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Øystein Gullvåg Holter: A Theory of Gendercide
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Elements of the Buildup of Genocidal Aggression

I have discussed devaluation, regressive reevaluation, and buildup leading to aggression. The model can be useful for understanding the major lines of development, but it does not explain all. In the last part of the chapter, therefore, I outline some other important elements, most of them closely connected to masculinity dynamics and what happens between men themselves.

Humiliation and Shame

A sense of humiliation and shame, discussed elsewhere in this volume (see Evelin Lindner, Chapter 2), is often part of the background of conflicts that create genocide. In patriarchal and especially in paternalistic circumstances, when the head “loses face;” the body - the dependents, the followers, etcetera-will have to suffer. A ”shame culture” creates shame-related violence.

Modern society, however, is also (and I think primarily) a “guilt culture;” with a more internalized form of control. Shame and guilt often work together, but the guilt element is central to most of the conflict phenomena. If the Nazi holocaust had been driven by shame principles, there would be no need to kill millions of Jews. The symbolic loss of face and targeting of selected persons as examples, along the lines of traditional anti-Semitism, would have been sufficient. Instead, the industrialized killing of six million people through extreme inhumanity disguised as rationality points to a much more self-inclusive or egocentric power system than those typical of paternalist societies and shame cultures. In this logic, there is no moderation, only a final solution.

Gendercide and Masculine Hysteria

Hysteresis is Greek and originally meant being behind, being late, and being deficient as a result. In psychological terms, it can be seen as an acute anxiety rigidity positioning - a condition creating hysteria, an “uncontrollable out burst of emotion or fear;” according to Webster’s Dictionary.

When we regard masculine forms of hysteria, a neglected subject (for many traditional gender reasons), we should recognize that common terms associated with femininity-like “uncontrollable” and “irrational” may not fit. We would not expect hysteria to take the same forms among men. “Outburst:” for example, might better translate to ”controlled outburst,” as suggested by studies of domestic violence.³⁴

Masculine hysteresis and divergent, underrecognized forms of hysteria may be more important in wars and aggressive conflicts than is usually conceived. This line of inquiry is especially interesting as regards “pathological machismo” and similar hyped-up, aggressive masculinity processes, as well as the more calculated uses of men as “uncontrollable” in war.
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There is a psychological level where an inner killing is going on through external terror. One interpretation is that the male hysteric has to kill himself again and again, following the masculine line of “acting out.” He kills some of himself, or averts something in himself, through the death of others.

This is often reflected in authoritarian propaganda. There is a feeling of pollution; the man must cleanse himself. In the words of race ideologist Hans Gunther: "This act of overcoming ourselves is rewarded by the knowledge of participating in a spirit which. . . determines the course of natural selection."³⁶ This action/reaction can be seen as a low-key, background process in most "normal" masculinity of the twentieth century, not just as a particular feature of some men in certain contexts. It is when this process becomes personally extreme and sociologically encouraged, that is, when this masculinity is provided with power, money, and weapons, that the consequences of the syndrome become extreme. Men's blood lust in modern wars has mainly been the product of extreme circumstances, either incidentally among normal soldiers under dehumanizing conditions and bad officers, or in more institutional forms like specialized terror troops.³⁷

A pattern of anxiety, rigidity, and aggression is found also in civil life studies of men's violence against women. One type of violent man is described as rather more passive or weak than the male ideal, even too kind-until he hits a woman, usually his partner or spouse. There are also more traditional masculine variants, but these may be in the minority.³⁸ Further, "kind" men seem to hit women in quite specific situations, usually those that create a sense of panic. Most typical is a situation of acute sexual jealousy. The panic is associated with a feeling of loss of self or intense reification. It is as if the man freezes before he hits-shrinking into an absolute zero. The phenomenology of wife battering can be associated with the anxiety/rigidity just described.

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Victimization (Mobbing) and Scapegoating

Like the link between racism and sexism, victimization and scapegoating are so common that they can be seen as intrinsic to genocidal and gendercidal conflicts. Civil life research into mobbing processes is therefore relevant. If hysteresis, sociologically speaking, creates a tremendous pressure toward projection-getting rid of, "cleansing;" "giving birth through death" -it becomes more understandable why aggressive but still "rationalist" strategies like Nazism and Stalinism were also constantly linked to civil life and military mobbing and scapegoating processes. There was widespread anti-Semitism even in the U.S. Army in World War n. The projective system is a central part of the aggression itself. It may appear in seemingly senseless ways, like neighbors who become incoherent and start shooting at each other in war-torn Sarajevo, but this is often camouflage.³⁹ One cannot, for example, reduce Serbian "cleansing" in Bosnia and Kosovo to groups of men acting out old male hunting roles.⁴⁰ There is a strategic purpose at the core, and if it can be hidden behind notions of age-old warrior masculinity or other metaphysics, so much the better. The victimization process serves to give a policy of aggression its populist mask-a notion that all who support the policy will profit, great and small, as with the appeal to all Germans to share the confiscated Jewish property.

The victimization process, then, serves at least three main purposes: (a) to function as a terror weapon, (b) to widen the basis of support, and not least (c) to hide the political purpose of the regime. In the Nazi dream Reich, class difference would no longer be a problem; all Aryans would be powerful and free. Killing the Jews was the mobbing logic's answer to the problems of Germany and capitalism. As the victimization process escalates, participation is ensured by force. For example, prisoners are turned into informers. Many Nazi camp survivors carried a burden of shame Mobbing principles serve as inner control mechanisms in aggressive regimes, destroying democracy and solidarity. Studies of mobbing in civil life show how the victim is positioned as a target of projections, leading to a destruction of the sense of self. This indirect aggression is a primary cause of long-term psychological harm.

Creating Race-Gender

If gendercide is caused by a combination of power and masculinity processes, we may look at the intermediate positions. What are the links between the two? How are power imperatives translated into gender system terms, mobilizing men?

The early writings of Joseph Goebbels, to take one example, are filled with a mixture of socialist sentiment and reactive anxiety formations. "One class has fulfilled its historical mission and is in the process of withdrawal in favor of another. The bourgeoisie must yield to the working class:" he writes, in the authoritarian, machinelike conception of capitalism that was typical of the period. This is a merciless, anxiety-provoking development. He clings to the past and has "childish" fantasies. For example, he writes of how "a real woman loves the eagle." The outlet is through scapegoating: "There are absolutely no Jews here, that is a blessing. Jews make me physically ill" Goebbels even claims, "Jesus cannot have been a Jew."⁴²

Goebbels was able to give the impression of a great rationality compressed into simple, strong imagery, and he was therefore the ideal Nazi propaganda minister, although his quirks and increasing tendency toward paranoia diminished his propaganda impact, at least outside Germany. Goebbels's writings display the extent of the male embodiment of race-gender ideology; he becomes physically ill.⁴³

Humor is a way to defuse anxiety, and in parts of occupied Europe folk humor was an effective weapon against local fascist leaders, like Quisling in Norway.⁴⁴ Yet the German hysteresis position seems not to have allowed this development. The German people's sense of humor was mobilized against Hitler only at the end of the war.⁴⁵

Although gender images and metaphors often appear in the research on authoritarian regimes and aggressive leaders, the masculine side of this has not been systematically investigated. For example, Roger Griffin argues that "the mythic core" of fascism contains a "vision of the (perceived) crisis of the nation as betokening the birth pangs of a new order."⁴⁶ He does not ask whether this core contains an element of masculine hysteria, with "birth pangs" and similar expressions. In a context of hysteric masculinity, the leader must give birth to the new nation.