



Course Sharing: Psychosocial Roots of Genocide and State Terror

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Course Description

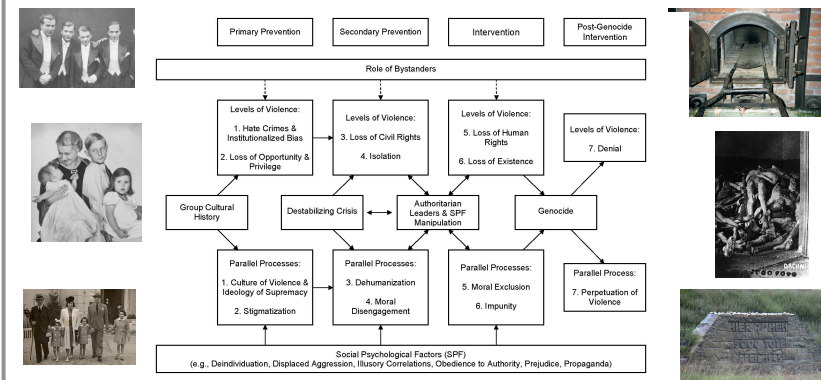
We live in a time of unparalleled instances of democide, genocide and ethnocide. In fact, Rummel (2007) estimated that political violence such as genocide resulted in the deaths of approximately 262 million. Indeed, the 20th century was so bloody that Powers (2002) entitled it the "Century of Genocide." Unfortunately, the advent of the 21st century did not usher in a century of peace. Genocidal violence continues unabated in regions such as the Nuba Mountains, Central Africa, and Myanmar. Of course, these statistics underestimate the additional toll on human life from physical and psychological scarring.

Although most individuals are aware of the Holocaust (although they often do not realize the extent of the brutality and actual cost in terms of human life), many are not aware of other past genocides/democides or of current genocides/democides. For example, many individuals remain unaware of the Armenian genocide in Turkey, the killing fields of Cambodia, the disappearances in Argentina & Chile, the death squad killings in El Salvador, or Stalin's purges. Many are unaware of recent events that have resulted in genocides in Bosnia, Rwanda/Burundi, and Darfur or the extreme violations of human rights and genocidal policies by the governments of China (including Tibet), Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and Indonesia (including the genocide of the East Timorese).

The Holocaust, the genocides in Turkey, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Darfur . . . the disappearances in Argentina, the death squad killings in El Salvador, . . . violence, torture, the mistreatment of human beings . . . All of these raise questions about extreme political violence. In this course, we will examine the psychological, cultural, and societal roots of human cruelty, mass violence, and genocide. We will examine the questions of what enables individuals collectively and individually to perpetrate evil/genocide and examine the impact of apathetic bystanders on human violence.

Psychosocial Model of Genocide

Woolf, L. M., & Hulsizer, M. R. (2005). Psychosocial roots of genocide: Risk, prevention, and intervention. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 7, 101-128.



Sample Course Outcomes

Students will be articulate and analyze definitions for the terms genocide, democide, ethnocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, mass violence, and state terror.

Students will be able to discuss the interaction of factors that play potential causative roles in the perpetration of human cruelty on an individual and collective basis (e.g. torture and genocide, respectively).

Students will be able to articulate the primary psychological and sociological theories related to the perpetration of genocide. Students will also be able to discuss the research on topics such as obedience, conformity, diffusion of responsibility, bystander behavior. Students will be able to relate these theories and topics to specific instances of genocide and analyze political situations at risk for genocide.

Students will be able to discuss the psychological and sociological research concerning bystander behavior and relate this research to the role of bystander behavior during genocide/state terror.

Students will be able to discuss the research related to the psychological impact of extreme victimization on individuals and groups as it relates to genocide and state terror.

Students will be able to articulate several theories examining both prevention of human cruelty, mass violence, and genocide or intervention during instances of mass violence and genocide.



Sample Course Topics and References

Introduction to the topic of genocide:

Totten, S., & Parsons, W. S. (Eds.). (2013). *Centuries of genocide: Essays and eyewitness accounts* (4th ed.). New York: Routledge. ISBN-13: 978-0415871921

Combines historical facts, scholarly analysis, and accounts written by survivors and witnesses of well known and lesser-known genocides including the genocide of indigenous populations.

Rummel, R. (1996). *Death by government*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Excellent statistical and historical information concerning instance of 20th century genocides and democide from that of Europe under the Nazis to the Soviet gulag state. Evaluates the role of power in the creation of democidal states and cultures.

General Psychosocial Theories of Genocide:

Staub, Ervin. *The psychology of good and evil*. New York, NY: Cambridge University, Press, 2003.

Staub, E. (2011). *Overcoming evil: genocide, violent conflict and terrorism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Waller, J. (2007). *Becoming evil: How ordinary people commit terrorism and mass killing* (2nd ed.). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.

Woolf, L. M., & Hulsizer, M. R. (2005). Psychosocial roots of genocide: Risk, prevention, and intervention. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 7, 101-128.

So what cultures are at greatest risk for genocide?

- Use of aggression as a normative problem solving skill
- Conflict oriented grounded in an assumption of antipathy with a perceived threat orientation (e.g., anarchic/realism perspectives and the security dilemma)
- History of strong ingroup/outgroup identification and institutionalization of bias. Lack of cultural diversity.
- Nationalism

Kecmanovic, D. (1996). *The mass psychology of ethnonationalism*. New York, NY, US: Plenum Press.

Opatow, S. (2005). Hate, conflict, and moral exclusion. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *The psychology of hate* (pp. 121-153). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Authoritarian Leaders:

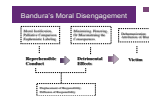
One key characteristic of genocidal states is the presence of a totalitarian ruler and an authoritarian form of government. Authoritarian leaders:

- Solidify and maintain power by eliminating opposition
- Centralize of power
- Promotion of economic self interest
- Create destructive infrastructures and reify destructive ideologies.

Hermann, M. G., Preston, T., Korany, B., & Shaw, T. M. (2001). Who leads matters: The effects of powerful individuals. *International Studies Review*, 3(2), 83-131.

How do you get neighbors to kill neighbors

One of the most powerful tools available to a leader is the ability to manipulate how the population thinks about, influences, and relates to each other. Examples include a host of social psychological concepts. For example, Bandura's model of moral disengagement is particularly useful in explaining all forms of state terror from torture to genocide.



Bandura, A. (2016). *Moral disengagement: How people do harm and live with themselves*. New York, NY, US: Worth Publishers.

Reconciliation and Reconstruction

The wounds of genocide can fester in all parties creating only the future potential for genocidal violence. Hence, post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction is imperative.

Staub, E., Pearlman, L. A., & Bilali, R. (2010). Understanding the roots and impact of violence and psychological recovery as avenues to reconciliation after mass violence and intractable conflict: Applications to national leaders, journalists, community groups, public education through radio, and children. In G. Salomon, E. Cairns, G. Salomon, E. Cairns (Eds.), *Handbook on peace education* (pp. 269-285). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Additional Information

Survivor Interview. Many communities have international centers with speaker bureaus for survivors of human rights abuses. Survivors of atrocities such as the Rwandan genocide as well as victims of torture or trafficking are often available to speak to a class and answer questions. Such first person accounts engage students to learn about human rights in a way that cannot be achieved through simply reading about events. It is important, however, that such interviews be done with care and arranged through appropriate organizations. The United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum (USHMM) has published guidelines for survivor presentations.

Sample Assessment Project: Students analyze an instance of genocide from a psychosocial perspective. In creating the paper, students are to:

- Discuss and apply concepts to a genocide not previously discussed in class to demonstrate an understanding of the concepts while learning about another instance of genocide.
- Research the genocide through journals such as *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* and the *Journal of Genocide Research* as well as scholarly books on the topic.
- Examine psychosocial topics such as group cultural history, the role of crisis (e.g., economic, post-colonization), social cognitive factors (e.g., ingroup/outgroup, heuristics), social influence factors (e.g., obedience, propaganda, deindividuation), social relations factors (e.g., relative deprivation), bystander behavior, and stages of mass violence.

