Criminology and genocide studies: Notes on what might have been and what still could be

L. EDWARD DAY & MARGARET VANDIVER
1Crime, Law and Justice Program, Department of Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16803, USA; 2Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN 38152, USA

Abstract. Scholars of genocide and mass killings have proposed several theories explaining how the behaviors of governments, political leaders, and ordinary citizens contribute to extreme violence. Many of the explanatory constructs developed in these theories bear a striking resemblance to core concepts of criminology or could be readily integrated with criminological ideas. As examples, this paper briefly describes the ideas of Herbert Kelman, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, and R.J. Rummel from the perspective of criminology and examines their applicability the recent genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda. The conclusion is that criminology, by largely ignoring the crime of genocide, has missed opportunities to both contribute to the field of genocide studies and to improve the specification of its own ideas.

The attempts at genocide, of which the Holocaust is the most extreme and grotesque but by no means the only recent manifestation, represent a profound challenge to our thinking about human nature and human society – from both a moral and a sociopsychological point of view. Indeed, I would argue, it is the most profound challenge of our century, but one with which we have barely begun to grapple.1

Introduction

Criminologists have paid scant attention to genocide.² Some within the field have even suggested that criminology has little to offer. For example, a recent review article on criminological approaches to the study of mass murder not only explicitly excluded genocide and other forms of political mass murder from the boundary conditions of their study, but claimed that “[a]lthough state-sponsored killings are important…, they may be better explained through the theories and methods of political science than criminology.”³ This is unfortunate, because attempts by criminologists to explain the ways in which normal morality may be suspended during the commission of criminal acts, and the efforts of deviance theorists to examine how intergroup conflict
plays out in the political sphere, offer a set of tools which can be readily applied to analyses of genocide. And it is ironic because those political scientists, historians and psychologists who have ventured where criminologists dare not tread have ended up developing theoretical ideas remarkably similar to the tools criminologists already had at their disposal.

In this paper we illustrate this point by examining three theories of mass violence that emerged in fields other than criminology. We compare the ideas in these theories to established criminological concepts and note areas where criminological theory could be integrated with the theories. We also attempt to demonstrate how the study of genocide might, in turn, lead to improved specification of criminological theories. Finally, we examine how well these concepts might account for events observed in two recent genocides, that of the Muslims in Bosnia and Hercegovina and of Tutsis in Rwanda.

The three theories examined are those of Kelman, whose work on sanctioned massacres examined Nazi behavior and the massacre committed by US troops at My Lai; Goldhagen, whose history of the Holocaust argues that longstanding eliminationist antisemitism in Germany precipitated that event; and Rummel, whose study of democide led him to conclude that democracy acts as a preventive factor against state sponsored mass violence.

**Herbert C. Kelman and “Violence without Moral Restraint”**

*Authorization, routinization and dehumanization*

Herbert Kelman has explored a form of mass violence he called sanctioned massacres. He described these as being “indiscriminate, ruthless, and often systematic mass violence, carried out by military or paramilitary personnel while engaged in officially sanctioned campaigns, and directed at defenseless and unresisting civilians, including old men, women, and children.” Kelman wrote that these massacres can best be explained not by looking at motives for the violence, but rather “at the conditions under which the usual moral inhibitions against violence become weakened.” He identified three interrelated processes that contribute to this loss of restraint: authorization, routinization and dehumanization.

By authorization, Kelman meant that sanctioned massacres occur in a context of an authority ordering or at least tacitly approving the killing. He argued that this authorization considerably enhanced the willingness of people to participate in massacres. He wrote, “An individual in an authority situation characteristically feels obligated to obey the orders of the authorities, whether or not these correspond with his personal preferences. He sees himself as having no choice as long as he accepts the legitimacy of the orders and of
the authorities who give them.” Kelman believed that persons felt obligated to obey orders either because they felt their highest duty lay in obedience, and/or because they felt involved in a “transcendent mission.”

Routinization allows people to participate in actions “without considering the implications of that action and without really making a decision.” Routinization allows even extreme actions to seem normal and legitimate; the focus is on performing the next small part of the action, not on looking at the action as a whole, or its consequences and moral implications.

Dehumanization of the victims further eases any remaining restraint perpetrators may feel against attacking. Kelman considers that dehumanization has occurred when “a group of people is defined entirely in terms of a category to which they belong, and when this category is excluded from the human family . . . .” Dehumanization of the victims makes it much easier for the perpetrators to attack them without restraint or regret. Having defined the victims as non-human, there is no reason to feel moral compunction about killing them. The victims are placed beyond “the sanctified universe of obligation,” to use Fein’s phrase. Kelman gives a chilling example of this kind of thinking, quoting Lieutenant William Calley’s words about the civilians at My Lai: “I did not sit down and think in terms of men, women, and children. They were all classified the same . . . just as enemy soldiers.”

Kelman argues further that “the actions of the victimizer make his own dehumanization an inescapable condition of his life . . . . I would propose that the victimizer loses both his sense of personal identity and his sense of community.”

Kelman sums up these three processes:

... processes of authorization, routinization, and dehumanization of the victim contribute to the weakening of moral restraints, not only directly, but also by furthering the dehumanization of the victimizer. As he gradually discards personal responsibility and human empathy, he loses his capacity to act as a moral being.

Techniques of neutralization

At least two of Kelman’s three processes – the motivational constructs of dehumanization and authorization – will be readily recognized by criminologists as constructs analogous to the techniques of neutralization proposed by Sykes and Matza some sixteen years prior to the publication of Kelman’s 1973 paper. At the heart of Sykes and Matza’s formulation is the idea that criminal behavior becomes possible when individuals are able to rationalize the behavior in a way that reduces its apparent immorality. Of the five techniques of neutralization described by Sykes and Matza, two are especially germane. The “denial of the victim,” a rationalization which posits that the
victims deserved their fate, becomes possible through processes of dehumanization. The “appeal to higher loyalties,” a rationalization which places responsibility for an act on a larger group of which the deviant is a member, is virtually identical to Kelman’s concept of authorization.

Sykes and Matza diverge from Kelman, however, in their explanation of how methods of suspending morality are linked to the larger social structure. Kelman’s formulation retains the idea of an oppositional or evil normative structure which imposes itself on “normal” individuals through authority or disguises itself in the minutiae of bureaucratic routine. Sykes and Matza, in their paper on neutralization and later work on delinquency, argue that theories of deviance need neither alternative normative systems nor some mechanistic positivist cause to explain criminal behavior. Instead, people “drift” into delinquency through a series of choices that reflect conventional, though sometimes “subterranean,” values.

The crucial difference is that Kelman’s theory presents a vocabulary of motivation, outlining events that push perpetrators into committing the act. Sykes and Matza’s ideas focus on mechanisms that provide a temporary release from conventional behavioral expectations. The latter approach offers a new solution to some of the most intractable analytical quandaries faced by genocide researchers – those involving the “how could they do that?” questions. Extraordinarily evil acts do not require extraordinarily evil ideas. Conventional moral evaluations are temporarily suspended in certain situations without the standard moral order itself being threatened. In fact, that moral order may, under certain conditions, provide the justifications. Nazi soldiers in the Warsaw ghetto and American soldiers in My Lai are free to shoot children not because they are ordered to by evil officers, but because they believe they are protecting their country and patriotism is a virtue.

Techniques of neutralization represents one of the few criminological approaches that have been applied to genocide. Alvarez used the approach to explain the actions of the “ordinary” people who perpetrated the Holocaust, demonstrating how criminological theories developed to explain relatively mundane forms of deviance can help explain seemingly incomprehensible acts of mass violence. Broader conceptualizations of social control theory influenced by Sykes and Matza’s work also provide explanatory frameworks which focus on relaxed normative restraints rather than evil motivations as the explanation for criminal behavior.

Application of these theories to extreme mass violence remains a largely untapped area of thought, but one which offers much promise for interpreting the actions of perpetrators. The implications of these approaches are also rather frightening. The imposition of oppositional normative structures is a much more difficult task than relaxing or redirecting conventional restraints.
If control theories provide an empirically valid way of accounting for the behavior of genocide perpetrators, then creating the conditions under which genocide might take place would be an easier task than is generally perceived.

**Daniel Jonah Goldhagen and “eliminationist antisemitism”**

*Eliminationist antisemitism*

Goldhagen’s book focuses specifically on the Nazi genocide of Jews and places primary causal importance on a type of subterranean value. The centerpiece of his argument is the concept of eliminationist antisemitism. Goldhagen argues that hatred of Jews was so deep, so widespread, so pervasive, and so virulent in German society that the opportunity to harass, rob, deport and kill Jews was accepted and even welcomed by the vast majority of Germans. Goldhagen wrote that antisemitism is “a deep and enduring hatred – so out of proportion with any objective material or social conflict – of a sort that is unrivaled by any other group hatred in western history.” While he does not claim that extant antisemitism in Germany is the sole explanation of the Holocaust, he does declare it to be a necessary and sufficient cause of the motivation for ordinary Germans to support the Holocaust.22

German eliminationist antisemitism is not a general theoretical construct that can be applied across other cases of genocide. Still, the hints of a general theory of genocide can be discovered in Goldhagen’s book. In one of the few passages where he discusses genocide in general, he writes:

> ...it can be said that certain kinds of dehumanizing beliefs about people, or the attribution of extreme malevolence to them, are necessary and can be sufficient to induce others to take part in the genocidal slaughter of the dehumanized people, if they are given proper opportunity and coordination, typically by a state .... Such beliefs constitute the enabling conditions necessary for a state to mobilize large groups of people to take part in genocidal slaughter.23

In this passage, we see that the general precursors of genocide assumed by Goldhagen are essentially the same as those proposed by Kelman: authorization “... given proper opportunity ... typically by a state”; routinization – “... coordination ... to mobilize large groups of people”; and dehumanizing beliefs. If there is a difference, it lies in Goldhagen’s assertion that the dehumanization of the victim group is a *fait accompli*, an already embedded part of the moral universe of the victimizing group that can be exploited by a state, rather than a variable feature of a society which is itself amenable to manipulation.
Culturally embedded bigotry is not an uncommon phenomenon; however, positing it as a primary cause of genocide raises a difficult theoretical problem. Goldhagen’s analysis does not provide a clear explanation of why an embedded, virulent antisemitism resulted in genocide only during the few years of the Holocaust – or, to be more precise, no explanation beyond the fact that there were Nazis in charge during those years and not during other centuries. In this case, criminological theories on the criminalization of behavior and subjects offer concepts which can specify the conditions under which conflict becomes more likely.

Turk, for example, provides a theory of criminalization which is based on the relative power of authorities and subjects and specifies the “conditions under which cultural and social differences between authorities and subjects will probably result in conflict, the conditions under which criminalization will probably occur in the course of conflict, and the conditions under which the degree of deprivation associated with becoming a criminal will probably be greater or lesser.” Conflict is most likely when subjects and authorities each have distinct and well articulated sets of social and cultural norms. Such cohesive but separate cultures establish in- and outgroup identities which provide a basis for conflict. The behaviors of subjects (or, in the case of genocide, the subjects themselves) are likely to become criminalized when subjects are an organized group, thus providing a threat to the authorities’ power or beliefs, and when either side lacks sufficient knowledge of the others’ behavior to achieve their goals through noncoercive means. Punitiveness increases when high level legal enforcers (adjudicatory officials) and low level enforcers (police) subscribe to the cultural and social norms of the authorities.

The Nazi regime provides an extreme example of these conditions that also serves as a special case demonstrating how states can create conditions conducive to conflict. The out-group status of Jews was exacerbated by fictional accounts of their social and cultural norms. An unreal threat was made real by the imputation of organization onto a group that was, in reality, largely assimilated. Because Nazi ideology excluded realistic assessment of Jews as a component of the German population, coercive actions became more likely. Because the Jewish population underestimated the Nazi threat while simultaneously lacking the organizational structure imputed to them, they were unable to form an adequate defense. Even in these conditions of highly likely conflict, however, the severity of the Nazi actions was impossible until the machinery of legal enforcement was occupied by those who bought into Nazi ideology. Holdovers from pre-Nazi Germany in the judiciary and the regular police of pre-Nazi Germany, while not explicitly opposing the Nazis, took a
relatively passive role in the enforcement of anti-Jewish laws. Judges appointed by the Nazi regime and the party’s private militias provided the legal and coercive elements of oppression. Although this analysis is sketchy, it demonstrates how an understanding of criminalization processes could be used to both explain and predict situations where genocidal events may occur.25

R.J. Rummel and “democide”

Rummel and the nonviolence of democracy

The Nazi democide is another instance of the principle that absolute ideology coupled with an absolute power of the state is absolutely deadly to human life.26 Rummel’s primary effort has been to try to count the victims of “democide,” a term he coined and by which he means “the intentional killing of people by government,” excluding the killing of those who are armed, those killed indirectly by military action and those legally executed for murder and treason.27 Rummel estimates that nearly 170,000,000 people have been killed in democides between 1900 and 1987.28 Instead of focusing, as Kelman and Goldhagen, on personal and social level factors which allow perpetrators to resolve individual level moral conflicts over involvement in killing, Rummel turns his attention to the macro-level study of political organization. Rummel examined the relative likelihood of democide across political structures, and found that it was far less likely under democratic governments:

. . . the best way to account for and predict democide is by the degree to which a regime is totalitarian along a democratic-totalitarian scale. That is, the extent to which a regime controls absolutely all social, economic, and cultural groups and institutions, the degree to which its elite can rule arbitrarily, largely accounts for the magnitude and intensity of genocide and mass murder. The best assurances against democide are democratic openness, political competition, leaders responsible to their people, and limited government. In other words, power kills, and absolute power kills absolutely.29

Symbolic politics and the object of dispute

Rummel’s ideas provide an example of how criminological theories can benefit from engagement with the field of genocide studies. Several scholars of deviance have examined the criminalization of particular behaviors as symbolic battles between ethnic groups. The classic study is this field was
Gusfield’s examination of the prohibition of alcohol in the United States.\textsuperscript{30} Gusfield argued that the anti-liquor forces represented a reaction of the largely rural, Protestant, and established population against newer immigrant groups which were urban based and Roman Catholic. A decade later, Musto’s study of the origins of anti-drug legislation demonstrated the generalizability of this argument, noting, for example, that anti-marijuana laws were passed in a context of anti-Mexican sentiment and that anti-opium laws were spurred by prejudice against Chinese.\textsuperscript{31}

The unposed question in these studies is why these intergroup battles focused on behaviors associated with the out-groups rather than the out-group members themselves. Under what conditions do ethnic conflicts objectify actions rather than individuals? Rummel’s ideas provide a possible solution to this quandary. In authoritarian societies, debate over ideas is closed. Acceptable ideas are determined by authorities and are passed through and enforced by the political and legal hierarchy. When ideas are not open to dispute, the range of objects on which interpersonal or intergroup conflict can focus and the arenas in which that conflict can be played out become greatly restricted. There is little choice of objects beyond the group members themselves. In democratic societies, disputes over ideas, in fact the very definitions of which ideas will be disputed, can percolate up from the bottom, providing an outlet or alternative arena for intergroup conflict. The opportunity for symbolic conflict in the political arena may be a protective factor against genocide. Conditions conducive to the demonizing of group members, rather than their behaviors, are reduced.

**Application of concepts to events in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda**

*Kelman, Goldhagen, and microlevel motivation*

Authorization – or in Sykes and Matza’s terms, the appeal to higher loyalties – was a factor in both recent genocides, though apparently a stronger influence in Rwanda. Many observers have remarked upon the exceptionally orderly and authoritarian nature of Rwandan society.\textsuperscript{32} Power and authority ran from the highest level of the government through 12 prefectures, 154 communes, 1,600 sectors and down to tens of thousands of cellules. In a social structure that more closely resembled a feudal hierarchy than a modern state, people were accustomed to obeying the orders of superiors and this probably played a role in the very quick and widespread obedience to orders to kill. As Zarrembo puts it, “The genocide had less to do with whether ordinary Hutus believed killing their Tutsi neighbors was a good idea than with upholding standards of good citizenship, which in the spring and early summer of 1994
was to kill Tutsis in broad daylight.\textsuperscript{33} The beginning of the genocide was announced on the tightly controlled radio. Orders and lists of who should be killed were passed from the central government, through the civil hierarchy, to local officials. Villagers gathered in the morning with their weapons and the names would be distributed. Killing would continue through the morning, the perpetrators would often go home for lunch, and then reassemble in the afternoon to continue their grisly chore.

The importance of the role played by authority is more difficult to pin down in Bosnia. It is clear that Serb leaders were present and directing operations at the bloodiest sites. For example, at Srebrenica, General Ratko Mladic directed the removal of Muslims from the Dutch guarded U.N. compound and eyewitness accounts have him directing the separation of men and women himself, the latter being placed on buses, the former led to slaughter.\textsuperscript{34} However, while citizens of the former Yugoslavia were accustomed to living under an authoritarian regime, it is not clear what weight official orders had for them. People living under Tito generally maintained at least the appearance of cooperating with the government, although many found ways to circumvent and even resist authority. As the 1996 and 1999 demonstrations against Milosevic show, there is an element of defiance in the culture of the former Yugoslavia.

A very important and relevant aspect of Kelman’s concept of authorization is what he calls transcendent mission. “According to this view, the authorities are agents of a larger set of corporate purposes that transcend the rules of standard morality. Thus their actions – and their orders – cannot be judged according to the usual moral or legal criteria.” Transcendent missions were clearly at work in Bosnia and Rwanda. In both situations, many perpetrators saw themselves as carrying out a mission which transcended their daily lives, thus transforming the behavioral requirements of the moral realm. Was, however, the content of the moral realm transformed?

Although Kelman acknowledges that “[i]ndividuals differ considerably in the degree to which – and the conditions under which – they are prepared to challenge the legitimacy of an order,” he also notes that “regardless of such individual differences. . . , the basic structure of a situation of legitimate authority requires the individual to respond in terms of authoritative demands rather than personal preferences . . . .\textsuperscript{36}” This explanation does not, however, explore whether there are orders given by legitimate authorities that would be universally disobeyed. It is not hard to imagine examples. Think of soldiers in any sanctioned massacre, whether the Nazis in Poland, Americans at My Lai, Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, or Hutus in Rwanda, and imagine that they had been given orders to appear in public and carry out the slaughter while dressed in evening gowns. It is difficult to believe that such orders would be obeyed; in
fact, nearly universal defiance seems the most likely result. If this is the case, obedience must not be due solely to orders issued by legitimate authorities and authorities are not able to establish completely novel rules of behavior. There must be a general lack of deep revulsion at the content of the orders or a means by which that revulsion can be compartmentalized, overcome and/or denied. This example suggests that people are willing to do almost anything to members of a despised group upon the orders of authority, but are not willing to do things that they feel would disgrace or belittle themselves personally.

Goldhagen presents a less frivolous example in the introduction to his book. He describes the defiance of Captain Wolfgang Hoffmann when he was ordered to have his men sign a declaration that they would not steal or plunder in Poland. This order shocked Captain Hoffmann’s sense of honor and he refused in writing to carry it out, saying that “it appeared to me a piece of impertinence to demand of a decent German soldier to sign a declaration in which he obligates himself not to steal, not to plunder . . .”37 Captain Hoffmann and his “decent German soldiers” were at that time carrying out the killing and forced deportations of thousands of Jewish civilians in Poland. Committing atrocities against a dehumanized group clearly does not cause many perpetrators to abandon all conventional perceptions of morality. Behavioral norms have not been replaced. A targeted group has simply been removed from the sphere in which those norms are applied.

Kelman’s idea of routinization, that mass killing is made more palatable by the bureaucratic organization of the tasks, may be more applicable to the Rwandan case than the Bosnian. Rwandan assassins, as noted above, often worked from government prepared lists. The slaughter was so well organized that often the victims themselves knew when their names had been added to the roll call.38 The army, Hutu militias and peasant groups were mobilized so effectively that even in the absence of technology available to the Nazis (most Tutsis were murdered with machetes and clubs), the death rate over the 100 days of the genocide was three times that of the peak rate achieved by perpetrators of the Holocaust.39 In Bosnia, the organization of incidents of ethnic cleansing was necessarily limited by the location of the front lines in the war for territory. Though the events at Srebrenica – with buses for removing women and children and bulldozers for covering the mass graves arriving a day after the fall – suggest that the slaughter had been planned, the chaotic scene as families were separated and genders sorted also suggests the improvisational way that the mass killings were actually carried out as the Serb militias rushed to consolidate their positions.40

The relative degree of planning and efficiency evident in these cases is irrelevant to the larger conceptual problem posed by routinization as an explanatory construct. In the first place, routinization does not seem to explain
the initial attack. It may be useful in understanding the continuation of at-
rocities, but it does not answer the question of how people overcome their
initial reluctance and revulsion. More problematically, routinization fails to
explain the experience of those who actually do the killing. With the possible
exception of gas chambers, where victims may be led, sealed in, murdered
out of sight and then removed by other members of the victim group, there
is no way to routinize the tasks of those who kill the victims. The slaughter
in Bosnia was committed with guns and heavy weapons. The slaughter in
Rwanda was aided by guns, but primarily carried out with machetes and
clubs. There is no way to bureaucratize the pulling of a trigger, the slash of a
machete or the wielding of a club. Systematic rape as a torture instrument was
prevalent in both genocides and this crime quite obviously cannot be carried
out in conditions of interpersonal distance.

In these cases, the careful ordering of tasks could only be protective of
those who directed the genocides. Those who did the actual killing, raping
and maiming – that is, those individuals whose actions were most directly
related to the death of the victims – cannot have had their moral qualms about
killing rationalized away through the routinization of their tasks. The only
way to have those moral qualms allayed is to remove the victims themselves
from moral consideration. Routinization, though perhaps helpful in achieving
the goal of genocide, appears to be an unnecessary condition for genocide.

This brings us again to the role played by dehumanization. As noted pre-
viously, Kelman and Goldhagen offer two different perspectives of this con-
struct. Kelman presents dehumanization as a factor which can be created and
manipulated by authorities. Goldhagen, on the other hand, implies that the
dehumanized status of the victim group must be an extant feature of the social
structure if genocide is to be accepted.

The role of hateful speech in dehumanization processes is recognized by
nearly all genocide scholars. Chalk and Jonassohn, for example, who have
compiled historical examples of genocidal events from classical antiquity
through the last half of the twentieth century, conclude that there is “no
evidence that a genocide was ever performed on a group of equals.”41 That
Muslims in Bosnia and Tutsis in Rwanda were the focus of dehumanizing
propaganda is indisputable. Milosevic, in post-Tito Yugoslavia, emerged from
relative obscurity with a speech at Kosovo which whipped up Serbian nation-
alism by damning the Muslims for a Serbian military defeat that had occurred
600 years previously. Tales of invented Muslim atrocities, such as reports of
Serbian soldiers being roasted alive on spits or Serb babies being fed to zoo
animals in Sarajevo, were standard fare on Serb controlled broadcast outlets
as the war intensified.42 In Rwanda, the Tutsis were reported to be the eaters
of children. Outlets of Hutu extremism, such as the magazine Kangura and
the popular commercial radio station Radio Mille Collines, portrayed Tutsis much as Jews are portrayed in antisemitic literature – as a privileged minority with disproportionate wealth, responsible for the poverty and disenfranchise-
ment of the majority.43 They also promoted a segregationist ideology called Hutu Power, which like white power movements in western countries damned not only the target group but all those who would interact with them.

Goldhagen’s conclusions about the Holocaust – that the hatred of the Jews existed from the beginnings of German Christian society and, when Hitler came to power, that he only needed to exploit and mobilize an existing hatred in order to commit full scale genocide – seems to find only limited support in the Rwandan case. Intergroup conflicts existed prior to the genocide, though apparently for decades rather than centuries. Prior to German, then Belgian, colonization, the boundaries between Tutsi and Hutu were permeable and based on personal wealth rather than genetic heritage.44 It was during Belgian rule that ethnic differences were institutionalized through the distribution of identity cards which specified ethnic identity.45 Between World War I and the end of World War II, the Belgians placed Tutsis in most positions of local power, institutionalizing a system of class differences that had emerged under the last of the precolonial kings. Belgian allegiance changed in the period following World War II in response to an independence movement among Tutsi elites. A Belgian engineered coup in 1961 brought Hutus to power and sparked a period of violence against Tutsis that lasted until the mid-60s. In many ways, the genocide of 1994 was a continuation of the ethnic hatreds that became crystalized at that time, and the “entrenched” tribal hatreds appear to have existed for decades, not centuries.

It is even more difficult to argue for the role of entrenched ethnic hatreds in the Balkans. Although the international media largely focused on the “an-
cient ethnic hatreds” presumed to exist among various national and religious groups, there is precious little evidence that such hatreds actually existed. More careful and scholarly analyses all dismiss the “ancient ethnic hatreds” assessment as a justification Western nations used for failing to intervene to protect civilians.46 Social indicators such as intermarriage rates suggest that the former Yugoslavia had achieved a degree of cultural interpenetration well beyond that of the United States. The dehumanization process in the Balkans may have been based on nationalist myths, but the hatreds themselves needed to be created anew. The frightening conclusion is that such hatreds are a variable which may be manipulated by unscrupulous politicians. While de-
humanization appears to be a necessary condition, embedded bigotry does not.

Kelman posits that victimizers lose their own humanity – their identity and their place in a community – as an inevitable part of dehumanizing and
attacking the victims. This again suggests that the previously existing moral order is destroyed by the genocidal events. Do these actions, contrary to the predictions of criminological social control theories, destroy the moral community in which the perpetrators had previously lived? Although it may be too early to draw conclusions from the Bosnian and Rwandan experiences, the evidence does not seem to support Kelman’s assertion. For example, a few months after the Dayton Accords brought an end to the siege of Sarajevo, a Serb soldier who had spent three years shooting at and shelling the city told one of the authors that he wished to return to his prewar job as a professor at the University of Sarajevo. This suggested an apparent attachment to previous social patterns, but more importantly, an astonishing lack of awareness of the significance of his actions. There are similar anecdotal accounts of the responses of Rwandan killers. Drawing examples from previous events, what we know of the lives of Greek torturers after the fall of their regime and of members of German Police Battalion 101 after their return to Germany from committing genocide in Poland seems to indicate that ordinary people can be perpetrators of atrocities and then return to their ordinary lives without seeming to feel much if any distress over what they have done. If conventional normative beliefs are replaced during genocidal events, the effect is not easily observable.

**Rummel and macro-level conflict**

Both the Rwandan and Yugoslavian cases offer circumstantial evidence supporting Rummel’s contentions. Both nations were led by regimes which clearly fall on the totalitarian end of his scale. However, although democracy may indeed be a protective factor, totalitarianism does not provide a sufficient cause for the occurrence of genocide. In fact, the Yugoslavian experience under Tito suggests that the authoritarian governmental structures can actually increase intercultural penetration, thus leading nations away from conditions favorable to genocide. Clearly other conditions must be present.

In Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, we find not only authoritarian power structures, but power structures which were under threat. In Rwanda, the Habyarimana regime had agreed to a power sharing arrangement with the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front. In a nation where economic success was closely tied to political power, this arrangement seriously threatened other members of the ruling group, galvanizing the Hutu extremists within the government. In Yugoslavia, the stability of the political structure was collapsing, coupled with an extremely high inflation rate within a country which had once taken its economic prosperity for granted. Politicians who reached for power by demonizing an outgroup while simultaneously encouraging ethnic nationalism found ready ears for their arguments. Both cases suggest that
Rummel’s theory needs to be extended by considering the interaction between the structure of power and the degree of stress that structure is enduring. Integration with conflict theories of criminalization can provide his ideas with this mechanism. In turn, as noted earlier, Rummel’s thesis can provide theories of symbolic politics with specifications of the conditions under which political conflict is likely to target people rather than behaviors.

Conclusion

Our purpose in this paper is not to provide a comprehensive criminological theory of genocide. Our more modest goal is to demonstrate that criminological theory has both much to offer and much to gain by engaging in genocide studies and to suggest likely avenues for the development of these ideas. We strongly disagree with the notion that this form of extreme violence should be placed beyond the boundary conditions of our field. To do so results in lost opportunities to test the generalizability of our concepts and lost opportunities to integrate concepts from other disciplines.

Kelman’s theory suggests that criminological constructs are crucial to understanding political murder. Unaware of the techniques of neutralization, Kelman was obliged to invent them anew. The long tradition of criminological thought on control theories also suggests that current motivational constructs in genocide theory may need to be revised. The investigation of Goldhagen’s and Rummel’s theses results in promising avenues of theoretical integration, strengthening approaches in both genocide studies and criminology. And there are other, rather obvious applications of criminological thought that have not been explored here. Theories of mass and serial murder, for example, might help specify who becomes a perpetrator and who resists.

Deviant behavior is a primary object of our field. Understanding how people can overcome moral proscriptions and commit deviant acts, and understanding why certain groups or their behaviors become the objects of criminalization, are two of our most important goals. Criminologists will have only a weak claim to understanding crime until we can address the worst of all crimes, genocide.

Notes

2. George S. Yacoubian, “The (In)significance of Genocidal Behavior to the Discipline of Criminology,” Crime, Law and Social Change 2000, this issue. For the exceptions to the rule, see Augustine Brannigan, “Criminology and the Holocaust: Xenophobia, Evolution,


10. Herbert C. Kelman, ibid., 44.

11. Herbert C. Kelman, ibid., 46.


19. Alex Alvarez, “Adjusting to Genocide: The Techniques of Neutralization and the Holocaust.”


25. Similar theories of criminalization which also provide promising avenues for understanding how a state may focus is legal machinery against specific groups are offered by

28. R.J. Rummel, ibid.
29. R.J. Rummel, ibid., 25.
36. Herbert C. Kelman, ibid., 39.
40. See Mark Danner, “The U.S. and the Yugoslav Catastrophe,” for a reconstruction of the scene from several sources; see also Jan Willem Henegouwen and Norbert Both, *Srebrenica: Record of a War Crime* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).


49. There is also the possibility that the apparent preventive effect of democracy is spurious, that societies which become democracies are precisely those which are unlikely for other underlying reasons to be either totalitarian or genocidal.

50. Mark Danner, “The U.S. and the Yugoslav Catastrophe”; Susan Woodward, Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War.
