

# OPPORTUNISM, AUTHORITY AND IDEOLOGY: ON THE MOTIVATIONS OF TURKISH PERPETRATORS AS PORTRAYED IN THE 1919 WAR CRIMES TRIALS<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract: The study of the motivations of the people participating in genocide is necessary to fully understand the dynamics of genocide and its genesis, as these are the people who actually implement genocidal policies and provide its material manifestation. This paper looks into the motivations of mid-level perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide through the verdicts of the Ottoman Special Military Tribunal which was established in 1919. It is found that opportunistic motivations dominated for perpetrators' participation, particularly the opportunity for material gain, rape, forced marriage, free labour and career progression. However, the ambiguous nature of authority, coercive structures and ideological tenets also provided a framework within which perpetrators could become motivated to participate.*

## Introduction

To look at the face of the clock, we can discern the time, and when one asks anyone how this clock works, they will answer that the hands of the clock turn and thus gradually signal the change of time. But to fully understand how the clock works we need to delve into the depths of the mechanics and understand how the various cogs are interlinked, what makes them turn and how they work together to make the time appear on the clock face. This is no different when trying to gain a full understanding of any social phenomenon, including the crime of crimes, genocide. It cannot suffice to describe and contrast the grand sweeps of history and look into the biographies of the leaders of genocide, but instead we also need to look into the dynamics and motivations of the individuals who actually put the genocidal policies into practice, the cogs which make the clock actually turn.

These implementing participants of genocide are not automatons, but instead living, breathing human beings with their own agency, ideas, emotions and interests. Only through a thorough understanding of why these people enlist in a genocidal project and put their

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beings in the violent service of the genocidal leaders can we ever expect to increase our recognition of what constitutes genocide and why it happens. And only with this knowledge will it ever be possible to contemplate preventing such atrocities from happening in the future. This paper provides one small mosaic stone in the bigger picture of why genocide occurs and will give some insight into why individuals participated in the genocide of the Armenian people in 1915.

There is an emerging field of work which studies perpetrators in general and in particular what motivates these people to participate in genocidal violence. In particular much work has been done on the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, as well as conceptual work in social psychology, criminology, anthropology and sociology. However, previous work in the field of the Armenian genocide has been mostly broad historical studies (Akçam 2006; Dadrian 1993, 1995, 1996, 1999; Kévorkian 2011; Zürcher 2010) which have failed to look in depth at the individual level. A wealth of survivor (National Archives of Armenia 2013; see also Anush 2007; Aved 1979; Barooshian 1976; Der-Garabedian 2004; Derderian 2008; Garougian 2005; Hamamdjian 2004; Hartunian 1999 [1968]; Jafferian 1993; Ketchian 1988; Kharpetian 2003; Odian 2009; Papazian 2000; Shamtanchian 2007; Soghoian 1997; Tabibian 1988; Tilkian 1992) and bystander (Alamuddin 1970; Davis 1989; Jacobsen 2001; Morgenthau 2000 [1918]; Niepage 1975 [1917]) testimonial literature fills this desideratum but does not give adequate credence to the dynamics of the perpetrators, the actual implementing individuals. This paper contributes to approaching this research gap and starts looking at the genocide from the perspective of the people who are implementing it.

From a perspective of genocide prevention, it is particularly important to study this topic of perpetration comparatively, in order to understand why people participate not just specifically in one case but across various cases, and thus what could lead people to participate in future genocides also. Thus, this paper will first provide an overview of what motivates people to participate in genocide more generally, before then developing a micro-level foundation for the Armenian Genocide and building a more nuanced understanding of why people participated in it. This analysis will draw on the state of the art on perpetration in the Armenian genocide, as well as analysing data generated from the verdicts of Turkish war crimes tribunals from 1919. Finally, this paper will contrast the findings from Armenia with those of other cases in an attempt understand key similarities and differences and some more generalisable implications.<sup>2</sup>

The contribution of this paper lies not in its in-depth study of specific motivations of the Armenian Genocide, but to draw on new data and combine this with the previous studies on this case as well as other cases to paint a broader picture than has been painted thus far on perpetrator motivations in the Armenian Genocide. This will not provide the last word

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2. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to retell the broad sweeps of the Armenian genocide here, and it is assumed that the reader has a rudimentary knowledge of the case. For an excellent introduction please see Kévorkian (2011).

on perpetrator motivations in the Armenian Genocide, but it is an attempt to synthesise the literature as it stands and bring a systematic perspective to this topic.

## **The Complexity Of Evil – Why People Participate In Genocidal Violence?**

There has been a growing amount of research on perpetrators in recent years, including work on attempting to understand the motivations individuals have for participating in genocide. This section will give a short overview of the literature on why people participate in genocide as a foundation for discussing the motivations of Turkish soldiers and officials on trial subsequently.

Most of the research on perpetrator motivations has been conducted on the cases of the Holocaust (e.g. Browning 2001 [1994]; Gross 2003; Lifton 2000 [1986]; Mann 2000; Welzer 2006) and the Rwandan genocide of 1994 (e.g. Fletcher 2007; Fujii 2009; Hogg 2010; McDoom 2008, 2013a, 2013b; Straus 2006; Verwimp 2005), as well as some individual works on the genocide in Bosnia in the early 1990s (e.g. Clark 2009; Lieberman 2006; Mueller 2000; Petersen 2002) and the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia from 1975-79 (Hinton 2004; Hinton 2005; Williams 2015). Furthermore, there is a large social-psychological literature which is informative for this topic (e.g. Bandura 1999; Burger 2009; Milgram 1963; Newman 2002, 2006; Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Staub 1989; Sternberg 2005; Vetlesen 2005; Waller 2002; Zimbardo 2008), as well as some criminological literature on genocide perpetrators (Brannigan 2013; Jäger 1982 [1967]). This research has shown first and foremost, that perpetrators' personalities are not individually aberrant, nor do most of them differ strongly ideologically from their peers; much more, perpetrators appear to be overwhelmingly normal (Browder 2003; Browning 2001 [1994]; Fujii 2009; Jensen and Szejnmann 2008; Straus 2006; Welzer 2006). However, beyond this, the many different approaches diverge on what they focus on, both in terms of causal explanations mostly informed by certain disciplinary borders and the cases they study.

Previously I have developed a model which synthesises these research findings from various historical cases and multiple disciplines to a more abstract and inter-contextually comparable model which seeks to explain participation in genocide across many cases of genocide (Williams 2014a; for an updated version see Williams 2014b). A model is to be understood as a systematic representation of social phenomena in which the model aims not to provide "a literally true account of the process or entity in question" (Hughes 1990, 71), but instead an abstraction or idealisation which reduces the complexity of reality to only its causally relevant elements (McMullin 1985, 261-262; see also Jones 2005; Psillos 2011).<sup>3</sup>

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3. The model I have developed is an abstract or idealised representation of genocide participation, which does not take on the form of a typology. A typology would systematically and exhaustively categorise the phenomenon in question along multiple dimensions, while models focus more strongly on capturing the complexity of causal mechanisms.

Motivations are seen here as the impetus for action within a genocidal situation in which a perpetrator finds himself or herself<sup>4</sup> and these motivations facilitate the process of making a decision between socially structured and individually constructed alternatives (in reference to Hedström and Udehn 2009). Motivations are the driver which guides a person to make a choice between these alternatives. I differentiate between three broad types of motivations: those which focus on the in-group of the perpetrators, on the out-group of the victims or which are intrinsic to the perpetrators themselves and independent of in- and out-group. These three types encompass eleven specific individual motivations.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, I identify facilitative factors which are not in and of themselves sufficient for causing an individual to participate in genocide, as a motivation is, but instead make this participation easier. Lastly, there are contextual conditions which influence the entire situation and can make certain motivations or facilitative factors more salient. My model differs from previous approaches to understanding perpetrator motivations as it is the first to systematically integrate findings from multiple cases and several disciplines, thus coming at the topic from a new, interdisciplinary angle. While this comes at the cost of a contextually embedded understanding of perpetration, it also allows for a more nuanced perspective which better incorporates the complexity of reality with the many different motivations underlying human action. The fundamental tenet of the model is that it is possible for similar human and interpersonal dynamics to occur in very different cultural and contextual settings. Whether this is then actually the case, can then be tested by applying the model to new cases (as will be done with the case of the Armenian genocide in this paper).

The first group of motivations I identify are in-group-focused motivations, which concentrate on the social dynamics within the perpetrator group and the social influence exerted between members of it. Social influence can be implicit, explicit or even backed up by (threats of) force and can be exercised vertically by an authority or horizontally between peers. Most prominent in perpetrator testimonies but also in the literature on motivations is explicit or implicit orders by a person in authority and the **obedience to orders** that this then effects (see among many others Alvarez 2001; Brannigan 2013; Du Preez 1994; Gourevitch 1998; Hinton 2004; Mamdani 2001; McDoom 2008; Meyer 2009; Milgram 1963, 1975; Semelin 2005; Straus 2006; Welzer 2002). Similar horizontal social influence is termed **peer pressure** when it is explicit and is a common feature of descriptions of the Bosnian and Rwandan genocides (Bašić 2006, 159; Fletcher 2007, 33; Hatzfeld 2004b, 25; McDoom 2008, 265; Straus 2006). When this horizontal influence is implicit instead, the active motivation is the desire for **conformity**, in which individuals participate in order

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4. While in the Armenian genocide most perpetrators were men, in other contexts women played a larger role. Although there is some research on the topic of women's diverging roles in genocide (Adler, Loyle, and Globerman 2007; Rights 1995; Hogg 2010, 84; Lower 2013; Sarti 2011; Sperling 2005), there is little evidence for systematic differences in their motivations.

5. Each of these motivations is described at a relatively abstract level and their manifestations in actual genocides will vary. The mechanism causing the person to participate will be the same though, even if it is culturally specific how this occurs.

for them not to lose favour with the group and remain part of it (Asch 1963). Finally, horizontal and vertical influence can be laced with the threat or actual utilization of violence. This **coercion** can be a powerful motivation for individuals to participate in order not to experience physical violence against them. Empirically various instances of genocide have provided significantly different degrees of how credible threats of coercion were, with no known instances of Germans being killed for refusing to participate in the Holocaust (Bhavnani 2006, 657; Fletcher 2007, 32; Hatzfeld 2004a, 130; Mann 2005, 164; Straus 2006; see also Jäger 1982 [1967], 84-93).

The second set of motivations focus on the out-group from the perspective of the perpetrators: the victims. Most prominently for this group and possibly the most pervasive in popular perceptions of genocide, **genocidal ideologies** can motivate individuals to participate in genocide. A genocidal ideology can lead to someone believing that it is the best and morally legitimate course of action or that the victims are deserving of the treatment. Ideologies can take on many different forms and while they may look quite different across various genocides (Goldhagen 1996; Harff 2003; Neilsen 2015; Orth 2002), Jonathon Leader Maynard (2014) provides a nuanced differentiation of six genocidal ideologies which can be found across various cases. The other out-group-focused motivation is **emotions** which at a psychological level raise the saliency of one desire over other competing desires and in this way shift motivations for genocide participation (Petersen 2002, 17-20). Emotions of particular interest in the context of genocide include fear (Fujii 2009, 121; Hinton 2005; Petersen 2002; Semelin 2005, 247; Straus 2006, 122; Sundhaussen 2001, 47), resentment, hatred and rage (Petersen 2002), as well as disgust (Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley 2000).

Lastly, there is a broad group of intrinsic motivations which are all particular to the individuals themselves and do not relate to the perpetrator or victim group. To begin with, people can be motivated to participate in genocide for a broad range of **opportunistic** reasons, such as being able to loot and pillage, career promotion (or avoiding demotion), the ability to settle personal scores or get ahead politically, the possibility of raping and many more (Browning 2001 [1994], 75; Fletcher 2007, 33; Fujii 2009, 97; Mamdani 2001, 218; Mann 2005, 32; Mueller 2000, 49, 61; Semelin 2005, 242; Straus 2006, 79; Valentino 2004). Innately motivating for people to participate is **sadism** as it gives people pleasure in inflicting pain on others (Alford 1997, 28; Baumeister 2002, 254; Segev 1992 [1988], 46-47; Valentino 2004, 40). Further, as with many types of crime people can experience a certain amount of **excitement or thrills** when being perpetrators which contrasts with their more mundane everyday life, thus giving them good reason to want to participate (Katz 1988, 53; Hinton 2004; Hinton 2005; Semelin 2005). Next, individual perpetrators can assume **genocidal roles** in which they come to conform to an alternative set of norms and practices associated with this role (Bloxham 2008, 232; Browder 2003; Lifton 2000 [1986]; Roth 2004, 214; Waller 2002, 221; Zimbardo 2008, 214). A pertinent example of this comes from the Cambodian genocide where one cadre speaks of what it was like to join the Khmer Rouge: “When we joined, it was like we were entering into a tiger zone, so we had to be a tiger like them. So, we needed to be a tiger like them, to be cruel like them. No

morality like them. That's why they were like that.” Finally, **status and power** can provide enough motivational allure for individuals to participate in genocide (Hinton 2004; Hinton 2005), particularly through the intensely satisfying experience of gaining power over someone else (Semelin 2005).

Besides these motivations there are also many facilitative factors identified in the model which make participation easier. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these in depth, but a few key facilitative factors will be mentioned in all brevity here. It is easier for people to participate when they can absolve themselves of the responsibility for their actions through the **groups** they are in. They can do this particularly by displacing it to others or diffusing it within a group, or alternatively by immersing themselves in anonymity (Bandura 1999, 196; Fujii 2009, 158; Vetlesen 2005, 147; Waller 2002, 212; Warr 2002, 62; Zimbardo 2008, 315).

Further, if people are not ideologically committed to the crimes they are committing it is likely that cognitive dissonance will occur as their actions do not match their morals. To overcome this, people can try and **morally disengage** from the situation by dehumanising the victim group (thus taking away the moral problem of killing fellow humans) (Bandura 1999, 200; Fein 1990, 37-39); furthermore, distance can help to morally disengage, be it physical (Bandura 1999, 199; Chirot and McCauley 2006, 52; Grossmann 2004), moral (Grossmann 2004, 75; Waller 2002, 196; Welzer 2002, 243), social (Browning 2001 [1994], 153; Hatzfeld 2004, 28, 51), psychological (Waller 2002, 196) or cultural distance (Grossmann 2004, 70).

Third, another way to overcome cognitive dissonance is to seek **moral justification** for the deed and thus change one's attitude towards one's actions. There are many strategies for moral justification and portraying why the killing is necessary and good (Eisner 2009, 53; Leader Maynard 2014; Waller 2002).

Finally, the factor **time** can have a facilitative impact on people's willingness to participate. Over time, people can become habituated into violence and thus grow desensitised (Browning 2001 [1994], 69, 128; Hatzfeld 2004, 54; McCauley 2002, 79; Sereny 1977 [1974], 200). Also individuals can progress along a 'continuum of destruction' (Staub 1989) by which an individual changes little by little over successive steps with each task preparing him mentally for the next slightly harder one. Similarly, the idea of 'escalating commitments' when a person will continue along a pathway towards participation in a series of small steps, because at each point in time, stopping would mean admitting that the previous step (which was not much less worse) was actually also wrong (Waller 2002, 205).

Besides these time-dependent facilitative factors, a final note on temporality as understood in this model is in order: over time people's motivations for participation can change. While a perpetrator may begin his or her participation in response to social dynamics within the perpetrator group, ideological justification can later become more important or the opportunities the participation has allowed for. The model does not claim that one factor will explain each individual's participation, but that various factors can coalesce and

that over time these may vary. Future empirical research should endeavour to trace these intra-personal developments in some cases.

In evaluating this model, a downside could be construed in its abstract nature by which it neglects cultural specificities and the individual dynamics inherent in various cases. However, this is also the strength of such a model as it is its abstraction which allows it to be inter-contextually and inter-culturally applicable, reducing the complexity of reality to the causal mechanisms which effect participation without their context. This in turn means that it can then be 're-inserted' into context and help to understand other cases of genocide participation by reducing the level of abstraction and showing how the causal mechanisms *actually* work here. Hence, this is the point where researchers who are expert on various cases of genocidal violence can bring to the model the cultural specificities of their cases and engage it with these more abstract causal dynamics. For example, some participants are motivated to participate due to obedience to authority; while social psychologically the causal mechanism for how they react to authority will be similar the nature of authority can vary strongly from case to case and authority during the Khmer Rouge meant something very different to authority in Nazi Germany or authority in the late Ottoman Empire. Thus, this means that the model should also be able to assist in understanding participants to the Armenian Genocide. The model will now act as the template by which these perpetrators can be analysed. It will be of particular interest, which cultural specificities the motivations take on when they manifest in this case, but also whether some motivations occur with a higher frequency than in other cases. This model is not important in and of itself, but it allows the empirical data on perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide to be embedded systematically in the broader discussions of genocidal perpetrators. This is important in order to establish the comparability of the Armenian Genocide's dynamics, but also with an ultimate view to genocide prevention.

## **The Challenging Data Situation On Perpetrators In The Armenian Genocide**

Having introduced in short what motivations can drive people to participate in genocide, the focus will turn now to the case of the Armenian Genocide to see whether the model can explain perpetrators' participation in this case also. This is not a formal test of the model but instead seeks to understand the case of the Armenian Genocide using the model as a framework. Should motivations emerge in the empirical analysis, this would disprove the model, while the model would be lent a higher credibility if the motivations found in the Armenian genocide resonate with the individual elements of the model. In researching perpetrator motivations various approaches which have been pursued in the past will be discussed, demonstrating that there is a dearth of original sources for investigating perpetrators in the Armenian genocide.

While others have successfully studied perpetrators and their motivations in the Armenian Genocide, this has most often remained a niche of their analysis (although their valuable insights will help inform this more general analysis below). The most significant

research dedicated *specifically* to perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide has been conducted by Hasmik Grigoryan who looks at perpetrators through the eyes of survivor and bystander testimonies (Grigoryan 2015a, 2015b). In particular she looks at the behaviour of children participants in the violence, women perpetrators and the role of sexual violence as a behavioural expression of perpetration. While the findings in this research are certainly interesting in and of themselves, they are more focused on the individual actions of the perpetrators than their motivations; this is quite reasonable as it is not only difficult for third parties to gauge the thoughts and motivations of others, but moreover the perspective of survivors is likely to diverge quite strongly from that of the perpetrators. Baumeister terms this a ‘magnitude gap’ between victims’ and perpetrators’ perceptions. Most of these differences in perspective “boil down to the fact that nasty events, both great and small, typically seem worse to the victim than to the perpetrator [...]. A researcher therefore cannot understand the perpetrator’s perspective without at least briefly adopting a view of the episode that makes it far less bad than it seems to the victim” (Baumeister 2002, 243).<sup>6</sup> More specifically, survivors like to entertain narratives which “construe the perpetrators’ intentions in a suitably grand and evil manner to match the suffering of the victims” (Baumeister 2002, 246). Referring to Zygmunt Bauman’s (1989) metaphor of a gardener who dispassionately weeds, Roy Baumeister (2002, 246) states that survivors would prefer to be hated passionately as this shows more respect than complete indifference. In this vein, “victim accounts tend to see stark moral issues with clear lines, whereas perpetrator accounts see many more grey areas in the relevant moral judgments. [... Further,] perpetrators usually have reasons and explanations for their actions, whereas many victims describe the perpetrator’s actions as utterly gratuitous” (Baumeister and Campbell 1999, 211). Certainly, much can be learned about forms of perpetration from the survivor perspective in the Armenian Genocide, as is demonstrated in Grigoryan’s (2015a, 2015b) work, but to understand motivations from a perpetrator perspective, a different approach becomes necessary.

To understand the perpetrator perspective, it would be most promising to directly interview the perpetrators themselves as was done in many of the studies on Rwanda and Cambodia, as well as some of the Holocaust research (e.g. Fujii 2009; Hinton 2004; Hinton 2005; McDoom 2008; Straus 2006; Williams 2015). Given the passage of time since the Armenian Genocide, interviews are obviously not a viable approach. Other methods for studying perpetrators certainly exist, such as using the transcripts of clandestine audio recordings of German prisoners of war (Neitzel and Welzer 2011; Welzer 2006; Welzer, Neitzel, and Gudehus 2011) or studying their diaries or letters to read how they portrayed themselves and their actions at the actual time. These approaches are advantageous as there is less danger of the people wanting to socially conform as they are not writing or speaking

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6. Although the terminology used in the literature on the Armenian genocide is that of ‘survivors’, these are equivalent to what is termed in most of the genocide studies literature as ‘victims’. The victims meant are obviously also those who were killed, but any types of post-genocide research referring to victims’ perspectives will also entail those who survived.



for a posterior audience. Unfortunately, such documents do not exist or are inaccessible for the case of the Armenian Genocide, as a vast majority of Ottoman soldiers were illiterate, as were the villagers and militiamen who participated in massacres (Zürcher 2010, 167). Furthermore, even if a small amount of such documents did exist, these would be under lock and key of Turkish military archives and thus inaccessible to the general public.<sup>7</sup>

Instead this paper will draw on data from judicial proceedings of the 1919 trials, an avenue of research also followed in many Holocaust-related projects (most prominently in Browning 2001 [1994]; Goldhagen 1996). More specifically, this paper will look into the verdicts of the Ottoman Special Military Tribunal, which was a post-World War I courts-martial set up in 1919 by the Ottoman State under extreme pressure by the Allied forces who had just defeated the Ottoman Empire, Germany and others. It was an act of the accommodation by the newly installed government particularly towards the British victors. This paper focuses on several cases which go beyond the highest echelons of power, particularly on the cases regarding local officials in Yozgad, Trabzon, Erzincan, Bayburt, as well as some Responsible Secretaries and Delegates of the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP). I focus in particular on the verdicts passed by the tribunal, and draw on two different translations from Turkish into English by Dadrian and Akçam (2011) and Yeghiayan (1990);<sup>8</sup>

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7. Private correspondences.

8. The verdicts studied here are from the following cases which include mid-level perpetrators:

1. In the trial regarding Yozgad (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 290-293; Yeghiayan 1990, 155-158) the accused were Kemal Bey, Boğazlıyan Sub-District Commissioner (Kaymakam) and Acting District Governor of Yozgad; and Major Tevfik Bey, Gendarmerie Commander for the provincial district of Yozgad.

2. In the trial regarding Trabzon (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 294-299; Yeghiayan 1990, 159-165) the accused were Mehmed Ali Bey, Director of Taxation of Trabzon; Nuri Bey, Chief of Police of Trabzon; Mustafa Effendi, Director of the (Secret) Service of Trabzon; Talat Bey, Sub-District Commissioner (Kaymakam) and Assistant to the Chief Inspector of the Trabzon Gendarmerie; Niyazi Effendi, Manager of a hotel in Trabzon; Ali Sayib Bey, Chief Sanitary Inspector, Trabzon; all of the aforementioned were present at their trial. Tried in absentia were Cemal Azmi Bey, Provincial Governor (vali) of Trabzon; and Nayil Bey, Party Responsible Secretary of Trabzon.

3. In the trial regarding Erzincan (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 312-313) the accused were Memduh Bey, Former District Governor of Erzincan; Hafız Abdullah Avni Efendi, son of Hacı Hüseyin; Halit, Former Deputy of Erzincan; Hacı Vahid-zade Efendi from Erzincan; Karmo Yusuf, Tribal leader from Dersim; Arslan, Gendarme sergeant from Erzincan; tribal leader Kagü, Director of the Daniz Bey village connected to the Township of Pülümür.

4. In the trial regarding Bayburt (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 304-310) the accused were Yanyali Nusret Bey, former district governor of Urfa; and Mehmet Necati Efendi, discharged from the rank of lieutenant.

5. In the trial regarding Responsible Secretaries and Delegates of the CUP (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 314-323; Yeghiayan 1990, 147-154), Avni Bey, Party Responsible Secretary of Manisa; Selaheddin Bey, Beyoğlu Responsible Secretary; Dr Besim Zuhti Bey, Eskişehir Responsible Secretary; Mithad Bey, Brusa Responsible Secretary; Cevted Bey, Lieutenant to the Responsible Secretary of Mirkun; Cemal Bey, Aleppo Responsible Secretary; Abdül Geni Bey, Inspector of Edirne; Abdül Kadir Effendi, Aid to the Konia Responsible Secretary; Hasan Fehmi Effendi, Aid to the Kastamonu Responsible Secretary; Agyah Bey, former President of the Sanitary Commission of Karahisar; Hayreddin Bey, former Karahisar official; all the accused were also present at the trial.

the use of two translations allows me to triangulate the translations and minimise the risk of mistakes or biases in the translations misleading the analysis.<sup>9</sup>

Before launching into the analysis of these trial documents, a short discussion of the limitations of this type of source is necessary. The people on trial are certainly not the low-level perpetrators in the focus of much perpetrator research, but the list of accused also goes beyond the leaders to include some of the mid-level functionaries to whom the scope of the model could also apply. Also, any form of post-genocide data collection is confronted with the problem that “perpetrator testimony after the fact is vulnerable to attempts to minimize personal responsibility, or else to construct socially acceptable narratives. Memory loss should also not be under-estimated” (McDoom 2008, 239). This is exacerbated when the testimonies being examined are taken in the course of judicial proceedings as the individuals have strong incentives to minimize their own role and misconstrue their motivations. Furthermore, the source used here are verdicts of the tribunal meaning that they are not the perpetrators’ own words but instead the condensed synopsis as seen by the judges. While this does allow for a certain adjudication of the credibility of the perpetrator testimony, it means that the motivations portrayed will have been filtered; and in this case even by a relatively partisan tribunal as was elaborated on above. Nonetheless, these documents are among the only primary sources available through which this level of interaction with perpetrators and their motivations is visible. Thus, these sources are anything but ideal, but -with these limitations in mind- nonetheless they constitute an interesting launching point from which to explore the motivations of perpetrators of the Armenian genocide, to try and understand, at least to a certain degree, what drove people to participate in this heinous violence. Lastly, the judicial documents only let one infer the actual motivations of the perpetrators to a certain degree; although much can be said about the actions of perpetrators and some motivations are made explicit, in parts the motivations are only implicit. To bridge this gap, they will –as far as possible– be matched to other studies in the literature in which these actions are founded within the motivations of the perpetrators. As explained in the introduction, the aim of this paper is not to study any one motivation in-depth, but to bring together the insights from these judicial documents with the further research on individual motivations conducted by others and place this within the research framework of perpetrator motivations in other genocidal contexts.

### **Perpetrator Motivations In The Armenian Genocide**

In this section, the Tribunal verdicts are analysed in more depth to uncover what motivated some of the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide who were on trial and their affiliates who did not need to face justice but were referred to in the trials. This analysis will be complemented by the insights from several other scholars who have in the course of their re-

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9. Both translations obviously offer the same content, albeit with different linguistic interpretations. If an idea is cited which can be found in both translations only the verdict will be referred to, whereas if a verbatim quote is given, the direct source will be mentioned.

search discussed perpetrator motivations to some degree. Key motivations referred to here are various forms of opportunistic motivations, obedience to authority, sadism, ideology, although all to varying degrees, as well as several interesting facilitative factors.

### *Material gain*

Of the motivations discussed in my model above, by far the most prominent in the data under analysis for the Armenian genocide is that of opportunism with various forms of opportunistic participation being described in the verdicts. Üngör and Polatel argue that the seizure of Armenian property by the Young Turk regime was not motivated by economic, but by ethno-nationalist reasons at the systemic level, with the economic destruction of the Armenians aiming at supporting the broader annihilationist campaign and securing a Turkish economy (Üngör and Polatel 2011, 166). In particular, “The expropriation of Ottoman Armenians was a functionally necessary phase linking persecution to destruction” (Üngör and Polatel 2011, 103). However, they argue that for the individual perpetrators themselves, economic motivations did play a more central role, particularly for the ordinary people participating in the murders who were motivated by plunder as a ‘pull factor’ (Üngör and Polatel 2011, 104). They also refer to Latham’s (2000) work who demonstrates that these economic motivations existed at all levels of the state apparatus and also for non-state participants (Üngör and Polatel 2011, 10).

First and foremost, looting is described in the verdicts as widespread with the seizure of abandoned property and possessions prevalent, as well as the stealing of the deported Armenians’ money and carried possessions (CUP Responsible Secretaries; Erzincan; Trabzon; Yozgad; for a broader discussion of the mechanisms of looting during the Armenian genocide see Kurt 2015). This occurred both in their homes prior to departure as well as when the deported Armenians were already being transported away. As the looting continued of the possessions they had taken along, increasingly anything they had with them was stolen, including even their clothes (Trabzon). Furthermore, even those who were spared immediate killing or were allowed to remain behind (mostly women who were then raped and killed or later married off, see below) were stripped of all their belongings. In their description of Aziz Feyzi, Üngör and Polatel (2011, 163) conclude that “it is likely that in his eyes he was only pursuing the financial interest of his family.” Furthermore, even not killing, but participating in the broader actions of genocide (e.g guarding a caravan during deportation) could also provide options for enrichment as guards accepted bribes to postpone deportation or to see one’s family one final time (Balakian 2010, 124), bribes to be allowed to use the toilet or to be allowed to rent carriages for transportation (at an already grossly inflated rate) (Balakian 2010, 132)

There were, however, also more subtle ways of gaining materially from participation in the deportations and genocide by either purchasing properties or possessions at desperation prices or by purportedly rescuing Armenians but doing this in order to charge a large sum of money. In one example a CUP Inspector for the province of Edirene, Abdülğani Bey, “had the cassimere and textile shop of the Kazazyan brothers, which was worth one hun-

dred thousand lira, given to his own son Hayrullah in exchange for one thousand lira, and he had the abandoned property [of the Armenian deportees] given to other followers at very low prices”(Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 319). This same Abdülgani Bey also took over the shares of two Armenian brothers in exchange for seeking an exemption for them through a special request to the governor-general (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 319).

In another example, Mrs Sophie Tahmarzian, widow and daughter of Onik Mahokian, trader and shipping agent, reports of Mehmed Ali Bey, Director of Taxation in Trabzon, that “in order to further facilitate stealing of my trousseau and my husband’s property he adopted me as his daughter. All my property and my deported husband’s thus became his” (Yeghiayan 1991, 434). Here the perpetrator was even able to present himself in a positive light as a rescuer, while at the same time taking the entire property of Tahmarzian and her family. It was also common among Turkish soldiers, paramilitaries and police, accompanying the deportations to collect money daily from the deportees in order to protect them from groups of bandits or potential looters from whom the deportees expected their imminent murder, as has been testified to broadly in the survivor literature (see for example Dadrian 1945).

#### *Access to ‘saved’ Armenians as free labour*

By participating in the genocide, perpetrators were also able to gain access to various types of free labour. Primarily such labour was garnered from women and girls who were not sent along with the rest of the deportees, but separated out. In the Trabzon verdict, for instance, the plight of several Armenian women and girls is told. They were first collected in a hospital supposedly for their protection, however, in due course, the women were then passed on to perpetrators’ households where they were used as slave labour or were married by the men (Trabzon). Not all ‘saved’ Armenian women who were given to members of the perpetrator group were forcibly married. Instead some were given into Muslim households as maids or slave labour. Here, again, perpetrators could benefit from participating by receiving unprecedented access to free labour for their households (Trabzon). Further, during the genocide some perpetrators took male deportees also as free labour to build clubhouses for members of the CUP or to work in the properties which had been stolen from the Armenian deportees (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 315). Lastly, orphaned children were also sometimes converted to Islam and then accepted into Muslim families (Balakian 2010, 87).

#### *Forced marriages and rape*

Of those who were forcibly married to their new husbands, it is also reported that many of them were first obliged to convert to Islam (Yeghiayan 1991, 434), and were often also raped in order to prepare “them for absorption into Muslim households” (Bjørnlund 2009, 30). Rape of Armenian women was also common throughout the genocidal process and this was integral to the systemic attacks against the Armenian population (Bayburt; Trabzon; Bjørnlund 2009). These practices of rape gave male perpetrators an incentive to participate as they had unmitigated access to sexual activity and can “be seen as a result of

a thoroughly brutalized environment that left room for local initiatives when it came to the methods of killing and humiliation, initiatives that satisfied individual needs, not only for self-gratification but also for variation” (Bjørnlund 2009, 29). At the individual level and beyond mere sexual desire, the raping allowed some men to gratify their sadistic or dominating needs and provide mutual recognition of masculinity (Bjørnlund 2009, 29). Theriault brings these perspectives together slightly differently:

“The pleasure of rape is not sexual, but rather is experienced as sexual because the perpetrator gets sexual pleasure from violent domination. Sexual enslavement of Armenian women and girls, including through coerced or forced marriages, allowed perpetrators a related avenue of dominion that could be extended out in time” (Theriault 2007, 30).<sup>10</sup>

#### *Freedom from prison*

A strong opportunistic motivation which can present itself to potential perpetrators is when they are currently in prison and are offered their freedom in exchange for their participation. There is significant evidence that this was a common recruitment strategy in the context of the Armenian Genocide. These former criminals were then trained for one week at the Ministry of War and then sent from the capital to the Caucuses as cadres of the ‘Special Organization’ (*Teskilat-i Mahsusa*) in order to implement the annihilation of the Armenian people (Altınay 1919, 23; quoted in Dadrian 1991, 121; see also Balakian 2010, 78).

#### *Demonstration of loyalty for career progression*

“During the period of the rule of the Committee for Union and Progress, [...] all civil servants from the very lowest of rank to the directors of offices were appointed based upon no other qualification other than loyalty” (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 307). In the build up to and during the Armenian genocide, local officials were systematically replaced by individuals more loyal to the CUP and its exterminatory plans (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 307; see also Balakian 2010, 78, 109). Thus individuals who towed the line and positioned themselves strategically in favour of the deportations and the genocide could advance their career by receiving promotions. However, it is also plausible that those who had careerist ambition during this time were *already* dedicated to the cause for other reasons, thus not making this a motivation. Nonetheless, either way, participation was a possibility to signal loyalty to the new system and to establish one’s authority over an area.

#### *Coercion*

Besides these opportunistic motivations though, there were also a host of further motivations. The power of coercion is indicated to varying degrees in different genocides, as

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10. These perspectives which ascribe little erotic sexual pleasure to the act of rape have more problem explaining why, in most accounts of genocidal rape against Armenian women and girls, it is the prettiest ones who are sought out. If it were solely about domination, the looks of the girls would matter less than, for instance, their social status. Notwithstanding this addendum, the possibility to participate in rape certainly provided a motivation for some perpetrators.

described above. In the case of the Armenian genocide, the threat of coercion varied substantially depending on an individual's position. As Mann's (2005, 164) thorough review of secondary sources demonstrates, normal soldiers were shot if they refused to participate or even dared to help the Armenians, while officers in the army were unlikely to be killed for rejecting participation. This security predicament is also demonstrated by the low-level perpetrating individuals themselves, as testified by Atkinson (2000, 88; quoted in Bjørnlund 2009, 21) when discussing a Turkish policeman who participated in killing because he ostensibly believed he would otherwise be killed himself, a common excuse or stated motivation.

### *Obedience to Authority*

Regarding the role of authority, many of the perpetrators were embedded in official state structures so that any orders they received came along traditional lines of authority used for all manner of legislation and its implementation, giving the genocidal policies fundamental legitimacy. However, the CUP party structure became ever more dominant throughout the Ottoman Empire, with party structures partially existing in parallel to its state counterparts. In this context, there are descriptions of individuals "without any official authority as supervisors over the officials and guards" (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 291) taking charge. These people nevertheless managed to successfully assert their authority in these situations, gaining obedience from individual perpetrators to act in accordance with the genocidal policies. It is through the authority of the increasingly dominant CUP that these people even without official rank were able to enforce obedience to their orders (Trabzon; Yozgad). These processes were amplified as decrees were not precisely formulated to begin with, giving ample room for interpretation (Üngör and Polatel 2011, 104), thus strengthening the importance of authoritative interpretation and the resulting pressure to implement this.

Consequently, state officials became less willing or placed to intercede. For example, in the Trabzon trial the court noted that even members of state institutions such as the local police chief, Nuri Effendi, took a back seat and "made absolutely no attempt, either officially or unofficially, to prevent [such acts], even though he witnessed them with his very own eyes" (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 296).

At the same time, these parallel authority structures made it possible for individuals to abdicate responsibility for their acts to the state structures. For instance, Besim Zuhti Bey, CUP Responsible Secretary of Brusa, says that "it was not within my authority to do anything, and so I cannot say anything whatsoever about it" (Yeghiayan 1990, 141). By referring to the 'Temporary Law of Deportation', individuals were also further able to displace the authority which would hold them accountable for their actions, rather than seeing them as just automatons implementing orders. Abdül Geni Bey, CUP Responsible Secretary of Edirne states in a cross-examination during his trial that "the deportations taking place were legally sanctioned. How could we have opposed laws established by the Government? [...] How could we have interfered? There was the law; there was the gendarmerie.

[...] Could we have said to him, ‘You are authorized’ or ‘You are not authorized’ to do this work on the basis of the Law?’ (Yeghiayan 1990, 127-128).

### *Ideology*

Michael Mann (2005, 167) finds that “few Kurds and few rankers in any unit can have been ideological killers.” While he posits that most perpetrators will have had little positive sentiment towards the comparatively privileged Armenians, he argues that for most people ideology did not play a key motivating part. There are certainly some actors who did have ideological motivation, for instance Kemal Bey in the Yozgad trial who displayed “feelings of revenge and of a personal vendetta [against the Armenians]” (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 292). This form of revenge is not opportunistic in the sense that it is personal but instead ideological as it is against the whole Armenian people.

While motivating only some individuals, ideology more importantly created a framework of legitimacy within which it became acceptable for people to participate in the deportations, lootings and killings. Mann also concedes to the role of ideology that “these motives of retaliation and revenge helped still normal taboos against murdering helpless human beings” (Mann 2005, 167). This began with the dispossession of the Armenians which was clad in legality, and thus suggested a degree of legitimacy (Üngör and Polatel 2011, 58) and then continued with the legitimacy was given to the expulsion of the Armenians as it was framed as a deportation or relocation. Furthermore, nationalist narratives in which the danger posed by rebellious Armenian groups fed into people’s perceptions of the necessity of their actions (see Göçek 2015, 225).

Also, the subjugated role of the non-Muslim Armenians within the Ottoman millet system and their unequal status which was legitimised within the doctrines of Islamic ideology (Dadrian 1995, 4-5) underlined this facilitative framework. Within this framework the discrimination and subsequent destruction was able to be framed as legitimate the Armenians could be portrayed as “antagonists” of the Muslims (Dadrian 1995, 125). Furthermore, at the local level, it was local religious authorities whose authority “played a pivotal role in motivating and legitimizing the massacres” (Dadrian 1995, 150; see also Balakian 2010, 146), giving religious absolution for these crimes and also underlining the state lines of authority discussed in the previous section. Through declaring the slaughter of the Armenians a religious war (‘jihad’), it became legitimate to kill people as a normal act of war, as testified by a police captain (Balakian 2010, 146), even stylising it to a “sacred religious obligation” (Balakian 2010, 145). Hence, ideology functioned here in facilitating people’s participation by removing moral inhibitions which individuals would have had and even creating a positive, religiously-legitimated reason to participate.

### *Sadism*

While there are no direct reports of sadism in the trial verdicts, there are multiple references to how the newly instated people who came to perpetrate the genocide were “cruel inhumane individuals” (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 307) and to the “atrocious and cruel”

(Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 294) manner of the killings. Furthermore, although survivor testimony is more susceptible to interpreting perpetrator motivations as vindictive and based on hatred – as explained in more detail above – the actual actions of the perpetrators can be gauged with a higher degree of veracity. The degree of gratuitous violence involved in the deportations and killings speaks to the presence of at least some sadistically motivated perpetrators within the group. If the perpetrators had only been motivated by opportunistic, coercive or obedient motivations, there would have been no necessity for gratuitous violence, no need to torture both physically and psychologically many of the victims before killing them.

*Facilitative factors – group dynamics*

As detailed above in the discussion of authority, some state and CUP officials were able to remain in their positions without effectively and actively propelling the genocide forwards. However, this inaction in and of itself also had an effect on other perpetrators in their perception of the legitimacy of the crimes, because the inaction signals to others that the person is not registering moral inhibitions or their dissent towards the policy, thus inadvertently and implicitly legitimating it. This is epitomised in the trials of the Responsible Secretaries, when the president of the tribunal is quoted as having said to Dr. Mithad Bey: “It is maintained that in your region and in others, many vile acts took place. And since you did not undertake any measures, your indifference encouraged the initiators and gave them license to expand the scope of their cruel activities” (Yeghiayan 1990, 145).

*Facilitative factors – moral disengagement through distance*

In the Armenian genocide, the key facilitative factor which enabled moral disengagement was distance. While the deportations for the most part started through actions of local officials who were geographically as well as socially and possibly even emotionally closer to the victims, the actual killings nearly always occurred either outside the towns in arid areas and “out-of-the-way and concealed places” (Dadrian and Akçam 2011, 294), or at sea where people were thrown overboard (Trabzon). Furthermore, the killing groups were most often not made up of individuals who were from the same place as the victims as they had already been deported onwards (Altınay 1919, 23; quoted in Dadrian 1991, 121). Thus any possible emotional or social ties which could have inhibited people from killing were removed.

This distancing process began earlier even in the dispossession of the Armenians which was clad in legal veneer, which also allowed the involved bureaucrats to take on a specific role of loyal civil servant. This legalisation of the dispossession created a framework for the implementing individuals which “structured their daily work and provided an impersonal, administrative-bureaucratic mask to hide behind. [... Furthermore, it] relieved the conscience of the perpetrators by placing the ultimate responsibility with the central authorities” (Üngör and Polatel 2011, 58).



*Facilitative factors – dehumanisation*

A further facilitative factor attested to broadly is the systematic dehumanisation of the Armenian population in the years before the genocide through state actors and media, which was augmented as a consequence of the early massacres of the Armenians and the deportations which reduced the humanity of their appearance and thus legitimised the bad treatment in the eyes of the perpetrators (Bjørnlund 2009, 22; see also Balakian 2010, 295). However, Theriault (2007, 30) convincingly argues against this omnipresent assumption of dehumanisation by demonstrating that many perpetrators actually attempted to maximise the suffering for the Armenian victims, which provided satisfaction precisely because of their status as humans. It is necessary for the human capacity for emotion and trauma of the Armenians to be “assumed by perpetrators in order for many forms of cruelty, such as raping of women and girls in front of husbands, siblings, or their children, to be considered meaningful” (Theriault 2007, 31). While Theriault does agree with the successive reduction of human features as cruelty mounted, he sees this gradual dehumanisation as a process in which enactment of cruelty which had the capacity to dehumanise was the foundation for the pleasure experienced by the perpetrators; he graphically phrases this as a process “through which genocide perpetrators consume the humanity of their targets by converting it into their own pleasure” (Theriault 2007, 31).

Other facilitative factors are also present in the Armenian genocide, such as the brutalisation of soldiers through standard training (see Riggs 1997, 127-128; quoted in Bjørnlund 2009, 21) which made it easier for them to participate in such horrific acts. Also, the use of sanitising language such as referring to massacres as ‘cleansing’ (Balakian 2010, 139) made it easier to frame the killing in a positive light. Other facilitative factors have already been alluded to above in the discussion of the motivations. First and foremost there are the moral legitimisation of the deportations and the genocide through tapping into narratives of revenge and resentment already palatable to many of the rural population. This was not the motivation for their participation but instead it provided the framework for legitimacy within which their actions could become perceived as good and just.

## **Discussion**

How does the data analysed from the Armenian Genocide compare to the motivations and facilitative factors which have been unearthed for perpetrators of other genocides, as described in my previously developed model? Most importantly, it should be noted that there were an exceptional number of opportunistic motivations found for why people participated in the Armenian Genocide. These were all based on the idea that participating in the deportations and killing enabled people to reap the benefits of being a member of the perpetrator group. These benefits range from the receiving the opportunity to loot Armenian money, possessions and property for personal material gain, the possibility to rape or receive a forced bride, access to Armenians as free labour, or career progression (or the avoidance of demotion) for loyalty. Lastly, a key incentive was the opportunity for criminals to gain freedom from prison in exchange for their participation. This long list of

opportunistic reasons certainly dominated the trial verdicts, as well as secondary source interpretations of why people participated.

Nonetheless, further motivations can be identified also. Referring to the in-group-focused motivations obedience to authority and coercion played a role, and the ambivalent nature of authority is particularly interesting in this context. However, there was little evidence of horizontal social influence in the form of peer pressure or conformity, as was important especially in the Rwandan genocide (Fujii 2009).

Next, out-group-focused motivations were primarily located in the realm of ideology, which played a role as a motivation for some, and provided a legitimacy framework for most, particularly drawing on the subjugating categorisations of the millet system, the ideas of an Islamic jihad and Turkish nationalism.

Regarding intrinsic motivations, the primary motivation of opportunism has already been mentioned, but this was also complemented by evidence of sadism. No specific data indicated the motivational power of genocidal roles, status or the thrill and excitement of participation. Further, regarding facilitative factors, particularly ideology as a legitimating factor, distance as morally disengaging and group dynamics were shown to have made individuals' participation easier.

Altogether, participation in the Armenian Genocide appears to have significant similarities to other cases, albeit with its own idiosyncrasies. While the motivations certainly have slightly different manifestations in this case to in other cases, they also appear to be quite comparable with other cases. The prevalence of opportunistic motivations which interact with a framework of legitimacy created by religious and state authorities shows how easy it can be to motivate ordinary people to become perpetrators of genocide, and this is an important lesson to heed in thinking about avoiding genocidal violence in the future. As and when new and better primary sources emerge it would be important to continue this systematic investigation of perpetrator motivations in the Armenian genocide in an attempt to find out whether certain motivations occur more frequently than others, whether more often in combination with certain others, as well as how these perpetrators themselves perceived their motivations at the time and since. This paper here has not been able to provide a final answer on these issues but has attempted to bring together the work done so far on perpetrator motivations and look at it through the perspective of a model to judge the comparability of perpetrators in the Armenian genocide to other cases. While this comparability is certainly given, much work still remains to be done, both in understanding the perpetrators and their motivations, as well as deriving lessons to be learned for the future from these.

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