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MICRO AND MACRO SOCIOLOGICAL CAUSES OF VIOLENT ATROCITIES

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To examine the structures that cause violent atrocities, it is useful to begin with a historical instance. I have chosen an example which contains a range of kinds of violence, some more extreme, more cruel, than others, but all within a short period of time. Cruelty is variable; it does not happen every minute, even in social settings where it may be culturally approved; and at some moments it happens where it is not approved. Everything has multiple causes, and these conditions must intersect at a particular time and place if anything is to happen. Cruelty has both small local micro-dynamics and large macro-sociological conditions, and these together determine the fateful moments when cruelty will happen or does not happen. Long-lasting structural conditions are not enough; because of the micro-component, cruelty when examined closely has a contingent quality, although as a sociological theorist I would prefer to consider this as its time-dynamics.

My example is the most destructive race riot in US history. It took place in New York City during four days in July 1863 (Asbury, 1928: 87-173). It is sometimes called the New York draft riot, since the instigating cause was the compulsory draft of troops for the Federal army, just then in the midst of the Civil War against the slave states of the South. President Lincoln, who had recently emancipated the slaves, and the Abolitionists, were unpopular with the Irish immigrant population who lived, mostly in poverty, in the lower part of Manhattan. The draft was particularly unpopular since it allowed wealthier citizens to buy their way out of conscription. In New York, the conflict pitted Anglo-Protestant middle and upper classes against lower-class Irish Catholics. The Irish were prepared to fight; they were already organized in neighborhoods political clubs or gangs, which often brawled with each other, and which regularly fought with the police, especially at election times. Irish patrimonial organizations, which the Anglos regarded as corrupt, struggled over control of city politics. Only recently a reform had centralized the police under control of Anglo elites; this had resulted in violent struggles between rival groups of police and their supporters in 1857, only six years earlier. The Irish were well mobilized to resent what they saw as another imposition of Anglo-Protestant power, and to strike back against the draft.

The first day of riots began by massive crowds, numbering around 10,000, marching uptown to attack the headquarters of the draft board where the selection was taking place. At first the crowds had success, forcing small numbers of police to retreat, occupying and burning two official buildings of the draft and a state armory. The crowd then moved on to find new targets, for a riot needs action to sustain itself and a crowd which is doing nothing soon falls apart. But the next targets chosen were better defended; repeated assaults on the main Abolitionist

newspaper, *The New York Tribune*, were driven back; and a march on police headquarters was met by a police counterattack. Although the police numbered no more than a few hundred against crowds of many thousands, the police attacked in a determined phalanx wielding clubs, and after a short 15 minute battle, forced the crowd to flee. How was this possible, that such small numbers could prevail, and without the use of guns? Clubs could be quite deadly, and contemporary descriptions claim the cops ferociously broke heads and killed rioters with their blows. Yet the rioters were similarly armed, also carrying a small number of guns — which however were not very effective in the crowded streets.

Here we must invoke a general principle, which I have documented in my book, *Violence. A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Collins, 2008). Winning or losing in a violent conflict is first of all a matter of who establishes emotional dominance; that side wins which holds together better, keeping up greater solidarity, and taking the initiative away from its opponent; emotional dominance comes first and makes possible physical dominance. Thus 100 police smashing the front of the crowd of thousands in a narrow street were able to turn its march into a disorderly retreat, leaving many luckless rioters open to being clubbed while they were stumbling and running away.

This pattern was repeated in numerous battles between crowds and police during the next days. Some of the rioters responded with better organized tactics; they took up defensive positions on rooftops, from where they could throw barrages of stones, causing many casualties among police. Army troops began to arrive on the second day and to use artillery against the crowds; when rioters retreated to defensive positions in upper windows and rooftops, the authorities developed an effective combined arms tactic of police clearing the building with their clubs, driving the rioters into the streets where they could be shot. On the second day, rioters set up European-style barricades, similar to those in 1830 and 1848 in Paris; but again the police and army attacked with superior weapons and superior energy and destroyed the amateur fortifications. Losses were heavy: during four days, police and army suffered 50 killed and over 1000 wounded; rioters lost 2000 killed and 8000 wounded, including many women and children — the bulk of the crowds being below the age of 20.

Despite this string of defeats, the riot continued, since there were numerous crowds throughout lower Manhattan, perhaps totaling 50,000 participants, who flowed away from the points of police strength to attack undefended targets. This is another general principle of violence: most violence is successful by finding weak victims. Thus rioters successfully attacked and burned several isolated police precinct stations, left largely unmanned because the police had been called away to muster in a few major actions. The homes of well-known citizens, such as the Mayor, the Postmaster, the newspaper editor, were attacked and burned if there were little guard. One must conceive of a riot as a temporary community of shared consciousness which can keep itself together only if it has attainable goals — targets where it can gain victories, where it can establish its own emotional dominance and keep up its emotional energy. The side in the conflict which is generally losing — and this was the condition of the rioters whenever they met the police and

the troops after the middle of the first day — tends to split off to seek easy targets. At first these were clear symbols of their enemies, upper class homes nearby on their line of march which were burned or looted, even as rioters retreated from the police. It was in this context that the riot began attacking negroes.

Here again the riot began with official targets and proceeded to opportunistic attacks on exposed individuals. On the first afternoon, as attacks on the Abolitionist newspaper and other official targets were thwarted, a crowd attacked the Colored Orphan Asylum; most of the children escaped, but the building was looted and then burned, and one small negro girl who had been left behind was killed. Small groups of rioters began to invade hotels, restaurants, even bars and brothels in the lower-class part of the city, seeking negro servants to attack. Negro homes were burned, and negroes on the streets were beaten and hung. These were easy targets, not only because the negroes offered little resistance, but because negro areas were dispersed among the Irish slums — in fact, the poorest of both races tended to live in the same place, so the rioters had the emotional comfort of fighting on their home turf. On the second and especially third days of the riot, attacks on negroes became the main success of the rioters.

These were displays of ritualistic cruelty. Isolated negroes were surrounded by crowds which beat them repeatedly and dropped heavy stones on their heads; women, who made up a minority of the crowds, came forward on these occasions to stab the bodies, to pour oil into the wounds and set them on fire. Here we are unquestionably in the presence of deliberate cruelty. Sociologically we should analyze the emergence of cruelty in the time-dynamics of the crowd's action, the temporal process by which the crowd prolonged its focus of attention on those places where it felt itself most dominant, its little bubbles and pockets of victorious emotion. Violence against isolated negroes was gratuitous, prolonged, overkill; bodies that were dead or unconscious nevertheless were repeatedly mutilated; burned bodies were hanged. The symbolic significance of these bodies as rallying-points for the crowd is shown by incidents which culminated the last day of rioting; the last big mob, totaling 5000 — the last time rioters were able to assemble in large numbers — hung a number of negroes along 8th Avenue. Army troops fired artillery into the crowd and drove them away, and cut down the negro bodies hanging from street lamps. When the army moved on, the mob returned to re-hang the bodies; eventually the police returned, took possession of the area, cut down the bodies and removed them. The trophies of battle gone, the riot finally dispersed and petered out.

There are plenty of instances of cruelty throughout the riot. By modern standards, we would regard firing artillery into a crowd to be cruel, and having one's head beaten in by a policeman's massive club would also be singled out by the modern media; casualties of women and children in these mêlées are shocking to us. Burning defenseless negroes no doubt seemed especially cruel even at the time, because it was prolonged and deliberate. But rioters too had been burned, chiefly on the first afternoon, when in the last of the crowd's big victories, the state armory had been captured. While rioters were upstairs ransacking the weapons, a police counter-attack outside the building caused a panic; fearing the police might recapture the

building, rioters set the downstairs floor on fire, burning hundreds of rioters who had barricaded themselves in upstairs. The fact that the crowd itself had started the fire was probably not appreciated at the time; the rioters no doubt considered the horrible deaths of their companions who had jumped from the burning roof, as the responsibility of the police. These are the emotional dynamics of a violent situation; if it is prolonged over a period of time — in this case, hours of tension stretching into several days — emotional and cognitive polarization sets in, both sides seeing the other as increasingly evil and inhuman; the perceived cruelty of the enemy becomes the incentive to practice cruel revenge, leading to a cycle culminating in the battle over the charred bodies of hanged and mutilated negroes on the third day of the riot.

Cruelty must always be located in time-dynamics — in the build-up of emotional polarization, and in the process of finding weak victims to keep a crowd mobilized when it no longer can prevail against the official targets with which it began. In fact the first victims of the crowd's ritualistic violence were isolated policemen and soldiers, caught away from their mass formations on the first afternoon; it was later, when police in phalanxes were no longer vulnerable targets, that torturing negroes became the crowd's chief preoccupation. Cruelty is not constant over time; it has its peak moments. These same Irish had lived in New York City with the negroes peaceably until those moments arrived — a pattern reminiscent of the ethnic atrocities in Bosnia in the 1990s.

Yet, although cruelty has its micro-dynamics, there is a structural aspect as well. Not all riots turn to ritual mutilation, torture, and prolonged battles over hanging corpses. When it is that violence upon one's perceived enemies is more prolonged, ritualistic, and pointedly symbolic? By historical comparison, the intensity of cruelty is greater where groups are separated from each other by strongly ritualized boundaries. The archetype are tribal societies, which keep up strong internal solidarity; living in close proximity, in dense networks closed to outsiders, engaged in collective activities that leave little room for individualism or cosmopolitan connections, these are societies of a high degree of Durkheimian solidarity, a strong collective consciousness and sense of its own identity (Durkheim, 1964 [1893]; Black, 1998). Morality is tight but local, demanding commitment of the individual in support of the group, but lacking moral sympathy with outsiders regarded as scarcely human. In such segmentary societies, ritualized boundaries are constantly being enacted against neighbouring tribes; the nearest tribe is also one's worst rival and enemy. It is true that enmity among segmented societies is not constant, and relationships with neighbouring groups can be mixed with ambiguous exchanges. Thus even where the structure promotes hostility, the contingencies of everyday interaction often contradict the facade of ferociousness.

In part this is because violence in tribal societies is not usually very effective, since military organization is low, and mutual suspicion keeps both sides from exposing themselves when they are isolated and weak. But although victims in tribal warfare may be comparatively few in any one fight, they are celebrated with great ferocity. Indeed, the ferocity serves to dramatize the importance of the victory because success against an enemy is so episodic and uncertain. In tribal societies, captives may be tortured at length in collective ceremonies which assemble the group and

thus serve as Durkheimian rituals of group supremacy (Collins, 2004; 2008). The death of an enemy in a tribal vendetta is celebrated with joyful dancing, and even a woman or a small child can be a suitable victim when — as if often the case — tribal warfare is too incompetent to score a real military victory. Occasionally through stealth an undefended enemy village may be taken, in which case a total massacre can happen — headhunters in the Philippines, for instance, prefer to attack when the enemy is asleep (Rosaldo, 1980). Group identity is so strong that categories of non-combatants are not singled out in the modern manner, and massacres of women and children evoke no moral qualms, although under some circumstances it may be considered a practical policy to take some of them as slaves, or even eventually to adopt them into one's own side to fill gaps left by the dead. Here, what by modern standards would be considered extreme cruelty is not locally recognized as such, and even is celebrated as the group's glory. This is the ancient morality that Nietzsche (1956 [1887]) perceived, where there is no standard of sympathy outside one's own ranks, and good is equated with collective dominance.

The exemplars of ritually segmented societies are simple tribes of the pre-state period, but similar structures exist inside historically more complex societies where residence and economy are segregated into local ethnic enclaves. It has often been noted that modern urban gangs are like artificially constructed tribes, practicing honorific vendettas and defending their turf against their nearest neighbours; gangs construct boundaries through initiation rites and symbolic emblems of identity such as graffiti, or handsigns which are used to provoke battles. Gangs build self-contained islands of purely localistic morality, dramatizing their ferociousness against their enemies with threats of exemplary cruelty, although indeed much of this is bluster and bragging which they rarely are competent to carry out. The Irish who joined in the 1863 New York draft riot were not ordinarily a unified group; most of the time they identified with their smaller neighbourhood gangs, fighting periodically with other Irish gangs, for the most part using clubs and stones. Localistic fighting of this sort tends to become routine, especially when it happens inside the larger context of a modern society; and the intra-Irish gang fights, although they caused many injuries and a few deaths, were not on the whole known for extreme ritualistic cruelty such as mutilating and hanging burned bodies. To explain this higher level of cruelty we need an additional cause.

Again historical comparisons reveal the structural pattern: ritualized public displays of cruelty upon helpless victims are most strongly institutionalized in societies which combine hierarchic stratification with strongly ritualized group membership. Such are the societies of caste or estate, where honorific aristocrats demand extreme deference from peasants or slaves, and where intermediate classes of gentry, priests, merchants, or craftsmen guard their own ritual boundaries and demand what deference they can from those below. Historically these are the type of society in which power and wealth are most unequal; unlike tribal societies (or gangs) which are relatively flat internally and do their fighting horizontally, we have here a society in which everyday life is vertical, imposing deference upon underlings. But both egalitarian tribes and hierarchies of status groups (to use Weber's term) have this in common, that both of them have a high degree of Durkheimian social density:

everything is highly visible, no one is anonymous, the force of public attention is on everyone all the time. In a ritualized hierarchic structure emotional dominance is always at issue; upper classes are full of pride and arrogance, those below them have varying diets of humiliation, with opportunities to pass it along to someone else even lower. These are the societies in which public executions are like carnivals, gaudy displays of torture, mutilation, and prolonged death, even punishment after death. In the long struggles between Scotland and England from the 13th through the 18th centuries, for instance, rebellious chieftans would not only be hanged but their heads displayed on the city walls on pikes (Mackie, 1978). It has been argued that these forms of public cruelty were calculated displays; since government power was intermittent and most resistance could not be stopped, authorities made the most of the few malefactors they could catch for token displays of terrifying power. (This is similar to the analysis of Helbling, 2006, of pre-state violence generally.) There is an element of truth in this, but we should not forget the moral context: by the 20th century complex societies preferred to hide away the ultimate powers of coercion and everyone would be shocked by displaying the bloody head of even the worst child-murderer. In historical perspective of previous societies, a remarkable thing about the Nazi death camps was that they were kept secret; 13th century Mongols (and many other peoples) conquering a city had their death camps in public, and piled up mounds of skulls to brag about the deed. This is not just a change in the calculating power of states; it is a change in the social boundaries of morality, from those in which cruelty on proper occasions was a public ritual celebrating the stratified public order, but in modern times changing into a new form of morality in which coercion, although still present, is hidden as much as possible, and cruelty is now considered to be immoral.

Where do the Irish crowds stand in this perspective, when in New York of 1863 they engaged in ritualistic killings with prolonged torture, mutilation, and public display? The Irish had endured years of treatment as a despised lower caste, even regarded by the Anglo-American elite as a separate race, the "black Irish" — cut off by their poverty, their Catholicism, their un-puritanical customs and even their local success in controlling politics in lower Manhattan. The draft riots from the outset breathed an atmosphere of resentment against hated elite. The New York Irish, too, were out of harmony with the moral stance of the social elite engaged in an altruistic Christian crusade to free the slaves. From our modern perspective, this puts the Irish even more in the wrong; but in terms of their local social structure, their allegiance was to their own group; their attacks on the Abolitionist newspaper make it clear that the militant altruists who had started the war were regarded not only as alien but as persecutors of the Irish, trying to close down their saloons and brothels. Irish tribal mentality was only then taking steps towards unification among themselves, the separate gangs cooperating in the huge crowds which fought against the draft boards and the city elite.

One further puzzle is why the most ritualistic cruelty in the 1863 riot was carried out by the Irish, rather than by the police and the army (although we could see cruelty in the tactics of the latter as well). In a hierarchic caste society, most of the ritualistic cruelty is downwards; it is the aristocrats and their agents who do most of

the torturing, mutilating, beheading, and displaying mangled bodies (Black, 1998). The upper classes control the means of military and political mobilization, and most of the means of ritual assembly as well. It is the transition to modern structures that enables political violence by the lower classes; democratization and urbanization opened up possibilities to mobilize on a larger political scale; upward resentment could be vocalized culturally, and resistance mobilized. Hence the fury of the Irish attack on upper-class institutions in New York, when a large-scale issue — the military draft that threatened all of them — gave them incentive to overcome their inter-tribal antagonisms and act in unison against a culturally alien enemy. If we think of democracy, not as an ideal form, but as an actual historical process of mobilizing the previously un-mobilized, we must recognize that it has generated plenty of opportunities for cruelty, especially in its early phases. Michael Mann, in *The Dark Side of Democracy* (2005), gives comparative evidence that the massacres of modern ethnic cleansing happen in populist democracies, which I would interpret as the combination of democratic mobilization with Durkheimian ritualistic enclaves prone to moralistic boundary violence. Thus it was the Irish in New York, precisely at the moment that they were breaking out of their immigrant ghettos into larger political participation that engaged in the widest outbreak of ritualistic cruelty.

But if structurally based resentment was against the Anglo upper classes, why did the negroes bear the brunt of the ritualistic cruelty? One could argue that lower groups displace their anger against those even lower; but this does not capture the episodic nature of the situation of those rapidly moving hours. In fact the crowd did most of their fighting with the police and the soldiers; only 20 negroes were hanged, but these murders were so spectacularly cruel — so spectacularly ritualistic — that they tend to monopolize our interpretation of the riot. But early in the riot, the Irish mobs made similar ritualistic attacks on whites: prolonged beating of the police commissioner who was arrogant enough to ride his horse alone into a rioting crowd, or stabbing and burning small numbers of soldiers who were overwhelmed by a large crowd while reloading their guns. But the white authorities for the most part organized effectively to win their confrontations; the negroes received the brunt of it because they became the easiest victims for the crowds to dominate; and they did bear a symbolic relation to the purpose of the riot, since the military draft and the entire war was perceived by the Irish as a movement to free negro slaves. The targets of ritualistic cruelty, especially in modern or modernizing situations, are episodically chosen, and what happens to them cannot be explained simply by long-standing cultural prejudices. Of course prejudices and hostile stereotypes exist, but violence is hard to carry out except when situational conditions are favorable. In almost every instance where modern ethnic massacres have taken place, not only were there currents of cultural hostility, but also considerable pragmatic success of these same groups in living peacefully near each other.

I have analyzed one form of cruelty, arising from ritually bounded social groups, where altruistic morality does not extend beyond the boundaries of one's own enclave, and deliberate public cruelty to enemies is a ritual of group solidarity. Historically, the antidote to this form of cruelty is structural change, which dissolves

dense groups and rigid boundaries into a fluid network of cosmopolitan contacts. To be sure, the transitional period of democratization is a dangerous one, creating opportunities for episodes of ritualistic cruelty on a mass scale (Mann, 2005). But when the era of Durkheimian mechanical solidarity passes, so should the era of Durkheimian ritualized public cruelty. Durkheim (1964 [1893]) thought that the large-scale trend, as societies became more complex and differentiated, was towards humanitarian identity on a global scale, what Talcott Parsons (1964) called universalism. It is because movements towards universalistic altruism have become widespread, especially among the educated classes since the 20th century that our standards of what is cruelty have expanded: we have formulated many more things as cruel than our ancestors would have recognized. It is useful to recognize this, because as sociologists we should be able to explain ourselves, including our most idealistic aspects. Sociology would be glaringly incomplete if we could explain only the bad guys, and leave the good guys as miraculously enlightened consciousnesses who just happen to drop down into history at the present moment.

But although neo-Durkheimian sociology gives an optimistic view, on the whole, of the structural trends of history with respect to cruelty, another side of sociology is the neo-Weberian view, which points to the creation of a distinctively modern form of cruelty. Ritualistically bounded enclaves characteristic of tribal and aristocratic societies have been dissolved, to a large extent, not only by the growth of complex differentiated networks, but by the state. From a Weberian point of view, pre-modern society was largely organized around patrimonial households (Weber, 1968 [1922]: 956-1110); enclaves of authority by property-owning elders, who rule their families, household servants, and economic dependents like independent fiefs. The growth of the modern state has been to penetrate society, inscribing individuals on the rolls of the state as military conscripts, as taxpayers, as subjects for education, health and welfare regulation, and for political mobilization as citizens and voters. Organizationally, all these activities were done by creating bureaucracies and expanding their reach; bureaucracies based on the impersonal interchangeability of their subjects, keeping records on all they come in contact with, acting according to written rules. State bureaucracies have broken through the walls of patrimonial households, restricting the power of elders and parents, freeing their individual members in some respects while tying them into bureaucratic regimentation in other respects.

On the whole, bureaucratic penetration of society has created more individualism, more cosmopolitanism, more concern for the universal and abstract than for the local and the particular; and in this respect bureaucratized modernity has reduced the conditions which produce ritualistic cruelty. Indeed bureaucracy reduces the level of ritualism of everything. But the Kafkaesque iron cage that Weber worried about before his death in 1920 has for the most part turned out to be less rigorous than he expected; instead of one big dominating bureaucracy there have been a multiplicity of overlapping bureaucracies. Persons working inside bureaucracies have gradually become more egalitarian and informal, at least in their personal dealings among themselves, even as we come to rely on a background of

formal procedures which are built into organizational routine. Many bureaucracies have turned out to be surprisingly benign, although perhaps this is mainly true in rich societies during periods of economic growth.

The return of cruelty in its second form, bureaucratic cruelty, is most apparent in bureaucracies whose task is to administer coercive power. This happens when the state acts militarily or diplomatically against external states, and also in the exercise of police power internally. The chief feature of bureaucracy is long chains of command. Orders are given and procedures are formalized — sometimes by chief executives or military commanders, but just as often by civilians, by judges, by administrative review boards, by staff specialists whose task is to formulate rules and regulations and circulate them throughout the organization. Chains of responsibility are often complicated out of all recognition; the consequences of decisions made in one place, of rules implemented through myriad channels, are often invisible in the eyes of those made them. Bureaucracy operates under a formal myth of responsibility, but in fact much of what happens consists of what Robert Merton (1936) called "unanticipated consequences of purposive social action". Since leaders and administrators are replaceable and indeed are often replaced, and those who carry out a policy locally are far from those who formulated it, the gap between what is officially intended and what actually happens is often large. Sometimes the discrepancy is trivial and the organization muddles along; sometimes it is comic, and bureaucrats themselves — ourselves — laugh about its irrationalities; sometimes however the means are coercive and the results are what I call bureaucratic callousness.

Take for example the diplomatic weapon of economic sanctions. This has been used in recent decades as a tactic of mildness, avoiding the cruelties of war. But international economic sanctions have rarely been effective in modifying the policies of so-called rogue regimes, much less in overthrowing a despotic government. To expect that increasing economic discontent among the people is a path to revolution is sociologically ignorant; historical comparisons by Skocpol (1979), Goldstone (1991), and others have shown that revolutions start at the top, with state crises and splits among elites, frequently through military defeats and expenses; the peaceful pathway to forcing regime change is in fact a mirage. Fifty years of US policy towards Cuba is an example of this failure; and we should expect little from sanctions against North Korea. Economic sanctions fall chiefly upon the poorest people, while privileged groups survive economic sanctions better than others, just as they survive most during disasters. Economic sanctions are often a hidden form of cruelty, hidden by its distant bureaucratic mechanism and seemingly impersonal mode of operation.

Warfare carried out by bureaucracy also produces much callous cruelty. Massive organizations, planning military operations from long distance, override individual details. Even if war is waged in the name of humanitarian ideals, and even if rules of engagement are spelled out to make fighting humane, the impersonal nature of bureaucratic structure generates its own cruelty. Large-scale armies aim to destroy not just the front line but the infrastructure of support; this means attacking not only logistics and military communications but economic targets. In the last 20 years,

increased scientific precision in targeting attempts to reduce collateral damage to civilians in one way, but increases it in another. As long-distance weapons become more lethal, armies respond by dispersing and hiding (Biddle, 2004). This happens not only in guerrilla war, where soldiers hide among the people, but even in conventional warfare. Battlefields expand as armies avoid concentrating troops and military equipment where they can be easily hit by long distance enemy artillery, rockets or aerial bombing. Satellite communications and global computer networks allow rich armies to avoid some of their own casualties by fighting via remote control, such as with pilotless drones; but this is fighting in an ultra-bureaucratic mode, increasing the tendency to impersonality; precisely because pilots are so far away and rely of purely mechanical signals, drones like the US Predators flying deep inside Pakistan or Afghanistan frequently hit civilians as well as military.

Besides these cruelties of the ever-expanding battlefield, there is a more basic, inherent callousness of combat. Fighting takes precedence over anything else in that location; wherever the enemy is met becomes the battlefield. Civilians who happen to live there, even if they escape injury, have their homes wrecked or taken over, their livelihood destroyed. They are turned into refugees. Wide battle fronts, advances and retreats of armies, push refugees along with them, adding another callous cruelty. The first concern of the military is to supply necessities such as food and water to their own troops; refugees come a distant third, even after enemy prisoners. Battlefields create inadvertent disasters, as bad as hurricane, fire or earthquake, because they destroy the built environment which provides inhabitants with basic necessities of life. The problem was not so severe historically in earlier forms of war, where armies were smaller and battlefields could be encompassed by a few thousand meters; modern battlefields covering hundreds or thousands of kilometers impose callous damage on more noncombatants. The enormous population losses of the Eastern Front in World War II were largely of this sort; a recent example on a smaller scale is the damage to civilians in the successful war of the Sri Lankan government against the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) ending in 2009.

Bureaucratic callousness adds another dimension to the Nazi holocaust and similar episodes of genocide or population cleansing. Multiple causes of death were involved; I would argue that even if the perpetrators' aim was not to murder the captured population, the effects of bureaucratic callousness in large-scale forced population movements were responsible for many deaths. Herding crowds of people into railroad cars for long journeys without food, water, heat or sanitation was bound to kill many; forced labor camps do not have to deliberately construct gas chambers if they keep the level of nutrition so low that people starve to death. The Armenian genocide carried out by the Turkish regime in 1915-16 did not necessarily depend upon official intent to exterminate the Armenians (Melson, 1992). Forcing them to march hundreds of kilometers from their homes, with inadequate supplies, into the Syrian desert was enough to kill many by sheer deprivation.

Let me add yet another mechanism to the complexities of cruelty. Bureaucratic callousness tends to create local conditions for the revival of ritualistic cruelty. People who are deprived of the basic means of subsistence become pathetic, diseased, dirty; robbed of the means of normal dignified self-presentation, it

becomes easy for their captors to regard them as subhuman. Masses of deprived victims come to incite disgust rather than sympathy — in the same way that a dirty, ugly beggar on the street makes us shudder. Thus the growth of sadism among Nazi prison guards, and the Turkish populace along the route of the Armenian forced march found it easy — at the moment the spectacle appeared before their eyes — to despise and maltreat these forced refugees, adding many scenes of gratuitous ritual cruelty to a trajectory of suffering already formed on the macro level by bureaucratic callousness.

In conclusion, a few words about the revival of torture. Incidents like those perpetrated by American military guards in the Abu Ghraib prison developed in the context of a bureaucratic organization, processing large numbers of captives. Multiple causes contributed to the torture of prisoners. On one level, the official chain of command sent down orders to extract information. This is a regular feature of all combat organization, which tries to gather intelligence from prisoners about the enemy. This has gone on in all armies for hundreds of years; very little research exists on how it has been done and what level of coercion has been regarded as normal. In general, battlefield prisoners are interrogated rather quickly, which tends to rule out prolonged or elaborate torture. What happened at Abu Ghraib is better known, because it was documented by modern surveillance technology, the mobile phone cameras of the guards themselves. What we saw goes into another dimension, where torture becomes not instrumental but ritualistic, an end in itself. Clearly the guards were enjoying humiliating the prisoners. Routine security precautions such as blindfolds were escalated to a further level, so that helplessly blind, passive prisoners could be arranged in postures that were not only painful but degrading. For the guards, this became an atmosphere of fun, from their perspective, full of laughter and humor. It added a sexual element, not only because of forced nakedness but with a risqué quality from the presence of female soldiers in the gender-integrated US army. For the guards, this was the atmosphere of a fraternity party.

Now we have come full circle. Ritual cruelty flourishes in small, close-knit groups of local solidarity, when they have power over despised outsiders. Bureaucratic organizations, as sociological researchers found in the years after Max Weber, contain an informal structure within. When the bureaucracy is a total institution, encompassing its inhabitants' entire lives (Goffman, 1961), these ritual boundaries become magnified. The bureaucratic military prison reconstructs within itself the conditions of medieval society — the all-powerful aristocracy ruling over a degraded caste of peasant-slaves. The combination of high Durkheimian density and ritualized vertical boundaries creates the conditions for ritual torture. As long as the prison structure dominates, this is downward cruelty. But it is not surprising that those who are humiliated respond, when they can, by ritual violence of rebellion from below. The ceremonial beheading of Western captives shown on al-Qaeda tapes are structurally like the Irish ritual mutilations of their token victims in the New York uprising of 1863.

What can be done? Ritual cruelty is not as widespread as it was historically because many structures have changed. But bureaucracy creates its own form of

cruelty, and we need more explicit awareness in guarding against this. And modern conditions can create little enclaves, revivals of tribalism which generate the return of ritual cruelty. Here micro-sociology can help. Research by Stefan Klusemann (2009) using video tapes from the 1994 Srebrenica massacre, has shown there are micro-interactional turning points, when ritual violence is either unleashed or inhibited. Greater awareness of these micro-interactional processes — both in their emotional dynamics, and in the dangerous configurations of small group structures — can enable us to better train our own forces and avoid some of the conditions which produce ritualistic cruelty. The micro is small, and these are small steps. Nevertheless, the micro is something we can control, with sufficient awareness of how it operates. In the end, sociology gives some grounds for optimism.

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Resumo/abstract/résumé/resumen

Causas micro e macrossociológicas de atrocidades violentas

Uma forma de crueldade surge de grupos sociais unidos ritualmente, onde a moralidade altruísta não ultrapassa as fronteiras e limites de cada um, e a deliberada crueldade pública para com os inimigos é um ritual de solidariedade de grupo. Demonstrações públicas ritualizadas de crueldade sobre vítimas indefesas estão fortemente institucionalizadas em sociedades que combinam uma estratificação hierárquica com uma pertença de grupo fortemente ritualizada. A crueldade volta na sua segunda forma, a insensibilidade burocrática, através da estrutura impessoal da guerra moderna e do exercício do poder organizacional.

Palavras-chave violência ritual, dinâmica temporal, crueldade burocrática.

Micro and macro sociological causes of violent atrocities

One form of cruelty arises from ritually bounded social groups, where altruistic morality does not extend beyond the boundaries of one's own enclave, and deliberate public cruelty to enemies is a ritual of group solidarity. Ritualized public displays of cruelty upon helpless victims are most strongly institutionalized in societies which combine hierarchic stratification with strongly ritualized group membership. Cruelty returns in its second form, bureaucratic callousness, through the impersonal structure of modern warfare and the exercise of organizational power.

Keywords ritual violence, time-dynamics, bureaucratic cruelty.

Causes micro- et macrosociologiques des atrocités violentes

Une forme de cruauté vient de groupes sociaux unis par des rites, où la moralité altruiste ne va pas au-delà des frontières et des limites de chacun et où la cruauté publique délibérée envers les ennemis est un rituel de solidarité du groupe. Les démonstrations publiques ritualisées de cruauté envers des victimes sans défense sont fortement institutionnalisées dans les sociétés qui allient une stratification hiérarchique à une appartenance de groupe fortement ritualisée. La cruauté revient sous sa seconde forme, l'insensibilité bureaucratique, à travers la structure impersonnelle de la guerre moderne et de l'exercice du pouvoir organisationnel.

Mots-clés violence rituelle, dynamique temporelle, cruauté bureaucratique

Causas micro y macrosociológicas de atrocidades violentas

Una forma de crueldad surge de grupos sociales unidos ritualmente, donde la moralidad altruista no supera las fronteras y límites de cada uno, y la deliberada crueldad pública hacia los enemigos es un ritual de solidaridad de grupo. Demostraciones públicas ritualizadas de crueldad sobre víctimas indefensas están fuertemente institucionalizadas en sociedades que combinan una estratificación jerárquica con una pertenencia de grupo fuertemente ritualizada. La crueldad vuelve en su segunda forma, la insensibilidad burocrática, a través de la estructura impersonal de la guerra moderna y del ejercicio del poder organizacional.

Palabras-clave violencia ritual, dinámica temporal, crueldad burocrática.