Explaining genocide and the question of theory[1]

One of the most surprising things about Sabby Sagall's **Final solutions: Human nature, capitalism and genocide** is the fact that it was published in 2013. Perhaps because of the "post-theory condition" in which most people work today, had I been asked to guess the year of its publication based on the title alone, I would have suggested that it was written in the mid to late seventies – before an unselfconscious engagement with the very idea of a theoretical synthesis between Freud and Marxist, in traditional form at least, became virtually unthinkable. But on reading **Final solutions** I discovered that the work took the form of just that, of an unselfconscious – neither **Anti-Oedipus** *(1983)* nor anything on late or post capitalism is in the bibliography – attempt to give equal weight to Marx and Freud in generating a theory of genocide. This theory, given the presence of psychoanalysis and historical materialism must, and explicitly does, attempt to make one of the most challenging of all close connections, that between the psyche and the social, and not just in a particular case but in such a way as to sustain a theory applicable to more than one genocide.

Sagall's is not, therefore, a modest book but it is one which, reassuringly, displays an awareness of the extent of the challenge it has taken on, one which has, moreover, found a clear design or structure for the text which mirrors the ambitious task the author has set himself.

After an introduction in which the meaning of genocide and the problems its conceptualization presents, Sagall

Susan Van Zyl

Division of Psychology, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg

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explores the limitations of previous scholarship. Two balanced parts each consisting of four chapters follow. The first part is entitled the "Origins of human destructiveness", while the second is entitled "Four modern genocides". These four modern genocides (the Nazi holocaust, the Native American, Armenian, and Rwandan genocides) take the form of what might be called case histories – correctly in my view. While it is tempting to pay attention to these cases, I want here to look at the bigger picture, at the nature and form of this attempt to synthesize Freud and Marx in theorising what is undoubtedly the most terrible of human group pathologies. And if a grand synthesis of this kind is to be attempted, then genocide does seem to be one of the most fitting of test cases.

In order to capture something of the trajectory of the argument presented in **Final solutions** I will focus on aspects of the Introduction, the short linking section entitled "Human nature, psychoanalysis and history", and in the last two pages of the book called "Summary and Conclusion". It is these sections, which hold the ambitions of the text together and in doing so present its bold theoretical objectives explicitly.

In the Introduction, Sagall tellingly critiques what he calls the external or objective approach. This approach is one he defines as focusing on social, historical and economic factors, such as war, colonization, and the relationship between the state and the perpetrators but crucially he critiques this approach as mounted from within the confines of a single discipline, reflecting in this what he calls the fragmentation of the social sciences. This approach, he believes, is inherently flawed because an understanding of genocide will be possible "only by organically linking elements from history, social theory, economics and psychology" (p 2). Having made it clear that in his view a theory of genocide must necessarily draw on different disciplinary traditions, Sagall explains that his emphasis on Marxism (capitalism) derives from its status as both a philosophy of humankind and of human history (p 2).

While he has put much in place in these opening pages, Sagall confesses he also needs an account that provides insight to human violence and must therefore complement this "external" account with one derived from a theory of the inner world, that is, to the question of human nature. Is there something about human nature itself which needs to be taken into account if we wish to understand genocide?

 Asking this question and answering it positively is absolutely central to the book and where Sagall turns for allies in the attempt to fill in the gaps is unsurprising. In looking for a type of psychoanalysis that can "trace character and family structures back to their historical roots and class backgrounds" (p 6) he turns to those who will ground the entire first half of the book: to two generations of psychoanalytic Marxists, to Reich, and then from the Frankfurt School, to Marcuse and Fromm, and finally, to all those "who tried to

salvage the lost dimension of Marxism i.e. subjectivity" (p 8). Freud, Sagall argues, may link the psyche to the social via the family but he ignores the manner in which the family acts as the mediator of larger socio-historical processes. The answer, again as might be expected, must lie in an amalgamation of the two, in the integration of psychoanalysis and Marxism. He ends the section with an attempt to distinguish between different kinds of genocides, and introduces the complex question of what counts as genocide or, at least the type of genocide he is theorizing, which he describes as "irrational or character-based" genocides (p 10). As an example, despite I imagine, arguments to the contrary, Sagall will later defend the view that the "extermination" of native American peoples is a genocide and is character-based in that it would not have happened if it were not for the particular character of the settlers (p 113).

If the Introduction prepares the way for the approach and main argument that Sagall goes on to present, then the brave three page section (pp 104-107) entitled "Human nature, psychoanalysis and history" attempts, as its title suggests, to pull the first four chapters of part 1 (those written from the internal perspective) together. In this section he raises, as he must given his characteristic position, the crucial question of how the internal perspective may be combined with the external perspective, before embarking on his four case histories. Without an indication of how history can be articulated with human nature and psychoanalysis, the two parts of the text would fall apart. The crucial linking section starts with the classic critique of Freud centring his essentially ahistorical position and, in a way that represents the need to seek out the historical, Sagall refers to one of the most quoted lines in all of psychoanalysis in which Freud, comparing the way in which Oedipus is treated in **Oedipus Rex** and **Hamlet***, refers to the difference in the mental life of people from the two widely separated epochs of civilization adding that "the changed treatment of the same materials reveals the whole difference in the mental life of mankind" (p 105).

It is very tempting to explore the implications of Freud's suggestion in detail, and to compare his point with those of the others Sagall quotes because the idea that human nature changes with changes on the social level, as suggested by Freud's use of the word "secular", has far-reaching theoretical consequences. However, at this point, it is enough to say that this is an idea accompanied by a number of difficulties and to note that it leads Sagall to adopt a strange and unusual view of the thing he calls human nature. What Sagall wants to show is that broad changes in psychic formation accompany most substantial social transitions and, in doing so, he goes on to argue that the unconscious, the Oedipus complex, the triad of sectors, the id, ego and super-ego, good and bad objects, the life drive, destructiveness, the paranoid-schizoid position and projective identification form "a useful psychic inventory" (p 105) in the attempt. The term inventory is telling and part of a bigger problem. There is a price paid for putting

all these terms in one basket, and in particular of confusing changes in what may be described as the *form* of human nature and changes in the *content* of its components. For example, pointing to changes in the content of the superego such as that particular violations of social norms are likely to produce unconscious guilt in a particular person or particular group is one thing, but saying, with Klein, that there was *no* superego prior to "pre-ancient or pre-Hellenic tribal society" (p 105) is quite another.

While Sagall does not, explicitly at least, argue that there was a period in which there was no superego he comes perilously close to doing so. In his discussion of what he calls "levels of sociality" (an idea derived from Marx), he says we can meaningfully talk of higher and lower levels of sociality and compares what he calls early collective communities with a strong sense of community and weak individuality with modern societies, characterized as ones in which there is strong individuality and a weak sense of community. If this appears to be more or less accurate, more controversial is the way in which he relates this point, not to sociology or social psychology, but to psychoanalysis, what is more to a Freudian meta-psychological premise.

Sagall argues that prior to capitalism individual psyches were held together by the concentric structures of the collectivity, whereas separating individuals from others and the isolated nature of individuals under capitalism, appears to need a strong superego which has to hold all these constituents together. Where he wants to go with this idea is clear but in saying that "[w]e can perhaps say the internal ego-superego-id structure looks different depending on the type of society we are examining" he is opening up a question at the heart of any attempt to synthesise Marx and Freud (p 106). And this broad claim clearly needs to be made concrete; a phenomenon which is able to bridge the gap between the space of agency and that of structure, a phenomenon that allows humans to both determine and be determined by social structures, is what he is looking for. And, for Sagall, this phenomenon is that which he calls "social character".

Aware of how much is at stake in the credibility of social character, not just as an epistemological tool but as a reality (and true to his "anti specialism") Sagall provides what can be described as three kinds of evidence for the existence of social character. He refers to psychoanalytic theory such as the work of Wilhelm Reich, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Heinz Kohut, to sociological or socio-psychoanalytical survey evidence such as Fromm's studies of the German working class and of the Mexican village; McKenzie's analysis of the English working class deference voter; Goldthorpe and Lockwood's studies of "bourgeoisification" among car workers; and to historical studies of Puritanism, such as E P Thompson on Methodism. Finally, he refers to literature such as realist novels which identify individual characters that are also social types of the kind encountered in the works of Dickens, Balzac and Dostoevsky (p 77).

Looking at this list one cannot but raise the question of the different status or nature of its ingredients. In order to prove the reality of social character, and with it the viability of his theory, he uses those that are advocates of this very theory, such as the 'political' Freudians, sociologist and historians working in the materialist tradition, and realist fiction. Sceptics, and as sympathetic as I am to Sagall and the courage he displays in an environment not predisposed to generating theories, would say that this is clearly loading the dice, and they would have a point.

But, and to once again give Sagall his due, I think it is only fair to return to the last two pages of the book entitled "Summary and Conclusion" (pp 247-248) where he puts his cards on the table in a final flourish. After all it is these principles, what they are and, crucially, how they link, that can be used as a measure of how Freud and Marx can be combined and, in this, indicate the extent to which his theory stands or falls. In other words, it is here that the very idea of a Freudo-Marxist synthesis, one that can sustain something called a *theory* of genocide, can be tested.

The Freudo-Marxian synthesis and the question of theory

In the short section entitled 'Summary and Conclusion" Sagall presents the five principles upon which his theory is based. Firstly, he asserts that there is such a thing as "human nature", the second is that there is a phenomenon called social character and the third he describes as the human capacity for destructiveness. The fourth point he makes is that "genociders" occupy a common class position, as they belong, that is, to an aspiring middle class. Finally, he sees capitalism, and the individualism and greed it generates, as being at the heart of the problem. Reflecting on each of these principles in some detail seems essential in order to show how the linking or knitting together of the psyche (Freud) and the social (Marx) actually works in **Final solutions**.

Sagall's description of human nature is at first reminiscent of Freud in that it is described as a cluster of needs, drives and capacities that is present in all human beings and in all societies either actually or potentially. But to give Marx his proper place in the synthesis, Sagall cannot rest with the characteristically Freudian feel of needs and drives and goes on to describe human nature as constituted by "self-creativity through the labour process, a collective activity that has resulted historically in a succession of different modes of production" (p 247). Crucially, he adds here that human beings are inherently social and, as if in preparation for explaining an act that looks as antisocial as genocide, argues that this inherent sociality is open to being distorted or obscured by class character. Human nature, he argues, never appears in a pure form but is "filtered though successive social structures that shape its manifestations" (p 247).

It is interesting to note at this point that Sagall does not include destructiveness as an essential ingredient in human nature but as a separate (his third) principle and, in this, differs in important ways from Freud who, in both his (Freud's) first and second two instinct theories, sees aggression as fundamental. A destructive force is, for Freud, an ever present, conflict-generating, force that must always be reckoned with while for Sagall it is a (mere) potential. For Sagall, although there are moments in the concluding pages of the text that seem to be more Freudian than others, the question of what it is at the individual/species level (natural destructiveness) that might "cause" genocides is always seen as predisposing humans to violence but it is identifiable social conditions, and a particular social character, which together move human destructiveness from its position as a potential to being realised in the actual.

There are many questions associated with "social character", a concept or idea that does much of the linking work Sagall needs. But it clearly has to be filled in, to be identified as a particular phenomenon, in order to work in all his cases if it is to become an ingredient in a theory. And an obvious way to go towards creating content for the idea of social character in Sagall's project would be to turn to class, the now largely neglected step-sister of social analysis. He does turn in the direction of class but with a revealing difference. With Freud and destructiveness, and terms like animal instincts, drive and energy in the mix, he writes that "[s]ocial character is the equivalent in the emotional domain of ideology in the intellectual" (p 247).

This is clearly a good move because it introduces an element of drive or affect into the mix that is social character adding not just affect *per se* but what could be called *an affective style* to accompany a class position. When attempting to capture the particular social character of the communities responsible for genocide, Sagall identifies the English puritans, the Scots, Irish, the young Turks and the Nazis. But being an aspiring middle class is not enough for Sagall. Genocide is the result of the irrational violence of social classes or communities that have suffered extreme distress, and a major denial of human needs, which mobilize human destructive capacity which, in turn, expresses itself in rage and, crucially, is projected on to outgroups (cf p 248). Here Sagall brings in the impact of external events, crises or other profound social changes but, importantly, this turn to the particulars of history is not, as might be expected, radical or thorough going. His basic idea is that the way a particular group deals with the events is determined by the social character of that particular (but still identifiable) social group and its location in the social system. And having made this Marxist move to class, Sagall adds another of Marx's attendant phenomena, that of capital.

Finally, then, Sagall adds the social and economic factors characteristic of capitalism to his armature. To what sound like ordinary psychological features he adds the

individualism, greed and competiveness of people under the domination of capitalism and makes direct reference to the alienation of human labour and the commodification of human beings and their relationships (p 248). There is evidence, Sagall argues, that much in social life and repression today is closely related to the production of commodities. It is capitalism, or a particular class of subjects in capitalist societies not human nature in and of itself, that makes genocide possible.

Sagall and the others

What is particularly interesting about the Sagall book today and its appearance a decade or more into the 21st century? As I hope to have shown, **Final solutions** (2013*)* is interesting in its own terms, in the detail as much as in the structure. But to my mind the bigger question arising from his work relates to the idea that with the help of historical materialism and psychoanalysis – still perhaps the grandest of grand theories – it is possible to build a *theory* of what might be the most visible and disturbing social pathology of modern times.

How might a fair response to this endeavour considered on a wider level begin? It would be possible, for example, to start by looking at the failures of this theory to fit examples other than Sagall's own cases. Along these lines one could focus, as Sagall himself does (almost in passing) on the Rwandan genocide which does not sit well with the idea that "aspiring middle classes" are to blame for genocide and as a result this component of the theory does not work as well in this case as it does in the other three examples. This should itself be worrying for any attempt to theory build; any account that is not just explanatory but also has real explanatory reach.

One could also ask questions about Sagall's theory-making procedure itself. Was it incidental that the first part of the book presents the theory that grounds the analyses of the particular cases or was it the particular cases that led to the development of the theory? Sagall's title and the organization of the book together suggest that the cases are illustrative of the need to show a *theory at work* and that the concepts or principles guide the analyses. In other words, he unashamedly starts from particular first principles; those derived from Freud and Marx, and tests the capacity of his particular synthesis of the two to illuminate his examples.

While a critical approach of this kind is clearly legitimate, I would now like to look at the wider question, that of what might be called "explaining genocide", by comparing **Final solutions** with Zygmunt Bauman's **Modernity and the Holocaust** (1987/2008), and with Mahmood Mamdani's **When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism and genocide in Rwanda** (2001), each of which focuses on a particular genocide. I have chosen these two substantial works to compare

with Sagall's primarily because they explore genocides which are cases in **Final solutions** and are works referred to by Sagall himself**.**

Looking at these two works, I suggest, raises a question central to those forms of inquiry that attempt to bring the social and the psychological together, but in ways that are not easily described as traditional works in social psychology or even in psychosocial studies of the kind explored, and ably defended, by Stephen Frosh (2012). Is genocide a fitting object, perhaps the perfect object, in which the social and psychological must be combined in any attempt to explain it? In other words, even if the grand figures of Marx and Freud are not involved, is there necessarily as common sense suggests a mixture of the social and the psychological (or psychopathological) where genocide is the topic or object of enquiry? What do these two authors do with genocide and, more important for my purposes, if they too distribute the psychological and the social in particular ways, how do their accounts compare with Sagall's?

Even at first glance what both Bauman and Mamdani share with Sagall stems from the role particular social formations play in accounting for genocide. However, on the level of what might be called the size and relative powers of these social formations the two works differ significantly from that of Sagall.

Although Bauman (2008) writes only about the Holocaust, the result resembles that of Sagall in that he too approaches this particular genocide theoretically or rather on the basis of a theory of a particular social formation. This social formation, which Bauman describes in broad brush strokes, he calls "modernity". Mamdani's equivalent of a social formation, which is also described in broad terms, is what he calls "settler society", a term that describes a society seen to be the product of two different social formations – those of the colonizer and of the colonized. Crucially for purpose of comparison, this settler society, Mamdani argues, produces a virulent form of what might now be described as "identity politics" imposed on the colonized by the colonizer, one which remains active in post colonial society. In that the features of their particular social formations are seen to provide the explanatory dimension each of their accounts of the origins of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, Sagall, Bauman and Mamdani share a common orientation to the question of genocide. But when it comes to the details they differ in revealing ways.

Bauman (2008: 5) starts his reflections by critiquing the what he calls the orthodox position in sociology which saw genocide as a "failure of modernity, of the civilizing process itself". He dismisses the emphasis on anti Semitism in particular and, in doing so, dismisses one version of holocaust scholarship – that based on the "uniqueness hypothesis" which suggests that it is the result of an especially virulent form of

anti-Semitism supposedly characteristic of Germany in particular. Instead Bauman raises the bigger question, that of Modernity itself, which entails approaching the Holocaust as a revealing symptom, a symptom which tells us something important about "our" society. He argues that an understanding of the nature of the society we occupy today is crucial to understanding genocide and that the holocaust must be seen as a "rare but yet significant and reliable test of the hidden possibilities of modern society" (Bauman, 1987: 12). As Dominique La Capra (1994: 91), in **Representing the holocaust** puts it, for Bauman "genocide is a possibility that modernity contains".

As part of his central argument, that the holocaust is a symptom of the dehumanization of the social by modernity itself, Bauman, presents what I see as three main arguments. These points are often captured in the chapter titles and the other powerfully evocative phrasing that characterizes **Modernity and the Holocaust** (1987). The first point Bauman makes in order to distinguish modern genocide from other genocides is that modern genocide is genocide "with a purpose"; it is part of the grand vision of a better society, of what he calls "obsessive modernization" (Bauman, 1987: 91). Genocide, he points out, differs from "other murders in having a category for it object" (ibid: 227).

Secondly, but clearly linked to the point above, Bauman sees genocide as related to the nature and extent of human movement in modernity and the production of social distance between groups it engenders. Modernity itself provides, in other words, the preconditions for the "ferocity of the boundary keeping urge" that the holocaust reveals (ibid: 35). The holocaust is the result of the success of a "strategy of estrangement" (ibid: 65).

Thirdly, and this point is covered in a memorable and a conceptually rich chapter entitled "Towards a sociological theory of morality", Bauman argues that genocide must be linked to the suppression of moral responsibility in modernity. Making a point crucial to his analysis as a whole, he critiques the traditional view that it is society itself that produces moral behaviour. How is it, he argues, that we became incapable of thinking of a society that does not produce morals but destroys them? Morality, he asserts, is not the product of society but something society, the social itself, can manipulate.

This destruction, exploitation or redirection of morals, is a process (one which Bauman refers to as "adiaphoization") in which actions, affects or thoughts which should have a moral status, have been rendered "morally neutral" (ibid: 208). The processes in modernity he sees as responsible for this neutralization of morals are ones Bauman argues are all around us in modernity. He identifies, for example, the substitution of rational criteria for ethical ones when it comes to judging actions, the emphasis on know-how or expertise that results from the increasing significance of technology

and the silencing of the moral urge that the killing by remote means – that takes the place of face-to-face combat in war – has brought (cf Bauman, 1987: 193-196). Immoral conduct and the distortions of morality must not, therefore, Bauman reiterates, be seen as the malfunctioning of society. Like the Holocaust itself, they must be seen as its product. Faced by this undoubtedly counter intuitive position and the cogency of many of the details Bauman uses to defend this view, a crucial question follows. If morality is not social in origin, and can be silenced and dampened by a certain types of social formations, what is it and where does it come from? In another striking, but not entirely convincing move, Bauman argues that morality has pre-social origins.

In order to ground this point, he uses the existential ethics of Levinas arguing (with Levinas) that being with others is a primary and central aspect of human existence. This human attribute, he argues, naturally brings responsibility with it and this responsibility in turn locates morality in the "primary structure of the *intersubjective* relation". Crucially then, immoral behaviour must not be seen to be the result of social malfunctioning but, by implication, where immorality is present it is the *"social administration of intersubjectivity"* that must be held to account (ibid: 182-183). The implications of this position, or rather the presence of this position from the start, is what grounds Bauman's fundamental orientation to his task, and that is the view that explaining the Holocaust involves an account of modernity's deformations of an essential human attribute. And the differences between Bauman and Sagall come vividly to the fore on this point.

While Sagall and Bauman share the view that specific social formations – capitalism in the one case and modernity itself in the other – are central to an understanding of genocide, their views on the "human nature" and the psychic structures it manifests are significantly different. For Sagall, as might be expected from the important role psychoanalysis plays in his work, human nature in its original, what Bauman calls its pre-social form, is in opposition to the restraints imposed by culture (by the other), and dominated by the pleasure principle and the demands for immediate satisfaction of animal needs and drives that are characteristic of it. The child resists the entry into culture and only has a nature that can be described as human once a culture or society has, as it were, negotiated or facilitated that entry – a negotiation which necessarily involves the internalization of that culture's morality. But for Bauman, "human nature" is on the side of morality, is humane in the strong sense of the word, a humanity which different societies can either build upon or deform.

While this difference between Sagall and Bauman is indeed fundamental, there are other points of comparison that need attention. It is important, for example, not to forget what comes with the *extent* of their explanatory claims. While Bauman focuses on a particular genocide, a distinctively, some would say uniquely, modern genocide,

Sagall, in his attempt to generate a theory of genocide, includes those that occurred in different periods and in different social configurations.

Remembering that the Rwandan genocide, as Sagall himself is aware, has to be massaged to fit his model, what does this suggest about genocide in societies that do not belong, at least not entirely, in the category "modern" in Bauman's sense? Nor do these, at least wholly, belong in the category "capitalist" in Sagall's sense. How does the task of explaining genocide in "settler societies" or "settler colonialism" (cf Adhikari, 2010) compare to that undertaken by Sagall and Bauman? And this is where Mahmood Mamdani's **When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism and genocide in Rwanda** (2001) is especially interesting.

Despite clear differences between their overall approaches, Mamdani's starting point resembles that of Bauman. Just as Bauman argues that the Holocaust must not be explained by way of the psychology of the Germans in particular, Mamdani (2001: 18) argues that thinking about what he calls the "unthinkable" should not begin with what the Rwandan genocide "can tell us about Rwanda and Rwandans". Explaining the Rwandan genocide is important because of what it can tell *"us"* (by implication all of us) about ourselves as political beings, as "agents with a capacity to tap both the creative and destructive potential in politics*"* (ibid: 18). The terms "politics" and "political beings" are central here. It is not the destructive potential in human beings that is emphasized by Mamdani but that in politics in those dimensions of the social associated with, to put it loosely, power.

In approaching the task of explaining a genocide in settler society Mamdani defines settler and native as *political* identities and argues that neither of these identities is especially prone to violence. In fact the violence in settler colonies is characterized by its *"shifting position from settler to native"* (ibid: 33). This shifting of violence from one group to another, Mamdani argues, begins with the colonial state's politicising of indigeneity, a process which animated distinctions between indigenous and non indigenous and, crucially, polarized them. The origin of the violence is connected to how Hutu and Tutsi were constructed by the colonial state "with the Hutu as indigenous and Tutsi as alien" (Mamdani, 2001: 34).

Of particular importance in this process, and perhaps most interesting for his overall project, is the particular route the construction of different identities took under colonialism, that is, the racialization of the difference between the Hutus and the Tutsis. The Tutsis came to be seen not just as a different ethnic group from the Hutus but as a different, and a superior *race.* Using what came to be called the "hamitic hypothesis" (ibid: 35), the colonial state set a search for origins in motion which came to play a central

role in Rwandan politics. In a way reminiscent of the title of his later work, **Define and rule** (2013), Mamdani's argument is that the colonial state linked questions of power and privilege to different groups based on what it perceived as their fundamental or natural (racial/ biological) differences.

Befitting his position as an historian, Mamdani argues against the search for "original" identities, whether they be biological or cultural, making the important point that there is no transhistorical category of either kind, and perhaps most important, he argues that the violence in post colonial Rwanda results from "the failure of Rwandan nationalism to transcend the colonial construction" (ibid: 34). The genocide must therefore, he argues, be understood in relation to the shifting of the meaning of Hutu and Tutsi as "every time a new power has seen fit to move them from political identities to polarised hidden identities with no middle ground" (ibid: 59).

While it is tempting to explore the role which identity, or different identities, in detail (Mamdani describes three identities; the market based, cultural and political) play in his work (p 21) what is interesting here is the extent to which Mamdani's thinking on identity can be related to Bauman's 'boundary-making urge' and, finally, the relationship between these phenomena and genocide.

Although it is obviously risky to align and perhaps blur vocabularies in this way, it seems to me that Bauman's boundary keeping and what is often called "the production of difference", and Mamdani's politically motivated production of competing identities in Rwanda do have something crucial in common. And it is easy for us, especially today, to see Sagall's class as just another often troublemaking identity. But if it is the case that these three authors (and many others by implication) see the "production of difference" as an important ingredient in explaining genocide, how much of a contribution to a wider understanding of genocide have they made?

After all, because genocide is definable as categorial murder, questions of identity, in the broad sense, are easy ingredients to explain with all three of their cases; merely add gender to class, nation and ethnicity/race and you have all the potentially competing identities we now routinely think with. But is this fair criticism?

Conclusion

To go back to the beginning and to the basics: what is fundamental to genocide is both the *category* and the *murder* in "categorial murder". The task of explaining genocide certainly and minimally requires an account of the production of difference but it also requires an account of when, why and how *(targeted) murder* by one group of people is inflicted upon another group as the "final solution".

Watching their explanations of genocide unfold what is clear is the careful attention Sagall, Bauman and Mamdani pay to the categorical, to the role of questions of identity and of difference. In addition, all three authors see not just the "mobilization of difference", but the attribution by one group of dangerous, inhuman, immoral characteristics to another, as an alibi for that group's extermination. What is more, all three authors describe particular social formations (capitalism, modernity, colonialism) as conditions underlying genocide, or even predisposing a people to genocide. But what of the three authors' accounts of violence, of the mass murder, be it hidden or vividly visible? Not all mobilizations of difference, even of an extreme and potentially conflicting kind, lead to mass murder. In my view, the problem that remains in most attempts to explain genocide is the question of violence.

On the level of logic alone is seems obvious to me, as it does to Sagall, that explanations located in one dimension or aspect of the problem – within a particular disciplinary dimension for example, is never enough. In order to explain genocide you need not just social (in the wide sense of the term) accounts of what leads to genocide. You, surely, need the *psychology* of mass violence to come in strongly. But as Sagall, Bauman and Mamdani agree, this should not be the psychology of a *particular (*murderous*)* people, nor should it be the abhorrent psychology of their chosen victims.

But saying what it is you *don't* need is not, of course, the same as saying what you *do* need in your explanation. And it is here that Sagall, who argues for the role of a theory of "human nature", comes to the fore. It is this human nature, the role of psychoanalysis in his account, the Freud in his *Freudo-Marxian synthesis*, that is so interesting. If you give Freud a place on centre stage in your theory, that theory has one of violence, as it were automatically, at its disposal. Freudian psychoanalysis, brings the violence, the natural aggression, be it directed towards the other or the self, with it. Violence is always close at hand for those who think with psychoanalysis – it is only a moment a way. In other words, the question of violence acquires another shape in psychoanalytic thought, or it should do. Instead of "what is it that explains this violence", it becomes "what conditions that *previously kept violence at bay have(now) failed* to perform this function?"

It is here that Sagall, armed with a theory, makes a bold and full attempt to explain genocide. With Freud strongly present, Sagall has a theory of human nature that includes violence. And with the idea of "social character" (read Marx coupled with Freud) he suggests that some classes, in their struggle for survival to maintain their very humanity, are, as it were, predisposed to genocide. The radicalization of their suffering, coupled with the thwarting of their natural, self-actualizing aims by more powerful groups, explains the move from frustration to violent, vengeful action.

But after all that careful theorising, and some practical success in his four cases, something strange happens at the end of **Final solutions**. Faced with the need to advocate a cure, to cast blame upon something his theorizing has identified as a target, human nature (that supposedly unchanging bedrock of our species) becomes infinitely flexible in Sagall's hands. Repression is no longer needed and the state, commodities and capitalism can be withered away. If you synthesize Marx and Freud in the right way, Sagall can now think a solution other than those abhorrent *final solutions* – a cure by way of socialism. The final paragraphs of the Sagall book are particularly telling. He writes:

> "There is evidence that our psychosexual life and the family contexts and personal ties through which it is expressed are shaped by the commodity relations of capitalist society. It therefore makes sense to posit a link between unconscious repression and the production of commodities. If so, isn't repression historically amenable to human, political action, contrary to what Freud argued? And can it not be seen, therefore, to be a phenomenon whose manifestations, like the state, could progressively wither away or at least be mitigated under socialism." (2013: 48)

And if this is not surprising enough, writing in 2013, Sagall ends his brave work in a way that neither Bauman 15 years earlier, nor Mamdani at the turn of the 21st century, could possibly have done. On the last page he quotes an extraordinary passage from Trotsky whom he (Sagall) describes as "sympathetic to the new science of psychoanalysis" and, crucially, as someone who, "argued for the possibility of uniting Marxist and Freudian visions" (p 248).

> *"The Nature of man himself is hidden in the deepest and darkest corner of the unconscious …. The human race will not have ceased to crawl on all fours before God, kings and capital, in order later to submit humbly before the dark laws of heredity and a blind sexual selection! …. Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself (sic) to a new plane …. Social construction and psycho-physical education will become two aspects of one and the same process. All the arts – literature, drama, painting, music and architecture – will lend this process beautiful form …. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe or a Marx. And above this ridge, new peaks will rise."*

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