3

Narratives of groups that kill other groups

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> When I send the flower of German youth into the steel hail of the coming war without feeling the slightest regret over the precious German blood that is being spilled, should I not also have the right to eliminate millions of an inferior race that multiplies like vermin?
>
> Adolf Hitler (in Rauschning, 1940: 129, quoted by Fest, 1973: 680)

Introduction

This chapter examines the relation between otherness and violence by inquiring into the language used to incite and defend group combat and genocide, in particular the discourse of sacrifice used to sanctify insiders and demonize outsiders. What is the meaning of narratives tying the immortality of the state to the sacrifice of, and killing by, its members? How do life's boundaries of birth and death figure in these state narratives of killing? The chapter argues that when groups hold out the promise of immortality tied to group membership, this enables a paradigm of sacrifice that accommodates mass, systemic violence directed against groups distinguished by hereditary or religious differences.

The first-person narratives referenced here are by Adolf Hitler, as well as President George Bush, his military command, soldiers and a group I call 'warriors'. The narratives include the language justifying decisions to risk one's own life and to kill others on behalf of specific group affiliations. This is a unique commitment, one inconsistent with the individualist competition for economic gain. Carl Schmitt, who believes the concept of 'the political' implies

the imperative to die for one's friends and kill one's enemies, writes:

> Under no circumstances can anyone demand that any member of an economically determined society, whose order in the economic domain is based upon rational procedures, sacrifice his life in the interest of rational operations. To justify such a demand on the basis of economic expediency would contradict the individualistic principles of a liberal economic order . . . To demand seriously of human beings that they kill others and be prepared to die themselves so that trade and industry may flourish for the survivors or that the purchasing power of grandchildren may grow is sinister and crazy.
>
> (Schmitt, 2007: 48)

This point, and most of Schmitt's work, originates with G.W.F. Hegel's critique of English social contract thought. Hegel argued that hypothetical political societies promising individual survival and property rights cannot account for states' ability to rouse armies to kill and die (Hegel, 1967). A patriotic citizen's decision to risk his life in war is inconsistent with the social contract theorist's axiomatic assumptions of self-interest and especially self-preservation.

This chapter reviews the means by which nation and religion create the structures appealing to their members' desire for immortality, not economic self-interest. I then analyze texts indicating how this desire for immortality manifests, paradoxically, in discourses of sacrifice, including the expectation that members sacrifice their own lives. These appeals are complemented by appeals to more instrumental incentives to commit group violence. The comparison of narratives offered by political leaders, soldiers and warriors highlights the different emphasis each places on sacrifice versus material rewards. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Georges Bataille's *Theory of Religion* (1992) and describes the appeal of sacrifice in war by reference to the concept of melancholia.

Comparing Schmitt and Hitler

Schmitt was an influential conservative intellectual in the 1920s and 1930s who became a Nazi acolyte; his essays supported Adolf Hitler's tactic and goal of war against liberal

individualists. Schmitt insisted on the incommensurability of instrumental rationality with the imperatives of the political categories 'friend' and 'enemy'. Hitler, similarly, according to his biographer, said it would be a '"crime" to wage war for the acquisition of raw materials' (in Fest, 1973: 607).[1] For Schmitt and Hitler, economics was in the realm of the profane, and politics the realm of the sacred, of sacrifice.

The striking similarities in the Weltanschauung Hitler shared with Schmitt are important because Schmitt's work was embraced by neoconservatives, especially within the Bush administration, who admired his forthright rejection of liberal-democratic norms (Horton, 2006). Likewise, cynics on the Left have been using Schmitt to prove that Thrasymachus was right all along, i.e., that governments exist to promote their own authority and not the rule of law, much less justice (Agamben, 1998; 2005). If we understand that Schmitt's and Hegel's world views were of a piece with Hitler's, then we see just how impossible it is to countenance a Schmittian politics, even for Leftist cynics and especially for liberals. The repulsion in these circles Hitler's regime provokes today would suggest that the theory supporting it must be rejected by those on the Right and Left alike.

Schmitt writes that only an 'existential threat to one's own way of life' – a threat to the preservation of one's group identity in distinction from others – can motivate combat: 'There exists no rational purpose, no norm no matter how true, no program no matter how exemplary, no social ideal no matter how beautiful, no legitimacy nor legality which could justify men in killing each other' (Schmitt, 2007: 49). Similarly, Hitler observed that the Nazi struggle is 'not waged with "intellectual" weapons, but with fanaticism' (in Fest, 1973: 241), and that the 'prototype of a good National Socialist [is one who would] let himself be killed for his Führer at any time' (in Fest, 1973: 241). Both of them believe that, in the realm of politics, individuals subsume their own interests, including their own lives, to the national sovereign and see war as nationalism's telos. And both Schmitt and Hitler define war as the telos specific to politics. Schmitt writes: 'A world in which the possibility of war is utterly eliminated . . . would be a world without the distinction of friend and enemy and hence a world without politics'

(Schmitt, 2007: 35). According to Hitler, war is the ' "ultimate goal of politics" [and] the "strongest and most classic manifestation" of politics' (quoted in Fest, 1973: 609).

Schmitt sketches the difference between 'the political' and other motivations but does not explain why some alliances require death. Why would people find unsatisfying commitments short of deadly combat? Hitler answers this question with a special clarity (see below), albeit the account holds for contemporary so-called liberal regimes as well, and echoes Hegel's idealization of an individual's identification with the state, such that the individual's life is absorbed into that of the nation. One's existential identity remains intact, in perpetuity, as long as the nation-state persists. On the occasion of an officer surrendering at Stalingrad, Hitler echoes Schmitt's views of how an 'existential threat to one's way of life' motivates self-sacrifice:

> Life is the nation; the individual must die. What remains alive beyond the individual is the nation ... So many people have to die, and then one man like that comes along and at the last minute defiles the heroism of so many others. He could free himself from all misery and enter into eternity, into national immortality, and he prefers [surrender and] to go to Moscow.
> (Hitler, quoted in Fest, 1973: 665)

The willingness to die for a friend and kill an enemy that Schmitt says is emblematic of 'the political' has an origin in two kinds of groups: first, those based on metonymies of birth, i.e., political societies that use kinship rules and rules sanctioning birth in a territory for their perpetuation; and, second, religious groups, in which membership gives one access to possibilities of reincarnation or an infinite life in heaven. Membership in both groups may require, for the perpetuation of the respective groups, the literal destruction of the other and even one's own fellow nationals or believers in war.

Additional narratives of group violence

Deaths of others

Schmitt's theory and Hitler's speeches crystallize the incitements to die and kill for a group appearing in less publicized

appeals to, and accounts by, soldiers. Before turning to these narratives, it is important to recognize that they are largely one-sided engagements with the brutalities of systemic violence. Perhaps it is a symptom of the other's dehumanization, but the stories committing one group to systemic violence against another group are largely silent on the deaths of the other. The recitation of risks to self and country are foregrounded, and the supposedly noxious, dangerous, threatening qualities of the other attacked, with little mention of the corollary details of mass killing. Hitler, who had vilified Jews for decades, seems to have thought it both unnecessary and prudent to avoid connecting his anti-Semitism to a programme of extermination. That the Nazi policies of denationalization, deportation and mass execution might have been an open secret does not change the fact that one of Hitler's highest officers maintained until his death that he was unaware of this (Sereny, 1996), nor that Hitler went to great lengths to hide the mass civilian graves of Jews and other 'vermin' from the Germans and Allied powers, including devoting scarce troops in 1944 to exhuming and burning corpses buried earlier (Fest, 1973: 697). While there is considerable circumstantial evidence that Albert Speer knew that Jews were being slaughtered, the question of his and other Germans' knowledge of the Jewish catastrophe is just that, and not the nature of a de facto, publicly avowed certainty similar to knowledge of Germany's levelling of English towns. This caution exemplifies concern on the part of the regime that revelation of the Jewish genocide and mass killings in the East could turn the German public against the Nazis, not to mention lead to war crimes charges. It suggests the slaughter of others, if they are civilians, is not fit for narratives available to public consumption, while accounts of killing enemy soldiers, damaging supply lines and blowing up munitions facilities are considered good propaganda.

Death, their own deaths in particular, captures the attention of groups that kill, while the fact of others' deaths is not so much rationalized or celebrated as it is treated as a strategy for gaining exclusive domination through obliteration towards the end of an eventual forgetting of the other.[2] Governments of all sorts try to avoid details of the body count. Perhaps the most obvious symptom of this is

the ease with which the US government could make it official policy not to report the number of people, including civilians, the military kills in war. This suggests that citizens in a nominal democracy would be so uninterested in this information it could be withheld easily.[3] The reason for the policy presumably is fear of a backlash against high levels of civilian deaths, although the absence of any pressure for the government to change this policy also indicates a general apathy about the deaths of others. Each and every US soldier who dies in Iraq or Afghanistan has that fact and often many of the details of their demise reported in most major print and television outlets, but the number of civilians killed by the US military is close to a state secret and can be gleaned only by inference and private services, such as iraqbodycount. org. During the first Iraq war, the US would not release information on even the number of Iraqi soldiers killed, which was estimated to be close to one hundred thousand. Nonetheless, it is important to see this link between risking life and taking life. Whether as a result of self-defence, retaliation or simply conquest, those who undertake the systemic destruction of others know this will be a mutually deadly proposition, and their narratives exhorting these risks reveal this.

Producing the other

To understand the fundamental dynamics of the so-called 'state of exception' that results in torture at Abu Ghraib and detention camps in Cuba, and that even leads to the illegal racial profiling and deportation of US-American citizens (Stevens, 2008), an excellent place to start is with the rules producing the other in the first instance. The domestic other is created by and through the idea of the political other, always on the verge of being an enemy who may invade, either directly with troops, or surreptitiously, through the immigration of aliens and intermarriage. The latter's phenomenology of legal contingencies highlights difference's ontological impossibility. People are well aware of how migration, borders and marriage may affect the demographics of a geographical territory and the geography of a particular demographic, resulting in new permutations of both. To take

one obvious example, the US Northwest used to be the Mexican Northwest. The majority of the city names in many states of the western US attest to this. However, far from providing an object lesson on the impossibility of an original, pure, single hereditary origin, these examples provoke a futile but harmful shoring up of difference's authenticity.

Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction appears as well in current discussions of the state of exception during war that use Schmitt's vocabulary to attack pseudo-liberal democracies by claiming they, too, remove government actors from the rule of law (Agamben, 1998; 2005). However, Schmitt, Agamben and those using their work fail to recognize that the rule of law creating citizens and aliens is necessary and often sufficient for most state violence, including laws creating the sorts of friend and enemy who will kill and die as such. For example, the main source of panic in the USA over immigration, and the vigour with which the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is attempting to deport undocumented residents, are a direct consequence of national membership rules, not an abstract assertion of emergency powers. To return to the example of Mexico – the current source of panic about the other in the USA – until 1848 most of the western United States belonged to Mexico (Nevins, 2002). If these borders still were in place, the national language of about half the country would be Spanish, current 'illegal aliens' in the southern USA would be legal citizens, and the Minuteman on the contemporary southern border would be in the middle of Mexico. But as a result of the US government's invasion of Mexico City and its threat to occupy the entire country, the Treaty of Guadalupe was signed, and the borders were moved to their current locations. This establishes the aliens and others of today's popular imagination and produces the DHS detention centres with their dehumanizing and deadly consequences. Rather than its abstract production of rights or law, the sovereign's myths of origins and eternity, which establish boundaries of self and other, are the key to understanding war and less violent means of including and excluding its members. There are many means by which the official categories of friend and enemy are mobilized to take a country beyond prejudice and into war. A few of these are discussed below.

Describing war: calculations of sacrifice and benefits

Media coverage

When the mainstream media discuss the combatants' motives in Israel/Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq, journalists tend to focus on the emotions of the political leaders urging Muslims to join in violent struggle against non-Muslims and specifically US and Israeli presence in the Middle East. Most accounts voicing complaints about US and Israeli occupation, for instance, ignore the emotional undertones and resentments informing the US, Israeli and European commitments to fighting. This lacuna implies that Muslims fight because of emotion, whereas Europeans fight because of economic imperatives or rational Enlightenment values, including democracy. In the last few years, American social scientists have been churning out books and articles at a furious pace, trying to understand what leads to the most extreme self-sacrifice in war-torn regions of the Middle East, Asia and Africa, and to explain the suicide missions (SMs, in the parlance of these writers) that rational choice theory cannot accommodate. The introduction to a collection of essays examining suicide missions echoes Schmitt, except that, for the editor, this finding is unexpected and alarming:

> SMs seem to breach the dictates of instrumental rationality: agents should seek to employ means that do not involve their own death . . . Furthermore, SMs also violate the notion, popular in modern Darwinian thinking, that extreme altruism is to be expected only towards one's kin; some suicide bombers do say that they do it to save or revenge family or friends, but most say that they do it for their group and its cause.
>
> (Gambetta, 2005: ix)

A contributor to the collection acknowledges this and then says that Middle East violence is *sui generis* and inexplicable (Elster, 2005).

However, most suicide missions have not been in the Middle East, and the number of US volunteer soldiers who have died in Iraq since 2003 (3080) (Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, 2007) is far higher than the number of non-US combatants who completed suicide missions in this period (889).[4] The willingness to die for a cause is different from a desire to die for a cause, but they lie on the same continuum,

whereas the loss of one's life is categorically different from a willingness to support one's government by paying taxes or risking economic hardships. There seems to be an orientalizing desire to make the sacrificial mission of killing others symptomatic of the mysterious psyche of organized violence in the Middle East, but this characterization ignores the dynamics motivating the violence pursued by supposedly civilized countries (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007).

War had a long history before Osama bin Laden fought with mujahideen against the Soviet Union. The techniques that he and other political leaders in the Middle East use for organizing groups to use violence also have much in common with those used in Christian countries. Al-Qaeda, as well as the US Army, relies on invocations of national honour, God and sacrifice. One of the most widely cited political science articles on suicide missions asserts they are used because they work better than instrumental appeals: groups that use suicide missions find it easy to recruit and are able to leverage results in their political negotiations (Pape, 2003).

In reviewing narratives of groups that kill it should be apparent that these do not follow from decisions of individuals. President Bush may be 'the decider' in starting a war in Iraq, but he is not the storyteller giving his protagonists their choices. He did not decide that God would choose the Israelites, that Jews would insist on themselves as a national minority in Europe, that Hitler would try to eliminate this nation, and that Israel would use the same kinship rules that Hitler used, existing from time immemorial, to try to eliminate the Muslims in Israel's newly sovereign borders; all of this defines the ideological terrain of present wars in the Middle East, if not worldwide. Nor did Bush decide that some causes and not others lead groups to kill other groups. Bush is a protagonist, one actor in a political improvisation performed within highly structured constraints.

One way to see the role of sacrifice in the US narrative is to review the appearance of the word 'sacrifice' in newspaper articles about the war, in contrast with other justifications. For a rough sense of the relative frequency of themes of sacrifice versus instrumental compensation appearing in President Bush's statements about the Iraq war, I conducted searches on Lexis-Nexis for articles between 1 January 2003 and 12 June 2007 that had 'Bush' and 'soldiers' in the first

Table 3.1 Results from Lexis-Nexis search of articles published in the USA between 1/1/03 and 6/12/07, with 'Bush' and 'soldiers' in the headline or first paragraph

	with 'sacrifice' in full text	with 'benefits' and not 'sacrifice' in full text
Northeast	292	236
Southeast	352	223
Midwest	167	157
Western	365	270
TOTAL	**1176**	**1075**
LA Times	6	7
Washington Post	40	25
New York Times	55	43

paragraph and 'sacrifice' in the full text. I compared these results, regionally and in specific newspapers, with those for 'Bush' and 'soldiers' in the first paragraph and 'benefits' in the full text. The results are in the table above, with the relevant passage from the first article quoted to randomly assess the articles' contents. I conducted these searches to assess the relative importance of ideas about sacrifice and instrumental benefits in war discourse.[5] I compared these word frequencies because I assumed that the relative importance of sacrifice versus instrumental gains as war incentives could be inferred by comparing the frequency of the words indicating these commitments.[6]

Passages using 'sacrifice' from the first hits for the New York Times, Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times

New York Times: From President Bush's 2007 Memorial Day speech (29 May 2007):

> 'Those who serve are not fatalists or cynics,' Mr. Bush said. 'They know that one day this war will end, as all wars do. Our duty is to ensure that its outcome justifies the **sacrifices** made by those who fought and died in it' (Bush cited in Gay, 2007: A16)

Washington Post: An officer preparing his unit to depart for Iraq (25 February 2007):

'It's worthwhile if we win,' Kauzlarich said. 'But to **sacrifice**, there's got to be a purpose. And if we don't win, then our **sacrifices** are going to be in vain.'

(Finkel, 2007: A1)

Los Angeles Times: From President Bush's 2007 Memorial Day speech (29 May 2007):

They 'are not fatalists or cynics', he added. 'They know that one day this war will end, as all wars do. Our duty is to ensure that its outcome justifies the **sacrifices** made by those who fought and died in it.'

(Bush cited in Drogin, 2007: A8)

Passages with 'benefits' from the first hits in the New York Times, Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times

New York Times: From article on contractors' high death toll (18 May 2007):

Many contractors in the battle zone say they lack the basic security measures afforded uniformed troops and receive **benefits** that not only differ from those provided to troops, but also vary by employer.

(Broder and Risen, 2007: A1)

Washington Post: From article on creation of War 'Czar' (17 May 2007):

As operations director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lute was a leading skeptic of the troop increase during the review that led to Bush's new strategy in January, according to some sources close to the process, but he reflected a consensus among senior officers that it would produce a temporary **benefit**, at best.

(Baker and Wright, 2007: A13)

Los Angeles Times: (9 March, 2007):

Clinton, a New York Democrat who is running for president . . . She called for a new GI bill of rights modeled on the broad array of **benefits** offered to World War II veterans.

(Newsday, 2007: A27)

Analysis of Lexis-Nexis search results

These results indicate that the United States media are 10 per cent more likely to reference themes of sacrifice than

economic benefits in their articles on war. The randomly selected samples above suggest that these are not pseudo-results but indications of meaningful differences. For instance, President Bush's speech on Memorial Day emphasizes the importance of sacrifice, while Senator Hillary Clinton pushes for an increase in soldier benefits and does not emphasize a desire for sacrifice. The relative parity of the themes suggests that benefits are a key concern, perhaps because the volunteer army must rely on instrumental benefits for recruitment, discussed below.

The frequent appearance of 'sacrifice' in war articles contrasts sharply with the relative absence of this theme in other discussions of US commitments. For instance, a search for 'economy' rather than 'soldiers' in the title or first paragraph, using the same range of dates, yielded 948 results for 'sacrifice' and over 6000 for 'benefit'.[7] This disparity is consistent with the insights of everyone from Hitler to Schmitt to Bush: the president exhorts his soldiers, and an officer his troops, by a vision of worthwhile sacrifice. They know that, in a situation in which a soldier is asked to choose between his money and his life, this is not a time to push only the rewards of instrumental benefits. This is the narrative that political leaders use to overcome the impasse of a Hobbesian-minded actor fearful, above all, of a violent death.

Army recruitment narratives

Political leaders may be rallying the troops with images of honour and sacrifice, but their lackeys in the military–industrial complex trying to put warm bodies in the trenches have other tools at their disposal as well, especially instrumental incentives (Olson, 1971). President Bush might not want to taint his cause by association with the incentive of cold cash, but that's exactly what the US Army is using for its recruitment campaign. When operationalized by advertising in magazines and television, the symbolic incentives are not those of tradition and patriotism, but NASCAR races in which the uniforms and car are used for 'US Army' product placement (US Army, 2007).

Three images rotating in the centre of the 'Go Army' recruitment web page inform viewers about an exciting

'NEW OFFER' that will give them $50 000 in extra benefits for signing up for two years (US Army, 2007). As one returning soldier says, 'The military is selling a lot of educational programs and giving a lot of bonuses away. So you've got more kids coming in now for the college money, but they don't know that you're going to do a tour in Afghanistan or Iraq' (Rieckhoff, 2007: 74). In another advertisement, the emphasis on instrumental incentives is further illustrated: it lists benefits from money to health care and even vacation as reasons for joining. One box states 'Earn Extra Cash for Retirement' and describes different tax advantages of military service. An additional recruitment image shows the US Army campaign to reach out to traditionally pro-military, southern white men through $16 million annual sponsorship of a NASCAR team (Bernstein, 2005: D1).

Soldier narratives

In addition to narratives from leaders pursuing warm bodies to fight their wars, there are narratives of the soldiers themselves. The etymology of soldiers is given under the heading of 'solid'. From the Latin *soldus*, 'contr. of the coin *solidus*, becomes OF *sold* (var. *soud*), payment, esp. a soldier's pay, whence OF-MF *soldier*, adopted by EE . . .' (Partridge, 1958). This suggests that soldiers are hired guns. In distinction from the meaning of soldiers suggested by the etymology, however, modern soldiers' discourse of service appears to echo that of their political and military rulers. Perhaps the most extreme example of soldiers' willingness to obey orders and kill themselves during their missions is the Japanese kamikaze pilots who, en masse – and hence in distinction from ad hoc acts of battlefield bravery – agreed to a mission that was not just risky but suicidal. Their reasons are similar to those of leaders and soldiers in more mundane contexts. One who committed to go said:

> To bring the nation to victory was our thought, and what was that nation? The land of my parents, younger brothers, and sister. Can we bear seeing our country being invaded by outside enemies? That was what was on my mind.
>
> (in Hill, 2005: 25)

Another stressed he was dying for his country but not the specific government: 'I would set out this minute on a suicide mission to defend my family and country but I do not want to die for a man that calls himself Emperor' (in Hill, 2005: 25).

Some armies have members who volunteer, and others are conscripted. It may appear worthwhile, therefore, to distinguish the narratives that induce volunteers to join groups that kill from those that conscript their members by violence or the threat of violence. A reasonable hypothesis might be that honour and benefits would play a larger role in the former justifications of service, and the simple desire to survive would explain the military service of those who serve in conscripted units. However, the narratives bolstering support for volunteer armies and conscription armies alike seem similar. One possible explanation is that those countries with mandatory national service have the highest levels of nationalist sentiments predisposing military service, and those that have volunteer armies have the lowest. Universal manhood conscription creates intergenerational cohorts who experience their citizenship through the imagined collective experience of military service, one that would cultivate feelings of national attachment passed on to children. Conscripted soldiers thus might be more prepared than their counterparts in countries with a volunteer army to pursue military service for reasons of solidarity and honour, and not for individual benefits.[8]

In addition to the narratives of honour, benefits and peaceful altruism explaining why soldiers go to war, there remains a final, very important one: brute force. If Adolf Hitler or Saddam Hussein had not shot officers who deviated from orders or soldiers who deserted, it is not clear their militaries would have continued to fight in Russia and southern Iraq, respectively, in the face of such overwhelming losses and certain ultimate defeat. Günter Grass writes that the 'first bodies' he saw after he joined the SS were hanging from trees in German villages:

> Soldiers young and old in Wehrmacht uniforms. Hanging from trees still bare along the road, in marketplaces. With cardboard signs on their chests branding them as cowards and subversive elements. A boy my age – his hair, like mine, parted on the left – dangling next to a middle-aged officer of indeterminate rank,

or, rather, stripped of his rank by a court-martial. A procession
of corpses that we ride past with our deafening tank-track rattle.
(2007: 75)

Just as it is loyalty to comrades and not country that moti-
vates most heroism in the trenches (the hands-on fighting
and not the more abstract agreement to kill discussed above),
some commit themselves to violence because they feel they
simply lack a choice in the matter.

Nevertheless, even when death threats are a chief tech-
nique for recruitment, narratives of sacrifice remain
important for building an *esprit de corps*. At the very least,
these are important for the elite's coherence, necessary for
the unity and determination to threaten others. Adolf
Eichmann's work may have been undertaken for reasons that
were banal (Arendt, 1994), but this does not explain why he
was motivated to exterminate Jews rather than to improve
intercontinental train service for a pluralist and tolerant
Europe. Only nationalism can explain that.

Warrior narratives

Having considered the symbolic narratives of political leaders
and soldiers, it is time to move to a new narrative terrain,
that of warriors. Soldiers and warriors exist on a continuum
of violence that begins with the wounds from family
hierarchy (Stevens, 2005) and culminates in the annihila-
tion of civilians through mass extermination – by guns, fire
bombs or a radioactive cloud – all facilitated by dynamics
of otherness. The warrior narrative's embrace of a violent
death distinguishes it from the soldier's mere acceptance
of this as a possibility. Soldiers accept their own death and
that of others as the price of obtaining a better future for
their country or, as the US Army imagines, to obtain health
benefits. Warriors, in contrast, are protagonists in a narrative
where death is not feared but, paradoxically, exalted and even
desired. It is a happy sacrifice in both senses of the word,
that is, both pleasurable and 'happy' in the Austinean sense
of the felicitous use of 'sacrifice', where to give to the gods
correctly means doing so fully and with joy (Austin, 1962),
not, as soldiers do, with fear and perhaps regret. Al-Qaeda
exalts self-denial, and its leadership practises and promises
frugality, not vacation benefits (Bergen, 2001: 79).

The distinction between the soldier and warrior is not based on whether the combat units they serve support state or non-state groups. There may be members of the US Army who are moved by warrior narratives, just as there may be members of Al-Qaeda trying to keep their heads down while earning money for their families. As opposed to soldiers, warriors fully embrace their causes and the wars pursuant to them. Warriors offer specific, principled reasons for their decisions to fight, not vague notions of duty, much less a desire for college tuition. For example, a warrior named Doha from Qatar explains to an interviewer that he is risking his life in the Caucasus to establish an Islamic caliphate:

> I think of democracy as the last attempt by man to create an alternative law to God's law, the last one. An attempt that will end tragically for mankind. I think Churchill said something like this: 'Democracy is the worst possible system, but man hasn't invented a better one.' So maybe we shouldn't invent anything but just return to the law given by God.
>
> (in Mamon and Pilis, 2005)

The distaste for democracy as a failed European system is also clear among those joining Al-Qaeda from both Egypt and Pakistan, countries where democracy is largely associated with corruption (Bergen, 2001: 156, 204). A Palestinian art history student planning a suicide attack in Israel explains:

> At the moment of executing my mission, it will not be purely to kill Israelis. The killing is not my ultimate goal ... My act will carry a message beyond to those responsible and the world at large that the ugliest thing for a human being is to be forced to live without freedom.
>
> (in Argo, 2003:10, quoting Hala Jabor,
> in Bloom, 2005: 90)

Self-sacrifice is for making an honourable statement. Patrick Henry said 'Give me liberty or give me death.' For this art student, his own death is not an alternative to liberty but its means. The student's martyrdom is of a piece with ending Palestinian oppression by Israelis as well as liberating his own soul in heaven.

Such an instrumentalization of death (its use for public relations) paradoxically diminishes death's importance, not only in the Kantian sense that generalizing a socially corrosive practice diminishes its effectiveness.[9] In addition,

seeking martyrdom may thwart salvation. Vasantha, whom the interviewer refers to as a boy, says of his commitment to the Tamil cause: 'This is the most supreme sacrifice I can make. The only way we can get our Elam [homeland] is through arms. That is the only way anybody will listen to us. Even if we die' (in Joshi, 2000, cited in Bloom, 2005: 63). A Tamil leader, Prabhakaran, said in a 1993 Black Tiger Day speech of his fighters:

> They have deep human characteristics of perceiving the advancement of the interest of the people through their own annihilation ... Death has surrendered to them. They keep eagerly waiting for the day they would die. They just don't bother about death ... No force on earth today can suppress the fierce uprising of Tamils who seek freedom.
>
> (in De Mel, 2003, quoting Narayan Swami, 2003: 250, in Bloom, 2005: 64)

As much as principle plays a role in the thinking on suicide missions, the thoughts in some cases may be literally immature – 60 per cent of the Tamil Tigers wounded since 1995 have been under eighteen (Bloom, 2005: 65). Their youth does not diminish the importance of such narratives, but highlights their significance in a calculus for those who lack adult competencies.

On account of this need to maintain a space for sacrifice, for the giving away of something useful, there are rules for distinguishing an egotistical suicide from a putatively selfless martyrdom. To be martyred is not technically possible out of a desire for heavenly salvation, as it smacks of instrumentality and not spiritual devotion. Jon Elster writes:

> Although Sunni theologians 'perpetuated the veneration [of] the early martyrs of Islam ... they nonetheless rigorously opposed the cultivation of a contemporary cult of martyrdom in their respective societies by emphasizing the illegality of suicide and equating the seeking of a martyr's death with this'.
>
> (Elster, 2005: 242, citing Larson, 1995: 571)

Either death is a valued end, in which case potential Christian martyrs need to worry about prohibitions against simony, and Muslims about Islamic edicts against glorifying death, or death is not so valuable, and hence a warrior's sacrifice to achieve martyrdom is not possible as such.

This latter view is the one held by Georges Bataille. The warrior is happy to die only because he does not understand

his actions, a stupidity that devalues his risks. Bataille believes the warrior's 'strength is in part a strength to lie. War represents a bold advance, but it is the crudest kind of advance: one needs as much naïvety – or stupidity – as strength to be indifferent to that which one overvalues and to take pride in having deemed oneself of no value' (Bataille, 1992: 58). If death is normalized by warrior culture, then it is profane, and sacrifice mundane. For Bataille, the warrior is another variant of the soldier, and the narrative of sacrifice an aporetic ruse. The warrior culture makes human death in fighting seem similar to that of animals, i.e. cyclical, natural, practical. Such deaths are banal and cannot be offered to gods any more than one might offer them breakfast or one's yawn.

Bataille writes, 'The warrior's nobility is like a prostitute's smile, the truth of which is self-interest' (Bataille, 1992: 59). Bataille's analogy here is a little strange, because of the obvious lack of similarity between the nobility afforded the warrior and the abjection of the prostitute. The warrior's nobility is not an individual's demeanour but a social script that interpellates sacrificial decisions as noble. A prostitute's smile, also scripted, is parasitic on an original of romantic intimacy; the commercial aspects of the affair make the smile false. The warrior's nobility is itself the supposedly authentic moment, its lie betrayed by the impossible script itself. A better analogy would be between the warrior's nobility and the smile of the married wife, as both are metonymically connected and similar in their use of nation-hood for their supposedly redeeming sacrifice. The warrior and the wife affect love in and for the relationship requiring their subordination and abjection in the name of sacrifice and honour not afforded to the prostitute.

In his theory of religion, Bataille foregrounds the importance of sacrifice. According to Bataille, death without a religious significance is part of, and indistinguishable from, animal life: 'Because death has no meaning, because there is no difference between it and life, and there is no fear of it or defence against it, it invades everything without giving rise to any resistance' (Bataille, 1992: 40). In other words, although religion may lead to the sporadic deaths associated with sacrifice, a world without religion would mean death would be a merely mundane event, like falling asleep, and

not worth the effort of its avoidance. This is another axiomatic insistence about the world and human nature that philosophers are so fond of making, and as usual it is impossible to judge based on the evidence on offer whether this is true. Hobbes makes the opposite claim: religion immunizes people from their otherwise natural and healthy fear of death (Hobbes, 1996).

A melancholic planet

The account of soldiers' motives for risking death by killing others seems to contrast with the paradoxical desires of warriors. But there are some crucial family resemblances between them, in contrast with the narratives of other high-risk behaviours. Individuals risk their lives in, for instance, rock climbing, heroin abuse or criminal activities. But their deaths have different connotations than those of soldiers. When the hearty rock climber plunges to her death after losing her grip, her funeral will not celebrate her 'sacrifice', a tribute that will be paid to the warrior and soldier alike. This is because those who die for actions pursuant to the life of their nation or religion, regardless of their motives, are the chief protagonists in the melancholic narrative of the nation.

The laws and citizenry that produce families and nations all partake of and produce a fetishistic melancholy (Goodrich, 1995), one that either as a habit or through a macabre decision creates the other that is instrumental to the anxious pretence of an immortal self. The narrative requires the destruction of others within and outside the particular political society. To view the narratives of groups that kill in this light is to question the framework established through interrogations of the 'state of exception', 'bare life' and 'the camp' that has been stressed by Giorgio Agamben (1998; 2005) and those using his work to attempt a transition from Foucauldianism to political analysis. The modern state is of a piece with more ancient societies that used the same narratives.

The tragedy of the twentieth century is not that political life suddenly becomes inseparable from bare life, that it creates bare life, but (only?) that the technologies of

regulating the longstanding ties of nation have been bureaucratized and made seemingly more efficient. The introduction of birth certificates and other devices of bureaucratic states did not inaugurate the ability to create and track national populations, but rather continued nationalism's longstanding practices (Stevens, 1999). In the past, the substantive idea of a distinctly Athenian, Roman, French or English subject or citizen, for instance, was inherently compromised by the form of its realization in possibly fictitious stories about paternity, the ability of people to move throughout empires and even between them with little regulation, and the absence of centralized records.[10] Today's form of record-keeping, tied to the citizen's body (by fingerprints or eye scans), suggests a determinacy of nationality that is claimed to be novel and more accurate than earlier techniques, a self-serving proclamation of efficiency every regime in each epoch advances on its behalf. Older forms of biopolitics, since antiquity, also have included the census, birth and marriage records, and laws and officers controlling movement and nationality. These earlier and contemporary forms of biopolitics, pursuant to the melancholic desire to avoid death, are the source of war and, in turn, the state of exception and related sacrifices of and to the rule of law.

Notes

1   The parallels between Schmitt's rationalization of 'the political' and Hitler's discourse are too frequent and direct to be coincidental.

2   It is true that some Arabs in the wake of the World Trade Center's collapse appeared to have been celebrating victims' deaths, but even this appears more of a celebration of their foe's vividly symbolized waning power than a glee at the sight of dead American civilians. For a meditation on the psychoanalytic aspect of a nation's forgetting of the other, see Behdad (2005).

3   'Our efforts focus on destroying the enemy's capabilities, so we never target civilians and have no reason to try to count such unintended deaths', Pentagon spokesperson, quoted by Price (2003).

4   Based on data posted on Wikipedia (Suicide Bombings, 2007).

5   A scan of the headlines appearing from these searches suggests that many of those articles discussing 'benefits' are assailing the Bush administration for its failure to provide them. In other words, the articles with 'Bush' 'soldiers' in the first paragraph and 'benefits' in the full text are not about President Bush encouraging soldiers to serve because of the personal benefits they will receive, but narratives of soldier sacrifice,

either praised and appreciated or assailed for the absence of respect and compensation.

6 The Lexis-Nexis newspaper database includes over one hundred newspapers and journals.

7 The Lexis-Nexis database does not show exact numbers over 3000. To the 'benefit' search I screened as well for 'jobs' and 'not jobs'. As both of these had over 3000 results, I could infer that the total number for 'benefits' would be over 6000.

8 Günter Grass's (2007) account of his own service in the SS is consistent with this.

9 Widespread lying reduces people's credibility and makes it more difficult for lies to work in the future. Likewise, widespread suicide bombings desensitize populations to their horrors.

10 The Nazi state's reliance on legal categories for its eugenics programme was not unique. Indeed, the US government had endorsed similar goals during this same period, invoking the spectre of a weakened race as justification for miscegenation laws. For similar eugenics programmes relying on family law during this period in Europe see Quine (1996).

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