

Militias and Genocide*

Alex Alvarez
Northern Arizona University

Abstract

This paper comprises a discussion of the role of paramilitary groups, such as militias, in perpetrating genocide. The reliance of many states upon paramilitary style units poses some potentially important questions about the nature of genocide and other human rights violations as well as the governments that create and unleash them. After briefly defining these groups, I specifically explore the reasons why genocidal states rely so heavily on paramilitary militia groups when they already have military and police forces available. Using Arkan's Tigers and the Rwandan Interahamwe militia groups as examples, I explore the nature and functioning of these groups as well

* Alex Alvarez is an associate professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at Northern Arizona University. He is the founding director of the Martin-Springer Institute for Teaching the Holocaust, Tolerance and Humanitarian Values. His main areas of study have been in the areas of minorities, crime, and criminal justice, and the areas of collective and interpersonal violence. His first book, *Government, Citizens, and Genocide*, was published by Indiana Press in 2001 and was a nominee for the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences book of the year award in 2002 as well as a Raphael Lemkin book award nominee from the International Association of Genocide Scholars Book in 2003.

as the specific advantages to using these kinds of units. Also included is a discussion about the types of individuals who join these groups and what they gain from participation.

Examining different examples of genocide, one finds that governments engaged in perpetrating this crime frequently rely on paramilitary organizations to actually carry out much of the violence. This is true for the Armenian genocide, the Rwandan genocide, the Bosnian genocide, and in a more limited sense the Holocaust. Paramilitary groups have also been involved in many other types of politically motivated violence such as has occurred in East Timor in 1999 (Parry, 2002; Robinson, 2002; Trowbridge, 2002), Guatemala in the 1980s (Sanford, 2003), Brazil in the 1980s (Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo, 2002), as well as in other locations such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Uruguay, and Haiti (Blum, 1995). Most recently, militias known collectively as the Janjaweed have been implicated in genocidal violence in the Darfur region of the Sudan (Human Rights Watch, 2004). These paramilitary organizations, often referred to as militias or sometimes as death squads, are frequently implicated in the worst excesses of the regimes which they serve, including mass murder, genocide, rape, torture, and various other human rights violations. Trained in violence, yet not bound by formal codes of conduct, these groups are a particularly

deadly form of social organization. The reliance of many states upon paramilitary style units poses some potentially important questions about the nature of genocide and other human rights violations as well as the governments that create and unleash them. Why do genocidal states rely so heavily on paramilitary militia groups when they have military and police forces already available? Why go to the effort of creating these paramilitary organizations? What are the benefits of using these kinds of organizations? It is also important to look at the types of individuals who join these groups and what they gain from participation. These are the particular issues which this present paper addresses.

Military and Police Forces

The obvious perpetrators of genocide are the military forces and the law enforcement agencies that already exist in a society. They are large and capable organizations that are trained and equipped for violence. Members of the military, and to a lesser extent police officers, all go through a period of indoctrination and training in which they are taught to obey orders, to defer personal attitudes and values to that of the group, to develop loyalty to the organization, to foster an esprit de corps with comrades, and to be aggressive. They are also conditioned to fall back on their training in stressful and violent situations which can result in an almost mechanical application of force and violence (Dyer, 1985; Grossman, 1995; Keegan and Holmes, 1985). Additionally,

these organizations also have the necessary plans, equipment, tools, and resources already in place for many types of violent activities. These organizations, therefore, provide a ready made tool for genocide. In point of fact, however, we should recognize that military and law enforcement organizations are often the primary instruments of genocide and during the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, as well as the Cambodian, Bosnian, and Rwandan genocides, it was the police and military forces that, to varying degrees, perpetrated much, if not most, of the killing. Even for these well known examples, however, paramilitary forces aided and abetted the killing and in some cases were the prime agents of the genocides. Regardless of whether paramilitaries only augment the work of the regular military and police forces or if they are the major instruments of killing, paramilitary groups are a pervasive facet of genocide and of much of the political violence of the 20th century as well. Before proceeding, it should be useful to briefly discuss the nature and organization of these groups.

Paramilitary Groups

What are paramilitary groups? Often referred to as militias, these organizations are created in order to engage in acts of collective violence. They can vary in size from just a few members to several thousand and are primarily organized along quasi-military lines. Typically provided

with a modicum of military style training, these groups are often in the forefront of the killing processes and can be distinguished from regular military forces in a number of ways. First, modern military organizations tend to be rigidly organized along regimental lines while paramilitaries are usually less formally organized with a looser structure. The hierarchy of authority in military groups tends to be very clear and inflexible which is not true for paramilitary organizations. Paramilitaries may or may not assign rank or allow for promotion and membership often revolves around personalities and individual relationships rather than on formalized roles and ranks. In many ways, militias have much more fluid and dynamic social arrangements than traditional military or police forces. In sociological terms, militia groups tend to rely on the authority of leadership, while the military and police tend to rely on the authority of position (Barnard, 1961). Second, militaries are composed of professionals whereas paramilitaries are made up of amateurs. Modern soldiers, especially the officer corps, tend to be individuals who have made the study and practice of war into a career (Dyer, 1985). This is usually not the case for paramilitaries who tend to be, at best, enthusiastic novices. Even though professional soldiers and ex-soldiers may advise and train paramilitaries and in some cases even serve with them, as a whole these groups tend not to have the professional skills, ethos, and experience that regular military organizations possess. Third, the military also clearly and overtly acts on the authority of the state, while

the connection between paramilitaries and the government tends to be much more obscured. Fourth and last, paramilitary groups often act for personal gain and profit, while members of the military and police do not generally profit personally from their activities. In fact, historically, military and police forces have often been punished and even executed for plundering and looting, while militia groups have often emphasized these activities. One journalist described the Serb paramilitary this way, "...many Bosnian Serb militiamen who volunteered to fight their Muslim neighbors...saw their war service as a way to enrich themselves" (Gjelten, 1995, p. 137). Paramilitaries were notorious for robbing refugees and looting anything of value during the violence in Bosnia and Croatia (Malcolm, 1994; Vulliamy 1994). This is not to suggest that soldiers and armies have never pillaged and looted, but rather that it is not typically considered the norm.

In many ways, militias can be seen as a type of mercenary organization. Historically, mercenary groups have been perceived as military forces that operate solely for pay rather than out of loyalty or affiliation to a specific cause. Paramilitary groups seem to operate in a nebulous area between the two extremes of pure military and pure mercenary. Members of militia groups often believe in the cause in which they serve, be it that of a greater Serbia or Hutu dominated Rwanda, but also feel no compunction about exploiting the situation for personal gain. James Davis writes about private armies and classifies them into the

following five categories. First are Regular Foreign Units which are long term organizations such as the French Foreign Legion. These are typically composed of foreign volunteers who serve as a specialized part of a country's military. Second are Auxiliary Foreign Units which are similar in structure to the first category but are more temporary in nature. The Flying Tigers are an obvious example. Third are Private Military Companies which fit the mold of a classic mercenary organization. These groups, often composed primarily of former military men, sell their military skills to governments and organizations. Fourth are Foreign Volunteers who are individuals who serve in the military of other nations. Fifth, and last, are Freebooters. These groups serve not only governments, but drug cartels, terrorist groups, and anyone else willing to finance them. It is into this latter category that militia groups most closely belong (Davis, 2000).

A closer look at a few specific examples of militia groups may offer a better understanding of these organizations. Two of the most notorious paramilitary groups of recent years, Arkan's Tigers which was active in Croatia and Bosnia and the Interahamwe of Rwanda, illustrate many of the mechanics and methods of the paramilitaries.

Arkan's Tigers

Formally known as the Serbian Volunteer Guard, this group was better known as Arkan's Tigers (Arkanovci) and its leader was a man named Zelko Ražnatović who went by the nom de guerre "Arkan." Born in 1950, Arkan was involved in crime from an early age and was often in trouble for snatching purses and similar kinds of delinquent behavior (Judah, 1997; Sudetic, 1998). At some point his father, a military officer, asked the Yugoslav Federal Secretariat for Internal Affairs (SSUP), the secret police, to help get the young Zelko out of trouble with the law. The SSUP did come to Arkan's aid because they evidently felt that his criminal career had compromised him and made him vulnerable to their advances. The SSUP were able to successfully run Arkan as a hired assassin and it is believed that this organization also helped him escape from a number of European prisons (Judah, 1997). Never shy about his crimes, Arkan sometimes boasted about his assassinations of nationalist Albanian and Croat leaders, including a past executive of Croatia's oil company (Sudetic, 1998). He also engaged in bank robberies and in fact had been convicted of armed robbery in Belgium, Holland, and Germany. At one point he was actually on trial in Sweden, but members of his gang pulled weapons in court and allowed him to escape (Sudetic, 1998). He was also wanted in Italy for the murder of a restaurant worker but the SSUP ignored all international

warrants for his arrests and continued to protect him because of his services to them.

In 1986 Arkan became a pastry-shop owner in Belgrade while he continued to work for the SSUP. His involvement in the paramilitary scene began in October of 1990 when he became head of the official fan club of Belgrade's Red Star football team. He had been a regular at the games of the team and his shop was located directly across the street from the Red Star soccer stadium. The fan club was known as Delije and his involvement as leader of the fan club was encouraged by the Milošević government which wanted to harness the energy, nationalism, and violence of the young men who made up the club. This interest on the part of the government was also motivated, in part, by a desire to counteract the influence of Vojislav Seselj, a prominent dissident who was later to become a rabid nationalist and leader of a rival Serbian militia group. Accordingly, Arkan took over as head of the club and at the same time began to surreptitiously set up the Serbian volunteer guard. The primary members of what were to become the Tigers were, not surprisingly, derived from the most aggressive of the members of Delije (Sell, 2002). As Arkan describes this group:

We fans . . . trained without weapons. I insisted upon discipline from the beginning. You know our fans, they are noisy, they like to drink, to joke about. I stopped all that in one go, I made

them cut their hair, shave regularly, not drink – and so it began the way it should be (quoted in Judah, 1997, p. 187).

Instilling the beginnings of a military style discipline and appearance was the first step in transforming these soccer fans into a military style organization.

Even at this early stage Milošević was planning for the future and recognizing the need to violently contest the coming breakup of Yugoslavia. The paramilitaries were an important part of that strategy. Arkan was actually arrested by Croatian police in November 1990 after being caught with a car loaded with firearms and ammunition. He was in the Krajina region of Croatia helping to coordinate and arm Serbs who were interested in fighting against Croatia's independence. After being convicted in a Croatian court he was released pending a legal appeal whereupon he fled back to Belgrade and taunted that "You will never catch me alive" (Judah, 1997).

On June 2, 1991, Slovenia and Croatia declared independence and precipitated the violence that many had foreseen. One day after the declarations the Yugoslavian National Army (JNA) moved in and began hostilities. While Slovenia escaped relatively unscathed, the fighting lasting only a couple of days, the conflict in Croatia was much more prolonged and brutal and involved not only elements of the JNA, but Serb militias as well, including Arkan's Tigers (Silber and Sell, 1996). During the fighting in Croatia the

paramilitaries were implicated in widespread looting and pillaging. In homes abandoned by Croats, for example, the commanders of the Serb paramilitaries would scribble their names over the door to signify that they had taken over possession (Silber and Sell, 1996). Similarly, when violence broke out in Bosnia after that country's declaration of independence, the Tigers played a major role in the ethnic cleansing. Almost immediately after the Bosnian declaration of independence, Bosnian Serbs declared the *Republika Srpska* and began "cleansing" the territory they controlled of Muslims. Arkan's Tigers entered the town of Bijeljina, for example, on April 2, 1992 in what was to become the first case of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. Dressed in camouflage uniforms with ski masks and armed with automatic weapons, this paramilitary group rampaged through the town in a preview of subsequent cleansing actions throughout Bosnia (Burg and Shoup, 1999; Silber and Little, 1995). Bijeljina was a north eastern border town and had already seen its share of violence. There had been a number of lethal barroom brawls and the leader of the Muslim party had already been assassinated. This, however, was but a prelude to the violence that descended upon the town that April morning when the Tigers arrived. Rushing from home to home, they booted in the doors of many of Bijeljina's Muslim population. They targeted the educated, influential, wealthy, and prominent Muslims and dragged them out into the street where they were summarily beaten and shot. Over two dozen men and women were murdered in this fashion.

After installing a Bosnian Serb government, the Tigers moved south to Zvornik where they repeated this signature violence that would come to be known by the name of “ethnic cleansing.” Throughout the fighting during Bosnia’s ordeal, Arkan’s Tigers continued to play an important role in Bosnia.

It should be noted that the Tigers were not the only paramilitary group engaged in this violence. In 1994 a United Nations report listed 83 paramilitary groups in the former Yugoslavia. Fifty-six were Serb, 13 Croat, and 14 Bosnian Muslim (Judah, 1997). Even though he was indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Arkan was never put on trial for the atrocities he helped commit. Often giving interviews to journalists, especially during the later violence in Kosovo, Arkan was himself killed when he was shot in the Belgrade Inter-Continental Hotel in January 2000 (Scharf and Schabas, 2002). While the killers remain unknown, some have suggested that he, along with other paramilitary leaders, may have been killed by members of the Milošević regime intent upon removing potentially embarrassing witnesses.

Interahamwe

Much of the killing during the Rwandan genocide of 1994 was perpetrated by paramilitary groups such as the *interahamwe* (those who stand together or those who fight together) and the *impuzamugambi* (those with a single

purpose) (Taylor, 1998; Melvern, 2000). The reason for their creation relates to the political changes sweeping Rwanda in the early 1990's. In 1990 Rwanda was invaded by 2500 members of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) who were Rwandan exiles. Although small in number, the RPF fighters were well trained, well disciplined and proved a formidable fighting force. Although they suffered some major setbacks initially, they began having some success under the leadership of Paul Kagame, who would later become the post-genocide leader of Rwanda (Melvern, 2004). In 1991, President Juvenal Habyarimana, whose National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND) held complete power, conceded to mounting pressure on his regime and allowed the creation of opposition political parties, many of which also created youth wings in order to defend their party's interests and coerce support. This development was not to the liking of Hutu extremists including the inner circle of the President's government, a shadowy group known as the *Akazu* (Little House) whose members included his wife and various political and military leaders who used their influence and power for personal gain and corruption (Scherrer, 2002). The extremists opposed any power sharing agreements and accommodation with the Tutsi.

As the RPF began gaining some success after initial setbacks, the *Akazu* increasingly mounted propaganda attacks against the Tutsi led RPF and the country's Tutsi population (Edgerton, 2002). Violence, assassinations, and

localized massacres also began cropping up throughout the country. The training of the militia groups also intensified, the most important of which was formed in 1992 by President Habyarimana who began providing military training to young members of his party. This was the beginning of the *Interahamwe* (Des Forges, 1999). Many of the *Interahamwe* members were recruited from soccer fan clubs and in this way their genesis mirrors that of Arkan's Tigers. Thousands of young Rwandan men had been left jobless, alienated, and angry by the economic problems in Rwanda in the late 1980's and early 1990's and they congregated to the government and *Akazu* sponsored fan clubs (Gourevitch, 1998). Membership in the militia was appealing for many young men as Philip Gourevitch describes,

Hutu power youth leaders, jetting around on motorbikes and sporting pop hairstyles, dark glasses, and flamboyantly colored pajama suits and robes, preached ethnic solidarity and civil defense to increasingly packed rallies, where alcohol usually flowed freely, giant banners splashed with hagiographic portraits of Habyarimana flapped in the breeze, and paramilitary drills were conducted like the latest hot dance moves. The President and his wife often turned out to be cheered at these spectacles, while in private the members of the *Interahamwe* were organized into small

neighborhood bands, drew up lists of Tutsis, and went on retreats to practice burning houses, tossing grenades, and hacking dummies up with machetes (Gourevitch, 1998, pp. 93-94).

Events continued to escalate as the military situation worsened for the Rwandan government. In January of 1994, the head of the U.N. mission warned that assassination lists were being drawn up of prominent Tutsis and that militia weapons caches had been discovered (Klinghoffer, 1998; Melvern, 2004). Even in the face of this mounting evidence of planned genocide and even with the increasing vitriol of the radio propaganda very little was done. Conceding to increasing international pressure and military setbacks, president Habyarimana was finally forced to go to the negotiating table in Arusha, Tanzania after which peace accords were drawn up and power sharing arrangements instituted. On April 6, 1994 as Habyarimana and other dignitaries, including the president of neighboring Burundi, were approaching the Kigali airport, two surface-to-air missiles hit the plane, causing it to crash and killing everybody on board. While no firm evidence exists as to the identity of the perpetrators, most believe that it was the *Akazu* that was behind the assassination, unhappy as they were with the concessions Habyarimana had agreed to.

The militias quickly moved into action in Kigali, rounding up and killing all those who had been on their

death lists. Soon the massacres spread throughout the country as armed groups of paramilitary militias, police officers, and local politicians hunted out the Tutsi and then killed them. Roadblocks were also set up by the militias who would check government issued identity cards and then kill anyone who was listed as a Tutsi, as well as anyone they deemed suspicious, or who, in their eyes, looked like a Tutsi (Gourevitch 1998, Des Forges, 1999). At other times they would descend upon communities or places of refuge where Tutsi had gathered and orchestrate massacres, often encouraging and/or forcing local Hutus to assist in the killing. They also often worked in concert with police and military groups in perpetrating the mass murder of the Tutsi. The killings of these paramilitary groups were particularly gruesome as they frequently relied on machetes and clubs, the shafts of which were sometimes studded with nails (Taylor, 1999). Alcohol and mass rape often accompanied the killing as the blood splattered genocidaires of the *Interahamwe* and other militias went about their brutal business. The killings only ended in July of 1994 when the government fell and the RPF took power.

Reliance on Paramilitaries

The two groups discussed above, the Tigers and the *Interahamwe*, are simply two of the most notorious examples of this kind of genocidal organization. They are representative of many other groups as well and as was

pointed out earlier, these types of groups are a ubiquitous feature of genocidal violence. Governments that use these groups do so for some very powerful reasons.

Deniability

The first obvious benefit to relying on paramilitary groups is deniability. The military and police forces of a nation are always overtly an official and recognizable branch of the state. There is no concealing the fact that they are representatives of the government and their involvement in genocide makes clear the role of the government in the murder of the targeted population which those regimes are often at pains to conceal especially given the international legal developments of recent years. Increasingly, government officials recognize that they may, at some future time, end up in front of a tribunal because of their actions while in power. One writer summarizes the situation this way:

Today states find themselves under scrutiny from foreign governments, both allied and enemy; semi-governmental agencies such as the World Bank; and a multitude of nongovernmental organizations...Failure to meet international norms of behavior can have all sorts of serious repercussions today, including loss of foreign loans and investment,

diminution or loss of foreign aid, loss of tourist revenue, trade boycotts, etc. States wishing to use extreme forms of extralegal violence thus have every reason to appear uninvolved. (Campbell, 2002, p. 13)

Genocides don't just happen. Rather they are planned attempts to remove a population and as such display intent, forethought, and purpose. Genocidally inclined governments, therefore, are usually at pains to disguise their involvement and paramilitary groups provide them with what is sometimes termed "plausible deniability." Paramilitary groups are usually affiliated with political power structures and tend to be funded, trained, and equipped by that political party even though their relationship is often intentionally obscured and denied.

Even though the evidence is clear that Milošević had a direct hand in equipping and training the Tigers, he didn't hesitate to deny knowing Arkan when confronted about the actions of the militia (Doder and Branson, 1999), especially after 1992 when international pressure made it prudent for Milošević to distance himself from the paramilitaries (Sell, 2002). Slododan Milošević's style as a politician has been described in this way:

Milosevic liked to compartmentalize his activities, never giving any one subordinate too much control or understanding of the

bigger picture. He took extra care to keep a formal distance, to make it seem as if others, outside his control, were responsible. He was the type of politician who leaves no traces. . . . His style was conspiratorial. Everything was moved by word of mouth – without a paper trail. (Doder and Branson, 1999, pp. 102-103)

While the linkages are obvious in hindsight, many accepted the disconnect. Richard Holbrooke, for example, a top American diplomat who helped broker an end to the fighting in Bosnia, described Arkan as a “freelance murderer” and the Tigers as a “private army,” the implication being that Arkan and his militia were acting on their own (Holbrooke, 1999, p. 189).

The paramilitaries allowed Milošević to conduct a campaign of ethnic cleansing and ostensibly keep his hands clean. When facing criticism for the violence happening in Bosnia, Milošević was able to assert that these atrocities were the responsibility of paramilitary groups and therefore beyond his control. On occasion, he even pointed out that paramilitary groups were banned in Serbia. In fact, later Milošević was able to portray himself as a peacemaker for being able to bring the militias to heel and at one point he even placed a member of a paramilitary group on trial in order to deflect international criticism and pressure (Doder and Branson, 1999). The truth is far different. Milošević was clearly responsible for forming, recruiting, housing,

transporting, arming, training, and directing groups such as the Tigers and time has shown that the actions of the paramilitaries were coordinated with the Yugoslav National Army through officials at the interior ministry and the state security forces. (Doder and Branson, 1999; Sell, 2002; Sudetic, 1998).

Not all genocidal states are so concerned about disavowing the linkages with paramilitary organizations. The extremists in Rwanda made almost no effort to disguise their support of the paramilitary groups although a memo from the Belgian military intelligence reveals that Habyarimana and others denied any military behavior on the part of the militia (Des Forges, 1999). President Habyarimana's denial aside, the Rwandan military openly trained, armed, and supplied the militias as well as coordinated attacks with the paramilitary groups in order to maximize their genocidal reach (Melvern, 2004). Clearly, groups like the *Interahamwe* were acting on behalf of Hutu power as overt agents of a nationwide campaign of extermination against the Tutsi.

On the other hand, the situation in Darfur, Sudan, reveals how governments often refute their relationship with the militias. In the Darfur region of the Sudan, one of the most remote and impoverished regions on earth, government sponsored militias have led the way in killing and brutalizing members of several tribes in appears to have all the qualities of a genocide (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Beginning in 2003, members of three ethnic groups (Fur,

Masalit, and Zaghawa) formed two organizations with the goal of improving their economic, political, and social status within the Sudan. The Sudanese government, largely Arabic Muslims, have long discriminated against the Africans of the Darfur region and they responded to this new development with brutality and violence. Government sponsored militias in conjunction with regular military forces have engaged in wholesale massacres, systematic rape, and widespread looting (Human Rights Watch, 2004). These Arab militias are known collectively as Janjaweed. Government representatives have responded to international outrage by asserting that the Janjaweed are outlaws and that the Sudanese government is working to suppress these “lawless” groups or as one report asserts, “The more international criticism the war in Darfur incurs, the more the government denies any involvement with or connections to the Janjaweed” (Human Rights Watch, 2004, p. 43).

Force Multiplier

Another reason why genocidal states often rely on militias is that they provide a quick and easy augmentation to the regular military forces. At the time of the RPF invasion of Rwanda in 1990, the Rwandan military numbered 9,335, not a large number by any stretch of the imagination (Melvern, 1994). While it is true that the army had grown to 27,913 by 1991, it is also true that most of these new recruits were poorly trained and ill educated young men. It takes a

great deal of time and resources to create a competent military force. Paramilitary groups on the other hand, are much quicker and easier to create, especially since most of their activities pit them against unarmed civilian populations, rather than against an armed enemy. This also frees up regular military forces for other duties. We must remember that genocides typically occur during civil wars or other types of conflict when most of a nation's military forces need to be deployed against the enemy. During the fighting in Bosnia, the Yugoslav National Army faced the problem of young men emigrating to avoid being mobilized into the military. Many others refused to be called up and as the conflict continued, the army began suffering from high desertion rates (Judah, 1997; Wilmer, 2002). The increasing use of paramilitaries during the conflict helped address the personnel shortcomings suffered by the military. So, paramilitary groups offer states the ability to quickly generate more forces needed to accomplish the goals of that government. While not necessarily up to the standards of professional military forces, the training and abilities of paramilitary groups are usually enough to allow them to achieve the goals set for them by genocidally inclined states.

Violence without Limits

The use of paramilitary militias also allows genocidally inclined states the best and the worst of military organizations. Military organizations have as their main

purpose the application of organized violence against a variety of opponents or as Chris Hedges puts it, "Organized killing is best done by a disciplined, professional army" (Hedges, 2002, p. 9). Their hierarchical structure, their training, their ethos have developed over centuries with the sole aim of making them effective in using force to achieve victory over enemies. For a genocidally inclined state, the military in the ideal is perhaps the best weapon they have to achieve their destructive goals, but the military is also sometimes handicapped in that ability. First, as mentioned above, they are directly linked with the state which may pose a problem for a government intent upon hiding its complicity. Second, the military may be needed for other tasks, such as engaging in combat against an enemy. Third, the military, while trained to kill, is also often imbued with a code of honor and discipline that may hinder their willingness to participate in genocide.

A central theme of much of the training in many military systems involves inculcating recruits with the proper attitudes, values, and ethos of the military culture. Notions of individual and group honor are often a particular emphasis of this type of instruction and a common theme within these value systems prohibits the killing of unarmed noncombatants such as women and children. Sometimes these values are even codified into a military code of conduct with potential legal consequences for violators. But noncombatant victims are precisely the main targets of genocidal violence and military leaders may be resistant to

participation in genocide. This is not to say that these perceptions of honor cannot be subverted. Omer Bartov, for example, illustrated how the discipline and training of the German army became highly politicized during the years of the Third Reich and this allowed the army to become active and willing perpetrators. The ideology of race war and genocide preempted traditional German military notions of honor and chivalry (Bartov, 1992). This is not the only example as history is replete with examples of military perpetrated atrocities from many different nations including the United States. We cannot forget that war is inherently a brutalizing process. Nonetheless, as tenuous as it often is, most militaries are at least nominally bound by a code of conduct that may act as a curb on excesses against civilian forces while militias suffer no such hindrance. It is worth taking a closer look at the training process and how it facilitates violence.

Paramilitary groups offer governments the benefits that military training brings to an organization without some of the ideological baggage against attacking the defenseless. Not only are they taught to use weapons and explosives, but they are taught the habits and patterns of obedience, at least in rudimentary form, which is the basis of military organization. This is done so that members obey orders reflexively, without thinking about the meaning of the behavior. The training that paramilitaries receive, typically from military instructors, reinforces and strengthens the inherent tendency for conformity to the

behaviors and ideals of the group. The training also submerges the values of the individual into the values of the group, in this context, a highly violent and aggressive group. There is freedom in this: the freedom to do things that are otherwise prohibited.

Every military organization has an initiation process known as boot camp or basic training. The experience is intentionally intended to be hard, brutal, and degrading because it is intended to turn civilians into soldiers who are able to engage in violence on command. After recruits are broken down both psychologically and physically, they are built back up into soldiers, a process that involves instilling a sense of loyalty, pride, and obedience. In sum, basic training is designed to provide new soldiers with the mechanical skills of violence and to socialize them into a value system that supports fierceness, aggression, and solidarity with their comrades. For the same reasons, informal military organizations such as militias employ the same kinds of training patterns. While not as lengthy or involved as the military version, militias also receive a similar kind of boot camp. Several Serb militias, for example, trained at a military camp near Mount Tara, on the Serb border with Bosnia and many, such as Arkan's Tigers, were trained by regular army officers. In Rwanda, the *Interahamwe* militia engaged in mass rallies with alcohol, speeches, marching, and drill maneuvers to train and instill the appropriate attitudes and behaviors. This militia also utilized three week indoctrination sessions at a training camp in Mutara where

recruits were taught how to use machetes on human shaped dummies, throw grenades and burn homes. It also should be noted that the type of individuals recruited into militias are particularly susceptible to this kind of training.

Militia groups are typically recruited from segments of a society that are extremely vulnerable to indoctrination into ideologies and practices of violence. Members of Arkan's Tigers were recruited from members of a soccer fan club in Belgrade. These young men made willing recruits into paramilitary violence. Similarly, members of the Rwandan *Interahamwe* were drawn from the ranks of soccer players and fan clubs. What is it about these organizations that made them such a productive source of militia murderers? First, the individuals who are drawn into these groups are young men. The literature on violent crime tells us that most violence is perpetrated by young males in their late teens and early twenties. Because of hormones, life style, inclination, and culture, young males are at their most aggressive and violent (Barak, 2003; Riedel and Welsh, 2002). This penchant for engaging in violent behavior drops throughout the life course. As people age, their participation in violent behavior tends to lessen dramatically. The militias are usually composed of men who are at an age at which they are particularly vulnerable to the attractions of violent behavior.

Second, many of these young men also tend to be jobless and poor, uneducated, and unmarried. In short they fit the classic image of disaffected and alienated youth. The

militias give these young men a mission and a sense of purpose that is easily harnessed to a political movement. One reason why many young men are attracted to sports fan clubs is that these organizations provide meaning, status, and a sense of belonging and identity from membership (Armstrong, 1998; Buford, 1990; Perryman, 2001). These are essentially the same kinds of attractions that paramilitaries provide. Eric Hoffer points out that, "When people are ripe for a mass movement, they are usually ripe for any effective movement, and not solely for one with a particular doctrine or program" (Hoffer, 1951, p. 16). Mass movements are interchangeable and the energies that young men channel into sports clubs can easily be transferred to more violent outlets, ones that are possibly political and/or genocidal. It's no accident that both the *Interahamwe* and the Tigers were originally recruited from among these ranks. The use of these kinds of young men in Rwanda and Bosnia is no different from the ways in which the Nazi movement used angry and aggressive young men in the Sturm Abteilung (SA) to do much of their dirty work in the early years of the Nazi movement. The power they derive from belonging to these organizations can be intoxicating, especially for angry young men who formerly felt powerless.

Third, these young men are a self selected group attracted to the violence that often accompanies many groups of sports fans. The phenomenon of sports hooliganism in Europe has been especially well documented (see for example Armstrong, 1998; Buford, 1990; Perryman,

2001). Membership in soccer fan clubs often revolves around issues of identity and territory that are sometimes described as a form of “tribalism” (Campbell and Dawson, 2001). In many ways, these groups are all about particular conceptions of masculinity, competitiveness, and asserting power or as Campbell and Dawson assert, “Hooliganism and violence are not effects of disordered psyches; on the contrary they are a logic of the quest for personal mastery” (Campbell and Dawson, 2001, p. 72). The young men who are drawn to this kind of organization are those whose affiliation to mainstream society is marginal at best. Chuck Sudetic, in describing the soccer clubs from whom Arkan recruited the Tigers, asserted that they, “had become a magnet for hoodlums and disgruntled, unemployed, and, very often, unemployable young men. From the worst of this raw material, Ražnatović formed a militia called the Tigers” (Sudetic, 1998, p. 98).

Conclusions

Militias and other forms of paramilitary groups remain a common feature for many types of human rights abuses, including genocide. They offer many advantages and few risks to states engaged in various forms of violent conflict. We must also remember that we live in an era in which international security and military forces are increasingly becoming privatized (see for example Davis, 2000; Singer, 2003) and conflict and war are less and less

about armies fighting traditional wars internationally, but more and more about internal conflicts fought nontraditionally. It is precisely in this kind of environment that paramilitary groups thrive and prosper. Unless the international community is able to act effectively and decisively to prevent states from utilizing these groups, we will continue to see governments relying on them.

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