1 Introduction

This study pursues a social history of mass violence and analyzes the latter as social interaction. Based in large parts on the close-up view of witnesses and survivors, it shows how violence comes from people (not only abstract machineries and systems), from direct interactions between individuals, and how deeply rooted and firmly anchored it is in societies. The book demonstrates that indirect violence, too, is often not abstract and anonymous but rather produced by people in social exchanges that may be surprising because of their ordinariness. I take these approaches in the attempt to demystify violence. By rejecting the idea that the loss of some lives is greater than that of other lives, regardless of whether people were killed directly or indirectly, the book aims at working toward a non-racist history of violence.

This volume synthesizes my thoughts about the subject since the publication of my book *Extremely Violent Societies*, where I emphasized that mass violence is often participatory, multi-directional and multicausal. A variety of groups is attacked by people from various sections of society, along with state organs, for a multitude of reasons, based on different interests and attitudes. Violence originates not only from the state, but very much from the people. Often mass violence occurs in connection with a crisis of society with immense social and geographical mobility.[1] In the present book, I move in several ways further on the way to a social history of mass violence. First, I take a closer look at social interaction on the ground between groups as well as between individuals. Second, I explore how the tendency of groups and individuals to recklessly and forcefully pursue their own interests and ideas creates circumstances under which many people suffer and die in a matter of weeks, months or a few years in ways that were foreseeable and avoidable. I refer to this as "conditions of violence". Third, this book deals more than my previous work with multi-polar violence.

Two Concepts: "Mass Violence as Social Interaction" and "Conditions of Violence"

The two main concepts used in this book, "mass violence as social interaction" and "conditions of violence", are two ways of deepening one's understanding of the social roots of mass violence and its participatory character.

1 See Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chapters 1 and 8.

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"Life is precarious", writes Judith Butler, because it "relies fundamentally on social and political conditions"[2] – and on social relations, as one might add. Likewise, threats to life have a political and a social dimension. However, political history (or more broadly, scholarly inquiry into the political aspects of violence) dominates the field, whereas a social history of mass violence is rare.[3] Jutta Bakonyi and Berit Bliesemann de Guevara have proposed to understand violence as a "social [. . .] process".[4] More specifically, social interaction is not treated here as mere context, but simultaneously indicative and constitutive of violence. Exploring the social history of mass violence is essential for understanding its causes. In addition, understanding mass violence as social interaction also aims at a better understanding of the social situation at the time. This implies to understand violence as part of societal developments and de-emphasize discontinuity.

If mass violence is not only a matter of rogue regimes, it may be less extraordinary and more widespread than many people perceive it to be. By examining social interaction, this book also depicts in which ways mass violence is embedded in everyday life. This follows Ranajit Guha's argument that a full history needs to take into account everyday life and, by implication, ordinary people who have to be raised out of scholars' racist assignment of allegedly being "without history".[5] Just focusing on elites, in turn, often merges with political history. I came to think about this everydayness more systematically because of recent experiences, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic and the current international conflict involving Europe, North America and parts of Asia.

Understanding mass violence as being constituted by social interaction is an attempt to take all groups and individuals involved seriously. This is directed against any haughtiness toward 'victims' and 'perpetrators' alike, who are not 'evil', dumb, thoughtless, nor do they go 'like sheep to the slaughter', etc. People from all sides are to be scrutinized. Furthermore, accepting mass violence as social interaction leads to acknowledging, demonstrating and analyzing complexity.

Extremely Violent Societies was about interactions between social engineering (policies) and the activities of social groups. In inquiring about mass violence as

2 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2016 [first 2010]), 21.

3 See some attempts in Christian Gerlach (ed.), *On the Social History of Persecution* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023); Christian Gerlach and Clemens Six, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Anti-Communist Persecutions* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

4 Jutta Bakonyi and Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, "The Mosaic of Violence – An Introduction", Bakonyi and Bliesemann de Guevara (eds.), *A Macro-Sociology of Violence: Decyphering patterns and dynamics of collective violence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 4.

5 Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limits of World-History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 8 (quote), 94.

social interaction, large parts of the present book are no longer much concerned with policies and the state, but with the ways of functioning of social exchanges in times of mass violence. I dispute the notion that social history, in this context, is merely identical with a local history that shows little variation (whereas policies would be all that varies and is interesting) and that social history is only about how things are playing out on the ground and therefore does not matter.[6] Instead, I argue that social action shapes violence.

This is a different level of analysis, and therefore this study works with sources that reflect individual experiences and perspectives, which I found mainly in survivor and witness reports. Thus, sometimes the construction of memory becomes subject to an analysis of its own, particularly in chapter 5, which focuses on Soviet war movies.

How people commit violence often also tells something about the reasons behind the act. The way how violence is carried out is not only indicative of motivations for violence (through the symbolic content of actions), but also constitutive of these motivations. For example, racism, which often plays a role in mass violence, is not only a "social phenomenon",[7] or construct, but also a social practice that is shaped and manifests itself in social interaction. On several occasions, this book will demonstrate, as other examples, killers' feelings of (moral) superiority over their victims and other people, their sense of being cool and their insistence on their freedom to kill (in particular, chapters 2, 3 and 7).

It is important that the analysis does not stop there. Direct violence often captivates the attention of audiences, to regard mass violence as social interaction may be disturbing and the descriptions and explanations derived from it may appear illuminating. However, it should not be forgotten that indirect violence often causes more deaths than direct violence and the former deserves full consideration. To put it stronger, indirect violence requires comprehensive scholarly scrutiny precisely because it is less spectacular.

Thus, what I call mass violence requires further elaboration. Often, no blood is spilled even when people die in great numbers in what I call 'violent conditions', or conditions of violence. This is the second core concept in this book, which builds on the first. It is important to understand that conditions of vio-

6 This refers to remarks by Tomislav Dulić in a discussion at the conference "Destruction of Jewish Communities in South-Eastern Europe during the Second World War: Roots, Practices and Outcomes" at the University of Uppsala, May 9, 2023.

7 Jean-Loup Amselle calls "Whiteness" "a social phenomenon" in Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Jean-Loup Amselle, "On various contemporary questions", Souleymane Bachir Diagne and Jean-Loup Amselle, *In Search of Africa(s): Universalism and Decolonial Thought* (Cambridge and Medford: Polity, 2020), 137.

lence, too, are based on social interaction. Following Marx, according to whom humans "make their own history", they also make their own conditions, including those of violence – "but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past", within certain systems and collectivities, constructed by humans and then reproduced, modified or changed.[8] The processes in which this interplay between tradition, systems, social relations and social interaction occur are very complex, but they only seem to be impersonal. This is another aspect of how deep the roots of violence in societies are and how wide they are branching out.

The opacity of these processes lets conditions of violence appear quasi-natural, at the time they happen and later. This can be linked to what Ulrich Herbert described as the "disinterest" and indifference of Germans toward the millions of forced workers whom everybody met in the Reich during the Second World War. They did not recognize or acknowledge these workers' treatment as violence, although most were insufficiently fed, housed and dressed, verbally or physically abused and barred from using air raid shelters during bombings.[9]

Two characteristics of conditions of violence obscure the injustice that is present in them: their longevity and their everydayness. What I call conditions of violence can lead to death within a time period lasting between weeks and a few years. Moreover, they either appear normal, as in the cases of misery and poverty, or are set in everyday life, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic (see chapter 7).

These properties of conditions of violence facilitate that they are frequently written out of history, although the fact that they are overlooked is only one reason for their marginalization. Scholars' work often serves to legitimize the very social systems in which conditions of violence were produced while delegitimizing other violence (and systems), which leads them to construct, and neatly distinguish, between good and bad violence (or bad and not so bad violence). The fact that many of those suffering under conditions of violence usually belong to a lower class such as workers, peasants, colonial subjects and illiterates who often speak 'non-Western' languages makes it easier for scholars to ignore or deny the violence against them through a process of othering. This is part of what Judith Butler describes as the "ungrievable lives" of those who live in a "lost and destroyed zone" where no people who matter live.[10]

8 Adapted from Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), in https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm (accessed March 31, 2023).

9 See Ulrich Herbert, "Arbeiterschaft im 'Dritten Reich': Zwischenbilanz und offene Fragen", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15 (1989): 352.

10 Butler, *Frames*, xix, see also xxii.

Conditions of violence frequently lead to forms of suffering and dying that include starvation; forced labor; exhaustion through work, coerced marches or flight (for example, refugees after expulsion); internment under miserable conditions; being exposed to cold; willful or neglectful exposure to deadly diseases; and denial of medical treatment. Often, conditions of violence become apparent through hunger, which indicates that the people affected can no longer cover their elementary needs and have lost their access to resources, either because they were poor from the beginning and vulnerable to economic changes or because of displacement/internment. In many cases, conditions of violence are a collective experience or one that people have in masses although in isolation from each other (for example, starving and freezing at home). Despite any collective character, it is difficult to resist such conditions because of the complex social relations at their root.

Some argue that it is normal that victims of indirect violence do not count as much and do not receive as much attention as those of direct violence. That this is incorrect and that conscious deliberations are behind assigning different values to the deaths and suffering of certain groups can be shown with the following: nobody will contest that the hundreds of thousands of Jews who starved to death and succumbed to related diseases in concentration camps and the Warsaw ghetto under the Germans were murdered. But it is very much contested that Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) were murdered, although they died under similar conditions and because of the same causes in German internment camps and mostly at the same time. Moreover, mass hunger can be put at the center of national histories of suffering from violence, as it has been done in a variety of ways in Ireland, India and Ukraine.[11] Whether this kind of narrative takes center stage or not depends on the circumstances of memory production.

Conditions of violence have originators, and the violence has a direction, or directions. Conditions of violence are created to affect certain groups, or it is known or foreseeable that these conditions will harm certain people. This typically targets groups rather than specific individuals. Many survive. People are exposed to conditions of violence in large numbers, but with such unequal chances that it seems too narrow to call all of those who endure survivors (for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, see chapter 7). Considering conditions of violence thus blurs the line between the oft-used categories of 'victim' and 'bystander'.[12]

11 This refers to Ireland in the 1840s, Bengal in the 1940s and the Soviet famine in the 1930s.

12 See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992).

Conditions of violence are imposed on certain people, but often in complicated ways. Therefore a state-centered analysis falls short of providing a reasonable understanding of the processes that ensue. Famines are a case in point. If their occurrence is blamed on somebody it is usually governments ('evil regimes').[13] These (including occupiers and colonialist regimes) may indeed create difficult conditions by setting low rations, restricting some people's mobility, extracting and redistributing resources, failing to aid those affected, or besieging or 'sanctioning' enemies; however, other agents are involved in a famine, too. Merchants are hoarding and charging high prices; surplus food producers also profit from high prices; big landowners take the opportunity to cheaply buy land of poor peasants; neighbors buy movable possessions of people in misery (and sometimes even buy their children) for next to nothing; rich farmers take advantage of urbanites in similar ways; entrepreneurs exploit people in misery through minimal wages and expand their business, etc. Therefore, a famine is more than a political crime, it is a social process ridden by conflict and highly unequal outcomes – who die are mostly poor people.[14] In this sense, virtually all famines involve indirect violence. But the conditions of violence have multiple originators.

Conditions of violence differ from another concept that is often referred to as structural violence. The former is different from the latter and not supposed to replace it. Unlike structural violence, which is meant to be anonymous and abstract,[15] conditions of violence are produced by identifiable historical agents – groups, organizations, individuals – regardless of how indirect the violence is, and although it may be generated through a system and in a division of labor within society, which can involve the state or not. Second, conditions of violence denote something more dynamic and acute, although often medium-term, than the very long-term, "static" character that structural violence implies.[16] The point where the notions of conditions of violence and structural violence overlap is that in both, violence can be defined as "avoidable" harm and exists in inequality of power, in the "distribution of resources" and "unequal life chances".[17] Johan Galtung, who coined the term "structural violence", perceived imperialism as

13 See Stephen Devereux, ed., *The New Famines* (London: Routledge, 2006).

14 This draws from Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981).

15 According to Johan Galtung, "structural violence" has no "actor that commits the violence" and is of a "more abstract nature". Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research* 6, 3 (1969), 170 and 187, note 12.

16 According to Galtung, "structural violence [. . .] is essentially static". Ibid., 173.

17 Ibid., 169 (first quote), 175 (second quote), 171 (third quote).

often being connected to structural violence and so it is with conditions of violence (see chapter 6 about the Second World War).[18]

Some scholars have used terms similar to "conditions of violence" to denote other things than meant here. Similar to Galtung, Emma Laurie and Ian Shaw attribute what they dub "violent conditions" to social injustice in general and its consequences, and, thus, stable conditions of life.[19] Of course, these are of great importance, but that is not what I mean by conditions of violence. Nor is the German literal equivalent of conditions of violence, *Gewaltverhältnisse*, the same what I mean because it has been used in reference to long-lasting problem zones like gender/family violence, and often came close to what structural violence depicts.[20]

No Struggle Between Good and Evil

The two concepts outlined thus far are different from 'genocide', among other things from its normativity. Genocide studies produce comforting stories of good and evil. They tell the tale of evil political systems, evil and absurd ideologies that inspire them, political radicals who drive them, evil individuals who govern and manipulate them, and regime change that removes these evils. This serves as the legitimation of their own political systems (namely, bourgeois democracy) through their supposed contrast to genocidal ones. It also leads authors and their middle-class audiences to thrilling, uplifting feelings of superiority over violent historical agents that are marked as decisively different through a process of othering. And many educators demand clear lessons from historians so they can tell simple stories of good and evil.

I reject the notion of evil. So do other authors, such as Mahmood Mamdani, who wrote that his "preoccupation is not with the universal character of evil [. . .]".[21] As a social historian, I do not believe in the discontinuities that such tales suggest. As an atheist, I refuse to let a discourse of religious origin be imposed upon

18 Johan Galtung, "A Structural Theory of Imperialism", *Journal of Peace Research* 8, 2 (1971), 81, 85.

19 See Emma Laurie and Ian Shaw, "Violent conditions: The injustices of being", *Political Geography* 65 (2018), 8–16.

20 See Regina-Maria Dackweiler and Reinhild Schäfer (eds.), *Gewaltverhältnisse: Feministische Perspektiven auf Geschlecht und Gewalt* (Frankfurt a.M. and New York: Campus, 2002); Otthein Rammstedt (ed.), *Gewaltverhältnisse und die Ohnmacht der Kritik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1974).

21 Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 228.

me.[22] (This may distance me from many readers.) The most important reason, however, is that the notion of 'evil' blocks a thorough analysis. Thinking along the lines of 'evil' leads to a mystification of violence, demonization and, thus, the dehumanization of the perpetrators; it indicates a low level of analysis – in fact, a refusal to analyze.[23]

Many scholars have used the notion of 'evil' upfront, such as Hannah Arendt in her concept of the "banality of evil" and Samantha Power in '*A Problem from Hell*'.[24] "Axis of evil"-politicians like George W. Bush could build on their work. Other genocide scholars, despite being more reflective of the term, insisted on speaking of 'evil' and marketed their books with titles like *The Roots of Evil* and *Becoming Evil*, offering elaborate explanations that they did not mean to refer to evil as an immutable, mystic force.[25] Claudia Card, a philosopher who claimed to offer a secular "theory of evil", was ambivalent regarding the demonization of perpetrators.[26] At the very least, this indicates that the concept is prone to misunderstandings.

But there is more to it. The political history of mass violence (or more broadly: the political inquiry into it) instills an uplifting sense of moral and political superiority in many people which is deeply *felt*. The attitude of 'How *could* they?' is a sign of ignorance, and, often, arrogance, from people who choose to overlook the violence of or by their own society (often directed against other peoples) and fail to realize or acknowledge how widespread mass violence is historically and contemporarily. People from ruling classes, or dominant nations, frown upon direct violence with a pleasant shiver but belittle conditions of violence that they may produce themselves.

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22 For the impact of religion on the concept of evil, see Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4; James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Violence* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 10.

23 According to Card, *Atrocity Paradigm*, 23 and 28, such concerns are not uncommon among scholars.

24 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1965, revised ed.); Samantha Power, *"A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003). As a result, Arendt's analysis is intellectually weak. For further information on this, see Christian Gerlach, "The Eichmann Interrogations in Holocaust Historiography", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15, 3 (2001): 428–452.

25 Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xii, 126; Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 10–18.

26 "'Evil' may seldom mark monsters. But often enough it marks monstrous deeds", as she wrote, and there is a subchapter "The Reality of Diabolic Evil"; Card, *Atrocity Paradigm*, 23, 211–213; see also ibid., 7.

By rejecting the notion of a struggle between good and evil, I must have disappointed the expectations of many readers. And those of publishers, because writing about 'evil' augurs good business and using words such as 'Holocaust' (burnt sacrifice, a term serving mystification) leads to higher sales.

I also have profound doubts about the alleged forces of 'good', said to be victorious over the forces (and system) of 'evil', whether this concerns the Rwandan Patriotic Front or the Allies in the Second World War, a point scrutinized in chapter 6. This leads me to a broader issue: genocide studies (or: the prevalent political history of mass violence) have difficulties in accounting for multipolar violence, as in the case of a civil war. If there was a civil war in a historical situation, conventional studies tend to downplay its significance, marginalize it and focus on one target group of violence, fading out others.

It is necessary to move beyond a Manichean world view to be able to understand mass violence as being based on conflict, as it often is. The complex backgrounds and dynamics of multipolar violence that play a major role in this volume are not easily grasped. What I mean is not 'mutual violence' because it is often directed at civilians who neither directly attacked other people nor participated significantly in creating conditions of violence for others. However, violence comes from among both sides (or all sides) and those who are attacked on the other side are often vulnerable. (Notably, these vulnerable people are often *men*.)

Some scholars have tried to account for multipolar violence. For example, Mahmood Mamdani, in his book *When Victims Become Killers*, attempted to explain the mass murders in Rwanda in 1994 in part through Hutu's "fear of a return of servitude" and what they saw as their own victimization.[27] Wendy Isaacs-Martin explored the multiple and complex violent conflicts in the Central African Republic in the 2010s in an attempt to correct the dominant image of a binary religious conflict.[28] Notable here is the proposal by Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, Jon Unruh and others to carefully record "grievance narratives" by people involved on all sides in the Darfur conflict and then mobilize them for peace building, work for it through traditional courts and mediation mechanisms and, in this context, pay great attention to competing claims to land.[29] This most significant ap-

27 Mamdani, *When*, 233.

28 Wendy Isaacs-Martin, "Political and Ethnic Identity in Violent Conflict: The Case of Central African Republic", *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 10 (2016): 25–39.

29 Jon Unruh and Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, "Constituencies of conflict and opportunity: Land rights, narratives and collective action in Darfur", *Political Geography* 42 (2016): 104–116, 104; see also Jerôme Tubiana, Victor Tanner and Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil, *Traditional Authorities' Peacemaking Role in Darfur* (Washington: United States Institute for Peace, 2012). And see Matthew

proach is based on the idea that all suffering matters rather than the notion that the suffering of one party is superior and that of the other is irrelevant because it is on the 'evil' side. In all three cases, social inquiry brought to light how questionable the prevailing simple narratives were, although most did more to explain conflicts than to solve them.

A Non-Racist Framework?

"Extremely violent societies" was also meant as a non-racist and non-imperialist framework. The latter was necessary because genocide studies, from which it split, have in origin and substance been wedded to liberal imperialism. To work toward a social history of mass violence was also a means to resist the politicization of the field (including Holocaust studies) and conduct fundamental research while avoiding a political instrumentalization of the research findings. The social history of mass violence may even have the potential to undermine simplified political narratives about the topic.

By contrast, most work in genocide studies and related fields consists of scholarly inquiry into political systems to fulfill the field's political function of supporting interventionism and legitimizing political liberalism. Financial support by funding institutions is allocated accordingly. In this study, I argue that some scholars' avoidance of social history is quite conscious.

As regards mass violence, liberal imperialists after the Second World War (and perhaps before[30]) have followed the following maxim in international fora: Declare 'our' norms universal, make the laws, man the courts. And write the history. This way, they condemned certain kinds of violence while distracting from others, for example preventing that their starvation blockades became a crime.

Genocide studies were arguably founded in the USA in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, who denounced Axis rule in Europe at a time when the USA were claiming moral superiority over their enemies, demanded their total surrender and started to erect military bases in states around the world.[31] It is well documented that the

Allen, *Greed and Grievance: Ex-Militants' Perspective on the Conflict in the Solomon Islands, 1998–2003* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), set in a different context.

30 See Daniel Marc Segesser, *Recht statt Rache oder Rache durch Recht? Die Ahndung von Kriegsverbrechen in der internationalen wissenschaftlichen Debatte 1972–1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010) For starvation blockades, see Mulder and van Dijk, "Why".

31 See Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944). For indirect hints of Lemkin's ideas being compatible with imperialism, see Dirk Moses, *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression*

great powers tailored the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment in ways that were to exclude their own past (and in part, future) mass violence – political, colonial and other types –, defining away some sorts of mass violence while denouncing others.[32] Genocide studies became a big thing academically and politically in the 1990s, being spread from North America to Western Europe and then to other parts of the world. It expanded as an instrument of bourgeois triumphalism and liberal imperialism; in other words, it serves an aggressive ideology. Allegations of genocide through governments and mass media served as a rationale for North American and Western European attacks during the wars of Yugoslav succession and the Second Iraq War. This resulted in the prolonged, and indeed colonial, foreign occupation of several countries and severe losses of human life.[33] The 1990s also saw the rise of political impositions of various kinds (from 'good governance' to gender issues and environmental aspects) as part of 'aid' conditionality by North Americans and Western Europeans.[34]

The rise of genocide studies in the 1990s also took place during a period when there was an upsurge of nationalism and ethnic polarization and the sanctification of the homogeneous nation-state. It was a time when some multiethnic states split up, or were split up, in Eastern Europe, West and Central Asia. This resulted in the foundation of many small to medium nation states, whose founding narratives sometimes incorporated stories of genocide. Leading industrial capitalist states, which robustly supported this disintegration and its rationales but which are multiethnic themselves, were not split up, such as Britain, Spain, the USA and France. Of course, nobody dared to intervene there. But given that most states in the world are multi-ethnic, industrial nations' policies of supporting ethnic separatism threaten peace and stability globally.

Genocide studies reached their peak during the high tide of the new colonialism in the 2000s and early 2010s. During that period, the "responsibility to protect" principle was adopted in the United Nations in 2005; Samantha Power,

(Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 166–168, and for direct hints, ibid., 404. For U.S. mass violence against non-combatants in World War II, see chapter 6 of this current study.

32 See Douglas Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 152–196; Moses, *Problems*, 223–231, 237.

33 For the connection between genocide studies and 'Western' imperialism, see also Moses, *Problems*, 455–462, 491–495, 499–509. To some extent, I disagree with Moses when he writes: "Ironically, and fatally, condemning illiberal permanent security [and, thus, violence] with the language of transgression often initiates a dialectic that leads to liberal permanent security [and, thus, violence]" (Moses, *Problems*, 39). There is no irony in this. The purpose of the condemnation of illiberal mass violence, its *raison d'être*, for many liberals is to commit own imperialist acts of violence.

34 See Olav Stokke, ed., *Aid and Political Conditionality* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

author of a well-known pro-interventionist book in genocide studies,[35] was appointed to the U.S. National Security Council in 2009 and advocated the U.S. military attack on Libya in 2011, along with British and French forces, invoking the "responsibility to protect";[36] and the French Ambassador to the UN, Jean-Maurice Ripert, advocated an armed intervention in Myanmar in 2008 when it rejected industrial countries' 'help' after a devastating cyclone.[37] Not incidentally, this was also a time of institutional growth: programs in genocide studies were founded in universities in many industrial and some other countries and several new journals in genocide studies were being established.

Then, however, the new multilateral colonialism[38] entered a crisis in the late 2010s, which became manifest in the problems of the U.S. forces in Iraq, the end of the foreign occupation of Afghanistan in 2021 and in the French retreat from Mali. More broadly, it turned out that the new imperialism can destroy but not control countries; foreign powers did not bring peace and stability but more violence, like in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Libya (in part because they did not resolve but often aggravate socioeconomic issues, one cause of the violence); and that imperialist powers of today are incapable of controlling political developments even in neighboring regions, occupied or not, be it the USA in Mexico or Haiti; Russia in Ukraine; the EU in Libya; or Saudi Arabia in Yemen. Simultaneously with this crisis, the growth of genocide studies stalled (and the field called Holocaust studies is in decline). In connection with this process, these fields congealed and increasingly follow the logic of memorialization and indoctrination rather than inquiry, marked by many new laws that prohibit certain statements about mass violence, such as in France, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Rwanda, Turkey and China; the most far-reaching restrictions are now in place in Germany.[39] It remains to be seen what kind of effects the most recent international tensions and conflict will have on this academic field.

This points to a close connection between political power, the intelligentsia (or large parts of it) and the legal system. Many scholars serve to uphold the national and international political system, thus cooperating with national and in-

35 Power, *"A Problem"*.

36 From 2013 to 2017, Power was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and since 2021 she has been Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

37 In this context, I left the *Journal of Genocide Research* as a co-editor in 2011 in disagreement over an editorial on the NATO's bombings of Libya. The *Journal of Genocide Research* is part of imperialist genocide studies.

38 See James Mayall and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, eds., *The New Protectorates*, New York: Hurst, 2011.

39 For Germany, see article 130 paragraph 5 of the German Criminal Law, https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stgb/__130.html (last accessed November 12, 2023), passed in 2022.

ternational courts. Where this leads, and where it comes from, becomes obvious after taking a brief look at the history of the International Criminal Court. Until 2015, all cases of this institution that reached the level of "investigation" were against Africans. The first non-Africans targeted (in 2016) were South Ossetian allies of Russia. At the point of this writing (April 2024), all official investigations have been against individuals from non-industrialized countries (eight in Africa, four in Asia and one in Latin America), except for one country: Russia. All of the 50 defendants have been Africans, except for three men from South Ossetia. At present, the president of the court is from Japan and the lead prosecutor is from Britain; except for one, the ten biggest financers are industrial countries.[40] Not only U.S. citizens but also those from NATO countries will hardly be put on trial in The Hague because *both* are covered by the American Service-Members' Protection Act of 2002, which authorizes the U.S. President to 'liberate' them by any means, apparently including military ones (in or against a country that happens to be allied with the USA).[41] Make the rules; man the courts. The ICC is but one example of the racism of the 'rules-based world order', with the proud involvement of many intellectuals.

If you think that I exaggerate, read John Rawls, the favorite philosopher of many contemporary liberals. In his book, *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls distinguished between five types of societies, including "liberal peoples", "decent hierarchical peoples" and three other types, "outlaw states", "societies burdened by unfavorable conditions" and "benevolent absolutisms".[42] Noting that "outlaw states" violating human rights "in grave cases may be subjected to forceful sanctions and even to intervention", Rawls argued:

> As we have worked out the Law of Peoples for liberal and decent peoples, these peoples simply do not tolerate outlaw states. This refusal to tolerate these states is a consequence of liberalism and decency. If the political conception of political liberalism is sound, and if the steps we have taken in developing the Law of Peoples are also sound, then liberal and decent peoples have the right, under the Law of Peoples, not to tolerate outlaw states. [. . .] Outlaw states are aggressive and dangerous; all peoples are safer and more secure if such states change, or are forced to change, their ways.[43]

40 "International Criminal Court", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Criminal_Court#Investigations_and_preliminary_examinations (last accessed April 15, 2024). See also "51 Defendants", International Criminal Court, https://www.icc-cpi.int/defendants (last accessed April 15, 2024). One defendant appears twice on the list.- South Ossetia is a small republic that split from Georgia and is not recognized by most states, but supported by Russia.- The International Criminal Court (ICC) should not be confused with the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

41 U.S. Public Law 107–206 of August 2, 2002, Sec. 2008, a) and b), (1) and (2).

42 John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 63.

43 Rawls, *Law*, 81.

I have difficulties to decide what is most remarkable about these thoughts: their circular logics, the question of who is included in the 'we',[44] the brutality of its liberal hybris, the selectivity of "rights" or the fact that it assigns – and denies – decency and worthiness of belonging to a "Society of Peoples" not only to states but also to peoples.[45]

If it comes to mass violence, a non-racist framework means that every civilian life has the same value.[46] At the time of this writing, during the Israel-Gaza war of 2023–2024, this is being repeated over and over by many politicians and public intellectuals from not-so-powerful countries around the world, but they are characteristically rarely quoted in European bourgeois media. If every civilian life has the same value, it follows that no victim group is more important than the other and no victimization is a proper rationale for attacking other civilians. If every civilian life has the same value, Palestinian lives are worth as much as Israeli lives; male and female; young and old; white, black and brown; Hutu and Tutsi; Hindu and Muslim; religious and atheist; and Axis and Allied citizens and subjects. Every life counts, and every experience counts. Sounds obvious but is in fact hugely controversial.

The problem of how to act responsibly in the field, i.e., without an endorsement of liberal imperialism, raises difficult questions, and in fact it is not easy to avoid racism.

Non-racist scholarship is not straightforward. Building on Souleymane Bachir Diagne's remarks on the universal, one could call it "a goal to be aimed at", a thing of the future, and the way to it is onerous.[47] Of course, I cannot be sure that I do not hold racist views on an unconscious level and against my will. My approaches are supposed to be non-imperialist; but are they, in an epistemic sense? After all, these are frameworks proposed by a person considered as white and intended to be applied to all sorts of contemporary societies, including some in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and my position allows me to export them. I do not think that every idea developed by a 'white' person is automatically contaminated. If there are no biological races among humans and race is just a social conception, one can possibly rise above it, like over one's class or nation. But is there anything in substance in my approach that is an imperialist imposition?

44 With the word 'we', Rawls does not merely refer to himself.

45 See also the criticism of parts of this excerpt in Zhao Tingyang, *Alles unter einem Himmel: Vergangenheit und Zukunft der Weltordnung* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2020), 194.

46 In addition to civilians, this also applies to other unarmed non-combatants that are subject to this volume such as prisoners of war.

47 Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "On the universal and universalism", Bachir Diagne and Amselle, *In Search of Africa(s)*, 39 (quote), 44.

That societies pass through phases of multi-directional mass violence can occur in industrialized and non-industrialized countries; this is meant in a non-essentialist manner. Similar to my work in the past, the case studies in this volume deal – if one may use these categories – with countries dominated by whites and countries dominated by others: East Pakistan/Bangladesh and Rwanda, the Soviet Union and (by point of emphasis) Central Europe in the COVID-19 pandemic and the Allies in World War II.[48]

Scholars of unrelated heritage have made important contributions to the study of mass violence through their sober external perspectives and new approaches, such as Christopher Browning for the persecution of Jews and Hilmar Kaiser for the destruction of the Armenians. Nonetheless, their findings have often clashed with nationalist narratives wedded to the genocide approach in some kind, and so did mine in the past, whether in Belarus, Hungary, Turkey, Bangladesh or Indonesia, because a common world historiography does not exist and it disaggregates into national and other particularistic narratives.[49] What is more legitimate, national or international perspectives, is an open question. In any case, I avoid using the word 'we' in this study. I am afraid there is no 'we'.

Moreover, to lay open all kinds of mass violence against all sorts of groups and point to the manifold people who committed it, including multipolar violence, can be regarded as a controversial, reckless and brutally frank concept. This contradicts cultural norms in many non-European countries that emphasize polite restraint, avoid open confrontation and prefer "silence after violence"[50] over outspokenness.[51] Also, what I propose includes distinctly historical thinking; it may only be possible after many years to face all of the mass violence that has taken place in a country.

It is part of my approach to take into account violence against all sorts of civilians in a given area or historical situation and analyze them on equal terms.[52] By implication, this is a non-racist framework, and at the same time it is not blind to the skin color and ethnicity of those who were attacked. It is compatible with

48 However, much – though not all – of my past work was either about Axis countries in World War II or violence in societies outside Europe (at other times than in World War II). *Both* could be misunderstood as uplifting stories proving one's own assumed superiority, because both Axis powers and violent regimes in non-European countries have often been portrayed as alien, although, as I would claim, not by me.

49 This is not to say that non-heritage scholars are free of particularistic outlooks.

50 See *Silence after violence*, special issue of *Acta Academica* 47, 1 (2015), edited by Anja Henebury and Yehonatan Alsheh.

51 See also Zhao's criticism of Jürgen Habermas' demand that a discourse must be "candid". Zhao, *Alles*, 193.

52 See Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, chapter 1.

the "principle of assigning equal value to [all] historical sufferings" from violence that Charlotte Wiedemann pleads for.[53] Already in my dissertation work (which dealt with the German occupation of Soviet Belarus in World War II) I had looked at violence against all major victim groups in one country.[54]

This means rejecting the hierarchies among unarmed victims prevailing in so many studies, whether they are based on the ways of killing or on the group to which those who suffer violence belong. These hierarchies are highly problematic, all the more because the argument behind them frequently has to do with affected people's descent. All lives matter equally.[55] To assign different values to the death of people from different groups and to do so on the basis of skin color or ethnicity, to create rankings in which premature losses of life of certain 'others' are less valuable and deserve less attention, is racist. To publish such ideas means spreading racist ideology.

In this context, this book may appear confusing to some. Who were the bad guys, Bangladesh or Pakistan? After all, chapter 3 depicts Pakistani atrocities but chapter 4 predominantly describes Bangladeshi violence, also against unarmed civilians, in 1971. And do I condemn the Soviet Union or not? Chapter 6 argues that the Soviet Union in the Second World War was an imperialist power like others which, supported by many of its people, used massive violence against foreigners and many of its own citizens, often with racist undertones, but chapter 5 shows that many postwar Soviet movies about the Second World War had tragic antiwar narratives instead of such of victory. What may appear contradictory to readers actually reflects some of the complexities involved in the social process that mass violence is.

Methods

To reach these goals, I take several different approaches in this book: sound history, participatory observation, but also film history and, in one case, a critique

53 Charlotte Wiedemann, *Das Leid der anderen verstehen: Holocaust und Weltgedächtnis* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2022), 201 ("prinzipielle Gleichrangigkeit historischer Leiderfahrungen"). See also ibid., 9.

54 Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941–1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999). But this was still a piece of political history.

55 This does not mean to criticize the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA. Its slogan made only sense if understood as countering the practice that black lives do *not* matter and deaths of 'black' people caused less public concern than others, doubtlessly an accurate assertion.

of existing scholarship and its narratives, confronting them with facts of social history. What links these approaches is the attempt to grasp the experience, and action, of people on the ground. In none of the chapters in this volume is the inquiry primarily policy-oriented (chapter 6 differs from this to some degree). This book is much less about intellectual history than practice. Perhaps one cannot say that the case studies are concerned with everyday life because they deal with people in extraordinary situations, but they do describe practice on some kind of everyday level, and search for overarching patterns in highly localized experiences. Compared to *Extremely Violent Societies*, this volume makes less of a political economy-related argument, with the exceptions of chapters 2 and 6, which focus on Rwanda and on the Second World War; see also chapter 7. Nonetheless, this volume strives for a people's history of violence, defined as a history from below.[56] For this I try to demonstrate what mass violence as social interaction entails and how conditions of violence work. This does not at all mean to idealize the masses or people from the lower classes – a common criticism of history from below – because it implies that they participated in shaping or influencing violence one way or another. It is not accidental that chapter 4 analyzes crowd violence in which, along with armed troops, many women and children were killed.

Sound history, which is used as a tool in chapters 2 and 3, brings readers to the level of direct exchanges surrounding violence and on-the-ground experience. Here, the historian listens in on past events and agents. This is not harmless and unproblematic; rather it is indiscrete and somewhat merciless. Noises have special qualities. I concur with Deborah Kapchan's argument that listening leads to "in-between" places and into "an acoustic space of ambiguity and paradox, a shifting ground wherein preconceived ideas have not yet overdetermined either the subject or the interpretation".[57] Listening produces more bodily and emotion-charged ways of knowledge than other avenues of perception.[58] In research about times of mass violence, attention to sound is of special significance because one can say that sound, and especially voice, embodies life as such since it is close to breathing.[59]

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56 Examples for such an approach are E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Penguin, 1968); Moritz Feichtinger, *"Villagization": A People's History of Strategic Resettlement and Violent Transformation: Kenya and Algeria 1952–1962*, Ph.D dissertation, University of Bern, 2016.

57 Deborah Kapchan, "Listening Acts: Witnessing the Pain (and Praise) of Others", Deborah Kapchan, ed., *Theorizing Sound Writing* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2017), 288.

58 Deborah Kapchan, "The Splash of Icarus: Theorizing Sound Writing/Writing Sound Theory", in Kapchan, *Theorizing*, 2–3.

59 For this thought in general, see Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (Albany: State University of New York, 2007, second rev. ed.), 3.

For the most part, the soundtrack is an untapped layer of information in the accounts of historical witnesses. Noises have been neglected by most historians, and by other scholars as well,[60] which is unfortunate. The core of the matter is that sounds – and larger "soundscapes" – can express power, rule and conflict, social relations, hierarchies, practices and social change, gender roles, religious practice, collective action, community ties, group identity and the use of technology.[61] The inquiry into sounds thus aims at much more than noises themselves. Sounds and hearing have also been associated with emotion, which corresponds to physical characteristics of sound that consists of waves that permeate the entire human body, which gives sound a special impact.[62] Hearing has a certain sense of existentiality to it and, working multidirectionally, the ear is the organ of alarm.[63] Sounds may not always be produced intentionally, but they are always communication.

Taken together, these qualities make it appear rewarding to inquire into what people heard in times of conflict, social upheaval and violence. In fact, sounds can *be* violence, used to intimidate or paralyze opponents.[64] However, except for the role of music and aerial bombings, almost no histories of sounds in mass violence exist, an article by Vannessa Hearman being the most notable exception.[65]

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60 See Jan-Friedrich Missfelder, "Der Klang der Geschichte: Begriffe, Traditionen und Methoden der sound history", *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 66, 11/12 (2015): 633–649. For a fuller treatment of the potential of sounds for the history of mass violence, see Christian Gerlach, "Echoes of persecution: Sounds in early post-liberation Jewish memories", *Holocaust Studies* 24, 1 (2018): 1–25.

61 See R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, 2nd ed. (Rochester: Destiny, 1994), esp. 3, 29, 35, 71, 184, 237; Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild: Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Munich, 1995), esp. 143–146.

62 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Zum Gehör* (Zurich: diaphanes, 2010), 19, 23–24; Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 79; Holger Schulze, "Bewegung Berührung Übertragung", in: *Sound Studies*, ed. Holger Schulze (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008), 147.

63 Hans Werner, *Soundscape-Dialog: Landschaften und Methoden des Hörens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 79.

64 For this point, see Schafer, *Soundscape*, 50–51, and in particular Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2010), esp. xvii, 155, 189.

65 See Vannessa Hearman, "Hearing the 1965–66 Indonesian Anti-Communist Repression," *A Cultural History of Sound, Memory and the Senses*, eds. Joy Darmousi and Paula Hamilton (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 142–156, and several other contributions in the same volume; and Gerlach, "Echoes".

Whereas much of 20th-century related sound history focuses on media, music and city noise and is often based on technically recorded sounds and sound observation (like, for example, many anthropological studies as well), chapters 2 and 3 reconstruct sounds from written texts, which is an established practice in histories of earlier periods.[66]

Rather than merely setting up an inventory of sounds, aural observations shall be used here as a point of departure for further thoughts, as an approach that uncovers otherwise "neglected aspects of human experience".[67] Memories concerning dramatic, existential experiences seem to be especially rich in recollections of noises of mass violence.[68] However, to realize this, it is necessary to go beyond music, technically mediated sounds and city noise. Instead, all kinds of noises can be equally meaningful and must be subject to analysis, including modulations of the human voice, which the witness reports describe very often.[69]

Thus, rather than government documents, the primary material that forms the basis of this book are accounts of survivors and witnesses of violence from large collections that were compiled in unrelated contexts. The fact that most earwitnesses do not pay much attention to sounds, and to telling about sounds, is a problem, but it also bears a potential. Many sounds may have been forgotten and/or omitted. But narratives about past sounds, if they are based on unconsciously made remarks, may also reveal undercurrents in memories and deep structures in social interaction. In this respect, one could speak of hidden transcripts.[70] This is why statements of such persons who were not asked questions about their aural experience appear especially valuable.

Accounts by survivors and witnesses of violence are the basis of chapters 2 and 3, which use sound history, and of chapter 4 which deals with crowd violence in East Pakistan and Bangladesh, respectively, from 1971 to 1972, and sporadically in chapter 6. In a way, the perspective of people who endured violence is also

66 For example, Corbin, *Village Bells*; Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*; Mark Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

67 Such an approach was demanded by Jan-Friedrich Missfelder, "Period Ear: Perspektiven einer Klanggeschichte der Neuzeit", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 38, 1 (2012): 33.

68 See Gerlach, "Echoes".

69 This follows the approach pioneered by Schafer, *Soundscape*.

70 I use the term of 'hidden transcripts' more in the sense that Mark Greengrass has made of it than in the sense that James Scott used it, because for Scott, unlike Greengrass, the term indicates *conscious* collective strategies of expressing opposition and dissent. See Mark Greengrass, "Hidden Transcripts: Secret Histories and Personal Testimonies of Religious Violence in the French Wars of Religion" in Levene and Roberts, *Massacre*, 69–88, esp. 75; James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), esp. xii, 4, 20, 27, 120 and 134.

prominent in chapter 5, which operates through a different approach, film history, concentrating on film plots and narratives as forms of memory production; but these were in many cases constructed or enacted by people who had lived through some of the Second World War's most violent episodes. For all of these four chapters, I have read these personal accounts with critical distance and concentrated on finding general patterns of behavior of people from all sides, rather than on individual stories, often told long after the event. Using the term 'oral history' for such witness and survivor reports could lead to the misunderstanding that what they say *is* history and to be taken at face value, which is not the case.

Chapter 7 drives this focus on drawing from personal experiences further because it is partially based on participatory observation. This approach is problematic on several counts, particularly from a historian's perspective; this includes a possible lack of critical and temporal distance from the events as well as the narrower limits of what can be said for personal and legal reasons. My lack of experience with participatory observation is no help either.

Chapter 6 stands out in this volume because it is essentially a meta-study of existing scholarship, with one focus on famines, and a critique of mainstream narratives (of World War II). However, it does look at commoners' experiences of violence, or conditions of violence, which is something that ties all chapters in this volume together, although chapter 6 also poses the question of who created these conditions.

Structure of this Book

This volume consists of two main parts. The first examines mass violence as social interaction (but not conditions of violence) in different contexts and ways: through the sound history of the mass murders in Rwanda in 1994 (chapter 2) and of one Pakistani army massacre in East Pakistan in 1971, for which there are many survivor reports (chapter 3); through the history of one form of aggression (crowd violence) during the East Pakistan/Bangladesh conflict in 1971–1972 (chapter 4); and through the inquiry into memory production by way of scrutinizing plots and narratives in Soviet films about World War II from the 1940s to the 1980s (chapter 5).

While the first part of this volume is about direct violence, the second part mostly deals with indirect violence. This second part turns to look at the genesis and consequences of conditions of violence in two contexts: the Second World War, uncovering masses of forgotten victims, especially in famines, through a much more global perspective than usual (chapter 6), and by considering the COVID-19 pandemic in large parts as mass violence with many avoidable deaths, which occurred because of certain types of behavior. Chapter 7 on COVID-19, the

only one in this book to work with both concepts (mass violence as social interaction and conditions of violence), shows through this combination of research perspectives how lethal violence can become socially hegemonic and normalized. This is absolutely crucial for the arguments made in this book. Finally, chapter 8 offers some conclusions, including naming some topics to which the concepts of this book, and conditions of violence in particular, could be applied in future research.