior levels of the United States military, after the dropping of the atomic bomb, likewise indicative of the thinking-in-collectives logic of reprisal:

“When General Leslie R. Groves, the director of the Manhattan Project, told [General] Arnold and General Marshall about the attack on Hiroshima, Marshall suggested that it would be a mistake to rejoice too much, since the explosion had undoubtedly caused a large number of Japanese casualties. Groves replied that he was not thinking as much about those casualties as about the men who had made the Bataan Death March [where Japanese soldiers marched US soldiers to death]. Afterwards... Arnold slapped Groves on the back and exclaimed, ‘I am glad you said that – it’s just the way I feel.’”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Connelly, 2002, p. 49.

¹⁷⁴ Schaffer, 1988, p. 154.

General LeMay similarly reported himself unconcerned with civilian casualties during the fire-bombing of Japan since “we knew how the Japanese had treated the Americans – both civilian and military – that they’d captured in places like the Philippines.”¹⁷⁵ As Schaffer observes, “even highly educated Americans sometimes lumped together all persons of Japanese ancestry with the particular organizations and individuals responsible for attacking Pearl Harbor and for later Japanese atrocities.”¹⁷⁶ Similarly, from the earliest stages the bombing of German civilians occurred against the background of calls from both public and leaders in Britain for retaliation.¹⁷⁷ Such sentiments were certainly not universal – Bellamy suggests that a large portion of the public held persistent reservations about bombing – but they were widespread.¹⁷⁸ They reflected a desire, in both the United Kingdom and United States, to ‘bring the costs of war’ to bear on German and Japanese civilians who, it was felt – reflecting the aforementioned faith in ‘transmission mechanisms’ between publics and governments – might ultimately be able to overthrow their leaders if they chose to.¹⁷⁹ Churchill talked approvingly of the general German populace “tasting and gulping each month a sharper dose of the miseries they have showered upon mankind.”¹⁸⁰ And a letter from Geoffrey Shakespeare, the Liberal Party MP for Norwich, to the British Air Minister, Sir Archibald Sinclair, offers a particularly graphic example. Shakespeare affirmed that:

“I am all for the bombing of working class areas of German cities.
I am Cromwellian – I believe in ‘slaying in the name of the Lord’,
because I do not believe you will ever bring home to the civil

¹⁷⁵ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 151.

¹⁷⁶ Schaffer, 1988, p. 155. See also: *ibid.*, 63.

¹⁷⁷ Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 138-9. Such a sense of German guilt also existed to a lesser extent amongst senior American officers, see: Schaffer, 1988, p. 37.

¹⁷⁸ Bellamy, 2008. See also: section 6.3 below.

¹⁷⁹ Schaffer, 2009, p. 42.

¹⁸⁰ Slim, 2007, p. 155.

population of Germany the horrors of war until they have been tested in this way.”¹⁸¹

More than any other justificatory mechanism, guilt-attribution occurred through the British and American media – the dominant epistemic authority for most people – whether with seething calls for vengeance or more measured but still persuasive assertions of German and Japanese guilt. Mark Connelly’s ‘The British People, the Press and the Strategic Air Campaign against German, 1939-45’ offers a sampling of media discourse containing a plethora of such claims. As the *Daily Mail* stated, in September 1940:

“The ruined homes and broken lives of Britain will be avenged. When Hitler has spent his fury in his useless effort to bring this country to her knees, the hour for attack will come. Then Britain must launch against Germany the most devastating offensive that has yet been seen.”¹⁸²

After Harris launched his first 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne, the *Express* declared “The Vengeance Begins!” whilst the *Gaumont* newsreel service titled its coverage of the raid “RAF Lets Hitler have it, right on the chin!”¹⁸³ Indeed, the media frequently criticised the government for not going far enough in punishing Germany, with the *Sunday Dispatch* opposing a government assurance that German civilians were not being killed wantonly since: “It is right that the German population should ‘smell death at close quarters’. Now they are getting the stench of it.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Hastings, 2010, p. 150.

¹⁸² Connelly, 2002, p. 47.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸⁴ Hastings, 2010, p. 216.

It would be wrong, however, to visualise most Britons or Americans as consumed by a burning wild-eyed hatred of the Germans or Japanese. As with most other atrocities, such passionate hatred reflected a minority rather than a majority. But guilt-attribution was powerful in part because, whilst sometimes eliciting such vengeful emotions, it could also take the form of more measured opinion which still moved within a consensus that the bombing of German and Japanese civilians was fundamentally just. Hastings quotes an interesting letter to the *Times* by one Brigadier, which he deems typical of popular opinion:

“Britain and her Allies and well-wishers must all be devoutly thankful that the RAF is at last able to repay Germany in her own coin and to inflict upon her cities the same devastation that she has inflicted on ours. But it must offend the sensibilities of a large mass of the British population that our official broadcasts, when reporting these acts of just retribution, should exult at and gloat over the suffering which our raids necessitate...”¹⁸⁵

Such comments indicate how the basic justificatory power of guilt-attribution could still work for individuals of more thoughtful inclinations than those expressed in vengeful media headlines. This is a conscientious critique of such media discourse, yet one which still involves an unquestioned extension of the criminality of Nazi leaders and the actions of the German military to the entire German public. Such an association appeared sufficiently obvious in the ideological environment of the time to need no explicit justification. And Hastings offers some reasons to believe that such measured internalisation of guilt-attributing arguments was the norm amongst both aircrews and

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 217.

publics. A censor's report on a sample of civilian letters after the 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne summarised that:

“There are those who are pleased, and those who regret that so much suffering should have to be inflicted. There are those who fear reprisals. Many of the letters contain two or more of these elements. Predominant is satisfaction, but many women express regret...”¹⁸⁶

An earlier study of aircrews' letters from June 1942 offered a similar characterisation: “Expressions of satisfaction that the Germans are having to undergo the punishment they have hitherto meted out to others are found in almost all letters, but there is an absence of vindictiveness or fanaticism in the phrases used”.¹⁸⁷ This again reinforces the more general claim of this thesis: ideological positions surrounding violence against civilians were often nuanced and measured rather than monolithic fanatical caricatures. The logic of reprisals and thinking-in-collectives embedded in Allied guilt-attribution allowed many to see area bombing as justified even when endorsed with lesser degrees of conviction, consciousness or emotional fervour.

Threat-Construction

Area bombing in World War Two obviously rested on the general understanding of the great danger presented by Germany and Japan, which was crucial in shaping more detailed assessments of necessity, constraint and permissibility. But area bombing also rested on more specific logics which connected German and Japanese civilians to that general threat,

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 216-7.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 178.

and which moved them out of the category of non-combatants/civilians against whom violence might be restricted. It is these threat-constructing logics which are worth examining, embedded as they are in particular assumptions about a) the nature of the ‘modern’ and ‘total’ war perceived by political and military leaders in the 1930s and 40s, and b) the role of industrial production in sustaining such total war. Central to the notion of bombing civilians was the claim that, because modern wars relied on industrial production and were not mere clashes of military regiments but *clashes of whole societies*, civilian workers were as central to the enemy threat as military forces. The roots of these ideas in the inter-war period were noted in section 6.1. By the time of the war itself, many air leaders were asserting an equivalency between the threat posed by soldiers and those posed by workers, confident that any contrary effort to maintain a non-combatant category must rest on naïve failures to ‘understand modern war’.¹⁸⁸ Harris stated that: “It is clear that any civilian who produces more than enough to maintain himself is making a positive contribution to the German war effort and is therefore a proper though not necessarily a worthwhile object of attack.”¹⁸⁹ General Eaker likewise declared his view that: “the man who builds the weapon is as responsible as the man who carries it into battle.”¹⁹⁰ And in a particularly indicative post-war expression, the US Air Force Secretary Symington told the U.S. Congress’s Armed Forces Committee:

“If this country’s safety is at stake, for the life of me I can’t see the difference in trying to stop the functioning of a man on a lathe building a bomber to attack the United States, and trying to stop a soldier. It would seem to me that in total war it is just as important to stop a bomber being created to attack the United States, and the

¹⁸⁸ See: Overy, 2005b, p. 284.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 281-2.

¹⁹⁰ Schaffer, 1988, p. 92. See also: *ibid.*, 151.

people who are building that bomber, as it would be to attack a railroad transportation line.”¹⁹¹

Of course, the considerable majority of the victims of Allied bombing were not workers on a lathe building bombers. But this fact – that if one targeted workers one would be certain to kill huge numbers of non-workers – was not *incorporated into* the assessment of the permissibility of targeting workers. Rather than involving such a holistic assessment, moral inquiry was fallaciously compartmentalised: threat-construction declared workers legitimate targets without any consideration of non-workers, whose deaths were then *subsequently* deemed legitimate because they were unavoidable consequences of the ‘legitimate’ targeting of workers.

Alternatively, the same thinking-in-collectives logic involved in generalised attributions of guilt to the German or Japanese populace were repeated regarding threats. Thus, Portal affirmed that: “I have for some time been expounding that the whole of an industrial city is in itself a military target.”¹⁹² The slotting of targets into broad but untextured categories – “military targets”, “industrial areas” – thus involved a crucial ideological decision to define an entire civilian area on the basis of certain particular objects that existed within it. There was nothing at all obvious or ‘natural’ about such classifications. Indeed at times, as when Truman described the entire city of Hiroshima as a “military base” to the American public, they were absurd misrepresentations.¹⁹³ These are examples of the key ideological interventions which occur in the whole military practice of *target definition* – one of the most powerful indicators of the significance of semantic choices within ideologies. Epistemically dependent on the military authorities providing such definitions, aircrews, journalists and publics rarely questioned them. Dresden, whose

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 196.

¹⁹² Bellamy, 2012b, p. 141.

¹⁹³ Ref Messer, 1995, p. 12.

bombing would ultimately cause enormous controversy, was initially presented to both bombers and public as an important German military asset. “Dresden,” the *Times* reported, “is a place of vital importance to the enemy...the centre of a railway network and a great industrial town...a meeting place of the main lines to eastern and southern Germany.”¹⁹⁴ Harris described it (wrongly, as Overy points out) as: “a mass of munitions works, an intact government centre, and a key transportation point to the east.”¹⁹⁵ Dresden’s controversy (it was a huge but not unique example of city bombardment in the overall campaign) derived principally from the revelation of such presentations as false, and the widespread awareness that the Nazi threat in the last months of the war was nothing like what it had been before. The ideological process of threat-construction, in other words, broke down.

But this was rare. Indeed, the American journal *The New Republic* was so confident that the US Army Air Force was only bombing military targets that it responded to two major British papers which reported that American bombing had killed innocent civilians by suggesting they must have been “misled”.¹⁹⁶ Military men were not so blind, but still found weakly substantiated classifications of targets as military threats satisfactory. Guido Perrera, secretary of the American Committee of Operational Analysis, invoked both the general and the specific threat in his post-war memoirs, reasoning that the United States was at war “with a fanatic enemy whose record of brutality was notorious,” and that “if his cities were indeed honeycombed with small war making plants and were a vital source of his war making power... there were logical grounds for attacking them.”¹⁹⁷ General LeMay similarly later argued that anyone could understand why he had supported the area bombing of Japan if they could simply “visit one of these targets after we’d roasted it, and

¹⁹⁴ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 255.

¹⁹⁵ Overy, 2005b, p. 293.

¹⁹⁶ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 258.

¹⁹⁷ Schaffer, 1988, pp. 163-4.

see the ruins of a multitude of tiny houses, with a drill press sticking up through the wreckage of every home.”¹⁹⁸

6.2.3 Soldierly virtues: duty, realism and hardness

But area bombing was also vitally supported by the distinctive virtuetalk of Allied ideology, exerting pressures to meet and conform to group standards of praiseworthy behaviour so as to obtain positive self-image in much the same manner as Nazi and Stalinist virtuetalk. It was particularly powerful amongst the military: airmen behaved how they thought good airmen should behave, and those thoughts were based on a militarist virtue-system which placed particular praise on duty, a notional ‘realism’, and machoistic hardness. Killing civilians therefore looked permissible, even desirable, because for most airmen it was framed in ways which made it seem a praiseworthy manifestation of soldierly virtues.

First and foremost, for most aircrews bombing was simply a matter of obeying orders, and thereby doing their duty. As LeMay put it:

“[T]here was no transgression...no venturing into a field illicit and immoral... Soldiers were ordered to do a job. They did it... The military man carries out the orders of his political bosses...so that didn’t bother me at all.”¹⁹⁹

Such a compartmentalised conception of soldiers’ responsibilities and the overriding importance of doing one’s duty were intensely disseminated to soldiers in institutionalised training, and it can hardly be surprising that most aircrews conceptualised their behaviour in this way. This emphasis on duty was intertwined with adulation of realism and hardness

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 151-2.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 152.

and, most importantly of all, the arrangement of those virtues in an antithetical relationship to serious moral reflection. Manly, hard, and realistic soldiers were seen as those who eschewed such 'idealism' and did what was 'necessary in war', while moral thinking was contrastingly framed as sentimentality and effeminacy. Just as often, it was smugly dismissed as naivety and a failure to 'understand' warfare. Again, such ideas and rhetoric have long been characteristic and embedded features of the military tradition in western societies, as well as the intellectual tradition of political realism.²⁰⁰ They constitute a selective and arguably fallacious form of amoralism – sweepingly declaring that some normative appeals (such as civilian immunity) are irrelevant in war, whilst advocating the supreme importance of others (such as duty and honour). But they reflect common and powerful portrayals of 'moral' argument, as no more than a form of idealistic abstract fancy and the proper province only of churchmen and philosophers.

Thus, the British Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Fisher, is famously reported to have declared that "moderation in war is imbecility",²⁰¹ and after the war LeMay expressed his view that: "All war is immoral, and if you let it bother you, you're not a good soldier".²⁰² A military officer, he explained, could not "mope around about the deaths he has caused."²⁰³ The US Secretary of War, Stimson, similarly argued that he had seen "too many stern and heartrending decisions to be willing to pretend that war is anything else than what it is. The fact of war is the face of death: death is an inevitable part of every order that a wartime leader gives."²⁰⁴ During the war itself, moral criticism was denigrated along such lines. The American Chiefs of Staffs effectively rejected any moral criticism of war-waging with the reasoning that it was "folly to argue whether one weapon is more immoral than another. For in the larger sense, it is war itself which is immoral and the stigma of such immorality

²⁰⁰ See: Donnelly, 2000, pp. 161-88.

²⁰¹ Hastings, 2010, p. 147.

²⁰² Schaffer, 1988, p. 150.

²⁰³ Ibid., 18.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 168.

must rest upon the nation which initiates hostilities.”²⁰⁵ Colonel Weicker, one of the leading planners of bombing campaigns in Germany, ridiculed moral critics with the retort that “you cannot always use the Marquis of Queensberry’s rules against a nation brought up on doctrines of unprecedented cruelty, brutality, and disregard of basic human decencies.”²⁰⁶ Harris likewise urged his superiors to disregard “the sentimental and humanitarian scruples of a negligible minority”,²⁰⁷ and after the war Truman described nuclear theoretician Robert Oppenheimer’s moral concerns about the atomic bombs as typical of “crybaby scientists”.²⁰⁸ Though a few did worry about some aspects of the bombing campaigns, the political and military leaders of Allied states expressed a supreme and enduring confidence that they possessed a superior understanding, of both circumstances and morality, than their critics.²⁰⁹

In this manner, a disregard for moral reflection came to look admirably ‘hard’. As with Nazi and Soviet justifications, bombing discourse revalenced terms of harshness, mercilessness, and brutality as positive wartime virtues. Prior to the war, Marshall had warned that: “if war with the Japanese does come, we’ll fight mercilessly. Flying fortresses will be despatched immediately to set the paper cities of Japan on fire. There won’t be any hesitation about bombing civilians – it will all be out.”²¹⁰ “We must not get soft,” demanded Arnold, “War must be destructive and to a certain extent inhuman and ruthless.”²¹¹ The US Assistant Secretary of War for Air, Robert Lovett, called for the use of new white phosphorous shells with the curious claim that “if we are going to have a total war we might as well make it as horrible as possible.”²¹² A letter to the British *Telegraph* similarly argued that: “We ought, with utter impunity, to bomb Berlin and bomb it

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 200.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 77.

²⁰⁷ Overy, 2005b, p. 291.

²⁰⁸ Messer, 1995, p. 15.

²⁰⁹ See also: Schaffer, 1988, p. 163.

²¹⁰ Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 149-50.

²¹¹ Schaffer, 1988, p. 103.

²¹² Ibid., 93.

unmercifully.”²¹³ And after the largest firebombing raids on Tokyo that killed as many as 80,000 civilians in one night, General Arnold wired LeMay to say: “Congratulations. This mission shows your crews have got the guts for anything.”²¹⁴

And of course, such virtuetalk drew off the other justificatory mechanisms – as is typical. A lengthy demand for more intense area bombing of Germany by one of the UK’s largest newspapers, the *Daily Mirror*, illustrates how the valorisation of violence looked plausible in light of deagentifying, dehumanising and future-biased assumptions:

“This is the only policy. This is the only effective method available to us in self-defence. This is the offensive... Bomb for bomb and the same all round! The only policy... The air war is no time for lecturers, and gloved persons wishing to live up to a high standard of ancient chivalry. The invention of the bombing plane abolished chivalry for ever. It is now ‘retaliate or go under’. We are not dedicated to passive and polite martyrdom. We *must* hit back... Also the dislocation of German communications and nerve-centres is essentially a ‘military objective’ – if really it is reasonable to go on making this almost obsolete distinction. A distinction that wears very thin. People are killed, in the devilish war of today, everywhere, anyhow. People killed are, in tens of thousands, useful workers; mainly war workers.”²¹⁵

Even more explicit was an article from the Fifth Air Force’s *Weekly Intelligence Review*, in July 1945, by Colonel Harry F. Cunningham:

²¹³ Connelly, 2002, p. 48.

²¹⁴ Schaffer, 1988, p. 132.

²¹⁵ Connelly, 2002, pp. 47-8.

“We military men do not pull punches or put on Sunday School picnics. We are making War and making it in the all-out fashion which saves American lives, shortens the agony which War is and seeks to bring about an enduring Peace. We intend to seek out and destroy the enemy wherever he or she is, in the greatest possible numbers, in the shortest possible time. For us, THERE ARE NO CIVILIANS IN JAPAN.”²¹⁶

Virtuetalk was thus intimately related to other justificatory mechanisms in the collective representation of civilians as legitimate targets of violence.

6.2.4 Science and technology in Allied ideology

Science and technology as virtues

But the virtue-system surrounding Allied bombing was not only one of soldierly virtues. A characteristic feature of liberal ideological cultures is their particularly positive valuation of scientific and technological advancement, characteristically finding the *cutting edge* of scientific progress intrinsically attractive.²¹⁷ As Davis Biddle argues, Britons and Americans “reinforced national self-identities that celebrated mastery of science and technology”,²¹⁸ and bombing was therefore attractive in large part because it promised “efficiency” and “precision”, and war conducted at the limits of technology and modernity.²¹⁹ Michael

²¹⁶ Schaffer, 1988, p. 142 [emphasis in original].

²¹⁷ Dillon and Reid, 2009, pp. 106-12; Derian, 2009b.

²¹⁸ Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 4.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 161.

Sherry has influentially described this “technological fanaticism” as definitive of western attitudes towards airpower since the late 19th Century. As he writes:

“People did not look at the airplane and then deduce its impact on human affairs. Rather they took general propositions about the benefits of technology and applied them as confidently to the imagined airplane as they did to other weapons and inventions – or more confidently, since the airplane was endowed with more virtues.”²²⁰

As a consequence, bombing acquired an aura of legitimacy in light of these modernist virtues. Western newspapers were consumed by fervent excitement throughout the war on the announcement of new super-large bombs and vast thousand-bomber raids.²²¹ Human deaths became shrouded in the technological virtues of supposed precision and efficiency, especially in American discourse, with General Arnold presenting bombing as occurring “with the care and accuracy of a marksman firing a rifle at a bullseye”.²²² This was a total fiction: post-war surveys suggested that only 2.2% of bombs dropped in precision raids even hit damageable buildings or equipment, let alone their main targets.²²³ Yet such images of bombing – and they operated more as impressionistic images than as strict propositions – were pervasive even amongst those in the know. Roosevelt sincerely described the air forces as “blowing to bits carefully selected targets”,²²⁴ and Truman, in Robert Messer’s

²²⁰ Sherry, 1987, p. 5.

²²¹ Farr, 2012, p. 147.

²²² Davis Biddle, 2002, p. 224. See also: *ibid.*, 212 & 245.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 243.

²²⁴ Overly, 2005a, p. 125.

verdict, also “had an exaggerated appreciation of the accuracy and efficacy of what he referred to as ‘precision bombing’”.²²⁵

This was the modern and glamorous image of air power inherited from the interwar years. As Overy writes:

“Both air forces also adopted the contemporary obsession with ‘rationalization’ or ‘national efficiency’ to justify attacking the enemy economy and society... The idea of air power as an expression of national efficiency... gave a spuriously scientific foundation to strategies that endorsed massive collateral damage in the nation under attack.”²²⁶

The use of the atomic bombs may represent the apotheosis of this intuitive approval of technological power. Freeman Dyson, who served with RAF Bomber Command throughout the war observed that:

“I have felt it myself, the glitter of nuclear weapons. It is irresistible if you come to them as a scientist. To feel it’s there in your hands – to release this energy that fuels the stars, to let it do your bidding. To perform these miracles – to lift a million tons of rock into the sky.”²²⁷

Perhaps it was this wonder at science which goes some way to explaining Truman’s otherwise incredible description of the dropping of the atomic bomb as “the greatest thing

²²⁵ Messer, 2005, p. 306.

²²⁶ Overy, 2005b, pp. 284-5.

²²⁷ Schaffer, 1988, p. 157.

in history”²²⁸ and General Norstad’s parallel description of the fire-bombing of Japanese cities as “nothing short of wonderful.”²²⁹ One cannot determine the thoughts behind such statements with any confidence. But I suggest that they may be influenced at least *in part* by the entrenched sense of modernist scientific wonder at new technology characteristic of recent western liberal-capitalist societies, a wonder does not fall out of the material world or facts about human biology, but is generated by ideology.

Science and technology as deagentification

But perhaps the most central role for the liberal idolisation of science was the way it encouraged a deagentified picture of area bombing. As the Nazis and Stalinists outsourced causal (and thereby, moral) responsibility for killing civilians from human decision makers to grand historical forces in a *racial* or *classist* determinism, so leading Allied bombers repeatedly outsourced it to parallel forces of *technological* determinism. Continuing the argument articulated by Douhet, the justifiers of aerial bombing consistently presented it as simply dictated by the nature of modern war, as unavoidable in light of the trajectory of technological progress. A book on *Air Power and Civilization* written in 1941 by Bernard Davy, a fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society, stated that: “Total war, made possible by the aeroplane, has reversed all the traditional concepts of warfare.”²³⁰ Most explicitly, J. Enrique Zanetti, a chemistry professor closely involved with the development of American incendiary weapons, argued that:

“Whether one is prepared to accept the long foreseen ‘all-out’ type
of warfare, in which the destruction of civilian morale plays such

²²⁸ Messer, 1995, p. 18. In truth, Truman’s own views on the bomb seem to have been far more complicated – even paradoxical – than this. See: *ibid.*

²²⁹ Schaffer, 1988, p. 138.

²³⁰ Overy, 2005b, p. 277.

an important part, or whether one condemns it as brutal, inhuman, and uncivilized matters little. ‘All-out’ war-fare [sic] is here and must be faced.”²³¹

In this conception, it was the essence of modern war which ultimately caused civilian death, not policy makers. Indeed, though Allied ideology rooted the nature of total war in technological developments rather than racial or class struggle, the concept of ‘total struggle’, necessitating the removal of all traditional constraints on permissible means, was a particularly strong parallel between Allied and Nazi or Soviet justification of violence against civilians. As Overy concludes:

“The argument for bombing Germany derived from assumptions about the moral character of total war inspired by a vulgarized Darwinism in which the struggle of nature was transposed onto the struggle between nations. In both Britain and the United States, wars of national survival were regarded as different in character from other forms of warfare, for they permitted the states under threat to use any means, however ruthless or indiscriminate, to defeat an enemy deemed a priori to be fighting just such a war.”²³²

Though Overy does not explicitly make the comparison with Nazism and Stalinism, this passage could be an equally apt description of either ideology.

Such deagentifying references to the nature of modern or total war reinforced the broader “continuum of destruction” or slippery slope effect noted by Ervin Staub and

²³¹ Schaffer, 1988, p. 157.

²³² Overy, 2005b, p. 295.

others regarding violence against civilians. Perceptions about the supposedly immutable nature of modern/total war were in fact, as is only natural, shaped by recent events and strategies and the impressions Allied leaders gained from them. The perceived modern/total war, far from being ‘unchangeable’ was in fact constantly radicalising in the eyes of policy makers and military men in response to the decisions they themselves were making. And as such, more and more extreme strategies could then be made to look justified by (recent memory of) the nature of modern/total war. There was, in other words, an intrinsically escalating momentum to such deagentification, expressed most clearly in Messer’s account of Truman’s choice to use the atomic weapons:

“The historical record shows that for him it was really a nondecision, the answer to which was implicit in the context of the question. Bombs had been used and were being used daily to win the war. The new atomic weapon was a bomb; an exponentially bigger bomb... but still a bomb. Under the ‘doctrine’ of total war bombing civilians was acceptable, legitimate, a regrettable but unavoidable product of the fact that ‘machines were ahead of morals’... [Truman] always maintained publicly that he had no choice.”²³³

Strategic deagentification

As with other cases of mass violence against civilians, however, not all Allied deagentification of aerial bombing was rooted in such grand claims about the nature of modern war. More mundanely, the destruction of alternatives to bombing civilians was

²³³ Messer, 2005, pp. 312-3.

generated by the apparent ‘dictates of strategy’, and perceptions of the constrained circumstances Allied leaders initially found themselves in. As Churchill stated, in a famous memorandum of 8 July 1940 to the Minister for War Production, Lord Beaverbrook:

“When I look around to see how we can win the war I see that there is only one sure path. We have no Continental Army which can defeat the German military power. The blockade is broken and Hitler has Asia and probably Africa to draw from. Should he be repulsed here or not try an invasion he will recoil eastward and we have nothing to stop him. But there is one thing that will bring him back and bring him down, and that is an absolutely devastating, exterminating attack by very heavy bombers from this country upon the Nazi homeland. We must be able to overwhelm him by this means, without which I do not see a way through.”²³⁴

Throughout the war, violence against civilians was made to look permissible by its comparison against only a tiny number of manifestly unacceptable alternatives – like surrender, or a vast and costly land war. Even the relatively critical John Strachey, frequently an opponent of Harris whilst working at the Air Ministry, “maintained that the choice was either to bomb cities or prolong the war.”²³⁵ Roosevelt was likewise, according to a close confidant, “a believer in bombing as the only means of gaining a victory.”²³⁶ And Truman also defended the dropping of the atomic bomb with such destruction of alternatives, in a quote also bearing the hallmarks of both dehumanisation and collectivised guilt-attribution:

²³⁴ Bellamy, 2012b, pp. 138-9. See also: Slim, 2007, p. 154.

²³⁵ Farr, 2012, p. 145.

²³⁶ Overy, 2005b, p. 286.

“Nobody is more disturbed over the use of Atomic bombs than I am, but I was greatly disturbed over the unwarranted attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor, and the murder of our prisoners of war. The only language they seem to understand is the one we have been using to bombard them. When you have to deal with a beast you have to treat them as a beast.”²³⁷

After the war, Stimson similarly described the dropping of the atomic bombs as “our least abhorrent choice.”²³⁸

Such conceptions of constrained options were not delusional. But they were heavily exaggerated, since there were *always* practicable alternatives to urban area bombing, often actively lobbied for by the Army and Navy, or other government officials. Even in the truly desperate circumstances of 1940-42, the considerably more effective mining campaign against German shipping, the redeployment of air forces to the Atlantic, Middle Eastern and Asian theatres, where they were desperately needed, or the use of bombers to attack Nazi Germany’s vulnerable oil industry, were just some of the available options.²³⁹ And from late 1942 onwards, as the war shifted in the Allies’ favour and new targeting technologies emerged, a much wider range of alternative strategies became available. Indeed, whilst Harris and other strategic bombing advocates insisted with absolute conviction that their bombers were ill-suited to supporting armies in a tactical role or hitting specific military targets, when they were overruled they found that their crews in fact performed outstandingly in such operations.²⁴⁰ Again, the destruction of alternatives was a sincere but contestable ideological conception, not a straightforward deduction of the

²³⁷ Schaffer, 1988, p. 171.

²³⁸ Bellamy, 2012b, p. 153.

²³⁹ Hastings, 2010, pp. 82, 149-50 & 434.

²⁴⁰ Davis Biddle, 2002, pp. 234-7.

self-evident range of choices actually available. In tandem with the other five justificatory mechanisms present in Allied ideology, it was tragically effective in allowing policy makers to perceive of bombing civilians as the only realistic option for winning the war, one dictated by circumstance, and thus necessarily justified.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to chart the ways in which ideologies can make massive violence against civilians look justified in the eyes of those who participate in it. By analysing recurring patterns in the ways perpetrators of violence justify their actions to themselves and to others, and by examining the broader ideologies which underpinned such justifications, I have tried to show how ordinary people can come to see exceptionally bloody acts of civilian destruction as permissible and even desirable. When the justifications I have identified are circulated amongst key policy makers, subordinate perpetrators, and wider society, civilians can come to seem like proper targets of violence, killing can appear unavoidable, and participation in it can look admirable and beneficial.

Some perpetrators come to hold such conceptions with real commitment, conviction and passion – especially amongst the elite decision makers who actually choose to implement the policies that lead to atrocities. But many perpetrators may not buy-in to ideological justifications of violence with such sincere and wholehearted commitment. Nevertheless, they may still internalise justifications to some degree: presumptively accepting threatening definitions of victims, ambivalently going along with assurances that violence will prove beneficial in the long run, and gradually having their empathy for victims and their sense of their own responsibility in causing violence eroded. As the worldviews of potential atrocity perpetrators are increasingly characterised by dehumanisation, guilt-attribution, threat-construction, deagentification, virtuetalk and future-bias, mass killing ceases to look extraordinary and abhorrent, and increasingly looks reasonable – not so different from conventional self-defence against opposing armies, and in any case an act with few if any alternatives. One does not have to have a heart of darkness to buy-in to such ideological worldviews. Ordinary people in both authoritarian

and liberal societies have repeatedly proved able to do so – through levels of gullibility, degrees of thoughtlessness, forms of sloppy reasoning, or circumstances of epistemic dependence which are a normal feature of how most of us think most of the time. Participation in atrocities is all too often rooted, in other words, in the ordinary moral fallibility of ordinary human beings.

Though heavily indebted to existing academic work on the relationship between ideology and violent atrocities, the research and theoretical development I have presented has sought to significantly advance our understanding of that relationship in a number of ways. Most obviously, my framework of six justificatory mechanisms has tried to broaden awareness of the links between ideology and violence against civilians. Existing work in this area has, I have argued, tended to cover only a partial fragment of the justificatory work done by ideologies. Whilst certain processes – the debasement of victims’ humanity or the scapegoating of victims for purported crimes, for example – have been examined in some depth, other vital processes, like those I call virtuetalk and deagentification, have been neglected, albeit not ignored entirely. The six-part framework of justificatory mechanisms thus aims to provide a more balanced and comprehensive account, and one in which the underlying processes through which violence comes to be seen as justified are more extensively unpacked and analysed.

Of course, the six justificatory mechanisms do not describe all the ideological patterns across cases of atrocity. I specified, in Chapter 1, that I have not engaged in any systematic effort to analyse some non-justificatory aspects of ideology’s role in this thesis. Whilst the role of ideology in restraining violence, or in intensifying the power of the justificatory mechanisms without justifying violence directly, has often been alluded to in my discussion, a more sustained integration of such processes into my theory is a task for future research. In addition, there are some important patterns that run through the six justificatory mechanisms which deserve highlighting but are not themselves mechanisms of

justification. For example, the tendency of atrocity-justifying ideologies to deploy rhetorics of certainty and invest quite dubious or even flatly false claims with the status of uncontested ‘science’ has repeatedly been apparent in my three case studies. The critical importance of conceptual frameworks for classifying, categorising and thereby *defining* certain groups of people has also been visible throughout my discussions of guilt-attribution and threat-construction.¹ Some particular ideas, like the notion of ‘total’ struggles against implacable enemies, or the conception of collective groups as homogenous and reified entities,² have also recurred across the cases in ways that run through multiple justificatory mechanisms. And the prominent role of notionally informative newspapers, radio and television in disseminating explicit or implicit ideological justifications for violence has been consistent across all the cases I have examined.³ The six justificatory mechanisms offer, I have argued, a more comprehensive and powerful model of the way violence against civilians comes to look permissible and desirable, but they do not exhaust all that we can say about the ideological patterns of atrocities.

Nor do those patterns exhaust what we might want to say about ideology in any *particular* atrocity. I have focused overwhelmingly throughout this thesis on the common justificatory mechanisms running through my three case studies – but it should be obvious from my presentation of those case studies that these patterns coincide with many differences. Particularly worth noting, since it has substantial normative relevance, is the absence in Allied wartime ideology of a conception of victim groups as fundamentally needing to disappear in the sort of world the Allies wanted to create – a real contrast with Nazi and Soviet attitudes towards many of their victims. As I have demonstrated, Allied bombing was motivated by far more belligerent and ‘ugly’ motives than the sanitised presentation of civilian deaths as mere ‘collateral damage’ suggests. Many participants in

¹ See also: Shaw, 2007, p. 10; Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p. 10; du Preez, 1994, pp. 48-50 & 69.

² Slim, 2007, pp. 175-6.

³ See also: Thompson and Price, 2003; Metzl, 1997.

Allied bombing were centrally motivated by vengeance, reckless prediction of likely consequences, bullish martial attitudes, and dehumanised and often racist conceptions of victims. There were genuine desires here to kill Japanese and German people because they were Japanese and German people, not solely because they were near factories or because this might make their governments surrender. Nevertheless, had their governments surrendered, Allied violence against civilians would have ceased – Allied ideology did not generally possess a sense that German and Japanese civilians needed to be wiped out entirely (though some Allied airmen, soldiers and citizens did appear to feel this way – as some of the surveys I have mentioned suggest). This is, in my view, a central reason why Allied bombing cannot be called ‘genocidal’. By contrast, in Stalinism, and especially in Nazism, some groups were ultimately felt to present such a fundamental and ineluctable obstacle to these ideology’s goals that they had to be eliminated come what may – there was no available vision of peaceful co-existence.

And other important ideological differences exist. In Nazi and Allied violence, there was a much deeper reliance on conceptions of ideal soldiers, legitimate military policies and military doctrine – reflecting the wartime context of both cases and the heavy reliance on military institutions to administer violence. In Stalinist oppression, on the other hand, though much use was made of martial and militarist virtuetalk, actual military policies were much less ideologically and practically prominent – violence was principally conducted by state security services and Communist party members, rather than by the Soviet armed forces. And in Stalinist and Allied violence, there was a much more unambiguous reliance on modernist and even futurist images of technological progress – compared to Nazism’s much more complex blending of futurism with elements of ruralist and backward-looking nostalgia, one reflecting the early influence of Volkisch ideology. And in the ways in which all three cases deployed relevant *identities* in justifications of violence, those identities were obviously different both in name and in substantive content.

My comments here provide only brief and rather simplistic sketches of these differences, and many more differences could be found, but it is tangential to my primary aims to dwell on this further. The point, however, is that observations of critical ideological patterns in terms of the six justificatory mechanisms I have analysed must not efface the contextual uniqueness of the ideological backgrounds to each case, or the many analytically and normatively relevant differences between them.

As well as offering a broader account of the links between ideology and violence, this thesis has also sought to place the analysis of those links on a more sophisticated theoretical foundation. I have sought to clear up a range of conceptual vagaries surrounding talk of ideology in work on violence, and encourage nuanced appreciations of the way ideology can encourage violence via ideas internalised with many different forms and levels of consciousness and conviction. The role of ideology in mass atrocities is complex, and cannot be properly understood if crude dichotomies between ideological and non-ideological individuals, motives or cases are sustained. The account of ideology's role in mass atrocities which I have defended is one that actively affirms great variety in the mental states of those who participate in violence. And I have attempted to import some key insights from the specialist literature on ideology to explain how people's ideologies emerge and evolve, and how they critically absorb atrocity-justifying ideas. Recognising that individual cognition is not disembodied, perfectly rational and socially discrete, but is driven by a range of psychological motives and tendencies and occurs under socialised conditions, allows us to analyse more deeply how atrocity-justifying ideas can shape thinking and behaviour. When atrocity-justifying ideas are articulated by prominent epistemic authorities utilising a range of effective discursive techniques, come to saturate a particular social context, and are consonant with a range of psychological and material motives amongst audiences, it is predictable that people will internalise them to some degree. And by emphasising the essential richness of ideologies, and the ways they can

influence behaviour not just through the provision of fanatical passions, but also through subtle frames, broad narratives about the world, factual assertions, the gradual erosion of concern for others, semi-conscious evaluative schema of positive action and character, and a multiplicity of other contributions, the full range of ways that ideologies can shape perpetrator behaviour becomes apparent.

My cases studies examine three of the most destructive campaigns of violence against civilians of the 20th century, and the commonalities in the processes of justification between them are, I believe, compelling indicators of how atrocities can come to seem permissible and desirable to relatively ordinary people. Ultimately, though, it will take further research to concretely establish whether the framework of six justificatory mechanisms I offer replicates over a much wider range of cases. There are good reasons to think that it does. The six justificatory mechanisms are intentionally broad, and what research I have conducted on other cases quite quickly reveals some instances of them in, for example, the discourse of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, Mao's regime in China, the Hutu elite in Rwanda, Serbian military and paramilitary forces in Yugoslavia, and earlier colonialist violence in North America and the empires of the European powers. Quite *why* the justificatory mechanisms recur so consistently and extensively in this manner is an interesting question. My suspicion is that they reflect a minimal cross-cultural structure of reasoning about violence, one orientated around basic foundational categories like the objects and users of violence, the intrinsic and instrumental properties of violence, and the set of alternative options to violence. They may also draw on the success of certain foundational ideological developments of modernity, like atomised conceptions of individual responsibility, notions of bounded ethnic community, increasingly prominent cultures of national security, and faith in rationalistic, scientific social planning. But this is a self-consciously speculative analysis at this stage. More cross-case studies are now needed to establish the scope of the six justificatory mechanisms, the degree of variance between

cases in how they manifest, and the extent to which case-specific ideological elements also play crucial roles.

This is a task for future research, but in the meantime the work I have presented in this thesis still substantially advances the capacity for both comparative and case-specific researchers to grapple with the role ideology plays in mass atrocities. And ultimately – though again this is a topic which I will investigate properly in the future – the patterns I have traced in the ideological dynamics of different mass atrocities may be able to significantly inform efforts to predict and prevent violence against civilians.⁴ If the six justificatory mechanisms are consistent features of the arc of ideological radicalisation towards atrocities, and are either not present or much more weakly present in ‘null cases’ where atrocities do not occur, they may substantially strengthen existing “early warning” frameworks for anticipating the risk of atrocities.⁵ And, bearing in mind the evidence that many perpetrators of atrocities are not committed fanatics but individuals caught up in the apparent plausibility of ideological frameworks of justification, efforts to counteract the justificatory mechanisms might prove able to halt or at least reduce willing participation in atrocities.⁶

Alongside efforts to tackle the world’s deadliest diseases and the growing risk of global environmental catastrophe, the effort to end the violent destruction of civilian life – Arendt’s problem of evil – remains one of the most vital challenges for human civilization. It is a challenge that we will fail to meet if simple but erroneous portrayals of perpetrators as either innately evil and psychopathic, or entirely unthinking and untouched by ideology, are maintained. This thesis is not the first effort to go beyond such crude extremes, but I believe it is the most comprehensive, dedicated and systematic account produced thus far,

⁴ See: Leader Maynard, 2014 [forthcoming].

⁵ See: Harff, 2003; Harff, 2009.

⁶ See the recent policy brief on ‘Countering Ideologies That Justify Mass Atrocities’, by the Australian Civil-Military Centre and the Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, for which I was the principle author: Australian Civil-Military Centre & Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, 2013.

and one which makes a serious effort to integrate theories of ideology with theories of genocide and other atrocities. It crucially emphasises the basically widespread capacity to engage in such crimes. When we are unwilling to scrutinise those underlying systems of ideas which make our beliefs look so obviously right to us, we remain oblivious to our frequent epistemic arrogance and ethical recklessness, and our consequent ability to become complicit in intensely harmful practices when the justificatory mechanisms analysed in this thesis are deployed. Quick to lose sight of the real human suffering of victims, quick to assume that they deserve what they get, quick to eschew consideration of alternatives, and quick to allow rhetorics of virtue to blanket wrongdoing in the language of right, we can come to perceive even the mass destruction of innocents as permissible or even desirable.

These ethical frailties are not uniquely illiberal or liberal. They are human. For the mind is indeed its own place, and has proved all too ready to make a heaven of the most hellish destruction of innocent life. This thesis has sought to show how.

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