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## Stopping a Genocide Perpetrator

Major Megan Latta

### JCSP 48

#### Exercise Solo Flight

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**Stopping a Genocide Perpetrator**

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*“The trouble with what is unthinkable is that at times it must be thought about.”*

— John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History*

## **TO STOP A PERPETRATOR**

### **Introduction**

Seemingly ordinary human beings can and do perpetrate genocide. Indeed, genocides can be found throughout history, and are currently in progress. In fact, genocide is the number one cause of unnatural death<sup>1</sup> and thus urgently requires preventative measures. Genocide is defined by the 1948 UN Convention under Article II as, “...acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national ethnical, racial, or religious group...”<sup>2</sup> As further elaborated by the sociologist Helen Fein, genocide is a series of purposeful actions by a perpetrator who may represent the state of the victim, another state, or another collective.<sup>3</sup> Perpetrators can be further defined as “those people who take deliberate actions that contribute to the social production of collective violence and do so with an understanding that their actions will contribute to such ends.”<sup>4</sup> Genocide is a wicked and massive problem. With the understanding of the individual and socially constructed factors contributing to genocide, one may begin to understand, condemn, and prevent further genocides. In other words, to understand is to be less surprised by atrocities, less likely to commit genocidal acts and allow us better means to stop and prevent future genocides.

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<sup>1</sup> Charny, Israel W, *The Genocide Contagion: How we Commit and Confront Holocaust and Genocide*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) 161.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p 5.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 14.

<sup>4</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 262.

There is no easy singular answer to the question of stopping genocide perpetration. The psychology within the individual as well as social construction forces can be explored to understand why genocides occur and why people commit atrocities. An understanding of the psychological mind of the perpetrator, that is the mental and emotional state of the person, could hold answers to genocide prevention. The influential social construction forces, which include psychological, cultural, and environmental factors, are a critical component as they enable the creation of a genocide. These factors include the psychological construction of the “other”, as well as cultural and environmental influences which essentially undergirds and powers the situation.<sup>5</sup> The psychological construction of the “other” comprises us-them thinking, moral disengagement and blaming the victims, with the result of victim dehumanization thus easing the perpetrator’s rationalization to harm and psychological burden.<sup>6</sup> The victims become the “other” and are essentially no longer seen as human beings. “The victim is a threat!”<sup>7</sup> Culture shapes meaning in intergroup relations, for example perceiving an out-group as a threat while the in-group believes only their members can be trusted.<sup>8</sup> Culture also functions as an enabler, providing a permissive environment in which ordinary people commit atrocities, with encouragement and rewards, as influenced by the power of the group.<sup>9</sup> The culture of a group plays an important role in moulding peaceful or violent

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<sup>5</sup> Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 230.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 220.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, Kjell and Erin Jessee, *Researching Perpetrators of Genocide*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020) 109.

<sup>8</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 163.

<sup>9</sup> Dudai, Ron. 2006. "Understanding Perpetrators in Genocides and Mass Atrocities." *The British Journal of Sociology* 57 (4), 2006: 702.

behaviours, the latter being potentially instigated by a society that embraces theories of superiority and finds motives for wars and persecution of others.<sup>10</sup> The environmental milieu can be attributed to the ruling government or how the society is organized, whether it espouses values of peace or policies of belligerence.<sup>11</sup> Most genocides occur under the cover of war, thereby creating conditions where the perpetrators create false narratives and constructed security threats, most often exemplifying the power of pacification. Within the war atmosphere, de-sensitization of violence occurs where brutalization is often provoked, permitted, and increased. The environmental factors can create a social context in which perpetrators are able to initiate, sustain and ultimately cope with their actions.<sup>12</sup> In summary, the psychology of the perpetrator powered by the social processes explained above “can result in simple ordinary people turning into mass killers.”<sup>13</sup>

The focus of this paper is to narrow down into the psychology of the perpetrator including the banality of evil, obedience to authority and perpetration motives due to narcissism, greed, fear, and humiliation, with a goal of exploring who is capable of genocidal acts. Perpetrators seem to be pulled into the forces contributing to genocide and there has been no defining solution discovered to date. Understanding the psychology of perpetrators is not to exonerate or justify the behaviour, although it may contribute to enlightening insight. The research for this paper will involve reviewing extant academic literature, particularly regarding the human psychology of perpetration. Examples of the psychology of perpetrators will be provided, primarily from the Holocaust as it is the

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<sup>10</sup> Charny, Israel W, *The Genocide Contagion: How we Commit and Confront Holocaust and Genocide*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) 27.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 28.

<sup>12</sup> Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p 227.

most exhaustively studied genocide. Each subtopic of the banality of evil, obedience to authority and the four psychological elements of narcissism, greed, fear, and humiliation, will also be explored as to how to stop perpetration followed by a discussion and conclusion. This paper will investigate how the psychological process within the individual results in genocidal perpetration, and what, if anything, can be done to stop it.

### **Banality of Evil**

Ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the ordinariness of perpetrators is quite unsettling and terrifying and certainly does not suit the plot of violent mass murderers. Although it is more reassuring to picture perpetrators as stereotypical monsters, this is far from reality. We want to believe that genocidal atrocities are purely evil acts committed by the few. However, to murder approximately six million Jewish people during the Holocaust, there could have been potentially hundreds of thousands of perpetrators.<sup>15</sup> All those perpetrators could not have been “extraordinarily evil” which is defined as “the deliberate harm we perpetrate on each other under the sanction of political, social, or religious groups...against a defenceless and helpless group”.<sup>16</sup> These “evil” people cannot possibly all fit the narrative we imagine, and therefore it can be concluded that evil itself is a partially useless term in the understanding of perpetrators. Still, one of the most famous and intriguing genocidal terms coined by philosopher Hannah Arendt is the banality of evil. In the 1960s, she was commissioned by the New Yorker publication to cover the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, a major bureaucrat

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<sup>14</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 20.

<sup>15</sup> Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p 14.

involved in the administration of sending over six million Jews to their death, otherwise known as the Final Solution.<sup>17</sup> Her controversial conclusion was that “Eichmann was not a sadistic monster but an uninspired bureaucrat who simply sat at his desk and did his job.”<sup>18</sup> With the release of her article for the *New Yorker* and the subsequent book titled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report On The Banality Of Evil*, Arendt was accused of supporting Eichmann even though she herself was a German Jew who escaped to the United States in 1941.<sup>19</sup> The uneasy question remains as to how a man that coordinated the Final Solution by ordering transports, negotiating supplies, and managing train schedules with zeal and efficiency, be described as ordinary and not evil?<sup>20</sup> The excuse from Eichmann could very well of been that he was faced with choiceless decisions. In 1965, Arendt also coined the Eichmann applicable term “lying self-deception” which is the effect of telling lies repeatedly resulting in a subsequent belief change.<sup>21</sup> This lying self-deception would have contributed to Eichmann’s ability to shield himself from the truth of his actions and convincingly proclaim his innocence. This concept could also persuade a perpetrator to believe the atrocities they are involved in are simply ordinary or as will be explored in the next section, a form of obedience. Another viewpoint of how ordinary perpetration occurs was shown during the Holocaust where most atrocities were

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<sup>17</sup> Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 99.

<sup>18</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 96.

<sup>19</sup> Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 98.

<sup>20</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 288, 292.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p 258.

not committed out of blind hatred or an instinctive impulse but rather an orderly and systemic “get the job done”.<sup>22</sup>

In the book *Researching Perpetrators of Genocide*, anthropologist Eva van Roekel’s chapter explores the narrative of military officers who were indicted for alleged crimes against humanity committed during the late 1970s in Argentina as part of a violent military dictatorship.<sup>23</sup> She was able to conduct multiple interviews with incarcerated officers who tried to convince van Roekel of their decency by showing her pictures of happy family events in an effort to establish their ordinariness and innocence.<sup>24</sup> One of the prisoners declared he did not feel responsible or guilty for the crimes, explaining that military warfare and war crimes followed a different logic of liability.<sup>25</sup> This viewpoint is strikingly similar to Eichmann insisting he was simply doing his honourable duty. Looking at the Rwandan genocide, civilian Hutu men and women were actively conscripted, and hordes of the ordinary population were transformed into murderers, slaughtering over one million people in just twelve weeks.<sup>26</sup> It was a vastly different genocide than the Holocaust, yet similar in that the perpetrators acted mindlessly doing what they were ordered to do, without concern of consequences or personal awareness of the terror they were executing.<sup>27</sup> The use of the machete as the weapon of choice in Rwanda could have been felt like an ordinary motion by perpetrators due to their lifelong

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<sup>22</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 212.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson, Kjell and Erin Jessee, *Researching Perpetrators of Genocide*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020) 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p 118.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 119, 120.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 473.

<sup>27</sup> Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 100.



familiarity with the tool to cut bananas, clear trees and kill chickens, the machete thus became dissociated from its brutal consequences.<sup>28</sup>

An understanding of the banality of evil could help stop genocidal perpetrators. We need to make sense of this ordinary killer to better understand how genocides take shape. Although the act of evil can be quite normal to perpetrators, there is nothing normal about the horrific genocidal acts that have been committed throughout history. The research to pinpoint is how someone can overcome the “evil” in themselves by being more self-aware or understanding that it can be quite easy to have evil tendencies or thoughts. As said by a Rwandan perpetrator, “One day we felt we were doing something wrong and the next day we didn’t.”<sup>29</sup> The key to stopping perpetrators caught up within the banality of their evil actions would be to show them they are making an illegal moral choice and causing harm. The challenge is that most perpetrators showed no hints of their perpetrator potential, before or after the genocide, therefore more psychological insight into the human mind is required. One strategy is interviewing perpetrators who are willing to share, which itself comes with the risk of untruthful testimonies, however, is worth the effort to crack the code. The best chance to understand perpetrators would be to have them rationalize their actions.

### **Obedience to Authority**

The obedience of genocidal perpetrators can be witnessed in their inclination to obey authority regardless of the act they are asked to carry out. In other words, obedience

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<sup>28</sup> Tanner, Samuel, "Some Thoughts on the Banality of Evil, Inspired by a Conversation with Jean-Paul Brodeur," *Champ Pénal* (Vol. IX) 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, Kjell and Erin Jessee, *Researching Perpetrators of Genocide*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020) 67.

to authority is the blind following of orders or an unconditional submission to authority.<sup>30</sup> It can be extremely productive and positive to follow orders, as demonstrated in military operations where obeying the leader typically enhances success and saves lives.<sup>31</sup> However, this ability to thoughtlessly obey authority can give way to blind compliance on the road to unthinkable atrocities. Stanley Milgram, a social psychologist from Yale University, carried out a study in the 1960s that gave support to Arendt's banality of evil concept as well as answered his question of how far ordinary people would go in inflicting harm on a stranger when guided by an authoritarian figure.<sup>32</sup> The experiment included a teacher, a learner (who was an actor) as well as the experimenter who encouraged the teacher participant to shock the learner with increasing voltage from 15 to 450 volts if they did not answer a series of questions correctly.<sup>33</sup> The experimenter was in the role of the "Authority" and utilized phrases such as "please continue" or "it is absolutely essential that you continue".<sup>34</sup> The teacher, or perpetrator in this case, became detached during the experiment and simply followed orders. The results showcased the perpetrator's willingness to continue to inflict pain on innocent strangers based on remaining obedient to the authority's order, which in fact 65% of the participants did willingly by executing the life-threatening 450 volts.<sup>35</sup> Although the experiment was not without its critiques, Milgram had successfully demonstrated that seemingly regular

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<sup>30</sup> Charny, Israel W, *The Genocide Contagion: How we Commit and Confront Holocaust and Genocide*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) 72-74.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p 73.

<sup>32</sup> Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 107.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p 108.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p 108.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p 109.

people can engage in harmful and inhumane behaviour by the innate reaction and desire to simply follow orders.<sup>36</sup> Milgram concluded that his experiments showcased the superior-subordinate relationship in which people become willing perpetrators to a legitimate authority to whom they also relinquish the responsibility for their actions.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, in a way, the perpetrator is simply following orders and dissociates themselves from taking ownership of the genocidal wrongdoing. This disappearance of a sense of responsibility is the most far-reaching consequence of submission to authority.<sup>38</sup> In summary, the Milgram experiment showed that most people will comply with authoritarian direction even if they are asked to do morally questionable tasks such as harming another human being.<sup>39</sup> A link can also be made to a synergy between obedience and the banality of evil.

Different ideologies capitalize on creating inherently strong obedience to authority as demonstrated by the relative success of the Nazi regime. A highly efficient assembly line contributed to the mass number of victims during the Holocaust as it allowed perpetrators to simply do their tasks and convince themselves they were not killing anyone, even if their job contributed indirectly or directly to the death of Jews.<sup>40</sup> Societies that have a hierarchal structure in terms of power and status often have a culture of obedience and respect for authority.<sup>41</sup> The Khmer Rouge was able to exploit the hierarchal nature of the Cambodian society to legitimize their power and create obedient

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<sup>36</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 48.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p 96.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p 310.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p 334.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p 296.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p 181.

perpetrators to willingly destroy minority Cambodians.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in terms of obedience, a Khmer Rouge perpetrator referred to himself as a victim of the regime as he was subject to coercion and intimidation to commit genocide against the victims.<sup>43</sup> The social psychologist Roy Baumeister argues that perpetrators “may see something wrong in what they did, but they also see how they were affected by external factors, including some that were beyond their control,”<sup>44</sup> such as the requirement to be obedient to authority. Bureaucratic complexity also grants perpetrators physical and psychological distance from the consequences of their actions.<sup>45</sup> It is a way to direct people to act obediently or risk punishment and can play a central role in systems that violate human rights.<sup>46</sup> It is also the bureaucratic structure that provides perpetrators with the power to rule over their victims.<sup>47</sup> Of course, bureaucracies do not always produce evil but inherently do encourage increasing levels of authoritarian treatment of other human beings where the master decides the fate of others.<sup>48</sup>

With an understanding of obedience to authority and bureaucratization, perpetrators could potentially be stopped by targeting the leaders and authoritarian figures of the genocide. To prevent acts of obedience, one needs to eliminate indifference and

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<sup>42</sup> Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 181.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, Kjell and Erin Jessee, *Researching Perpetrators of Genocide*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020) 13.

<sup>44</sup> Lower, Wendy, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013) 154.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 546.

<sup>46</sup> Charny, Israel W, *The Genocide Contagion: How we Commit and Confront Holocaust and Genocide*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) 76.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p 77.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p 77.

institutionalized passivity.<sup>49</sup> Lessons from genocides should be utilized to recognize, prevent, and stop the cruelty, but cynically lessons can also be a “how-to” on conducting mass murder more effectively by utilizing obedient perpetrators.<sup>50</sup> The switch needs to be flipped on obedience and the subservient perpetrator needs to be convinced to do no harm. Further research is required into the psychology of the mind on how perpetrators convince themselves that obedience overrules their own moral judgement. As Arendt said of Eichmann, he was unable to think. The perpetrator’s moral conscience needs to be strengthened and override any harmful obedience pressures. However, that creates the confusion between following a “good” order and an “evil” order, as well as raises the question of who determines what is evil or good. Laws against genocide and human atrocity need to be clearly understood as to what is lawful and unlawful, particularly under a cloud of war and genocide. The would-be perpetrators need to understand how easily they can become willing participants in a horrible devastating process such as genocide.

### **Narcissism, Greed, Fear and Humiliation**

Psychological aspects that are common characteristics of perpetrators within a genocide regime will now be explored. Canadian scholar Adam Jones details the four psychological elements that motivate people to commit genocide are narcissism, greed, fear, and humiliation.<sup>51</sup> Each of these elements warrants explanation with the goal of reaching more precise thoughts on how perpetrators can be stopped.

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<sup>49</sup> Johannessen, Jon-Arild, "Management by Obedience: The Patterns that Lead to Evil Acts." *Kybernetes* 44 (1) 2015: 167.

<sup>50</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 257.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 528.

Narcissism can be defined as having a strong sense of superiority or arrogance over others and can be displayed as an inflated sense of entitlement.<sup>52</sup> Two types of narcissism can affect the individual perpetrator: the narcissism of minor differences and malignant pathological narcissism.<sup>53</sup> Remarkably, the narcissism of minor differences promotes intergroup conflict between similar groups, for example, the Hutus wanting to eliminate the Tutsis in Rwanda. Malignant narcissism is defined as the inability to have empathy with others and to regard human destruction as trivial in the quest for personal glory.<sup>54</sup> Numerous genocidaires could fit the definition of malignant narcissism including Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong.<sup>55</sup> As for the effect of narcissism on a group, collectively it can explode into mass entitlement and potentially lead to large scale criminal activities. Examples of collective group narcissism contributing to the mass perpetration of genocide include Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, and Maoist China.<sup>56</sup> The Nazi regime fancied themselves as the “master race” and believed they were entitled to claim lands outside of Germany such as Poland.<sup>57</sup> In terms of the prevention of narcissistic perpetrators, the ability to alter the mindset of a narcissist could be further studied. Also, understanding when an idea is approaching a narcissistic view would be important to monitor for the possible emergence of hate crimes and dangerous ideologies that contribute to the construction of the “other”.

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<sup>52</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 250.

<sup>53</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 529.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p 529.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p 529.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p 531.

<sup>57</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 250.

Greed is defined as an “uncontrollable longing for an increase in the acquisition or use of material gain or social value such as status or power”.<sup>58</sup> Greed has been illustrated in genocidal history by how fast goods and belongings are seized by perpetrators from the victims of genocide. In fact, greed can be seen as a principal motive of some genocidal perpetrators.<sup>59</sup> Examples include the Turks looting immediately after the Armenians were ripped from their homes and forced to join the death marches in 1915.<sup>60</sup> Greed can corrupt the perpetrator and it is connected to hunger for power, domination, and prestige.<sup>61</sup> Absolutely this would be a motivating factor to perpetrate: a place to live and treasures to steal Greed played a role in the German women who became willing perpetrators and went on “shopping sprees” for Jewish-owned goods while also brutalising Jews during the Holocaust.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, “greed is never satiated; but when it is fed, one feels validated, successful – even omnipotent.”<sup>63</sup> This brings up the potential solution of paying perpetrators to stop. If their motivation to kill is brought on by greed, fulfilling that greed with a monetary payment to stop could be an effective, albeit controversial solution.

Fear is an emotional response to a current perceived danger and can lead to the targeting of scapegoats.<sup>64</sup> It can also aggravate other psychological elements such as narcissism and humiliation. Mortal terror is an animal fear based on a perceived threat

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<sup>58</sup> Wikipedia Definition of Greed." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greed>, accessed 25 April 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 533.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p 209.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p 533.

<sup>62</sup> Lower, Wendy, *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 534.

<sup>64</sup> "Wikipedia Definition of Fear." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fear>, accessed 25 April 2022.

and can result in an animal response leading the perpetrator to sacrifice others.<sup>65</sup> Psychological projection contained within mortal terror is demonstrated when the perpetrator destroys the human body in an effort to “convince themselves the victim is no longer human”.<sup>66</sup> Another common reason to perpetrate is when one is motivated by fear with the thought that if you refuse to kill, you will be killed. Peer pressure also creates a form of fear as the perpetrator does not want to be rejected from the group. In that case, it is better to participate in the violence than be a victim. Rwanda is a good example of mass participation in violence to be part of the group and eliminate the feared “other”, in this particular case due to an ancient tribal animosity. Fear of contamination describes the perpetrator’s impression that the group is so polluting that its very presence creates danger therefore they need to get rid of them.<sup>67</sup> The fear could also be felt as a threat to the state, for example, Nazis saw Jewish people as a threat to existing institutions and to the very existence of Germany.<sup>68</sup> With the case of why perpetrators joined the Schutzstaffel, the organization itself provided a feeling of security and safety with its hierarchy, obedience, and esprit de corps.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the best-known example is that Hitler’s fear and perception of the Jewish threat fuelled his desire for a Jew-free Europe, believing an urgent response was needed to sustain the Aryan race.<sup>70</sup> Prevention of fear is complicated, but better information dissemination could be a good place to start to

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<sup>65</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 534.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p 538.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p 536.

<sup>68</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 209.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p 211.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p 277-278.



eliminate fear causing violence. The world should fear what will happen if we do not figure out how to prevent genocide.

Humiliation is at the heart of genocides as the genocidaires feel oppressed by the target group.<sup>71</sup> Those with high but unstable self-regard tend to respond violently when they are humiliated.<sup>72</sup> As well, humiliation can be a motivating force in terms of violent behaviour as it wards off feelings of shame and replaces them with pride.<sup>73</sup> Over one million Armenians were murdered in Turkey between 1915 and 1923, provoked by the decline of the Ottoman Empire which triggered humiliation amongst the Turks.<sup>74</sup> Humiliation spurred the violence as the empire failed, targeting the Christian minorities of the Armenians. A strong feeling of humiliation can also linger and shape the path forward within a group, potentially explaining why the Turks deny the Armenian genocide to this day. To link humiliation and the role of narcissism in perpetrators, it is the humiliated narcissist that is the leading candidate for violent action, particularly acting out of fear of a perceived threat.<sup>75</sup> Hitler himself is an example of threatened egotism, having had an inflated sense of self-worth, received harsh feedback with a rejection from the Vienna Conservatoire when he was 18, could not accept the negative appraisals and therefore responded emotionally towards those he blamed for his failures.<sup>76</sup> In summary,

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<sup>71</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 541.

<sup>72</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 328.

<sup>73</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 539.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p 201, 202.

<sup>75</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 250.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p 267.

there is often a source of humiliation behind the motives of perpetrators but being able to eliminate the effects of the humiliation is uncertain.

With an understanding of narcissism, greed, fear, and humiliation contributing to people becoming perpetrators, it is difficult to determine if anything can turn the tables away from genocidal actions. Keep in mind these four elements are all generalized as having been a component of some perpetrators' psychology, but it is not an absolute. It is not entirely clear how to conduct a prevention strategy based on these four human traits. Having these qualities does not necessarily make you a perpetrator, but with them and a surrounding culture of violence and war, there could be potential for perpetration to occur.

## **Discussion**

There is no complete model of the perfect perpetrator, thus making the task of stopping perpetration extremely difficult but nevertheless, of great importance. Further to the ideas brought forth within the three sections, three overall strategies will be presented including prevention of the genocide before it begins, further research into the psychological process that transforms ordinary people into perpetrators and finally humanitarian support and legal enforcement organizations becoming more effective by recognition from all of society.

Prevention is the key as once a genocide starts, it is hard to stop it without great effort and violence. Genocide normally progresses along a continuum of destruction with a starting point of an extreme loss of control in society and escalating violence against the constructed others.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, to prevent the atrocities and death, genocide would

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<sup>77</sup> Newman, Leonard S., et Erber, Ralph, *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 214.

optimally need to be stopped before it begins. Genocide awareness needs to be increased worldwide to trigger effective strategies for prevention when warning signs begin to appear. Dr Gregory Stanton is a well-known genocide researcher and the founding President of Genocide Watch, which monitors early warning signs of genocide and seeks to build an international movement to prevent and stop genocide.<sup>78</sup> Genocide Watch includes worldwide alerts under Genocide Watch, Genocide Warning and Genocide Emergencies.<sup>79</sup> With Genocide Watch in place since 1999, genocides have still occurred and are continuing to occur. Potentially there are political barriers, and a lack of state will involved, *realpolitik*,<sup>80</sup> and society needs to stop accepting and authorising perpetrator genocidal acts. An example where this did not occur is in the Darfur-Sudan region, where effective action was not taken to stop or reduce the genocide in Sudan.<sup>81</sup> The Rwandan genocide is another example where it “was simply too remote, too far, too poor, too little and probably too black to be worthwhile.”<sup>82</sup> Time will also tell if Russia will carry out genocide on Ukrainian civilians and if anything will be done to stop it. Worldwide media also plays a crucial role to report real-time atrocities and increase public knowledge towards accurate information dissemination.

There is a lot to be gained from trying to understand the process that transforms ordinary people into perpetrators of genocide, specifically on how to understand and use

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<sup>78</sup> Charny, Israel W, *The Genocide Contagion: How we Commit and Confront Holocaust and Genocide*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) 163.

<sup>79</sup> "Genocide Watch." <https://www.genocidewatch.com/>, accessed 25 April 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Totten, Samuel, *Last Lectures on the Prevention and Intervention of Genocide*, 1st ed. Vol. 1, (Milton: Routledge 2017) 11.

<sup>81</sup> Charny, Israel W, *The Genocide Contagion: How we Commit and Confront Holocaust and Genocide*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) 162.

<sup>82</sup> Jones, Adam. 2016. *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd; 3 ed, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016) 474.

psychology for non-evil ends. The dive into perpetrator psychology is important and accelerated data gathering could be useful. Since it is so difficult to target the psychology of the individual perpetrator, the environmental factors of genocide should be targeted first. If there is not someone to be obedient to, or if the narrative is flipped to humanize the other, it could change history. The most well-known and documented genocide is the Holocaust therefore to increase the understanding and perspective of perpetrators, more genocides need to be studied to analyse how different killers came to be. The examples in this paper were mostly drawn from the Holocaust therefore there is a question as to whether the data holds up in contemporary context. Genocides of the past were more secretive due to minimal information operations and the lack of social media. Advances in those two areas have now created faster and wider dissemination of information to propel and build genocidal power. There is also a potential fear of understanding perpetrators as the research could be insinuated as justification for their actions, however, further critical research should trump that fear. It is also important to shift the narrative burden away from survivors and discover insights into those that perpetrate the unthinkable violence. The continued increase in the diversity of academic backgrounds researching genocide including anthropologists, psychologists, and criminologists, is extremely positive progress. Society can rest assured that current and future academics and activists will refuse to let this subject be dormant.<sup>83</sup>

Legal organizations have emerged over history in the quest for human rights including the United Nations, Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the International Criminal Court (ICC). The challenge is to get society to respect these organizations and

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<sup>83</sup> Charny, Israel W, *The Genocide Contagion: How we Commit and Confront Holocaust and Genocide*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) 9.

humanitarian law, as genocides continue to occur.<sup>84</sup> Perpetrators must retain full moral and legal accountability for the atrocities they commit<sup>85</sup> therefore the ICC was established as an international force to help end impunity for the perpetrators of genocide.<sup>86</sup> As expressed on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, on the 107<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, the Office of the Armenian Human Rights Defender stated, “the punishment of those responsible and the restoration of justice can prevent future crimes,” as impunity only justifies new crimes .<sup>87</sup> April 24<sup>th</sup> is also the commemoration of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and at the 2022 commemoration event, the local minister called for more efforts to arrest perpetrators by stating “...efforts to fight against genocide ideology and denial should be intensified.”<sup>88</sup> In summary, the justice of perpetrators is of great importance to deter future violence.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has only scratched the surface of what makes a genocidal perpetrator. The goal was to narrow down into the psychology of the perpetrator including the banality of evil, obedience to authority and perpetration motives due to narcissism, greed, fear, and humiliation. In the discussion, three high level strategies were proposed to stop perpetration of genocide including genocide prevention, further academic research, and respect for humanitarian law. It is hard to stop these genocidal processes when there is a

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<sup>84</sup> Charny, Israel W, *The Genocide Contagion: How we Commit and Confront Holocaust and Genocide*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016) 164.

<sup>85</sup> Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 18.

<sup>86</sup> "International Criminal Court." <https://www.icc-cpi.int/>, accessed 25 April 2022.

<sup>87</sup> "It is the Punishment of the Perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide that can Prevent Future Crimes. Ombudsman's Message." *Armenpress News Agency*, 23 Apr 2022.

<sup>88</sup> Nkurunziza, Michel, "Egide Nkuranga, the President of IBUKA Reiterated the Call to Bring to Book Genocide Perpetrators in Amayaga Region." *The New Times Rwanda's Leading Daily*, 25 April 2022.

society marinating in a culture of hate against the “other”. It will also be important to analyse more modern genocidal perpetrators. Genocide and its perpetrators are difficult to stop therefore prevention, research and humanitarian action need to be the worldwide emphasis. We owe it to the would-be future victims of genocides to once and for all, figure out how to stop the continuum.

“As much as the world has an instinct for evil and is a breeding ground for genocide, holocaust, slavery, racism, war, oppression, and injustice, the world has an even greater instinct for goodness, rebirth, mercy, beauty, truth, freedom and love.” Desmond Tutu.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> "Desmond Tutu Quote." <https://www.quotenova.net/authors/desmond-tutu/xe59ek>, accessed 4 May 2022.

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