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The Three Waves of the Sociology of Genocides

Las tres olas de la sociología de los genocidios

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Key words

Genocide
- Social Theory
- Sociological Theory
- Violence
- Collective Violence

Abstract

The objective of this article is to present a panoramic image of the sociology of genocides, from its origins to the present. The fundamental thesis defended is that the sociology of genocide would be today reaching a level of maturity that makes it an increasingly thriving and already well-established subdiscipline. Combining the *obedience paradigm* with the *permission paradigm* seems a promising option for future research. The assumption that there are two concepts of genocide, the *legal concept of genocide* and the *sociological concept of genocide*, allows us to broaden the cases to be considered and to include, in a very primary way, cases of political violence and colonial cases.

Palabras clave

Genocidio
- Teoría social
- Teoría sociológica
- Violencia
- Violencias colectivas

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar una imagen panorámica de la sociología de los genocidios, desde sus orígenes hasta el presente. La tesis fundamental que se defiende es que la sociología de los genocidios estaría alcanzando, hoy en día, un nivel de maduración que la convierte en una subdisciplina cada vez más pujante y ya bien asentada. La combinación del *paradigma de la obediencia* con el *paradigma del permiso* parece una opción prometedora para futuras investigaciones. Asumir que existen dos conceptos de genocidio, el *concepto jurídico de genocidio* y el *concepto sociológico de genocidio*, permite ensanchar los casos a considerar e incluir de una manera muy principal a los casos de violencias políticas y los casos coloniales.

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Introduction

Apart from some circumstantial, piecemeal instances of reflection found in the classics of sociology, the sociology of genocides has evolved across three generations or waves, spanning from the 1950s to our time. This article seeks to provide an overview of the sociology of genocides, tracing its evolution from its origins to the present day. The core thesis is that the sociology of genocides has reached a level of maturity that renders it an increasingly thriving and well-established sub-discipline. This article therefore presents an outline of the sociology of genocides and advocates for a field that remains largely unpopular and has yielded very few research outputs in Spanish. It also extends an invitation for social scientists to engage with this sub-discipline, which, in its current stage of development, calls for both theoretical and empirical research to deepen our understanding of genocidal processes. Few issues deserve as much priority as the one at hand. Sociology scholarship has traditionally been reluctant to place genocidal violence at the core of its analysis. As a result, many of the studies on genocide have often started by expressing regret over the absence of a research tradition in this area. I hold that the third wave of the sociology of genocides has rendered it an established sub-discipline and therefore encourages us to move beyond lamenting its lack of development. Over the past two decades, this growing field has been advanced through a significant body of work supported by an international institutional framework. While earlier concerns regarding the limited development of this field remained valid until the early twenty-first century, it is now time to shift towards a balanced recognition of the considerable progress and achievements made so far. Moreover, sociological theory has failed to include the existing knowledge of genocidal processes in its analysis outside of the sub-discipline. This remains unfinished business: the field of genocide sociology must, so to speak, spill over into the mainstream of contemporary social theory; an outcome which, sooner or later, will likely come to pass.

After a brief reference to the classical period of sociology and the sporadic reflections on genocide found within it, this article will focus on the three waves of the sociology of genocides. Thus, I will begin by examining the first wave, which includes the pioneers whose research findings were published between the 1950s and 1970s. This will be followed by an examination of the second wave, characterised by systematisers who worked during the 1980s and 1990s. I will finally turn to the third wave and discuss works published from the beginning of the twenty-first century to the present. This latest wave has brought both a thematic and a paradigmatic expansion, as shall be seen below. I believe we now have a substantial body of work and even specific journals on genocide studies, which makes it possible to speak of this field as a sub-discipline. There is a vast and steadily expanding body of increasingly high-quality literature on the subject. In fact, the second and third waves have seen the founding of several journals dedicated to the publication of these studies, such as the *Revista de Estudios de Genocidios*, founded in 2007, and *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal,* founded in 2006, as well as those created in the second wave, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies,* founded in 1986, and *Journal of Genocide Research,* founded in 1999. Nevertheless, journals specialising in sociology and sociological theory, history, philosophy, anthropology and political science continue to publish articles on genocide.

Classical theory and genocides

After their journeys to North America, Alexis de Tocqueville and Harriet Martineau —two leading classical authors in our discipline— recorded their reflections and concerns about the extermination of Native Americans in the early nineteenth century. Tocqueville (2006 [1835]) wrote in *Democracy in America* about the tragic fate of Native Americans, whom he seemed to admire. He emphasised their character and rebelliousness, and argued that they had been crushed by historical progress and were therefore, in his view, fated to disappear from the face of the earth. When Martineau (1837) travelled to the United States of America, she wondered at one point where Native Americans were. They were nowhere to be found, which puzzled her. The answer is that they were either on reservations or dead or in the long process of migrating from the east to the west of the United States. They were certainly in the process of being exterminated, which would lead to their virtual disappearance over the following decades. It should not be forgotten that in *Capital* (2000 [1867]), Marx argued that history is forged by blood, plunder and violence. He examined in detail how so-called "primitive accumulation" was brutally carried out, ultimately reducing individuals to mere labour once their land and other means of subsistence had been seized from them. Du Bois (1907: 81) took a more explicit stance. From the United States, he forcefully voiced his concerns —which were certainly premature then, yet highly relevant today—, as he noted that the founding fathers of American democracy were so absorbed by major issues that they neglected crucial matters such as human rights. While democracy was being built in America, Native Americans, who would be exterminated, were excluded, and shocking numbers of slaves were taken there from Africa. As Du Bois wrote with regard to the First World War, "this is not Europe gone mad [...] this *is* Europe", to some extent confirming what Europe really was. He added:

> Think of the wars through which we have lived in the last decade: in German Africa, in British Nigeria, in French and Spanish Morocco, in China, in Persia, in the Balkans, in Tripoli, in Mexico, and in a dozen lesser places —were not these horrible, too? Mind you, there were for most of these wars no Red Cross funds. Behold little Belgium and her pitiable plight, but has the world forgotten Congo? What Belgium now suffers is not half, not even a tenth, of what she has done to black Congo since Stanley's great dream of 1880 [...] Harris declares that King Leopold's regime meant the death of twelve million natives (Du Bois, 1920: 15).

The general reflections made by Horkheimer and Adorno (2006 [1944]) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* must be considered alongside the analyses of Tocqueville, Martineau and Du Bois. How is it possible that the Enlightenment has become a myth? How is it possible that what seemed to be an ascent towards uninterrupted progress in human societies has become a return to barbarism?

It was Raphael Lemkin (1944) who, in the 1940s, as Horkheimer and Adorno pondered over the perverse consequences of modern reason, invented the word "genocide" to refer to a plan to destroy a social group. Lemkin's approach was essentialist and considered social groups to be preconfigured entities. However, the scope of his ideas about genocide was such that it included all social groups. Lemkin's concept encompassed killings, destruction of political institutions, famine, religious persecution, deportations, destruction of economic and cultural foundations, birth control measures and marriage-related measures. Nonetheless, for Lemkin (1933) the crime of genocide was somewhat barbaric, and was indicative of a return to barbarism in the face of modern civilisation. It is worth

noting that the first concept he developed in the 1930s to refer to these crimes was "acts of barbarity". He subsequently changed the name and coined the hybrid term "genocide" (*genos* from Greek, race or tribe; *cide*, from Latin, murder).

Lemkin's term gained recognition and was adopted by the United Nations. The initial wording of Resolution 96 of the United Nations Assembly held in 1946 stated the following:

> Genocide is a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings; such denial of the right of existence shocks the conscience of mankind, results in great losses to humanity in the form of cultural and other contributions represented by these human groups, and is contrary to moral law and to the spirit and aims of the United Nations. Many instances of such crimes of genocide have occurred when racial, religious, political and other groups have been destroyed, entirely or in part (UN, 1946).

But after years of negotiations (Kuper, 1982; Moses, 2021), political groups were eliminated from the Resolution and intent was underlined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UN, 1948) of 9 December 1948, which reads:

> In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
>
> a) Killing members of the group;
>
> b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
>
> c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in par;
>
> d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
>
> e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

This resolution established the *legal definition of the concept of genocide*, or *genocide in a restricted sense*. However, primarily due to the essential nature of social groups and the absence of political groups, the discipline of sociology and related sciences has criticised this definition, leading to the development of a *sociological concept of genocide*, or *genocide in the broadest sense* (see Ribes, 2019).

In 2005, as Shaw reported, the United Nations adopted the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Resolution, which consisted of:

> 1) The responsibility of each state to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. 2) The international community's responsibility to assist the state to fulfil its responsibility. 3) The international community's responsibility to intervene, including by military intervention as a last resort, where the state fails to protect its citizens from atrocities (2015: 152).

The pioneers' wave

The pioneers of the first wave emerged in the period between the 1950s and the 1970s. Their works contributed to various sociology-related disciplines, including history, philosophy, social psychology and political science. While some of these were only indirectly related to genocides, their analytical contributions became highly influential. I refer to the works by Hilberg, Arendt, Milgram, Asch, Zimbardo, Wolff, Sartre, Kelman and Dadrian, which will be briefly discussed here.

I would like to begin with Hilberg's (1961) seminal work on the Holocaust, along with Arendt's (2015 [1963], 2025 [1969]) studies on Eichmann, the banality of evil and the "rule by Nobody". As is well known, but worth recalling here,

Hilberg focused his study on the perpetrators and held that what the National Socialists attempted to carry out was a modern destruction of an entire people on an industrial scale. Hilberg's study was fundamentally Weberian in that it stemmed from the rationalisation and bureaucratisation of the world, and focused on the part that the consequences of these processes played in triggering the Holocaust. The "final solution" was seen as an administrative problem that German bureaucracy was able to tackle successfully, supported, however, by stereotypes that had been operating on a psychological level for hundreds of years. The same approach was partially shared by Arendt (2015 [1963]), who, in her analysis of the figure of Eichmann, held that it was possible to actively participate in the Holocaust as a grey civil servant who rationally sought the best means to achieve a given end. The most effective and efficient means would ultimately be the Holocaust. Its destructive drive operated like a car factory; the individuals who participated in it did so without passion and held no particular hatred for the Jews; they simply did their job. All this would lead Arendt (2015 [1969]: 53) to speak of the "rule by Nobody": "rule by Nobody is clearly the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done". This state of affairs makes "it impossible to localise responsibility and to identify the enemy".

Milgram (2004 [1975]), Asch (1955) and Zimbardo (1971) carried out their famous experiments on obedience to authority, peer pressure and social role adaptation in the 1950s-1970s. These experiments were only indirectly relevant to the Holocaust and genocides, but it is indisputable that that these classic experiments in social psychology have had an enormous impact on the sociology of genocides. This is particularly true of what has been termed the *obedience paradigm* (Ribes, 2021), that is, the paradigm that considers obedience to authority to be the main explanation as to why a normal individual becomes a perpetrator; this paradigm predominated in the first and second waves of the sociology of genocides. The *obedience paradigm* stands in contrast to the *permission paradigm* (Ribes, 2021), which places greater emphasis on genocidal acts initiated from below —so to speak— by individuals acting on their own accord, rather than under the direction of a central authority demanding obedience. This paradigm belongs to the third wave of the sociology of genocides, although the notion of "authorisation" can be found in the first wave, specifically, in works by Kelman (1973), who could very well be the forerunner of this paradigm.

Within the realm of sociology, Wolff (1969) proposed a sociology of evil, taking into account the difficulty involved in dealing with the very concept of "evil" in modern secularised societies. Wolff identified a complete lack of studies on the notion of evil within the social sciences. Modern social control was, in Wolff's view, more "total and cruel, as well as efficient" (Wolff, 1969: 114) than ever before. He highlighted the significance of the Weberian analysis of modern societies and the triumph of instrumental rationality, aspects that are particularly important in the thought of Hilberg, Arendt and Milgram, to name only a few examples. If "good" represents a utopian society whose foundations already exist, Wolff argued, "evil" is what is opposed to it: injustice and misery and imposture. Based on this, he advocated for the need to establish a programme of the sociology of evil, which would constitute the reverse side of the utopian society that we seek to build. Any sociology of

evil should, of course, include a detailed study of genocide.

In the late 1960s, Sartre (1968), in his classic study of genocide, explained that genocidal massacres were largely avoided during the First World War, since forces among the great industrial powers were balanced. However, during the colonial expansion following 1830, European powers operated under the logic of "perpetual massacres". For the purposes of this paper, this can be interpreted as a logic or a process of the weakening of others, which led, in certain places and at certain times, to genocidal processes, whether tolerated, encouraged or actively pursued. Sartre held that, when a society needs the labour of given social groups, this restricts the possibility for genocide to occur, since the colonisers needed the labour of the colonised. Obviously, there could be and there was violence of all kinds and even genocidal massacres, but not outright genocide.

The 1970s saw the classic studies by Kelman and Dadrian, both highly influential, each in their own way, as well as Savon's book. The latter adhered to the UN notion of genocide and proposed a typology of genocides, distinguishing between the genocide of substitution, genocide of devastation and genocide of elimination (Savon, 1972: 24). Kelman's (1973) article became a seminal classic in the study of the psychological basis of genocides, as it focused on the psychosocial dynamics that would allow individuals to circumvent moral constraints to participate in genocides, and therefore, to become perpetrators. The question of permission was analysed in Kelman's classic study and partially departed from the *paradigm of obedience* to inaugurate, albeit hesitantly, the *paradigm of permission*. Kelman spoke of authorisation, although his final explanation of genocidal processes took him back to obedience. However, his definition of "authorisation" included what I am calling "permission" here. Thus, Kelman wrote:

> When acts of violence are explicitly ordered, implicitly encouraged, tacitly approved, or at least permitted by legitimate authorities, people's readiness to commit or condone them is considerably enhanced (1973: 39).

Kelman was clearly considering obedience to authority as a mechanism for overcoming moral constraints on committing violence against weak and unarmed civilians. In fact, he analysed three elements in his model: authorisation, routinisation and dehumanisation:

> Processes of authorization, routinization, and dehumanization of the victim contribute to the weakening of moral restraints, not only directly, but also by furthering the dehumanization of the victimizer. As he gradually discards personal responsibility and human empathy, he loses his capacity to act as a moral being (1973: 52).

Dadrian (1975) was perhaps the most interesting pioneer from the field of sociology, as he inaugurated a new style of the sociology of genocides that was to become the norm in the following wave: articles and books that attempted to establish what genocide was and then organise them into a typology. He considered that what had happened in North America and Australia were genocides in their own right. The basic problem was that the notion of genocide originated from the Second World War and was closely linked to the Holocaust. Therefore he was in favour of broadening the notion of genocide. Dadrian, however, fell prey to the *obedience paradigm* and believed that genocides required a hierarchy and a well-organised, top-down group of perpetrators. A particularly interesting element in Dadrian's approach to the definition of genocide was his assertion that for a

group to become the victim of genocide, it must be weaker and highly vulnerable.

The systematisers' wave

What have become the now classic works on the sociology of genocides began to appear in the 1980s and 1990s, to the extent that, in Strauss's (2007) analysis, this wave was considered the first generation of the sociology of genocides and the third wave, as described in this paper, would correspond to the second generation. Nevertheless, in my view, the group of systematisers of the 1980s and 1990s should be deemed to be the second wave, as the fundamental contributions made to the study of genocide by the pioneers of the 1950s-1970s warrant a separate category in their own right.

With the contributions from Kuper (1982), Fein (1990) and the book by Chalk and Jonassohn (1990) over these two decades, the sociology of genocides reached its maturity. The works by these authors are the foundational books of the sub-discipline. Also particularly relevant are the works by Bauman (2010 [1989]), *Modernity and Holocaust,* and Browning (2001 [1992]) about Battalion 101, as will be shown later.

Let us begin by examining the contributions of Kuper, Fein, and Chalk and Jonassohn, whose pioneering research laid the foundation for the sociology of genocides as a distinct sub-discipline. Their primary goal was to clearly delimit the concept of genocide and to analyse various cases that fall within this framework. Notably, Chalk and Jonassohn's work also sought to establish a specific tradition within the sociology of genocides. It may be particularly useful to compare the different definitions of genocide proposed by these authors, especially in relation to the UN's definition mentioned earlier.

Kuper (1982) strongly argued that the system of international relations, by advocating respect for what happens within each country, is in fact an authorisation to commit genocide. Moreover, he preferred to speak about genocidal processes, to highlight the processual dynamics of genocides that can take decades, as happened with Native Americans in North America, for example. Kuper reluctantly accepted the concept of genocide ratified by the United Nations, but reserved a space for "other atrocities" in which he included cases that do not fit that definition. Kuper's choice is therefore pragmatic. He also regretted the exclusion of political groups from the UN-recognised crime of genocide, i.e. the *legal definition of genocide*, or *genocide in a strict sense*. Helen Fein's (1990) definition emphasised the possibility that genocide may be carried out either directly (through physical violence) or indirectly (by hindering biological or social reproduction). Furthermore, Fein, in alignment with Dadrian, stated that the victims pose no threat. Chalk and Jonassohn (1990) presented a particularly interesting definition of genocide, as they held a non-essentialist view of the social groups that unfortunately became victims. Thus, for them, genocide is:

> A form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrators (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990: 23).

They understood that groups are constructed by the perpetrators, and whether people are members or not is a matter of careful consideration.

I always remember the novel *Fatelessness* by Holocaust survivor Imre Kertész. A remarkable yet harrowing novel in which the author presented the Holocaust through the perspective of a naive young boy who experiences the genocidal process firsthand. The

readers, who already know what is going to happen, shudder with each new step taken by the authorities and with each setback suffered by the unfortunate protagonist. In *Fatelessness,* Kertész described how the young man and his relatives come to recognise themselves as Jews insofar as the Nazis define them as such. Before, they had not defined themselves as Jews, either culturally or religiously:

> A while ago we took little notice of the neighbours, but now it has turned out that we are of the same race, which calls for some exchanging of views of an evening on the matter of our mutual prospects (Kertész, 2018 [1975]: 17).

Writes the ill-fated protagonist of the novel. The opposite was also the case, as we know. Elie Wiesel (2008), who was also a Holocaust survivor, arguably offered the most compelling account of the hardships endured by Jewish families who identified themselves as Jewish in his acclaimed work, *The Night Trilogy*, particularly in *Night.*

I promised I would discuss Bauman (2010 [1989]) and Browning (2001 [1992]). Their two books, one from sociology and the other from historiography, have become two essential classics of the sub-discipline. To a certain extent, Bauman's book can be considered the archetype of the *obedience paradigm*: it was concerned with the Holocaust; it was theoretically based on the works of the generation of the 1950s-1970s; it stressed the dimension of genocides understood as the hidden face of modernity; and it deemed the processes involved to be hierarchical and bureaucratised in nature, in line with the classical works by Weber, Milgram and Arendt. The Holocaust was understood and explained as the creation of a bureaucratised death industry.

Browning's book, on the other hand, presented an empirical study of the 101st Battalion, one of the death squads that rampaged through Poland, sowing death and cold-blooded murder. The Holocaust was framed here as something more material and less industrial, something dirtier and more direct, with killings carried out in a direct way: with gunshots instead of gas chambers. While hierarchisation remained important, other elements came into play, including the relative voluntariness of genocidal actions (soldiers could ask to be transferred or even not participate in the killings) and social pressure. Browning continued to deal with the Holocaust, but focused on that less publicised side that has little to do with the industrialisation of death. In this way, Browning's book serves, in part, as an empirical corrective to the *obedience paradigm*.

To recapitulate: this period was characterised by its systematising efforts, led by Chalk and Jonassohn, Fein and Kuper. These were a series of attempts to define genocide, reconstruct the history of the sociology of genocides, and identify a number of case studies that would come to constitute a corpus of genocide cases. This period also encompassed the classic contribution and best example of the *obedience paradigm*, Bauman's work, and a somewhat empirical corrective to this paradigm found in Browning's work. Above all, this was an effort to establish and flesh out a sub-discipline. It should be emphasised that the work in this second wave was theoretically indebted to the work of the first wave of the sociology of genocides. Section five below presents the third wave, which introduced a series of fundamental ruptures that significantly transformed the sociology of genocides in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The third wave of the sociology of genocides

The turn of the twenty-first century saw an explosion of interest in the sociol-

ogy of genocides. But this field of study also underwent two substantial and related changes. On the one hand, the discipline was broadened by the inclusion of the colonial violence of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, it combined the *obedience paradigm* with the new *permission paradigm* by the very inclusion of those colonial genocides. These changes were closely interconnected, since it was this expanded field of analysis, with its empirical studies, that shook up the *obedience paradigm* and filled it with "anomalies", in Kuhn's sense (1970 [1962]), which could only be overcome by incorporating permission as an explanatory element. The emergence of the third wave can be explained by the fact that the *obedience paradigm* and the focus on the Holocaust as the only case study seemed insufficient to a new generation of researchers, much as the continued reliance on the *legal concept of genocide* seemed inadequate. The broadening of case studies and the emergence of the *permission paradigm* rendered the work of the second wave outdated and accounted for the need to find a new, specifically sociological, conceptualisation of genocide. Significantly, Davis (2001) inaugurated this stage with his studies on colonial violence, the *El Niño* phenomenon, liberal logics, and the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. In the years that immediately followed, there was a substantial surge of high-quality research, the majority of which used a comparative approach. Without attempting to be exhaustive, this new third wave could include the anthropology of genocides edited by Hinton (2002); Mann's (2005) seminal work on ethnic cleansing; Semelin's (2005) analysis of purification and destruction; Bruneteau's *Le siècle des génocides* (2009 [2004]); Martin Shaw's (2015) essential Lemkinian book; Levene's (2008 [2005]) research; the *Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Bloxham and Moses, 2010); and Moses's more recent, monumental book (2021) on the problems of genocide. Some significant additional works were a series of articles on colonial violence and on some less studied genocides (Madley, 2004; Madley, 2008; Woolford, 2009; Docker, 2015), as well as some very important contributions to genocide theory (Moshman, 2007; Finkel and Strauss, 2012; Strauss, 2012; Owens, Su and Snow, 2013; Malesevic, 2013; Luft, 2015; Ribes, 2019; Ribes, 2021). Let us briefly examine some of the developments in the third wave of the sociology of genocides, with special emphasis on the most innovative ideas that it has contributed to this sub-area of research.

Davis (2001) extended the framework of genocides and focused on nineteenth century colonialism. His text questioned the issue of intent, which is fundamental to *the legal concept of genocide*. He concluded that the combination of colonialism, liberal ideology and the *El Niño* phenomenon led to what he called "Victorian holocausts", which were responsible for between thirty and sixty million deaths in India, Brazil and China. In addition to examining intent, Davis's analysis shed light on the divergences that can emerge between different branches of the State—particularly in democratic contexts—where one branch may question or challenge the actions of another, as illustrated by the parliamentary debates and press pressures that arose in the final third of the nineteenth century. A key element of this third wave has been the broadening of cases particularly in relation to the study of genocides —understood *in a broad sense*— in North America and Australia (Madley, 2004; Madley, 2008; Woolford, 2009; Docker, 2015). This extension has made it possible to see the inadequacy of models based on the *paradigm of obedience*, as these gen-

ocides often involved actions from below, without direct orders, which were permitted by the implementation of specific laws that ultimately allow genocide to occur. This was the case with the *Martial Law* in Tasmania in 1828 and the *Act to prevent the sale of firearms and ammunition to Indians* that was passed in California in 1852 (Ribes, 2021).

Bruneteau (2009 [2004]): from a historiographical perspective, provided an analysis of what he called "the century of genocides", referring to the twentieth century. His analysis contained many ideas of interest, but it will suffice to highlight two here. One of them is the problematisation of the concept of intent. Similarly to what was shown in Davis's work, Bruneteau held that, in actual genocides, people are often displaced to locations where death is not only probable but rather, to be expected. As noted in a military report on the Herero genocide mentioned in Bruneteau's book:

> No pain and no sacrifice was too great to eliminate the last vestiges of enemy resistance. Like a wounded animal, the enemy was chased from one source to another until it fell victim to its own environment (2009 [2004]: 48).

In the same vein, Chief of Defence Staff Von Schieflen said: "The desert of Omaheke will finish what the German army has begun: the extermination of the Herero nation" (quoted in Bruneteau, 2009 [2004]: 47). Another important idea proposed by Bruneteau concerned participation from below, without direct orders, which provided arguments for the *permission paradigm*. Thus, when referring to the Armenian genocide, Bruneteau pointed out how during the long march to nowhere which the Young Turks forced Armenians to undertake, Armenians were assaulted, attacked and robbed by the population on their own initiative.

Mann (2005) proposed that ethnic cleansing was the flip side of democracy and warned of the dangers of merging *etnos* with *demos*. According to his model, ethnic hostility escalates when ethnic conflicts overshadow class conflicts, particularly in cases where two ethnic groups plausibly lay claim to the same territory. Tensions worsen if the minority believes it will receive external support or if the majority is manifestly stronger. All of these factors are exacerbated in situations characterised by high levels of political instability. In Mann's view, ethnic cleansing is not the initial plan, but is usually plan C or D, once the initial plans (A or B) have been discarded. He stressed that there are not large numbers of perpetrators, nor does there need to be; an elite of ethnic entrepreneurs are enough to pull, first, some militants and eventually the entire population. The fusion of *etnos* and *demos* is crystallised in the definition "We, the people"; and if an organic "we" is generated that identifies people and State, there is a temptation to take action to purify, which can culminate in ethnic cleansing or genocide. Interestingly, Mann's proposal refined the conceptualisation of perpetrators that previous generations had been grappling with. Before Mann, there were basically two types of perpetrators: ideological and bureaucratised perpetrators, so to speak; or pre-Arendt murderers and Arendt murderers. However, Mann expanded this typology and identified a wider range of perpetrators: ideological and bigoted, violent, fearful, careerist and material, disciplined (obedience to authority), comradely (peer pressure) and bureaucratic killers. A key element in this new wave of the sociology of genocide was thus the changing conception of perpetrators. Looking at local variations in the Rwandan genocide, Luft (2015) outlined a dynamic conception of dehumanisation processes by looking

at the statements made by the perpetrators. She contended that this dehumanisation is not necessarily something that happened prior to genocide, as Kelman, and so many others after him, influentially argued, but that the process of dehumanisation may occur in the course of genocide, while genocide is taking place. One of the people interviewed by Luft (2015: 164) noted the following: "[The Tutsi] had become people to throw away, so to speak. They no longer were what they had been, and neither were we". They were not what they had been before the genocide began.

Semelin defined genocide as:

> That particular process of civilian destruction that is directed at the total eradication of a group, the criteria by which it is identified being determined by the perpetrator (2005: 535).

And he differentiated genocides from massacres, the latter being a "a form of action that is most often collective and aimed at destroying noncombatants" (Semelin, 2005: 21). Beyond this distinction, Semelin remarkably incorporated a contemporary notion regarding the perpetrators' definition of what the target group of genocide is. This is an idea that has been repeated as one of the most obvious criticisms of Lemkin's and the United Nation's definition, that is, *the legal definition of genocide*. For Semelin, the search for purity leads to the search for submission (if it is political purity) or to the search for eradication (if it is identity purity). Besides, the imaginaries of death play a major role, including a tendency towards othering and a "delusional rationality" "(a)nd therein is probably one of the powerful vectors for the rise in mass violence: the mad desire to build a world without conflict or enemies" (Semelin, 2005: 63). But there is an additional element worth highlighting in Semelin's approach: the continuities between everyday life and genocides. This is an issue that Scheper-Hughes (2002) had already addressed. Semelin argued his view (2005) as follows:

> The social dynamics that can lead to "ethnic cleansing" and genocide are in fact latent in our school playgrounds or neighbourhoods. [...] The dynamics of violence that end up in massacres draw on such factors: the identification of scapegoats, a radicalised antagonism between friend and enemy and, worse yet, killing as an act of purification. [...] (T)he specific form a massacre takes always depends on the culture and the conflict that gives them shape. But they also have a universal foundation specific to our common humanity.

Shaw (2015) criticised the essentialist nature of social groups and dismissed the use of a biological approach, claiming that when social groups that are victims of genocide are defined as biological social groups, this is often derived from an essentialist worldview. Firstly, Shaw identified the civilian status of the groups and individuals who are made victims as an essential feature of genocides. Secondly, he drew attention to the links between war and genocide. When looking at the UN's *legal definition of genocide,* which crucially refers to the intent to destroy social groups, Shaw held that all these terms are problematic: intention, destroy and social groups, because this definition ignores cultural issues and the connection between genocide and war. He believed that it is essential to develop the *notion* of a *sociology of genocide*, recovering Lemkin's general spirit and applying basic notions of sociological theory. The key for Shaw was to see genocides as a social conflict in which there is an unequal power relationship.

Given the complexity of the concept of genocide and its legal nature, some authors have advocated abandoning this notion once and for all. Gerlach (2010) deliberately moved away from the concept of genocide, replacing it with "mass

violence". Gerlach's (2010: 4) idea was to literally combine the top-down approach with the bottom-up approach, or, in our terms, the *obedience paradigm* with the *permission paradigm*. He even abandoned the term "perpetrator" and replaced it with "persecutor" and introduced the concept of a "coalition for violence". Gerlach also highlighted the importance of continuities between episodes of mass violence and everyday life: how structural violence eventually turns into physical violence at a certain point in time. His approach seems to be the epitome of the third wave of the sociology of genocide. It is a book that masterfully captures all the concerns of the early twenty-first century. Finally, in the same vein, Moses (2021) thoroughly analysed how the concept of genocide emerged and argued that it ought to be abandoned altogether. He contended that this notion imposes an essentialist ontology of social groups, excludes political groups and fails to encompass a multitude of civilians killed throughout history. Instead, he proposed replacing it with the concept of "permanent security". Moses differentiated between illiberal (*etnos*) and liberal (civilised humanity) permanent security. In either case, the result is the mass killing of civilians in the name of a given people or of humanity.

To conclude

Beyond a few unsystematic classical reflections —specifically those by Tocqueville, Martineau, Marx, and Du Bois—, the first wave of the sociology of genocides established its research methodology by focusing on obedience and discussing the Holocaust in a very rudimentary way. Notable here were the works by Hilberg, Arendt, Milgram, Asch, Zimbardo, Wolff, Sartre, Kelman and Dadrian. The second wave inaugurated comparative studies and broadened the concept of genocide. It also saw the emergence of the view that the legal concept of genocide is fundamentally inadequate for fully grasping the complexity of this issue, and generally involved considerable systematising efforts. The sub-discipline started to become self-aware. The works of Kuper, Fein, Chalk and Jonassohn, Bauman and Browning were particularly relevant here. The third wave extended its scope to include incidents from the past two centuries and made significant contributions by questioning intent and whether it must be proven. This broadened the concept to encompass situations where vulnerable populations are effectively left to die amid food shortages and limited resources. It also examined the perpetrators' profiles, investigated how dehumanisation unfolds, challenged the supposed rupture from everyday life, and addressed the disregard for political and colonial violence. The works by Davis, Mann, Semelin, Bruneteau, Shaw, Gerlach, Luft and Moses have made particularly interesting contributions in this regard.

The sociology of genocides has now been constituted as a sub-discipline, following the work done in these three waves. The level of maturity it has attained allows for the coexistence of two functioning paradigms: *the obedience paradigm* —dominant in the first and second waves— and the *permission paradigm* —emerging in the third wave—. However, the latter still requires further theoretical refinement and stronger empirical grounding. The combination of both paradigms seems to be a promising path for the sociology of genocides to take in the near future. The introduction of the *permission paradigm* calls into question issues such as the supposed total rupture with socio-historical, economic

and political processes, as well as the rupture with everyday life.

Defining the concept of genocide remains problematic and is vigorously debated within sociology and related sciences. At present different notions coexist, namely a *legal definition of genocide*, *genocide in a strict sense*, a *sociological definition of genocide* and *genocide in a broad sense*. It seems inappropriate to continue to spend time and resources debating or questioning the definition of genocide when it can be accepted as a reality. Nor does it seem sensible to operate like Gerlach and Moses, who dismiss the concept of genocide and seek to replace it with others, since genocide already carries an enormous burden and has given rise to a substantial body of work and a certain tradition as a social phenomenon, as has been shown throughout this paper. There are thus two conflicting definitions and a virtually unanimous agreement exists that the *legal definition of genocide* is insufficient and unable to account for the reality of the genocides that have taken place over the last two hundred years. A promising direction for the sociology of genocides, which opens up a new research agenda, lies in the broadening of the concept of genocide. This includes questioning the necessity of intent, expanding the profile of perpetrators and challenging the notion of a complete rupture with everyday life.

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