

## DARK IMPULSES OR RATIONAL CALCULATION?

Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley: *Why Not Kill Them All? The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006. Pp. 268. \$24.95.)

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Chirot and McCauley would be accused by William Sewell of committing the fallacy of experimental time by engaging in transhistorical theorizing, in this case about genocide, by fracturing history and comparing cases under a common label (mass killing) and ignoring both differences in societies and the context of particular historical conditions. Though even guiltier of the charge of loose generalization, they are most guilty of illogically slipping from a general truth to an associated generalization that has no demonstrated validity. If they cannot make the diagnosis correctly, I will spend no time on the modes of prevention advocated.

The authors are, however, innocent of the hype of the publisher's publicists, who think the authors believe that impulses and emotions both explain and justify mass killing. "What dark impulses lurk in our minds that even today can justify the eradication of thousands even millions of unarmed human beings caught up in the crossfire of political, cultural or ethnic hostilities? . . . If genocide is to become a grisly relic of the past, we must fully comprehend the complex history of violent conflict and the struggle between hatred and tolerance that is waged in the human heart" (my italics). Though the dust jacket insists that this question lies at the heart of this book, it does not, for blind hatred of the Other is both transformed by cognitively legitimizing the perception of the Other as a threat while conjoining that perception with a fear for the actual perpetrator's own safety: "Fear of reprisals for not killing, including the fear of death, is another part of what moves perpetrators" (90). However, only when those emotions are transformed—when hatred and real fear of one's own safety, conjoined with love of one's own group, are mutated into a cognitive system of justification—is genocide, and not just a prejudice or even a pogrom, allowed to take place. According to the authors, genocide is not driven by impulses but by a ruthless logic even though they state that "hate is more an explanation of genocide for leaders than for followers" (91). Logic explains. But that same logic does not justify genocide per se; it only provides a justification for the actual killers, which is provided by elites who demonize the Other as an infectious agent that needs to be exterminated.

Third, victims are not killed because they are caught up in the crossfire of ethnic or cultural hostilities. They are deliberately targeted by the group in authority with control over powerful, coercive instruments. In the modern period, this is the state. Finally, there is no struggle between hatred and tolerance that produces genocide when hatred wins. Rather the authors transmute tolerance into self-hate and demonize self-preservation by equating that effort with demonizing the Other as an alien, an Other worthy of extermination. How one gets on this slippery illogical slope is never explained other than pointing to an abstract logic and the possibility that when groups stand in the way of economic gain they may be exterminated (131). "It is part of our central contention that all such cases [of mass killing], whether large or small, have a logic and rationale behind them" (4). Mass killing is perceived as intentional and deliberate on the part of the authorities with a goal and a process of reasoning that determines that mass killing is the best way to achieve that goal. Thus, although elites create the rationale, their hatred and reification of the Other goes deeper than the relatively superficial emotions of the actual killers. "[L]arge scale genocidal acts are the result of planning and of long-lasting, not short-term, passions and ideologies" (60). The Other must be characterized as a continuing threat (63). Pain-aggression anger as a blind impulse may be present in the short term, but what is required is the cognitive appraisal of a moral violation (insult-anger) so that the target is considered morally repugnant (66-67).

So both fear and anger as emotions of the moment have to be mutated into cognitive processes.

How did the publicists come to emphasize impulses and emotions? Because, according to the authors, the authorities play on a lust for killing and manipulate passions (5). Sometimes the rationale may be convenience and a calculated instrumental opportunity, or it may be revenge or even fear that if the enemy is not totally destroyed, it will rise up and retaliate against the group conducting the mass killing. Or it can be a combination of two of these factors or even all three as in the mass killing of the Herero in Southwest Africa by the Kaiser's Germany. Finally, that fear may not be of retaliation, but diabolic destruction from within by an agent characterized as a bacillus or pollutant, a fear that without this cleansing, catastrophe will result. Whatever the rationale, humans are predisposed to distrust and fear competing groups that are susceptible to stereotyping and demonization. Feelings of threat, anger, shame for past humiliations, resentment as well as disgust, all predispose us to violence and, therefore, to mass murder, when other groups stand in our way and are believed to threaten us. The "dark impulses" (7) by which normal human beings are all too ready to kill by category are ready to be manipulated. However, it is the logic of mass murder that must be understood and countered. Then why do the elite leaders who perpetrate the genocide have to reinforce these fears of the Other by convincing ordinary people that their own lives will be endangered if they do not become "willing executioners"?

Though all four factors facilitate mass killing, the overwhelming power one group has over another plays the crucial role. In the modern period, that overwhelming power is located in the state because its resources are crucial for defense and economic well being and because minorities without control of a state are at great risk. State authorities use camaraderie, group identification, binding mutual responsibility, leadership training, and an appeal both to potential perpetrators' emotions and their sense of duty. Using these means, they manage to persuade ordinary people to overcome their inhibitions and participate in mass murder by providing a legitimate authority and a personal self-interest, lest their own lives be in danger.

There is now widespread agreement that for genocide to take place a group must be made the Other, must be converted into an alien and then a threatening enemy. Furthermore, the Other is viewed as an enemy that works insidiously from within and, thus, is the greatest threat of all. How perpetrators move from one category to a more extreme one is not understood as all conceptions are homogenized into a common set of conditions just as mass killing covers a widely varied set of phenomena. Further, the elites in the modern world who perpetrate the demonization of the Other seize and use the power of the state in the context of war, a context to which the authors pay too little attention. Instead, they illogically equate essentializing the Other as worthy of extermination with the policies of states that assume

responsibility for one group and, thus, include laws of return for descendents of their own citizens—as Germany, Israel, and other countries do. The authors, as do others, falsely equate this with a nationalism of blood, which, if true, would not allow spouses or converts to Judaism, in the case of Israel, to become citizens under such a law. However, the authors go further in blaming the victims, for it is the Jews who “left us a religious tradition justifying total war” because they told stories of genocide and advocated purity when they should have accepted exogamy and integration (110).

Without evidence or logical argument, the authors engage in the same illogic of genocidal perpetrators, so that “Our hatreds are the reflection of our love.” (77). For Chirot and McCauley, a devotion to endogamy is dangerous (111). They illogically and without evidence equate it with the desire to exterminate the Other. Behind a tremendous and commendable bringing together of many different examples of mass killing lies a moral tale advocating total assimilation and the elimination of group differences, as the preservation of group difference results into making the Other an alien Other, an enemy Other, an enemy Other that is a threat, and an alien Other that is threat from within. So they offer up the tautological nostrum that there would be no genocide or ethnic cleansing if there had been more intermarriage (119). By insisting on the logic of genocide, they engage in perpetuating an illogic common to enlightenment rationalists in which anti-Semitism takes on the guise of an irrational form of reason in the advocacy of group death through a higher moralism that is not regarded as murder. Perhaps this illogic has more to do with explaining genocide than any of the factors of legitimization pointed out.

—Howard Adelman