

'WITH SCORN AND BIAS': GENOCIDAL DEHUMANISATION IN BUREAUCRATIC DISCOURSE

ROWAN SAVAGE

The quantification of nature, which led to its explication in terms of mathematical structures, separated reality from all inherent ends and, consequently, separated the true from the good, science from ethics. —*Herbert Marcuse*¹

...political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called elimination of unreliable elements. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them. —*George Orwell*²

Orwell is, of course, the dean of investigators into the political use of bureaucratic and euphemistic language to conceal the reality to which it refers, and which it constructs. This essay examines this set of utterances in episodes of genocide and mass killing: it is an analysis of the 'regimes of practices' — to use Michel Foucault's term — contingent upon the emergence of modernity. These regimes spawned a discursive strategy of bureaucratic dehumanisation that legitimised the mass killing of collectivities categorised according to demography, and

¹ Marcuse, H (1972), *One Dimensional Man*, London, Abacus, 121.

² Orwell, G (1961), 'Politics and the English Language' in George Orwell, *Collected Essays* London, Mercury, 347.

dealt with these collectivities – that is, oppressed and killed them – in rational-instrumental fashion.

My intent is both simple and specific: to examine the *role of bureaucratic discourse and structure as a form of dehumanisation in genocide and genocidal killing*. I do not intend to mount a general critique of bureaucratic centralisation as a system of power, though I draw upon such critiques to inform my argument. Nor will I present a more general case concerning bureaucracy as a functional aspect of state governance which makes genocide possible, though many aspects of such an argument have points of relevance to my subject matter. Both of these arguments – that is, general critiques of bureaucracy as a system of domination, and a claim concerning the centrality of bureaucracy *in toto* as an aspect of modernity which is deeply implicated in the practice of genocide – have been well outlined in the literature. My purpose, and the originality of my contribution, is not to recover this ground, but rather to use it as a point of departure to examine bureaucratic dehumanisation as a discursive strategy.³ I look at the way in which this strategy came to be constituted, how it is internalised and enacted by perpetrators within bureaucratic systems, and how it may discursively construct its objects in ways which legitimise genocidal action to-ward them.

‘Bureaucracy’

How are we to define ‘bureaucracy’? While both bureaucratic practice and modern society have changed a great deal since the time of his writing, Max Weber’s definition of bureaucracy

³ For full discussion of the conceptualisation of genocidal dehumanisation as a discursive strategy, see Rowan Savage (2009), ‘Genocidal Dehumanisation as a Discursive Strategy in the Modern Era’, PhD thesis, University of Sydney.

is still a good 'shorthand' to identify what is meant. Weber's bureaucracy is an 'ideal type', one which is not fully manifest in any (or every) given situation.⁴ In principle, bureaucracy is understood as a system of domination which is centralised, hierarchical, governed by a set of general, rational(ised) rules and based upon written documents, in which authority is graded in levels, particular bodies have fixed jurisdiction, and the (appointed) office of the individual is separate from her or his person (in terms of private life and domicile).⁵ In analysing bureaucracy, it is important to distinguish between its aspect as a delegated structure of responsibility, and as a record-keeping exercise. Both of these aspects have roles to play in dehumanisation, roles which will become clear. The critiques of bureaucracy which we encounter here will show, first, how *contra* Weber, the necessity, neutrality, and rationality of modern bureaucracy as a system have been challenged; and second, the way in which this system, as a system, is deeply implicated in the enactment of death and destruction, what Philip Zimbardo terms 'administrative evil'.⁶

Bureaucratic management can be considered both a technique and a technology. Kathy Ferguson writes that '[t]he term "bureaucratization" refers to the invasion of disciplinary technique into both the discursive and the institutional

⁴ For a problematisation of Weber via Bauman's argument on bureaucracy and genocide, see Bloxham, D (2008), 'Organized Mass Murder: Structure, Participation, and Motivation in Comparative Perspective', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol 22, no 2.

⁵ Weber, M (1948), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (ed and trans H H Gerth and C Wright Mills), London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 196-200.

⁶ Zimbardo, P (2007), *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding how good people turn evil*, New York, Random House, 381; Zimbardo's analysis is useful despite my major misgivings about the use of the term and concept 'evil'.

practices of a particular realm of human relations...reshaping both the roles and the events available to people, and the language commonly used to describe those events, along bureaucratic lines.⁷ With regard to the human, it has been argued – most notably by Weber – that bureaucracy’s ‘specific nature...develops the more perfectly the more [it] is “dehumanised”’, that is (according to this logic), the more it operates under the principle of *sine ira ac studio*, ‘without scorn or bias’.⁸ The material presented here will not analyse this claim regarding the function of bureaucracies in completing tasks, but it will be shown to be utterly false in the relationship it posits between dehumanisation and equal or respectful treatment.

I deal here with the ‘realm of human relations’ which pertains to bureaucratic mass killing. I examine, first, the inherently dehumanising tendencies of bureaucracy as a system and their specific implication in mass killing; and second, bureaucratic and euphemistic language which names victims as non-sentient objects. This most often occurs in bureaucratic utterances in which individuals are referred to as ‘pieces’, ‘units’ and so forth, but it may also occur in more direct metaphors in which victims are thought of or referred to as, for example, ‘logs’. The salient feature here is that victims are ‘de-biologised’; they are entirely denied agency and individuality; they are removed from the question of the moral order in regard to their status as objects of action; and they are turned into units of production (though ‘destruction’ might be the more appropriate term⁹). It will become apparent

⁷ Ferguson, K E (1984), *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 37.

⁸ Weber, *From Max Weber*, 215–16.

⁹ On the efficiency of organisational processes of destruction in the Holocaust, see Clegg, S (2009), ‘Bureaucracy, the Holocaust and

that even non-bureaucratic de-biologising utterances tend to follow and emerge from the patterns created by modern bureaucratic discourse, and that such utterances are intimately connected with overtly bureaucratic dehumanisation.

Structure and subject

I outline the historical developments which created the system and the discourse of bureaucratic management, and the inherent ideological tendencies which were 'built in' to this system from its inception. I trace the ways in which bureaucratic-genocidal dehumanisation emerges, first, from the centralising project of modernity and the (nation-)state; second, from the mass scale on which ideology thus became able to be realistically conceived and action logistically executed; and third, from the tendency, not to ignore the existence of the individual as such, but to perceive, categorise and act upon the individual as an idealised type, and only as a representative of that idealised type. I show the way in which bureaucratic and euphemistic construction creates social, moral, physical and psychological distance which makes invisible the victims' humanity and the meaning or reality of involvement in action taken against them. I analyse the way in which the logic of bureaucratic discourse and practice is weighted against the humanisation of victims, before turning to the differences between the nature and use of bureaucratic and euphemistic discourse on the part of bureaucratic 'middlemen' in the killing process, and on the part of direct killers.

The purported nature of the ideal bureaucratic-rational system is that it is free from affect, and that its very purpose is to deal with, and to make comprehensible, processes concerning concrete physical reality. In contrast to this aspect

of its own ideological self-representation, the bureaucratic style tends to be heavily euphemistic in its *reduction of every item to a unit* which is interchangeable with other units in the same category, the specific nature of which is not important to the process. Bureaucratic discourse therefore produces euphemistic language including (as we will see) the classification of humans as 'units'. Bureaucratic management also produces non-verbal dehumanisation—for instance, the tattooing of numbers onto some of the Nazi camp prisoners at Auschwitz. I also deal with non-bureaucratic euphemistic language which names victims as inanimate objects—but may nonetheless relate to production, the better to associate killing with activities which do not produce equal psychic or cognitive dissonance. The connections between these forms, which at times seem unrelated, should become clear later. At this point, it suffices to say that bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic euphemism often work hand-in-hand, as in the Nazi case, where euphemisms which were not strictly bureaucratic, such as *Endlösung* (final solution), were used within official circles (indeed, euphemistic language, or lying, was itself specifically known as the 'language rule') along with strictly bureaucratic euphemisms relating to units, numbers, and so forth. These two related types of utterance, while not always present in the same situation, are mutually reinforcing.

Modernity, bureaucracy and the State: the creation of distance

'I am not a number, I am a free man!' ran the memorable catchphrase from the 1960s television series *The Prisoner*. While most people accept, grudgingly or otherwise, that modern mass society must be run on centralised bureaucratic principles in which statistics are the method by which policy decisions affecting individuals are made, this does not mean that being treated as a statistic does not cause fear and resentment, as in the case of 'Number Six'. And rightly so,

given that this discursive strategy objectifies the individual and denies her/him agency in the construction of the nature of his/her own identity. The conceptualisation of the individual as one 'unit' among other identical units of the same kind (whatever the category chosen) allows the making of decisions which impact on individuals, without reference to their humanity—as Weber puts it, "[t]he "objective" discharge of business primarily means a discharge of business... "without regard for persons""¹⁰ —and therefore without reference to the human impact of such decisions. In modern bureaucratic society, emotional distance is created between the decision-maker or facilitator in a centralised position of power, and the object of her or his decision. In the words of James Waller, '[r]educed to data, dehumanised victims lose their moral standing and become objects requiring disposal'.¹¹ The most famous example of the murderous bureaucrat who manages to disavow connection with the consequence of his or her actions is, of course, Adolf Eichmann; but as we will see, *Schreibtischtäter* ('desk murderers') are not confined to the Nazi genocide.

According to Zygmunt Bauman (to whom, with Weber and Herbert Marcuse, this essay is indebted), 'the essence of bureaucratic structure and process' is the sole focus on instrumental-rational criteria for means, and the consequent dissociation of ends from moral evaluation.¹² This occurs through 'the meticulous functional division of labour', and

¹⁰ Weber, *From Max Weber*, 215.

¹¹ Waller, J (2007), *Becoming Evil: How ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing* (2nd revised edn), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 208. On bureaucratic distance and psychological impact, see also Bloxham, 'Organized Mass Murder', 218.

¹² Bauman, Z (1989), *Modernity and the Holocaust*, New York, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 98. See also Opatow, S (1990), 'Deterring Moral Exclusion,' *Journal of Social Issues*, vol 40, no 1, 175.

'the substitution of technical for a moral responsibility'.¹³ How has this discursive formation emerged? We can begin to answer through the examination of a number of characteristics of the modern bureaucratic society – namely, the physical size and internal distances of units of governance, along with new technologies of communication; the psychological distance which accompanied its physical counterpart; the assumption of ethical authority by the state; and discourse emerging from Enlightenment ideology valorising 'reason' and 'rationality' as ends and as moral good in themselves.

In the modern era the (nation-) state model, along with the rise of mass society, involved, as the standard method of governance, the centralisation of power and the implementation of demographic techniques of population conceived and enacted from the centre¹⁴ (made possible by modern technologies of speedy communication over long distances, technologies Weber calls 'the pacemakers of bureaucratization'¹⁵). The physically-distanced nature of modern society in itself has repercussions; as Bauman observes, 'responsibility is silenced once proximity is eroded; it may eventually be replaced with resentment once the fellow

¹³ See also Betton, J and Hench, T J (2000), "'Any color as long as it's black": Henry Ford and the ethics of business', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol 4, no 4, 539, on technical responsibility. See also Huggins, M K, Haritos-Fatouros, M and Zimbardo, P G (2002), *Violence Workers: Police torturers and murderers reconstruct Brazilian atrocities*, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, Berkeley, 170–72.

¹⁴ On the techniques of population in the context of mass killing, see Semelin, J (2007), *Purify and Destroy: The political uses of massacre and genocide*, New York, Columbia University Press, 338–39.

¹⁵ Weber, *From Max Weber*, 213.

human subject is transformed into an Other', a process which may be all the easier considering the lack of intimate knowledge of the other occasioned by physical distance.¹⁶ In this society, 'the distance at which human action may be effective and consequential...grow[s] rapidly'; but the capacity of the moral drive remains limited to the proximity of the individual.¹⁷

The distance created by modern bureaucratic systems is both physical and psychological.¹⁸ Bureaucratic organisation creates a class of 'middlemen' (bureaucrats) who are vital to the enacting of power, but who do not feel a connection with these actions inasmuch as they neither order action (in the sense of deciding what action will be taken), nor physically carry it out.¹⁹ Bauman writes that, as opposed to the conditions inhering in the pre-modern order, in the bureaucratic division of labour 'most functionaries of the bureaucratic hierarchy may give commands without full knowledge of their effects'.²⁰ It thus becomes possible for action to be disavowed by every party involved: '[f]or the person on whose behalf they are done, they exist verbally or in the imagination ... The man who has actually done them, on the other hand, will always view them as someone else's and

¹⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 193. This is not to say that familiar proximity always inhibits violence, as we see in episodes like the Rwandan genocide.

¹⁷ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 193.

¹⁸ For a discussion from a psychoanalytic perspective of the satisfactions and fulfilments for the individual of involvement in bureaucratic destructiveness, see Alford, C F (1990), 'The Organization of Evil', *Political Psychology*, vol 11, no 1, 18-20.

¹⁹ Bandura, A (1999), 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities', *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol 3, no 3, 199.

²⁰ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 99; Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 249.

himself as but the blameless instrument of an alien will'.²¹ The division of any action into minute, functional, separate tasks spreads responsibility so thinly that no individual need feel it in regard to the final action:²² 'the organization as a whole is an instrument to obliterate responsibility'.²³ As Waller notes, the larger the group is, the less responsibility is felt by any individual.²⁴ The acceptance of personal responsibility is also inhibited by the fact that '[t]he bureaucratic division of labor...creates an ethos in which refusing to kill would only alienate—in a condemnatory fashion—one's friends and colleagues and, in the end, not deter in the least bit the killing operations' (a subject to which we will return).²⁵ Ultimately, responsibility is both displaced onto the agency of others, and diffused to the point of non-existence.²⁶

Furthermore, bureaucratic language (similar to that often used by perpetrators reporting their own participation in

²¹ In Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 25; see also Milgram, S (2005), *Obedience To Authority: An experimental view*, London, Pinter and Martin, (1st edn 1974), 9–10; Bandura, A (2002), 'Selective Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency', *Journal of Moral Education*, vol 31, no 2, 106–08.

²² Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 100; see also Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 247–50; Milgram, 12–13; Bandura, A, Barbaranelli, C, Caprara, G V, and Pastorelli, C (1996), 'Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in the Exercise of Moral Agency', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol 71, no 2, 365.

²³ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 163.

²⁴ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 248.

²⁵ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 250.

²⁶ Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli, 365; Bandura, 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities', 196–98; Bandura (1990), 'Selective Activation and Disengagement of Moral Control', *Journal of Social Issues*, vol 40, no 1, 34–37.

brutality) can be characterised as an 'agentless, passive style' which serves as a linguistic tool to create the appearance that action (in this case, action which might on other interpretations appear immoral) is 'the work of nameless forces rather than people':²⁷ Stanley Milgram calls this 'counteranthropomorphism', the attribution of an impersonal quality to forces which are human in origin and maintenance.²⁸ Bureaucratic processes thereby not only allow the evasion of responsibility, but create their own momentum, both actual and psychological, and, as we will see, ultimately *become their own end*.

Another aspect of the rational, centralised and bureaucratic nation-state (and nationalist) model of governance is the usurpation of supreme ethical authority by state powers on behalf of the societies which they rule.²⁹ 'The good of the nation-state' (or, as Weber put it, 'reasons of state') becomes the ultimate ethical authority, and technical experts are in turn employed to advise on action which in itself becomes a foregone, unquestionable conclusion.³⁰ Following from this, Milgram notes that a specific characteristic of modern society is the way in which it teaches individuals to respond to *impersonal* authorities.³¹ In Rwanda, according to Alison Des Forges, the claim by perpetrators that

²⁷ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 12; see also Bandura, 'Selective Moral Disengagement', 105; Bandura, 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities', 195; Bandura, 'Selective Activation and Disengagement', 32.

²⁸ Milgram, 10.

²⁹ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 199. See Bloxham, 'Organized Mass Murder', 203.

³⁰ For a case study from Nazi Germany, see Mierzejewski, A C (2001), 'A Public Enterprise in the Service of Mass Murder: The Deutsche Reichsbahn and the Holocaust', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol 15, no 1, 33–46.

³¹ Milgram, 139.

they killed because authorities told them to kill, reflects not a predisposition to obey orders but a recognition that the moral authority of 'the state' made 'the unthinkable' both thinkable and do-able.³²

The rise of the distance society, operating in the framework of the model of the state, was necessarily accompanied by a massive expansion both of the techniques and discourse of bureaucracy, and of the bureaucratic classes. Bureaucratic demography was intimately informed by Enlightenment ideals which made 'rationality', placed in opposition to a devalued 'emotionality', a guiding principle and ideology of management and governance – the ideal, as Weber puts it, is '[t]he "objective" discharge of business ...according to *calculable rules* and "without regard for persons"'.³³ Ideology that depicts bureaucracy as a rational and pragmatic system dealing with concrete reality also conceals the value-laden metaphorical nature of the language which it employs. Marcuse, following Weber, calls this ideology 'technical rationality' and views it, at least in the Nazi case, as the 'legalized terror of bureaucratisation', an all-embracing instrument and apparatus of mass domination.³⁴ Logic, in Marcuse's view, emerges from and must pay tribute to systems of domination; rationality, expressed as an hypothetical system of forms and functions, is dependent on a pre-established universe of ends (ends which, as part of this process, conceal their pre-established nature); and rationality

³² Des Forges, A (1999), *'Leave None To Tell The Story': Genocide in Rwanda*, New York, Human Rights Watch, 12.

³³ Weber, *From Max Weber*, 215 (original italics).

³⁴ Marcuse, H (1998), *Technology, War and Fascism: Collected papers of Herbert Marcuse*, (vol 1, ed Douglas Kellner), London and New York, Routledge, 77-78.

develops not only in, but *for* this system of ends.³⁵ Within this discursive-ideational system, the individual is literally reified—turned into a *res*, a thing, whose only pertinent qualities are those which are quantifiable.³⁶ Ultimately, in modern society the ‘rational’ is inherently political, and—rather than the irrational, as in some commonly held theories about oppressive social domination—it becomes the most effective vehicle of mystification.³⁷ In this process, ‘the object world (including the subjects) is experienced as a world of *instrumentalities*’ in which ‘[t]he technological context predefines the form in which objects appear’.³⁸ ‘Rationality’ (a means) comes to be seen as an end in itself, and as such conceals the actual purpose, or end, for which action is taken (as, for example, genocide and genocidal killing).

We have examined the characteristics of modern bureaucracy and their relationship to dehumanisation; what, we now ask, is the relationship between the system itself, and the individual within this system?

The individual within the bureaucratic system

How are individuals subsumed into a bureaucratic system?

³⁵ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 137.

³⁶ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 138.

³⁷ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 153.

³⁸ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 173 (original italics). We might also be reminded here of the way in which ‘rationality’ or ‘reason’ has been used as a justification for the oppression and destruction of humans who were claimed not to possess these qualities, and therefore to be in a ‘lower’, ‘subhuman’, or ‘animal’ condition—and speaking of the disempowered, it has also been argued that inherent in bureaucracy is a structural inequality in which the socially weakest are sacrificed in a form of ‘triage’ of the rationalising process (Sjoberg, G, Vaughan, T R and Williams, N (1982), ‘Bureaucracy as a Moral Issue’, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, vol 20, no 4, 446–47).

The characteristics of bureaucracy outlined in the introduction tell us something about the way in which this process occurs. As Marcuse contends:

bureaucracy...emerges on an apparently objective and impersonal ground, provided by the rational specialization of functions, and this rationality in turn serves to increase the rationality of submission. For, the more the individual functions are divided, fixated and synchronized according to objective and impersonal patterns, the less reasonable it is for the individual to withdraw or withstand...The rationality embodied in the giant enterprises makes it appear as if men, in obeying them, obey the dictum of an objective rationality...Private power relationships appear not only as relationships between objective things but also as the rule of rationality itself.³⁹

This ideological representation of harmony between the special and the common interest is delusive.⁴⁰ Marcuse also suggests that the creation or expansion of an ideologised bureaucracy (as in Nazi Germany) offers numerous novel opportunities and creates a new elite, factors which in themselves bind individuals to bureaucracies and to the organisations which created them.⁴¹ As we have seen, the end to which the apparatus of bureaucracy works is its own maintenance on an increasingly efficient scale;⁴² therefore,

³⁹ Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 57–58. Marcuse draws a value-distinction between private bureaucracy, and effectively democratic public bureaucracy which the argument of this essay would challenge; however, his insights into the functions of private bureaucracy may be generalised.

⁴⁰ Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 57.

⁴¹ Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 75–76.

⁴² Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 78. For a contrasting position discussing the way in which entrepreneurial competition

every individual within the apparatus has an incentive to work toward this end. In Marcuse's words, 'morale has become a part of technology'.⁴³

As well as this, bureaucracies are mass groups which are large enough that the individual is not personalised or known to all other members, but small enough to maintain the characteristic of being a group. Thus the moral obligation of individuals comes to be owed to the organisation to which they belong, and to individuals within that organisation, not to the objects on which they act.⁴⁴ In sum, moral concerns do not relate to the action one performs, but rather to how well one lives up to the expectations of authority and/or to those of one's (organisational) peers.⁴⁵ This, furthermore, is a self-reinforcing process: individual bureaucrats, observes Weber, have 'a common interest in seeing that the mechanism continues its functions and that the societally exercised authority carries on'.⁴⁶ In the bureaucratic situation, that is, a group identification occurs on the part of the individual

over efficiency within bureaucracies contributed to the Holocaust, see Mixon, F G Jr, Sawyer, C and Trevino, L J (2004), 'The bureaucracy of murder: empirical evidence', *International Journal of Social Economics*, vol 31, no 9, 855-67.

⁴³ Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 161.

⁴⁴ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 99, 195; Bandura, 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities', 196.

⁴⁵ Milgram, 10, 147-48; this phenomenon has also been documented in detail by Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 159-66, by Hannah Arendt in her study of Adolf Eichmann (1983), *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil* [revised and enlarged edition], New York, Penguin, 22, 92, and, in regard to the expectations and judgements of one's equals rather than one's superiors, by Christopher Browning (2001), *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, London, Penguin, 174-75).

⁴⁶ Weber, *From Max Weber*, 228-29.

which ‘carries with it a *repression of conscience* where “outside values” are excluded and locally generated values dominate’.⁴⁷

Bureaucracy and individual morality

What exactly *are* these ‘locally generated values’? Bureaucratic language charts the progress of labour, best expressed in statistics, which ‘say nothing about the nature of the operation or its objects’.⁴⁸ In other words, bureaucratic discourse diverts any question of morality from the object, while concealing its human nature. What occurs as a result of these processes is, in Bauman’s words, a state in which every action is *multifinal*: it ‘can be combined and integrated into more than one meaning-determining totality. By itself, the function is devoid of meaning, and the meaning which will be eventually bestowed on it is in no way pre-empted by the actions of its perpetrators’.⁴⁹ In short, ‘technical responsibility...forgets that the action is a means to something other than itself’.⁵⁰ It is only the *performance* of the act which is in question: Milgram calls this process a ‘narrowing of moral concern’.⁵¹ Furthermore, the euphemistic terminology of modern bureaucracy, which over time seeps increasingly into everyday language, in itself distorts meaning regarding action. Marcuse identifies this as ‘functional language’, ‘the language of one-dimensional thought’, which identifies *things* and their *functions*. We may more specifically state here that, in terms of people, the individual is identified, firstly, with the collective, and secondly, with the effect that collective is said to have on

⁴⁷ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 243, original italics; see also Milgram, 10–11.

⁴⁸ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 99.

⁴⁹ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 100.

⁵⁰ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 101.

⁵¹ Milgram, 9.

'society'. Not only the non-human world considered as such, but also human beings and actions themselves, become Heideggerian 'standing-reserve'. Such language, by its internally constructed terms of reference, validates itself and grants itself immunity against contradiction, and denies possibilities of distinction and complexity.⁵² This characterisation holds even (or perhaps particularly) when language 'does not transmit orders but information'.⁵³

In itself, this aspect of bureaucracy may not *seem* directly related to dehumanisation. It is the dehumanising discursive strategy which constructs humans as objects that allows calculation to take place with the least possibility of 'moral calculus' regarding ends intruding: 'the language in which things that happen to [humans] (or are done to them) are narrated, safeguards its referents from ethical evaluation'.⁵⁴ This discourse of technical *expertise* assures the psychological distance of both 'desk-murderers' and 'hands-on' perpetrators from their victims.⁵⁵ Bauman offers the example of Willy Just, a German technical expert who gave advice on improvements to Nazi gas vans so that 'fluids' would flow to the middle, allowing 'thin fluids' to exit the van and 'thicker fluids' to be hosed out afterwards.⁵⁶ The 'personality type of the technical expert', writes Weber, is strongly furthered by the bureaucratisation of all domination.⁵⁷ The fact that feelings of moral responsibility continue to exist—but oriented toward

⁵² Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 80–88.

⁵³ Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 91.

⁵⁴ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 103.

⁵⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 196.

⁵⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 197. For further examples of the role of technicians see also Katz, E (2005), 'On the neutrality of technology: the Holocaust death camps as a counter-example', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol 7, no 3, 414–17.

⁵⁷ Weber, *From Max Weber*, 240.

fulfilling a technical role, rather than toward the ends or consequences of action—means that, in perpetrators' own eyes, their essential goodness is endorsed, allowing them to feel more 'human' and to return to society after the commission of their deeds.⁵⁸ Indeed, this situation, in which a perpetrator has entered into the realm of authority of their own free will, and recognises the justifying ideology of the actions demanded, secures not only obedience, but *willing* obedience, 'accompanied by a strong sense of doing the right thing'.⁵⁹ Finally, a bureaucratic structure which rewards loyalty and performance creates a situation in which professional self-interest can play a role in perpetrator attitudes to the task to which they have been assigned;⁶⁰ this includes their understanding of the meaning of victims' existence and of their actions toward victims.

Many examples can be found of the way in which the system outlined above binds willing perpetrators to systems of mass killing. Hannah Arendt argued that the 'horribly painstaking thoroughness' of Nazi genocide could be traced to the notion (very common in Germany, she added) that to be law-abiding is not only to obey laws, but to identify one's own will with the principle behind the laws.⁶¹ In pre-colonial Rwanda, there was a well-developed system of hierarchical organisation and structure of authority, a fact that the Belgian

⁵⁸ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 250.

⁵⁹ Milgram, 143–44.

⁶⁰ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 253–54; see also Milgram, 139–40.

⁶¹ Arendt, 136–37; it should be noted, however, that characterisations of cultures as more or less inherently 'law-abiding' are highly problematic, and are often self-comforting rationalisations on the part of external bystanders, rather than theoretically-considered explanations.

colonisers considered 'a major factor for progress'.⁶² Also well-developed were institutions of labour mobilisation and requisition, a practice which would continue in colonial, and post-colonial, systems such as the *umuganda* (obligatory communal work).⁶³ It is worth noting here that Rwandan genocide was often characterised as 'communal work' – that is, both as familiar and morally unambiguous 'work' rather than 'killing' as such, and as an activity authorised by, ordered by, and for the good of the community – meaning that to reject such work was to betray the community.⁶⁴ Indeed, Philip Verwimp proposes as a representative example of this narrative the similarity between a 1979 exhortation of President Juvénal Habyarimana's to communal work in order to 'attack' the problem and 'destroy the forces of evil', and the

⁶² Straus, S (2006), *The Order of Genocide: Race, power, and war in Rwanda*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 209–11.

⁶³ Straus, *The Order of Genocide*, 211–14, 217–18. The literal meaning of *umuganda* is the wood used to construct a house: Verwimp, P (2000), 'Development ideology, the peasantry and genocide: Rwanda represented in Habyarimana's speeches', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol 2, no 3, 344; an interesting connection may be seen here with the genocidal exhortation, mentioned elsewhere in this essay, to 'cut the tall trees' (that is, kill Tutsi).

⁶⁴ Philip Verwimp suggests (in a controversial and somewhat eccentric article) that the ideology of development, combined with a valorisation of agricultural work (which was discursively constructed as excluding Tutsi) was the chief ideological motivating factor in the Rwandan genocide; an argument concerning the importance of this factor in discourse is put in Li, D (2004), 'Echoes of violence: considerations on radio and genocide in Rwanda', *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol 6, no 1, 15. Li suggests that as well as *umuganda*, '[t]he value of work was also tied to the virtues espoused by the Catholic Church (Prunier (1995), 77; Verwimp (2000), 338) and to the dignity of being associated with the activities of the state (Taylor (1999), 141)'.

language used in 1994 to refer to the killing of Tutsi.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the agricultural nature of much *umuganda* worked in tandem with the euphemistic framing of killing as ‘chopping down the tall trees’ (a theme to which we will return). After the genocide, many perpetrators explained their actions by reference to the importance of obeying ‘the law’ (*igeteko*) or ‘the authorities’.⁶⁶

We can conclude with Marcuse that in the modern society, domination and administration have ceased to be separate and independent functions.⁶⁷ The system is designed such that the individual comes to self-identify with that system; if not on all levels, certainly to the extent that the incentive to perform binds him/her to the system and seriously obstructs not only possibilities, but also the conceivability, of meaningful resistance.

In speaking of tendencies which support oppressive domination, two other properties of modern bureaucracy must also be noted. First, Weber argues that the chief influence on ‘the bureaucratic tendency’ was the need created by standing armies and by the connection of public finance with the military establishment, developments of the modern era;⁶⁸ this itself should tell us something about the nature of bureaucracy. Indeed, the military metaphor is frequently seen in genocide, and all the more so given that genocide is often carried out in periods of warfare. In Rwanda, for example, Tutsi were often depicted in an essentialised fashion as ‘accomplices’ of the rebel RPF, or as the generalised ‘Tutsi enemy’ or *Inkotanyi*: Scott Straus concludes that ‘killing Tutsi

⁶⁵ Verwimp, 350.

⁶⁶ Straus, *The Order of Genocide*, 137, 159–60, 173, 219–21.

⁶⁷ Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 92.

⁶⁸ Weber, *From Max Weber*, 212.

was inseparable from the language of war'.⁶⁹ Second, bureaucracy innately lends itself to concealment and (public) euphemism.⁷⁰ As Weber notes, for those within the system superiority is enhanced by keeping secret their knowledge and intentions, meaning that this tendency is built into the system: '[t]he concept of the "official secret" is the specific invention of bureaucracy, and nothing is so fanatically defended by the bureaucracy as this attitude, which cannot be substantially justified beyond these specifically qualified areas'.⁷¹

Some of the psychological states mentioned above are not innovations of the modern age—for example, the displacement of moral responsibility of those 'acting on orders'. This should not blind us to the fact that in the modern system as it was created in the West and then imposed, more or less thoroughly, on a global scale, these common psychological processes were employed in the creation of a new model of governance, and a new society. Physical, psychological, emotional and moral distance was created between those who enacted or supported power, and the objects of such action. Modern bureaucratic management was not and is not a neutral tool which can be put to any ends; it contains various propensities and tendencies, outlined above, which in some circumstances may be considered to be offset by other benefits, but in other contexts contribute immeasurably to the existence and operation of systems of destruction.⁷²

⁶⁹ Straus, *The Order of Genocide*, 29, 50, 58.

⁷⁰ On bureaucratic secrecy and its relationship to power and morality see Sjoberg, Vaughan and Williams, 443–46.

⁷¹ Weber, *From Max Weber*, 233.

⁷² As mentioned in the introduction, we may consider 'bureaucracy' in itself to be a technology; in this sense, Eric Katz's argument regarding the misconception of a perception of technology as 'value-neutral' is highly relevant. As Katz observes, 'technologies determine

Genocidal and non-genocidal bureaucracy

We have seen the way in which the rise of the modern bureaucratic state allowed the removal of 'moral calculus' from the enactment of violence, and the way in which this process takes place both on the level of executive or collective decision-making, and at the individual level. From this premise, it may be objected that there is nothing uncommon about the fact that genocidal states use this kind of language about their subjects; that this fact has nothing specific to tell us about *genocide*, and that bureaucratic centralisation and its impact on society has already been exhaustively explored. Bauman acknowledges this objection when he writes that 'the adverse impact of dehumanisation is much more common than the habit to identify it almost totally with its genocidal effects would suggest'.⁷³ Taking this train of thought a step further, Donald Bloxham criticises Bauman's reading thus:

To some degree genocidal structures inevitably will resemble the political systems in which they are embedded, and so Zygmunt Bauman, who locates the character of the Holocaust within the bureaucratic mindset that he sees as central to its perpetration, may be saying only that Nazi Germany was a modern state, which is self-evident.⁷⁴

the forms of human life, and thus the values that humans live by' (413).

⁷³ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 103.

⁷⁴ Bloxham, 'Organized Mass Murder', 206. Bloxham makes more detailed criticisms of Bauman's argument regarding modernity, but, given that they relate to the specificities of the German situation, they will not be addressed here. In a comparative sense, Bloxham's argument is directed not at the conditions of modernity *in toto*, but at the argument that genocide is normatively carried out by modern methods. Indeed, Bloxham's argument for a comparative approach, for the importance of ideology as a motivating factor, and for an understanding of bureaucracy as a common modern characteristic

Bauman has indeed located the murderous social reorganisation of the Holocaust, and, by extension, other genocides, within the realm of the massive, rational, *ordering* process of modernity in which 'everyone will be transported from their present, contingent site to the place where reason orders them to be' (including nowhere).⁷⁵ And it is true that a bureaucratic system is the practice of the modern capitalist state or institution, no matter what substance it is dealing in (oil, sugar or people) and, furthermore, that it *always* deals with people in this way. An example can be found in the fact that *every* modern, Western, human society already, on a massive scale, treats biological beings (namely, animals and plants) in exactly this fashion: as interchangeable items representing a class, and as units of production. Far from being a counter-example, this demonstrates, first, that the fact that this is the standard system of organisation in such societies is intimately involved in the expression of dominance over particular groups; and second, that an enabling aspect of the enactment of such dominance upon humans is that it is discursively related to other forms of the enactment of dominance which are conceived as less morally problematic. As Bauman writes, 'the civilizing process is, among other things, a process of divesting the use and deployment of violence from moral calculus, and of emancipating the desiderata of rationality from interference of ethical norms or moral inhibitions'.⁷⁶ The infliction of genocide involves prejudice, in the sense of an emotional feeling of the lesser worth of or the danger posed by another

rather than a specific aspect of the Holocaust, can be read as supporting the argument that I present here.

⁷⁵ Bauman, Z (2000), 'The Duty To Remember – But What?', in Kaye, James and Str  th, Bo (eds) *Enlightenment and Genocide, Contradictions of Modernity* (Series philosophy and politics; no 5), Brussels, P I E- Peter Lang, 50.

⁷⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 28.

collective, but also 'the routine and unemotional function of modern society'.⁷⁷ And both of these practices involve dehumanisation.

Given that genocide and mass killing are the extremes of the expression of violent dominance, the following becomes clear. Such discourse functions constantly at a lower-key register on an everyday level (to allow one not to think about the rise in levels of domestic violence or homelessness, the treatment of refugees and minority groups, or the fate of the dead animal on one's plate). But this means that it can be used as a model to create similar psychological-emotional states toward other circumstances, ones to which there has been less time to become habituated, which have not yet become socialised as norms, or which are periodical or circumstantial rather than ongoing. The very fact that decisions regarding action in mass society are, at least in principle, always made on the basis of statistical research and demography (whether they involve cuts in tax or cuts in welfare) means that the use of such language can normalise genocide. It makes genocidal action into just another task among many in the running of a well-ordered society, rather than leaving the possibility that it will be seen by the perpetrator as an unprecedented, extraordinary or qualitatively different event within her or his universe of meaning and morality.⁷⁸ As Bauman puts it, '[t]his mode can be put to the service of a genocidal objective without major revision of its structure, mechanisms and

⁷⁷ Bauman, 'The Duty To Remember', 52.

⁷⁸ On the discursive and structural similarities between the genocidal situation and 'everyday' corporate organisational trends, see Stokes, P and Gabriel, Y (2010), 'Engaging with genocide: the challenge for organization and management studies', *Organization*, vol 17, no 4, 474-76.

behavioural norms'.⁷⁹ In Rwanda, according to Des Forges:

[a]dministrators broke the genocide down into a series of discrete tasks which they executed without consideration of the ultimate objective of the work. Cultivators turned out for the long-standing practice of communal labor although they knew that they were to cut down people as well as the brush in which they found them. Priests announced public meetings without consideration of the message to be delivered there. Businessmen contributed money to the 'self-defense' fund established by the government as they had contributed to similar collections in the past, even though the money was to buy 'refreshments' for the militia and fuel to transport them to their places of 'work'.⁸⁰

Such a process is self-sustaining, and contains its own momentum. Once individuals have been transformed into units, their very humanity 'slows down the smooth flow of bureaucratic routine', creating a 'nuisance factor' which means that individuals are considered not only with indifference, but with disapprobation and censure.⁸¹ To return to an earlier point, Bauman maintains that bureaucracy is not merely a tool, which can be used for good or bad ends; rather, 'the dice are loaded', inasmuch as bureaucracy 'has a logic and momentum of its own'; it is 'programmed to seek the optimal solution', and to measure that solution in a way which does 'not distinguish between one human object and another, or between human and inhuman objects'.⁸² In genocide and genocidal killing, the rational sequence of the destruction of victims (as outlined by Raul Hilberg), beginning with definition and ending with annihilation, is arranged, according to the logic of bureaucratic discourse,

⁷⁹ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 104.

⁸⁰ Des Forges, 12.

⁸¹ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 103-04.

⁸² Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 104.

precisely to evict the 'object' from the realm of moral obligation, with each step putting further distance between the victim, and perpetrators and bystanders.⁸³ We may also consider Wolfgang Sofsky's comment on categorisation in the Nazi camps: *in itself*, this system 'created distances, intensified antagonisms and drew lines of social demarcation that none could cross...[it] guided social judgement by intensifying the perception of differences'.⁸⁴ In the following section, I outline the way in which such categorisation dehumanises its objects and legitimises mistreatment and killing.

Bureaucracy, categorisation and dominance

In the introduction, I mentioned the way in which, in the modern age, individuals are categorised as representative of an ideal type. This type is chosen from among a pre-constructed taxonomy of types which is itself in turn chosen from other taxonomies as relevant to the situation at hand:⁸⁵ that is, a situational ideological framework is created through which circumstance is comprehended and action taken. Paul Chilton, drawing on research in the cognitive sciences, argues that language which categorises in this way blends the cognitive domains or 'modes' of social intelligence with those of intuitive essentialism and technicality (tool-making). A naturalisation of the categories which are used takes place (categories which, though they may belong only to humans,

⁸³ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 190–92. On the genocidal creation of bureaucratic distance see also Clegg, 340–41; Stokes and Gabriel, 465.

⁸⁴ Sofsky, W (1999), *The Order of Terror: The concentration camp* (trans W Temppler), Princeton, Princeton University Press, 123.

⁸⁵ On categorisation in the context of arguments regarding genocidal and non-genocidal prejudice, see Billig, M (2002), 'Henri Tajfel's "Cognitive aspects of prejudice" and psychology of bigotry', *The British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol 41, 175.

do not in themselves remind one of the humanity of their objects), and humans thus come to be classified as non-human things which can be instrumentally manipulated.⁸⁶ In the discursive terms of modern technologies of population, in any given situation, one property is taken to be the defining characteristic of the individual (as a woman, Jew, Communist, *et cetera*), and that individual as such is synecdochal, is only a representative of the group of people who have that property, and who are a group only because they have that property.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Chilton, P (2005), 'Manipulation, memes and metaphors: The case of *Mein Kampf*' in de Saussure, L and Schulz, P (eds) *Manipulation and Ideologies in the Twentieth Century: Discourse, language, mind*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 40.

⁸⁷ See Graumann, C F (1998), 'Verbal Discrimination: a Neglected Chapter in the Social Psychology of Aggression', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, vol 28, no 1, 48. On 'the Jew' as 'one political actor' in Nazi propaganda see Herf, J (2006), *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*, Cambridge Mass and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 37–38. Herf also provides numerous examples of the way in which the singular term *Juda* was used to characterise the alleged actions of Jews. On the way in which the process of quantifiable efficiency removes the possibility of 'the intangibles of life' and of lives, see Betton and Hench, 538–39. We might also consider such characterisation to be a particular aspect of metonymy, 'the part for the whole'; George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that, like metaphor, metonymy is deeply grounded in human thought and action, to the point that we are not necessarily conscious that it occurs (Lakoff, G and Johnson, M (1980), *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 35–40). Finally, Victor Klemperer has noted the way in which, under the Third Reich, categorical identity came to be a defining characteristic, such that he was always referred to officially as 'Jud Klemperer' ([the] Jew Klemperer) (Klemperer, V (2000), *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii: A philologist's notebook* [trans M Brady, 3rd edn], London and New Brunswick N J, The Athlone Press, [original German date of publication 1957], 78; see also 176–77 on the universe

Bauman suggests that this kind of categorical abstraction 'is one of modernity's principal powers...genocide differs from other murders in having a category for its object'.⁸⁸ In a possible endgame, the individual becomes representative *only* of that property itself: Jews come to be understood not just as likely to bear or spread disease, not just as a metaphorical disease which makes up part of a figure of speech, but as 'disease incarnate'⁸⁹ (the Nazis also depicted them, and justified much of their treatment, as 'criminals incarnate'). In Rwanda, Straus notes the way in which 'over and over again' Tutsi were spoken of by perpetrators as a unit, 'a single entity with identical – and permanent – intentions': the category 'the Tutsi' came to substitute for the individual.⁹⁰ For many perpetrators, *the* central phrase of the genocide was recalled as '*Umwanzi ni umwe ni umututsi*' (the enemy is one; it is the Tutsi).⁹¹

Many scholars have shown the paradoxical nature of modernity, the way in which it contains its own contradictions. Thus, often-claimed dehumanising characteristics of modern society have been associated both with the group (mass culture, bureaucracy, centralisation, standardisation, homogenisation) and with the individual (in the claim that social groups and the moral and social benefits they create, whatever they may be argued to be, are being destroyed due to capitalist-consumerist individualism). But

of meaning contained within the adjective *jüdisch* [Jewish]).

⁸⁸ Bauman, 'The Duty To Remember', 36.

⁸⁹ On the disease metaphor see Savage, R (2007), "'Disease Incarnate": Biopolitical Discourse and Genocidal Dehumanisation in the Age of Modernity', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol 20, no 3, 404–40.

⁹⁰ Straus, *The Order of Genocide*, 173.

⁹¹ Straus, *The Order of Genocide*, 225.

these positions are not necessarily as contradictory as they might seem, and the contradiction may be resolved by asking to what use a process is put: what is this process of production in fact producing, and at whose behest? The (identity of) the human individual *must be* conceptualised in the 'gaze' of the bureaucratic institution *both* as a demographic, *and* as a (single) unit of production—this concept can be seen as similar to Foucault's definition of the two poles of development of modern bio-power: the anatomo-politics of the human body, and that of the 'species body'.⁹² The fact of the individual's existence as an individual is the locus of a process which, in conception, execution and aim, determines that the individual remain within the relevant category, and represent that category through his/her actions. This applies to all modern citizens, not only to victims but to their persecutors—though it should be affirmed that these categories are highly malleable according to time and circumstance: they are determined and produced by the question which is asked.⁹³ In Bauman's words, '[d]ehumanisation starts at the point when, thanks to the distantiation, the objects at which the bureaucratic action is aimed can, and are, reduced to a set of quantitative measures'.⁹⁴ The definition of victims in this way 'sets them apart as a *different* category, so that whatever applies to it does *not* apply to all the rest'—individuals become exemplars of a

⁹² Foucault, M (1978), *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An introduction* (trans R Hurley), New York, Pantheon Books, 139; On Foucault, the 'gaze' of the State, identity, *Modernity and the Holocaust* see Clegg, 326–47.

⁹³ For a case study of the development of genealogy and racial classification through bureaucracy in Nazi Germany, see Hertz, D (1997), 'The Genealogy Bureaucracy in the Third Reich', *Jewish History*, vol 11, no 2, 53–78.

⁹⁴ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 102.

type, and that type 'seep[s] into their individualized image'.⁹⁵

Groups of people may often be divided, on paper, into various categories; but this is not usually done in order to physically *destroy* one group. In bureaucratic genocide, language already exists in which is inherent a certain categorisation of the object (to be dealt with as inanimate), accompanied by a certain moral-emotional state (apathy) with regard to that object; the use of such language is standard practice in mass situations. This allows the employer of such language to deny the fact of the victims as living individual humans who, under previous normativities, would have been owed at least a minimal amount of consideration and/or obligation as to the way in which they were treated. This language, then, is a self-fulfilling prophecy of genocide, one in which victims are named as inanimate matter before they are transformed into that state.

The example of the genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda in the mid-1990s casts some light on these processes. At first glance, discussion of this case in terms of modernity and the state may seem counter-intuitive. The genocide took place during a period of civil war and administrative chaos, in which the official Rwandan government had collapsed after the assassinations of the President, Juvénal Habyarimana, and the Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana.⁹⁶ Rwandan society was anything but highly modernised or industrialised; Rwanda was chiefly a subsistence agriculture economy, and the genocide itself can be characterised as 'low-tech' (in comparison to, for example, Nazi genocide). Given this, what

⁹⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 191 (original italics).

⁹⁶ The history of the lead-up to the genocide, the connection between the assassinations of Habyarimana and the commission and outbreak of genocide, and the role of politicians in the genocide, are complex topics which are not relevant to the subject at hand.

role can bureaucracy and bureaucratic discourse have played? In the first instance, Rwanda is a prime example of the way in which bureaucratic techniques of demography and population management generate a precondition for genocide by creating and shaping identity categories. While ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ were certainly identity categories in pre-colonial Rwandan society, they were categories which were both flexible and permeable. Between 1927 and 1936, the colonising Belgians—employing a divide-and-rule strategy typical of colonialism—(re)organised administration in the areas of education, state administration, taxation, and Church around these identities, took a census classifying every Rwandan as Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, and issued identity cards bearing this information.⁹⁷ Identity cards continued to be used in the post-colonial period, and were employed during the genocide as a marker of identity, and hence as one method of identifying victims.

As Mahmood Mamdani observes, colonial rule (and the transition from direct to indirect colonial rule) came to be premised upon the necessity for hierarchical structures of domination, not only between colonisers and colonised, but also between different colonised collectivities. Legally- and politically-constructed hierarchies were organised by essentialised identity categorisation.⁹⁸ The centralised and hierarchical system of domination which the Belgians instituted in Rwanda was premised upon rule through the Tutsi, who, according to racial-religious ‘Hamitic’ theories current at the time, were racially superior, considered to be taller, lighter-skinned, and more fine-featured than the Hutu.⁹⁹ Indeed, in 1902 the Church described Tutsi as

⁹⁷ Mamdani, M (2002), *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 88.

⁹⁸ Mamdani, 24–28.

⁹⁹ The ‘Hamitic’ thesis is the Biblically-based concept that Tutsi

'supreme humans' (leaving an obvious inference to be drawn as to the 'human nature' of the Hutu).¹⁰⁰ In the post-colonial period the power dynamic was reversed, leaving the Tutsi a minority subject to institutionalised oppression, massacre, and ultimately genocide in the context of civil war. This demography played itself out in the periodic massacres of Tutsi which took place in the period between independence and the genocide. In the 1973 violence, which began with purges of Tutsi, 'officials and government supporters called the actions [purgues] "ethnic rebalancing", "clearing off" (*déguerpir*) and removing a Tutsi "surplus". The issue to which they referred was "ethnic proportionality"'.¹⁰¹ 'Ethnic balancing' was carried out by 'Public Safety Committees'.¹⁰² The role of bureaucratic discourse in genocide, mass killing and mass violence in Rwanda is evident both in general terms, and in the specific use of language by perpetrators.

I do not claim that we can draw a straight line between bureaucratic colonial governance in Rwanda, and genocide. But we may say that this governance, and in particular the characteristically bureaucratic features which it imposed on Rwandan society in terms of hierarchy and the categorisation of essentialised identity, were necessary conditions for the genocide which occurred there. Mamdani argues that the origin of violence in Rwanda is found not in the realms of biology and culture, but rather, in state constructions of political identity.¹⁰³ It was not only the creation of a race-

originated in Northern Africa and were therefore, firstly, not 'black' in the same way as the 'Bantu' Hutu, and secondly, not indigenous to Rwanda.

¹⁰⁰ Mamdani, 88.

¹⁰¹ Straus, *The Order of Genocide*, 190.

¹⁰² Straus, *The Order of Genocide*, 191.

¹⁰³ Mamdani, 34.

mythology regarding Rwandan peoples which led to violent ongoing conflict; similar mythologies were applied elsewhere without this consequence. Rather, in Rwanda this notion became a rationale for a set of *institutions* inspired by, embedded in, and reproduced by this ideology.¹⁰⁴ The ideology was incorporated into a *system* organised along bureaucratic lines: an institutional construct.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, the bureaucratic dehumanisation of Hutu (under the colonial regime) and Tutsi (in the post-colonial period) was a vital factor in the Rwandan genocide. The role of bureaucracy and bureaucratic discourse in this and other genocides goes beyond the fact that bureaucratic organisation is necessary in order to attempt genocide in the age of the mass society. Although present in varying degrees in different cases, this discursive strategy is intimately involved with dehumanisation in general, and specifically, genocidal dehumanisation.

In bureaucracies, however, it is not only victims but also perpetrators who undergo a process of de-individuation. In a group situation, there is a decreased focus on personal identity, which becomes submerged in the nature of the group, and general social norms have their place taken by situation-specific group norms.¹⁰⁶ This process also takes place in 'hands-on' situations, in which a perpetrator group who identify as such are more likely to behave cruelly and aggressively.¹⁰⁷ A common example would be a particular military unit or militia group, who generally share some kind of visual signifier, such as a uniform. This brings us to the question of the different psychological states of those indirectly and directly involved in killing, and the different

¹⁰⁴ Mamdani, 87.

¹⁰⁵ Mamdani, 87.

¹⁰⁶ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 251.

¹⁰⁷ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 251–52.

psychological desires and needs which euphemistic and bureaucratic language fulfils in each case.

***Schreibtischtäter* and direct perpetrators: distinctions and similarities**

While some have spoken of ‘primeval moral drives’ against killing, I have argued elsewhere that this is an overstatement of the case.¹⁰⁸ It should not be assumed that individuals have an innate propensity not to act violently, which must be overcome by external influences. Milgram writes that ‘[t]hough such prescriptions as “Thou shalt not kill” occupy a pre-eminent place in the moral order, they do not occupy a correspondingly intractable position in the human psychic structure’.¹⁰⁹ Milgram’s experiments have demonstrated that the commonsense understanding that it is more difficult to harm someone directly, than to order harm done—that the closer the victim, the harder it is to act against them—*is* borne out in fact.¹¹⁰

The literal distance between bureaucratic perpetrators and victims plays a part in legitimising their actions; but how does bureaucratic discourse relate to direct or ‘hands-on’ perpetrators, the men and women ‘on the ground’, who cannot ignore the physical consequences of their actions? For the direct perpetrator, killing, when constructed as the processing of objects, can be understood as an unpleasant task, but one identical in kind to other tasks which must be carried out for the functioning (or even the survival) of society. Their actions, just like those of the ‘desk-murderer’, are ‘nothing personal’, and hence may be disconnected or

¹⁰⁸ Savage, ‘Genocidal Dehumanisation’, 126–33; Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 188.

¹⁰⁹ Milgram, 8.

¹¹⁰ Milgram, 33–44.

compartmentalised from their self-conception.¹¹¹ Furthermore, the language, discourses and practice of industrialisation, or, in less modernised societies, of everyday work, can be applied to the killing process.¹¹² In each case, euphemistic language provides a discursive strategy in which, despite the fact that terminology is not literally believed to be factual, the meaning of acts can be altered to produce less cognitive dissonance: 'as they live within their euphemistic labels, and use them with each other, perpetrators become bound to a psychologically safe realm of dissociation, disavowal, and emotional distance'.¹¹³ Albert Bandura, whose work has consistently provided empirical demonstrations of the disinhibitory power of euphemistic language, comments that:

[e]uphemistic language...provides a convenient tool for masking reprehensible activities or even conferring a respectable status upon them (Bolinger, 1982; Lutz, 1987). Through sanitized and convoluted verbiage, destructive conduct is made benign and those who engage in it are relieved of a sense of personal agency.¹¹⁴

The bureaucratic routinisation of actions, their division into separate tasks which are performed identically each time

¹¹¹ Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros and Zimbardo, 59-60.

¹¹² Betton and Hench draw a connection between the Enlightenment discourse of 'value-neutrality', adopted by business from the realm of science, with the 'physical manifestations of Taylorism' such as the assembly-line (537-38). A similar argument regarding discourse around technology, made with regard to Nazi death camps, can be found in Katz, 411.

¹¹³ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 212.

¹¹⁴ Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli, 365; see also Bandura, 'Selective Activation and Disengagement', 31-32. We might note here the telling term 'sanitised' language; on this subject see also Bandura, 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities', 195; 'Selective Activation and Disengagement', 32.

they occur, desensitises the direct perpetrator to her or his own actions, and, '[o]nce habituated, the prevailing mindset becomes how to do it better, not whether to do it at all'.¹¹⁵ It may seem on the surface that an important difference is that strictly bureaucratic euphemism does not deal directly with motivatory questions of morality, with the issue of 'should', while non-bureaucratic euphemistic language often does so in regard to the terms with which it creates meaning, inasmuch as the terms used themselves imply and thus call for the 'correct' action in response. This difference may be considered superficial, as, in each case, action is premised on similar discursive thinking. In bureaucratic discourse, action is premised on (moral) responsibility to the bureaucracy and one's fellows, while in the case of non-bureaucratic discourse action is determined both by the previous factors, by direct exhortation, and by the way in which 'reality' is thus constructed. According to Bandura, euphemistic language, either as 'sanitisation' or as the 'agentless passive voice', both of which are in evidence in documentary material presented in this essay, can be seen as an 'injurious weapon'.¹¹⁶ The following examples provide elucidating evidence of the existence and function of euphemism at bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic registers.

The paradigmatic case of bureaucratic euphemistic language is, of course, the Nazi destruction of the Jews (though their record-keeping practices were rivalled by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia). To take a few examples from a list which could be multiplied virtually *ad infinitum*: in terms

¹¹⁵ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 244–45, 248.

¹¹⁶ Indeed, Bandura cites evidence that 'people behave much more cruelly when assaultive actions are given a sanitised label than when they are called aggression'. Bandura, 'Selective Moral Disengagement', 104.

of euphemistic language, we see such phrases as the prefix *Sonder-*, that is, 'special', which was widely used to indicate physical destruction, as, for example, in *Sonderbehandlung* ('special treatment', that is, killing), or *Sonderkommando* (the Jewish units which disposed of corpses); strictly-maintained linguistic reference to camp inmates as *Häftlinge* (prisoners);¹¹⁷ the listing by statisticians and public health authorities of corpses as *Figuren* (figures or pieces); and memo references to victims as 'the load', 'number of pieces', and 'merchandise'.¹¹⁸ Trains carrying Jews to camps were referred to by Ostbahn bureaucrats as *Seifenzuteilung* ('soap allotment'), while the people being transported were termed *Umsiedler* ('resettlers').¹¹⁹ Another notorious example is found in the tattooing of numbers on camp prisoners. This highly bureaucratic and centralised genocide provides perhaps the most extensive use of such discourse, and the clearest demonstration of its purposes; in the fact, for example, that victims in the camps, if they had not been selected for immediate killing, were identified both by a number, and by a coloured symbol indicating to which group they belonged. These indicated and constructed a place in a hierarchy of power and value defined by the perpetrators, a place which defined the way in which the individual would be treated within the camps. A similar process obtained in Khmer Rouge Cambodia, where, upon reaching co-operative farms, people were grouped into three classifications, with the blue scarves given to city dwellers used to identify and target them as *bannheu*, or 'deposed'.¹²⁰ As Sofsky puts it,

absolute power is the absolute power to label...defining a

¹¹⁷ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 208.

¹¹⁸ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 208.

¹¹⁹ Mierzejewski, 39–40.

¹²⁰ Raszelenberg, P (1999), 'The Khmers Rouges and the Final Solution', *History and Memory*, vol 11, no 2, 68–69.

taxonomy of categories into which every prisoner was pigeonholed...the use of the class hierarchy was a strategy of graded discrimination, persecution, and annihilation. The ultimate value in this pecking order was the worth a person's life was accorded. This value sign was sewn to an individual's clothing, visible for all to see, a stigmatic patch...[w]ith the aid of categories, power implemented its model of society.¹²¹

As well as the German case, euphemistic utterance, and language which transforms victims into objects without subjectivity can be found in many other episodes of genocide and genocidal killing; the resemblance to the better-known Nazi language is often striking. In planning the Srebrenica massacre, 'Bosnian Serb political and military leaders used a code to communicate among themselves, referring to the groups of men to be executed as "parcels"' to be 'delivered'.¹²² In occupied China, Japanese army personnel conducting cruel and lethal medical experiments referred to the civilian Chinese who were their victims as *maruta* ('logs').¹²³ These prisoners were identified by a number and a card describing their biomedical particulars:¹²⁴ as one perpetrator recalled, '[a]lthough, when [prisoners] arrived, they each had cards with their name, birthplace, reason for arrest and age, we simply gave them a number. A *maruta* was just a number, a piece of experimental material.'¹²⁵ Biomedical records gave a prisoner's case number only, along with textbook-style,

¹²¹ Sofsky, *The Order of Terror*, 19.

¹²² In Semelin, *Purify and Destroy*, 254.

¹²³ Barenblatt, D (2004), *A Plague Upon Humanity: The hidden history of Japan's biological warfare program*, New York, HarperCollins Perennial, 49, 126.

¹²⁴ Barenblatt, xix.

¹²⁵ Barenblatt, 63.

identical full-body illustrations.¹²⁶ People to be shipped to Pingfan, headquarters of the notorious Japanese Biological Warfare Unit 731, were called *Tokui-Atsukai* ('special consignments'), while Japanese forces responsible for rounding up Chinese victims were known as the 'Special Handling Forces', and the activity of spreading disease among the populace in person, generally through the distribution of contaminated food, was called 'field strategy'.¹²⁷ Even in the Australian colonial era, Aboriginal victims of special Native Police Forces were labelled as 'kangaroos' who had to be 'dispersed'.¹²⁸

As we see from these examples, euphemistic utterances employing the language of officialdom and production, and carrying the moral and ideological imperatives of these domains, are available for use by both direct and indirect perpetrators of mass killing. The non-bureaucratic naming of victims as inanimate objects is not as common as either bureaucratic discourse which de-biologises victims, or utterances which name them as threatening animals and disease organisms;¹²⁹ however, it should not be ignored. Non-bureaucratic objectifying language could be seen as a kind of halfway point between these two, or more strictly, three types (that is, de-biologisation and binarised biologisation). In this case, while victims are named as metaphors for other things,

¹²⁶ Barenblatt, 118.

¹²⁷ Barenblatt, 58, 62–63, 146. Here we might think of another common vegetable metaphor in the concept of 'root and branch' extermination, where the killing of civilians, or the employment of genocide as opposed to oppression, is justified by the need to remove the 'roots' of the 'problem'. See for example Straus, *The Order of Genocide*, 193.

¹²⁸ Tatz, Colin (2011), *Genocide in Australia: By Accident or Design?*, Monash Indigenous Centre, 21.

¹²⁹ For this three-part typology of genocidal dehumanisation, see Savage, 'Genocidal Dehumanisation'.

rather than completely written out of existence except as units, they nonetheless continue to be placed within the framework of units of production, as in the case of *maruta*, or of the Hutu Power call to ‘cut down the tall trees’, that is, to kill Tutsi.¹³⁰ Such a discursive strategy is not intimately related to modernity in itself in the same way that bureaucratic discourse is, though the systematic logic of production is undoubtedly a modern innovation. But it is related to episodes which could only have taken place under the auspices of modernity.

In Rwanda, a highly agriculturalised economy where the machete was a near-ubiquitous tool, the naming of Tutsi as ‘tall trees’ to be ‘chopped down’ performed a number of functions. Firstly, as with all dehumanisation, it functioned strategically to remove the sanctions otherwise attaching to the killing of fellow human beings, and to remove empathy which might otherwise be felt, by naming victims as non-human. Secondly, this language equated the killing of Tutsi with communal agricultural work, thereby framing genocide both as a familiar and morally impeccable activity and as a duty to the community. Thirdly, it made physical reference to the supposed height of Tutsi in comparison to Hutu, pointing out and stigmatising their difference from the ingroup and, in a metaphor within a metaphor, referring to the ‘high’ roles of power and prestige they were alleged to unfairly occupy within Rwandan society. Fourthly and finally, it referred to the manner in which they could or should be killed, that is, with machetes.

Euphemistic language which names victims as inanimate objects and units of production is not solely the confine of

¹³⁰ It is interesting that the two chief examples here both relate victims to plant life – that is, to an object envisaged as somewhere between animals and inanimate objects.

bureaucrats who do not 'get their hands dirty' in the actual business of torture, theft and killing; it is also used by those who are personally involved with such actions on a day-to-day basis, and is not limited to killing in highly modernised, bureaucratised and industrialised societies such as Nazi Germany. While a distinction should be drawn between, for example, Nazi paperwork in which Jews are considered 'units', and Hutu Power radio announcers calling for Hutu to 'chop down the tall trees', in each case this language objectifies victims, categorises them in a way which denies them individuality, defines their inclusion in the victim group as their only salient characteristic, and allows the 'invisible-ising' of the human consequences of action taken toward them. This permits in turn the full or attempted suppression of any moral or emotional response on the part of perpetrators—that is, in Arendt's (perhaps over-universal) phrase, the overcoming of 'the animal pity by which all normal men are affected in the presence of physical suffering'.¹³¹

In his analysis of National Socialism, Marcuse provides a further insight into the connection between bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic discourse in violent oppression. It may seem from outward appearances that the 'irrational' or 'idealistic' language embodied in philosophy, ideology and propaganda is opposed to technical-rational discourse 'pertaining to the realm of administration organization and daily communication'; but Marcuse argues that each type is *technical*, that is, 'its concepts aim at a definite pragmatic goal, and fixate all things, relations and institutions in their operational function

¹³¹ Quoted in Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 20. See also Savage, 'Genocidal Dehumanisation', ch 4. My quotation of this phrase is not intended to concur with the argument that a normative human position is to refuse to participate, directly or indirectly, in killing.

within the National Socialist system'.¹³² In genocide, the value of supra-technical mythological and metaphysical language becomes exclusively operational, as they are made parts of particular techniques of domination.¹³³

Having demonstrated both the role played by bureaucratic, and euphemistic, language in genocide, and the intimate connection between these two forms, in concluding we must return to a final question relating to the individual psyche and the role of this discourse within a broader examination of the work done by dehumanisation—determining whether the role played by this discourse is legitimacy, motivational, or both.¹³⁴

Conclusion

While the biological determinism of modern racism is rooted in Enlightenment rationalism, the logistics of modern genocide and mass killing are no less the fruit of the huge modern projects of population, reliant on centralised, bureaucratic technologies of surveillance and action; and both legitimise the mass killing of individual human beings. Unlike other forms of dehumanisation, the bureaucratic-euphemistic strategic discursive type is *purely* legitimacy. It does not provide a motivation for killing, except inasmuch as the bureaucratic process creates its own objects and is self-perpetuating, as every individual is motivated to excel at their

¹³² Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 148–49.

¹³³ Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 149. More recent socio-cultural analysis has focussed on the fact that *all* political forms of domination employ these 'supra-technical' discourses for their own purposes; but this does not detract from Marcuse's valuable insight into the workings of the genocidal state.

¹³⁴ For a detailed discussion of this distinction see Savage, 'Genocidal Dehumanisation', 168–77.

assigned task;¹³⁵ in overall terms, we may consider this a secondary motivation. But this language functions to conceal the human nature of the objects of power, and the human consequences of action, as well as displacing responsibility from the individual perpetrator—whether a bureaucratic functionary or a ‘hands-on’ killer. Thus, as a discursive strategy, it helps to achieve what Bauman argues was *necessary* for the perpetration of the Holocaust (and, we might add, most if not all other genocides): not the mobilisation of attitudes toward victim peoples, but merely their neutralisation.¹³⁶ Language itself enacts ‘a transformation of personal relations into impersonal things and events’.¹³⁷ Further, the more such language *depersonalises* victims, the more possible it becomes to construct motivational characterisations around violence toward the victim.¹³⁸

The language of bureaucratic euphemism and production is intimately related to other types of genocidal dehumanisation, in that it allows the depersonalisation of victims, the distancing of the victim from perpetrators and bystanders, and an erasure of individuality which makes of the victim a ‘blank slate’ onto which can be written motivational characterisations. In *itself*, however, it dehumanises victims by presenting them as non-human objects in a process of production—or rather, destruction—in which moral responsibility is defined by the process (the means), rather than the ends. As the examples presented in this essay demonstrate, this set of utterances appears in extremely diverse episodes, from those in which more motivational types of dehumanisation are present (Nazi genocide of the Jews), to cases of genocidal killing in which

¹³⁵ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 101–02.

¹³⁶ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 185.

¹³⁷ Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 150.

¹³⁸ Kershaw quoted in Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 189.

there is no intent for the complete disappearance of the entire victim people (Japanese mass killing in China); as well as episodes in which more extreme and nakedly hostile biomedical forms of dehumanisation are not in evidence (genocide in Rwanda).

In terms of the work of dehumanisation, bureaucratic and euphemistic discourse may be considered to be chiefly legitimacy. It is applied permeably to both non-genocidal and genocidal situations, and it seems universally to appear in concert with other, more overt and overtly hostile forms of dehumanisation: it may thus be considered a 'constant' which is necessary for the legitimisation of modern genocide and mass killing, but is not sufficient, either as a motivation, or as a form of dehumanisation in itself.¹³⁹ Both in its relationship to non-genocidal practice, and in the lack of any motivational aspect, it can be considered a relatively less extreme type of genocidal dehumanisation. Given that legitimisation is a universal function of genocidal dehumanisation, despite these qualifiers this type has a vitally important role to play in the commission and enactment of genocide in the modern era.

¹³⁹ Dehumanisation or demonisation *in itself* is never a sufficient or sole source of motivation for genocide; see Savage, 'Genocidal Dehumanisation'.