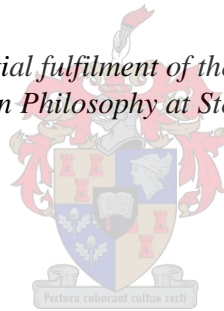


# **Evil, Morality and Modernity**

by  
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## Abstract

This thesis takes Zygmunt Bauman's book *Modernity and the Holocaust* as a point of departure in an attempt to show that genocides of the twentieth century are by-products of modernity, and not aberrations, as previously thought. Bauman's work focuses on the distinctly modern nature of the Holocaust. Using the theory he develops in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, this thesis attempts to show, first and foremost, that the Holocaust is not the only example of modern genocide. By comparing and contrasting the Holocaust to another, more recent, genocide, namely the Rwandan genocide of 1994, it becomes clear that despite superficial differences between the two genocides, the Rwandan genocide is also a by-product of modernity. This conclusion has important implications, not only for the way in which we remember the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, but also for our understanding of evil and perpetrators of evil. Drawing on the work of Bauman and Hannah Arendt, especially with regard to the Eichmann case, chapter three investigates our traditional assumptions and expectations with regard to evil and perpetrators of evil and notes the unsettling differences between our assumptions and the modern reality. In order to truly understand the nature of perpetrators of modern genocide, it is important to look at the influence of morality on such perpetrators and the reasons why morality seems incompatible with modernity. In this regard, Haas' book *Morality after Auschwitz* is of critical importance. Given the various failures and unexpected by-products of modernity, one has to wonder whether postmodernity would offer a better moral alternative to modernity. Chapter five investigates this supposition, and finds it wanting. Drawing yet again on Bauman, the notion of an ethics of responsibility is put forth as the only safeguard against modern evil.

## Abstrak

Hierdie tesis neem Zygmunt Bauman se boek *Modernity and the Holocaust* as 'n beginpunt en probeer om te wys dat die volksmoorde van die twintigste eeu byprodukte, en nie afwykings, van moderniteit is nie. Bauman se werk fokus op die moderne eienskappe van die Holocaust. Deur gebruik te maak van die teorie wat hy in *Modernity and the Holocaust* ontwikkel, probeer hierdie tesis om, eerstens, te wys dat die Holocaust nie die enigste voorbeeld van 'n moderne volksmoord is nie. Deur die Holocaust met 'n ander, meer onlangse volksmoord, die Rwandese volksmoord van 1994, te vergelyk en te kontrasteer word dit duidelik dat ten spyte van die oppervlakkige verskille tussen die twee volksmoorde, die Rwandese volksmoord ook 'n byproduk van moderniteit is. Hierdie gevolgtrekking het belangrike implikasies nie net vir die manier waarop ons die Holocaust en die Rwandese volksmoord onthou nie, maar ook vir die wyse waarop ons die kwaad (*evil*) en *perpetrators of evil*<sup>1</sup> verstaan. Deur verder gebruik te maak van Bauman se werk sowel as die werk van Hannah Arendt, veral met betrekking tot die Eichmann saak, ondersoek hoofstuk drie ons tradisionele aannames en verwagtinge met betrekking tot die kwaad (*evil*) en *perpetrators of evil* en wys die onaangename verskille tussen ons aannames en die moderne realiteit uit. Ten einde werklik die aard van *perpetrators* van moderne volksmoord te verstaan, is dit belangrik om na die invloed van moraliteit op hierdie *perpetrators of evil* te kyk, asook die redes waarom moraliteit blykbaar teenstrydig is met moderniteit. Haas se belangrike boek, *Morality after Auschwitz*, word hier geraadpleeg. Gegewe die verskeie tekortkominge van moderniteit, moet ons wonder of postmoderniteit nie dalk 'n beter morele alternatief bied nie. Hoofstuk vyf ondersoek hierdie stelling en vind dat postmoderniteit ook nie voldoende is nie. Laastens word Bauman weereens geraadpleeg en sy seining van 'n etiek van verantwoordelikheid word voorgestel as die enigste beskerming teen moderne kwaad.

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<sup>1</sup> Ek het hier besluit om die Engelse frase te behou, aangesien alle Afrikaanse vertalings van *perpetrators of evil* of *perpetrators*, (kwaadoener, booswig, skuldige) alreeds die skuld of boosheid van die persoon onder bespreking impliseer. Hierdie tesis argumenteer juis teen sulke aannames.

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*Vir my ouers.*

## Contents

<b>Introduction: A Century of Camps</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. <i>Modernity and the Holocaust: Understanding a Modern Genocide</i></b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 The Jews and Modernity	10
1.2 Racism and Modernity	15
1.3 The Front Lines: Controlling Animal Pity, Overcoming Violence, and Generating Indifference	21
1.4 Translating Hitler's Dream into Reality: The Role of Bureaucracy	26
1.5 Cooperation and the Rationality of Survival	30
1.6 A Modern Genocide: Summary and Conclusion	34
<b>2. <i>The Rwandan Tragedy: A Modern Genocide?</i></b>	<b>37</b>
2.1 A Brief History of Rwanda	39
2.2 Racism in Rwanda	43
2.3 Rwanda in the 1990s: Infrastructure, Politics and Economics	46
2.4 The 1994 Genocide: What caused it?	48
2.5 Organisation and Planning of the Genocide	50
2.6 The Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide: Similarities	53
2.7 The Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide: Differences	67
2.8 Conclusion	72
<b>3. <i>The Face of Twentieth Century Evil</i></b>	<b>75</b>
3.1 Evil People: Evil and the Individual	77
3.2 Evil Societies: Explaining Evil in Social Terms	81
3.3 Eichmann and the Myth of Pure Evil	86
3.4 Making Sense of Modern Perpetrators	90
3.5 Evil and Us	100
3.6 Conclusion	105



<b>4. Modernity, Morality and Ethics</b>	<b>109</b>
4.1 Morality and Ethics: A Distinction	112
4.2 Modernity and the Challenge of Morality	117
4.3 Zygmunt Bauman, Morality and Modernity	121
4.4 Critical Comments	130
4.5 Conclusion	132
<b>5. Postmodernity: The Light at the End of the Tunnel?</b>	<b>135</b>
5.1 What is Postmodernity?	136
5.2 The Postmodern Habitat	138
5.3 Postmodernity and Consumer Culture	140
5.4 The Postmodern Subject	143
5.4.1 The Vagabond	144
5.4.2 The Tourist	146
5.4.3 The Stroller	147
5.4.4 The Player	148
5.5 The Postmodern Community	149
5.6 Postmodernity and the Other	151
5.7 Postmodernity: The Tunnel at the End of the Light?	154
5.8 Conclusion	161
<b>Conclusion: An Uncertain Future</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>174</b>

## **Introduction: A Century of Camps**

The predominant theme throughout the history of mankind is the constant and unrelenting struggle to survive – survival in the face of nature and one another. Survival takes precedence over all other concerns, and has to be achieved by any means necessary. Today, a large portion of the human population has lost touch with this instinct. Our lives are sufficiently comfortable and we have access to most, if not all, of the resources we need to survive. We only notice our survival instinct in the face of things that we consider to be abnormal – violent crime, for example. Prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the world was a much different place. ‘Early’ man experienced the world as a confusing and erratic place. He was at the mercy of nature. Pitted against her forces, man was powerless. Disease swept through settlements, killing many, and disappeared just as mysteriously as it arrived. Floods and famines seemingly struck at random. Nothing could be done to control, predict or influence nature in any way. Man experienced the world as a continuous, relentless and confusing assault on his life, and he had no choice but to passively accept his fate, whatever that may be. Nature would not be controlled. Of course people attempted to exact some kind of control over nature in the form of various religious beliefs - be they primitive or sophisticated – and while they did provide some measure of comfort to many, they did little to change the state of things.

Nature was not the only obstacle that had to be overcome. This was a world in which the class system reigned supreme. The belief was that whatever class you were born into was your proper position in the world. There was no way for people to escape from the shackles of their class. Since most people were born into the lower classes, it is not surprising that they experienced the world as a harsh place, one filled with repetition and stagnation. The only changes that could interrupt the continuity of their lives came in the form of wars and plagues. The minority elite who sat atop the class pyramid had little to complain about. They lived in the lap of luxury, and had plenty of food, riches and servants to cater to their every need. Their privileged position also gave them absolute power over the impoverished masses, a privilege they used to ensure that things did not change. However discontent the lower classes may have been with their existence, there was nothing they could do about it. The elite cleverly limited the amount of resources and education available to them, and by implication, also limited the possibility of resistance. It seems that the elite had it all – but even they could not hide from Mother Nature. In the face of disease and natural disasters, all

men are equal. No matter how rich or powerful they may have been, even the elite had to contend with the fact that they were powerless in the face of nature. Everything they had could be taken away from them in an instant, if not by a natural disaster, then by other men. Even the “ill will, malice, and uncouth conduct of the neighbours next door, or on the next street, or beyond the river, that made people fear and tremble in anticipation of imminent disaster, were classified on the side of nature” (Bauman 2008: 79). This period of history, known as pre-modernity, revealed nature as “the major source of uncertainty that haunted human life” (Bauman 2008: 78). This would not, however, be the case for long.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century heralded in a new age for mankind – one characterised by scientific and technological innovations and industrialisation. Modernity had arrived. Modernity refers to a form of society that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and is epitomised by the Enlightenment ideals of science and rationality, and it is largely seen as a response to the unpredictable and unruly nature of pre-modernity. The age of modernity can be seen as the age of man – it is characterised by a “drive to mastery; a mode of being shot through with hope, ambition and confidence” (Bauman 1992: 132-133). No more will man cower in fear of the unknown. This is an age in which all the mysteries of the pre-modern age are sliced open, as it were, and examined until their behaviour can be predicted and in some cases even controlled. Modern man therefore strives to control, cultivate and design the world around him; he strives to eliminate the uncertainties of the pre-modern world and shape the world into what he wants it to be. This is an age of ‘gardeners’ “who treat society as a virgin plot of land expertly designed and then cultivated and doctored to keep to the design form” (Bauman 1989: 113). Man is now a planner or designer, who not only has a vision of what his world should look like, but who also, has the *tools* to achieve it. Science, technology, reason and order are the ‘gods’ of modernity, and they reign supreme. Nature is seen as a dangerous thing, an obstacle to overcome. This is an attitude towards life and the world that states that “nothing should grow unless planted, and whatever would have grown on its own must have been the wrong thing, and hence a dangerous thing, jeopardizing or confounding the overall plan” (Bauman 1989: 57).

In the modern world, all people can, in theory, control their own lives and their own destinies. This is the age of the entrepreneur and self-made millionaire. Instead of being told to bear their burdens, and accept their nature, children are now told that they can do anything and be anyone they want to be. This is a radical departure from the feudal system and social

immobility that dominated pre-modernity. Modernity seems to be synonymous with freedom - freedom to shape the world and your own life however you want it - but the new order of things in the world is not natural, it is man-made, and therefore fragile. It is an artificial form of order and unlike in pre-modern times, it is an order that requires constant and continuous management. Man has managed to contain nature, but the new order requires intense scrutiny, lest nature break free from its shackles and ruin man's grand plan. Many people refer to modernity as a project of sorts – that of man's vehement and persistent refusal to take the world as it is, instead opting to cut away, remove and suppress those parts that are deemed undesirable. Bauman notes that “what set the modern era apart from other times was the obsession with designing and pursuing projects” (Bauman & Tester 2001: 72). Modernity is a war on the unruly, unpredictable and unwanted, and as such it is a war on difference (Bauman 1992: 112). Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than the Holocaust.

As one of the most horrifying events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Holocaust stands out amongst all other instances of genocide. The extermination of European Jews came as a surprise to most of the world, but what was even more surprising was the incredible speed with which millions of people were executed. Since the end of the Second World War, people have grappled with the Holocaust in order to explain how something as horrific as the Holocaust could have occurred in modern, civilised Europe. Prior to the Holocaust, modernity was seen as a civilising force that tamed mankind's barbaric urges. As a result, traditional responses to the Holocaust views the Holocaust as the moment in which modernity lost its hold on the barbaric nature of man. According to this response, the hold modernity had over mankind merely slipped, and that the Holocaust is therefore nothing more than an interruption in the normal flow of history (Bauman 1989: viii). The Holocaust is seen as “a cancerous growth on the body of civilised society, a momentary madness among sanity” (Bauman 1989: viii). Proponents of the traditional approach do not view the Holocaust as indicative of anything but the need for *more* control and more civilisation. This type of approach is often influenced by the way in which the memory of the Holocaust has been appropriated – it is seen as an event that is only of importance to the Jews (Bauman 1989: viii). The Holocaust happened to the Jews, and the Jews alone, and as such it is only up to them to remember it – it is the sole and collective property of the Jews, and they guard it jealously (Bauman 1989: viii). This complacency can also be attributed to the many studies that focus on the so-called ‘Germanness’ of the Holocaust (Bauman 1989: xii). While this is an approach that is widely accepted, it is also an exercise in “exonerating everyone else, and particularly *everything* else.

The implication [is] that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were a wound or a malady of our civilisation...It all happened ‘out there’ – in another time, another country” (Bauman 1989: xii). The Holocaust is therefore viewed as a picture on a wall, neatly outlined and separated from everything else (Bauman 1989: vii). Not only does this paint an over-simplified view of the Holocaust, but it also suggests a very obvious answer to the problem of modern genocide, one which claims that “the Hobbesian world has not been fully chained, the Hobbesian problem has not been fully resolved” (Bauman 1898: 13). In other words, what we need is more civilisation, more modernity.

Another popular approach to the Holocaust claims that it should be viewed as the truth of modernity, which is “superficially concealed by the ideological formula imposed by those who benefit from the ‘big lie’” (Bauman 1989: 6). Proponents of this view are of the opinion that modernity holds no advantage for mankind at all. They believe that the so-called ‘improvements’ that are attributed to modernity are nothing but a ruse, disguising the more appalling aspects of modernity. The Holocaust is, therefore, seen as the moment in which modernity’s true nature was laid bare for all to see. Proponents of this view are often guilty of equating everyday suffering to that of the Holocaust. I think it is quite clear that describing the company you work for as an ‘Auschwitz’ belittles the importance of the Holocaust, by not only reducing the horrors of genocide to the level of daily suffering, but also belittling the suffering of millions of people (Bauman 1989: 6). Both of these approaches seem to over-simplify the Holocaust, and that is understandable. People do not like being faced with problems they do not know the answers to, especially if that problem is something as sinister and terrible as the Holocaust. An over-simplified answer means that they do not need to think about the Holocaust anymore – they have their answer, and it is one that sits well with them.

In 1989, the Polish Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman published a book that proposed a radical new theory and approach to the Holocaust, that soon challenged many of the more commonly accepted responses. If the traditional responses to the Holocaust are like a picture on a wall – neatly outlined and separated from everything else that was happening at the time - then in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Bauman sets forth a theory that likens the Holocaust to a window:

Looking through that window, one can catch a rare glimpse of many things otherwise invisible. And the things one can see are of the utmost of importance not just for the perpetrators, victims and witnesses of the crime, but for all those who are alive today and hope to be alive tomorrow. What I

saw through this window I did not find at all pleasing. The more depressing the view, however, the more I was convinced that if one refused to look through the window, it would be at one's own peril (Bauman 1989: viii).

What is it then that Bauman uncovered once he looked through that window? Was he able to confirm the gnawing suspicion that the Holocaust was more than just an interruption in the normal flow of history, an interruption in progress (Bauman 1989: 7)? Did he uncover two faces of modernity, two faces that are not only attached to the same body, but that are wholly dependent on each other (Bauman 1989: 7)? Bauman discovered that the 'ingredients' that made the Holocaust possible, were completely normal – that is that they were fully in keeping with everything we know about our civilisation (1989: 8). This, according to Bauman, is the true terror of the Holocaust.

Should we accept what Bauman is saying, or should we simply throw our hands in the air and shrug off the possibility that the Holocaust is a mistake that could be repeated? We are repelled by the very thought, and argue that the Holocaust did, after all, happen more than sixty years ago, and the world was a different place then. Not only that, but surely we have learned from the Holocaust, and that in itself will prevent something like it from happening again. Bauman defies this kind of thinking. The conditions that made the Holocaust possible have not disappeared from our societies today. If anything they are stronger now than they were in 1941. Secondly, Bauman notes that we are fooling ourselves if we think we have learnt anything from the Holocaust (Bauman 1989: 11). It would be easy to label Bauman a prophet of doom, but when we examine the most common responses to modern and relatively current genocides, it appears that he may have a point. When we hear about “atrocities that some not particularly civilized, and for this reason spiritually far-away people, visit upon their equally barbaric neighbours”, we find it all very sad, but wonder what on earth it could possibly have to do with us (Bauman 1989: 85)? “If it proves anything at all, it certainly proves how bad it is to be unlike us, and how good it is to be safe and sound behind the shield of our superior civilisation” (Bauman 1989: 85). This is exactly why we should take Bauman seriously. The Holocaust is a product of modernity, a product of civilisation – the same civilisation that we expect to keep us safe from such atrocities. Nobody expected the Holocaust in 1941, and when it finally happened, it was met with universal incredulity (Bauman 1989: 85). The only difference now is that we know what we didn't know in 1941 – and that is that “the unimaginable ought to be imagined” (Bauman 1989: 85).

That being said however, we need to be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking that the same principles that ruled over the lives of Auschwitz inmates, rule our daily existence (Bauman 1989: 87). “Truly, one would be well advised to avoid the temptation to deploy the inhuman imagery of the Holocaust in the service of a partisan stance towards larger or smaller...routine and daily human conflicts” (Bauman 1989: 87). Just because the Holocaust is a product of modernity, does not mean that we live in an Auschwitz – this view belittles the importance of the Holocaust by comparing it to petty conflicts (Bauman 1989: 87). We do, however, have to be weary when it comes to putting all our trust in civilisation – the barriers that have been erected by modern civilisation to keep us safe, have been proven ineffective when it comes to protecting us against atrocities like the Holocaust (Bauman 1989: 87). The most prominent feature in the downfall of the victims of the Holocaust was that they found themselves alone – their sense of security, as we will see later, played an integral part in Nazi operations (Bauman 1989: 88).

Despite all of this, there are those people who still find it difficult to buy into Bauman’s theory. Genocide and mass murder have been occurring for centuries, so it is certainly not a modern invention. This view seems to deny the uniqueness of the Holocaust, lumping it together with all other instances of mass murder. This is not the case. The Holocaust is unlike any other genocide that preceded it, because it bore features that had never been seen before, and these new features had a distinctly modern flavour (Bauman 1989: 88). It is these modern features that deserve special attention, and their prevalence in the Holocaust means that modernity played an active, rather than passive, role in its creation and implementation (Bauman 1989: 89). The Holocaust can be seen as an accomplishment of modern society, if measured against all the standards that is preached and institutionalised by this society (Bauman 1989: 89). The Holocaust is a demonstration on an epic scale of what the “rationalizing, engineering tendency of modernity is capable of if not checked and mitigated” (Bauman 1989: 114).

The Holocaust was not, however, the only horrific genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Almost fifty years after the end of the Second World War, the people of Rwanda entered into a bloody genocide of their own. In the spring of 1994, the Hutus started to massacre their Tutsi countrymen. By the end of the bloodshed, nearly eight hundred thousand Tutsis had been hacked to pieces by their Hutu neighbours, friends and colleagues (Hatzfeld 2003: vii). The speed and voracity with which the Rwandan genocide was executed, is an eerie reminder of

the Holocaust, an event so gruesome, people vowed to never let something like it happen again. Yet relatively soon after that promise was made most of the world averted their eyes while thousands of people were hunted down and slaughtered like animals. Even though the Rwandan genocide appears primitive in comparison to the Holocaust, in some ways it was even more terrifyingly precise, efficient and gruesome.

Given the events in Rwanda, and given what we know about Bauman's explanation of the events of the Holocaust, it is impossible not to ask ourselves whether Bauman's theory would hold if applied to the Rwandan genocide. The relationship between modernity and the kinds of human rights abuses that took place during the Holocaust appears evident, but would this be the case when looking at Rwanda? At first glance, the two instances of genocide look radically different, but what would a closer critical comparison yield? Would we find what we may already suspect – that Bauman's theory of the Holocaust (and genocide, by extension) is so tightly intertwined with his theory of modernity, that it could not possibly be applied to the Rwandan situation (because we believe that Rwanda lacks the modern characteristics that are so crucial to Bauman's theory), or alternately, will a comparison between the two, with the help of Bauman's theory, reveal that the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide are the outcome of the same persistent problem, merely camouflaged by superficial differences? Would we find that the Holocaust is not the only instance of a modern genocide? Could the Rwandan genocide be another instance of modern genocide? Bauman's argument (if equally applicable to both cases) is an argument about the pivotal role of modernity in the conceptualisation and execution of genocide in our times. That raises the question of rectification and/or prevention of the horrors of genocide. Has ethics anything to say or contribute in this regard? Are we simply to admit that these horrors are indicative of a complete breakdown in the moral consciousness/orientation of human beings? Is morality to be understood as a human "faculty" that is simply suppressed by tyrants in their pursuit of absolute power, or is it an ambiguous phenomenon that is understood, applied and exploited by people in power to fit their own purposes?

In the first chapter, I examine the relationship between modernity and the Holocaust. Specific attention will in this regard be paid to the work of Bauman. The second chapter is devoted to examining whether or not Bauman's theory is applicable to the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s. If it is, in what respect, and if not, why not? How do the differences in historical, socio-political and economic contexts between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide



influence the situation, and what can we learn from the way in which the worst conceivable forms of evil become incarnate in society? Following from this comparative study, we move on to the issue of evil itself. It is impossible to examine the phenomenon of genocide in isolation – one also needs to give some consideration to the notion of evil and morality. The third chapter examines how the notion of evil is best to be understood, and whether or not it is merely a product of individual minds or imaginations. If this is not the case, does the incarnation of evil in society add a dimension and a momentum that cannot be fully explained in individualist terms? Morality is the main focus of chapter four – what is to be made of its possible role as a redeeming factor in this debate? Is morality the outcome of a universal human consciousness, or is it no more than a code of conduct that is produced by a community or society and that expresses and reinforces deep-seated prejudices in societies? Haas claims that a “Nazi ethic” existed – what are we to make of this claim? If morality does play a role in the prevention and redemption of evil, how is it to be understood; how can it be effectively acquired (is it “caught” or “taught”?) and implemented, and what can be expected from it? Finally, based on what we’ve learnt thus far, does postmodernity, the apparent antithesis of modernity, provide a solution to the proliferation of genocide in the twentieth century, or does it create more problems than it solves?

## 1. *Modernity and the Holocaust: Understanding a Modern Genocide*

Today, more than at any other time, the Holocaust is not a private property (if it ever was one); not of its perpetrators, to be punished for; not of its direct victims, to ask for sympathy, favours or indulgence on account of past sufferings; and not of its witnesses, to seek redemption or certificates of innocence. *The present day significance of the Holocaust is the lesson it contains for the whole of humanity* (Bauman 1989: 206)

The Holocaust can be described as the single most terrible ‘surprise’ of the twentieth century. At the start of the Second World War, nobody could have imagined the horrors that millions of European Jews would be subjected to. It was an event of such unbelievable evil and efficiency that we still grapple with the phenomenon of the Holocaust today. When talking about the Holocaust, two of the most commonly asked questions are, ‘How could something like this have happened in a civilised and modern country?’, and ‘How could ordinary people commit such crimes, or stand aside and do nothing?’ It has now been more than 60 years since the end of the Second World War, and many theories have since been formulated surrounding the Holocaust in an attempt to make sense of the madness that swept through Europe. Many of these theories explain the Holocaust as the result of unsuppressed barbaric drives or link it to something inherent to Germany or Germans themselves. These responses all fall short of the truth.

In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Polish Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman develops a theory that points out the inability of such traditional responses to the Holocaust, which treat it as a so-called ‘failure’ of modernity (1989: vii – xiv). Bauman develops a radical new theory that finds the cause of the Holocaust not rooted in a failure of, or rupture in, modernity, but instead as an outcome of modernity itself. He argues that the Holocaust was in fact a *product* of modernity. In response to people’s disbelief that something like the Holocaust could have happened in a modern, civilised country like Germany, Bauman notes that the reason the Holocaust could happen was precisely *because* Germany was a modern society. Bauman’s theory not only reveals the catastrophic potential of the forces at work in a modern society, but also debunks the popular belief that remembering and studying the Holocaust is only important for Germans and Jews. The modern societies we find ourselves in today are not that much different from Germany in the 1940s; the implication being that the forces that caused the Holocaust are still present today. If these forces are still present

today, that means that we could not only become the victims of something like the Holocaust, but that we *may do it* to others.

In this chapter, I attempt to distil the essence of Bauman's theory. Since this chapter is largely based on Bauman's seminal book *Modernity and the Holocaust*, the discussion will inevitably lead to examples from the Holocaust, so as to better understand the theory itself. The chapter is roughly divided between aspects relating to the perpetrators of the Holocaust and those relating to its victims. The first half deals with questions surrounding the reasons the Jews were targeted for extermination and the relation between modernity and racism. The second half examines the role the Nazi party played in controlling the response of ordinary Germans towards the Holocaust, as well as those of the soldiers executing Hitler's vision. Lastly, the importance of bureaucracy in executing the dream of a *judenfrei* Europe and the role the Jews played in their own downfall is examined in detail.

### **1.1 The Jews and Modernity**

The Holocaust is most commonly understood as being the culmination of centuries-long European hatred of the Jews. This appears to be one of the few things we can say with certainty when speaking about the Holocaust. Bauman, however, points out that this commonly accepted 'fact' is not true. Historically, Germany was considered by many Jews to be one of the most tolerant places in the world, and Germany "entered [the twentieth] century with far more Jewish academics and professionals than contemporary America or Britain" (Bauman 1989: 31). Not only did Germany have an astounding number of Jewish academics as they entered the twentieth century, but according to Paul Johnson, author of *A History of the Jews*, Germany was by far the best-educated country in Europe, if not the world (1988: 470). Germany had the finest universities in the world, excelling in almost every discipline (Johnson 1988: 470). Johnson notes that

in the nineteenth century the fate of Germany and the Jews were very much interwoven...[B]etween 1870 and 1914 the Germans suddenly emerged as an actively powerful nation, just as suddenly as the Jews emerged as an actively powerful race. The two helped each other enormously. Among the many things they shared was an almost fanatical devotion to learning. The ablest Jews loved Germany because it was the best place in the world to work in. Modern Jewish culture had an essentially German framework. But in turn...the Jews gave all of their finest efforts to Germany and helped to make her

great...For Germany to turn on the Jews was not just mass murder; it was, in a real sense, mass parricide (1989: 470).

What then happened to make the Germans turn on the Jews? The most popular answer has to do with the First World War. The Germans suffered a decisive defeat. They entered the war with confidence and came home humiliated and demoralised. The grief and the anger at such a defeat was “unhinging”, and they desperately needed a scapegoat (Johnson 1988: 470). Enter the Jew. There were widespread rumours that Jews had evaded service in the army, and even that they leaked strategic German military intelligence to the enemy, effectively stabbing the army in the back (Johnson 1988: 476).

In modern times, there had been one enemy Germany feared above all others - the threat of the Russians - and as post-war Germany saw an influx of Russian refugees of German origins, these refugees “all stressed the Jewish-Bolshevist connection” (Johnson 1988: 472-473). This played right into Hitler’s hands. The Germans not only needed a scapegoat for their defeat in the war, but the demoralised German population also needed something that would unite them as a nation once more, and the anti-Semitic ‘threat’ did just that. The Nazis used several methods to garner support for their anti-Semitic campaign, but specifically focussed on the biological-sexual threats posed by the Jews. These supposed ‘medical threats’ and their relation to modernity will be discussed in the next section.

Bauman suggests a somewhat different answer to the sudden decline in the popularity of the Jews in Germany. He notes that while the answer does partly lie in the need for a scapegoat following the German defeat in the First World War, the transition from pre-modernity to modernity, in Europe is also to blame. The advent of modernity was characterised by the disappearance of old boundaries and securities and, as such, was met with great opposition. In pre-modern Europe with its feudal system, the Jews were not seen to be any different from any other caste of people. They were merely a group among groups (Bauman 1989: 35). But with the disappearance and shifting of traditional boundaries and the establishment of new boundaries brought on by modernity, the Jews were seen as an oddity – they were a group of people who belonged neither here nor there (Bauman 1989: 37). They were perceived as being in a permanent and universal state of homelessness, not belonging to any particular territorial state (Bauman 1989: 35). The Nazis used this state of homelessness to their advantage – since the Jews had no territorial state, they could not participate in the power-

struggle that was war, and as a result they had to use ‘indecent methods’ (Bauman 1989: 35). This perpetual state of homelessness has long been a problem plaguing the Jews. Paul Johnson notes that in Britain in 1915, several high-profile Jews such as Chaim Weizmann, the liberal MP Herbert Samuel, and the soon-to-be Prime Minister Lloyd George, were campaigning for the establishment of a national home for the Jews (1988: 424-426). The proposed site for this new nation-state was Palestine (Johnson 1988: 426). This idea met with great opposition, specifically from the Prime Minister at the time, Herbert Asquith, and in 1920 their attempt ultimately failed (Johnson 1988: 426 - 437). In keeping with Bauman’s discussion of modernity, it is interesting to note that the very idea of a nation-state (and by extension the concern with ‘homelessness’ as was the case with the Jews) is a thoroughly modern one (Giddens 1997: 14). Anthony Giddens argues that the nation-state differs from traditional societies in that it

is a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries, its rule being sanctioned by law and direct control of the means of internal and external violence (Giddens 1983: 190).

This definition points out the inherently modern characteristics of the nation-state, most importantly the key role administration and bureaucracy play in its governance. Giddens does not deny the existence of some form of administration in traditional societies, he simply points out that the type of administration they could maintain, would be limited at best (Jessop 1989: 108). In fact, traditional societies did not ‘govern’ at all, or at least not in the sense of providing “regularized administration of the overall territory they claimed as their own” (Jessop 1989: 108). Their governance was limited to mitigating conflicts within the ruling classes and in the main urban centres (Jessop 1989: 108). They made up for this lack of administration by sporadically resorting to military force (Jessop 1989: 108). It is with the disappearance of these traditional societies, and the emergence of rigorously controlled and administrated modern nation-states, that the hatred of the Jews became especially prevalent. Bauman points out that this form of anti-Semitism was a manifestation of a larger boundary-keeping urge (1989: 34). Not only did the Jews sit astride every barricade (they were neither citizens nor foreigners, for example), but they were also losing their distinctiveness – it was no longer as easy to spot a Jew - they moved into different neighbourhoods, dressed like everyone else, and became part of a homogenous modern society – and as such it became more and more difficult to mark them as alien (Bauman 1989: 36 & 45). Even though

modernity championed integration and equality for all, the non-Jewish population of Europe remained suspicious of the Jews. The disappearance of visible marks of difference was, therefore, seen as tantamount to erasing the boundary itself (Bauman 1989: 59). This did not only attribute to anxiety regarding the Jews, but also anxiety regarding modernity.

Even though we now have some sort of plausible explanation for the hatred of Jews in Germany, it is still baffling that even people who had Jewish friends and neighbours could be anti-Semitic, or at the very least, stand by and watch Jews being wrenched from their homes and communities. Bauman notes an interesting fact about anti-Semitism in this regard – it can exist regardless of the actual situation on the ground; in other words, one can find anti-Semitism in societies where people have never even seen or met Jews (Bauman 1989: 38). There is therefore a separation between ‘the Jew’ (or the conceptual Jew, as Bauman calls it) and actual Jewish men and women (Bauman 1989: 38). The implication of this is obvious – Germans could support Hitler’s anti-Semitic campaign and still have Jews in their social circles and not think the two to be contradictory. Modernity therefore inherited ‘the Jew’ “already firmly separated from the Jewish men and women who inhabited its towns and villages” (Bauman 1989: 39). With all the changes taking place at the advent of modernity, the conceptual Jew became an important visualisation of boundary transgressions and non-conformity (Bauman 1989: 39). Counter to the current order is not another order, but chaos and devastation (Bauman 1989: 39). With the disappearance of old boundaries and securities, fighting the enemy of clarity and order came to the fore (Bauman 1989: 40). And that enemy was ‘the Jew’.

As mentioned before, for the majority of people, the advent of modernity meant the total destruction of order and security. For many, the Jews seemed to stand very close to that destruction (Bauman 1989: 45). The Jews suddenly had access to new opportunities, and their rapid social advancement was seen as indicative of the havoc wreaked by modernity “upon everything familiar, habitual and secure” (Bauman 1989: 45). Their good fortune was seen as a testament to their complicity in the destruction of traditional societies. The fate of the Jews therefore served as a constant reminder of the scope and intensity of the social upheaval caused by modernity, as well as the erosion of old securities (Bauman 1989: 45). The Jews were therefore caught in between the most ferocious of historical conflicts – that between pre-modernity and modernity (Bauman 1989: 45).

Ultimately though, it was the ‘universal homelessness’ mentioned before, that played the biggest role in marking the Jews for destruction. This fact about the Jews was inherently incompatible with nationalism, something that dominated Europe, and post-war Germany, at the time. “The sight of a large group of people free to flip at will from one national fortress to another...aroused deep anxieties. It defied the very truth on which all nations, old and new, rested their claims” (Bauman 1989: 55). Since the Jews did not ‘belong’ anywhere, they had the freedom to choose where their loyalties lay; an idea which is inherently incompatible with the implied obligation of the doctrine of Nationalism (Bauman 1989: 55). With the advent of modernity, the Jews were able to move out of their ghettos and started to merge with the rest of society. This is largely due to the abolishment of the class system and the modern dream of a homogenous society. They, therefore, became citizens like everyone else, a fact that quickly caused an outcry amongst other citizens, who thought that the Jews were unworthy of the new legal and social position that had been conferred upon them (Bauman 1989: 56). The separation of the Jews from the rest of the population therefore became a huge problem in modernity – in pre-modern times with its stratified class system it was seen as a given; the Jews were but one class amongst many – and it was a problem that now had to be rationally argued, administered and monitored (Bauman 1989: 57). Jewish separation had lost its naturalness, and became artificial and brittle (Bauman 1989: 57). New naturalness had to be manufactured – differences had to be created and maintained (Bauman 1989: 57 – 58):

The distinctiveness of the Jews had to be re-articulated and laid on new foundations, stronger than human powers of culture and self-determination...Judaism has to be replaced with Jewishness: ‘Jews had been able to escape from Judaism into conversion, but from Jewishness there was no escape’ (Arendt in Bauman 1989: 59).

Arendt points out a crucial element in the history that led to the destruction of the Jews. Once the Jews had integrated into society, it was no longer as easy to argue for their separation from the rest of the population based on their religious beliefs. Many of them had converted to Christianity or had denounced Judaism, and became, in a sense, like everyone else. The challenge now was to find a way to alienate them in spite of all of this, and, as mentioned before, the answer came in the form of racial hygiene and eugenics. If people were made to believe that the Jews were inferior to everybody else, that they were sub-human, then it would be possible to segregate them once more, setting right the ‘balance’ that was disturbed with the advent of modernity. The modern world view argued that everything was possible

with effort and good will – and as such the task of generating new reasons to separate the Jews from everybody else, generating difference as it were, fitted in with the mantra of modernity (Bauman 1989: 58).

## 1.2 Racism and Modernity

Bauman paraphrases the earlier quote by Arendt, in summarising the philosophical essence of racism: “Man is before he acts; nothing he does may change what he is” (1989: 60). This is not only the essence of philosophical racism, but also one of the reasons the Jews, in particular, were marked for death. A converted Jew remains a Jew. A German Jew is not a German citizen, he is a Jew. Always. That being said, it is therefore essential that we look at the integral role racism played in the Holocaust, especially with respect to its relation to modernity. But first we should look at a few concepts that underlie racism as we know it.

In his book *A World on the Wane*, Claude Lévi-Strauss points out that pre-modern or ‘primitive’ societies deal with the danger of strangers in their midst with the help of a strategy that we would consider less than civilised (Bauman 1995: 179). The strategy is an anthropophagic one, meaning that they “eat up, devour and digest (biologically incorporate and assimilate) the strangers who carry powerful, mysterious forces” (Bauman 1995: 179). Modern man’s strategy on the other hand, is an anthropoemic one – “we throw the carriers of danger up – and away from where the orderly life is conducted; we keep them out of society’s bounds – either in exile, or in guarded enclaves where they can be safely incarcerated without hope of escaping” (Bauman 1995: 180). Bauman argues, however, that these two strategies are present in all societies, including ours, and that they are applied in parallel in every level of social organization (1995: 180). He goes on to point out that they are effective exactly because they co-exist – alone they would create too much waste, but together they can each tackle each other’s waste (Bauman 1995: 180). The phagic approach is an inclusivist strategy, “[metaphorically] assimilating strangers to neighbours”, whereas the emic approach is an exclusivist strategy, “merg[ing] them with the aliens” (Bauman 1995: 180). These two strategies posit an “either-or” approach, and it is only in this form that they stand a legitimate chance of controlling the social space (Bauman 1995: 180). In the modern world where strangers are an irremovable part of society, the “meaning of domination of control over social spacing is to be able to alternate phagic and emic strategies and to decide when one or the other is to be put in operation, as well as to adjudicate on which of the



strategies is ‘appropriate’ for the case in question” (Bauman 1995: 180-181). Bauman further explains that these strategies do not eliminate the problem of strangers, but they do offer ways of controlling the problem (1995: 181).

Bauman describes the anxiety, confusion and ambivalent sentiments that arise as a result of the presence of strangers as proteophobia (1995: 181). “Proteophobia refers...to the dislike of situations in which one feels lost, confused and disempowered” (Bauman 1995: 181). He claims that such situations are a result of the waste of social spacing – we feel lost, confused and disempowered in these situations because we do not know how to respond to them (Bauman 1995: 181). This is because the world around us has already been subjected to social spacing, “and we have mastered [the] rules which regiment conduct within the ordered space (Bauman 1995: 181). Yet when we find ourselves ‘outside’ of the ordered space, so to speak, we do not know which rules apply (Bauman 1995: 181). Again, the strategies for the administration of social space do not eliminate proteophobia, and rather surprisingly, it is not meant to either (Bauman 1995: 181). These strategies “[use] proteophobia as its main resource, and willingly or inadvertently, but constantly, replenishes its stocks” (Bauman 1995: 181). What does this mean? From the point of view of those who are in charge of order, proteophobia is a powerful tool. Being in charge of social spacing gives them the ability to adjust or shift the focus of proteophobia, selecting the objects “on which proteophobic sentiments are targeted, and then to expose such objects to the alternation of phagic and emic strategies” (Bauman 1995: 182). Thus, certain categories of people are perennially either included or excluded from the ordered society, or conversely, from the alien group. This is certainly a powerful instrument in the ‘tool bag’ of racism – by shifting the focus of proteophobia, those in charge can generate support for whatever agenda they want to promote. In the case of the Jews, it is relatively easy to turn friends against one another if the one believes that the other is a potential threat to his/her safety, well-being or health. Everything in our modern societies has to be administered, directed and controlled, and it would seem that not even our sentiments towards other people are our own. The emic and phagic strategies therefore underlie racism as we know it today.

Racism is often confused with other forms of inter-group resentment or prejudice, but racism stands alone in its “proud affinity with the scientific spirit of the age” (Bauman 1989: 62). Everything about racism is modern – it combines the strategies of architecture and gardening (constructing the perfect society) with that of medicine (cutting out the elements that do not

fit into the design, or cannot be transformed to do so) (Bauman 1989: 65). Racism is therefore the conviction that a certain group of people cannot be incorporated into the design or order, no matter the effort – no amount of re-education can fit the degenerate and unwanted into the design (Bauman 1989: 65). Bauman summarizes this by stating that

in the modern world distinguished by its administration to self-control and self-administration, racism declares a certain category of people endemically and hopelessly resistant to control and immune to all efforts at amelioration. To use the medical metaphor; one can train and shape ‘healthy’ parts of the body, but not cancerous growth. The latter can be ‘improved’ only by being destroyed (1989: 65).

The Jews were therefore beyond redemption, and only a physical separation of distance “or a break of communication, or fencing them off, or annihilation, may render them harmless” (Bauman 1989: 66). Gardening and medicine provided the necessary metaphors for a constructive stance towards an inherently destructive process, while health and sanitation provided the “archmetaphors for human tasks and strategies in the management of human affairs” (Bauman 1989: 70). Interestingly enough, the influence of the fields of science and medicine did not only stretch as far as metaphors describing the problem. Science and medicine would be used as a justification for the elimination of the Jews. As mentioned before, modern anti-Semitism was the result of the identity and boundary confusion that followed in the wake of the transition from pre-modernity to modernity. People’s agitation with the Jews as the so-called promoters of modernity dominated Europe during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Ivar Oxaal notes that

exacerbated by [these] national questions...scientific racism, of which modern anti-Semitism formed an important sub-specialism, sought to provide a blueprint for a better, rationally organized world. The culturally ambiguous, soon to be biologically degenerate Jew could expect no place in the modern new order of society (2002: 177).

To clarify Oxaal’s statement: when he refers to a “rationally organised world” it should be made clear that this world did not include the Jews. There was no place for them in this new world. This emphasises the fact that people did not have a problem with modernity as much as they had a problem with the Jews.

Hitler in particular was interested in two topics related to modern anti-Semitism, and scientific racism. Firstly, the threat of the corruption of German blood by the inferior Jews, and secondly, “the spread of syphilis, for which there was as yet no antibiotic cure” (Johnson

1988: 472-473). He was therefore not only concerned with the military and political threat posed by Jewish-Bolshevism, as mentioned earlier, but also the “deeper, biological threat from any contact, but especially sexual congress, with members of the Jewish race”, the latter concern being the most important among his followers (Johnson 1988: 473). One of the characteristics of modernity, is its obsession with health, sanitation and cleanliness. Medical science had made great advancements by the start of the twentieth century, which only served to bring these concerns to the fore. The medical-sexual ‘threat’ posed by the Jews, served to turn the “merely prejudiced into fanatics, capable of any course of action, however irrational and cruel” (Johnson 1988: 473). The Jews were regarded as “a dangerous kind of vermin” or bacilli (Johnson 1988: 473). The medical scare supposedly posed by the Jews also had the added effect of enabling all Jews to be lumped together in the same category – the religious, non-religious, ‘full Jew’, ‘half Jew’, the highly educated man and the farm worker all posed the same threat, which their standing in society could do nothing to remedy that (Johnson 1988: 473). If there were any people who were sceptical of Hitler’s anti-Semitic campaign, the fact that it had apparently now been backed up by medical science quelled many, if not all, of their concerns. Racial hygiene became so important that it came to dominate all spheres of German life, whether directly or indirectly.

It is astonishing that such nonsense could become widely accepted in a highly-educated country such as Germany, but Hitler found all sorts of expert sources to corroborate his information, “albeit sometimes oblique[ly]” (Johnson 1988: 473). A leading expert in the field of racial hygiene, for example, became the rector of the University of Berlin, announcing in his rectoral address his support for the forceful intervention of Germany’s leadership in matters of racial preservation (Glover 2001: 321). Soon many other academics, scientists and professors of racial hygiene added their voices in support of Hitler. One of the more ingenious methods Hitler used was to take work of Jewish intellectuals and use it against the Jews. Freud was one such an example. The Nazis argued that Freud’s work “removed the moral guilt from sexual promiscuity and so increased it. Thus Freud enabled the Jews to gain greater access to Aryan women” (Johnson 1988: 474). A distinction was also drawn between Freudian-Jewish psychiatry and the rest, stating that it was a mistake of medical psychology “to apply Jewish categories...to Christians, Germans and Slavs” (Johnson 1988: 474). The same fate befell Einstein’s work, which was labelled as “Jewish physics” (Johnson 1988: 474). Soon, scientific institutes dealing specifically with the ‘Jewish question’ had been set up, and their ‘research’ was conducted in the same spirit and with the

same vigour as that of any other scientific problem (Bauman 1989: 70). The support the Nazis garnered from experts was all that was needed to legitimize and moralise their dream of a Germany without the Jews.

The Holocaust represented social engineering on a grand scale – in the thousand-year Reich there was no room for anything but the German spirit – and racial ‘stock’ was the key link in the chain of this engineering process (Bauman 1989: 66). The National Hygiene Department, set up to preserve racial health, described their strategy by stating that they were there to

facilitate the propagation of healthy stock by systematic selection and by elimination of the unhealthy elements...improv[ing] the physical standards not perhaps, of the present generation, but of those who will succeed us (Bauman 1989: 66).

The reality was, of course, more gruesome than that as the Nazis saw no reason to restrict themselves to future generations, but to improve the present generation by means of the forceful removal of *unwertes Leben* (Bauman 1989: 67). At first they started to euthanize their own people, mostly the sick and disabled, but after an outcry by the Church they merely shifted their attention to the Jews and to different places, mostly outside of Germany (Bauman 1989: 67). It should be made clear that when referring to ‘euthanasia’, a concept usually associated with compassion,

the Nazi policy was not based on respect for autonomy, on the idea that an individual person may choose to die. Nor was it based on compassion for someone facing a terrible illness and unable to express a choice. Respect and concern for individuals did not come into it. The Nazis’ aim was to ‘improve’ the ‘race’, to tidy up the world by killing people who did not fit into their biological blueprint (Glover 2001: 323).

The separation of the Jews was only a half-measure. They were seen as “an invisible cohesive web of slime fungus...existing since time immemorial and spread over the entire earth”, and as such had to be ‘cleansed’ completely, not just from Germany, but the entire world (Hitler, quoted in (Bauman 1989: 68).

Only in its modern and scientific form, could the extermination of the Jews be articulated as an exercise in sanitation and cleansing, and “only with the modern incarnation of Jew-hatred have the Jews been charged with an ineradicable vice, with an imminent flaw which cannot be separated from its carriers” (Bauman 1989: 72). Thanks to the achievements of modernity, the Nazi regime could not only imagine a world in which there were no Jews, but also had at

their disposal the resources and technology that could make that world a reality (Bauman 1989: 73). This form of anti-Semitism is unimaginable outside of an advanced state of modernity. It is ironic then that such a modern form of anti-Semitism is so inextricably bound up with an allegedly pre-modern concern – the disappearance of traditional boundaries and securities brought on by the advent of modernity. Bauman summarises this idea by stating that modernity would in the end

supply its enemy with sophisticated weapons only his defeat made possible. The irony of history would allow the anti-modernist phobias to be unloaded through channels and forms only modernity could develop. Europe's inner demons were to be exorcised with the sophisticated products of technology, scientific management and the concentrated power of the state – all modernity's supreme achievements (1989: 46).

The whole of the Nazi project was a modern one; they used modern technology and modern conceptions of the state and administration to exterminate the Jews – the very people who were accused of being promoters of modernity. The form of modern anti-Semitism and racism that was utilised against the Jews can be seen as “a thoroughly modern weapon used in the conduct of pre-modern, or at least not exclusively modern struggles” (Bauman 1989: 62).

Racism comes into its own not only in the context of a design of the perfect society, but by the intention and commitment to implement this design through consistent and unwavering effort (Bauman 1989: 66). And yet racism, even coupled with all the ‘advantages’ of modernity, could not accomplish the feat of the Holocaust – to do so theory had to be turned into practice, and by all accounts, that did not happen in the Holocaust (Bauman 1989: 73). In order to accomplish such a feat, the Nazi government would have needed to energise human agents to cope with the task and sustain it for as long as possible (Bauman 1989: 73). The effort to do so, by means of propaganda and education, fell short of achieving the level of “emotion-led extermination” required for such a task (Bauman 1989: 73). *Kristallnacht* is a superb example of this failure, as the violence perpetrated that night did not inspire the sort of enduring emotionally-charged frenzy that was thought to be necessary in order to bring about the extermination of the Jews. In fact, it had quite the opposite effect. The scenes of violence merely paralysed the German people, and in fact led to an outpouring of sympathy, as the following morning, for example, many Germans were seen helping their local Jewish shopkeepers sweep away broken glass (Bauman 1989: 74). This was problematic for the

Nazis. As long as people were sympathetic towards the plight of the Jews, they were unlikely to succeed in their campaign to annihilate the Jews. They had to find a way to continue their task whilst at the same time limit the possibility of interference and opposition from the majority of Germans. If people were not going to become fanatical supporters of their anti-Semitic campaign, then they needed to be, at the very least, indifferent towards the fate of their Jewish colleagues and friends. How would the Nazi's accomplish this difficult task?

### **1.3 The Front Lines: Controlling Animal Pity, Overcoming Violence, and Generating Indifference**

While every attempt was made to remove violence from the sight of the majority of Germans, it was impossible to shield the men and women who had to execute the inhumane task of the Holocaust. Contrary to popular, and more comforting, belief, most of the perpetrators of the Holocaust were ordinary Germans, who in all other spheres of their lives were exemplary parents, spouses and citizens (Bauman 1989: 19). As such, Hannah Arendt rightly notes that the most difficult problem faced by the Nazis was “how to overcome...the animal pity by which all normal people are affected in the presence of physical suffering” (Bauman 1989: 20). Here, two important questions seem to be closely connected to one another: Firstly, the question as to how ordinary people could commit such horrifying crimes; and secondly, how it was possible for them to do so without being afflicted with this ‘animal pity’?

There seems to be a general pattern when it comes to turning ordinary people into perpetrators of modern genocides: First, the violence has to be authorised – in other words, orders are followed to the letter; secondly, the actions are routinised so as to appear to be ‘normal’; and lastly, and most significantly, the victims are dehumanised, so as to lessen the chance of any feelings of guilt on the part of the perpetrators (Bauman 1989: 21). These findings are linked to the well-known experiments on obedience conducted by Milgram in 1974. Milgram recruited university students to participate in what had been advertised as “a study of memory and learning” (Beauchamp & Childress 1994: 155). One participant was designated as the ‘teacher’, while another played the role of ‘learner’ (Beauchamp & Childress 1994: 155). The researcher in charge of the experiment explained that the study tested the effects of punishment on learning (Beauchamp & Childress 1994: 156). The learner would attempt to learn a list of word pairs, and whenever she made errors, electric shocks of increasing degrees of intensity would be administered by the teacher (Beauchamp &

Childress 1994: 156). What the subject assigned the role of teacher did not know, was that the so-called learner was in fact a member of the research team, and that the machine did not deliver electric shocks to the learner as promised (Beauchamp & Childress 1994: 156). The point of the experiment was therefore to see “how far a person [would] proceed in a concrete and measurable situation in which he is ordered to inflict pain on a protesting subject” (Beauchamp & Childress 1994: 156). Prior to the experiment, Milgram’s hypothesis – “cruelty is not committed by cruel individuals but by ordinary men and women trying to acquit themselves well of their ordinary duties” – caused an outcry, and most people were convinced that the participants in the study would “refuse to co-operate as the cruelty of [the] actions they were commanded to perform grew” (Bauman 1989: 153 - 154). What actually happened was that the intensity of the electric shocks that the majority of people were prepared to administer, was up to three times the initial estimate by the researchers (Bauman 1989: 154). Interestingly enough, the participants in the study were given a sample of an electric shock (a real one in their case), so that they were aware of what exactly they were administering to the learners. Beauchamp and Childress notes that 62.5 per cent of the participants continued to obey the researcher’s commands to administer the shocks “up to the maximum of 450 volts, labelled on the machine ‘Danger – Severe Shock’” (1994: 156). The surprising results of the experiment had a lot to do with the fact that the participants were told to administer the electric shocks by a person in a position of authority – the researcher - who assured them that they (the participants) would not be held responsible for any negative effects on the subjects (Bauman 1989: 161). This was coupled with the fact that the experiment was ‘in the interest of science’ or ‘research’ (Bauman 1989: 161). It was a potent combination. A litany of criticism erupted around his findings, which stipulated that “while cruelty correlates but poorly with the personal characteristics of its perpetrators, it correlates very strongly indeed with the relationship of authority and subordination, with our normal, daily encountered, structure of power and obedience” (Bauman 1989: 153 – 154). Milgram’s findings refuted some of the best known, and widely accepted theories on cruelty, such as *The Authoritarian Personality*<sup>2</sup>, by Adorno and his associates (Bauman 1989: 153). People were now faced with the uncomfortable possibility that not only could something like the Holocaust happen to us, but that *we may do it to others*.

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<sup>2</sup>*The Authoritarian Personality* was published shortly after the Second World War. In the book, the authors sought out the explanation of Nazi rule in the presence of a certain type of individual – a kind of personality that is “inclined to obedience against the stronger, and to the unscrupulous, often cruel, high-handedness towards the weak” (Bauman 1989: 153).

One of the most striking findings of Milgram's experiment was the inverse ratio of readiness to cruelty and proximity of the victim – it is difficult to harm someone we are touching, but it is easier to do so when the person is some way away and even more so when you cannot see/hear him (Bauman 1989: 155). The participants in Milgram's experiments were separated from the so-called learners, making it easier for them to administer the electric shocks. This is often the case in modern societies too – others often stand between us and “the final destructive act to which we contribute” (Bauman 1989: 155). The separation of the perpetrator and the victim plays an important psychological role, but it also performs a social role, as it draws together the perpetrators (or in the case of Milgram's experiment, the participant and the experimenter), making the victim an outsider, who stands alone, physically and psychologically (Bauman 1989: 156). The loneliness of the victim is a function of the togetherness of the perpetrators, who enjoy physical closeness and camaraderie, which in turn is produced by their joint actions (Bauman 1989: 155). “The effect of physical and purely psychical distance is, therefore, further enhanced by the collective nature of the damaging action” (Bauman 1989: 156). Furthermore, the fact that the intensity of the alleged electric shocks increased ever so slightly each time they were administered, meant that it was easier for the participants of the study to eventually administer high levels of shocks. In the long run, this forms a sort of trap from which the subject cannot escape:

If the subject decides that giving the next shock is not permissible, then, since it is (in every case) only slightly more intense than the last one, what was the justification for administering the last shock he just gave? To deny the propriety of the step he is about to take is to undercut the propriety of the step he just took, and this undercuts the subject's own moral position (Bauman 1989: 158).

This is known as ‘sequential action’, and it is in the course of such actions that the actor becomes a slave to his past actions (Bauman 1989: 158). The trap is therefore the impossibility of quitting without rejecting your own past actions as wrong; in other words, it is a paradox – “one cannot get clean without blackening oneself” (Bauman 1989: 158). Sequential action therefore went a long way in ensuring continued commitment on the part of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. The importance of Milgram's study is, therefore, that the “process of rationalisation facilitates behaviour that is inhuman and cruel in its consequences” (Bauman 1989: 155). Therefore, the more rational the organisation, the easier it is to be cruel and still remain at peace with oneself (Bauman 1989: 155).



Milgram's findings go a long way in answering the two questions posed at the start of this section, namely how ordinary people could become perpetrators of the most horrifying crimes, and how they could commit these crimes without being afflicted with 'animal pity'. In addition to the insight provided by Milgram's findings, it is also important to note the Nazi policy regarding violence. The extermination of the Jews was treated in a highly rational manner, and killing for pleasure, or as a result of personal motivations or vendettas was penalized (Bauman 1989: 20). After the disappointment of *Kristallnacht*, party members only killed when they were ordered to do so (Bauman 1989: 20). The Holocaust absorbed enormous volumes of violence and coercion, and it was all harnessed for a single purpose – the extermination of the Jews and other marginalised groups – as well as adding to the stimulus for its further “specialization and technical perfection” (Bauman 1989: 98). Modernity transformed violence into a technique, free from emotions and purely rational (Bauman 1989: 98). Violence, like everything else in modernity, needed to be administered in the most effective manner, relying on the subjection of its use to purely bureaucratic and technical considerations (Bauman 1989: 98). The use of violence was most efficient and cost-effective “when the means [were] subjected to solely instrumental-rational criteria, and thus dissociated from moral evaluation” (Bauman 1989: 98). This links back to Milgram's findings – violence is used in a highly rationalised and authorised manner, lifting the responsibility off the shoulders of those administering the violence, making it easier for them to do things they would normally have been opposed to. Not only are they not responsible for their actions, but they need not feel guilty about them, as they were just ‘doing their jobs’ and following orders. And even if they want to object, they could not because objecting means judging their own past actions as immoral, something which they convinced themselves they were not. Modernity may therefore be antithetical to the “wild passions of barbarism”, but it is “not at all antithetical to efficient, dispassionate destruction, slaughter, and torture” (Bauman 1989: 97).

Even though every effort was made to shield the German public from the violence committed against the Jews, many people knew what was happening. Why then, were the inhuman and cruel policies and actions against the Jews met with such widespread indifference on the part of the majority of Germans? The Nazis learnt very early on that if they were going to be successful in their plan of total Jewish annihilation, they would have to contend with two facts: Firstly, the fact that the German public did not, on the whole, support the party's anti-Semitic goals, and secondly, that Nazism did not serve to inspire the ordinary German, in fact

it only paralysed them. It was the latter fact that was eventually utilised by the Nazis, and that ultimately only served to tighten the noose around the necks of the Jews. As mentioned earlier, there was a distinction in the mind of the ordinary German between the conceptual 'Jew', and the Jewish people they knew. This meant that when people heard what was happening to 'the Jews', it had no effect on them, and even when their Jewish friends and neighbours were taken away, they could rationalise it and convince themselves that it was 'for their own good'. No matter what horrible things were happening to the Jews, it definitely had no adverse influence on the rest of the population, and therefore "are of no concern for anybody but the Jews" (Bauman 1989: 125). The most distinctive testimony to this is the fact that all the negative reactions to anti-Jewish violence coincided, with the enthusiastic approval of anti-Jewish legislation (Bauman 1989: 187). Hitler realised that the German people responded better to policies that focussed on management and administration than to violence. That is not to say that he eradicated violence, of course. As Hitler moved into office, he promised to end the "political lawlessness" that was so prevalent in the Weimar Republic (Johnson 1988: 483). Johnson points out that Hitler had a peculiar anti-Semitic drive – on the one hand he was passionate and filled with emotional loathing, and on the other hand he approached the 'Jewish problem' with cool reasoning (1988: 483). He calls this Hitler's dualism, and it was expressed in two forms of violence:

[T]he spontaneous, highly emotional, uncontrolled violence of the pogrom, and the cool, systematic, legal and regulated power of the state, expressed through law and police power...[Hitler] had mobilized instruments to express both aspects of his anti-Semitic personality. On the one hand there were the party street-bullies, and in particular the Brownshirts (SA), over 500,000 strong by the end of 1932, who habitually beat up Jews in the streets and even murdered them from time to time. On the other hand there was the elite SS, to run the police power and the camps, to administer the elaborate apparatus of state violence against the Jews (Johnson 1988: 483)

Individual acts of violence and cruelty were therefore encouraged, and then used as pretexts to introduce formal and legal policies against the Jews (Johnson 1988: 484). Hitler let it be known that he disapproved of these acts of violence, but he never punished anyone for them, and then in 1935, he used these acts of violence to justify the introduction of the Nuremberg Decrees, stripping the Jews of their most basic rights (Johnson 1988: 484). The Nuremberg decrees had a terrible effect on the Jews and the rest of the German population – the German population approved of it, convinced that it would end the violence against the Jews, and the Jews, who should have protested against them, were deceived (Johnson 1988: 484). Since the

decrees harked back to a familiar pre-modern past - in which the Jews were subject to legal restriction - “it deceived the Jews (and the rest of the world) that the Nuremberg system would give the Jews some kind of legal and permanent, albeit lowly, status in Nazi Germany” (Johnson 1988: 484). They overlooked the accompanying warning by Hitler, though, who warned that if these arrangements failed, then it might be necessary to pass a law handing over the problem for final solution (Johnson 1988: 484-485). With their enthusiastic approval of the Nuremberg decrees, both Germans and Jews sealed their own fate.

#### **1.4 Translating Hitler’s Dream into Reality: The Role of Bureaucracy**

Hitler’s dream of a Germany, and ultimately a Europe, that had been cleansed of Jews, was an ambitious one to say the least. Prior to the Holocaust, no genocide had been recorded that could match its sheer scale. Some would even argue that no such genocide had ever even been imagined. But the Holocaust did happen, and much like the people living then, many of us still find it difficult to grasp the scale of destruction and death that the Holocaust embodied. The unimaginable happened, and Bauman argues that modernity played a central role in the conceptualisation and execution of the Holocaust. More specifically, the Holocaust was made possible as a result of management and bureaucracy – incorporating everything modernity stands for into one goal. It is not only what made the Holocaust possible, but what makes it unique amongst all other instances of mass murder. According to Bauman, Max Weber describes modern administration in terms of speed and precision, and states that bureaucracy

offers above all the optimum possibility for carrying through the principle of specialized administrative functions according to purely objective considerations... The ‘objective’ discharge of business primarily means a discharge of business according to *calculable rules* and ‘without regard for persons’ (1989: 14).

The bureaucratic model owes its effectiveness to two parallel processes, the first being the “meticulous functional division of labour”, and the second the “substitution of technical for a moral responsibility” (Bauman 1989: 98). At first glance, it does not seem that the division of labour would be a noteworthy process of the bureaucratic model, especially not with reference to the Holocaust. Yet, the division of labour creates a distance between most of the contributors and the final outcome, and that is key to our understanding of the Holocaust (Bauman 1989: 98). Before the direct executors of the last link in the bureaucratic chain of

power confront their task “most of the preparatory operations which brought about that confrontation have been already performed by persons who had no personal experience, and sometimes not the knowledge either, of the task in question” (Bauman 1989: 98-99). This is unlike the model used in pre-modern times, in which all steps of the hierarchy shared the same occupational skills, and practical knowledge of the task at hand actually grows towards the top of the ladder, so to speak (Bauman 1989: 99). “The master knows the same as his journeyman or apprentice, only more and better” (Bauman 1989: 99). In the modern model, the people occupying each successive rung of the ladder differ greatly in the kind of expertise and training their jobs requires (Bauman 1989: 99). The modern model does not entertain the “romantic recipe” that requires every person to start at the bottom, and work their way up, and as such understands the full scope of the organisation (Bauman 1989: 99).

This creates a practical and mental distance from the final product, and links back to the findings of Milgram we discussed in the previous section. The implication of this is that people within a bureaucratic structure may give commands without full knowledge of their effects, and people may, in turn, perform those commands without any regard or knowledge of the task they are working towards (Bauman 1989: 99). If people are aware of the effects of their commands or actions, then it is, at most, an abstract and detached awareness, best expressed as statistics measuring the results, but not by passing any judgement (Bauman 1989: 99). This distance and detachment becomes radically magnified once the division of labour becomes functional (Bauman 1989: 99). Now, there is not only a lack of direct personal experience of the end task to which each person contributes, but also a lack in similarity between the task at hand and the function of the office as a whole (Bauman 1989: 99). This “distances the contributor from the job performed by the bureaucracy of which he is a part” (Bauman 1989: 100). The psychological impact of this is immense – there is a difference between giving the command to load bombs on a plane, and keeping up a regular supply of steel to a bomb factory (Bauman 1989: 100). In the first scenario, the commander can choose not to imagine the devastation caused by the bombs, but in the latter, the supplier can choose not to think of what the factory produces (Bauman 1989: 100):

In a functional division of labour, everything one does is in principle multifinal; that is, it can be combined and integrated into more than one meaning-determining totality. By itself, the function is devoid of meaning, and the meaning which will be eventually bestowed on it is in no way pre-empted by the actions of its perpetrators (Bauman 1989: 100).

Bauman notes an example by Kren and Rappoport that further illustrates this point. They ask if workers of the chemical plants that produce Napalm would accept responsibility for burned babies (Bauman 1989: 100). The answer to that is “no, of course they wouldn’t”, and there is no bureaucratic reason why they should – “the splitting of the baby-burning process in minute functional tasks and then separating the tasks from each other have made such an awareness irrelevant – and exceedingly difficult to achieve” (Bauman 1989: 100). Modern bureaucracy and technology act as moral sleeping pills, and this is aided by the functional division of labour (Bauman 1989: 16). To summarise, the bureaucratic pursuit of efficiency is ethically blind – its main concern is to achieve its objectives in the shortest amount of time, with the least amount of money, and as efficiently as possible (Bauman 1989: 15).

The second process that plays a key role in the bureaucratic model is the substitution of moral for technical responsibility, something that is inconceivable without the “functional dissection and separation of tasks” (Bauman 1989: 100). In pre-modern times, we find a linear division of command, one that is vulnerable to individual morality (Bauman 1989: 101). For example, shooting soldiers is acceptable, but shooting babies is not (Bauman 1989: 101). This was replaced by the functional division and separation of tasks we have been discussing up until now, and in this model, people obey commands no matter what (Bauman 1989: 101). In this modern model, there is no room for personal morality – you do your job, and you do it well. This is the most basic form of technical responsibility, as opposed to moral responsibility. It differs in that one forgets that action is a means to something other than itself – in the modern model, the act becomes a means in itself (Bauman 1989: 101). What matters is not what end goal your actions are contributing to, but rather that you obey commands to the best of your ability, and that you do so according to the best available know-how and as cost-effectively and efficiently as possible (Bauman 1989: 101). In other words, within the bureaucratic model, the means become ends in themselves. Here the phrase ‘taking pride in one’s work’ takes on a whole new meaning. Moral standards are irrelevant for the technical success of bureaucratic operations – within a bureaucratic organisation, morality is instead measured in terms of how well you perform your tasks (Bauman 1989: 101-102). A moral person is a good, diligent and efficient worker. Inside the bureaucratic system, the language of morality takes on a new vocabulary – loyalty, duty, discipline – and as Milgram pointed out, the subordinate person feels shame or pride depending on how well he has performed his tasks (Bauman 1989: 160). An important point to note here is that the

bureaucratic system does not “militate against norms as such”, it merely redeploys them to serve its own purposes (Bauman 1989: 160). It is not the substance, but the action that is subject to assessment in terms of good or bad, right or wrong et cetera (Bauman 1989: 160). The so-called ‘technology of action’ forms a substitute conscience that ensures a happy, willing and efficient work-force, without which the Holocaust could never have been a reality.

The substitution of a technical morality for a morality of substance was no doubt made significantly easier by shifting the balance between the subject’s proximity to the “targets” and his proximity to the source of authority of the action – something Milgram also realised, and showed, in his study (Bauman 1989: 161). The result of this continuous shifting of responsibility is a sort of “free-floating responsibility”, where every member of the group believes that he is at someone else’s beck and call, and those people think, and believe, the same thing (Bauman 1989: 163). Everyone believes that they are merely following orders – doing their jobs – and that their superior will accept responsibility if anything goes wrong. This is essentially why ‘good’ people could actively participate in the Holocaust, a question we have been exploring from the very beginning of this chapter. By breaking up tasks into smaller (meaningless) pieces, and shifting responsibility away from the actor, millions of Germans could participate in tightening the noose around the necks of their Jewish friends and neighbours without ever believing that they had done something wrong – they took pride in their work and had no guilty conscience to keep them up at night.

The bureaucratic model is quintessentially modern, and its fingerprints are all over the Holocaust, and for everyone to see (Bauman 1989: 105). The bureaucratic model made the Holocaust in its own image, and not only contributed to the Holocaust through its strengths, but also through its ailments – the bureaucratic system is prone to losing sight of the overall goal, concentrating instead on the means (Bauman 1989: 106). This is best illustrated when one looks at the final days of the Second World War. Almost all Nazi operations had been shut down, but the one thing that kept going, constantly, as if defeat were nowhere in sight, was the delivery of victims to the gas chambers. People within the bureaucratic system kept doing their individual tasks, as if nothing had changed. The “machinery of murder developed its own impetus”, it actively sought out new territories to cleanse, and with the impending defeat of the Germans, its goals became increasingly unrealistic – it kept going as a result of

its own routine (Bauman 1989: 106). Bureaucracy, and modernity by extension, is therefore intrinsically amenable of genocidal action:

To engage in such an action, it needs an encounter with another invention of modernity's bold design of a better, more reasonable and rational social order...and above all the capacity of drawing such designs and determination to make them efficacious. Genocide follows... It is only their meeting which has been, thus far, uncommon and rare (Bauman 1989: 106).

That is not to say that the whole bureaucratic model is corrupt and that we should cease to operate within it. Bureaucratic models incorporate many of the aspects we value in modernity – efficiency, cost-effectiveness, speed, precision. These are all things that, under normal circumstances are of value to us, and make our lives easier. The point Bauman is trying to make, however, is that modernity has another face, as it were, and the normal things we value have the possibility to aid in great destruction. The Holocaust is an extreme case of a normally much more benign, but it is because of its extremity that it revealed aspects of the bureaucratic model that would otherwise have gone unnoticed (Bauman 1989: 122).

### **1.5 Cooperation and the Rationality of Survival**

In the same way that the majority of Germans cooperated with the Nazis through their widespread indifference, the Jewish communities who were marked for removal and extermination cooperated with the Nazis. Given the massive managerial and administrative effort that the realisation of a *judenfrei* Germany would require, the Nazis made use of the leaders of doomed Jewish communities to perform the preliminary bureaucratic work and to supervise keeping the victims alive until they were gassed (Bauman 1989: 118). This is not to say that without all such help, the Holocaust would not have occurred, but it would probably have gone down in history as a far less destructive and terrifying instance in a long line of mass murders (Bauman 1989: 118).

The cooperation of the victims is yet another feature of a modern genocide, something that set the Holocaust apart from all other genocides before it. This new feature might have something to do with the fact that 'ordinary' genocides are very rarely aimed at total annihilation of a certain group – the purpose of the violence is usually to destroy a marked category as a "viable community capable of self-perpetuation and defence of its own self-identity" (Bauman 1989: 119). In the case of ordinary genocides, the objective is met once

the violence has been large enough to undermine the will and resilience of the sufferers and to make them surrender their superior power and accept a new power; and secondly, once the marked group has been deprived of the resources it needs to continue its struggle against its enemies (Bauman 1989: 119). The traditional elites of the doomed communities usually form the prime target of the genocide (as long as the genocide is aimed at the destruction of the marked people as a community) (Bauman 1989: 119). The rest of the population is then at the mercy of their tormenters, and can be forced into enslavement. This is not the case with the Holocaust. The Nazis had no use for the services of the Jews, and this made the ‘special’ treatment of Jewish elites unnecessary (Bauman 1989: 120). This seems contradictory to the initial point made at the start of this section – the fact that Jewish leaders cooperated with the Nazis and helped them with their bureaucratic tasks. But the Jewish cooperation solicited by the Nazis did not mean that they had any need for their skills – whether you were a doctor or a beggar, it was all the same to the Nazis - collaborators might have been under the impression that if they cooperated they would be saved, but this was not the case. They merely helped to cement their own destruction and were wholly expendable. In the preliminary stages of the Holocaust, the Jews occupied a position more akin to that of a subordinate group than of victims, making them part of the social arrangement that would destroy them (Bauman 1989: 122).

Under ‘normal’ conditions, genocide splits the actors unambiguously into murderers and victims, and as such resistance is the only (rational) option the latter would have (Bauman 1989: 122). This was not the case in the Holocaust. The Jews were made to believe that if they cooperated, and behaved rationally, there was a chance of redemption and survival. “The Jews could therefore play into the hands of their oppressors, facilitate their task, bring closer their own perdition, while guided in their action by the rationally interpreted purpose of survival” (Bauman 1989: 122). The situation for the Jews was reduced to one factor: the actions the Nazis chose to undertake, and as rational beings, their only option was to adjust their conduct to the anticipated reactions of the Nazis (Bauman 1989: 128). Furthermore, they had to assume that there was a logical link between actions and reactions, and so, for that reason, some actions were more desirable and advisable than others (Bauman 1989: 128). The Jews, as rational beings, were therefore guided by the same principles as the Nazis – efficiency, higher gain, and less expense (Bauman 1989: 129). The Nazis therefore deployed one of the main features of modernity – rationality – against the Jews in pursuit of their own goals. “Each rational step would deepen the helplessness of their prospective victims and



bring them an inch or two nearer to their ultimate destruction” (Bauman 1989: 129). It follows logically that in order to make their victims’ actions manipulable and controllable, the Nazis had to force the Jews to act rationally, and in order to do so, the Jews had to believe that there was something worth saving, and more importantly, that there were clear rules to go about saving it (Bauman 1989: 130).

The existence of bureaucratically defined categories with varying degrees of rights and privileges provided all the motivation the Jews needed. A frantic race developed in which Jews sought to be ‘re-classified’ as a kind of “Third Race” – one that lies somewhere between “full Jews” and the blameless German *Volk* (Bauman 1989: 130). This process was known as *Befreiung* (liberation), and while fighting for special privileges – believing all the while that their efforts were not necessarily in vain - the Jews and those who helped them tacitly accepted the premises of the Nazi design (Bauman 1989: 130). The premise being that “‘normal’ Jews, Jews ‘as such’, did not deserve the ordinary rights offered by German citizenship” (Bauman 1989: 131). You need to be a special kind of Jew, as it were, to protest discrimination – it required that you accept that while all other Jews might be exactly what the Nazis say they are, you are different from them:

Preoccupied by the ‘save what you can’ strategy, the future victims lost from sight, if only temporarily, the awesome identity of imminent fate. This gave the Nazis a chance to achieve their purpose with greatly reduced costs and a minimum of trouble (Bauman 1989: 133).

This was a truly inspired strategy – life under oppression was structured in such a way that the chances of survival seemed to be relatively evenly distributed, and even more importantly, they seemed manipulable (Bauman 1989: 134). In the words of Helen Fein, this created the illusion of “differential chances of death every day. The chance of each to survive depended on his or her place in the class order, and the whole class order arose from imposed scarcity and political terror, rewarding those most able to serve the Nazis directly or indirectly” (Bauman 1989: 134). Furthermore, this also served to obscure the recognition of a common enemy – the Nazis – as the animosity was displaced onto the *Judenrat*, responsible for managing life in the ghetto, and acting as a middle man between the Jewish people and the Nazis (Bauman 1989: 134).

Not only did the Nazis have to ensure that the Jews acted rationally, but they had to ensure that they continued to act rationally, even as the circumstances around them became more and more irrational (Bauman 1989: 142). In order to achieve this, enclaves of normality had to be ‘cut out’ for the Jews, in other words, all actions, whenever contemplated separately, and from the point of view of the administrators of the Holocaust, “allowed for a choice guided by rational criteria of survival” (Bauman 1989: 143). Most of these actions were also rational from the point of view of the victims (Bauman 1989: 143). This relied on the appearance of selective survival and self-preservation to be kept up, all the while gradually increasing the price (Bauman 1989: 143). The rationality of self-preservation soon revealed itself as the enemy of moral duty, as morality was pushed to its limits in an attempt to survive (Bauman 1989: 143). From the point of view of the members of the *Judenräte* who often had to decide who could stay in the ghetto, and who had to be sent off to the camps, ‘playing God’ was made much easier when it was done out of self-interest (Bauman 1989: 144). In the ghetto, the distance between classes was equal to the distance between life and death, and as more and more Jews were sent off the camps, “simply remaining alive meant closing one’s eyes to other people’s destitute agony” (Bauman 1989: 146). The price of compassion has seldom been so high, and concern with self-survival had seldom been so close to moral corruption (Bauman 1989: 146):

It acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts. The Jews were first proclaimed immoral and unscrupulous, selfish and greedy detractors of values, who used their ostensible cult of humanism as a convenient cover for naked self-interest; they were then forced into an inhuman condition where the definition promoted by propaganda could become true (Bauman 1989: 147-148).

What the Holocaust revealed is the consequences of a distinction between the rationality of the actor and the rationality of the action (Bauman 1989: 149). Had they a choice, none of the Jewish councillors or policemen would have boarded the “train of self-destruction”, but they didn’t have that choice (Bauman 1989: 149). The range of choices had not been set by them, and as such they had to deploy their reason and skill of rational judgement with the choices that were available to them (Bauman 1989: 149). Reason can be a good guide for individual behaviour only when the two rationalities overlap and resonate; if not, it is nothing more than a suicidal weapon (Bauman 1989: 149).

## 1.9 A Modern Genocide: Summary and Conclusion

Modern genocide is genocide with a purpose. Getting rid of the adversary is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end: a necessity that stems from the ultimate objective, a step that one has to take if one wants ever to reach the end of the road. The end itself is a grand vision of a better, and radically different, society. Modern genocide is an element of social engineering, meant to bring about a social order conforming to the design of the perfect society (Bauman 1989: 91).

Contemporary genocide stands apart from other forms of genocide in that it is used as a tool to achieve the perfect society, as imagined and designed by those in charge. It is not used in order to frighten a certain group of people into subservience and obedience – its goal is to completely annihilate the targeted group, and to do so in the most efficient, rational and cost-effective manner possible. It is cold and calculated, with no room for personal motives, opinions or morality. Its success is wholly reliant on an unwavering obedience to authority. A modern genocide like the Holocaust is therefore, as Bauman has argued, a by-product of modernity. It is what happens when the modern drive to achieve a “fully designed, fully controlled world...[gets] out of control and [runs] wild” (Bauman 1989: 93). Most of the time this does not happen, but when it does, it reveals certain aspects of modernity that would otherwise have remained hidden. And yet the factors that make a modern genocide like the Holocaust possible are completely ordinary, as we have seen. Taken on their own, none of the things mentioned in this chapter would arouse suspicion. A modern genocide occurs when ordinary factors that are normally kept apart, are brought together. It is therefore only the combination of factors that are unusual, not the factors themselves (Bauman 1989: 94). This does not, however, mean that living in a modern society is equal to living in an Auschwitz. Bauman’s theory, and the existence of the Holocaust, reveals the deadly potential our modern world holds.

So far we have looked at the factors responsible for the ‘success’ of the Holocaust. The Jews were targeted specifically as they were seen as the enemies of order and security. With the advent of modernity, their success made it seem as though they were ‘agents’ of modernity – in other words, they stood for the destruction of everything safe and familiar. In pre-modern times in Europe the Jews were seen as just another caste among castes, but with the advent of modernity, and the homogenous society it propagates, Jews started to integrate into this new modern society. Over time the Jews lost their distinctiveness, and it became harder and harder to recognise them, in other words, to mark them as alien. This initiated an enormous

boundary-keeping response from other citizens, and slowly but surely earlier anti-Semitic sentiments came rushing back. The Jews did not fit into any society or country – their perpetual state of homelessness was threatening to people who valued nationalism. The sight of a group of people who could flip their allegiance from one country to another induced fear and anxiety. But the destruction of the Jews was not reliant on personal emotional sentiments. In fact, the Nazis tried to mobilise the people of Germany against the Jews, and all that this achieved was a state of paralysis. The failure of *Kristallnacht* is a superb example of this. People did not respond well to public displays of interpersonal violence, and the Nazi party soon realised that if they were to achieve Hitler's dream of a *judenfrei* Germany and Europe, they had to go about their business in a different way. The indifference of ordinary Germans to Nazi policies against the Jews was used as a weapon, and this relied very heavily on the apparent distinction in the minds of ordinary Germans between 'Jews as such' and the so-called 'conceptual Jew'. This meant that they could lament the injustices suffered by their Jewish friends and neighbours and still support anti-Jewish legislation without any apparent contradiction. The indifference of the public was key, but even more important was the obedience and loyalty of the people charged with performing the more gory aspects of Hitler's dream. The soldiers on the front lines, as it were, who had to execute Jewish mothers and babies had to remain focussed on the task at hand without any risk of their personal moral convictions getting in the way. This was achieved as a result of their unwavering obedience to authority. They did whatever they were told to do, and did it well, as they were assured that their superiors would be the ones held responsible for the consequences. They were only doing their jobs, and instead of focussing on the moral implications of their actions, they focussed on performing their tasks with speed, precision and efficiency. This substitution of moral for technical responsibility ensured that they remained loyal to the organisation and performed their tasks as well as possible, without having to suffer a guilty conscience. In addition to this, the Jews were dehumanised, and a distance was created between the actor and the victim, so as to minimise any potential for moral judgement.

The enterprise of the Holocaust is an ambitious one to say the least, and it could not have been achieved without intensive administrative management. It is here that bureaucracy played a central role. The bureaucratic model owes its efficiency to two parallel processes, the division of labour, and the substitution of moral for technical responsibility, as we have already mentioned. By dividing work into small, meaningless tasks, everyone could in essence participate in the destruction of the Jews without thinking anything of it. If your job

is to do filing, it is difficult to connect that with the extermination of a whole race of people, and yet it is small administrative tasks like that that made the Holocaust as ‘successful’ as it was. A last factor that ensured the success of the Holocaust, and a characteristic of a modern genocide, was the participation of the victims with the Nazis. In ‘normal’ genocides, the only rational response the potential victims have is to rebel against their oppressors, yet that makes the victims difficult to manage, and ultimately leads to chaos. This was not the case with the Nazis – they made the Jews believe that there was a chance of being saved, if they act rationally and cooperate within the channels set up by the Nazis. In their struggle to survive, they not only cooperated with the Nazis, but they lost their humanity along the way. Morality stood no chance against the rationality of survival, as the Jews did anything they could in order to survive. Ultimately their cooperation and the indifference of ordinary Germans simply served to tighten the noose. Their fate had been sealed, and for the Nazis all these other strategies were just there to make things run as smoothly as possible.

The Holocaust, and the modern strategies implemented in order to ensure its success, represents a shocking and distorted view of the modern world we find ourselves in. While it is important not to trivialise the significance of the Holocaust by comparing it to our everyday sufferings, we must be vigilant in the world we live in. We think of the Holocaust as a historical event, and one that will never be repeated, but we are wrong. The Holocaust and modernity certainly changed the world in many ways, but it also changed the way in which extremely violent events such as genocides are executed. Most people still firmly believe that we as the human race have been vigilant and have kept our promise to never again allow an event like the Holocaust to take place. We want to believe that, but we are wrong. Given that the conditions that made the Holocaust possible are still present in our societies today, it stands to reason that an event like the Holocaust can easily take place again. And I would argue that one already has, and it occurred not so very long ago or very far away. On the surface, the Rwandan genocide may seem like a completely different form of genocide, and that comparing it to the Holocaust is a fool’s errand. In the following chapter, I argue that once one peels away the superficial differences between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide of 1994, a startling and uncomfortable array of similarities can be found.

## 2. The Rwandan Tragedy: A Modern Genocide?

In 1994, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day was widely commemorated, with great ceremony and much media coverage. The same year also saw the release of Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*, widely acclaimed by millions of cinemagoers. Such events revived the memories of those who lived through the war years and kindled interest among younger generations. It is clear that they stimulated so much discussion about the genocide of the Jews that there can be no doubt that the victims will be remembered well beyond the lifetimes of the remaining survivors (Destexhe 1995: 1).

The dead of Rwanda accumulated at nearly three times the rate of Jewish dead during the Holocaust. It was the most efficient mass killing since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Gourevitch 2000: 3).

Since 1945, "never again" has meant, essentially, "Never again will Germans kill Jews in Europe in the 1940s" (Rieff 2011: 30).

The majority of people living today would agree that the Holocaust changed the course of human history. The breakneck speed and cold efficiency with which the Nazis executed European Jews had never been seen before, and could not have been imagined prior to the start of the Second World War. After the defeat of the Nazis and the liberation of the concentration camps, the world pledged to never again allow such evil to defile the human race. This was an earnest and sincere pledge, as can be seen by the formation of the United Nations and the formulation of the Genocide Convention. It has now been more than sixty years since the end of that dark period in human history, and most people would say that the ideals set forth at the end of the War have been upheld, and that nothing like the Holocaust has happened since. That is not to say that there have not been wars and violence, on the contrary, but nothing even remotely akin to the Holocaust has been allowed to rear its head. For the majority of people, this is an uncontroversial opinion. Some would even say it is a fact.

Unfortunately, they are wrong. The Holocaust may indeed have been the first instance of genocide to employ modern technology and rationality, but it certainly is not a lone instance of what Bauman terms a 'modern' genocide. Another somewhat unlikely example comes to mind as well – in the spring of 1994, massacres broke out in the tiny central African state of Rwanda, and in one hundred days, between eight hundred thousand and a million people were killed. One has to wonder how it is that this massacre, this genocide, which coincided

with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day and an increased awareness of the events of the Holocaust, simply slipped under the world's radar. Very few news agencies reported on the Rwandan genocide, with many refusing to even call it genocide. The supposed increased awareness of the Holocaust did little to help the people of Rwanda as they were hunted down and killed like animals by their friends and neighbours. Despite the increased attention directed towards the Holocaust in 1994, it seemed to have done little to promote an actual understanding of events like the Holocaust (Destexhe 1995: 1). It would seem that the world had learnt nothing from history, and it was repeating itself in a somewhat different guise right before our very eyes.

It may seem odd to compare an event such as the Holocaust with that of the Rwandan genocide, since, on the surface, the two genocides appear to be very different. It is true that these two instances of genocide occurred under very different socio-economic conditions; Nazi Germany was a well-developed, modern country, and Rwanda a poor, underdeveloped nation. The different conditions in which the Rwandan genocide were so different, in fact, that many people attributed it to a 'typical' pre-modern tribal dispute. In this chapter I argue that the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide are not as different as they would seem, and when examined closely, the theory developed by Zygmunt Bauman with reference to the Holocaust as a modern genocide is also applicable in the case of Rwanda. In order to fully understand the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the country's history will be discussed briefly. Given the fact that the genocide was committed by the Hutus against the Tutsis, the nature of racism in Rwanda will also be addressed, along with the political, social and economic conditions of the 1990s that ultimately gave rise to the genocide. The core of this chapter, however, consists of a comparative study of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. In the first chapter, Zygmunt Bauman's theory with regard to the modern nature of the Holocaust was discussed in detail, and in this chapter, that theory will form the basis of this comparative study. Bauman's theory is certainly correct with respect to the Holocaust, but does it hold when applied to the Rwandan genocide of 1994? That is the question that the comparative study aims to answer. It is important to note, however, that the aim of this comparative study is not to only examine the similarities between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide and to therefore discard the features that made each instance of genocide unique; on the contrary - the differences between these two genocides will also be taken into account in order to ascertain whether or not there were modern elements at work in the Rwandan genocide.

## 2.1 A Brief History of Rwanda

Rwanda's population can be divided into three distinct groups – the Hutu, the Tutsi, and the Twa. The country was first settled by cave-dwelling pygmies whose descendants are the Twa people (Gourevitch 2000: 47). Today they make up less than one percent of Rwanda's population (Gourevitch 2000: 47). The Hutu and Tutsi, who make up the majority of the population, settled in the country much later, and little is known of their origins (Gourevitch 2000: 47). Their chiefs were called Mwamis, and they were made up of both Hutus and Tutsis (Gourevitch 2000: 47). The Hutus and the Tutsis lived and worked together and over time there was little difference between the two groups (Gourevitch 2000: 48). With time they all spoke the same language, shared the same religion and social and political culture, intermarried and lived together on the same hills (Gourevitch 2000: 47). The names Hutu and Tutsi stuck, however, and are generally considered to be based on the occupations of the two groups. The Hutus were agriculturalists, and the Tutsis pastoralists - and although some Tutsis worked in the fields, and some Hutus had cattle, the distinction stuck and became the source of the original inequality between these two groups (Mamdani 2001: 51). Since cattle are far more valuable than produce, the word Tutsi became synonymous with the political and economic elite (Gourevitch 2000: 48). We can therefore say that even though the Hutus and the Tutsis shared the same cultural identity, their economic identities were very different (Mamdani 2001: 51). Their everyday interaction with one another was influenced more by their cultural rather than economic identities, and as a result they lived together quite peacefully. It is during this peaceful period that things began to change. Slowly but surely the differences between the two groups became more and more defined and exaggerated.

There is no definitive way of knowing what factors contributed to and accelerated the stratification between the Hutus and the Tutsis. Pre-colonial Rwanda had no literacy and their tradition was therefore oral, and subject to change (Gourevitch 2000: 48). It is generally accepted, however, that it was with the ascension of the Mwami Rwabugiri, a Tutsi, in 1860 and the subsequent expansion of his domain, that the divide between the two groups began to deepen (Gourevitch 2000: 48). By the time Rwabugiri became a Mwami, Rwanda was an extensively administrated state, with a "multilayered hierarchy of military, political, and civil chiefs and governors, subchiefs, and deputy governors, sub-clan chiefs, and army recruiters" (Gourevitch 2000: 49). Rwanda was "a traditional state system regulated by codes of laws, juridical norms, and unwritten rules" (Lemarchand 2009: 55). The Mwami was revered as a



divinity, and his power and influence was absolute and infallible (Gourevitch 2000: 49). He was considered to be the personal embodiment of Rwanda and as Rwabugiri expanded his domain, “he increasingly configured the world of his subjects in his own image” (Gourevitch 2000: 49). Since he was a Tutsi, he favoured Tutsis for high-ranking military and political jobs (Gourevitch 2000: 49). Rwabugiri’s regime was therefore a feudal one: Tutsis were aristocrats, and Hutus were peasants (Gourevitch 2000: 49). Never before had the divide between the Tutsis and the Hutus been so great, and slowly but surely the two groups began to develop different cultures and different ideas about themselves and one another. One of the most prevalent ideas about the difference between the Hutus and the Tutsis is that of their physical appearances. The Hutus are “stocky and round-faced, dark-skinned, flat-nosed, thick-lipped, and square-jawed” while the Tutsis are “lanky, long-faced, not so dark-skinned, narrow-nosed, thin-lipped, and arrow-chinned” (Gourevitch 2000: 50). To say that these traits were universal would be a mistake, as there are countless exceptions – so much so that in modern-day Rwanda, Rwandans often exclaim that they themselves can’t tell each other apart – but these traits were treated as a generally accepted fact (Gourevitch 2000: 50).

While Mwami Rwabugiri was in power, there was a resurgence of interest in the African continent amongst Europeans. The African interior, once shrouded in mystery, had recently been “opened up to the European imagination” by a new generation of explorers, and this heralded in a frenzied scramble for precious African ‘real estate’ (Gourevitch 2000: 53). In 1885 representatives of all the major European powers gathered in Berlin (Gourevitch 2000: 53). The goal of the now infamous Berlin Conference was to divide up the ‘unclaimed’ African continent amongst the major European powers. In doing so they marked out new frontiers on the map, with little regard for existing political and traditional territories (Gourevitch 2000: 53). “Hundreds of kingdoms and chieftaincies that operated as distinct nations, with their own languages, religions, and complex political and social histories, were either carved up, or more often, lumped together beneath European flags” (Gourevitch 2000: 53). The cartographers in Berlin decided however, to leave Rwanda and its southern neighbour Burundi intact (Gourevitch 2000: 53). They were given to Germany, and were administrated as provinces of German East Africa (Gourevitch 2000: 53). Rwanda was now part of a European empire, a fact of which the people of Rwanda were blissfully unaware. No European had ever visited Rwanda, and even though the explorer and proponent of race ‘science’ John Hanning Speke had reported on Rwanda and its inhabitants, he did not actually visit the country – he had merely “peered over the country’s eastern frontier from a

hilltop in modern-day Tanzania” (Gourevitch 2000: 54). The country was so ferociously exclusive that even slave traders passed it by (Gourevitch 2000: 54). In 1894 a German count became the country’s first European visitor, and in 1897 Germany set up their first administrative offices and declared indirect rule over Rwanda (Gourevitch 2000: 54). This was meant to be the easiest way of ruling over Rwanda – they had a few agents oversee the operations of the existing government (Gourevitch 2000: 54).

The German visitors to Rwanda “formed a picture of a stately race of warrior kings, surrounded by herds of long-horned cattle and a subordinate race of short, dark peasants, hoeing tubers and picking bananas” (Gourevitch 2000: 50). In their ignorance, they assumed that this was the tradition of the country, a natural arrangement, instead of realising that this was simply how one Mwami had configured his domain (Gourevitch 2000: 50). It was around the time that the Germans set up offices in the country, that Mwami Rwabugiri died. He had expanded his domain to such an extent that it was roughly the size of modern-day Rwanda. As a result of the size and prestige of the domain that was now up for grabs, a violent succession fight arose amongst the Tutsi royal clans, a fight the Germans found themselves in the middle of (Gourevitch 2000: 54). At the same time, the Hutu population had tired of being mistreated under Rwabugiri’s rule, and now wanted one of their own to be the next Mwami (Gourevitch 2000: 54). As a result of the ignorance of the Germans who ran the colonial operation in the country, a sort of “dual colonialism” resulted (Gourevitch 2000: 54). They were under the impression that the Tutsis were naturally superior to the Hutus, and as such they did everything they could to help the Tutsis maintain calm amongst themselves and remain in control of Rwabugiri’s legacy (Gourevitch 2000: 54). The “Tutsi elites exploited the protection and license offered by the Germans to pursue their internal feuds and to further their hegemony over the Hutus” (Gourevitch 2000: 54). By the end of the First World War, the League of Nations had turned Rwanda over to the Belgians as a spoil of war, and by this time the terms Hutu and Tutsi had come to be defined as separate ethnic identities, instead of just two different groups of the same race (Gourevitch 2000: 54). This fact was used by the Belgians as “the cornerstone of their colonial policy” (Gourevitch 2000: 54).

As with the Germans, the Belgians bought into the idea that the Tutsis were not only the natural leaders of the Rwandan people, but also that they were the superior race. The Belgians found themselves in possession of an extremely orderly society, and instead of

having to instil a new order, they simply “sought out those features of the existing civilisation that fit their own ideas of mastery and subjugation, and bent them to fit their own purposes” (Gourevitch 2000: 55). The Belgians worked closely with the Catholic Church, and their unwavering support of the Tutsis as the ‘master-race’ of Rwanda set into motion a radical re-engineering of Rwandan society along ethnic lines (Gourevitch 2000: 56). They started by dismantling the traditional hill-by-hill administrative structures which “had offered Hutus their last hope for at least local autonomy” (Gourevitch 2000: 56). The Tutsis were given full authority over the Hutus, and that included exploiting them for labour, and levying taxes against them (Gourevitch 2000: 56). Shortly afterwards, the Belgian government conducted a census and issued every citizen with an ‘ethnic’ identity card, carefully labelling every Rwandan as either Hutu (eighty-five percent), Tutsi (fourteen percent), or Twa (one percent) (Gourevitch 2000: 57). The Belgian government now had everything they needed in order to ensure a perfectly administered apartheid system, all the while basing their decisions on the myth of Tutsi superiority (Gourevitch 2000: 57). Where the Hutus and Tutsis once enjoyed relative equality and peace<sup>3</sup>, living together as one people, now only the Tutsi elite enjoyed riches, power, and happiness, while the Hutu majority had to be content with discrimination, subjugation and misery. “Nothing so vividly defined the divide as the Belgian regime of forced labour, which required armies of Hutus to toil en masse as plantation chattel, on road construction, and in forestry crews, and placed Tutsis over them as taskmasters” (Gourevitch 2000: 57). The Belgians had therefore “made ‘ethnicity’ the defining feature of Rwandan existence”, obliterating any semblance of national identity, developing instead “mutually exclusionary discourses” (Gourevitch 2000: 58).

The Tutsis prospered under the stewardship of their Belgian protectors, but this soon ended. The Belgians were entering an age of greater equality in their own country, and after a long social revolution, the effects were also felt in Rwanda. Flemish priests visiting Rwanda after the Second World War identified with the plight of the Hutus, and encouraged them to seek social change (Gourevitch 2000: 58). Belgium’s colonial administration had also recently been put under United Nations trusteeship, and as a result they were under pressure to “prepare the ground for Rwandan independence” (Gourevitch 2000: 58). Hutu political

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<sup>3</sup>It would be a mistake to suggest that pre-colonial Rwanda was a society of complete peace and harmony. Pre-colonial Rwanda “was one of the most centralized and rigidly stratified anywhere in Africa” and violence did not just occur between Hutu and Tutsi (Lemarchand 2009: 79). For example, violence was not necessarily more prevalent between Hutu and Tutsi than between Tutsi and Tutsi.

activists started calling for a revolution of their own, and in 1957, a group of Hutu intellectuals published the *Hutu Manifesto*, in which they argued for ‘democracy’ (Gourevitch 2000: 58). The contents of the manifesto made it clear, however, that they were not fighting for equality – as demonstrated by the fact that they did not want to get rid of ethnic identity cards – but rather over “who would dominate the ethnically bipolar state” (Gourevitch 2000: 58). The social revolution began in earnest in 1959, as bands of Hutus attacked Tutsi authorities and burnt Tutsi homes (Gourevitch 2000: 59). Their biggest supporter was a Belgian colonel named Guy Logiest, who preached Belgian partiality towards the Hutus, stating that they had to protect ‘the people’ (Gourevitch 2000: 59-60). In the space of a few months, the Tutsis had fallen out of favour with the Belgian government, and now they were not even considered worthy of protection, as the Belgians stood by watching Hutus torch Tutsi homes. Colonel Logiest was practically running the revolution himself, attempting to “rectify the gross wrong of the colonial order he served”, and in 1960 he led a coup d’état, replacing Tutsi chiefs with Hutu chiefs (Gourevitch 2000: 60). This was followed with communal elections – presided over by Hutus at the polling stations – and unsurprisingly, the Hutus won an overwhelming ninety per cent of the top posts (Gourevitch 2000: 60).

The Belgians had switched sides on the eve of independence, the new order they prepared was merely the old order stood on its head. In January 1961, the Belgians convened a meeting of Rwanda’s new Hutu leaders, at which the [Tutsi] monarchy was officially abolished and Rwanda was declared a republic... A UN commission reported that the Rwandan revolution had, in fact, ‘brought about the racial dictatorship of one party’ and simply replaced ‘one type of oppressive regime with another’...[but] the Belgians didn’t care much (Gourevitch 2000: 60-61).

Rwanda’s new government was led by Grégoire Kaybanda, who frequently referred to Rwanda as “two nations in one state” with each ‘nation’ engaged in a constant struggle for dominance and superiority, a struggle that had been solidified by the Belgian colonisers (Gourevitch 2000: 62).

## **2.2 Racism in Rwanda**

As mentioned before, renewed interest in the African continent was sweeping through Europe in the mid to late nineteenth century. Europeans were suddenly faced with not only new opportunities to expand their empires, but also with new information about Africa and the people who live there. This information, however, did not always fit the stereotypes that were

so deeply ingrained in the European consciousness. The African interior had been the last part of Africa to be ‘discovered’ by Europeans, and it had long been believed that it was the domain of savages, with the Sahara desert acting as a civilisational barrier (Mamdani 2001: 79). The more Europeans explored beyond this ‘barrier’, the more they were confronted with – and had to explain - the phenomenon of highly organised civilisations prospering long before their encounter with Europe (Mamdani 2001: 79). This did not sit well with the European world view, and faced with something as perplexing as pre-colonial civilisation in Africa, there emerged alternative explanations for this ‘contradictory’ phenomenon. The most influential of these, the Hamitic hypothesis, suggests that every trace of civilisation in Africa can be contributed to the influence of an outside race (Mamdani 2001: 79). “This race of civilisers, it was said, were Caucasians who were born black in colour without being Negroid in race” (Mamdani 2001: 79). This race of people were known as the Hamites, and they were separated from the so-called ‘real’ Africans, the Bantu (Mamdani 2001: 79).

The Hamites were seen as the “hidden hand” responsible for pre-colonial civilisations in Africa, a notion that easily appealed to European sensibilities (Mamdani 2001: 80). This claim was supported by the ‘scientific’ authority of Diedrich Westerman, among others, who cite the racial superiority of the Hamites as being responsible for the founding of many of Africa’s largest states (Lemarchand 2009: 54). The Hamitic hypothesis was even supported by the Church, as its basis was the Biblical story of Shem, Ham and Japheth, sons of Noah (Mamdani 2001: 80-81). “The sons of Noah were the predecessors of the three main races in humanity: the Europeans were begotten from Japheth, the Semites from Shem, and the Hamites from Ham” (Mamdani 2001: 83). This meant that the Hamites were far closer to civilised Europeans than ‘real’ Africans, and this therefore explained how organised, civilised life was possible on the African continent without external influence. The ancient Egyptians, the Nubians, Ethiopians, and of course the Tutsis, were seen as Hamites (Mamdani 2001: 82). The Hamitic hypothesis did not only serve to justify pre-colonial civilisations in Africa, but it was also used to justify the slave trade (Mamdani 2001: 83). The Hamites civilised the barbaric Africans of central Africa, and as such the Bantu people, or the ‘real’ Africans, were seen as less than human.

The Hamitic hypothesis played an important role in colonial Rwanda. While there certainly were differences between the Hutus and the Tutsis in pre-colonial Rwanda, they were still seen as part of the same race. Even under the rule of Mwami Rwabugiri, the first Mwami to

significantly elevate the social status of the Tutsi, the Hutus and the Tutsis were seen as two groups of the same race. The Hamitic hypothesis, as utilised by the Belgians, changed all that. By the end of the colonial period, Hutus and Tutsis were considered to be of different ethnicities. The Belgians used the structures of discrimination that had been put in place by Rwabugiri, to institutionalise the differences between the Hutus and Tutsis. “The Tutsi were racialized, not just through an ideology but through a set of institutional reforms that the ideology inspired, in which it was embedded, and which in turn reproduced it” (Mamdani 2001: 87). For the first time in Rwandan history, Hutus and Tutsis were forced to carry identity cards and were lawfully favoured or discriminated against. It is important to note that “the racialization of the Tutsi/Hutu difference was not simply an intellectual construct, one which later and more enlightened generations of intellectuals could deconstruct and discard at will” (Mamdani 2001: 87). Since the Hamitic ideology permeated every aspect of society, there was no escaping the institutionalised discrimination that had become the trademark of the colonial regime. It is also not simply something we ascribe to the Rwandan society in retrospect – the difference between Hutus and Tutsis was emphasized at every level of society – be it at school, at work or at church (institutionalised racism was supported by European missionaries).

In addition to the ethnic identity cards Rwandans had to carry and the forced labour many had to endure, even Hutu children felt the effects of the Hamitic hypothesis, as they were picked on and bullied at school by teachers and fellow students simply because they were now thought of as a different, inferior, race. The Belgian government therefore made sure that the Hamitic hypothesis did not just remain an ideology – they translated it into an institutionalised fact “by making it the basis of changes in political, social, and cultural relations” (Mamdani 2001: 88). They made use of and reorganised key institutions around “an active acknowledgement of these identities” (Mamdani 2001: 88). For the first time the identities of ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ held permanently – they became enforced legal identities (Mamdani 2001: 101). Rwanda was no longer a country inhabited by various ethnic groups – they were now seen as different races, and more importantly, the Hutus were seen as the indigenous majority, while the Tutsis were classified as an alien minority (Mamdani 2001: 101). These identities stuck throughout the colonial period as well as thereafter, and these institutionalised differences would become the source of a great deal of spilt blood, culminating in a gruesome genocide in 1994.

### 2.3 Rwanda in the 1990s: Infrastructure, Politics and Economics

The departure of the colonial government heralded in a new age of Rwandan history. Under the colonial government the Tutsis prospered, while the Hutus struggled to survive. This all changed, of course, as the Belgians turned the tables on the Tutsis, and gave the Hutus supreme control of the country. The Hutus had emerged victorious over the Tutsis, but now President Kayibanda's regime was under pressure to keep the spirit of the social revolution alive (Gourevitch 2000: 64). Instead of changing the oppressive colonial system that they had once been a part of, the Kayibanda regime fell back on their old habits. Unable to live up to the promises they had made to the Hutu majority; the only way they could remain popular, was to stir up the Hutu masses against the Tutsis (Gourevitch 2000: 64). In addition to the violence and unrest that ran rampant throughout the country, the government realised that the colonial model of official discrimination could be used as "a sufficient method of pest control to keep the Tutsis in their place" (Gourevitch 2000: 66). The Hamitic hypothesis was first used by the colonisers as a "simple model for understanding perceived distinctions between lower and higher orders of humanity", but in the hands of the Kayibanda regime, it was recast in order to discredit allegations of Tutsi supremacy (Lemarchand 2009: 57). Long after the Belgian colonisers had vacated Rwanda, the Hamitic hypothesis was still in use – but this time the same themes used to prove Tutsi superiority were invoked to prove Tutsi foreignness (Lemarchand 2009: 58). Lemarchand remarks that

the Hamitic race, believed by Europeans to embody all that was best in humanity, was now presented by Hutus as the embodiment of the worst. Hamites represented cruelty and cunning, conquest and oppression. Where missionaries had invoked Semitic origins to suggest racial superiority, Hutu ideologues invoked them to argue that 'the Tutsi are all originally bad'... Even physical attributes once seen as marks of worthiness were denounced: what some perceived as Tutsi feminine grace was now vilified as yet another ploy designed to subjugate the unsuspecting Hutu. (Lemarchand 2009: 58).

Gourevitch argues that while the Hamitic hypothesis may have provided a convenient way for the Hutu majority to control the Tutsis, the prevalence of the myth also points to a "deep, almost mystical sense of inferiority" among the new Hutu elite, a fact that "gave extra teeth to the quota system" (2000: 66). The insecure Kayibanda regime did not last long, however, and in 1973, when the regime launched pogroms on the Tutsis with renewed vigour, the general in charge of the violence, ousted Kayibanda from his post (Gourevitch 2000: 69).

General Major Habyarimana declared himself the new president of the Second Republic, and, in a move that surprised many, called a moratorium on the attacks against the Tutsis (Gourevitch 2000: 69). Unlike Kayibanda, Habyarimana believed that all Rwandans should live in peace and work together (Gourevitch 2000: 69). This seemed like an idyllic turn of events for the Tutsis, but the fact was that under Habyarimana's rule, Rwanda was more tightly regulated than ever – the government had to approve and regulate every aspect of its citizens' lives (Gourevitch 2000: 69). "People were literally kept in place by rules that forbade changing residence without government approval, and for Tutsis, of course, the old...quota rules remained... If Tutsis thought they deserved better, they hardly complained; Habyarimana...promised to let them live unmolested, and that was more than they had been able to count on in the past" (Gourevitch 2000: 69-70). Even though the discrimination of Tutsis persisted under the Habyarimana regime, the West did not bat an eyelid. Rwanda was regarded as a boring, virtuous Christian country, and even though the current president was in power because of a military coup d'état, he impressed foreign dignitaries with his simple life-style, sober demeanour and devout Catholicism (Melvern 2004: 11). In addition to that, "the Rwandan government had a good track record for economic management and had moderate foreign policies" (Melvern 2004: 11). Coupled with the fact that Rwanda had a working bureaucracy and "a centralised system of administration, with executive, legislative and judicial branches of government", Rwanda was favoured by foreign donors who were systematically bled dry by the president and his constant talk of 'development' (Melvern 2004: 11).

It was not just all talk on the part of the president, as Habyarimana did indeed improve the infrastructure of the country, and by the 1990s, Rwanda had an excellent telephone system and power supply network (Melvern 2004: 11). This is a significant improvement since the Kayibanda regime – when Habyarimana took over, the overwhelmingly rural Rwanda was one of the poorest nations in central Africa and by the 1990s seventy per cent of the population had access to clean drinking water, and clinics and schools had been established in all main towns (Gourevitch 2000: 72; Hintjens 2001: 33). Rwanda's stable infrastructure also reflected its economic situation. Rwanda's government had managed to avoid debt, and the economy was well managed on the whole, with stable levels of inflation, and low levels of corruption (Hintjens 2001: 3). Prior to the 1994 genocide, Rwanda had always been synonymous with coffee – Rwanda's biggest export. A steady coffee price had ensured the economic well-being of Rwanda, but when coffee sales fell by more than two-thirds in one



year, Rwanda was in trouble (Hintjens 2001: 3). All evidence suggests that this was not as a result of mismanagement or corruption on the part of the Habyarimana regime, but Rwanda was plunged into an economic crisis nonetheless (Hintjens 2001: 330). As a result of the economic crisis, the national currency was devalued by two thirds in one year (Hintjens 2001: 34). Up until then, Rwanda had avoided debt and donor conditionality, and were free to manage their country as they saw fit, but since they were no longer able to meet the conditions set by their foreign donors, the donors stopped turning a blind eye to the injustices that were being perpetrated in Rwanda (Hintjens 2001: 33). They demanded democratic reform, and with famine and mortality on the rise in his country, Habyarimana had no choice but to agree to meet leaders of the opposition in order to come to some sort of arrangement. This would take place in Arusha, Tanzania, where the now infamous Arusha accords would be signed. The ink on the document barely had time to dry when Habyarimana's plane was shot down upon his return to Rwanda, and genocide ensued.

#### **2.4 The 1994 Genocide: What Caused It?**

Like other instances of genocide, the reasons for the eruption of violence in Rwanda in 1994, are complex, varied and uncertain. They range from simple economic needs to matters of fear and security. The aim of this chapter is not to determine the causes of the Rwandan genocide; however but some of the principal causes need to be mentioned insofar as they are relevant to the discussion as a whole. Having already discussed the Habyarimana regime in some detail, it is important to reiterate the fact that, in spite of the reality of Habyarimana's rule, his regime never intended to eliminate the Tutsis. Prior to the genocide, the Habyarimana regime was regarded as a welcome relief to the Tutsi minority, who enjoyed far greater prosperity and peace than under the Kayibanda regime. It therefore seems baffling that the genocide would take place under the auspices of the Habyarimana regime. What caused this shift in sentiment towards the Tutsis? It is generally believed that the invasion of the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) on 1 October 1990 provided the catalyst that set the planning of the genocide into motion (Melvern 2004: 13). The RPF crossed the Rwandan border with Uganda, shooting dead the guards at the customs post (Melvern 2004: 13). They were followed by roughly four thousand armed men, wearing Ugandan army uniforms (Melvern 2004: 13). The RPF was a rebel army and was made up of mostly second generation Rwandan (Tutsi) refugees whose parents had fled Rwanda after the Hutu revolution in 1959 (Melvern 2004: 13). They had joined the Ugandan army directly from the refugee camps and were a well-

trained force with combat experience (Melvern 2004: 13). They demanded an immediate end to the ethnic divide in Rwanda (Melvern 2004: 13). The invasion caused widespread panic amongst the Rwandan elite who were convinced that the Tutsis had come to take back Rwanda, and that they would be forced into subservience once more (Melvern 2004: 13). The invasion was considered a failure as the RPF was blocked by French and Belgian troops (Melvern 2004: 14). The Rwandan government, aided by the France and Belgium, had succeeded in quashing the RPF threat and were now firmly in control once more. Instead of floundering after the invasion, the government decided to use the invasion to their advantage. Three days after the RPF invasion, the Rwandan government staged a fake attack on the capital, Kigali, “with gunfire and explosions all night long, intended to encourage citizens to make arrests of ‘Tutsis suspects’” (Melvern 2004: 14). After the invasion, the Tutsis living in Rwanda were described as accomplices of the RPF (Melvern 2004: 14). Not only did the fake attack on the capitol serve as a way of punishing Tutsis living in the country – the very people the RPF was trying to protect – it also served to convince any remaining Hutu sceptics of the ‘real’ danger posed by the RPF and Tutsis in general. This is often seen as the first ominous warning of the genocide that would erupt in less than four years.

In the years in between the RPF invasion and the genocide, the government and the people of Rwanda were on edge. The RPF proceeded to attack Rwanda on two more occasions, in 1991 and 1993, and each time it was met with violent crackdowns on Tutsis living in Rwanda. The threat posed by the RPF became a part of everyday life, and as a result the Rwandan people believed that the invasions were sure signs that the Tutsis were going to rise up and take control of the country. All Tutsis were therefore regarded with suspicion. This heightened atmosphere of fear and insecurity, coupled with the economic crisis that was plaguing Rwanda at the time, resulted in the founding of Hutu extremist opposition parties (Midlarsky 2005: 163). When foreign donors forced President Habyarimana to initiate democratic reforms in the country that would, if successful, result in the ruling party becoming a minority party in the proposed parliamentary system, the road forward was clear – the only way the Hutus could stay in power was to eliminate the Tutsi demographic base, thereby nullifying the Arusha Accords and a potential RPF victory in a renewed war (Midlarsky 2005: 166). This is exactly what transpired in Rwanda, and the Hutu majority did not need to wait long for the perfect opportunity to execute their plan. On April 6, 1994, the plane carrying President Habyarimana was shot down, killing the president and everybody else on board (Lemarchand 2004: 490). The president was on his way back from Tanzania, where

talks about the new democratic reforms were taking place. The RPF were immediately blamed for the attack, and in some parts of Rwanda, the genocide ensued within hours of the crash.

## **2.5 Organisation and Planning of the Genocide**

Many people attribute the Rwandan genocide to nothing more than age old animosity finally reaching its boiling point – a messy, primitive and inevitable tribal war. It is true that in the aftermath of Habyarimana's death, it did seem as if the violence that erupted in Rwanda was just another chapter in the turbulent relations between Hutus and Tutsis that had come to characterise Rwandan society since 1990. However, this view overlooks several key features of the Rwandan genocide, features that disprove the notion that the genocide can be reduced down to mob violence; in fact a much more sinister and organised approach to the annihilation of the Tutsis can be observed. Even without the benefit of hindsight, there were clear signs in the first days of the genocide that this renewed onslaught against the Tutsis had been planned for some time. Almost immediately after the news of Habyarimana's death reached Kigali, militia roadblocks sprang up all around the city (Prunier 1995: 229). Militiamen and the Presidential Guard went from house to house searching for and killing 'enemies' (Prunier 1995: 229). Most of the first victims were liberal politicians, and it soon became clear that the militiamen and Presidential Guard were searching for specific people – they had received lists of 'enemies' who had to be killed first – the most prominent of these was the Prime Minister (Prunier 1995: 231). These lists had been drawn up ahead of time, and included the names of politicians, priests, activists and journalists, but the list was not only restricted to well-known people (Prunier 1995: 231):

The lists were long, detailed and open to extension. Tutsi were killed simply because they were Tutsi, i.e... 'accomplices' of the RPF, and this even in the case of people who had no sympathy with the guerrillas. Hutu who were either members or simple sympathisers of democratic opposition parties were also killed... Several journalists were killed because they had written too freely about corruption among senior officials. Many priests and nuns were killed because they tried to stop militiamen from killing others, some well-dressed people, or people who spoke good French, or people who owned a car and were not MRND supporters were killed simply because these marks of social distinction made them natural suspects for holding liberal opinions (Prunier 1995: 231).

The extensive nature of the lists made it clear that the first killings had been planned for some time, especially since the activities of many of the people on the list appear to have been monitored. The preliminary lists had probably been drawn up as early as 1990 when a series of secret meetings were taking place to discuss the elimination of the Tutsis as a permanent solution (Melvern 2004: 19). The targets on the list had to be eliminated first, in order to ensure as little possible opposition to the large scale destruction of Tutsis that was about to unfold. The killing of such a wide array of people also served to send a message to anyone else who might have considered opposing the genocide.

After the targets on the list had been eliminated and genocide spread like wildfire throughout the country, another sign of the planned and organised nature of the genocide came to the fore. The men who hunted for Tutsis in the villages and in the swamps all had access to weapons. This does not seem strange until one considers that Rwanda was in the throes of an enormous economic crisis. These ordinary Rwandans could certainly not have afforded to acquire weapons on their own. In the midst of an economic collapse, the Rwandan government spent a total of US\$4.6 million in 1993 on importing machetes and other agricultural tools (Melvern 2004: 56). The total number of machetes imported in 1993 weighed an estimated 581.175 kilograms – that is one new machete for every third man in Rwanda (Melvern 2004: 56). This was accomplished in eighteen separate deals, and the tools were supplied by companies who were not usually associated with agriculture, and had made no such imports in 1991 or 1992 (Melvern 2004: 56). This might seem like an insignificant fact, given that the majority of Rwandans live in rural areas and are involved in agriculture, but the fact that the machetes were distributed and stockpiled all around the country instead of being put to use, suggests that they were being saved for a more sinister use. The planners of the genocide knew that in order to accomplish the mammoth task of genocide, they would need more than just the police and the army (Melvern 2004: 19). They initiated a so-called ‘civilian defence’ programme, in which peasants, who were concerned about the threat posed by the RPF, could participate in (Melvern 2004: 19). The machetes were therefore stockpiled for the purposes of this programme, and in addition to the machetes, the government also distributed assault rifles, guns and grenades (Melvern 2004: 56). “In the three years from October 1990 Rwanda, one of the poorest countries in the world, became the third largest importer of weapons in Africa” (Melvern 2004: 56-57). As many Rwandans lost their jobs as a result of the economic crisis, they were recruited in their thousands to join the militia

(Melvern 2004: 57). These men were trained as communal police, and would eventually lead the charge against the Tutsis (Melvern 2004: 57).

Now that we have identified the Rwandan genocide as a planned genocide, our attention must shift to the planners of the genocide. Who were they, and what role did they play in the Habyarimana regime? As mentioned before, the RPF invasion of 1990 posed a serious threat to the Rwandan elite who benefited greatly from the Habyarimana regime. They were willing and eager to do anything possible to ensure that they remained in such a fortunate position. The President surely felt the same way, but with international donors forcing him to instigate democratic reforms, and reconcile with the RPF, the last thing he could do was plan a genocide. He had to focus on keeping up the charade that the Rwandan government was doing everything in its power to ensure peace. It was therefore left to his inner circle to plan the genocide. The president's wife, Agathe Kanzinga, was from a well-established Hutu clan in the north, and as a result she had relatives in powerful positions (Melvern 2004: 12). During the first twenty years of her husband's presidency, she had developed an impressive network of associates and informers who were more than willing to do her bidding (Melvern 2004: 12). Surrounded by other family members and close associates, they formed the infamous *Akuza*, "a word used during the monarchy to describe the group of courtiers surrounding the king" (Melvern 2004: 12). Madame Agathe, as she was known, was the muscle behind Habyarimana's presidency and she and her cronies were quick to set the president back on the right path on the rare occasions that he dared cross the *Akuza* (Gourevitch 2000: 77). It was the *Akuza* who engineered the fake attack on Kigali in the aftermath of the RPF invasion in 1990, and it was the *Akuza* who organised the secret meetings in which the details of the genocide were put forth. The *Akuza* had powerful members in every sphere of Rwandan society, from the military to the media, who could ensure that their extremist Hutu message was broadcast to the general public, and implemented at the local level.

As with any government policy, it is not enough for the government to simply declare its intentions – in order for the government to be effective, these intentions need to be implemented at every level of society, and the Habyarimana regime knew this all too well. Rwanda is considered by many to be a failed state, but the reason it failed is not because it was ineffective, on the contrary - Helen M. Hintjens argues that the Rwandan state "became so powerful and effective that it crushed and overwhelmed Rwandan society completely"

(1999: 245). This efficiency is best illustrated when one looks at how the genocide was implemented at the local level. As mentioned before, the success of the Rwandan genocide relied heavily on the mass mobilization of people across all levels of society, and in order to achieve this, the national government put a lot of faith in local authorities to mobilise their people and ensure that the national genocidal design was executed. This was by no means an easy feat. In the years preceding the genocide, the people of Rwanda had become tired of living in fear of the RPF – all Rwandans, Hutus and Tutsis alike, wanted peace (Hintjens 2001: 38). Luck was on the side of the government as most of the local authorities were supporters of the Habyarimana regime, and those who were not were quickly removed from office and replaced with more compliant supporters. The task of the local authorities was also made significantly easier by the culture of social conformity that is so deeply ingrained in Rwandan society (Hintjens 2001: 38). Rwandans have a tendency to blindly obey commands – if someone in a position of power issues a command, they will execute the command with little regard to their personal feelings or moral objections. This cannot alone explain the popular participation in the genocide, but coupled with the rampant poverty and unemployment in the country, and the availability of weapons distributed by the government, most men found no reason not to participate in the genocide. They had all the tools to do the job, and since many of them were desperate for relief from the poverty that they found themselves in, the looting that accompanied the killing provided a welcome relief, or at least an incentive to participate.

## **2.6 The Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide: Similarities**

Up until now we have looked at the history that lead to the Rwandan genocide, and the conditions within which it took place. Contrary to popular belief, the Rwandan genocide was indeed planned, and it was therefore not a case of centuries-old hatred reaching its boiling point. Even though planning and organisation is an integral characteristic of a modern genocide that is not in itself enough to conclude that the Rwandan genocide was indeed a modern genocide. As was argued in the first chapter, Zygmunt Bauman believes that the Holocaust is the first example of a truly modern genocide. He emphasizes specific (and distinctly modern) aspects of the Holocaust that differentiates it from all other instances of genocide. The systematic way in which the Holocaust was planned, and the efficiency with which these plans were executed is an integral part of what makes the Holocaust a modern phenomenon. The modern inventions of bureaucracy and the division of labour played a key

role in achieving the aforementioned efficiency. In addition to this, the clever tactic of combining policy-making and violence not only ensured that ordinary Germans did not object to the deportation of Jews, but it also served as a motivation for the significant cooperation of the Jews. These aspects are all present in the case of the Holocaust, but the same cannot be said of the Rwandan genocide. Many of the modern aspects of the Rwandan genocide are difficult to identify because the conditions in which the genocide germinated and the way in which it was executed seem vastly different from the Holocaust. Perhaps it is easier to identify the aspects that make the Holocaust unique simply because the speed and efficiency with which the Jews were annihilated had never been seen before, or perhaps it has to do with the integral role technology and bureaucracy played in the process – something that had also never been seen before. Yet in examining the Rwandan genocide, we are presented with many of the same questions that had plagued people about the Holocaust. We cannot help but wonder in horror at the speed with which Tutsis were massacred, and how it was possible for neighbours and friends to not only stand by and do nothing to stop the violence, but to also actively participate in killing their friends. In that sense then, there is obviously more to the Rwandan genocide than meets the eye; there has to be more to the insanity that engulfed Rwanda in 1994 than simple tribal or ethnic rage. This section aims to compare the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide in an effort to find similarities between the two tragedies.

Since it is the organised nature of a modern genocide that distinguishes it from an ethnic or tribal conflict, it is apt to start our comparison there. The organisation of the Rwandan genocide bears a strong resemblance to that of Nazi Germany in the sense that the decision to commit genocide was the result of a long process. In both cases of state-sponsored genocide, the respective governments slowly implemented more and more policies restricting the rights and privileges of their eventual victims. In the case of the Nazi party, it is generally assumed that the decision to implement the Final Solution was only taken sometime in the course of 1941 (Hatzfeld 2003: 53). Prior to this decision, the Jews had been declared subhuman, and they had been subject to “dismissals, confiscations, brutalities, anti-Jewish laws, the wearing of the yellow star; exclusions, deportations, pogroms, confinement within ghettos, [and] in concentration camps” (Hatzfeld 2003: 53). The Nazis had made no secret of the fact that the Jews did not fit into their idealised German society, but the decision to exterminate a whole race of people was only made after all of the above-mentioned strategies had been ‘exhausted’. The Nazis saw that their policies pertaining to the management of the ‘Jewish problem’ had, thus far, been ineffective and too time-consuming. In the spirit of the modern

rationality that had emerged in Europe in recent years, ineffective policies would not do – the Germans were constantly searching for faster, more effective and more cost-efficient ways of ‘managing’ the Jews, and when the most effective, cost-efficient and fastest strategy was to send them to the gas chambers, they wasted no time in adopting it.

A similar approach can be identified when looking at the Habyarimana regime and its treatment of Tutsis. As mentioned before, the regime started out promoting better cooperation between the Hutus and the Tutsis, a strategy that was a significant improvement from the Kayibanda regime which was characterised by widespread violence against the Tutsis. That is not to say that the Habyarimana regime treated Hutus and Tutsis equally – on the contrary – but the Tutsis enjoyed greater prosperity and peace under the auspices of the Habyarimana regime than it ever did under Kayibanda. This slowly changed. The more the regime felt threatened by the RPF, the more it tightened restrictions on Tutsis living in Rwanda, increasingly believing that all Tutsis were accomplices. This culminated in the rise of more and more Hutu extremist parties, and in a last ditch attempt to remain in control of the country, the regime (or rather the Akuzas) quietly planned the genocide in the background, while keeping up pretences that they were trying to ‘protect’ their citizens from the RPF. A similar strategy had been used by the Nazis, who insisted that all the anti-Jewish policies were there for the safety of the Jews. It must be said, however, that while both regimes decided to commit genocide, their motivations for doing so differed greatly. The different motivations behind each regimes decision to commit genocide will be discussed later on.

As a result of the long process that led to genocide and the gradual restrictions placed on the Jews and the Tutsis, there exists a striking similarity between the disbelief of the victims in each of the two cases – neither group predicted the fate that would eventually befall them. In the case of the Holocaust, the history of anti-Semitism in Europe lead the Jews to believe that, at the very worst, there would be some violence directed towards them, but that they would ultimately, like so many times in the past, be separated from the rest of the population and live out their days in the ghettos. This was what had always happened in the past, and there was little reason for the Jews to think that the anti-Semitic charge lead by Hitler would be any different. What they did not account for was the fact that, unlike in the past, they were now living in a modern age, an age in which man treated the world around him as his garden; and like in a garden, there were weeds that did not fit into the overall design, and therefore had to be removed. The Nazi project was to cultivate a world in which the Jews had no place,



a world in which they no longer existed, and as such it was no longer enough to simply hide the Jews behind the walls of their ghettos. One often marvels at the way in which the majority of Jews remained ignorant of the reality of what was happening to them, and this is largely as a result of the long process that led to the decision to commit genocide. The Nazis first employed the policies and methods the Jews had been subjected to in the past, leading to a more compliant group of victims. Once the Jews had been deported and or placed in ghettos as before, the process of genocide began, and they were moved to the concentration camps. This is where the rationality of modernity comes in – the most efficient way to exterminate a whole race of people would be to ensure their continued cooperation. If they are under the impression that good behaviour may allow them to live while others are exterminated, they are less likely to revolt and cause trouble. This in turn meant that the Nazis needed less man power to police the Jews.

In order to achieve this, it was important for the Nazis to maintain an air of normality in the ghettos. In addition to this, the Jews were enlisted to help with the vast administrative duties that are characteristic of any bureaucracy. This not only created an air of normality, but also made the Jews believe that they were in control of their own fate. If they could prove that they were of value to the Nazis, they would spare them. But this is, of course, not how the bureaucratic pursuit operates – the division of labour means that no one individual is indispensable, especially not a Jew. This is what Bauman calls the rationality of survival – the Nazis wanted to make their victims' actions manipulable and controllable, and therefore had to force them to act rationally (Bauman 1989: 130). The only way they could achieve this is if the Jews believed that all was not lost, that there was something left to save, but the Nazis knew that “each rational step would deepen the helplessness of their prospective victims and bring them an inch or two nearer to their ultimate destruction” (Bauman 1989: 129). While the rationality of survival certainly was prevalent in the case of the Holocaust, it is more difficult to identify a similar strategy in the case of the Rwandan genocide. When it comes to the air of normality that was maintained by the Nazis, there is, however, evidence that suggests that the Habyarimana employed a similar tactic in the years leading up to the genocide.

In the weeks and months leading up to the genocide in Rwanda, very few Tutsis fled the country. Like the Jews, they were also under the impression that if violence broke out in Rwanda, it would stick to a historically established pattern. They certainly did not expect to

be the victims of genocide. Where the Nazis explicitly solicited the cooperation of the Jews, the Habyarimana regime had a different approach. They had kept the planning of the genocide hidden as far as possible in order to maintain an air of normality. They needed to ensure that the Tutsis did not feel threatened by the regime and the Hutu population. The Tutsis were never displaced from their homes – a fact which added greatly to the impression of normality. From an outside point of view, it is hard to believe that the majority of Tutsis remained in their homes, since there had been violence and discrimination directed towards them, a clear sign, in our eyes, that they had reason to fear for their safety. It is important to remember, however, that the Tutsis had been frequent victims of violence and discrimination, especially in the four years preceding the genocide, and as a result the violence and discrimination that we see as indicative of an imminent genocide, were considered to be the normal state of affairs. In addition to this, the fact that the president was in the process of negotiating a power-sharing deal with opposition parties (or at least maintaining the façade of doing so) meant that the Tutsis really had no reason to flee their country. They believed, along with the rest of the world, that Rwanda was on the brink of democratic reform.

Where many people believe the lack of organisation to be the most defining difference between the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust, even more believe that the nature or way in which the killing was administered in Rwanda provides conclusive proof against the idea that the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide share any similarities. It is true that the outbreak of genocide in Rwanda was accompanied by widespread chaos, as people started to flee from their homes in a last attempt to survive. The Holocaust, on the other hand, was a picture of organisation and efficiency, something that is not usually associated with the Rwandan genocide. It certainly seems as if this assumption is true, but when one looks at the events that took place in the immediate aftermath of Habyarimana's plane crash, a different story emerges. One of the first tasks executed by the militiamen was the setting up of roadblocks all over the country. By the time the first killings were taking place, the Tutsis had realised that their lives were in danger, and tried to flee. Unfortunately for them, the regime's strategy of keeping the Tutsis calm had worked a little too well. By the time most Tutsis wanted to flee, a vast network of roadblocks was already in place, "enclose[ing] all Tutsi and moderate Hutu into a manageable space" (Boydell 2010: 32). Adam Jones writes that not only were people contained by the road blocks, but "at the infamous roadblocks, those carrying Tutsi identity cards...were shot or hacked to death" (Jones 2008: 238). This meant that the chaos that is so often associated with the Rwandan genocide was in fact contained in

smaller areas, allowing the killers to systematically ‘clear’ each area of Tutsis, before moving on to the next one. The victims had nowhere to go, and could do nothing except wait until it was their turn to die. While the weapons the Hutus used were fairly primitive - they relied mostly on machetes – the way in which the country was divided up into smaller more manageable grids not only attests to a sense of organisation and efficiency, but also meant that their primitive weaponry was in no way an obstacle. In this sense then, the Rwandan genocide took place with an efficiency comparable to that of the Holocaust.

The history of the Holocaust is rife with stories about the *Einsatzgruppen*, or death squads who typically followed the advancing German army into urban areas where large numbers of Jews were known to live. They would gather all the Jews, and either execute them there and then, or take them to a location outside of the town or city, where they would be killed. The *Einsatzgruppen* were ultimately found to be inefficient, and the wide-spread use of gas chambers was implemented instead. Even though gas chambers were not used in the Rwandan genocide, there existed a group of elite forces who can be considered the ‘peers’ of the *Einsatzgruppen*. The Interahamwe, as they were known, was originally formed as a youth group of the ruling MRND party. They were better organised than other government groups and were given military training (Melvern 2004: 25). The recruits were taken to secret bases where they would be given specialised training, focusing on the use of weapons and explosives, and, perhaps most importantly, “killing at speed” (Melvern 2004: 25). Their preferred method was to first immobilise their victims by cutting their Achilles heel (Melvern 2004: 25). When the genocide started, the majority of the responsibility for exterminating the Tutsis rested on ordinary Hutus, mostly farmers who had no military training whatsoever. They were often timid, especially in the beginning, and did not know how to ‘properly’ kill someone. This is where the Interahamwe came in. They usually lead the charge against the Tutsis, especially in the beginning, and demonstrated how to properly immobilise and kill victims (Melvern 2004: 27). They also encouraged and often threatened those who did not wish to participate in the genocide. While the Interahamwe’s eventual function was much different from that of the *Einsatzgruppen* that operated during the Holocaust, they were considered to be an elite force, much like the Nazi death squads, and played an integral role in maintaining the incredible speed and efficiency with which the Tutsis were annihilated. Were it not for them, it is doubtful that as many Tutsis would have died.

Bauman argues that one of the things that differentiate a modern genocide from a pre-modern genocide is the goal of the genocide. In the case of pre-modern genocides, the goal was to subjugate the targeted group, and therefore in most cases, only their political and community leaders were executed until the targeted group surrendered (Bauman 1989: 119). In such cases, civilians and especially skilled people such as doctors and lawyers were not killed as they were deemed valuable to the new regime. In the case of a modern genocide, the aim is to wholly exterminate a specific group of people. The murderers have no interest in the skills of the victims – they have no use for them and as such no exceptions are made – doctors and beggars receive the same treatment. They are all part of the targeted group, and are therefore worthless. This modern characteristic can be found in both the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. In both cases, the respective regimes wanted to destroy the entire targeted group. This brings us to one of the most gruesome elements of both the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide – the merciless killing of even women and children. One often wonders why even women and children had to be exterminated – in the case of the Holocaust, the matter seems easily explained: the Jews did not fit into the design of their ideal society, and therefore everyone had to be exterminated. In the case of the Rwandan genocide, the killing of women and children seems puzzling.

We know that all Tutsis were identified as accomplices of the RPF, and this explains why Tutsi men were murdered – they could easily mount an attack from within the country. In order to explain why women and children were brutally murdered too, it is important to note that the RPF leader (and current Rwandan president) Paul Kagame left Rwanda as a child and then returned as the leader of a rebel army that caused endless problems for the Hutu majority. “The implication is that since Kagame was spared in the past and ultimately grew up to be a rebel, all Tutsis should be killed this time” (Straus 2008: 164). Many Hutus therefore felt that “killing all Tutsis would prevent a future threat: children were killed so that they would not become rebels in the future, and women were killed so that they would not give birth to children who would become future rebels” (Straus 2008: 164). The Tutsis within Rwandan were therefore seen as a unit, all accomplices of the RPF, and therefore they had to be destroyed as a unit. The Hutu majority did not want to run the risk of being subjected to Tutsi rule ever again, and therefore they could not leave any man, woman or child alive. In addition to this, another reason for killing all Tutsis was that the Tutsis in Rwanda were seen as “a fifth column of support for the rebels” and that by eliminating that support system, they would weaken the rebels and defeat them (Straus 2008: 164). It could also have been far

simpler than that – by killing all Tutsis in the country, the government was sending a message to the RPF, stating that their attempts to liberate Rwanda from the clutches of the Habyarimana regime was in fact killing the very people they wish to free.

When talking about an event such as the Rwandan genocide, one is struck by the way in which the murderers readily and brutally killed people they knew. As with the Holocaust, we have to ask ourselves how this was possible? Here we find another similarity between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide – the substitution of technical for moral responsibility. Bauman argues that unlike in pre-modern times, where the linear division of command was vulnerable to individual morality, the modern system of bureaucracy thrives on the division of labour. The division of labour ensures that there is no room for individual morality – the focus is shifted instead onto performing the task at hand to the best of your ability. By breaking up tasks, people are not confronted with the difficulty of questioning the implications of their actions – what matters instead is that you do your job to the best of your ability and as cost-effectively and efficiently as possible. This is the most basic form of technical responsibility. Morality is therefore measured according to how well you perform your tasks – a moral person is a diligent and efficient worker. In the first chapter the implementation of such a system was discussed with respect to the Holocaust, but how was it implemented in Rwanda, and to what extent?

Constance Boydell notes that in Rwanda, much as was the case in Nazi Germany, “the state replaced individual morality with the notion of the moral authority of the state, therefore it could use this system of super-ordination to establish a false technical responsibility, and impose a centralised sense of morality which justified the killings” (2010: 27). This explains why civilians so easily took up arms against the Tutsis – the government was sponsoring the genocide, and the reason given for the genocide was the security threat posed by the RPF. As soon as the killings were justified, the killers could participate without their individual morality holding them back - they had a job to do, and the only requirement was that they do it well, not that they should evaluate the moral implications of their actions. As mentioned before, Rwanda was in the midst of an economic crisis when the genocide broke out, and as a result most of the Hutus who participated in the genocide were very poor. Many of them welcomed the opportunity to get rid of the Tutsis, whom they not only suspected of aiding the RPF, but who they believed had more money and food than they did. The fact that the government was endorsing the genocide, made it that much easier to carry out the grisly task

of clearing Rwanda of Tutsis. This does not mean however, that the killing of Tutsis was done in an emotionally-charged manner – the whole operation had to remain as efficient and as rational as possible – if there were too many emotions running wild amongst the killers, the genocide could have easily disintegrated into yet another case of mob-violence. Since this was a state-sponsored genocide, the state also directed the emotions of the killers and deliberately nurtured certain forms of hatred – “inter-Hutu rivalries were actively suppressed. Hatred was only legitimate when directed towards a specific, ordered target” (Hintjens 2001: 26).

Here we find a correlation between the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust. The Nazi officers and soldiers who had to execute the more hands-on job of killing the Jews were strictly monitored – Hitler’s Nazi regime did not tolerate vindictive killings or killing that was not ordered. They had a job to do, and those who disobeyed orders were punished accordingly. The same can be said with respect to the Rwandan genocide. Not only did the Habyarimana regime not tolerate inter-Hutu rivalries that may have resulted in conflicts over items looted from Tutsi homes, they also acted swiftly and with severity against those Hutus who refused to cooperate and participate in the genocide. These people were either punished and forced to comply, or labelled as a Tutsi sympathiser and traitor, and killed. In his interview with Jean Hatzfeld, Alphonse Hitiyaremye, a man tried for his role in the Rwandan genocide, says that “to kill so many human beings without wavering, we had to hate with no second thoughts. Hatred was the only emotion allowed...The killings were too well managed to leave us room for any other feelings [or independent thinking, for that matter]” (2003: 221). Alphonse here describes the unwavering hatred for the Tutsis but he also makes reference to the incredible efficiency of the Rwandan genocide. The government carefully managed the emotions of the killers by means of extensive propaganda, and at the same time ensured that the killers continued to work quickly and efficiently by normalising the extreme violence that they were exposed to. How does the propaganda used in the Rwandan genocide compare to that used before and during the Holocaust, and what role did it play in the normalisation of violence that became such a defining characteristic of the Rwandan genocide? These questions will be addressed in the following section.

One of the most important weapons used by the Nazis in their campaign against the Jews, was propaganda. In order to ensure the success of their campaign to destroy the Jews, it was critical for all German people to hear the Nazi message – the Jews were accused of being

unclean and polluting German society with their cunning tactics. Goebbels ensured that Nazi propaganda infiltrated every part of German life, relying on mediums such as film, radio (to broadcast Hitler's infamous speeches), pamphlets and Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* to spread the Nazi ideology, as well as organisations such as the Hitler Youth which ensured that children bought into the Nazi message from a young age. Propaganda therefore played an integral role in the Holocaust in the sense that it not only encouraged Germans to join the Nazi party and assist them in the task of exterminating the Jews, but also sent a clear message to anyone who wanted to resist Nazi rule, thereby limiting the amount of opposition the party would have to deal with. Propaganda, in the form that it was used by the Nazis, focused on generating differences between the Jews and the German *Volk* where there once was none. Prior to the advent of the Nazi party, the Jews were Germans in every conceivable way. In pre-modern times Jews were seen as a separate caste of people, but with the advent of modernity this changed, and they became citizens like everyone else. We have already seen in the first chapter that the notion that there was wide-spread anti-Semitism in Germany at the start of the twentieth Century is a myth. Germany was on the whole tolerant of Jews, who played an important role in the economic, cultural and social life of Germany. With the advent of the Nazi party, the Jews were marked as alien and blamed for a wide range of social problems, most notably the fact that the Germans lost the First World War. The Nazis focused on alienating the Jews from the rest of the German population, thus ensuring that the deportation and eventual extermination of the Jews did not meet with opposition.

Can a similar form of propaganda be found in the case of the Rwandan genocide? The Nazis made use of all the advantages bureaucracy bestowed upon them in order to generate enormous amounts of propaganda. We know that in socio-economic terms, Rwanda is incomparable to Nazi Germany, but beneath Rwanda's relatively underdeveloped veneer lay very effective tools of mobilization and propaganda. The Rwandan government could not rely on films and television to spread their message of hate, and instead relied heavily on radio and print media. In the years preceding the Rwandan genocide, it is said that there existed a 66 per cent literacy rate "and a 29 per cent rate of radio ownership (59 per cent in the cities)" (Melson 2003: 333). These rates might seem low, but when you consider the fact that Rwandans often gathered together to listen to radio broadcasts and hear the latest reports, read aloud, these rates do not offer a true representation of the reach of propaganda in Rwanda (Melvern 2004: 49). There were two important 'organs' of propaganda – the radio station RTL (Radio-Télévision des Milles Collines) and the journal Kangura. RTL was

not the only radio station in Rwanda, but the national broadcaster, Radio Rwanda, did not broadcast propaganda. Melvern writes that RTLM was founded just as the Arusha talks were being concluded (2004: 52). It was said to be run by a “so-called free and independent broadcasting company” and was set up ‘to create harmonious development[s] in Rwandese society’” (Melvern 2004: 52). The radio station was in fact set up by President Habyarimana’s brother-in-law and son-in-law, undoubtedly members of the Akuzas (Destexhe 1995: 30). The radio station had a large audience, thanks to regular broadcasts of popular music (Destexhe 1995: 30). The station was christened “‘the radio that kills’” by its opponents as it broadcast “unceasing messages of hate, such as ‘the grave is only half full. Who will help us fill it?’” (Destexhe 1995: 30). At the same time as RTLM started broadcasting, a strange ‘coincidence’ occurred: hundreds of cheap transistor radios became available, making the station even more popular (Melvern 2004: 52). “RTLM carried no factual reports but there were commentaries and lengthy interviews and it soon became clear that the new radio station was part of a campaign to promote extremist Hutu propaganda” (Melvern 2004: 53). The Akuzas had successfully infiltrated mass media, and as a result their message was spread right down to the local level.

In addition to the radio station, the monthly journal *Kangura* devoted many columns to extremist Hutu propaganda. In Kinyarwanda, *Kangura* means ‘wake up others’ and its main aim was to promote Hutu interests (Melvern 2004: 49). In the three years it was published, from 1990 to 1993, it persistently campaigned against the Tutsis, spreading racist propaganda as well as heavily criticising the president over the concessions made during the Arusha talks (Melvern 2004: 49). *Kangura* caused a sensation; everybody spoke about it, and it was even read aloud during Interahamwe rallies (Melvern 2004: 49). *Kangura*’s most successful and infamous issue was number six, containing what was called the “Hutu Ten Commandments” (Melvern 2004: 50). This was a manifesto against all Tutsis, calling for outright hatred (Melvern 2004: 50). The eighth of these commandments stated that, “The Hutus should stop feeling any pity for the Tutsis”, with the tenth commandment ordering Hutus to treat even moderate Hutus as traitors (Destexhe 1995: 30). Despite the primitive conditions within which anti-Tutsi propaganda were spread “the state propaganda machinery...was highly sophisticated, ensuring that ‘underdevelopment was no obstacle to genocide’” (Hintjens 2001: 41). As was the case with Nazi propaganda, the Rwandan government focused their propaganda on generating difference - they wanted to reracialize the Tutsis (Mamdani 2001: 190). They were no longer seen as an ethnic group but rather as a separate race and an alien



one to boot (Mamdani 2001: 190). Unlike under colonial rule, the fact that the Tutsis were not indigenous to Rwanda was now used against them. Not only did institutionalised racism and propaganda legitimise the decisions of the ruling party, but it also served as a way for ordinary Hutus to explain their miseries by means of scapegoating – a similar strategy as the one employed under Nazi rule, where the Jews were also targeted as scapegoats (Uvin 1997: 112). The Tutsis and the Jews were therefore both seen as the ‘enemy inside’.

An important aspect of the propaganda that was employed against the Tutsis, was the use of everyday language and terms to describe the killing of Tutsis – “‘bush clearing’, ‘clearing away tall trees’ and cutting ‘bad branches’” were some of the euphemisms used to urge people to take up arms and exterminate the Tutsis (Eltringham 2004: 67). The use of everyday language of work is significant because it emphasises the fact that the genocide was sponsored by the state, and for that reason participating in the genocide was seen as the new national occupation, not a crime against humanity. “During the genocide, the work of the killers was not regarded as a crime in Rwanda; it was effectively the law of the land, and every citizen was responsible for it administration” (Gourevitch 2000: 123). Performing the genocide was really seen as work, and since the majority of the Hutus who participated in the killing were farmers, the euphemisms conveyed a sense of normality. Instead of tending to their fields, the killers were now tending to their country. It is difficult to ignore the echoes of Bauman’s definition of modernity as a type of ‘gardening’ – removing the unsightly ‘weeds’ in order to shape the world according to your design. The Hutus were busy removing the weeds from their society, much like the Nazis did with the Jews, and creating a new world order. Most importantly, however, by using the language of work to describe the ‘weeding’ process, the Rwandan government created the impression that the country was in the hands of “hard-working peasants” (Eltringham 2004: 67). Instead of the gruesome business that is genocide staring them full in the face, the government cleverly disguised the genocide as the task of hard-working people, and what can be more just and wholesome than that? Coupled with the fact that extreme violence and cruelty became part of the everyday lives of the killers, the Rwandan government successfully normalized the gruesome task of committing genocide (De Lame 2004: 311). This normalisation ensured that the killers were not affected by the horrifying acts they were committing, but maintained their speed, efficiency and drive throughout the genocidal campaign. It was crucial for the killers to remain as efficient as possible, a characteristic that the Rwandan genocide shares with the Holocaust. Adam Jones summarises this feature:

A remarkable feature of the genocide was its routinized character. The killings were 'marked not by the fury of combat or paroxysms of mob violence, but by well-ordered sanity that mirrored the rhythms of ordinary collective life'. Killers arrived for their duties at a designated hour, and broke off their murderous activities at five in the afternoon, as though clocking off (2008: 243).

Up until now, we have discussed all the potential similarities between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, save for one. One of the central arguments in Bauman's book is how modernity transformed genocide into an industrialised process. He points to the machine-like precision and speed of the Holocaust as a distinctly modern characteristic. "[N]ever before in history had people been killed on an assembly line basis" (Hilberg 2003: 922). This was largely achieved with the help of modern technology which in turn ensured the speed and efficiency demanded by the bureaucratic model. The Holocaust is indeed notorious for the speed at which Jews were exterminated, but the Rwandan genocide presents an equally chilling case:

On April 20, at the parish of Karama in Butare prefecture, 'between thirty-five and forty-three thousand people died *in less than six hours*'. This was more than were killed in the Nazis' two-day slaughters of Jews outside Odessa and Kiev (at BabiYar) in 1941, or in the largest single-day extermination spree in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau (Jones 2008: 239).

The Rwandan genocide is filled with such stories about the incredible efficiency and horrifying speed at which Tutsis were hunted down and killed. It therefore seems likely that if the Rwandan genocide is indeed a modern genocide, Bauman's theory regarding the use of modern technology as a means of achieving the goals of a modern genocide, should be applicable in the Rwandan case too. Many people doubt that modern technology was used in the Rwandan genocide, but that is largely due to our conception of what modern technology entails. When we think of the Holocaust, we immediately call up images of gas chambers, advanced train networks and machine guns, and as a result we immediately assume that such technologies were not present during the Rwandan genocide. This is indeed true when it comes to specific examples, but we must not forget that the Rwandan genocide took place in a socio-economic environment very different from that of the Holocaust. The modern technology available to the central African nation would naturally not have been on the same level as those utilised during the Holocaust. This is not, however, to say that the Rwandans did not make use of any modern technology at all.

As mentioned before, the principle weapon for the majority of killers was the machete. This relatively primitive weapon was an obvious choice for most Rwandans – most of them already owned a machete, and since they were mostly farmers, they were used to using the tool in the fields. While the machete certainly does not qualify as a modern weapon, the way in which it was used can be seen as a form of modern technology. Constance Boydell notes that Rwanda has some of the best roads in Africa, and she argues that this, coupled with the vast network of roadblocks that sprang up across the country within hours of the president's plane crash, can be seen as a form of modern technology and management (2010: 31). Once the Tutsis realised that their lives were in danger, they set out along the roads that would lead them out of Rwanda, only to find that they were blocked in and surrounded. The roads had been transformed into “a network of human fly traps where killers could focus their attack” (Boydell 2010: 31). Once they surrounded the Tutsis at the roadblocks, they could use their machetes and easily kill the Tutsis. Had these roadblocks not been in place, it would have been much more difficult for the Hutus to put their machetes to optimal use, as the success of the machete as a weapon is dependent on being in close proximity to the victim.

In addition to the good roads and roadblocks, the radio, while not incredibly modern, can be seen as an important form of modern technology employed against the Tutsis. The radio was used to broadcast messages of hatred and propaganda against the Tutsis, thereby assisting the genocidal campaign. In addition to the radio, telephone communications, or the lack thereof, rather, played an important role in the plot against the Tutsis. In the first days of the genocide, telephone communications were cut off, which meant that the Tutsis could not receive any warnings from friends and family members, nor could they get any news from the outside world (Boydell 2010: 31). They could also not rely on the radio for news because the genocide was state-sponsored, and as a result the national broadcaster Radio Rwanda would not reveal any information that might aid the Tutsis, and the ‘independent’ broadcaster RTLM was committed to spreading propaganda against the Tutsis. To illustrate the effectiveness of modern communications in the Rwandan genocide, recall for a moment the story of Paul Rusesabagina, the man whose efforts to save as many Rwandans as possible was adapted into the film *Hotel Rwanda*. Paul had an active phone line and a fax machine, and could therefore phone and fax anybody in the world (Gourevitch 2000: 132). He notes that he would stay up until four every morning “sending faxes, calling, ringing the whole world” (Gourevitch 2000: 132). He mentions that he frequently sent faxes to then President Bill Clinton at the White House, and also allowed some of the refugees with foreign contacts

to use it (Gourevitch 2000: 132). At one point, one refugee was actually interviewed on a French radio station via the phone in the hotel (Gourevitch 2000: 132). In retrospect, the phone calls to international aid organisations and to Bill Clinton, for example, did them no good, but the point is that they had contact with the outside world and could therefore tell the international community what was really happening in Rwanda – something the Habyarimana regime had tried to avoid at all costs.

Even though the victims of the Holocaust did not have the advantages of modern communication at their disposal, this does not count, in my opinion, as a major difference between the two genocides. Modern communications, as a form of technology, played an integral role in the Rwandan genocide. “Modern communications and technology in one instance promote freedom and ease of interaction, however adversely seen in Rwanda, reliance on communications and the networks put in place can also act as a web that victims become caught in” (Boydell 2010: 31). Boydell therefore correctly argues that “modern technology and communications, like road networks [and] in the case of the Jewish genocide rail networks, have been used in Rwanda to entrap the victims of the genocide” (2010: 31). Some would argue that these methods are not sufficiently modern, and that the use of modern technology cannot be seen as a similarity between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. This counter point will be argued in the following section.

## **2.7 The Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide: Differences**

The similarities between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide are striking and at times unexpected. When compared with each other, the Rwandan genocide reveal many modern characteristics that would otherwise have remained hidden, or misunderstood. There also exist important differences between the two genocides that stretch farther than the fact that the one happened in “a minute, underdeveloped, overpopulated, poverty-stricken state, and the other [in] a highly developed industrial society” (Lemarchand 2000: 120). Perhaps the most striking difference between the two cases is the popular participation that characterised the execution of the Rwandan genocide. The Holocaust was executed largely by an elite few – the majority of Germans did not actively participate in, or contribute to the genocide, even though many of them were members of the Nazi party (often not by choice). In this case, the organisers of the Rwandan genocide succeeded in doing what the Nazis could not do – mobilise the masses into actively participating in the genocide. In the first chapter we

discussed the Nazi party's failure to mobilise ordinary Germans into sustained action. With the majority of Germans' aversion to violence in mind, the Nazis had to carefully shield their citizens from the gruesome reality of mass extermination. For the most part, they employed policy-making and propaganda to quell concerns among the German people – an example of this would be the insistence of the Nazis that the deported Jews were being taken to labour or re-education camps, instead of admitting the truth. This also served to pacify their future victims, since committing acts of violence for all to see made people act irrationally, and therefore made them more difficult to manipulate and control. In addition, the majority of these camps were situated outside of Germany, keeping the reality of the camps a secret. That is not to say, however, that the Holocaust was completely devoid of open acts of violence and aggression, but the point is that the Holocaust was not characterised by the mass participation and willingness to commit genocide that was seen in the case of the Rwandan genocide.

It is important to reiterate the fact that even though popular participation was a distinguishing characteristic of the Rwandan genocide, this must not be seen as mob violence. Mob violence has a mindless, unorganised quality to it, and as was the case with *Kristallnacht*, cannot be kept up for very long. The mass participation that can be found in the case of the Rwandan genocide differed greatly from mob violence - it was well organised, with local leaders who made sure that everyone participates and executes the job of killing as quickly and efficiently as possible. One of the men tried for his role in the Rwandan genocide, reinforces this statement when he notes that “if these organizers hadn't shown up, it wouldn't have occurred to the farmers to begin the work. They would have brandished machetes in anger over the plane crash and then gone back to their fields. Or let's say they would have sweated it out in the marshes, but not for so many days” (Hatzfeld 2003: 182). It therefore becomes clear that the popular participation that characterised the Rwandan genocide would not have occurred had the state not made the decision to commit genocide. Up until that point, the pro-genocide position was largely unpopular and was only supported by the minority of extremists (McDoom 2005: 6). Mass participation did not however result simply because the state gave the order to commit genocide, it also depended on “the prior internalisation within the population of a particular set of historical and ideological beliefs” (McDoom 2005: 6). This is where the Hamitic hypothesis and state-controlled propaganda played a decisive role. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the Hamitic hypothesis was first introduced by European colonisers, but over time the hypothesis changed from an externally imposed theory to one that even the local population believed in. The Habyarimana regime continued

the Hamitic tradition by insisting that the Tutsis were a foreign race and not an ethnic group, as was previously thought. The internalisation of the myth was coupled with state-controlled propaganda which focused on degrading and implicating all Tutsis as supporters of the RPF. When coupled with the law-abiding nature of Rwandans and the prospect of looting, the majority of people did not hesitate to participate in the genocide. The Rwandan government had succeeded in turning its population into killers.

In the first chapter the experiments of Stanley Milgram were discussed with reference to the readiness of the Nazi perpetrators to commit acts of cruelty. Milgram concludes in this regard that there exists an inverse ratio of readiness to cruelty and the proximity of the victim – in other words, people would more readily harm someone when they do not have to touch the person, or better yet, when they cannot see or hear them (Bauman 1989: 155). This finding correlates strongly with the events of the Holocaust, especially with regard to the manner in which the extermination of the Jews took place. The same cannot be said with regard to the Rwandan genocide. The popular participation that characterised the Rwandan genocide rules out Milgram's theory – we cannot possibly explain why so many people eagerly committed acts of violence by referring to the distance between themselves and their victims. The killers in the Rwandan genocide were in many cases less than a meter away from their victims when they killed them – they looked in their eyes, saw their terror, and were drenched in their blood. Surely they had to be fully aware of what they were doing, and according to Milgram's theory, it should have been much more difficult for them to kill as many people as they did, given their proximity to their victims. But it wasn't. How do we explain this?

I would refer here to another finding made by Milgram. He notes that the separation of the victim and the perpetrator also performs a social role, as it draws together the perpetrators and further alienates the victim, who stands alone, physically and psychologically (Bauman 1989: 156). This makes it even easier for the perpetrators to harm their victims. The loneliness of the victims is therefore a function of the togetherness of the perpetrators (Bauman 1989: 15). I would suggest that in the case of the Rwandan genocide, the togetherness of the perpetrators played a much larger role than it did in the Holocaust, or in Milgram's experiments, for that matter. The difficulties that should arise as a result of the absence of physical distance between the perpetrators and the victims in the Rwandan genocide are overcome by the extreme collective nature of the damaging action. Milgram rightly notes that the sense of camaraderie between the perpetrators creates a psychological

distance from their victims, but I would argue that when an entire population is mobilised and turned into killers, the psychological distance created by that sense of camaraderie eclipses the need for physical distance between the perpetrators and their victims. This would explain why the Rwandan genocide was executed with the same speed and efficiency as the Holocaust, even though it lacked the 'required' physical separation of victim and perpetrator. There is no need for physical separation between victims and perpetrators when an entire population is acting as an organised and directed unit. When considering the motivation behind the popular participation, it is interesting to note that this popular participation should not be attributed to nationalism, on the contrary (Straus 2008: 132). In the case of the Rwandan genocide, the killers were motivated by concerns for their security, as will be demonstrated shortly (Straus 2008: 153).

Although the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide bear many resemblances, the motivation for committing genocide differs in each case. In the case of the Holocaust, the Jews were targeted for extermination because they did not fit into the modern worldview of the Nazis. They were seen as fundamentally flawed human beings – no amount of re-education could change them. A Jew, even a converted Jew, always remained a Jew, and as long as they existed, they would poison and spoil the perfect German society envisioned by Hitler. The Nazis were committed to anti-Semitism, and as such the Jews had to be removed from their society by any means possible, and for good. This means that in the case of the Holocaust, the decision to commit genocide was an ideological one. Nigel Eltringham emphasises this point when he writes that “when one sees the process of the Holocaust it was a...policy. From Hitler’s rise to power it was clear. The exclusion of the Jews was a policy” (2004: 55). He continues on, and notes with respect to the Rwandan genocide that “in contrast, in Rwanda one can say that there was exclusion and ethnic discrimination, but one also saw strong ethnic integration and there was regional discrimination among Hutu. But Hutu and Tutsi always found a space for economic and social activities without a problem” (Eltringham 2004: 55).

This ideological policy is absent from the conditions that gave way to the Rwandan genocide. The Rwandan government’s decision to commit genocide was based on security concerns. From 1990 to 1993, Rwanda had been subjected to several invasions and threats from the RPF. This was usually followed by government retaliation, specifically targeting Tutsis living within the country. This period is seen as a period of civil war in Rwanda, and is distinguished from the genocide of 1994. Straus writes that “the main rationale that

perpetrators consistently gave for genocidal violence is the following: the RPF killed President Habyarimana; RPF soldiers had invaded to kill Hutus; all Tutsis were RPF supporters or potential supporters; ergo, Hutus had to kill Tutsis in order to prevent being attacked by them” (2008: 153). The growing RPF threat made the Hutu majority fearful that they would be invaded by the RPF and would once more be subjected to Tutsi rule and domination. The Tutsis had to be eliminated, not for ideological reasons, but to quell a potential security threat. This was at least how the genocide was justified by the government, and how many killers justify their participation. This means that unlike the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide “emanated from an environment in which there had been a genuine conflict” (Eltringham 2004: 55). This was never the case with respect to the Holocaust. The Nazis fabricated supposed medical and biological threats posed by the Jews in order to justify their anti-Semitic policy. Nazi propaganda, for example, was utilised to convey these threats, whereas in Rwanda, the propaganda focused on convincing the Hutu majority that all Tutsis were RPF accomplices. This had nothing to do with a certain ideology that the Hutu government was trying to impose, as was the case with Nazi propaganda. It was a merely a response to the threat posed by the RPF. After being subjugated by the Tutsis for centuries, the Hutu majority was desperately clinging to every ounce of power they had, and would do anything to hold on to it. Straus calls this the ‘rationality of security’, and as a motivation to commit genocide, it differs greatly from the anti-Semitic ideology that was the main force behind the extermination of the Jews.

As a last point of interest, I would like to address one of the perceived differences between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. In the previous section, it was argued that the technology used by the Rwandans in the execution of the genocide was the most modern technology at their disposal, and as such the similarity with the Holocaust, with respect to the use of modern technology, holds. Yet it can be argued that the methods employed by the Rwandans were not modern enough. The economic and social development of Nazi Germany and Rwanda in 1994 differs greatly, and it is this difference that can account for the perceived lack of modern technology in the execution of the Rwandan genocide. It can be argued that a certain level of economic and social welfare is integral to the conception of a modern genocide and that as a result the Rwandan genocide does not constitute a modern genocide. The technology used in the execution of the Rwandan genocide may be seen as too weak an example of modern technology in order to establish a similarity between it and the Holocaust. While these are all valid arguments, I believe that to fixate on the superficial details



concerning each individual genocide, is to lose sight of the bigger picture. Instead of directly comparing the technology used in the Holocaust with that used in the Rwandan genocide, we should look at the impact of modern technology in each case, regardless of specific examples. If we can establish that modern technology played an integral role in the execution of the genocide, then we must concede that there exists a similarity between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, regardless of the varying levels of modern technology.

In 1994 nobody believed that the violence taking place in Rwanda constituted genocide, much less a modern, planned genocide, and yet we have proven that this was indeed the case. Perhaps the images of the Holocaust were still too fresh in the collective memory of the international community, and as such what was happening in Rwanda seemed like little more than a tribal conflict. After the Holocaust, the world pledged to never again allow an atrocity like it to take place, and yet by focusing on specific details instead of taking the context surrounding the violence in Rwanda into consideration, the world stood by and watched as nearly a million people were massacred. I would therefore argue that even though the technology used by the Rwandans seems primitive when compared to that used in the Holocaust, the Rwandans used the most modern methods and weapons that were at their disposal. As was mentioned in the previous section, radios and road networks played an integral role in preventing the future victims of the genocide from escaping the violence. Had these methods not been employed, many Tutsis would have been able to flee the country, and considerably less would have been killed. The impact of modern technology on the genocide was therefore profound, and in this sense then despite superficial differences, there exists a definite similarity between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

At the start of this comparative study, there may have been doubts as to whether or not the Rwandan genocide could indeed be qualified as a modern genocide. Comparing anything to the Holocaust is a daunting task, and often when using the Holocaust as a measuring stick, we diminish the importance of the Holocaust, especially when it is compared with trivial everyday instances of suffering. Conversely, however, when one compares the Holocaust with other instances of genocide, one runs the risk of not taking other genocides as seriously. We live in a society that is to a large extent, fascinated with the Holocaust, with films about the destruction of the European Jews released almost annually to rave reviews. We are

therefore constantly being bombarded with images, whether real or staged, of the incredible horror and cruelty that characterised Nazi Germany. We have formed a very definitive picture of the Holocaust, and when confronted with Bauman's theory of the Holocaust as a modern genocide, we also then have the same definitive picture in mind. Other instances of genocide have not received the attention that the Holocaust has. As such, when we compare another instance of genocide to the Holocaust we are bound to consider it a less serious case of genocide. This is simply due to the fact that we have not had the same kind of exposure to, for example, the Rwandan genocide as we have had to the Holocaust. Needless to say, all cases of genocide deserve our attention and since we live in an age in which the conditions that gave rise to the Holocaust are still present, we need to also consider the possibility that the Holocaust could have been the first of *many* modern genocides.

As previously noted, the Rwandan genocide appears to be very different from the Holocaust. It was executed in a very poor, underdeveloped country with a history of violence and hatred between Hutus and Tutsis. The genocide is often regarded as the final chapter of the civil war of 1990-1994. The country had a history of Tutsi domination over Hutus, and many people simply assumed that that genocide was a result of decades of built-up anger between these two groups that had finally reached its boiling point. The few images of the Rwandan genocide that were seen in Western media were all of hordes of men wielding machetes, hunting down their next victim. This seemed to be a far cry from the efficient, cold and calculated way in which the European Jews were executed. The Nazis had made use of the best modern technology that they could get their hands on. It was rigorously planned and organised, unlike, it would seem, the primitive mob violence that was taking place in Rwanda. For this reason, the world simply declared the chaos that was taking place in Rwanda as yet another case of tribal warfare, and that was that. Little did they know that beneath the primitive exterior of the Rwandan genocide, lay modern elements, elements that were very similar to those that Bauman identified in the Holocaust. The Rwandan genocide was planned and organised as early as 1990, lists of targets were drawn up and weapons were stockpiled around the country. The organisers of the Rwandan genocide did not have the same resources as the Nazis, and as such they had to ensure that underdevelopment did not hamper their genocidal plans. Instead of building gas chambers, they made use of manpower, ensuring that all Hutus internalised the message of hate that had been carefully prepared by the propaganda that was spread on behalf of the government.

People were made to believe that the rebel RPF, led by Paul Kagame, posed a real threat to their security, and that their Tutsi friends and neighbours were part of a fifth column of support for the RPF. Every last Tutsi had to be exterminated, and with the state providing the weapons, and sponsoring the genocide, hunting Tutsis became the new national occupation of Rwanda. The men arrived at 'work' at a certain time and left at a certain time. The genocide became the new normality. In the midst of an economic crisis, poor farmers and unemployed youths were given the opportunity to loot the houses of their victims and free themselves from the grip of poverty. By sponsoring the genocide, the government ensured participants that no disciplinary action would be taken against them. The only thing that was of importance to the government was that the killing of the Tutsis be executed with speed and efficiency. With the successful replacement of moral responsibility for technical responsibility, and the utilisation of the most modern forms of technology available to them, the Rwandan genocide reveals itself to be far more similar to the Holocaust than would have seemed at first. Even when we take into account the differences between the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, the most prominent being the popular participation that characterised the latter, we have no choice but to declare the Rwandan genocide modern. On the surface, it might not seem so, but we have to take into consideration the socio-economic factors that made each instance of genocide unique. It is doubtful that any two cases of genocide will ever be exactly the same, and as such we have no choice but to distil the essence of each instance of genocide in order to make a fair comparison. I believe that the Rwandan genocide is undoubtedly modern, in which case humanity has failed to keep its promise of 'Never Again'. We have once again allowed evil to flourish while we turned the other way. What can we learn from this? How are we to understand this form of evil that has come to characterise the twentieth century? These questions will be addressed in the following chapter.

### 3. The Face of Twentieth Century Evil

The mollusc is known by its shell, the ray by its sting, the beaver by its damhouse, the boa by its remorseless grip. What a creature builds, what it destroys, how it destroys, mark it like its face or smell (Tiger 1987: 295).

The twentieth century was meant to be the pinnacle of human achievement, the century in which all the ideals of the Enlightenment would be reached, a century that would signal a new age of mankind. New technology sprang up everywhere, and man was given immense power to design and shape the world around him. Man had finally proven his mastery over nature and could now herald in a new era, characterised by advanced industrial societies and extensive mechanisation. The twentieth century should have been remembered as a utopian century, but instead it is remembered for the extreme forms of violence perpetrated by human beings against other human beings. The Enlightenment ideals and goals gave man, not only the power to create a new world, but also the power to destroy his fellow man. Never before had such instances of evil been seen, and never before had such advanced forms of technologies been used in the service of evil. The Holocaust stands as the supreme example of this new type of evil, but it is not alone as an example. As have been seen in the two preceding chapters, the Holocaust may be the most famous example of modern genocide, but the Rwandan genocide, perpetrated fifty years later and in very different circumstances, proves that this particular form of evil is anything but eradicated.

What is it about the genocides of the twentieth century that continues to captivate and stimulate discussion? There have been plenty of other genocides prior to the twentieth century, and none of them have fascinated us in the way that the Holocaust does. Why is this the case? The answer may lie in the fact that the genocides of the twentieth century represent a new kind of genocide. We have already established in the first chapter that the Holocaust is the first instance of a modern genocide. A modern genocide differs from a traditional genocide in that the perpetrators do not target the victims in order to gain control over the targeted group. In the traditional case, the victims are mainly politicians, community leaders, people in positions of power, and men. The goal of a modern genocide is not only to overpower the targeted group, but also to destroy it completely. No distinctions are drawn with respect to victims either – men, women, children and babies are all part of the targeted group, and must all be annihilated. In addition to this, modern genocides are also more

systematic and organised, and makes extensive use of bureaucracy and technology in order to reach its goals. The modern genocide therefore differs greatly from our 'normal' conceptions of genocide, and as a result we struggle to understand this form of evil. This can be illustrated by the way in which traditional genocides, while terrible, do not trouble us in the same way that modern genocides do. We agree that traditional genocides are awful, we sympathise with the victims and are disgusted by the perpetrators, and yet we manage to make sense of the violence. This is very much unlike the case of the Holocaust which still seems incomprehensible to us today.

There are two possible reasons why the evil of modern genocides continue to astound us: These genocides are implemented utilising rational, scientific and technological means, the very things we view as the best features of modern civilised society. They are not instigated at random, or on a whim, but are meticulously planned and organised, sometimes years in advance. Secondly, modern genocides are implemented by all manner of people. The overwhelming majority of perpetrators of modern genocides are not sadistic maniacs, but people who, in all other aspects of their lives, would have been considered completely normal. They are usually good citizens, spouses and parents. These two facts about modern genocide trouble us deeply as we struggle to comprehend how mankind's Enlightenment dream could be put in the service of such cruelty. We wonder at the apparent normality of the perpetrators, at how much they resemble ourselves. If put in the same situation, we wonder, would we have acted differently? The usual response to these types of questions would be to shrug them off - as can be seen in the way in which the Holocaust in particular is often treated as an accident or aberration - or in insisting that there *must* be something different about the perpetrators that distinguishes them from us, because we would never have acted in the same way.

In the first two chapters of this thesis, the first response, that the Holocaust was an abnormality in an otherwise serene and civilised world has been debunked, especially against the background of the Rwandan genocide as yet another instance of modern genocide. At the end of the Second World War, the Holocaust may well have seemed like an aberration, but the fact is that the Holocaust was merely the first<sup>4</sup> in a line of *modern* genocides that have

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<sup>4</sup> The Holocaust was not the first genocide of the twentieth century. We must not forget the Armenian genocide and the Herero genocide in Namibia, but in my opinion (and Bauman's), the Holocaust is the first truly modern genocide that meets the requirements set forth by Bauman (see page 6 of this thesis). I therefore acknowledge

plagued the twentieth century. The second response, that we would never have acted in the same way as the perpetrators of the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide, has not yet been addressed. Faced with the fact that our modern society could not only be responsible for modern genocide, but also that we have no way of differentiating between ourselves and the perpetrators of genocide, how are we to understand this new form of evil?

In order to make sense of this new form of evil, it is of the utmost importance that we look at the ways in which evil and perpetrators of evil specifically, are usually understood. There are two primary approaches one could take: The first identifies evil in the individual, with motive and harm-based accounts of evil being the most popular. The second response identifies evil as something that is generated by society, thereby influencing people to do/become evil. The role played by ideology and group dynamics is important in this regard. The primary section of this thesis does not, however, deal with traditional interpretations. Our struggle to understand modern genocide is due to the fact that this form of evil does not conform to our traditional understanding of evil. When it comes to the perpetrators of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide we are at a loss. In one of the most important books about evil, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt brings us face to face with the quintessential perpetrator of modern genocide, Adolf Eichmann. What can Arendt's observations reveal about this form of evil, and more importantly, does she provide a satisfactory explanation for Eichmann's behaviour? And if not, can we find another theory or explanation that is more convincing? These concerns make up the second, and primary, part of this chapter. The third and last section focuses on the implications of the first two sections, specifically regarding our relation to evil. Are evil people monsters, and if not, are we all potentially evil? Do we underestimate our own nature, and how does our belief in the myth of pure evil actually enable us to become perpetrators of evil? The last sections attempts to clarify these issues.

### **3.1 Evil People: Evil and the Individual**

This section addresses two prominent approaches that explain evil as rooted in the individual: The first is a motive-based account of evil, while the second is harm-based. Most people would agree that a common feature of evil is that evil actions correspond with evil intentions or motives. We believe that evil is not committed by accident. People who commit evil,

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the fact that, chronologically speaking, the Holocaust was not the first genocide of the twentieth century, and will henceforth refer to the Holocaust as the first *modern* genocide of the twentieth century, since that is what is at issue in this discussion.

therefore, do so because they want to. In other words, agency is very important in this popular account of evil. This corresponds, to a certain extent, with Immanuel Kant's idea that evil and free will are intertwined. Kant notes that "evil is radical, because it corrupts the grounds of all maxims; it is, moreover... a natural propensity" (1960: 32). According to Kant, we have an innate inclination towards evil, but this inclination is not in and of itself enough to move people to commit evil acts. In this respect, Kant stresses the importance of free will – nothing compels us to act on our inclinations, we are therefore free to either act on these inclinations, or ignore them (1960: 17). This explains why some people do evil, and others do not. We therefore do not commit evil as a result of our sensuous nature, but as a result of a free action of a rational agent against the moral law (Kant 1960: 30).

Up until now, Kant's theory seems to support the popular account of evil mentioned above. There is, however, one problem. Kant does not believe that people choose evil for the sake of evil, a fact that we take as a given (1960: 30-31). Kant denies the existence of what he calls a diabolical will (Kant 1960: 30). If, according to Kant, we do not commit evil for evil's sake, then what exactly are we doing when we choose to give in to our inclinations? Kant argues that we have a tendency to make exceptions for ourselves, which allow us to respect the Categorical Imperative even whilst violating it (Kant 1960: 24). How does this work? When we choose to commit evil, we are not rejecting the moral law (the Categorical Imperative in this case) altogether, but we are "subordinating moral considerations to those stemming from self-love" (Allison 2001: 92). We therefore trick ourselves into thinking that we are being virtuous in order to circumvent the fact that we are violating the Categorical Imperative. An everyday example of this would be lying to a friend in order to spare her feelings. We convince ourselves that we are acting virtuously in order to conceal or justify the fact that we lied. What does this have to do with free will? By rejecting the existence of a diabolical will (defined as "one which explicitly denies the authority of the law") Kant argues that even when we violate the moral law, we still recognise and respect it by trying to justify our actions (Allison 2001: 93; Kant 1960: 31). Evil is therefore not an uncontrollable product of our sensuous nature, but a result of a free action of a rational agent against the Categorical Imperative. This approach proves satisfactory in practice, as we generally assume that people who commit evil are responsible for their actions precisely because they are free and rational agents. In the justice systems of most western countries, this assumption is only ever lifted after rigorous evidence that proves that the agent in question was not in possession of all his faculties. Generally, however, we would argue that people are always presented with a

choice, and as such they must be held responsible for their actions. The most notable problem with Kant's theory is that he rules out the kind of defiant rejection of moral law that is part of the human experience (Kant 1960: 31).

We may be able to accept Kant's explanation on a smaller everyday scale, but what about larger instances of evil, such as genocide? Perpetrators of genocide certainly have a diabolical will, or so we believe, and therefore rule out Kant's theory. However, Jovan Babić argues that even if we bracket off the problem with the diabolical will, Kant's conception of self-justification, when applied to larger instances of genocide, is valid (2004: 235). Perpetrators of genocide generally deceive themselves in order to commit the most atrocious acts. Babić argues that it is justification on the smaller, everyday scale that paves the way for bigger and more diabolical forms of evil, such as genocide (2004: 235). He argues that while everyday violations of the moral law require a separate justification for each violation, we can easily move from that to large-scale forms of evil by "providing in one fell swoop all exceptions we need" (Babić 2004: 236). This can be done by re-interpreting the moral law or 'the good' as a whole, so that it justifies your actions (Babić 2004: 236). This re-interpretation of 'the good' is an integral part of what makes modern genocides so successful. The next chapter deals with this re-interpretation at length, and therefore it will not be discussed here in detail. In addition to providing support for Kant's notion of the role of justification, Babić also agrees with Kant that human beings lack a diabolical will, stating that large-scale evil such as genocide would not be possible if the agents were choosing evil for evil's sake (2004: 236). This is best illustrated by looking at the way in which evil such as the Holocaust was not presented as evil. According to Kant and Babić, people would not choose evil for its own sake. This explanation goes against our instinctual beliefs about intent and action, but may well provide fruitful insights when applied to perpetrators of modern genocide.

A second explanation of evil is developed by John Kekes in *Facing Evil*. In his book, Kekes provides a substantial harm-based account of evil, defining evil as undeserved harm (Kekes 1990: 6). He characterises evil people as those who "are regular sources of underserved harm" (Haybron 2002: 263). In addition to this, Kekes also draws a distinction between agents of "habitual chosen simple evil" and "habitual unchosen simple evil" (1990: 85). Simple evil is "to deprive people of the minimum requirements of their welfare...[which are] universally human, culturally invariant, and historically constant features of life" (Kekes



1990: 51). When agents frustrate or inhibit these physiological, psychological and social facts of human nature they are, according to Kekes, agents of simple evil (1990: 53). It is of course also implied that the victims of simple evil are innocent (Kekes 1990: 53). We can certainly apply this theory to the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, as the deprivation of the minimum requirement for welfare stands out as a characteristic of both the Nazi and Habyarimana regimes. Kekes' distinction between chosen evil and unchosen evil is also of importance here. Kekes argues that there exist very few agents of chosen evil (1990: 84). These people are "moral monsters", a rarity because most people do not, according to Kekes, choose to cause undeserved harm (1990: 84).

Kekes suggests an alternative, that of the agent who convinces himself of the truth of a certain conviction that makes his evildoing appear (to him at least) moral (1990: 85). In order for self-deception to succeed, these agents have to convince themselves of the truth of their convictions. This is the only way that they can justify their actions – evil actions are not evil if they are committed in the pursuit of justice and righteousness, for example. These agents are slowly transformed into agents of unchosen simple evil, as their conviction in the 'truth' leads to the development of certain vices (Kekes 1990: 85). According to Kekes, we cause evil when we naturally and spontaneously act in accordance with the vices that have achieved dominance in [our] characters" (Kekes 1990: 6). If we changed our moral outlook in order to justify our actions, as agents of unchosen simple evil do, the dominant vices may very well be less than virtuous. When we act in accordance with those vices, we are not choosing to commit evil, but acting in accordance with "habitual patterns ingrained in [our] characters" (Kekes 1990: 6). People who cause undeserved harm are therefore people whose natural response to certain situations is less than virtuous. A good example of this would be a perpetrator of modern genocide – so convinced of the truth of the ideology he serves, his natural reaction to his enemies is to be cruel and malicious. He believes he is working in service of a righteous cause, and as a result he does not choose to be cruel and malicious, but reacts the way anybody would when faced with those who try to undermine what is good and right.

Intuitively, this approach to evil does not sit well with us. We like to believe that all agents of evil (or at least the majority) *choose* to commit evil acts. Conversely, we might feel that Kekes is trying to justify the actions of perpetrators by claiming that they are not choosing to commit evil. We believe that people can always choose how they will act. Another objection

to this approach is the fact that Kekes is basing his conception of evil on actions alone. He does not link evil actions with evil intent or motive. To call someone evil based on their actions alone seems to be problematic. Surely there are people who choose to commit an evil act but who cannot be called evil? What about people who choose to commit murder in self-defence? Killing someone is, according to most forms of morality, evil, and yet we feel that there are extenuating circumstances. We also think that people can be evil without being a source of underserved harm. Daniel Haybron provides an excellent example of this:

Take the vilest person you can imagine and make her a quadriplegic with no ability to communicate: living in silent spite she wishes nothing more than the greatest suffering for her fellow creatures, and takes the greatest joy in witnessing others in agony (2002: 264).

Making her handicapped makes her less of a threat, but it does not make her a better person (Haybron 2002: 264). The woman in this example is clearly evil, and yet she cannot commit harm of any kind. It is therefore difficult to concede that a person's moral motivations could fail to be relevant in determining whether or not they are evil (Haybron 2002: 264). Kekes calls our reluctance to accept this position the 'soft reaction' to evil (1990: 83). We want to pardon people who commit unchosen evil, and punish those who choose evil, but this approach to justice is very problematic, as we will see when we turn our attention to Hannah Arendt's work and more specifically her portrait of Adolf Eichmann.

### **3.2 Evil Societies: Explaining Evil in Social Terms**

It is often argued that we should not view or examine perpetrators of evil in isolation of the conditions that created them. As appealing as it is to attempt to locate evil within the individual, we must concede that as human beings we are all formed by our environments. We therefore have to ask ourselves whether or not there are certain features of society that are more likely to produce evil-doers. This exercise could potentially yield valuable results, as the kind of perpetrators this chapter is concerned with are perpetrators of genocide. It is already widely established that genocides do not simply develop out of thin air – there are certain conditions within which genocide is more likely to occur: Times of war, economic instability and social inequality, for example. If there are certain conditions within which genocide is more likely to be perpetrated, then surely the same can be said of perpetrators of genocide? One of the defining features of any modern society is bureaucracy. Zygmunt Bauman also identified it as one of the main features of modern genocide, especially when

coupled with technology. This view, along with the effects of authority and the distance between the perpetrator and the victims, is discussed in the first chapter. As such, those findings will not be repeated here. It is quite clear that bureaucracy separates the perpetrator from the effects of his actions and therefore allows him to continue working as quickly and as efficiently as possible without being exposed to the less savoury aspects of genocide or to moral culpability. In this way the bureaucratic model wields a significant amount of influence over potential perpetrators. Even though bureaucracy plays a central role in the execution of modern genocides, we cannot blame bureaucracy alone for the formation of perpetrators of genocide. It is pertinent that we also examine two other features that influence and shape society, and enable ordinary people to become killers. This section focuses on two main features of modern societies that are often linked to the formation of perpetrators of evil, namely ideology and group dynamics.

Modern genocides are committed in the name of a certain ideological conviction. In Nazi Germany it was the threat posed by the Jews to ‘hygiene’ and ‘racial purity’, and in Rwanda in 1994 it was the ‘security threat’ posed by Tutsis and moderate Hutus. It is however difficult to examine the influence of ideology over potential perpetrators since it is such an abstract notion. For the purposes of our discussion, I would suggest that we examine propaganda instead, as ideology made visible. Nazi rule over Germany was characterised by the production of widespread propaganda against the Jews, Bolsheviks and anyone else who did not fit the Aryan ideal. The Nazi propaganda machine was famously lead by Goebbels who produced enormous amounts of propaganda. Nazi propaganda ranged from leaflets, posters, and films, to Hitler’s very own *Mein Kampf*. In Rwanda propaganda was directed towards Tutsis and moderate Hutus. While the Rwandan government never openly supported or released propaganda, as was the case in Nazi Germany, they silently sponsored the creation of the propaganda-centric radio station RTLM. Given the unprecedented horrors that took place in both Germany and Rwanda, one has to wonder what it is about propaganda that turns good people into perpetrators of violence. How does propaganda manage to ‘switch off’ the moral brakes that usually prevent us from doing evil (Baumeister 2001: 169)?

One of the most important ways in which propaganda influences ordinary people, is by identifying their anxieties, and providing an outlet for those anxieties. The conditions that give rise to genocide are usually quite turbulent. In Rwanda in the early 1990s, the economy was collapsing and large portions of the Hutu population found themselves unemployed and

unable to support their families. Their livelihoods were threatened, and it was quite easy to pin the blame on the Tutsi population who, for years, were stereotyped as rich and prosperous. This stirred up old feelings of hate that stemmed from the repressive Tutsi monarchies of old. The Tutsis were therefore blamed for the economic instability in Rwanda. A similar situation was present in Germany after the Second World War. Morale was low and the economy was in shambles. The Jews proved to be an excellent scapegoat for these concerns. Once the scapegoat is identified, all anxiety is displaced onto that group, and it is made to bear all responsibility for the problems of the population as a whole. But identifying a scapegoat is not yet enough to persuade ordinary people to take part in violent crimes. The main function of propaganda is to turn ordinary people against the scapegoat. This is a formidable task, as many people are probably friends or neighbours with a member of the scapegoat group. Propaganda therefore has to focus on amplifying the differences between ordinary people and the scapegoat. This usually involves the dehumanisation of the scapegoat. Once this dehumanisation has been internalised by ordinary people, and the scapegoat has been ostracised by the rest of the community, it is quite easy to disable the moral brakes that usually keep people from doing evil.

At this point it is important to keep in mind the state-sponsored nature of modern genocide. If genocide is sponsored by the state, then the propaganda that supports that particular ideology is also state-sponsored. This is very explicit in the case of Nazi Germany, but not as obvious in the case of the Rwandan genocide. Nevertheless, the state-sponsored nature of the genocide, coupled with the dehumanising influence of propaganda, not only legitimises the violence, but also provides the necessary leverage to disable all normal moral considerations. Having been convinced that they will not be prosecuted for their participation, ordinary men can give themselves over to violence as they leave all previous moral convictions behind. The new ideology which they now serve legitimises the violence by creating a new code of morality. Every ideology presents itself as in pursuit of what is good and just, which means that whoever participates with them are agents of the good, and those who oppose them are enemies. This further legitimises the violence, as the perpetrators can now convince themselves that they are doing the 'right' thing. Evil acts are generally not considered to be evil if they are executed in the pursuit of justice and righteousness. The transformation of morality that is indicative of ideologies responsible for genocide is discussed in the following chapter.

The success of the ideological influence on perpetrators is not only dependent on the dehumanising effects of propaganda and the transformation of morality. It is also largely dependent on the influence of group dynamics. I want to make it clear from the start that there is a marked difference between a group and a mob. So often the two terms are used interchangeably, but that is not the case here. It should be clear by now that modern genocides are systematic and organised attempts to exterminate a targeted group. Modern genocides thrive on, and embody (albeit in a twisted fashion) the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and science. This stands in stark contrast to the usual conception of mobs. Mobs are undisciplined and driven by emotion, as people get swept up in the action. Mobs are usually not goal-oriented, and there are no real membership criteria. Mobs do not attempt to justify their actions by appealing to some shared moral authority, and their staying power and effectiveness is usually quite limited. The kind of groups referred to in this thesis, however, are highly disciplined, rational, emotionless and goal-driven. Their only concern is doing their jobs as best they can. A portrait of the SS, Nazi Germany's most fearsome group, illustrates this point:

Indeed the SS was in every way an elite. It was designed to be, and it regarded itself as, the purest and best of the organizations serving the country and party. Getting into the SS was quite difficult, and various criteria were imposed to ensure that only superior beings qualified...The slogan 'SS man, loyalty is your honour' was inscribed on their uniforms...The people designated to carry out the most brutal and wicked actions were the ones who had been chosen and taught to be an elite force, superior in character and virtue to everyone else. *It was not the dregs and thugs, but the finest flower, who committed the most horrible deeds* (Baumeister 2001: 189-190; emphasis mine).

Having established the difference between a group and a mob, let us turn our attention back to the perpetrators of modern genocide, and the ways in which they are influenced by group dynamics. Perpetrators of modern genocide never act alone – they are always members of a certain group, which makes it easier for them to do things they would normally not do if they were acting alone. “When someone kills for the sake of promoting a higher good, he may find support and encouragement if he is acting as part of a group of people who share that belief. If he acts as a lone individual, the same act is likely to brand him as a dangerous nut” (Baumeister 2001: 190). Abstract concepts such as ideologies “gain social reality” simply by being shared by a group of individuals (Baumeister 2001: 190). Without the group context, these ideals remain abstract and are branded the “whims of individuals” (Baumeister 2001: 190). A group can justify the use of violent means, whereas an individual cannot (Baumeister

2001: 190). Belonging to a group who passionately shares your convictions and who think that force is necessary, enables you to commit deeds you would otherwise have shied away from (Baumeister 2001: 190). People seem to need other people who can assure them that the use of violent force is justified – in the absence of such assurance, the majority of people will stop short of violence (Baumeister 2001: 190). This reminds one of Stanley Milgram's findings, discussed in the first chapter. The perpetrators not only stand apart from the victims, but they are also members of a group of perpetrators who offer them assurance and support. By "deferring to the group's moral authority", ordinary people are able to overcome their individual moral instincts (Baumeister 2001: 191). Initially, ordinary people may need some persuasion to take part in violence, but once they have relinquished their individual morality in favour of the group's moral authority, their first violent act paves the way for even more violence. Once a perpetrator has dirtied his hands, it is almost impossible for him to stop or refuse to participate, as his refusal condemns his past actions. This is known as sequential actions, and has been discussed in the first chapter with reference to the Holocaust.

Why do groups have this effect on people? It has been suggested that the desire to belong to a group is rooted in human nature (Baumeister 2001: 192). We yearn to create social bonds, especially during turbulent times. As mentioned before, the conditions which are necessary for modern genocide to take place are usually highly unstable and unpredictable. In the face of such uncertainty and anxiety, people gravitate towards others with the same concerns. This is especially prevalent if the group you are joining can also identify the source of all instability and anxiety and promise to root it out. This feeling of belonging and security is a great advantage in an unpredictable environment. People who lack these assurances and social ties are automatically at a disadvantage. This is especially true when there exists competition or conflict with other groups, as is the case with genocide. The presence of a rival or enemy group stimulates the need to bond with other people (Baumeister 2001: 192). In the context of group competition, evil is therefore defined as the group that opposes your group (Baumeister 2001: 193). This is not, however, to say that there is something inherently evil or bad about belonging to a group, or that all groups foster violence (Baumeister 2001: 1930). Groups can often accomplish good, but it is undeniable that membership to a group influences the way in which people act. If the group is motivated by a hate-filled ideology, that action often takes the form of brutality and violence. Once a person has joined a group, it is very difficult for him to refuse to participate in violence, or any other action that is required by the group. The reluctance to give up new-found security and stability is usually enough of

a motivating factor, but the ideological convictions of the group can also be quite persuasive. In an uncertain world, groups ‘empower’ people who were previously at the mercy of the elements – by belonging to a group they can work towards the greater good, a task so noble that all means are acceptable.

### **3.3 Eichmann and the Myth of Pure Evil**

While the theories discussed in the preceding sections can be applied to a wide variety of perpetrators of evil, they fail to provide an adequate explanation of the kind of perpetrator that has become characteristic of modern genocide. When thinking about perpetrators of evil, most would agree that they usually inflict pain intentionally and/or for pleasure (Baumeister 2001: 63). We see them as sadistic monsters whose goal is to create as much suffering as possible. Roy Baumeister notes that the perpetrators’ actions usually seem incomprehensible to us, and as such we view the victim as innocent, good and undeserving of harm, while the perpetrator is seen as monstrously evil and guilty (2001: 73). According to this view, we conceive of evil people as being wholly different from ourselves – we are good, innocent and altruistic in nature, while they are simply evil. This widely-held idea may be true for some perpetrators of evil, but when it comes to the perpetrators of modern genocide, the majority do not fit this image. This false view of evil is what Baumeister calls the “myth of pure evil” (2001: 63).

According to the myth of pure evil, evil people are egotistical, irrational, unable to control their emotions, and most importantly, they have always been evil (Baumeister 2001: 74). This is a very comforting view of evil. If true, we never have to entertain the possibility that we have anything in common with these perpetrators. Integral to the myth of pure evil, is the notion that evil actions and evil intentions are intertwined. We think that people who commit evil do so because they have evil intentions. Sadly, however, this is a grossly oversimplified theory. The true face of evil is far more disturbing and deeply unsettling. The troublesome relationship between evil intent and evil action underscores much of the work Hannah Arendt does in her famous book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, as she tries to come to terms with one of the Holocaust’s most notorious perpetrators – Adolf Eichmann. The purpose of this section is to address some of the inconsistencies between the myth of pure evil and the true face of evil. In this regard, the case of Adolf Eichmann will be used, as Eichmann has become synonymous with a new ‘breed’ of perpetrator, one that is especially common in modern genocide, and one that defies all traditional explanations of evil.

Adolf Eichmann was the man in charge of the transportation of Jews to the death camps. After the Allied victory, Eichmann fled and went into hiding, but was eventually apprehended by Israeli operatives in Argentina (Cesarani 2005: 230). He stood trial in Israel in 1961 and was hanged for his role in the Holocaust (Cesarani 2005: 256). To this day, Eichmann remains the only person to ever receive the death penalty in Israel. Arendt attended his trial, and her portrait of Eichmann, and the conclusions she draws from this portrait with respect to evil are of immense importance. Arendt's portrait of Eichmann has not been without controversy, but, for the purposes of our current discussion, let us assume that Arendt's description of Eichmann is correct. Eichmann was responsible for the deportation of the Jews to concentration camps, and yet, for a long period of time, he continued to fly under the radar. Very few people outside of the Nazi Party even knew of his existence, and at the Nuremberg Tribunal, Justice Francis Biddle saw Eichmann's name on a draft of the tribunal's judgement and wrote 'Who is he?' next to it (Cesarani 2005: 1). Not even Nazi-hunters such as Simon Wiesenthal initially set out to find Eichmann (Cesarani 2005: 1). Yet as more and more information came to light regarding the functioning of the SS and the organization of the Final Solution, Eichmann soon became a much wanted man. The image of the demonic Nazi monster had become quite commonplace, and Eichmann was naturally associated with that image. But terrible as such images were, the Eichmann trial would reveal a far more disturbing picture.

Eichmann's apprehension in Argentina and the announcement of his trial caused a sensation. The world expected Eichmann to be a sadistic monster, but instead, they saw an ordinary, middle-aged man. Gideon Hausner, who lead the prosecution, described him as having "receding hair and a balding head, the sides grey and apparently freshly barbered, thick horn-rimmed glasses on a stark nose, the mouth small and thin-lipped, and the pallid skin of his clean-shaven face creased with lines of worry or age, or both" (Cesarani 2005: 257). His appearance did not match the magnitude of his crimes, and this was compounded by the fact that Eichmann spent the entire trial inside a bullet-proof glass booth. The middle-aged, balding man inside the glass booth added to the strange juxtaposition of image and reality. Frustrated by Eichmann's ordinariness, Hausner exclaimed "I almost felt like searching him for fangs and claws. For externally there was nothing to indicate his nature" (Cesarani 2005: 257). Eichmann confounded expectation, not only with regard to his appearance but also with regard to his answers under cross-examination.



Faced with a very ordinary-looking man, the prosecution attempted to show that despite his appearance, Eichmann was a fanatical and unrepentant anti-Semite. Hausner did so by drawing on testimonies from Eichmann's former colleagues and of course testimony from survivors who claim to have seen Eichmann at the death camps, or who had interacted with him (Cesarani 2005: 265). These testimonies all supported the assumption that Eichmann was evil – he knew what he was doing and did so with zeal. There were of course numerous problems with such testimony, namely that his former colleagues could easily have overstated Eichmann's role in order to lessen their own responsibility, and that the testimony provided by survivors was biased, and therefore possibly inaccurate. But what struck the world most was Eichmann's insistence that he did not have any ideological motivation for deporting the Jews. Writers Maenvell and Fraenkel, quoted in Cesarani, argue that Eichmann's statement is not as puzzling as it may seem - "Eichmann adopted anti-Semitism as a career; he was not personally anti-Semitic" (Cesarani 2005: 360). Seen in this way, Eichmann's insistence that he was not anti-Semitic makes sense, yet it also makes his crimes that much worse. In the service of an ideology he allegedly did not believe in, he presided over the deaths of six million people. Faced with the question as to why he chose to continue the deportation of the Jews if he had no ideological motivations and clearly knew what he was doing, Eichmann stated that he accepted moral responsibility for his role in the Holocaust, but not legal responsibility (Cesarani 2005: 284).

Under cross-examination he maintained time and time again that he was merely a cog in a machine that he did not make the decisions regarding the deportation of the Jews, and that he was simply fulfilling a bureaucratic role, like so many others. The prosecution attempted to cast Eichmann as a Nazi leader, while he maintained that he was not. He once conceded that the men sentenced at the Nuremberg trials deserved their sentences because "they were the men who gave the orders" and that they are responsible but "not those who receive them" (Cesarani 2005: 285). Eichmann carried out his orders because he was motivated by "the most mundane, and petty considerations of advancing his career, pleasing his superiors, [and] demonstrating that he could do his job well and efficiently" (Bernstein 2002: 220). This flies in the face of all our expectations and assumptions. On the witness stand, Eichmann revealed the ordinary face of evil, one that up until then had been overlooked. Arendt brought to our attention, to great furore in the international community, the fact that the perpetrators of the most horrific crimes were "men like ourselves" (Fine 2001: 143). Arendt famously called

this phenomenon the “banality of evil”. At this point it is crucial to understand what Arendt means when she refers to the banality of evil. Says Arendt,

Some years ago, reporting the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem, I spoke of “the banality of evil” and meant with this no theory or doctrine but something quite factual, the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer...however monstrous the deeds, the doer was neither monstrous nor demonic, and the only specific characteristic one could detect on his part as well as in his behaviour during the trial and the preceding police examination was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think (Arendt 1971: 417).

For Arendt, the Eichmann trial revealed that in order to commit evil, one does not necessarily have to have evil motives. People like Stalin and Hitler, for example, do not fit this schematic, but there are many others who do. This can be illustrated when one looks at the bureaucrats who were in many ways the driving force behind the Nazi enterprise. Without bureaucratically highly efficient men like Eichmann, the Holocaust would not have succeeded in eradicating six million people. It is therefore safe to say that Eichmann’s seemingly peculiar motivations were not a deviation from the norm, but that men like him *were the norm*. A similar phenomenon can be seen in the case of the Rwandan genocide. Many of the people who committed the most atrocious crimes during the 1994 genocide were men who had no political motivations whatsoever. In interviews with convicted participants of the Rwandan genocide, the phrase ‘I was just doing my job’ comes up over and over again (Hatzfeld 2003: 47, 71, 129). This proves to be problematic, as many perpetrators of genocide may (and have) used this excuse in order to hide their evil motives, but for many perpetrators this cliché appears to be true.

How are we to understand perpetrators for whom this is the case? Assuming it is true that men like Eichmann remained unmoved by ideology and hatred, we are still baffled by the fact that they continued to do their jobs knowing full well what the consequences of their actions were. Eichmann knew that his logistical brilliance was used to send millions of people to their deaths, and the killers of the Rwandan genocide who maintain that they were just doing their job had no way to turn a blind eye to their actions. In the case of Eichmann, Arendt maintains that this was due to an inability to think, as noted in the earlier quotation. What does this mean? Arendt certainly did not mean that Eichmann was stupid and did not realise what he was doing (Bernstein 2002: 219). On the contrary, Eichmann “was extremely

intelligent and efficient in knowing how to keep the deportations operating, even under the most adverse conditions of fighting a war on several fronts” (Bernstein 2002: 219). He was, however, unable to make independent judgements and think from the standpoint of another person (Bernstein 2002: 221). Arendt notes that this inability to think “can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together, which perhaps are inherent in man – that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem” (1963: 288). Whether or not we accept Arendt’s explanation is a matter for the next section.

It should be clear by now that the reason why Arendt’s account of the Eichmann trial has evoked such a critical response is because in denying that Eichmann had evil motives, she is in fact calling into question the way in which we think about good and evil. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she mocks the chief prosecutor, Gideon Hauser, for the way in which he portrayed Eichmann as a sadistic monster. Hauser held fast to age-old belief that “evil deeds presuppose evil motives, and that the degree of evil manifested in the deeds corresponds to the degree of wickedness of the motives” (Bernstein 2002: 219). It is exactly this assumption that Arendt challenges and turns on its head. Arendt, therefore, debunks the myth of pure evil, a fact that many people are very uncomfortable with. It would be easier and more reassuring if we could make a definitive distinction between ourselves and evil-doers, and yet we cannot. In the absence of evil intent, how are we to judge or account for the face of evil we were confronted with in the twentieth century? We cannot simply accept that since evil intent and evil deeds are no longer necessarily connected we have no way of accounting for this new kind of evil.

### **3.4 Making Sense of Modern Perpetrators**

In the aftermath of the Eichmann trial, and specifically in the aftermath of Arendt’s portrait of Eichmann, the ordinary man in the bulletproof glass booth has become the quintessential example of the perpetrator of modern genocide. In 1961 the disjunction between Eichmann’s ordinary nature and the magnitude of his crimes was seen as an aberration, yet as the twentieth century progressed, littered with genocide, it soon emerged that he was in fact, as Arendt had stated, the norm. These perpetrators are characterised by their cold and rational approach to their tasks. They are not fanatical followers of any specific ideology, nor are they sadistic monsters who enjoy the suffering of others. They see their task as a job like any other, and are exemplary citizens, parents and spouses who would not look out of place in our societies. There is nothing that would indicate that they are any different from you and me. If

anything, their most characteristic feature is that they have no characteristic feature. These are the kinds of people who perpetrate the most heinous crimes and who frustrate all traditional attempts at explanation. At the start of this chapter four traditional explanations of evil were discussed. In light of Arendt's portrait and analysis of Eichmann, and the fact that Eichmann has now come to be seen as the norm for perpetrators of modern genocide, what do we make of these theories? Do they provide any insights that are applicable to the case of modern perpetrators?

Kant's conception of radical evil focuses on the free will of the agent. Kant believes that we have a natural propensity for evil, but that this is not by itself a sufficient reason to commit evil deeds. According to Kant, we decide whether or not we will succumb to these inclinations and violate the moral law. Kant does not, however, believe that we commit evil for the sake of evil, because we lack a diabolical will. This is because evil is very rarely presented as evil – if it were, it would not be able to achieve its goals (Babić 2004: 236). This is characteristic of regimes like Nazi Germany and Habyarimana's Rwanda. In both cases the future victims were represented as the enemy – in Germany the Jews were the enemy of hygiene and racial purity, and in Rwanda the Tutsi population were said to be in cahoots with the rebel army and that they posed a threat to national security. Neither victimised group was ever presented as innocent, because people do not (usually) answer the call to murder innocent people. Once people believe that what they are doing is right, they quite easily join in the violence. This of course hinges on the assumption that perpetrators of evil are convinced of the guilt of the victimised group, an assumption that may not be as self-evident as it seems, but more about this later.

Kant believes that when we commit evil we do so while still upholding the moral law. We convince ourselves that we are upholding the Categorical Imperative in order to circumvent our violation of it. We therefore make exceptions for ourselves in the name of the very moral law we are violating. Furthermore, Kant states that when we make exceptions for ourselves, we do so because we are “subordinating moral consideration to those stemming from self-love” (Allison 2001: 92). How does Kant's theory of radical evil hold up when applied to the perpetrators of modern genocide? From an outsider's perspective, we like to believe Kant when he states that we always choose to commit evil. This also seems to be true with respect to modern perpetrators - in both the case of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, perpetrators were always able to choose whether or not they would participate in the

violence. There were of course people who were coerced, but that was not true for the majority (Villa 1999: 39; Hatzfeld 2003: 75-76, 223).

While we like the importance Kant places on free will, the same cannot be said of his belief that people do not commit evil for evil's sake. His rejection of a diabolical will does not conform to the myth of pure evil, but it is applicable to the case of Eichmann and his contemporaries. As has been mentioned before, the most disturbing fact about Eichmann's trial was that he was terrifyingly normal and was apparently not motivated by anti-Semitism (despite the prosecution's insistence that he was). He lacked what Kant calls a diabolical will. His only motivation was to advance his career and please his superiors. This continues to baffle us given the magnitude of Eichmann's crimes. How should we make sense of this? Applying Kant's theory, one could explain it by stating that Eichmann knew that what he was doing was in violation of the moral law, and as such he sought to justify this violation by appealing to the moral law itself. If Eichmann is to be believed, this is not just mere conjecture, but the truth. One of the most surprising moments of the Eichmann trial was Eichmann's insistence that he had lived his life guided by "Kant's moral precepts, and especially according to a Kantian definition of duty" (Arendt 1963: 135-136). This seemingly ludicrous statement becomes more plausible when we consider it not only in the light of Kant's theory of radical evil, but also in light of "the foreshortened version of Kant Eichmann had in mind" (Villa 1999: 50).

After making such a seemingly ridiculous statement, Eichmann was able to provide a fairly correct formulation of the Categorical Imperative (Villa 1999: 50). "I meant by my remark about Kant that the principle of my will must always be such that it can become the principle of general laws" (Arendt 1963: 136). Eichmann also noted that he had read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and that he had known that "from the moment he was charged with executing the Final Solution he had ceased to live according to Kantian principles" (Arendt 1963: 136). This shows that Eichmann did indeed realise what he was doing and the extent to which his deeds violated the moral law. How did he overcome this realisation and continue with the job he was tasked to do? He consoled himself with the fact that he was no longer "the master of his own deeds" (Villa 1999: 50). Eichmann's awareness of his violation of the Kantian moral principles is quite strange, and yet Hannah Arendt argues that Eichmann remained consistent and acted from duty:

What he [Eichmann] failed to point out in court was that in this ‘period of crimes legalized by the state’, as he himself now called it, he had not simply dismissed the Kantian formula as no longer applicable, he had distorted it to read: Act as if the principle of your actions were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land (1963: 136).

Villa rightly points out that this distortion goes against the spirit of Kant, yet it did agree with Eichmann’s ‘household’ use of Kant (1999: 50).

In this household use, all that is left of Kant’s spirit is the demand that a man do more than obey the law, that he go beyond the mere call of obedience and identify his own will with the principle behind the law – the source from which the law sprang. In Kant’s philosophy that source was practical reason; in Eichmann’s household use of him, it was the will of the Führer (Arendt 1963: 136 -137).

In Nazi Germany, the will of the Führer was both in theory and in practice, the source of the law, therefore Eichmann’s “Kantian reification of duty and law-abidingness was morally fatal. Eichmann was a law-abiding citizen of a regime which had made murder into law, a legal (and thus ‘moral’) obligation” (Villa 1999: 51). Aware of the fact that his execution of the Final Solution was in violation of Kant’s moral principles, Eichmann clung to the law of the land in order to soothe his conscience. Eichmann’s approach in this regard is not unlike that of many of the perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide who clung to the fact that, since the genocide was sponsored by the state, it was their duty to execute it, regardless of their personal feelings and moral considerations (Hatzfeld 2003: 48-49). Totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and Habyarimana’s Rwanda place a lot of emphasis and importance on duty and abiding by the law. As such, one can see how it would be possible to participate in the genocide by focussing solely on duty. Perpetrators of genocide adhere to the laws of the regime they serve, thereby maintaining that they are not in the wrong. In totalitarian states, breaking the law, no matter how corrupt, is the ultimate offence.

According to John Kekes’ harm-based theory of evil, evil can be defined as undeserved harm (1990: 6). Evil people are those who are regular sources of undeserved harm. He focuses on simple evil, which can be defined as the deprivation of the minimum requirements for welfare. The most important part of his theory for our current discussion is his distinction between chosen and unchosen evil. Like Kant, Kekes argues that there exist very few agents of chosen simple evil, since most people would not choose to be a source of undeserved harm. Insofar as perpetrators of modern genocide are sources of undeserved harm and deprive

their victims of the minimum requirements for welfare, they certainly are evil, but this discussion is not concerned with whether or not perpetrators of genocide are evil – that is apparent. What is of importance is the way in which these perpetrators are able to commit evil in spite of their moral convictions, which for the purposes of this discussion, we assume all people have. Kekes suggests an answer to this problem – unchosen simple evil. An agent of unchosen simple evil is one who convinces himself of the truth of his actions in order to make his evildoing appear moral. Continued self-deception leads to the development of certain vices, and when those agents respond naturally to a certain situation, their new dominant vices lead them to act as agents of undeserved harm. These agents, therefore, do not choose to commit evil; they are simply acting in accordance with ingrained habitual patterns. Can Kekes' theory help us to explain why perpetrators of modern genocide are able to commit evil with such apparent ease?

One can assume that the self-deception described by Kekes requires a certain amount of belief on the part of perpetrators in the ideology they serve. In order for the self-deception described by Kekes to truly take root in the mind of the perpetrator, he needs to convince himself of the truth of the dominant ideology. Totalitarian states cannot achieve their goals without the support of the people they rule, and as such much time and effort is spent indoctrinating ordinary individuals of the righteousness of their cause. These attempts are not always successful, as proven by Eichmann. For that reason, Kekes' proposed explanation fails with regard to ideology, but self-deception still has importance. With respect to Kekes' notion of an agent of unchosen simple evil, it seems, on the surface, as if he is excusing perpetrators of undeserved harm. The implication of an agent of unchosen evil, in the way that Kekes formulates it is that by means of self-deception, people are able to change their nature. If you commit evil without choosing to do so, and you are simply responding naturally and spontaneously to a situation, then surely you are inherently evil? If this is the case, then Kekes' account greatly diminishes the importance of ideology in the formation of a perpetrator of evil.

Take Eichmann's well established character traits, for example: duty, efficiency and a strong work ethic. If Kekes is right, and Eichmann had deceived himself into thinking what he was doing was right, or at least that it was his duty, then the reason Eichmann performed his job with such zeal, and the reason the transportation of the Jews was such a 'resounding success', is not because he was motivated by ideology, but because he was responding naturally to a

given situation, guided by these dominant vices. On the other hand, we cannot be sure that Eichmann would not have performed any job with an equal amount of zeal and success – the prevailing opinion is that he would have, in which case the vices that guided his actions were not newly developed as a result of self-deception, as Kekes would suggest, but innate. These vices would not have been seen as such during the Nazi regime; on the contrary – Eichmann was acting in accordance with what was deemed important in Nazi Germany. This has been covered in the first chapter, but to repeat – what was of importance to the Nazi regime, was following orders and doing your job as quickly, as cost-effectively as possible. Individual moral concerns fell by the wayside in the pursuit of these ideals. The only moral concerns that were allowed were the morality of the state, a fact that is discussed in the following chapter.

Perpetrators of modern genocide are usually not wholly influenced by ideology. This is strange, since one would think that ideology would play an important role in persuading ordinary people to participate in the violence. Yet if the Eichmann case has taught us anything it is that our traditional assumptions about evil are mistaken. Eichmann was seemingly not influenced by ideology, and all evidence suggests that the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide have this in common with Eichmann. This is, however, not to say that ideology had no influence on perpetrators. Eichmann is said to have adopted anti-Semitism as a career, even though he was not personally anti-Semitic (Cesarani 2005: 360). Did this career-motivated ‘belief’ have any influence on Eichmann? Nazi ideology was focussed on dehumanising the Jews to the extent that people viewed them as nothing better than cattle. Dehumanising the targeted group was meant to make the extermination process easier by lifting the burden of guilt from the shoulders of the perpetrators. Did the dehumanization process achieve success with respect to Eichmann? Even though he wasn’t anti-Semitic and did not personally hate the Jews, did the effect of the dehumanisation process on the rest of society trickle down to Eichmann to the extent that he too viewed the Jews as animals? There are many conflicting reports on Eichmann’s attitude towards the Jews. They are not only conflicting but also unreliable because many of these reports are from Eichmann himself or from survivors of the Holocaust. The most reliable source of information in this regard is from Eichmann’s taped memoirs, recorded by Willem Sassen in Argentina (Cesarani 2005: 217). Sassen, himself a Nazi in hiding in Argentina, suggested to Eichmann that they should embark on a full account of the Final Solution, in order to tell the truth from a Nazi perspective (Cesarani 2005: 218).



Eichmann and Sassen met over a period of five months and recorded more than sixty-seven tape reels (Cesarani 2005: 218). In the company of a fellow Nazi, and copious amounts of wine, an often inebriated Eichmann had no reason to hide his feelings on the Final Solution. Eichmann recalls his tour of killing sites in 1941-1942, and his repulsion at what he saw (Cesarani 2005: 106). It is particularly Eichmann's account of the mass-shooting at Minsk that reveals his less than Nazi-like response. He recalls how the Jews were forced to undress and walk to the death pit (Cesarani 2005: 106). Moments later the shooters started firing at them (Cesarani 2005: 106).

Why did this scene linger so long in my memory? Perhaps because I had children myself? And there were children in that pit. I saw a woman hold a child of two into the air, pleading. At that moment I wanted to say 'Don't shoot, hand over the child...' Then the child was hit. I was so close that after I found bits of brains splattered on my long leather coat (Cesarani 2005: 106).

After his tour, Eichmann went back to Müller, his superior, and expressed his concern with what he had seen. At the time Eichmann was in charge of the deportations of the Jews, and in 1941-1942, when the solution to the 'Jewish problem' turned to physical annihilation, Eichmann was distressed because it was no longer a political solution (Cesarani 106-107). He did, however accept physical annihilation as the new solution, and his obsession with following orders and doing his duty could indicate that he tried to suppress his displeasure with the Final Solution by focussing on his career and abiding by the law. If this is true, Eichmann's pride in his work (something he also expresses at length in the Sassen tapes) did not have to do with anti-Semitism as such, but rather simply with the fact that he had forced himself to concentrate on his work alone, and not the consequences of his actions. There is of course the possibility that Eichmann was lying in the Sassen tapes, but he really had no reason to. He did not know that they would later be used as powerful incriminating evidence against him. From his exchange with Sassen we can conclude that the anti-Semitic propaganda that focussed on the dehumanisation of the Jews had little or no effect on Eichmann. If anything, Eichmann's repulsion at the sight of such brutal killing, caused him to exclaim to Müller that if physical annihilation was going to be implemented, it would have to be done in a different way (Cesarani 2005: 106). Eichmann was convinced that mass shootings and gassing people in vans would "educate [our men] to become sadists" (Cesarani 2005: 106). This would also go a long way in explaining why Eichmann was so passionate about his job – concentration camps must have seemed like a more humane alternative. This

view of Eichmann is quite unsettling, as it indicates he was not unaffected by the fate of the Jews.

Eichmann's reservations about the physical annihilation of the Jews did not ultimately stop him from participating in the organisation of the Final Solution. His reservations were quickly dispelled at the Wansee conference in 1942, where the leaders of the Nazi Party met to convince members of the Civil Service and various ministries, whose cooperation was essential to carrying out the Final Solution, of the need for a radical solution to the 'Jewish problem' (Villa 1999: 47). Arendt writes that this conference was a decisive turning point in Eichmann's mind:

Although he had been doing his best right along to help with the Final Solution, he had still harboured some doubts about 'such a bloody solution though violence', and these doubts had now been dispelled. 'Here now, during this conference, the most prominent people had spoken, the Popes of the Third Reich.' Now he could see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears that not only Hitler, not only Heydrich...not just the S.S. or the Party, but the elite of the good old Civil Service were vying and fighting with each other for the honour of taking the lead in these 'bloody' matters. 'At that moment, I sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling, for I felt free of all guilt.' *Who was he to judge?* Who was he 'to have [his] own thought in this matter?' (1963: 114)

In the face of the enthusiasm of the leaders of the Nazi Party, Eichmann succumbed to the dynamics of the group. He deferred to their moral authority instead of his own, and from there on his role in the Final Solution was secured. Baumeister notes that people who are hesitant to participate in violence always need other people who can assure them that the use of violent force is necessary (2001: 190). This is exactly what Eichmann experienced at the Wansee conference and what the ordinary Rwandans experienced in the aftermath of President Habyarimana's plane crash. They were hesitant to butcher their Tutsi neighbours and friends, but in the face of enormous public and state approval for the genocide, who were they to disagree? This paints a rather disheartening picture of modern societies – one in which people easily relinquish their own morality for that of the state, despite any prior moral concerns. It is interesting to note that while some perpetrators may defer to the group's moral authority because they enjoy the stability and sense of belonging that the group provides, this was not the case with Eichmann, nor was it the case with the majority of the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide. Those reluctant to participate do not seem to participate because they want to retain the security and stability provided by the group. They rather seem to participate because they do not deem their own moral concerns as important or as relevant as that of the

group. If all the people around you participate or believe that the use of violence is justified, you are more likely to participate as well. This is not just a simple case of peer pressure, but rather a situation in which the agent doubts the validity of his own moral concerns and therefore suppresses them in favour of the moral authority of the group. Group dynamics therefore play a far more important role in the formation of modern perpetrators than ideology, for example. One does not need to be influenced by ideology to take part in genocide. As long as there are enough people who support the use of violence, even those who disagree with the dominant ideology will participate. People do not need to be indoctrinated by the ideology they serve in order to be killers, nor is it required. They just need to participate.

What are we to make of these interpretations, specifically with respect to Arendt's interpretation of Eichmann, and by extension, perpetrators of modern genocide? Arendt locates the root of Eichmann's puzzling behaviour in the fact that he could not make independent judgements and think from the standpoint of another person (Bernstein 2002: 221). Arendt therefore reduces Eichmann's crimes to thoughtlessness. Given what we have learnt thus far about the nature of modern perpetrators, is this plausible? All the evidence, as subjective and unreliable as it is, points to the fact that Eichmann's actions were not the result of thoughtlessness. Eichmann's initial response to the physical annihilation of the Jews points to the fact that he was neither thoughtless nor monstrous in the typical sense. For a short period of time, Eichmann's conscience functioned in the way we would expect it to. He was horrified by what he saw during his tour of the killing sites. He did not approve of the physical annihilation of the Jews, and yet after the Wansee conference, all his reservations vanished and he fervently worked to realise the Final Solution. How do we reconcile the perpetrator who is repulsed by the sight of mass shootings with the perpetrator who works tirelessly to send millions of people to their deaths? Eichmann knew what he was doing, just as the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide knew what they were doing – how could they not?

David Cesarani refutes Arendt's view that Eichmann was thoughtless and that he unthinkingly followed orders (2005: 11). Cesarani points out that to understand Eichmann as an unthinking robot is to misunderstand the structure of the Nazi Party as a whole. Eichmann and his colleagues did not just follow orders mindlessly, but were able to take initiative (Cesarani 2005: 359). Eichmann himself provides evidence to support this when he talks

about the zeal with which he conducted his duties (Cesarani 2005: 361). Cesarani points out that the picture of the zealous Nazi does not align with that of a mindless and helpless bureaucrat (2005: 361). At his trial, Eichmann tried to maintain that he followed orders blindly, and is therefore not responsible for the Final Solution, but this defence was rendered moot when he asserted that he had saved a Jewish member of his own family (Cesarani 2005: 366). He clearly went against not only orders given by his superiors, but also the law of his country. We can therefore no longer claim that Arendt was right – a thoughtless marionette does not ever defy orders, not even to save a family member. Eichmann was therefore able to put himself in the position of the Jews and he was definitely not as obedient as both Arendt and Eichmann himself would make him seem.

The fact that Arendt's view of Eichmann does not hold, is not however reason enough to dismiss her theory entirely. Arendt had it right when she asserted that Eichmann did not join the Nazi Party because he was anti-Semitic, and she was certainly correct in debunking the myth of pure evil. There is nothing inherent in Eichmann, or in his contemporaries, that made him do what he did. He was a bureaucrat, yes, but not a mindless one. Eichmann asserted that he knew what was happening at the concentration camps, but since he was only responsible for getting the Jews to these sites, in his own mind he was not responsible for the fate that awaited them there (Cesarani 2005: 366). The fact is then that either Eichmann wanted to kill the Jews, or he did not care that they were annihilated (Cesarani 2005: 367). I believe that the latter was the case. If this is true, how do we explain his behaviour? Much like the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide who were timid and did not want to participate in the killing, Eichmann was repulsed by what he saw at the killing sites. His conscience functioned normally, and then stopped. Cesarani suggests that "the key to understanding Adolf Eichmann lies not in the man, but in the ideas that possessed him, the society in which they flowed freely, the political system that purveyed them, and the circumstances that made them acceptable" (2005: 367). This correlates with what we know about the organization of Nazi Germany and Habyarimana's Rwanda, as well as what we have learnt thus far regarding the effects of bureaucracy and the division of labour (chapter one) and the group dynamics that allow ordinary men to set aside their moral concerns in favour of the group's morality. These are the conditions that allow ordinary men to knowingly perpetrate atrocities, and yet this does not mean that "we are all potential Eichmanns", rather that the conditions which produce perpetrators like Eichmann have multiplied and are still present in our societies

today. Eichmann therefore “appears more and more like a man of our time” (Cesarani 2005: 238).

Even though Eichmann was a product of his society, that is not to say that he is not responsible for his actions. He was everything but a cog in a machine (Villa 1999: 51). Eichmann followed orders when it suited him, and disobeyed them when it was in his best interest to do so. Eichmann represents a new kind of criminal, one who does not unthinkingly follow orders, but “who participates willingly in the activities of a criminal regime” (Villa 1999: 52). This kind of perpetrator views himself “as insulated from any and all responsibility for his actions by both organisational structure and the law” (Villa 1999: 52). In other words, he regards himself to be immune from the consequences of his actions because he was simply following orders given to him by his superiors and operating within a system in which the “law is the law” (Villa 1999: 52). While this kind of perpetrator is not influenced by ideology, he does deceive himself by thinking that he is not responsible for his actions. This promotes a remoteness to reality that enables perpetrators to silence their own moral concerns; even after they are faced with the harsh realities of the ideology they serve (Villa 1999: 52). Coupled with the impact of group dynamics, this self-deception leads to a kind of thoughtlessness. Even though we may disagree with Arendt’s definition of thoughtlessness, her theory could remain applicable if we changed the definition to mean *this* kind of thoughtlessness. It is not then an inability to think from the perspective of another person or to make independent judgements, but rather a kind of thoughtlessness that results from an inability to view oneself as a perpetrator of evil, and not just a cog in a machine. Where does this leave the troubling fact that Eichmann had no motive for sending six million Jews to their deaths? Perpetrating this kind of evil does not require any motive, since “where the regime is criminal, motives are superfluous and a demonic character unnecessary: only mendacity and conformity to the law are required” (Villa 1999: 52).

### **3.5 Evil and Us**

Thus far this chapter has focused on the analysis of specific perpetrators and specific instances of genocide and with the help of theorists such as Kant and Arendt; we now have a deeper understanding of what makes these perpetrators tick. We have seen that evil is not necessarily the result of monsters, but that evil people are often ordinary people like ourselves. What does this mean for us? Are we all therefore potentially evil? Do we all have a

‘dark’ side that is lying dormant, waiting for the correct set of circumstances to present itself? In order to address these questions, let us first re-familiarise ourselves with what we have learnt thus far about evil people, and ourselves. With regard to evil people, we need to accept three facts:

- I. Evil people are not, on the whole, monsters. There is nothing significant that sets them apart from us.
- II. Evil people do not usually view themselves or their own actions as evil.
- III. The exceptions to I and II above are not as common as we would like to believe.

With regard to the way we view ourselves, we need to accept the following:

- I. We normally see ourselves as good people.
- II. We mostly believe that even though we do bad things now and again, we are still essentially good.
- III. We believe that evil people choose to commit evil.

With these observations in mind let us turn our attention to the aforementioned questions. One thing that is clear from the above-mentioned statements is that the way in which we view evil people, and by implication, ourselves, is at odds with reality. This, I would argue, has interesting implications not only for the way in which we conceive of evil, but also for the way in which we ourselves are influenced by evil. In the preceding sections, we saw that the myth of pure evil informs our perception of evil as well as the way in which we treat evil people, but does it also enable us to *do* evil? According to the myth of pure evil, we view ourselves as good, and we view evil people as wholly alien and evil. We are convinced that if placed in the same position as the perpetrators of the Holocaust, for example, we would have acted differently. We would have seen the Holocaust for what it was and would have put an end to it, but it is not always that simple, as we have seen. Evil does not always present itself as evil, on the contrary. Yet it is precisely because we so often believe in the existence of pure evil and pure goodness that we are particularly susceptible to the influence of evil. Moreover, it is precisely because we view ourselves as wholly good and those who oppose us as wholly evil, that we are vulnerable to the influence of evil.

Peter J. Haas argues that we view good and evil as mirror images of one another, and as such they take up “diametrically opposite contents” (1992: 4). He notes that it is this binary

opposition that lies at the base of all ethical thinking (Haas 1992: 4). How does this relate to the myth of pure evil and the way in which it makes us susceptible to evil? We have noted before that evil requires the support and participation of the people in order to be successful. In order to achieve this support, the targeted group needs to be represented as entirely evil. People are more willing to approve radical action against a group they believe to be wholly evil, as opposed to a group that is only somewhat evil. By appealing to the myth of pure evil and using what we already believe to be true of evil (that evil people are wholly evil), the powers that be can frame the targeted group in such a way as to make us believe that we are confronted with a source of pure evil, and as such any action is permissible. This is easily achieved. Haas argues that in these kinds of situations ethical systems are pushed to their limits (1992: 4). As a result of this, conceptions of good and evil become mutually exclusive (Haas 1992: 4). In other words, anything which has some characteristics of good will be deemed totally good, and any phenomenon with some evil characteristics will be deemed totally evil (Haas 1992: 4). In addition to this, conceptions of good and evil are mirror images of one another. In other words, good is defined in relation to evil; “we come to understand how good operates by observing evil, and vice versa” (Haas 1992: 4). By this logic, not only is any action permitted against sources of pure evil, but it is also deemed to be good.

It is important to note that this kind of reasoning and appeal to the myth of pure evil is not applied to all cases of otherness. That which is other is not necessarily evil. On the whole, we tend to tolerate other groups, and they in turn tolerate us. Living together in the world with other groups is not usually cause to destroy them. It is only when the other group is perceived as a threat that we feel it necessary to take action against them. It is interesting to note that evil groups are not usually portrayed as a threat to our governments or our political systems. They are portrayed as posing a direct threat to us, to ordinary people. They threaten our livelihoods, our children and our safety. We may be upset if we found out that another group was planning to overthrow our government, but we would only be moved to radical action if we thought that they would then pose a threat to our individual lives. Our commonly held perception of evil can therefore easily be turned against us. The myth of pure evil is therefore not only a way in which we conceive of evil, but it also provides fertile ground for evil to take root. By refusing to believe that evil and goodness are not clearly defined and mutually exclusive, we are in fact making ourselves vulnerable and paving the way to become ordinary agents of evil.

If this view is correct, we are susceptible to the influence of evil because we are incapable of viewing ourselves as anything other than good. Do we therefore underestimate our nature? Are we all in fact potentially evil? Is our insistence that we are all essentially good leading to us becoming the kind of people we condemn? I would argue that we are certainly not essentially good, but we are also not inherently evil. We are not essentially good, as we experience the inner struggle between doing what is right and doing what is wrong on a daily basis. We are all confronted with choices, and as much as we strive to always do what is good, we often fail. We often do what is wrong, and we often do so because we are motivated by selfishness. As human beings we are always looking out for our own interests. Under normal conditions, this drive can be relatively harmless, but under the kind of conditions that generate radical instances of evil such as genocide, it can literally be deadly. This selfish drive does not necessarily make us evil,<sup>5</sup> but it certainly makes us vulnerable to evil, especially in situations where doing good is not in our best interest. Examples of this can be found in both the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. Helping Jews during the Holocaust was done at great personal risk. It was certainly much easier to simply turn a blind eye and reap the benefits. In the Rwandan genocide, participation brought many economic rewards, in the form of cattle, land, and material goods, such as sheet metal. Those who opposed the slaughter did so at great personal risk, and often found themselves among the victims.

Another factor to keep in mind is that as human beings we are products of the societies we find ourselves in. This complicates the question of whether we are inherently good or evil, as it would suggest that we are what our societies want us to be. We are therefore inherently malleable. We are shaped by the dominant values and convictions of our societies, be they ideological, religious or moral. We therefore forget that if the values of our societies were different, we too would be different. And in forgetting this fact, we delude ourselves into thinking that we have a fixed nature that can withstand the forces of evil. The problem with this approach, however, is that it implies a sort of relativism. By saying that we are all products of our societies, one could easily claim that people therefore are not responsible for their actions, since their actions reflect the dominant values of their society. While it is important to take context into account when speaking of perpetrators of evil, it is also counter-intuitive to argue that perpetrators cannot be held responsible for their actions since they were simply acting in accordance with the dominant values of the time. And yet this

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<sup>5</sup>This claim is widely disputed in literature; a famous example is of course William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* in which he paints a much less optimistic view of human nature.



kind of explanation seems to greet one at every turn, especially when discussing perpetrators of modern genocides. This relativistic explanation is left wanting. We believe that perpetrators are free individuals who *choose* how they will act, a fact we feel we experience every day. As such an explanation that relies so heavily on context is not sufficient.

Is it really true that evil people choose to commit evil? From the preceding sections it is clear that distinguishing between what is good and what is evil is somewhat problematic, especially if the myth of pure evil is used to make that which is evil appear good. As was mentioned before, people usually do not choose evil for the sake of evil. In addition to this, the initial actions which lead to genocide are usually small and only relatively immoral (at best). Those taking the first tentative steps down the road to destruction could in most cases not have foretold their fate. The gradual process that leads to modern genocide therefore complicates the notion of choice especially since the choice is usually not evil or even immoral at first, and since it is portrayed as a choice made in the service of what is good and just. One could argue that even if one chose to participate at the outset, the choice to stop participating is always available. We argue that someone like Eichmann should have stopped deporting the Jews once the focus shifted from relocation to physical annihilation, a fact he was apparently uncomfortable with. The widely-held view that we are free to make our own choices and are therefore responsible for these decisions, is known as the libertarian view (Dennett 2003: 98). For many people, this view is an obvious one, but it is often opposed by the school of thought known as determinism. Determinists believe that “every event is causally determined by antecedent events” (McKenna 2009: 2). This form of determinism relies on findings regarding the laws of nature in order to justify its claim (McKenna 2009: 3). In stark contrast to the libertarian belief, the determinist view, if correct, posits that “only one future is possible at any moment in time” (McKenna 2009: 3). This of course problematises the notion that we have any influence over how we act, or whether or not we are good or evil. While there are several proponents of such a view, it remains extremely contentious, and does not yield satisfactory answers with respect to instances of radical evil.

An important factor that influences the behaviour of ordinary people under abnormal circumstances is that of denying responsibility for your actions. This tendency was illustrated by the famous experiments conducted by Milgram. The participants deferred their responsibility to those with higher authority (Masters 1997: 254). Even though they were the ones administering what was believed to be increasingly harmful electric shocks, they

assumed that the man in the white lab coat instructing them to administer the shocks was responsible. This is an increasingly prevalent phenomenon among perpetrators of modern genocide to such an extent that the 'I was only carrying out orders' defence has started to gain cliché status. Yet this defence is problematic, since many perpetrators clearly convince themselves that they are not responsible for their actions if they were instructed to execute them by a superior. Masters highlights the dangers of such an approach, stating that once this sort of thinking has been adopted, there is "no limit to the amount of wickedness man may wilfully perform" (1997: 254). The Holocaust and the more recent Rwandan genocide is proof of the limitless nature of such evil.

This shifting of responsibility also seems to be problematic for outsiders, especially those who seek to prosecute perpetrators of genocide. We have seen two approaches in this regard. At the Nuremberg trials, the organisers of the Holocaust were tried. The Allies realised that given the institutionalised nature of the Holocaust, and the large number of participants (almost the whole of German society) it would be foolish to seek to punish everyone who participated or contributed to the Holocaust. At Nuremberg, the organisers and superiors were tried and held responsible, but not those who carried out their orders, yet the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, currently underway in Arusha, has sought to punish everyone from organisers to petty functionaries. The tribunal believes that those responsible should be held responsible. In this case, everyone. Why has a Nuremberg approach not been followed? The Rwandan genocide shares the institutionalised and highly organised nature of the Holocaust, so shouldn't only the organisers be punished? Or do we distinguish between killing people with a machete and killing people by signing forms? Responsibility is not lessened by the fact that some people used bureaucracy as their weapon of choice, and others used a machete. This inconsistency in persecuting those responsible seems to only add to the problem.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Perpetrators of modern genocide perplex us in a way that no other kind of perpetrator does. Devoid of motive and ideological influence, these perpetrators are ordinary people like ourselves. At home they are often good parents, spouses and citizens, but at work they can seemingly turn into perpetrators of the most atrocious crimes. The twentieth century is littered with examples of such men and women. The most famous among which is Adolf

Eichmann. His capture, trial and execution in Jerusalem have situated the image of the ordinary man in the bulletproof glass booth at the centre of any discussion of perpetrators of genocide. He has become symbolic of such perpetrators, partly because of the media coverage of the trial, but also thanks to Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. She solidified Eichmann's image as an unthinking marionette of the Nazi regime, an ordinary man who was responsible for the deaths of six million people. In this chapter I have attempted to show that not only do traditional interpretations and theories of evil fall short of the truth when applied to perpetrators of modern genocide, but Arendt's own theory does not hold. Eichmann had no motive whatsoever (other than fulfilling his duty) and was in all other respects a perfectly normal human being, who had a normal childhood and upbringing. This flies in the face of the myth of pure evil, which hinges to a large extent on the assumed relationship between evil actions and evil intent. Eichmann and his contemporaries in Rwanda did not participate in genocide because they were primarily anti-Semitic or hated Tutsis. We have seen that this fact nullifies all attempts to explain evil in terms of intention. Harm-based theories like that propagated by John Kekes also fail, since that places too much importance on the role of ideology. The influence of ideology on perpetrators of genocide has traditionally been seen as a way to understand why people can participate in genocide. But perpetrators of modern genocide are very rarely urged on by ideological convictions. Arendt attributed Eichmann's willingness to transport six million people to their deaths, not to ideology, but to sheer thoughtlessness, in other words, his inability to make independent judgements or think from the perspective of another person. This view has proven to be incorrect. Eichmann was anything but unthinking, since he obeyed and disobeyed orders when it suited him.

If intent or harm-based theories do not hold when applied to perpetrators of modern genocide, what does? A more plausible explanation states that perpetrators silence their own moral concerns by deferring to the morality of the group. If everyone else agrees with the regime's genocidal plans, who are you to disagree? Uncoerced, people readily participate in genocide, regardless of their personal moral concerns. Villa points out that this also has to do with the fact that perpetrators deceive themselves into thinking that they are insulated from taking responsibility for their actions. This is due to the fact that they are simply taking orders given to them by a superior, and more importantly, abiding by the law. This results in a kind of thoughtlessness, one that differs from Arendt's definition. This kind of thoughtlessness refers to the fact that perpetrators are unable to view themselves as anything other than a cog in a

machine. This inability to conceive of oneself as a responsible agent, and the inability to conceive of oneself as anything other than good becomes increasingly problematic when we think about the proliferation of Eichmann-like perpetrators of evil in recent history.

Given what we know about perpetrators of evil, and their ordinary natures, we cannot help but wonder if we are all potentially evil. It is clear that the perpetrators of the most horrific acts of violence and cruelty did not see themselves as evil, nor did they think that their actions were wrong. They saw themselves as good people doing what needed to be done in order to vanquish evil. Do we not all share this inclination? If we remove our moral judgements from the equation, it is clear that perpetrators of evil are just like us. This is troubling, and rightly so. I have attempted to show that human beings have no fixed moral nature. We are neither inherently good nor evil, but we are subject to the dominant values of our societies. We are therefore products of our societies. This hints at a sort of relativism, and yet we cannot only take societal factors into account. By doing so we deny that people can be held responsible for their actions. We therefore continue to seek to explain the presence of evil in our world. This task is not made any easier by our insistence that good and evil are clearly defined terms with no gray areas. Coupled with our denial of the ordinary nature of evil people, we are faced with a problem: By holding fast to the myth of pure evil we are making ourselves vulnerable to the influence of evil. The myth can just as easily be used against potential perpetrators as it can be used against victims. In addition to this, the structure of modern genocide seems to enable limitless evil, as the division of labour leads to a denial of responsibility on the part of the agent. Those responsible often displace their responsibility onto their superiors and claim that they were simply carrying out orders. While we can certainly understand such reasoning, understanding it does not make it legitimate. We have a deep-seated belief that people are responsible for their actions. This corresponds to the libertarian view, with its emphasis on free will and choice. Yet there are many people who believe that we are not as free to choose as we believe. Determinism posits that only one future is possible, thus relegating choice, free will and responsibility to the margins. Even though this approach has been deemed unsatisfactory with respect to instances of radical evil, it remains puzzling.

Given the above observations on evil and human nature, we have to wonder if it is ever possible to know that we are truly doing what is good and right and not what is evil. Given the ordinary nature of perpetrators and the fact that human nature is highly malleable, how

are we to distinguish between ourselves and perpetrators of evil? The only thing that is capable of performing such a task is morality. We have seen that when state-morality replaces individual morality, things go awry. Is morality therefore our answer? The following chapter is dedicated to this question, as well as the challenges levied by totalitarian regimes against individual morality.

#### **4. Modernity, Morality and Ethics**

The modern genocides that punctuate the history of the twentieth century arguably represent the worst forms of evil. Executed in a highly rational, systematic and organised manner not by monsters, but by ordinary people, genocides like the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide of 1994 confound traditional explanations of evil. This horrific and highly puzzling phenomenon has become characteristic of the twentieth century, and if its proliferation and success in that century is anything to go by, we have yet to see the last of it. It was noted in the previous chapter that what puzzles us most about the perpetrators of modern genocide is the fact that they are rarely motivated by ideology, lack evil intent and are usually convinced of the righteousness of their cause. In most cases these perpetrators are highly disciplined and perform their duties to the best of their abilities, seeking the approval of their superiors and the promise of career advancement and personal gain. These normal concerns are not unusual and are in keeping with the ordinary nature of these perpetrators. If genocide in general causes us to think critically about human nature and the societies we live in, then modern genocides should cause us to do so more fervently than ever. The ordinary nature of perpetrators, in particular, is cause for serious deliberation, as it not only calls into question everything we thought we knew about evil, but also calls into question what we think we know about ourselves.

Given that there is little that differentiates us from the perpetrators of modern genocide, how are we to know that we are not also in danger of becoming like them? We believe that if we were in their position we would have acted differently, but would we really? Perpetrators of modern genocide are generally speaking convinced of the righteousness of their cause and are convinced that their actions against the targeted group are justified. Irrespective of how mistaken these perpetrators may be, we have to admit that, like them, we too are for the most part convinced of the righteousness of our actions. This is highly problematic as it blurs the line between good and evil. How are we to resolve this problem and ensure that we do not gradually slide into becoming ordinary perpetrators of evil? It has been suggested that perhaps morality provides the answer. As human beings, we believe that we can distinguish between what is right and wrong, and what is good and evil. Surely this moral 'sense' provides a good safeguard against the influence of evil and is possibly our best weapon against modern genocide.

Traditionally, western moral philosophy has been concerned with three questions that are of value with respect to our current discussion. They are listed by John Rawls in his *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* as,

First: Is the moral order required of us derived from an external source, or does it arise in some way from human nature itself...and from the requirements of our living together in society?

Second: Is the knowledge or awareness of how we are to act directly accessible only to some or to a few...or is it accessible to every person who is normally reasonable and conscientious?

Third: Must we be persuaded or compelled to bring ourselves in line with the requirements of morality by some external motivation, or are we so constituted that we have in our nature sufficient motives to lead us to act as we ought without the need of external inducements? (2003: 10)

The two heavy weights of western moral philosophy are David Hume and Immanuel Kant. Hume, a Scot, and Kant, a German, both agree (in different ways) that with respect to the above-mentioned questions, the second alternative to each question, is true (Rawls 2003: 11). In other words, they believe that morality is derived from human nature itself; that knowledge of how to act is accessible to everyone, not just an elite few; and that we have in our nature sufficient motives to act as we ought, without needing external motivations (Rawls 2003: 11). For the purpose of our current discussion, a detailed explanation of Hume and Kant's views is not necessary. It is sufficient to note that Hume was an empiricist, and stressed the "universal character of human nature" (Trigg 1999: 91). Hume believes that we need societies in order to survive, but argue that these societies cannot change us (Trigg 1999: 91). In *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume notes that we have a "general appetite to good, and aversion to evil" (1978: 417). Kant on the other hand argues that awareness of the moral law results in a strong desire to act in accordance with that law (1978: 417; Rawls 2003: 148). In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant formulates his version of the moral law, the Categorical Imperative. The second formulation of the Categorical Imperative sums it up nicely: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Kant 1996: 73). These two juggernauts of the western moral tradition support the popular view that all people have an internal sense of what is right and wrong and that this is sufficient reason to act as we ought. In contrast to the views of Hume and Kant, Hobbes has a less favourable view of human beings.

In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes life in the state of nature as “poore, nasty, brutish and short” (1981: 186). According to Hobbes, in the state of nature human beings are inherently self-interested and, if left to their own devices, will be in constant conflict with one another. For Hobbes, human beings are ruled by their appetites and aversions (Haworth 2004: 82). We desire those things “which tend to our own preservation” and avoid those things that may cause us harm or “tend to our own destruction” (Haworth 2004: 82). In a state of nature, people only have their own strength and ingenuity to rely on in order to survive (Haworth 2004: 75). The only way we can escape from the state of nature, where we are constantly at war with one another, is to enter into a social contract. By entering into a social contract we give up some of our power in the hands of a sovereign in order to live in peace. Hobbes has some very interesting ideas regarding what this sovereign should be like, but that is not relevant to our current discussion. With respect to human nature, Hobbes believes that it is only once we enter a society that we stop being ruled by our appetites and aversions and start to live ‘morally’.

If Kant and Hume are correct then we have to assume that all rational people would choose what is good over that which is evil. How do we then explain instances of horrific evil such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide? In these cases, the perpetrators did not only choose to do evil once or twice – they committed the most heinous acts of cruelty and violence over and over again for an extended period of time. According to Kant and Hume, this should not be possible – it is only the criminally insane who would engage in “systematic and conscious immoral behaviour” for such an extended period of time (Haas 2001: 107). We have already established that the perpetrators of modern genocide were not criminally insane at all but seemingly completely normal. On the other hand, if Hobbes is correct then we could attribute the atrocities of the twentieth century to man’s self-interested nature. We have to wonder if the restraints that were supposed to enable man to act morally somehow failed and resulted in atrocities such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. This view, that modern civilisation’s hold over man ‘slipped’ and revealed man’s barbaric nature, has been disproven by Zygmunt Bauman, and is discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. We are therefore left with two possible options: either we are mistaken regarding the ordinary nature of perpetrators, or there is something about modern genocide and modernity in general that radically challenges the principles of western moral philosophy. I believe that the latter is the case.



This chapter aims to illustrate how traditional moral responses have failed with respect to modern genocide and to provide possible solutions for this problem. In this regard Haas' discussion of the creation of a Nazi ethic in his important book *Morality After Auschwitz* is of interest. With the assistance of Haas' theory and his distinction between an ethic and morality, this chapter aims to understand the mechanisms that circumvented accepted moral theories. Genocides like the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide of 1994 do not, however, occur in a vacuum, and as such it is also important to look at the relation between modernity and morality. Here I will draw yet again on the work of Zygmunt Bauman in order to explore the possibility that modernity itself is to blame for the failure of dominant moral theories, as well as a possible solution suggested by Bauman.

#### **4.1 Morality and Ethics: A Distinction**

In *Morality after Auschwitz*, Peter J. Haas works from the assumption that the Holocaust is a problem for ethical theory, and as such his book is a study of "how societies create and adopt ethical systems" (1992: 1). In this way, Haas moves away from explanations of the Holocaust that focuses on how people can do evil things to

the more interesting question of how evil is understood in the first place and by what mechanisms it is redefined so that people can be led in good conscience to commit Holocausts. [His] focus moves away from individual psychology to the social, cultural, and linguistic context in which people come to understand good and evil to begin with. [He asks]...how people come to understand the ethical obligations to which they dedicate themselves (1992: 2).

Haas' focus on ethical systems and ethical obligations seem quite odd at first, since we believe that the Holocaust was characterised by a *lack* of an ethical system and ethical obligations. If Haas is to be believed, we are mistaken. With regard to the way in which Haas uses the term 'ethic', he does not mean it to be synonymous with 'morality'. An ethic can be defined as "a complete and coherent system of convictions, values, and ideas that provides a grid within which some sorts of actions can be classified as evil, and so to be avoided, while other sorts of actions can be classified as good, and so to be tolerated or even pursued" (Haas 1992: 3). This means that an ethic can be any formal system that would enable people to make judgements of good and evil, regardless of the content of the system (Rubenstein 1994: 159). While the content of the ethic does not matter, it is important that the ethic be coherent

(Haas 1992: 3). This contrasts sharply with the common definition of morality, which includes an inherent value judgement. No specific content is required for something to qualify as an ethic (Willis 1994: 51). An ethic in the sense in which Haas uses it, is therefore a formal system (Rubenstein 1992: 159). Haas suggests this explanation, as it is in accordance with what we know about the perpetrators of the Holocaust. He notes that these perpetrators did not suddenly become unable to tell right from wrong, nor does he believe that they knew that what they were doing was evil, but did it anyway (1992: 3). In the preceding chapters, we have examined both of these claims, and noted that perpetrators were ordinary people (and as such must have been able to tell right from wrong) and that people do not, on the whole, choose evil for the sake of evil. Haas therefore accepts that an ethic operated in Nazi Germany in a “coherent and systematic way”, without claiming that it was “proper or moral” (1992: 3-4). Haas is merely asserting that such an ethic was regarded by its adherents as “a proper system for judging the rightness and wrongness of behaviour” (1992: 4).

Haas notes that the power of an ethic lies in the fact that it “provides a system for judging every action in a coherent, non-self-contradictory, and intuitively correct way” (1992: 4). In order to accomplish this, an ethic cannot just throw up random standards and accept people to regard them as correct (Haas 1992: 4). An ethic is only able to win broad public acceptance if it is able to convince people that it provides a coherent and intuitive system for judging right from wrong (Haas 1992: 4). It is only once this is achieved that a particular ethic stands a chance of becoming the governing norm of a civilisation (Haas 1992: 4). How is this accomplished? Haas notes that it is of integral importance that the ethic allows the people who think in its terms to clearly understand the distinction it draws between good and evil (1992: 4). In this regard Haas draws upon structuralism and notes that “concepts of good and evil are never merely different from each other but are mirror images, each reflecting the logical structure of the other” (1992: 4). This mirroring occurs only at the subconscious level, since actual moral judgements are usually more ambiguous (Haas 1992: 4). Concepts of good and evil therefore take up “diametrically opposite contents”, and it is this opposition that Haas claims lies at the base of all ethical thinking (1992: 4). This binary opposition was discussed in the previous chapter. One part of Haas’ definition of an ethic as a system that could prove problematic is his notion that an ethic should be ‘intuitively correct’. What does this mean? Should an ethic conform to our innate feelings about the world or our conscience? Haas does not think so. He notes that by ‘intuitively correct’ he means that in addition to

being logically coherent, an ethic should also create the impression that it is advancing the interests and values of the individual or group (1992: 5). In other words, an ethic that is perceived as working against the interests and welfare of the community will ultimately be rejected (Haas 1994: 5). It is therefore clear to see why the Nazi ethic, for example, was so successful – it provided a system that apparently addressed what the German population deemed to be the greatest threat to themselves and their culture (Haas 1994: 5).

Haas notes that the formation of an ethic operates on three different levels: the level of concepts (consciousness); the public level at which foundational concepts are linked together in consciousness; and the level of decision making (1992: 5-6). The first level, that of consciousness, is where basic pre-linguistic convictions operate (Haas 1992: 6). These concepts “operate subconsciously to structure how we perceive the world” (Haas 1992: 6). It is at this level that we find the mirroring of good and evil. The second level is where we relate these subconscious concepts and “basic convictions to one another in the public realm and are able to refer to them in reasoned discourse” (Haas 1992: 6). Haas notes that it is at this level that “basic values and convictions are discursivized. In ethics, this level provides the vocabulary, the analogies, metaphors, and reasonings to make and warrant ethical judgements” (1992: 6). This level provides the form for a particular ethic (Haas 1992: 6). It is this level that provides a linguistic grid within which ethical judgements are made (Haas 1992: 6). The third level is where we assign specific content to our formal system, and it is at this level that the Nazi ethic, for example, strikes us as foreign (Haas 1992: 6). We have moved from the basic formal patterns to symbolization to the application of the ethic to real-life phenomena. If an ethic does strike us as foreign, as the Nazi ethic does, it is at the level of the application of the ethic that we wonder how so many people could be persuaded to commit such horrible acts of violence (Haas 1992: 7). Haas notes that an ethic’s ability to persuade people to participate in evil has to do with the second level, since it is at that level that basic concepts and convictions are given linguistic shape (192: 7). Haas illustrates this with reference to the deportation of the Jews:

[P]eople were persuaded to tolerate the deportation of the Jews...because such a deed made sense within the universe of discourse that gave public definition to concepts of good and evil in Nazi society. In fact, as Nazi propaganda shows, the deportation of the Jews was portrayed as compatible with an overall good that people could see and with which they could sympathize – that of self-preservation (Haas 1992: 7).

Once it was established that the Jews posed a threat to German culture, there were certain ethical ramifications (Haas 1992: 7). These ramifications were based on notions such as self-defence and since these ramifications were in keeping with the accepted style of ethical discourse of the time, they were perfectly understandable within the context (Haas 1992: 7). The reason that the majority of Germans could so easily condone violence and cruelty towards the Jews was because the formal characteristic of Western ethical discourse had not changed; what had changed was the application thereof (Haas 1992: 7). The reason that the Nazi ethic was so successfully implemented was that the Nazis did not attempt to alter basic ethical convictions, they merely changed the way these basic ethical concepts were applied – “that is, what actions or phenomena in the real world were to be placed under one rubric or another” (Haas 1992: 7). The Germans therefore did not lose the ability to tell right from wrong, they merely evaluated certain actions in a different, although still ethically coherent, way (Haas 1992: 7). In this way, Haas argues, no sudden break in legal, political or moral thinking occurred, it was all very gradual (Haas 1992: 8). It would therefore seem as if Haas is arguing that Nazi morality flowed from an underlying ethical grid (Willis 1994: 52). How was this possible? In order for morality to flow from such an ethical grid, a “radical reconceptualization of good and evil” is necessary (Willis 1994: 52).

In an article written almost ten years after the publication of *Morality after Auschwitz*, Haas notes that his now famous book stemmed from two questions relating to the good, namely whether or not the definition of the good could be changed, and secondly, what definition of the good had come to replace the accepted definition in the case of the Nazis (2001: 113). He notes that the answer to the first question is a resounding ‘yes’ since the history of the good itself proves that it had not only changed, but that the definition of the good has changed remarkably in the last two thousand years (Haas 2001: 113). He cites the examples of Plato, Kant and John Stuart Mill who all had their own, very different ideas of what constituted the good (Haas 2001: 113). Haas concedes that these examples do not represent anything like the radical change of the good that he argues occurred in the case of Nazi Germany, yet it does establish the principle that a change in the definition of the good is indeed possible (2001: 113). With regard to the second question, Haas identifies the content change that occurred as anchored in the scientific paradigms of the nineteenth century, especially that of Social Darwinism (2001: 113). Social Darwinism’s assertion that certain races are further along the evolutionary path and therefore ‘better’ than others, combined with the idea that the human race, like animals, are subject to a process of evolution, led to the eugenics, “the engineering

of the gene pool” (Haas 2001: 113-114). The idea that humanity’s genetic heritage was the key to its advancement and betterment soon spawned the idea that some individuals should and could be sacrificed in order to ensure the survival and shaping of a “common genetic code, which represented the future endowments of the race” (Haas 2001: 114). The sacrifice of some for the greater good of the gene pool was presented as being in line with the process of evolution in nature, where the weak are defeated by the strong and only the fittest survive. The individual was therefore suppressed in favour of the social good, a fact that was perfectly compatible with fascism, which was spreading through Europe at the time (Haas 2001: 114).

A redefined conception of the good, now including the ideals of Social Darwinism, was then “poured, as it were, into the normal language of received morality” (Haas 2001: 114). The perpetrators could therefore still talk about good and bad and right and wrong without having to relinquish the traditional forms of Western morality that they have always abided by (Haas 2001: 114). They could even refer to great Western religious and philosophical texts to “show how the good always required strength and a devotion to duty while the evil was always to be battled” (Haas 2001: 114). They could therefore transfer Western moral rhetoric straight into their Social Darwinist situation so smoothly that those who were enmeshed in the language could not easily find a way out (Haas 2001: 114). When coupled with the binary opposition of good and evil, and the mutually exclusive definitions of these terms (a result of the myth of pure evil), it is not difficult to see how easy it was for people to participate in the Holocaust. Science, therefore, seemed to provide an incredibly coherent picture of the world and explanation of reality, and as such it is not difficult to see how attractive it would have been to build an ethic out of this material (Haas 2001: 114). Haas notes that

it is equally clear how an ethic based on this model could yield the kind of eugenics, racial warfare, and finally genocide that we call the Holocaust. It could proceed seamlessly and almost effortlessly out of the past. And so people proceeded down the path to genocide with both a clear understanding of what they were doing and also with a sense that what they were doing was perfectly in line with their moral duty (Haas 2001: 114).

The evil of the Nazi policy was therefore “hidden behind a self-serving, deceptive rationale whose aim [was] to extend and reconfigure the good” (Willis 1994: 56). What cannot be denied with regard to this reconfiguration of the good, is the role played by science. The role played by science, technology and Enlightenment rationality in the process of extermination

has already been noted in the first chapter, yet it now becomes clear that these modern achievements also played a role in the replacement of morality with an ethic like that of the Nazis. This phenomenon is one that, like all modern aspects of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, deserves closer scrutiny.

#### **4.2 Modernity and the Challenge of Morality**

At the threshold of the modern era, nature was viewed as mankind's major source of uncertainty (Bauman 2008: 78). The pre-modern world was unpredictable and man was at the mercy of nature (Bauman 2008: 78). With the arrival of the modern era, this all changed. Modernity, at least in the way in which the term is used in this thesis, refers to a form of society that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and is epitomised by the Enlightenment ideals of science and rationality. In contrast with the pre-modern era, modernity can be seen as the "story of humans lifting themselves by their own wits, acumen, determination, and industry...out of the mire of the 'natural', 'precivilized' condition" (Bauman 2008: 79). This period of time is characterised by the rise of industrialisation and technological and scientific advancements. The effect of these advancements was the "unshakeable trust in the human ability to improve on nature and the belief in superiority of reason over 'blind natural forces' – which humans, with reason's help, can harness to more useful tasks, or shackle in case they prove too obstreperous" (Bauman 2008: 79). In the pre-modern era, nature evaded man's control and "exploded human designs" due to it being unpredictable and haphazard (Bauman 2008: 79). With the arrival of modernity, man could finally be the master, not only over nature but also over his fellow human beings. Due to the incredible advances in technology and science, modernity is also characterised by a rich profusion of knowledge – with the help of science and rationality, man could, in theory, explain every aspect about himself and the world around him.

Modernity certainly heralded in a prosperous period for the sciences, and these modern advances greatly improved man's quality of life. But, as the Holocaust amply demonstrated, these modern drives, if left unchecked, can also produce the greatest horrors in human history. Given what we know about modernity, and the way in which modern advancements have changed the world around us, what can we say about the relationship between modernity and morality? Given that modernity has changed almost every aspect of our lives, can we truly claim that morality has remained the same? In light of the horrors of modern

genocide perpetrated in the twentieth century and the failure of morality to curtail those events, it seems fair to assume that modernity has had some effect on morality. What effect has it had, and why? Are there certain aspects of modernity that are incompatible with morality, at least in the way in which it has traditionally been understood?

In *Morality and Modernity*, Ross Poole notes that the importance modernity bestows upon rationality and science problematises the relationship between morality and modernity (1991: ix). Reason has gained such prominence in the modern world that it occupies the same revered position that was previously reserved for religion. With the advent of modernity and man's increased knowledge of the natural world, religion has all but fallen by the wayside, as it is no longer needed to explain the inexplicable. Science – and by implication, mankind – seemingly has the ability to do that. Science claims to be objective which stands in opposition to morality, which is notoriously subjective (except in highly theoretical cases). As we have seen throughout mankind's history, and have undoubtedly experienced in our own lives, morality differs from person to person and from society to society. There are of course points at which different forms of morality overlap, but even the smallest differences can have significant effects. It is precisely morality's subjective nature which is at odds with the dominant values and goals of the modern era. Given modernity's emphasis on rationality, individuals are considered rational if their beliefs are tested by methods which “are more likely...to yield true beliefs” (Poole 1991: 66). Rationality in this sense is therefore embodied in the “modern institutions of scientific education and research” (Poole 1991: 66). Faced with the dominance of reason and so-called objectivity afforded by science, morality can scarcely expect to be taken seriously. Modernity has therefore constructed a conception of knowledge and of truth

which excludes the possibility of moral knowledge; morality becomes, not a matter of rational belief, but subjective opinion. In a world which is antithetical to faith and dogma, morality can only survive as a matter of personal faith or dogmatic conviction. In neither case can morality retain the authority it needs to play its role in social and individual life (Poole 1991: ix).

A rational individual will therefore reject the claims of morality, since morality lays claim to an objective truth it no longer has claim to (Poole 1991: x). In a world in which science defines the “realm of cognitive rationality” questions of value necessarily fall outside of that realm (Poole 1991: 67). Values and meanings therefore only exist insofar as they are created

by us (Poole 1991: 67). The ‘objective’ nature of science, which is driven by proof and rationality, does not only stand opposite the subjective nature of morality, often driven by intuition, but it is also its adversary. With the rise of modernity, objectivity and reason triumphed over subjectivity and intuition. As long as science provides the standards for objective knowledge, “morality can only be a self-deluding subjectivity” (Poole 1991: 69).

Poole notes that the subjective nature of morality is not the only reason for the troubled relationship between morality and modernity. He states that morality is generally thought to “express the demands of a particular form of social life; it is the voice of society and it is addressed to the members of that society” (Poole 1991: 134). This is a fairly uncontroversial definition, except when applied to morality in modern societies. Poole argues that as individuals living in modern societies we are “encouraged to think of ourselves as having an identity independent of the social relations in which we exist” (Poole 1991: 134). This means that for us, the voice of society is not equal to or the same as our voice (Poole 1991: 134). This detachment from our network of social relations creates an externality which “is fatal to the enterprise of morality” (Poole 1991: 134). What does this mean? It was noted earlier that since science defines the boundaries of rationality, values and meaning necessarily fall outside of those boundaries. As individuals living in modern societies we necessarily form part of the realm of reason and scientific rationality. Morality is external – in other words, it falls outside of the modern realm – and as such “it cannot provide a reason which is a reason *for us* why we should act in the ways it commands” (Poole 1991: 134). Poole continues and states that we may hear the voice of morality, “but we do not know why we should obey” (1991: 134).

While Poole provides an interesting account of the relation between morality and modernity, I would propose that we look at the relationship between the individual and society in a different way. I agree with Poole that in modern societies we are encouraged to think of ourselves as having an identity independent from our social relations, and I would agree that this separation from our network of social relations is to blame for the failure of morality, but not for the reason Poole suggests. Whereas Poole views morality as a societal force, I prefer to think of it as something founded in the individual. In this sense I am inclined to agree with Kant and Hume that morality is inherent to human beings. This is not however, the same as saying that human beings are inherently good. Here I agree with Zygmunt Bauman’s view that human beings are not inherently good or evil, but that we are moral which means



“having eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and knowing that things and acts may be good or evil” (Bauman & Tester 2001: 4). I prefer this explanation of morality specifically with reference to modernity, as Haas’ work illustrated how societal forces can generate an ethic of its own and can therefore not be trusted to provide sufficient moral framework that would enable us to resist evil. It can be argued that it is because we are separated from our network of social relations that morality is unable to deter the rise of evil. In my view, individual morality exists and can only be quashed or redirected by external forces (like propaganda, for example, or the Nazi ethic). As moral individuals, our individual morality is unable to have much effect on radical forms of evil such as genocide, because our separation from our network of social relations (each other) prevents this individual morality from spreading to society a whole. It has been documented that modern perpetrators of evil are usually hesitant to perform their tasks as it clashes with their personal moral beliefs. It is only once they relinquish their individual morality and take up the state’s morality that they become committed perpetrators of evil.

Furthermore, I am of the opinion that while Poole’s argument is certainly compelling, his conception of the relationship between morality and modernity hinges on a flawed understanding of the term ‘morality’. It seems as if Poole considers morality to be a set of laws or rules that guide our conduct within a certain society. This to me is more in line with an ethic, not morality. Poole notes that morality is very subjective which is why it struggles to garner influence in a modern world driven by reason and objectivity. Yet it seems to me that in describing morality as the “voice of society” he is making an error – if a modern society is governed by principles of science and rationality, then surely reason and the values of modernity must be the voice of society (since a modern society is governed by modern forces). This seems to contradict Poole’s argument, so one can therefore only infer that what Poole had in mind when he used the term ‘morality’ was in fact an ethic. Even though I disagree with Poole with regard to his explanation of the relationship between the individual and society, I do agree that there is a marked difference between morality and that which is valued by modernity, and to “demand reasons from morality is to make [it] subject to standards which are not [its] own” (Poole 1991: 136).

### 4.3 Zygmunt Bauman, Morality and Modernity

Zygmunt Bauman argues that the failure of morality under modern conditions has to do with the difference in the way in which we view morality. To illustrate his point, Bauman employs two etiological myths. Etiological myths can be defined as stories that explain the origin of something, but these myths are “something more than stories of a single event which took place once, and in obscure antiquity” (Bauman 1998a: 11-12). The stories they tell “[are] located in a ‘present imperfect’ and doomed to stay imperfect forever” (Bauman 1998a: 12). These stories not only tell of the origin of something, but “they also spell out the conditions that must be met in order to ensure that the phenomenon in question does happen over and over again – that its happening was not a one-off event” (Bauman 1998a: 12). In this case, the two myths are stories from the Bible that provide the framework for all thinking within the Judeo-Christian tradition (Bauman 1998a: 12). The first story is that of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden:

Evicted from Paradise, Adam was told to ‘win his food with labour’ and to ‘gain his bread by the sweat of his brow’. He was not given any other instructions to follow...The sole command he got was that from now on he had to, so to speak, take matters into his own hands: struggle to live, to decide and choose (since he had already tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he knew that the choices he was about to make could be more or less preferable, better or worse, good or bad) (Bauman 1998a: 12).

Adam and Eve had therefore been given the *freedom to choose*, and this is how they became moral persons – choices appeared to them as either good or bad (unlike in Paradise), and they were free to choose their own path. The second etiological myth is the story of Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai. God spoke through Moses, and Moses explained to his people that they should obey and follow God’s laws, to which they answered that they will do everything the Lord expects of them (Bauman 1998a: 13):

And then the Lord went on, spelling it out in profuse detail what they should do and what they should refrain from doing...In doing what God told them to do, people will be good; in doing what the Lord told them not to do, they will be evil. For obedience they will be rewarded, for disobedience – punished (Bauman 1998a: 13).

These two stories both try to illustrate what it is to be moral. The first story would suggest that to be moral means facing a choice between good and evil, and to make a decision knowing that such a choice exists (Bauman 1998a: 13). It is interesting to note that it is only in the modern era that people could, for the first time *choose* the good. Bauman notes that in the pre-modern era, where religion was given high importance, free will could only mean choosing *wrong* over right (1994: 4). This meant breaching God's commandments, or to "depart from the way of the world as God ordained it" (Bauman 1994: 4). Being in the right meant following the conventional way of life (Bauman 1994: 4). Being in the right therefore did not involve a choice. Under modern conditions men and women were, for the first time, presented with the idea (and reality) that they could *choose* between right and wrong.

The second story illustrates that in order to be moral one simply has to follow a command or rule (Bauman 1998a: 13). The first story, therefore, presents morality as a situation of ever-present uncertainty, whereas the second story equates morality with obeying rules. The second option is of course the easiest, as it provides relief from the constant inner struggle that results from having to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. Most traditional moral theories draw their inspiration from the second story (Kant's Categorical Imperative, where reason is the law-giver, is one example). According to such theories, the perfect moral life is one that is devoid of moral conflict since you only follow one rule of law (Nienaber 2003: 12). In this situation, individuals will only be faced with moral conflict in a situation where they are faced with "the co-presence of two or more laws pressing their demands, each one backed by equally powerful and respectable authority, but each one demanding a conduct incompatible with that demanded by the others" (Bauman 1998a: 14). According to Bauman, it is the first, not the second story that captures the true nature of morality.

We might at this point protest against Bauman's preference for the first story over the second, and attempt to argue that the second story illustrates an attempt to capture the essence of morality in a set of values, and as such does have merit. We may even go so far as to say that it is of more value to us, since it provides us with a unified and cohesive conception of morality. Bauman, however, does not view the second story's illustration of morality in such a positive light, in fact he disputes that morality based on laws can be regarded as a true form of morality. The second approach is more in line with an ethic than with morality. What does Bauman have to say about ethics, and why does he view it in such a negative light? Bauman links ethics to the dawn of the modern era, and the Hobbesian attitude that states that "in a

moral world, only the voice of reason should be heard. And a world in which only the voice of reason is heard is a moral world” (1995: 258). In other words, when faced with moral dilemmas, we should be guided by logic and reason rather than by our emotions. This approach seems to make sense, given the enormity of moral dilemmas and the fact that we tend to view them in a serious light. We want to make the right decision at all times, and what better way to ensure that than to employ our logical faculties, that aspect of our nature which we believe is best suited for the task. Bauman links this to the Hobbesian view of man which states that if left to themselves and their passions, men will attempt to destroy each other. As such it is pertinent to exercise some form of control over man’s passions, and therefore these passions, which are mostly destructive, need to be rooted out and stifled (Bauman 1995: 258). It is according to this view that reason should reign supreme, and with respect to morality, emotions should be discarded in exchange for logic and rationality.

At first glance, the substitution of logic and reason for emotion does not seem all that bad. People often act and respond irrationally to situations and as a result make the wrong decisions. In cases such as those, would a little more logic and a little less emotion really be so terrible? Most people would say no, but Bauman urges us not to be fooled. According to Bauman, the drive to capture morality in a set of laws should not be viewed as an effort to ‘improve’ on morality, but rather as an effort to free man from any form of uncertainty. As mentioned before, modernity aims to organise and regulate the world. When we combine this goal with the scientific forms of rationality that permeate every aspect of modern life, the modern attitude towards morality becomes clear. When faced with a moral dilemma in the modern world, there is only one correct course of action and a myriad other incorrect paths (Nienaber 2003: 13). Modernity therefore promotes morality as an ethic in order to create an ordered and uniform world. Only by means of a systematic approach that includes rules and regulations can we determine what the correct course of action will be (Bauman 1995: 258). Not only does this ensure that we make predictable decisions, but it also removes every speck of uncertainty from the moral decision-making process. It is exactly this removal of uncertainty that Bauman is highly suspicious of.

Why is Bauman so suspicious of the disappearance of uncertainty from moral decision-making? Moral dilemmas and moral decisions are, as we have all experienced, never simple or clear cut. There are always grey areas, situations that require one to bend or even disregard traditional moral rules in order for one to truly act morally. One can argue that it is in these

grey areas that one's moral reasoning is truly tested, and these situations are also when moral reasoning is needed most. It is in these grey areas that we experience a profound sense of uncertainty. Am I making the right decision? Would another course of action be better? What will the consequences of my actions be? Modern ethical thought attempts to do away with this sense of uncertainty and smooth over these grey areas. If modern ethical thought were capable of prescribing a course of action that would lead to the correct result in all situations, then we would certainly welcome it. But although it attempts to convince us of this fact, it simply cannot accomplish such a mammoth task. Why? Ethical systems of thought, as described here, are based on universal, not specific, situations. In other words, they attempt to prescribe universal rules for specific situations. Such attempts lose sight of what makes moral dilemmas exactly that – it is in specific situations that we find our accepted ethical systems challenged. Even though we know this, under modern conditions we often find ourselves convinced that certain ethical theories are capable of bridging these grey areas. Why? These ethical systems of thought are developed by experts who possess knowledge that is not available to the man on the street (Nienaber 2003: 13). Given the importance modernity places on expert knowledge, it is easy to see why a solution compiled by experts who claim to know better than we do is so tempting.

By definition, all ethical prescriptions need to be universal, and in order for ethical prescriptions to be regarded as such, all people need to accept them as true. This can only be accomplished if a firm foundation is in place. In the case of ethical prescriptions, the foundation “stood for the coercive power of the state that rendered obedience to the rules a sensible expectation” (Bauman 1994: 8-9). This reasonable expectation has to do with the view that a perfect ethical theory does indeed exist. The search for such a theory, one that is universally grounded, can be regarded as one of the projects of modernity. In the face of theories that are proven wrong, the search for the ideal ethical code is not abandoned, but starts anew. Such is modern man's confidence that it indeed exists:

Any alleged ‘foolproof’ recipe could be proven wrong, disavowed and rejected – but not the very search for a truly foolproof recipe, one that will, as one of them surely must, put paid to all further search. In other words, the moral thought and practice of modernity was animated by the belief in the possibility of a non-ambivalent, non-aporetic ethical code. Perhaps such a code has not been found yet. But it surely waits around the next corner. Or the corner after that (Bauman 1994: 9).

Bauman is critical of the modern impulse to constantly seek out a better universal ethical code and believes that morality cannot be universalized (1994: 12). He argues that the search for a set of rules that can be applied to every situation leads to the replacement of the autonomous ethical subject with one who blindly follows set rules (Nienaber 2003: 15). For Bauman the transformation of morality into an ethical code is not equal to, as was asserted earlier, an ‘improved’ sense of morality, or indeed even the capturing of the essence of morality in a set of rules. Bauman believes that the universalization of morality leads instead to the *neutralisation* of morality (1994: 12). Any attempts to smooth over the grey areas characteristic of moral dilemmas and eradicate the sense of uncertainty that is inherent to moral decision-making, can only be seen as “a thinly disguised declaration...to eliminate all ‘wild’ – autonomous, obstreperous and uncontrolled – sources of moral judgements” (Bauman 1994: 12). In summation, Bauman asserts that the “overall effect is not so much the ‘universalization of morality’, as the silencing of moral impulse and channelling of moral capacities to socially designed targets that may, and do, include immoral purposes” (1994: 12). If Bauman is so vehemently opposed to modern ethical codes, what does he propose as an alternative? This brings us back to the first etiological myth, and uncertainty as an inherent part of the moral decision-making process.

Bauman suggests that in contrast to the modern idea of a moral person as one who follows rules and chooses reason and logic over emotion, morality means being able to *choose* between right and wrong (Nienaber 2003: 10). This ties in with the first etiological myth. Bauman argues that having eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, man knows that in any given situation he always has to choose between good and evil. This is what makes man moral. As such, Bauman believes that choice is integral to morality itself - “no choice, no morality” (Bauman & Tester 2001: 44). It is from this view of morality that Bauman comes to defy modern ethical codes. These codes remove uncertainty from every moral dilemma and replace it with a set of seemingly universal rules. These rules prescribe the correct course of action for every possible situation (or so they claim) and as such remove the human being from the decision-making process. If morality does not exist without choice, then what is being passed off as morality under conditions of modernity cannot be anything other than an ethic. Morality as Bauman conceives of it is therefore incompatible with the standards and norms of modern society (Nienaber 2003: 11). One simply has to look at the prevalence of genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to realise how incompatible the norms and values

of modern societies are with morality. When we enter the world of rules, standards, norms and regulations we are no longer engaged with morality, but rather with ethics. This corresponds to the distinction Haas draws between morality and ethics.

The conclusion that we can draw from our study of Haas and Bauman's work thus far, is that any form of morality that is derived from an outside source (society in this case) must be doubted. This view flies in the face of a canonical sociological theory, the Durkheimian view. According to Bauman, Durkheim and his followers view "morality as the product of society and the achievement of sanction-assisted social control" (Bauman & Tester 2001: 54). According to this view, morality is not only the product of society, but society is viewed as "an actively moralizing force" (Bauman 1989: 172). This means that man is moral because he lives in a society. Independent of society, man is greedy and cruel, and it is only with the help of social structures that man can be moral. Society and the control exerted by social structures are therefore seen to be responsible for morality, while the absence of such structures can only lead to immorality. Says Bauman of this view:

All morality comes from society; there is not moral life outside society; society is best understood as a morality-producing plant; society promotes morally regulated behaviour and marginalizes, suppresses or prevents immorality. The alternative to the moral grip of society is not human autonomy, but the rule of animal passions. It is because the pre-social drives of the human animal are selfish, cruel and threatening that they have to be tamed and subdued if social life is to be sustained. Take away social coercion, and humans will relapse into the barbarity from which they had been precariously lifted by force of society (1989: 173).

This view reminds one of some of the initial responses to the Holocaust, namely that the Holocaust occurred because modernity failed to exert sufficient control over man's barbaric impulses. In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Bauman disproved such a theory, and it is therefore a view that he treats with a great deal of suspicion on account of its moral indifference (Bauman & Tester 2001: 54). "[I]f there is nothing to the morality of the members of society but the will of the society to which they belong, on what ground could one dispute the morality of any norm? And where could one find a springboard for resisting an evil norm?" (Bauman & Tester 2001: 54). Bauman therefore rejects the Durkheimian view of morality. The problem that arises as a result of Bauman's rejection of such a universally-accepted view of morality is that it leaves him with the task of providing an alternative

theory. Any theory that hopes to take its place must take into account what we now know about modern societies. The fact is that societies, far from preventing cruelty, may actually “endorse and promote” it (Bauman & Tester 2001: 54). An alternative theory must therefore accept that the kind of morality created by modern societies do not qualify as morality, but rather as an ethic, and that an ethic, unlike morality, can be created by manipulating morality (Bauman & Tester 2001: 54). This has been amply illustrated by Haas’ study of the Nazi ethic and the way in which the ethic was grafted onto already existing and accepted traditional forms of morality. The second crucial factor is the need to ground morality and the moral self in a more “solid and reliable” basis than the “whimsical majority opinions” of its predecessor (Bauman & Tester 2001: 54). Is it possible to come up with a theory that meets all of these criteria, and if so, what does Bauman suggest?

Bauman suggests that instead of focussing so heavily on the social factors that produce and manipulate morality, we try to find a pre-social source of morality. What does he mean by this? It is important to note in this regard that there are two distinct ways of looking at the human condition. There is the view that states that man is selfish and cruel and that morality only comes to the fore in a society (Nienaber 2003: 50). The second view is that which believes that human beings are inherently moral beings (Nienaber 2003: 50). This view implies that humans naturally have an aversion towards cruelty and the suffering of the Other (Nienaber 2003: 50). This is the view that is supported by Bauman. He believes that we have an inherent feeling of responsibility towards the Other, and notes that “if this view is correct, or at least plausible, then the accomplishment of the Nazi regime consisted first and foremost in neutralizing the moral impact of the specifically human existential mode” (Bauman 1989: 185). The Nazis did not achieve this neutralisation as a result of specific unique characteristics of the Nazi regime, but rather by utilising general characteristics of modern society (Bauman 1989: 185). He defends his criticism of the view that man is cruel and violent by nature by noting that there simply was not enough violent outbursts that led to the Holocaust to support this idea (Bauman 1989: 185). He concedes that Nazi ideology had a large following, but that the majority of Germans remained horrified by the actions of the Nazi party and chose to ignore it and not become involved in it themselves (Bauman 1989: 185). Those who chose to participate in the violence made up a small percentage of the overall population, yet the larger portion of people, those who remained passive, are the ones who had the biggest effect on fate of the Jews.



If Bauman truly believes that man is a moral being who has an inherent personal responsibility towards the Other, how does he explain the incredible passivity of the majority of Germans in the face of the destruction of the Other? Bauman writes that “we share the world, and so we willy-nilly affect each other’s lives; what we do or abstain from doing is not indifferent to the life of others” (2000: 84). The fact that we share the world with others and that our actions affect their lives makes us responsible for the Other, but we can choose whether or not we want to take up that responsibility (Bauman 2000: 84). The responsibility we have towards the Other is ours, whether we know it or not, or whether we want it or not. Yet it is only once we take up that responsibility “that the self turns moral; only then the moral self is coming to life” (Bauman 2000: 84). This is not to be confused with Bauman’s earlier statements that human beings are moral. In that case the fact that we are moral means that we have the ability to choose between good and evil, not that we are inherently good. In the case of taking up our responsibility to the Other, Bauman argues that it is only once we *choose* to take up that responsibility that we can truly become moral or ‘good’ people – “taking up responsibility for the Other...is the birth-act of morality” (Bauman 2000: 84). This therefore explains why Bauman can state that all people are moral and that all people are responsible for the Other, while explaining the incredible passivity of the majority of Germans. They chose not to take up the responsibility towards the Other, but that does not lessen the fact that that responsibility existed. By identifying our responsibility towards the Other as a responsibility that we may choose to take up, Bauman ensures that that responsibility is not seen as a contractual obligation (1998a: 18). By choosing to either ignore the suffering of the Other, or do something about it, we are firmly in the realm of moral responsibility, not contractual obligation. Bauman therefore locates the pre-social source of morality in our responsibility towards the Other.

Bauman notes that previous theories have neglected the fact that “moral behaviour is conceivable only in the context of coexistence, of ‘being with others’” (Bauman 1989: 179). In this regard he draws a distinction between the social and societal spheres, the social referring to the context of coexistence, and the societal as that sphere in which morality owes “its appearance to the presence of supra-individual agencies of training and enforcement” (Bauman 1989: 179). The social sphere has been neglected, and as such ‘being with others’ does not have any special significance to sociologists (Bauman 1989: 179). Bauman argues that as a result of this neglect, the Other has become part of the environment – “those vast territories where the forces which prompt the actor’s choices in a particular direction, or limit

the actor's freedom of choice, are located" (1989: 179). The Other is therefore not permitted to have any subjectivity that could set them apart from the rest of the environment (Bauman 1989: 179). This lack of subjectivity of the Other serves the needs of modernity, as it makes the Other predictable and easy to control, yet it is extremely problematic given Bauman's definition of morality. Under modern conditions, the presence of other people in the actor's field of action constitutes just another challenge to be overcome. The aim is to remove the erratic nature of a subjective human being from the world, and replace it with "a calculable and manipulable factor" (Bauman 1989: 180).

It should start to become clear why the Other's loss of subjectivity is such a problem when it comes to modern genocide, and all evil for that matter. By reducing the Other's subjectivity to that of an environmental factor to be overcome, the actor loses that sense of responsibility to the Other that is so integral to Bauman's definition of morality. Bauman's notion of responsibility towards the Other is inspired by the work of Levinas. Levinas' belief that we are unconditionally responsible for the Other is an idea that takes centre stage in Bauman's search for pre-social origins of morality. Bauman argues that responsibility for the Other is the building block of all moral behaviour. How else would we explain why we attempt to do the right thing most of the time, and generally feel terrible when we have made the wrong decision? It was noted earlier that although we have an inherent responsibility towards the Other, we may choose whether or not we take up that responsibility. Under conditions of modernity, the choice to ignore our responsibility for the Other becomes easier and easier all the time. How so? Bauman argues that our responsibility for the Other is derived from our proximity to the Other (1989: 184). In order to defuse this responsibility, a physical and spiritual separation from the Other is needed (Bauman 1989: 184). This seems quite similar to Milgram's findings with respect to the proximity between perpetrators and victims. The further away we are from other people, the easier it is to harm them, or ignore their plight, for that matter. As Bauman has amply illustrated, modernity is especially capable of engineering such social separation as a result of its reliance on technology, the bureaucratic model and division of labour. In chapter two I argued that such a social separation can not only be seen in the Holocaust, but can also be used to explain the violence that swept through Rwanda in 1994. The need to order and control nature therefore also extends to man and when coupled with technological and bureaucratic rationality an urgent need to rediscover our responsibility for the Other emerges.

The moral nature of man is therefore inhibited once he enters the modern societal sphere, and as such it is precisely this sphere of so-called universal values that is responsible for immorality, rather than morality (Nienaber 2003: 111-112). The responsibility to make the correct decisions rests with the individual, not with institutions, and therefore, when we only focus on following the rules set forth by an ethical code, we give up our moral responsibility. Under modern conditions, our responsibility towards the Other is therefore displaced by means of replacing morality with ethics and by means of the exemption of large portions of human actions from moral evaluation as a result of the replacement of moral for technical responsibility (Nienaber 2003: 92-93). Bauman therefore suggests that we return to the pre-social origin of morality that places importance on our responsibility towards the Other. Contrary to popular opinion, pre-social is not synonymous with the immoral. Bauman is the first to admit that his view of the pre-social origin of morality as located in our inherent responsibility to the Other is not sufficient as an alternative sociological theory of morality (1989: 198). Yet he believes that even such a rudimentary investigation of other sources of morality makes it clear that that which we accepted as true with regard to morality and society has turned out to be false, and in some cases, deadly. He singles out the notion that society is essentially a moralising device and points to the way in which highly civilised and ordered societies have been the backdrop for some of the most horrific crimes in human history.

#### **4.4 Critical Comments**

Bauman believes that evil and the failure of morality in cases such as the Holocaust is intimately linked to the modern project. Modernity transformed pre-modern societies into ones of order and rationality. Modernity is characterised by man's triumph over nature and his ability to redesign the world around him. This is known as the garden culture. Bauman believes that modernity's need to order and design the world, coupled with the use of technology and bureaucracy are responsible for modern genocide. The same mechanisms that have enabled us to greatly improve our lives can also generate the greatest evil. It has been argued that the perpetrators of modern genocide are not, on the whole, monsters, but are ordinary people who are motivated to commit or participate in violence and cruelty by ordinary concerns. They believe that their cause is righteous, and most importantly, are generally shielded from the consequences of their actions by the division of labour and the replacement of moral for technical responsibility that is characteristic of modernity. This

lessens or even eliminates any possible feelings of guilt and enables ordinary people to commit heinous crimes. If Bauman is to be believed, all of these things can be attributed to modernity. When it comes to the failure of morality to prevent the prevalence of evil, modernity is the culprit yet again. The modern drive to order the world has led to the replacement of morality with an ethic, such as the Nazi ethic identified by Haas, and an ethic does not allow one to choose good over evil.

If this argument is to be believed, all people living in modern societies are subject to these modern forces. If some people are capable of committing acts of violence or simply looking away while their friends and neighbours are killed or deported, then is this true for all modern people? The problem with this is that in all cases of genocide, modern or otherwise, we hear stories of people who risk their own lives to save others. If there is no definitive way of distinguishing between ordinary people and perpetrators of evil, then the same can be said of the Oskar Schindlers<sup>6</sup> of the world. They live in modern societies just like the perpetrators they are subject to and defy the same modern forces. If modernity is the culprit in the creation of ordinary perpetrators of evil, then how do we explain the few who were not ‘turned’, as it were? What is it that prevents some people from becoming perpetrators of evil and not others? We could argue that some people simply have a stronger moral centre than others and are therefore not as easily persuaded to commit evil. Yet if Durkheim and his followers are to be believed, morality is a product of societies and does not exist independently. There is of course no way to test whether or not this is true, since not one of us have ever met the Hobbesian man who exists outside of society, in a state of nature. This brings me to Bauman’s argument regarding the pre-social source of morality.

Bauman urges us to reject any source of morality that is grounded in external sources, and instead wants us to return to the idea of morality as inherent to human nature. This is problematic. As human beings, we are part of a society from the moment we are born. Bauman himself states outright that “you say ‘human’ and you imply ‘society’” (Bauman & Tester 2001: 59). Now, on the one hand, the fact that we are always part of a society and as such always living together in the world with others serves Bauman’s argument regarding our responsibility towards the Other. We are never left alone – we are always standing in relation

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<sup>6</sup>Oskar Schindler was a German industrialist who saved over 1000 Jews during the Holocaust by employing them in his factories, which were located in what are now Poland and the Czech Republic. Schindler’s story was told in the book *Schindler’s Ark* by Thomas Keneally. The book was adapted into the film *Schindler’s List*. The film was directed by Steven Spielberg and starred Liam Neeson, Ben Kingsley and Ralph Fiennes.

to other people and other things, and as such we are always responsible for the Other, whether we like it or not. On the other hand, however, the fact that we are always a part of a society and always stand in relation to other people, things and institutions must influence the way in which we view the world in some way. Bauman rejects morality derived from an external source, but isn't personal morality also influenced by external forces? Can we really argue that given that we are constantly subjected to external forces (that of society, in this case) that we are in no way influenced by them? Bauman insists that we are responsible for the Other, but isn't that view in itself also one that is influenced by external forces?

Bauman is in no way arguing that we need to return to a pre-social state, a state of nature, since that would be impossible. But isn't that exactly the point? If we are unable to return to a state of nature, if we are unable to ever meet a Hobbesian man, can we really say that morality that is not derived from an external source is possible? I agree with Bauman that relinquishing morality in favour of rules to be followed blindly can have disastrous consequences. Haas' *Morality After Auschwitz* clearly illustrates this. Yet rule-based morality is also necessary to ensure the proper functioning of a modern state. We therefore have to wonder if a truly pre-social source of morality even exists. I would argue that given the impossibility of ever being free from society, any possible pre-social source of morality cannot help but be influenced by external factors. Any pre-social source of morality is conceived of within the bounds of society and is therefore a response to and influenced by another form of morality, one that it attempts to rectify. Does this mean that we need to agree with Durkheim and his followers that morality only exists within a society and that it cannot exist independently? No, we certainly do not have to accept that, but it would be difficult to prove it wrong. What we can agree to, however, is that modernity has caused us to move further and further away from the people with whom we share the world. Modernity's reliance on science, technology, the division of labour and the bureaucratic model all encourage us to distance ourselves from the Other. In this respect I agree with Bauman that we need to rediscover our responsibility for the Other, yet I do not agree that this constitutes a pre-social source of morality, if such a thing even exists.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

At the start of this chapter it was noted that traditional western moral philosophy is concerned with three questions. These questions deal with the source of morality, the accessibility of

knowledge of how to act, and whether or not human beings need to be persuaded to act morally. It was noted that Kant and Hume both believed that morality is derived from human nature itself, that the knowledge of how to act was accessible to all, and that we have in our nature sufficient reason to act as we ought. Hobbes, on the other hand, would disagree on all three counts. He would argue that since human beings are inherently selfish, morality cannot be derived from human nature, and, as a result, the knowledge of how humans should act is not accessible to everyone. Therefore, human nature in itself does not provide us with sufficient reason to act as we ought. Modernity views morality in a Hobbesian way. In order for people to act as they ought, morality and order should be imposed on them, otherwise human life will regress to a state of nature. According to this view, morality is conceived of as a set of rules and regulations that dictate how a person should act in every given circumstance. These rules eliminate the unpredictable nature of subjective morality, and also rid human beings of the troublesome sense of uncertainty that usually accompanies the moral decision-making process. It should seem as if this is the best way to ensure that all people act morally all the time, but Zygmunt Bauman would argue that in removing uncertainty from the moral decision-making process and equating morality with a set of laws, we are not only mistaking an ethic for morality, but we are also giving up what makes us human beings: choice.

Bauman believes that human beings are not inherently good or evil, but that we are moral. This means having knowledge of both good and evil and being able to choose between the two. Bauman is very critical of any theory which attempts to remove the individual human being from the decision-making process. He believes that we need to move away from the modern conception of morality as an ethic. Such an ethic, as Haas pointed out with respect to Nazi Germany, can easily be used for evil purposes. Bauman suggests that in order to fight the onslaught of evil which seems to follow modernity everywhere, we need to re-locate morality in a pre-social source. For Bauman, this source is the fact that we live together with other people in the world. This means that our actions inevitably influence the Other, and we are therefore responsible for the Other, whether we like it or not. He believes that this responsibility is not a contractual obligation. We are free to choose whether we want to take up this responsibility or not. It is only once we have taken up that responsibility that we become truly moral human beings. This is Bauman's suggested answer to the problems faced by morality under moral conditions. The Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide have demonstrated to us that traditional forms of western morality have failed to protect both

victims and perpetrators. Bauman therefore urges us to rediscover our responsibility to the Other and realise that the features of modernity that we hold dear can also be responsible for the destruction of the Other. In many cases, social structures can actually inhibit moral responsibility instead of strengthening it (Nienaber 2003: 51). We should therefore take seriously any attempt that tries to investigate alternative sources of morality and realise that it is not always in our best interest to follow the rules set forth by modern societies. We have, therefore, established that modernity is inherently incompatible with morality. What would then happen if we were to move away from modernity? Would there be more hope for the Other, more hope for morality? Would we be better off and better able to resist evil? The following chapter discusses the phenomenon of postmodernity as a reaction to modernity and its potential to prevent the twenty-first century from being characterised by evil.

## **5. Postmodernity: The Light at the End of the Tunnel?**

Modernity was, in the eyes of many, meant to be mankind's finest hour, but looking back on a century of war, genocide and violence, we can say with certainty that modernity produced some unexpected consequences. The dream of mastering nature, ordering the world according to our own design and finally entering a new civilised age of science, technology, and rationality has revealed itself as a dream capable of producing nightmarish results. The history of the twentieth century is a history of great scientific and technological advances, but it is also a history of violence and cruelty. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than by looking at the line of systematic, modern genocides that punctuated the twentieth century. The Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide of 1994 are but two examples of genocide that can be described as the products of modernity. This new form of genocide not only utilised modern methods and scientific and technological advances, but also managed to disable all of our traditional defences against evil. This can be illustrated by looking at the perpetrators of modern genocide. Far from being monsters, the majority of perpetrators are ordinary people who would not look out of place in our present societies. Modernity succeeded in disabling those safeguards that prevent us from participating in violence. These ordinary perpetrators of evil willingly played their part. Modernity's legacy of carnage and cruelty overshadows its scientific and technological accomplishments.

Given that modernity has proven its ability to be as destructive as it is productive, we have to wonder if mankind would have had the ability to resist against such evil under different conditions. Would we fare any better under postmodern conditions? Postmodernity is generally seen as a reaction to the failures of modernity, and as such we cannot but wonder if the world would be a better place under postmodern conditions. Does it provide us with a better alternative? Would postmodernity be able to stop the long line of modern genocides that characterised the twentieth century? Given the rather grim picture painted by modernity, is postmodernity our light at the end of the tunnel? Are we standing on the cusp of a new era shot through with new-found, yet realistic, hope? This chapter aims to examine these questions in light of the important work done by Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman has become one of the foremost theorists on postmodernity and has tracked mankind's path from modernity to postmodernity. As such I will be focussing specifically on Bauman's conception of postmodernity. The first section of this chapter is devoted to understanding Bauman's conception of the various aspects of the postmodern world. This covers a brief definition of



postmodernity, and, finally, the postmodern habitat and community, postmodern consumer culture, as well as the postmodern subject and Other. The second section is devoted to answering the question, ‘Does postmodernity provide a better alternative than modernity?’

### 5.1 What is Postmodernity?

In *Intimations of Postmodernity*, Zygmunt Bauman notes that “the term postmodernity renders accurately the defining traits of the social condition that has emerged throughout the affluent countries of Europe and those of European descent in the course of the twentieth century, and took its present shape in the second half of that century” (1992: 187). As was mentioned before, postmodernity can be viewed as a response to modernity. Postmodernity gives up on the big promises made by modernity. Postmodernity is viewed as dismantling the modern power-supported structures, yet it does not attempt to uncover a new world order from beneath the debris that was once modernity, nor does it try to substitute one universal truth for another (Bauman 1992: ix). Such an attempt would be against the very spirit of postmodernity. The postmodern state of mind is therefore one that braces itself “for a life without truths, standards and ideals” (Bauman 1992: ix). Postmodernity, according to Giddens, refers to the fact that “the trajectory of social development is taking us away from the institutions of modernity towards a new and distinct type of social order” (1997: 46). Postmodernity is often seen as “destructive destruction”, but against its critics, Bauman argues that postmodernity should rather be viewed as a site-clearing operation rather than as a site of demolition (1992: ix). It is true that postmodernity does not try to replace the modern truths it destroys with others, but, says Bauman, it “uncovers the truth in its pristine form which modern pretensions had maimed and distorted beyond recognition” (1992: ix).

Postmodernity can therefore be seen as restoring to the world what modernity had tried to take away (Bauman 1992: x). If modernity waged war against mystery and magic, postmodernity can be seen as “*re-enchantment* of the world that modernity tried hard to *dis-enchant*” (Bauman 1992: x; Bauman’s emphasis). Postmodernity can be interpreted as “fully developed modernity”, as “modernity that acknowledges the effects it was producing throughout its history” (Bauman 1992: 187). Postmodernity is therefore “modernity conscious of its true nature – *modernity for itself*” (Bauman 1992: 187; Bauman’s emphasis). In addition to this, postmodernity can also be characterised as modernity that “reconciles itself to the fact that the purposes which were originally set, e.g. rational order

and absolute truth, will never be reached” (Bauman, Cantell & Pederson 2002: 16). In his introduction to Habermas’ book *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Thomas McCarthy notes that to the universality of modernity, postmodernity opposes “an irreducible plurality of incommensurable lifeworlds and forms of life, the irremediably ‘local’ character of truth, argument, and validity;...to certainty, fallibility; to unity, heterogeneity; to homogeneity, the fragmentary;... [and] to the unconditioned, a rejection of ultimate foundations of any form” (1987: ix). All the features that were seen as signs of failure under modern conditions make up the most conspicuous features of postmodernity.

When referring to postmodernity as a reaction to modernity, Bauman is not implying that postmodernity is a passing aberration or a “diseased state of modernity” (Bauman 1992: 188). Neither does it refer to “symptoms of systematic deficiency...limited by the time required to rebuild the structures of cultural authority” (Bauman 1992: 52). For Bauman, postmodernity represents a fully-fledged system which has come to replace the “classical modern capitalist society” (1992: 52). Even though postmodernity seems to represent a sort of counter-structure to that of modernity, it is a “self-reproducing, pragmatically self-sustainable and logically self-contained social condition defined by *distinctive features of its own*” (Bauman 1992: 188; Bauman’s emphasis). Postmodernity is, therefore, capable of solving problems and reproducing itself like any other system. Baumann goes to great lengths to emphasise the “systemness” of postmodern society, emphasising those features that set postmodernity apart from modernity (1992: 53).

The distinctive nature of postmodernity does not necessarily mean that modernity has ended. Dennis Smith notes that postmodernity can more accurately be described as a key idea used by intellectuals to understand and cope with the impact of four changes to the “big picture” of modernity (1999: 9). These are “the shrinking of the national state, the spiralling of risk, the globalisation of capital and the collapse of European imperialism” (Smith 1991: 10). There seems to be a mistake here. How can we reconcile postmodernity as a system of its own with the fact that modernity has not necessarily ended? While these two facts seem to be incompatible, they are not. We need to be careful from the start not to view postmodernity as following directly after modernity in a linear fashion. Bauman himself notes that “the word ‘postmodernity’ implies the end of modernity, leaving modernity behind, being on the other shore”, but thinking of postmodernity in this way would be a mistake (Bauman & Tester 2001: 97). We have not moved beyond modernity, so to speak, but are as modern as ever,

obsessively ‘modernizing’ everything we can lay our hands on” (Bauman & Tester 2001: 97). The modern and postmodern strategies are therefore employed simultaneously (Van Niekerk 1999: 425). Bauman himself realises that the term postmodernity is fraught with difficulty and he therefore chooses to use the term ‘liquid modernity’ in his later work. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I will continue to use the term postmodernity.

Given this brief description of postmodernity, have we arrived at a definition? Bauman suggests the following:

The postmodern condition can be...described, on the one hand, as modernity emancipated from false consciousness; on the other as a new type of social condition marked by the overt institutionalisation of the characteristics which modernity – in its designs and managerial practices – set about to eliminate and, failing that, tried to conceal (1992: 188).

In order to fully understand Bauman’s conception of postmodernity, we need to address several important aspects thereof. The following sections will be dedicated to discussing the postmodern habitat, community, subject, Other and consumer culture. These are all important features of postmodernity that will ultimately enable us to decide whether or not postmodernity provides a better alternative to modernity with respect to morality.

## 5.2 The Postmodern Habitat

Bauman makes it clear that postmodernity is not just an aberration, but is indeed a social system, yet he does not refer to a system in the traditional sense. Bauman notes that

the theory of postmodernity would do well if it disposed of concepts like *system* in its orthodox, organismic sense (or for that matter *society*), suggestive of a sovereign totality logically prior to its parts, a totality bestowing meaning on its parts, a totality whose welfare or perpetuation all smaller (and, by definition, subordinate) units serve; in short, a totality assumed to define, and be practically capable of defining, the meanings of individual actions and agencies that compose it (1992: 190; Bauman’s emphasis).

Bauman therefore rejects the orthodox understanding of a system, and instead opts for the idea of a complex system, or a habitat (Nienaber 2003: 73). Unlike the “system-like totalities of modern social theory”, the postmodern habitat “neither determines the conduct of the agents nor defines its meaning” (Bauman 1992: 191). No agent has the power or ambition to

design and exercise control over the goals of the habitat (Nienaber 2003: 73). This means that the possibility of projects of social engineering disappears (Nienaber 2003: 73). The postmodern habitat is therefore made up of many agencies or agents, and none of them can determine the behaviour of other agencies or agents (Smith 1999: 150). Each agency sees the habitat as an unpredictable and chaotic space filled with competitors “promoting rival claims: different meanings, different solutions” (Smith 1999: 150). Each competitor therefore views the rest of the habitat as a series of opportunities or problems that either hinder or help him to pursue his particular objective (Smith 1999: 150). They are therefore only partly dependent on each other: they may have shared interests in a certain field, but none in another. Their actions therefore always remain autonomous (Nienaber 2003: 73). For every agency, the habitat appears strikingly different from the “confined space of its own autonomic, purpose-subordinated pursuits” (Bauman 1992: 193). The habitat appears as a space of chaos and indeterminacy since it is constantly subjected to rival meaning-bestowing claims, and thus perpetually ambivalent (Bauman 1992: 193). These competing claims all appear equally contingent, as none of them provide “overwhelming reasons for being what they are, and they could be different if any of the participating agencies behaved differently” (Bauman 1992: 193).

Bauman notes that in light of the features of the postmodern habitat, we can define the existential modality of postmodern agents as “one of insufficient determination, inconclusiveness, motility and rootlessness” (1992: 193). The identity of each agent is therefore not authoritatively given or confirmed, but has to be constructed (Bauman 1992: 193). Identity is constructed through a process of trial and error, and this process of self-constitution has no visible end or stable direction (Smith 1999: 150). The only constant point in this process is the human body itself (Smith 1999: 150). The human body is seen “as the sole constant factor among the protean and fickle identities: the material, tangible substratum, container, carrier and executor of all past, present and future identities” (Bauman 1992: 194). Given the centrality afforded to the body, it is understandable that the focus should fall on preserving and enhancing the operations of the body. In the postmodern habitat, operations that focus on the health and preservation of the body (exercise, diet regimes, etc.) replace to a large extent “the panoptical drill of modern factory, school or the barracks” but unlike their modern predecessors, these new operations are not perceived as externally imposed (Bauman 1992: 194). The operations that focus on the health of the body are rather seen as

manifestations of the agent's freedom, since the agent chooses to take up or take part in one or many of these operations (Bauman 1992: 194).

Since the process of self-constitution or identity formation is not guided or monitored in any way by a sovereign life-project designed in advance and controlled by another agent or agencies, there emerges a demand for a substitute (Bauman 1992: 194-195). In the postmodern habitat, this comes in the form of a constant stream of orientation points that guide each successive move (Bauman 1992: 195). What serves as orientation points? Other agencies, of course. The impact of these agencies on the process of self-constitution differs from those under modern conditions. In the postmodern habitat, agencies do not monitor or knowingly administer acts of allegiance (Bauman 1992: 195). Bauman notes that from the vantage point of self-constituting agents, other agents or agencies are seen as randomly scattered and free-standing poles which one can join or abandon without needing permission (Bauman 1992: 195). Agents therefore seek out other agents or agencies and proclaim their allegiance by means of adopting symbolic tokens of belonging (Bauman 1992: 195). These tokens might include the kinds of clothing the agent wears, the things they purchase, where they live, what they consume, how they live, what opinions they express and so on and so forth (Smith 1999: 151). They are free to choose as they wish, and they can change their minds at any time. The freedom of choice is only limited by the availability and accessibility of such tokens (Bauman 1992: 195). The freedom to choose certain tokens and not others are inherently tied to the postmodern consumer culture, and it is the consumer culture that comes to dominate the postmodern habitat.

### **5.3 Postmodernity and Consumer Culture**

When Bauman talks about the postmodern consumer culture, he is not interested in consumerism on a moral level, but rather wants to discuss it on an intellectual level, as it provides a new and interesting insight into the relationship between the individual and society (Nienaber 2003: 75). He therefore does not accuse consumerism of promoting a materialistic culture, and rather views it as having a unique instrumentality (Nienaber 2003: 75). Consumer culture in the way Bauman uses the term, refers to “the production, distribution, desiring, obtaining and using of symbolic goods” (1992: 223). In the context of the postmodern habitat and self-constituting agents, these goods do not simply fulfil a material purpose, but also a symbolic one (Nienaber 2003: 75). It was noted in the previous section

that individuals adopt certain symbolic tokens in order to proclaim their allegiance to a certain agent or agency and that the freedom to choose these tokens is only limited by the availability and accessibility of these tokens. This is where the consumer culture comes in. The freedom to choose which symbolic tokens to adopt is not equally distributed. The postmodern habitat is stratified, and since the freedom to choose certain tokens and not others are linked to the ability to participate in a consumer culture, your position in the habitat determines what choices are open to you (Smith 1999: 151).

At the top are the privileged minority who have the widest array of choices (Smith 1999: 151). These are the people with the most credit and expertise. They have all they need to make the world their oyster (Smith 1999: 151). The middle stratum is made up of those who have the money and the knowledge to participate in the consumer culture, but to a lesser extent than those on top (Smith 1999: 151). The lowest level is made up of the poor, those who lack the money needed for a free existence within the postmodern habitat (Smith 1999: 151). In a habitat in which freedom and identity formation are closely tied to the consumer culture, the poor, who are unable to participate in this culture, and whose choice of tokens are severely limited, are marginalised. The poor are influenced by the postmodern habitat and consumer culture like everybody else, but they are dominated by those with credit cards and bank accounts (Smith 1999: 151). In fact, the majority of the poor are not just marginalised, but are altogether excluded from the socio-political arenas of the postmodern habitat “and remain penned up in the ‘Third World’” (Smith 1999: 151). Some of these people can also be found in airports all over the world, “waiting to be deported – sent back to ‘where they belong’” (Smith 1999: 151). Consumerism is therefore a way of life, and those who cannot “play the game” properly are denied dignity and deemed to be flawed consumers (Bauman & Tester 2001: 116).

For those individuals who are able to participate in the postmodern consumer culture, the relationship between freedom and security is quite different from what it was under modern conditions. “In the modern habitat, panoptical surveillance is widespread and inhabitants operate according to a set of rules established by external authority” (Smith 1999: 151-152). In a modern habitat, people generally wish for more freedom (mainly freedom from the state), but within the postmodern habitat where people have more freedom, another need constantly nags at them (Smith 1999: 152). They have so much freedom that they constantly desire security, especially the kind of security that is supplied by popular opinion or by

experts (Smith 1999: 152). The freedom deficit in the modern habitat is therefore replaced by a security deficit (Smith 1999: 152). How do the citizens of the postmodern habitat achieve this much-desired security? They achieve this security by participating in the consumer culture. They seek to establish that they have chosen the right tokens and that they have assembled their identities correctly. They get this reassurance if their tokens conform to popular taste (Smith 1999: 152). In this way, people constantly leave certain tokens behind and adopt others, depending on the trends of the season and what experts are recommending. We see this quite frequently in our day-to-day lives, as people vie for the latest cell phones, computers, clothing brands and so on. Where modernity allocated the primary responsibility for giving people their identity to work or labour, in the postmodern habitat you *are* what you buy (Smith 1999: 157). This difference is easily illustrated with reference to two questions: the common ‘what do you do?’ that is frequently uttered when meeting a new person, is now replaced with ‘what/who are you wearing?’ heard up and down red carpets, walked by the rich and famous. The postmodern habitat therefore engages individuals as consumers, not as producers.

In the postmodern habitat, people therefore experience a pressure to participate as consumers and to spend money (Bauman 1992: 52). On the social level,

the pressure of symbolic rivalry, for the needs of self-construction through acquisition (mostly in commodity form) of distinction and difference, of the search for social approval through lifestyle and symbolic membership; on the systemic level, the pressure of merchandising companies, big and small, who between themselves monopolize the definition of the good life, of the needs whose satisfaction the good life requires, and of the ways of satisfying them (Bauman 1992: 50).

The pressure to spend does not enter life-experience in the form of oppression, as is the case with pressures generated by production-oriented systems (Bauman 1992: 50). The surrender demanded in the postmodern habitat is that of a “straight-forward sensual joy of tasty eating, pleasant smelling, soothing or enticing drinking, relaxing driving, or the joy of being surrounded with smart, glittering, eye-caressing objects” (Bauman 1992: 50-51). Seduction therefore takes the place of oppression as the preferred vehicle of social control (Bauman 1992: 51). We are trained by advertising companies to think that our identity is connected to what we buy, and as such we are seduced into the role of consumers (Smith 1999: 157). This in turn ensures the continued existence of the capitalist system. In the postmodern habitat, the

success of the capitalist system is a result of the freedom of the individual, not the oppression of freedom (Bauman 1992: 51). Freedom and consumerism are therefore intimately linked.

The consumer culture tries to convince us that by exercising our freedom as consumers we will be happy. Bauman is very critical of this promise, since it implies that all people can be equally happy (Nienaber 2003: 76). Yet we have seen that this is not the case. The freedom of the agent is measured by the amount and range of choices that can be made, and as was previously mentioned, the identity of the agent is linked to the use of symbolic tokens. The availability of these tokens varies from agent to agent since it is linked to the financial status of the agent. The postmodern version of freedom inevitably leads to inequality, and as such the consumer culture's promise of universal happiness is a promise it cannot live up to (Bauman 1992: 195). Bauman has a further problem with the postmodern version of freedom. He argues that the concept of freedom has been reduced to mean freedom of the consumer to make choices within the consumer culture (Bauman 1992: 225). As such the postmodern system "has successfully squeezed out all alternatives to itself but one" and as a result, people forget that participating in the postmodern habitat as consumers is not the only way in which to identify themselves (Bauman 1992: 53). Yet by giving such prominence to the consumer culture and making all other alternatives undesirable, it *is* the only option. The postmodern consumer culture therefore has a strong effect on postmodern human beings, as they are dependent on symbolic consumer goods in an attempt to construct and reconstruct identities for themselves. Given the influence of consumer culture on the individual, how does the postmodern subject differ from the modern subject?

#### **5.4 The Postmodern Subject**

When speaking of the modern subject, Bauman uses the metaphor of a pilgrim (1995: 83). This fits in with his idea regarding modern life as a project. The pilgrim is always on his way to a better place because where he finds himself now is never good enough (Bauman 1995: 83). Bauman calls the modern subject's dissatisfaction with the present a 'distance' (1995: 86). The modern subject therefore sees his identity as a project, "and it is this distance which enables the projects to be" (Bauman 1995: 86). In addition to this, the modern pilgrim travels within linear time (Bauman 1995: 87). This makes sense in the context of modern life as a project. For the pilgrim, each event in his life causes another event, and is caused by a preceding event (Nienaber 2003: 77). Every event and every action hopefully brings the



pilgrim closer to his end goal. In this way, the course of the pilgrim's life is already determined at birth (Nienaber 2003: 77). The pilgrim's world is therefore very stable and predictable (Bauman 1995: 87). The identity of the modern subject is seen as a goal to be achieved, a task, that can only be attained by means of hard work and planning (Nienaber 2003: 77).

The identity of the postmodern subject is similar to that of the modern subject in the sense that it is also created by the subject, but it differs in one important respect: the postmodern identity does not need to be fixed or meticulously designed (Bauman 1998b: 27). This is because the postmodern subject values flexibility more than anything else (Bauman 1998b: 27). In the postmodern habitat, the agent's identity does not develop as the result of a certain pre-determined design, but as a result of self-design (Bauman 1992: 194). This self-design has no goal that has to be reached or that serves as a measuring stick for progress (Bauman 1992: 194). Bauman notes that the self-design of the postmodern subject is as much a process of assembling and adopting new elements as it is of disassembling and shedding of others, "learning together with forgetting" (1992: 194). The postmodern habitat rules out the possibility of a "cohesive life-strategy" and as such the metaphor of the pilgrim is not applicable to the postmodern subject's search for identity (Bauman 1995: 91). Bauman proposes four new metaphors as the pilgrim's postmodern successors:

I propose that in the same way as the pilgrim was the most fitting allegory of modern life strategy preoccupied with the daunting task of identity-building – the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player offer jointly the metaphor for the postmodern strategy moved by the horror of being bound and fixed...Each type conveys but part of the story which hardly ever integrates into a totality...in the postmodern chorus, all four types sing – sometimes in harmony, though more often with cacophony as the result (Bauman 1995: 91).

#### 5.4.1 The Vagabond

One of Bauman's four new metaphors is that of the vagabond, perhaps the one most closely related to the pilgrim. The vagabond was seen as the bane of early modernity and according to Bauman, sent rulers and philosophers into an ordering and legislating "frenzy" (1995: 94). The masterless nature of the vagabond was one condition modernity would not tolerate (Bauman 1995: 94). The vagabond moves around from place to place and sees each place as merely a stopover (Bauman 1995: 94). This does not mean that the vagabond has a set course

that he follows, like the pilgrim. Vagabonds have no set destination, a fact that made them highly undesirable under modern conditions because they are unpredictable – “you do not know where [the vagabond] will move next, because he himself does not know or care much” (Bauman 1995: 94). Vagabonds also do not know how long they will stay in one place, largely because the duration of their stay is not determined by them (Bauman 1994: 240). Bauman notes that “what keeps [the vagabond] on the move is disillusionment with the place of last sojourn and the forever smouldering hope that the next place which he has not visited yet...may be free from faults” (1994: 240). The vagabond moves through an “unstructured space” like a wanderer through a desert – he only knows the trails that have been marked with his own footprints only to be blown away by the wind when he leaves (Bauman 1994: 240). The vagabond therefore structures each site he happens to occupy at the moment he does so, only to dismantle it when he leaves (Bauman 1994: 240).

The vagabond is a stranger wherever he goes, he can never ‘settle’ anywhere or be a ‘native’, but not for lack of trying (Bauman 1995: 94). Whatever the vagabond may do to try and ingratiate himself wherever he is, the memory of his arrival is always too fresh in the minds of the natives (Bauman 1995: 95). The vagabond always still smells of other places, places against which the homesteads of the natives are built (Bauman 1995: 95). The dream of going native can only end in disappointment for the vagabond, and as such he does not become too attached or accustomed to any one place (Bauman 1995: 95). He moves on to the next place, spurred on by the hope that it may be less cruel and more hospitable, and if the people there disappoint him as well, he can always move on to the next place (Bauman 1995: 95). Bauman notes that the early modern vagabond was outnumbered by the settled natives, but this ratio is reversed in the postmodern habitat (1995: 95).

The ‘forever settled’ residents wake up to find the places (places in the land, places in society and places in life), to which they ‘belong’, non-existing or no more accommodating;...now the vagabond is a vagabond not for the reluctance or difficulty of settling down, but for the scarcity of settled places...the world is retailoring itself to the measure of the vagabond (Bauman 1995: 95).

Another postmodern character that is like the vagabond is the tourist. Like the vagabond, the tourist knows that he will not stay in one place for a long time, yet unlike the vagabond, the

tourist chooses to leave each place, he is not forced to move on because he is not welcome there (Nienaber 2003: 79).

#### 5.4.2 The Tourist

In contrast to the modern pilgrim, the tourist has no eventual goal, and goes through a wide array of temporary identities (Nienaber 2003: 79). Like the vagabond, the tourist avoids long-term attachments, but unlike the vagabond, as mentioned before, the tourist does this out of choice. The tourist travels the world seeking new experiences and is fascinated by that which is different and new (Bauman 1995: 96). The tourist is therefore led by the search for entertainment and pleasure, while the vagabond is dependent on the “rough realities” of the places he visits (Bauman 1994: 241). An interesting difference between the vagabond and the tourist is that the vagabond is more akin to a homeless person, while the tourist pays for his freedom (Nienaber 2003: 79). As mentioned before, Bauman is very critical of the relationship between the postmodern conception of freedom and financial status. The tourist who pays for his freedom, pays for “the right to disregard native concerns and feeling, the right to spin [his] own web of meanings, [and obtains all of this] in a commercial transaction (Bauman 1994: 241). The amount of freedom available to the tourist is therefore dependent on his ability to pay for it, and given the importance placed upon consumerism in the postmodern habitat, once the tourist has paid for his freedom, it becomes a right he can loudly demand (Bauman 1994: 241). The tourist is therefore extraterritorial like the vagabond, but unlike the vagabond, the tourist “lives this extraterritoriality as a privilege, as independence, as the right to be free, free to choose” (Bauman 1994: 241).

One similarity that the vagabond and the tourist do share is the fact that they are constantly on the move, moving *through* the spaces in which other people live (Bauman 1994: 241). The natives, their spaces and the way in which they live in their spaces have no real influence on the tourist or the vagabond. They only have brief encounters with the natives, and as such they never form any real relationships with them (Bauman 1994: 241). Due to the fact that they do not form relationships with the locals, they also have to bear no responsibility for them – when things get too complicated, they can simply pack their bags and move on to their next destination (Nienaber 2003: 80). “Physically close, spiritually remote: this is the formula of both the vagabond’s and tourist’s life” (Bauman 1994: 242).

### 5.4.3 The Stroller

Bauman characterises the brief encounters between the tourist and the vagabond with the natives of a particular place as a ‘mis-meeting’. According to Bauman, a mis-meeting is an encounter with another person (usually a stranger) without it having any impact on you (Bauman 1995: 92). The stranger simply becomes part of the background (Bauman 1994: 154). The idea of a meeting as mis-meeting is a characteristic the stroller shares with the vagabond and the tourist. The concept of the stroller has an interesting history. Charles Baudelaire dubbed Constantin Guy as ‘the painter of modern life’ because of his penchant for painting city street scenes from the perspective of the stroller (Bauman 1995: 92). Walter Benjamin then turned the concept of the stroller into a central figure of modern city life (Bauman 1995: 92). On a psychic level, strolling “means rehearsing human reality as a series of episodes – that is, as events without a past and with no consequences” (Bauman 1995: 92). This means rehearsing meetings as mis-meetings: the fleeting fragments of other people’s lives are spun off into stories by the stroller; “it was his perception that made them into actors in the plays he scripted, without their knowing that they are actors” (Bauman 1995: 92). Bauman describes the stroller as the “past master of simulation” – he makes other people part of his flights of imagination, of creation, without there being any real penalties or consequences for himself or the Other (Bauman 1995: 92). He is therefore, like the vagabond and the tourist, free from any responsibility to the Other (Nienaber 2003: 81).

A good example of this is the activity of ‘people watching’. Many people enjoy sitting down in a crowded place and just watching the people who pass them by – we wonder who they are, what they are doing, where they are going and why. We sometimes even go so far as to imagine all the possible answers to these questions, but we never go so far as to form relationships with these strangers. They often do not know that we are watching them or that we have constructed a narrative in which they are the stars. We are free to leave at any point, since we are but strangers among strangers (Bauman 1995: 92). The stroller was a marginal figure in the modern scene, but in the postmodern habitat, strolling came to be seen as life itself (Bauman 1995: 92). All strands of life are therefore encapsulated by the activity of strolling – finding oneself among strangers and being a stranger to them, “taking in those strangers as ‘surfaces’ – so that ‘what one sees’ exhausts ‘what they are’” (Bauman 1995: 92). In the postmodern habitat, shopping malls have become the preferred “tracts to stroll while you shop and shop while you stroll” (Bauman 1995: 93). In the case of shopping malls, the agent gets to enjoy the act of strolling while participating in the consumer culture that

drives the postmodern habitat. A second postmodern incarnation of the original stroller is represented by television – the viewer’s contact with the Other (on television) is just as episodic and equally without any real consequences (Nienaber 2003: 81).

#### 5.4.4 The Player

The idea that your actions do not have any real consequences is a characteristic that the stroller shares with the player. The player is a person who views the world as a series of games, each with its own rules (Smith 1999: 162). If you are constantly busy playing a game, there can be no lasting effects or consequences (Nienaber 2003: 81-82). In order to ensure that no game leaves lasting consequences, it is important for the players to remember that this is *just* a game (Bauman 1995: 99). This is rather difficult to remember, as the point of a game is to win, and as such there is no room for any pity or commiseration – “the game is like war, yet that war which is a game must leave no mental scars and no nursed grudges” (Bauman 1995: 99). The world of the player is unpredictable and difficult to control, yet no action is irreversible (Bauman 1995: 99). If you do not like the outcome, there is always the option to start again from scratch. This is often the case, as the rules of the game change quite rapidly, and as such it is best not to establish any long-term relationships (Bauman 1995: 99). For the player it is of the utmost importance not to be fixed to one place, one career or one partner (Nienaber 2003: 82). This is to ensure that there are no adverse effects or consequences when the game ends (Bauman 1995: 99). Like the vagabond, the tourist and the stroller, the player, as a result of his lack of long-term relationships or affiliations, is not responsible for the Other. He can end his current game and start a new one at any time.

With regard to all four types sketched above, Bauman notes that each

contains a solid dose of ambivalence of its own; in addition, they also differ from each other in a number of respects, and so blending them into one cohesive life-style is not an easy matter. No wonder there is quite a generous pinch of schizophrenia in each postmodern personality – which goes some way towards accounting for the notorious restlessness, fickleness and irresoluteness of practical life strategies. There are, though, certain features which the four types share. The most seminal among them are the effects on popular moral and political attitudes, and indirectly on the status of morality and politics in the postmodern context (Bauman 1995: 99).

The effects that the four types have on morality in particular will be discussed later on when we consider the impact of the postmodern habitat on the prevention of genocide. Needless to say these four types deviate quite a bit from the modern pilgrim, and as such there are bound to be important consequences, especially with regard to our responsibility for the Other, but more about that later.

#### **5.4 The Postmodern Community**

What should be clear by now is that the individual living in the postmodern habitat is constantly moving through identities, relationships and spaces. Nothing seems to last in the postmodern habitat, and this does not bode well for communities, yet Bauman argues that postmodernity is the age of communities. How are we to understand this? Under modern conditions, communities were determined by nationalism (Nienaber 2003: 83). The kinds of communities created in the modern world therefore relied heavily on external sources of control and a universal source of authority. These ideas have been demolished by the rise of postmodernity. As mentioned before, postmodernity is a reaction to modernity, and as such, postmodernity is modernity made aware of its flaws, chief of which are excessive social control and the appeal to a universal source of authority. Communities, at least in the way in which they are traditionally understood, have been demolished, yet the individual living in the postmodern habitat still has need for them. Why is this so? This has to do with fear.

Bauman notes that while “typical modern fears were related to the threat of totalitarianism perpetually ensconced in the project of rationalised and state-managed society..., postmodern fears arise from uncertainty as to the reliability of advice offered through the politics of desire” (1992: 199). The politics of desire refer to different agencies who constantly vie for the “scarce resource of individual and collective dreams of the good life” (Bauman 1992: 199). These are the agencies whose actions are aimed at generating the relevance of certain tokens for the individual’s self-constitution (Bauman 1992: 199). In other words, they make us believe that if we buy the latest gadget or eat the latest superfood we will finally find what we are looking for. In the postmodern habitat, individuals become suspicious of these agencies and yearn for some authority to approve their choices, yet in the postmodern habitat there is a peculiar “absence of ‘official-approving agencies’, able to force through, with the help of sanction-supported norms, their approval or disapproval” (Bauman 1992: xviii).

Postmodernity has therefore eradicated these “official-approving agencies”, but not the fears that they were designed to quell. People therefore seek this approval in communities; yet, a community capable of providing the “succour previously sought in the pronouncements of universal reason” is not able to grow in the wilderness that is the postmodern habitat (Bauman 1992: xix). Bauman describes communities as greenhouse plants that need to be sowed, fed, trimmed and protected from weeds and parasites (1992: xix). Yet postmodernity is fundamentally a reaction against the sowing and trimming inclinations of modernity. What then becomes of communities in the postmodern habitat? Bauman notes that individuals now construct imagined communities (1992: xix). These communities exist more as a concept than as an actual social grouping – “belief in their presence is their only brick and mortar, and imputation of importance their only source of authority” (Bauman 1992: xix). Imagined communities have only their members as anchors, and exist solely through their manifestations, in other words, “through occasional spectacular outbursts of togetherness (demonstrations, marches, festivals, riots)” (Bauman 1992: xix-xx). Since no imagined community is alone in the world, there develops a fierce battle between different imaged communities (Bauman 1992: xx). The battle is for public attention – the attention generated by the imagined community is proportional to the power and authority of that community, at least for the time being (Bauman 1992: xx). A community may win the public attention, and by implication the power and authority, today, but tomorrow the battle for attention begins again, with each display or attempt to win attention more bizarre and shocking than before (Bauman 1992: xx).

Bauman refers to these imagined communities as tribes (1992: 136). The postmodern habitat is devoid of any universal truths, or notions about what is right or wrong – each tribe therefore has its own truth (Bauman 1992: 136). Bauman notes that the term ‘tribe’ is perhaps not specific enough, and suggests, along with Maffesoli, the term ‘neo-tribes’ instead (1992: 136). Whereas a tribe is usually seen as a community that has very strict and formal rules of membership, neo-tribes are formed as concepts, rather than strict social groupings (Bauman 1992: 136). Traditional tribal membership is also not a matter of choice, whereas members of neo-tribes choose to ‘belong’ to them (Nienaber 2003: 84). These neo-tribes form as a result of the individual’s attempted self-identification, and since the postmodern individual continually changes his identity, these neo-tribes do not endure for long periods of time (Bauman 1992: 136-137). As with all previously discussed aspects of the postmodern habitat, we observe a lack of long-term association. We can therefore conclude that in the postmodern

habitat there is never the possibility of forming communities in the true sense of the word. This has some serious consequences for the Other.

## **5.6 Postmodernity and the Other**

Up until now I have focussed mainly on the individual and the community in the postmodern habitat. But what of the Other? What is the fate of that category of people that traditionally make up the targeted group when it comes to instances of genocide, and violence in general? Are they in a better position in the postmodern habitat than they were under conditions of modernity? As we have seen, consumer culture plays an important role in the postmodern habitat and this fact is also closely related to the way in which we conceive of the postmodern Other. Bauman notes that the consumer culture is a democratic institution – everyone is free to take part in it (1987: 168). The only requirement for your participation is money. Without money you are unable to be a part of this consumer culture, and by implication, this world. Money therefore enables people to escape, to be free (Bauman 1987: 169). For people who do not have money, the promise of the freedom it can bring drives them to do almost anything to get it (Nienaber 2003: 86). Bauman therefore envisions two worlds within the postmodern habitat. The first world functions according to the mechanisms of seduction, while the other (original) world functions according to the principal of domination by means of oppression (Nienaber 2003: 86). There are two worlds because not all people have had the opportunity or ability to cross over from the one to the other. The ones who have failed to do so and are still trapped in a cycle of oppression are known as the ‘new poor’ (Nienaber 2003: 86).

Bauman notes that social theorists often overlook the category of people known as the new poor (1987: 168). The dominance of the market in the postmodern habitat leads to the continued marginalisation of the new poor (Bauman 1987: 168). Bauman notes that the existence of the new poor is in itself a function of the consumer culture that dominates the postmodern habitat (1987: 168). What does this mean? Bauman argues that the two worlds contained within the postmodern habitat, that of seduction and that of oppression, cannot exist without one another (1987: 168). The strength of the seduction of the consumer market owes itself to the fact that oppression is its only alternative (Bauman 1987: 168). The new poor represent a threat to other individuals in the habitat, because they serve as a reminder of what could happen if you are not active in the habitat as a consumer (Bauman 1987: 186).



The new poor's inability to participate as consumers in a consumer culture alienates them from the rest of the habitat, and serves to make the consumer perceive all other options as unacceptable (Nienaber 2003: 86). Compared to the fate of the new poor, the tension and uncertainty of being a consumer seems bearable (Bauman 1987: 186). The new poor are therefore a necessary product of the consumer culture, they are the products of the malfunctioning of the system (Nienaber 2003: 86). They are such an integral part of the consumer culture that if they did not already exist, they would have had to be created (Bauman 1987: 186).

The technological advances that drive the consumer culture (the mechanisation of labour, for example) have deprived the new poor of a significant economic role (Nienaber 2003: 86). Under modern conditions where production was the most important factor in society, the poor were desperately needed as labourers and were often exploited. One may think that the postmodern new poor have it better since they are no longer being exploited, but this has also deprived them of their revolutionary power (Nienaber 2003: 86). In the past, the exploited poor were the ones who held the greatest power within revolutions. Their simple refusal to work was a powerful bargaining chip (Nienaber 2003: 86-87). Now, in the postmodern habitat, the fact that the new poor have no bargaining power means that they are replaceable and invisible (Nienaber 2003: 86). In the past, the poor were encouraged by intellectuals to realise their own power and change their circumstances, now the new poor, stripped of what made them valuable in a production-centric modern world, are only subject to sympathy and humanitarian aid (Bauman 1987: 179). Help on a humanitarian level is all that the new poor can receive since they no longer have any influence in the world (Bauman 1987: 179). This is applicable to the poor parts of any society as well as poor people all over the world, mainly in third-world countries (Nienaber 2003: 87). Since postmodern individuals shy away from long-term associations with other people and therefore are not responsible for anyone, providing humanitarian aid is no longer seen as a moral responsibility. It is certainly admirable to help the new poor, but one is not obliged to do so, since it does not benefit you in any way.

In the modern era, the Other was part of a class or a social order, but this is not the case anymore. According to Bauman, the new poor are simply bad copies of consumers (1987: 193). If given the opportunity or means to free themselves from the situation they find themselves in, the new poor would not create a new class of people, but would assign to

themselves the role of consumer (Bauman 1987: 193). For this reason, the new poor are not really a threat to the rest of society and are, therefore, unlike their modern predecessors who formed a separate class that was deemed to be dangerous and unwanted. The modern Other was seen as an enemy that was trying to topple the system from within or from the outside. In the postmodern habitat, the Other is merely an imitator (Nienaber 2003: 87). In the postmodern habitat, one is either a consumer or not. Bauman notes that while the modern focus with respect to the Other was on equality, the redistribution of wealth, the postmodern focus is on human rights (1987: 197). We tend to view human rights in a very positive light, yet Bauman is very sceptical about them and views it as nothing more than an attempt to establish freedom of choice for the agent (1987: 198). On its own, freedom of choice does not seem like such a terrible alternative, but we know now that Bauman links this freedom of choice to the postmodern consumer culture. We can therefore say with some certainty that freedom of choice in the postmodern habitat will inevitably lead to the choice to become a consumer, since the only alternative is to be part of the new poor, a highly undesirable position.

I have already briefly mentioned the postmodern consumer culture's tendency to replace oppression with seduction, but it is also of importance with respect to the Other. Bauman notes that as a result of the uncertainty that dominates our lives in the postmodern habitat, we yearn for someone or something to tell us what to do, or to reassure us that we have made the right decision. In the postmodern consumer culture, this falls on the advertising agencies who attempt to sell us the latest gadget or miracle cream that will finally allow us to live the good life. Bauman notes that we should not be too quick to blame these agencies for the postmodern consumer culture, since they are simply providing a service to the public, a service that we yearn for (1992: 194). Being a consumer is construed as being free, yet when we yearn for some kind of authority to help us choose symbolic tokens, we are giving up our autonomy (Nienaber 2003: 89). In the postmodern habitat, the new poor or the new Other, are unable to participate in the consumer culture and are therefore seen as flawed consumers. Since they cannot be subjected to the seduction that consumers are subject to, a different set of rules apply to them.

In discussing these rules, Bauman refers firstly to oppression by means of disempowerment or humiliation. He refers to welfare systems in this regard, and notes the findings of J.R. Feagin in this regard. Feagin lists numerous examples of welfare systems in America and the

atrocious treatment that the people who receive help from these welfare organisations have to endure (Bauman 1987: 183). They are subjected to spot checks of their homes, rude and verbally abusive social workers and in some cases are even subjected to pressure from the state with regard to the amount of children they may have (Bauman 1987: 183). All of these examples point towards the disempowerment and humiliation of the new poor. This can also be seen in the case of wealthy countries lending money to developing nations. The wealthier nations often feel that their monetary support entitles them to prescribe how another country should be run (Nienaber 2003: 91). The new poor have no way of insisting to be treated fairly; they need help, and are therefore willing to put up with anything. Bauman notes that by treating the new poor in such a way, the hope is that they will accept the roles assigned to them by the bureaucracy (1987: 184). Once they identify with these roles, they become part of their identities and that is that – they never try to escape from these assigned roles (Bauman 1987: 91).

The second way in which the postmodern habitat deals with the new poor is by means of the old methods of policing and criminalisation (Bauman 1995: 205). These methods remind one of the totalitarian methods of the modern era (Bauman 1995: 205). There is one important difference, though: in the postmodern habitat these forms of oppression are linked to justice (Bauman 1995: 205). The growing number of unemployed people is a characteristic of the postmodern consumer culture (Nienaber 2003: 91). Unemployment obviously also increases the criminal elements in a society, since people are forced to commit crimes in order to survive (Nienaber 2003: 91). This also leads to a growing number of people who end up behind bars. Bauman cites the work of Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie who draws our attention to “the capacity of modern industrial society to institutionalise large segments of the population” (Bauman 1995: 205). It is therefore easy to see how the new poor, stripped of everything that made them valuable in the modern era, can easily be removed from the postmodern habitat and placed behind high walls and bars. For the new poor who are subject to different rules than those lucky enough to be able to participate as consumers, the postmodern habitat is not one of freedom, but one of limitations and inequality.

### **5.7 Postmodernity: The Tunnel at the End of the Light?**

At the start of our investigation into the primary features of postmodernity, the hope was to find that postmodernity, as a response to modernity, would provide us with an alternative that

would contribute to halting the long line of genocides that characterised the modern era. From what we have seen thus far, can we say that postmodernity does indeed contain this potential? In the previous chapter, I noted that all traditional moral approaches have failed to prevent the proliferation of genocide in the twentieth century, and that Bauman argues for a return of our responsibility to the Other as the only moral safeguard against evil. In this last section I would like to seriously address Bauman's argument in light of key aspects of postmodernity. Under modern conditions, Bauman identifies the modern subjects' tendency to displace moral responsibility by means of replacing morality with an ethic, and also through the process of adiaphorization. Adiaphorization is the process by which a large portion of human action becomes exempt from moral judgement. This is one of the most effective strategies used by perpetrators and organisers of modern genocide that enables them to carry out their tasks without being burdened by the moral consequences of their actions. What has become of adiaphorization in the postmodern habitat? Adiaphorization was brought about by modern bureaucracy and aided by modern technology. Bauman argues that this still remains true under postmodern conditions, but that two new developments have been added to the modern, now traditional, methods of adiaphorization.

The first is the effect of the increasing "oversensitization" to cruelty that takes place in the postmodern habitat (Bauman 1995: 149). We are increasingly bombarded and exposed to enormous volumes of violence and human suffering. The more images we see of such suffering, the less it affects us. In addition to this, the simulations of violence that are served up by the media start to look more and more interesting than everyday instances of violence (Bauman 1995: 150). Violence is sensationalised and therefore ceases to shock us. Bauman also notes that it is easier to commit acts of "real war" under conditions of postmodernity, than it ever was under modern conditions (1995: 150). He refers here to the American troops in the Gulf War who said that it felt like they were in a video game, since they hardly even saw their victims – they were simply dots on a screen (Bauman 1995: 150). The increased distance between perpetrators and victims was identified by Stanley Milgram as a factor that enables people to do evil. Now that this distance has increased even more, doing evil is easier than ever. We now have even more technological advancements on our side than we did under modern conditions, and therefore the postmodern potential for violence and cruelty free from moral repercussions has reached terrifying new heights.

Bauman notes that even though postmodernity has heightened modern forms of adiaphorization, this should be the least of our concerns (1995: 152). True postmodern adiaphorization is even more dangerous since it manifests itself in our everyday lives (Bauman 1995: 152). As mentioned before, Bauman sees the postmodern subject as a schizophrenic mixture of four different types of life strategies, that of the tourist, the vagabond, the stroller and the player. The one thing that all four of these different life-strategies have in common is the fact that they fragment human relationships and leave them fragmented (Bauman 1995: 100). All four life strategies are vehemently against the cultivation of long-term relationships or associations. Bauman notes that

they all favour and promote a distance between the individual and the Other and cast the Other as the object of aesthetic, not moral evaluation; as a matter of taste, not responsibility. In effect, they cast individual autonomy in opposition to moral...responsibilities and remove a huge area of human interaction, even the most intimate among them, from moral judgement (a process remarkably similar in its consequences to bureaucratically promoted adiaphorization) (1995: 100).

This is obviously not to the benefit of the postmodern Other, the new poor who are unable to afford the life of a tourist, stroller or player. In order to engage the moral impulse that causes us to feel responsible for the Other, we must engage with the Other and take an interest in the Other's welfare (Nienaber 2003: 95). This moral impulse is suppressed by the "commitment-avoidance" that is characteristic of all four types of postmodern life-strategies (Bauman 1995: 100). In order to take an interest in the welfare of the Other we need to have a relationship with the *whole* person (Nienaber 2003: 95). Postmodern adiaphorization requires, amongst other things, that our relationship with the Other be limited to certain useful or interesting aspects of the Other, but never the whole person (Bauman 1995: 133-134). This is known as the aesthetic value of the Other (Bauman 1995: 134).

Bauman notes that within the social space there are three separate processes at work, the cognitive, the aesthetic and the moral (Bauman 1994: 145). These three processes usually interact with one another (Bauman 1994: 146). Concepts of distance and proximity are integral to all three of these processes, yet they also differ from one another. The cognitive space is constructed in an intellectual manner by means of the gathering of knowledge, while the aesthetic space relies on attention guided by curiosity (Bauman 1994: 146). The moral

space relies on the acceptance of responsibility (Bauman 1994: 146). Within the cognitive space, we engage with the other by means of mis-meetings – in other words by means of inattention (Bauman 1994: 168). The Other is therefore treated as a stranger who “melts into the meaningless physical space” (Bauman 1994: 168). In the aesthetic space, we engage with the Other by means of curiosity (Bauman 1994: 168). The Other becomes the object of our attention (Bauman 1994: 168). What makes this form of interaction with the Other so attractive is that it has absolutely no consequences. We have already seen this in our discussion of the stroller. The stroller’s form of control over the Other, watching and casting the Other in scripts he wrote with no consequences to himself, differs greatly from the more sinister modern forms of control and seems quite harmless in comparison (Bauman 1994: 169). Bauman notes that this form of control over the Other is epitomised in Henning Bech’s term ‘telicity’ (1994: 178).

Without going into too much detail, Bech’s telicity refers to the situation in which the Other are those characters on our television screens who are there for the sole purpose of our observation and enjoyment (Bauman 1994: 178). We can watch these characters do things that we would never do or imagine for the Other, and at the same time we are free to switch off the television or change the channel at any time. There are therefore no consequences to the observer. The Other therefore takes on a new-found entertainment value (Bauman 1994: 179). While this may seem harmless, Bauman warns us that the popularity of the telicity as an aesthetic space can lead to it setting the standard for the aesthetic space as a whole (1994: 179). What does he mean by this? By connecting to the Other a new aspect of entertainment or pleasure, we create a space in which our proximity to the Other (a requirement for moral responsibility) is dependent on the capacity of the Other as a source of entertainment (Bauman 1994: 179). In order to attain proximity to us, the Other therefore needs to be able to capture our attention for extended periods of time, yet the irony of the matter is that the more this proximity is maintained, the less entertaining the Other becomes (Bauman 1994: 179). We become over-familiar with the Other (Bauman 1994: 179). This stands in stark contrast to the very nature of moral responsibility – moral responsibility is dependent on extended periods of attention focussed on the Other, not fleeting moments of attention. Paying attention to the Other therefore now becomes a responsibility (Bauman 1994: 180). Our contact with the flesh and blood Other is now an extension of the Other in the aesthetic space (Nienaber 2003: 98).

Postmodernity therefore adds an additional requirement to Bauman's notion of our responsibility for the Other, and in a world in which we are constantly bombarded with images, sounds and new and exciting things, the Other's ability to grab hold of our attention is made all the more difficult. Every attempt to catch our attention has to be more spectacular or shocking than the last. This can be illustrated by looking at people's reactions to everyday instances of suffering and their reactions to the victims of freak accidents, such as tsunamis, earthquakes or tornadoes. The more impressive and less frequently seen instances of suffering are the ones that grab our attention, yet only for a little while. While a tsunami may grab our attention this year, next year's tsunami needs to be coupled with an earthquake and threat of a nuclear disaster (as was the case in Japan in 2011) in order to elicit a response from us. This is why people are often more inclined to donate money to help victims of disasters on the other side of the world than the beggar on the street corner.

At the start of this section I mentioned that the replacement of morality with an ethic is an important tool that enables perpetrators to do evil. This phenomenon was also discussed in the third chapter of this thesis with reference to Haas' book *Morality After Auschwitz*. Under conditions of modernity we see the emergence of an ethic instead of morality not only as a way in which adiaphorization takes place, but also because individual moral judgements are deemed undesirable. Modernity values uniformity and order. This is not so under postmodern conditions. Postmodernity attaches the greatest value to concepts of diversity, liberty and tolerance (Bauman 1991: 272). With respect to liberty or freedom, I have already noted that Bauman sees the postmodern form of freedom as that of the consumer in a consumer culture. This kind of freedom, therefore, only includes those who are capable of being consumers and therefore cannot but create inequality.

Since postmodernity moves away from the uniformity that was given great importance in modernity, differences are encouraged and tolerated in the postmodern habitat (Bauman 1991: 273). In principle, being tolerant towards the Other who differ from you sounds like a huge improvement when compared to the social engineering of modernity where differences of any kind were treated with aversion (Nienaber 2003: 102). Yet Bauman is sceptical and notes that 'tolerance' can turn into 'indifference' very quickly (1991: 275). Tolerance can also lead to a situation where differences are *merely* tolerated, in other words, where the spectacle of tolerance is maintained, but not truly believed in (Bauman 1991: 275). Seen in this way, Bauman notes that when tolerance becomes indifference, or when differences are

*merely* tolerated, social bonds based on this tolerance become superficial (1991: 275). Bauman even goes so far as to suggest that tolerance does not necessarily rule out social domination (1991: 275). This is a surprising revelation, as one would think that a society that promotes tolerance would also therefore promote equality, yet Bauman argues that since the Other is different from us, we cannot but treat him as different (1991: 275).

Under conditions of postmodernity, we feel that we have no right to impose our own ideas regarding what is right and what is wrong on other people since we have no proof that our version of right and wrong, or the truth, for that matter, is better than theirs (Nienaber 2003: 103). On the surface this view seems to be quite sensible, especially considering the horrors of modernity. Yet Bauman argues that when we stop trying to convince the Other of our point of view, it means that we have stopped caring about the Other (1991: 235). This view is in direct conflict with Bauman's assertion that we need to rediscover our responsibility for the Other and that we should care what happens to the Other. Here Bauman is trying to draw our attention to the fact that tolerance of the differences of the Other is merely a small step away from indifference (1991: 235). When we move away from tolerance to an attitude of indifference we often exclaim that the Other is free to do as he pleases, even if 'we' think it is wrong (Nienaber 2003: 104). In this scenario we may seem to tolerate the Other, yet we still *know* that *we* are right and they are wrong (Bauman 1991: 235). Bauman argues that what is missing from this sort of attitude towards the Other is respect for the Other (1991: 235). It is not enough to simply tolerate the Other's differences, we need to respect them too. Tolerance is therefore not all that is needed in order to have a moral relationship with the Other.

We now come back to the question posed at the very beginning of this chapter: given the evil that has been perpetrated in the name of modernity, does postmodernity provide a better alternative? I noted at the start of this section that Bauman feels that the only way in which we can successfully deter evil is by accepting responsibility for the Other. Modernity was characterised by the replacement of morality with an ethic, a universal ethical code that dictated how people should act. Bauman and Haas both reject such an ethical code as allowing people to give up their moral responsibility. Postmodernity has rid us of such universal ethical codes, yet Bauman cautions us not to celebrate prematurely. With the disappearance of universal ethical codes, the responsibility for moral decision-making rests with the individual, an individual who desperately wants a universal ethical code to tell him what to do, what decision to make. Bauman notes that "the tyranny of choice returns, though



this time it taxes not so much the moral competence as the shopping skills of the actor. The actor is responsible not for the *contents* with which the responsibility is filled, but for the *choice of an ethical code among many*, each of which sports expert endorsement” (1995: 5; my emphasis). While the responsibility to make moral decisions no longer rests with a central authority, this new “privately owned” responsibility which now rests with the actor is not one that relies on one’s listening to one’s moral instinct or following a moral impulse (Bauman 1995: 5). The actor now simply places his bets on “an ethical pattern that is likely to emerge victorious from the war of expert promises and/or popular ratings” (Bauman 1995: 5). The choices that are being made in the postmodern habitat are therefore not moral simply because they are no longer made by a central authority but by the individual. Whereas individuals were previously told what to do by a universal ethical code, they can now have their pick from a wide range of ‘gurus’ and self-help books (a contradiction) who will advise them on what to do (Nienaber 2003: 105). In this way, the agent is still not responsible for the consequences of his actions, much less for the effect these actions have on the Other.

Bauman notes that our responsibility for the Other is not a responsibility that we can get away from, no matter how hard we may try. No amount of adiaphorization will make this responsibility disappear. No matter what life-strategy postmodern individuals employ in order to distance themselves from the natives, strangers or the Other, our responsibility for the Other remains as true as ever. It is the fragmented nature of postmodernity that is ultimately to blame for the distorted relationship between the postmodern individual and the Other. The moral relationship that Bauman thinks we are required to have with the Other is the exact opposite of the kinds of relationships sought out by the vagabond, the stroller, the player and the tourist. A moral relationship with the Other entails that a long-term and lasting relationship is formed with the Other in which the Other’s differences are not merely tolerated but respected. The fragmented nature of postmodernity makes such relationships difficult. In a world in which every other agent and every agency is vying for our attention, the Other has to compete alongside them. The Other, therefore, has to *earn* our attention, but like everything in the postmodern habitat our attention does not remain fixed on the Other for extended periods of time, since the more familiar we become with the Other, the less the Other interests us.

Bauman’s notion that our responsibility for the Other is the only safeguard against evil comes up against serious opposition. The adiaphorization that took place under modern conditions

have not only been heightened, but the postmodern form of such adiaphorization now infiltrates our everyday lives and is therefore no longer simply a tool that is used under exceptional circumstances (such as war). Every action of the postmodern subject is shot through with the impulse of adiaphorization. We try to avoid becoming responsible for the Other at all costs. Our indifference towards the differences and suffering of the Other therefore challenges Bauman's argument. That is not to say that indifference to the Other will lead directly down the path of genocide. Just because the Other is no longer put in gas chambers, does not mean that our relationship with the Other is a moral one (Nienaber 2003: 106). Indifference therefore does not necessarily lead to the torture or murder of the Other, but it also definitely does not lead to a better life for the Other (Nienaber 2003: 106). While postmodernity may have demolished those aspects of modernity that lead to the Holocaust, that is not to say that it provides us with a better alternative or with the safeguards we need to avoid evil.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

At the start of this chapter the question was posed as to whether or not postmodernity provides us with a better alternative to modernity. Given the horrors that were perpetrated in the name of modernity, our initial instinctive answer was yes, postmodernity does provide a better alternative to modernity. As a reaction to modernity, how could postmodernity not provide us with the answers we have been looking for? It is true that postmodernity did demolish those structures that caused a great deal of pain and suffering under modern conditions. The obsessive search for a universal ethical code, the need for uniformity and order and the social control exercised by a totalitarian regime were all put to pasture. In their stead, postmodernity greatly values those characteristics that were seen by modernity as flaws or mistakes to be corrected. These include pluralism, variety, contingency and ambivalence. In our discussion of the key aspects of postmodernity, the dominance of the consumer culture, the way in which freedom is inherently linked to consumption and the Other as the new poor, or those who are unable to be consumers, was revealed. We also looked at the postmodern subject and the four new types of life-strategies identified by Bauman to replace the modern pilgrim. The one thing that these life-strategies all have in common is that they shy away from prolonged relationships or interaction with the Other. By avoiding such relationships, the individual never has to feel responsible for the Other.

In the third chapter it was noted that Bauman believes that the only way for us to safeguard ourselves and our societies against evil is to take up and accept our responsibility for the Other. The hope was that the postmodern condition would make it easier for the individual to take up this responsibility, yet this is not the case. If anything, postmodernity can be seen as an attempt to *avoid* such responsibility. In the postmodern habitat, our interactions with the Other are of a fleeting and fragmentary nature, and while we promote a culture of tolerance towards the difference of the Other, we *merely* tolerate these differences. Tolerance is replaced by indifference, the very thing that Bauman attempted to ward off in the first place! Bauman notes that while we may try to avoid our responsibility for the Other, we will always remain responsible for them. He notes that to say that we tolerate the differences of the Other is not enough to ensure a moral relationship with the Other. We need to also respect these differences and commit to a long-term relationship with the Other.

Bauman's argument that our responsibility for the Other is the only safeguard against evil may be true, but it certainly is not a responsibility that we take up by default. Instead of making such a relationship with the Other easier, the postmodern condition has in fact added a wide array of obstacles that have to be overcome in order to have this relationship with the Other. Can we therefore conclude that Bauman's argument has failed? I think that this is difficult to ascertain. On an intellectual level, his argument makes sense and if implemented in the way that Bauman envisions it, could provide us with a very successful safeguard against evil. Yet postmodernity has made it very clear that such a responsibility is not one that it is naturally inclined to. What I think we can conclude with some certainty, is that postmodernity does indeed protect us from modern forms of evil, but that it does not protect us against all forms of evil. The dismantling of modern power structures does not equal an immediate victory of the good and just over the evil and unjust. It simply signals the end of modern forms of evil. Postmodernity as a system, not just an aberration of modernity, is capable of solving its own problems and also of creating new forms of evil that need to be guarded against. Postmodernity therefore *does* provide us with a better alternative to modernity, but postmodernity is not the antidote to its own problems.

## **Conclusion: An Uncertain Future**

This thesis has attempted to chart the unexpected by-products of modernity that lead to horrors such as the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. Hailed by many as the triumph of civilisation over barbarism, modernity also illustrated man's ability to destroy his fellow man. The very things that were supposed to make us more civilised have also, unexpectedly, made us capable of more destruction and evil than ever before. The products of modernity, such as bureaucracy, science and technology, once applauded for their ability to improve our lives and the world, now take on a more sinister tone. Zygmunt Bauman devoted his book, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, to exposing the fact that the Holocaust was not an aberration of modernity, as previously thought, but a product of modernity. Bauman's arguments in this regard does not only have important consequences for the way in which we view modernity, but also calls into question much of what we think we know about evil and morality. In an attempt to shed light on the true nature of the Holocaust, Bauman also calls into question what we think we know about perpetrators of evil. With the help of Hannah Arendt's work on the Eichmann trial, we now know that as monstrous as their acts were, the majority of perpetrators did not conform to the stereotype of the sadistic monster. These perpetrators were mainly ordinary people doing their jobs. This revelation in turn calls into question the nature and effectiveness of morality. We view phenomena such as the Holocaust with horror; it fills us with moral revulsion. If these perpetrators are like us in many respects, why did it not revolt them too? Drawing on the work of P.J. Haas, it was argued that the failure of morality to curtail evil can to a large extent, be attributed to the replacement of morality with a universal ethical code. In chapter four it was argued that the best defence against evil is morality. Traditional Western forms of morality failed to curtail the events of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. In response to this, Bauman, drawing from the work of Levinas, suggests that the only way we can ensure that morality does not fail us again in future, is to take up our responsibility for the Other.

Bauman argues that the very nature of modernity actively attempts to separate us from the consequences of our actions. This is especially apparent when one considers the prominence of technology during the Holocaust, especially in the extermination process itself. Using gas chambers to kill victims was easier for the perpetrators because it created a distance between themselves and their victims. Stanley Milgram's experiments (discussed in chapter one) confirm that it is indeed easier to do evil if we are separated from those we are harming.

When combined with the adiaphorization that took place under modern conditions, it is evident that modernity actively opposes taking moral responsibility for one's actions. Bauman urges us to rediscover our fundamental responsibility for the Other. Drawing on Levinas, Bauman notes that this is not a responsibility that we can deny or rid ourselves of. We can choose whether to take up that responsibility or not, yes, but the responsibility always remains. In the wake of the failure of morality, that feature of humanity that was supposed to protect us from evil and help us to defy it, we desperately need a new way of looking at morality, and Bauman feels that taking responsibility for the Other is exactly that. Let us now turn to a brief examination of Bauman's claim in light of modernity and postmodernity.

According to Bauman, my relationship with and responsibility for the Other is not one of reciprocity (1994: 50). My responsibility for the Other is not dependent on what the Other can do for me, or what I expect of the Other. "Being a moral person means that I am my brother's keeper. But this also means that I am my brother's keeper whether or not my brother sees his own brotherly duties the same way as I do" (Bauman 1994: 51; Bauman's emphasis). This kind of responsibility for the Other is incompatible with modernity for various reasons. Firstly, the idea that we are responsible for the Other, irrespective of whether or not the Other reciprocates that responsibility seems irrational, and if there is one thing that modernity actively tries to eradicate, it is irrationality. Under modern conditions, reason has taken centre stage, and only reason and rationality will be cultivated. Secondly, this responsibility for the Other places moral responsibility firmly in the hands of the individual. Modernity's drive to order and control every aspect of the world means that this individual, subjective responsibility goes against the modern search for a universal ethical code. Such a code is highly desirable under modern conditions, as it orders moral action and eliminates the unpredictability of personal morality. This responsibility for the Other is therefore irreconcilable with any form of rule-based morality (or ethics). To reiterate: our responsibility for the Other does not take the form of a contractual agreement. It neither hinges on the fulfilment of certain conditions stipulated in a contract, nor does it start when I sign the contract, or make the decision to take responsibility for the Other. Our responsibility for the Other is certainly a responsibility we can accept or reject, but rejecting it does not mean that it does not exist. We are responsible for the Other in an unconditional, unlimited way and this responsibility is always present, whether we want it or not.

It is clear that modernity therefore does not facilitate or encourage this kind of responsibility, but would postmodernity? As was argued in chapter five, postmodernity is a reaction to modernity. Postmodernity, as a way of thinking of and looking at the world, is against the modern search for a universal ethical code. Postmodernity values those things that modernity viewed as failures or mistakes that needed to be corrected. Does moral responsibility for the Other, in the way that Bauman and Levinas conceives of it, stand a better chance in the postmodern habitat? Bauman writes of postmodern ethics that it is viewed as “one that readmits the Other as a neighbour...into the hard core of the moral self, back from the wasteland of calculated interests to which it had been exiled; an ethics that recasts the Other as a crucial character in the process through which the moral self comes into its own” (1994: 84). Before attempting to see whether or not this is in fact true, it is important to examine what exactly makes up our responsibility for the Other, and what conditions a system that promotes such responsibility must meet.

Inherent to the concept of responsibility for the Other is the notion that the Other is worth taking responsibility for. In other words, the reason why we should take responsibility for the Other is because we value the Other. We should not value the Other based on what they can do for me, or what they contribute to our society or economy, but we should value the Other simply because the Other is a human being, like us. We all differ from one another to a greater or lesser extent, and yet we are all ‘thrown’ into the world together. This value is therefore unconditional and should be seen as inherent to all people, everywhere. A system that promotes moral responsibility for the Other should therefore also promote the inherent value of the Other. In the case of the Holocaust, it was apparent that the Germans did not value the Jewish population of Europe at all. They were neither valued for the skills they had to offer the German economy, nor were they valued as human beings. In fact, the Jews’ value to the German economy and their contributions to the German intellectual tradition was viewed with suspicion, and ultimately contributed to their downfall. This is what made their extermination possible. The Nazis had absolutely no use for the Jews. The same phenomenon may be observed in the case of the Rwandan genocide.

The second requirement that needs to be met is that of equality. Inherent to the idea of taking moral responsibility for the Other is the notion that the Other not only has value, but also that the Other is our equal. If we see ourselves as better than the Other, or if we live in a society or system that does not bestow the same ‘amount’ of equality on the Other as it bestows upon

ourselves, then we cannot hope to make our responsibility for the Other a viable defence against evil. As we have seen with the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, the Other (the Jews or the Tutsis respectively) were not seen as or treated as equal to Germans or Hutus. Their rights were systematically stripped away to the point that they no longer even seemed human. In the case of the Jews, they were even deported and moved out of the spaces occupied by Germans. They were subject to different standards than the Germans, and slowly but surely they even lost their most basic human rights.

A third requirement that must be met is that of freedom. Any system that hopes to cultivate our responsibility for the Other must also promote the freedom of the Other. As is the case with equality, the freedom of the Other is often stripped away along with their rights or is attached to the value they have in a particular society. Under modern conditions, freedom was monitored and controlled, since truly free individuals should in theory be able to make individual judgements without the imposition of a universal ethical code. If we are to take responsibility for the Other, the Other needs to have the same kind of freedom that we do. They cannot be subject to less freedom, or freedom of a different kind. This freedom cannot be conditional, in other words the Other should not be deprived of freedom simply because he does not meet certain requirements. In the case of the Jews and the Tutsis, we can see that they were deprived of their freedom or an equal share of freedom because they did not meet certain requirements (racial requirements, in these cases). No matter what attributes the Other may have or lack in our eyes, they should always be afforded the same kind of freedom that is afforded to us.

The final requirement, and perhaps the one that underpins all of the above requirements, is respect for the Other. We must respect the Other enough to grant him freedom and equality. When we respect the Other we also show that we value him, not for the things he contributes to society, but because he is a human being. Under modern conditions, it is blatantly obvious that respect for the Other was absent. The cruelty that the Jews were subjected to and the horror that surrounded the Tutsis as they literally ran for their lives can in many ways be ascribed to a profound lack of respect for them on the part of the perpetrators. It is therefore clear that the four above-mentioned requirements – value, freedom, equality, respect – were all absent from the modern way of life and since these requirements underlie our responsibility for the Other, modernity could not have promoted responsibility for the Other.

Given what we now know about the nature of moral responsibility for the Other, and the requirements that are needed to promote such responsibility, we can say with certainty that modernity fails to promote such responsibility. What then of postmodernity? Does it satisfy all the above-mentioned requirements? As mentioned in chapter five, the postmodern habitat has close ties with consumer culture, and as such people's primary role is no longer that of producer, but that of consumer. In a consumer culture, people are valued insofar as they are able to participate in the postmodern habitat as consumers. Their value as human beings is therefore connected to their financial status. Those people who are unable to be consumers, the new poor, are valued less (or not at all) than those individuals who are able to be consumers. In this regard, postmodernity fails to fulfil the requirement that we value the Other purely because he is a human being, and not for what he can or cannot contribute to society. The postmodern system therefore does not attach any unconditional or inherent value to the Other (the new poor in this case).

With respect to the second requirement, that of equality, we can conclude that postmodernity does not succeed to promote a greater sense of equality. Why are we so sure of this? As mentioned above with respect to postmodernity and the value of the Other, the postmodern consumer culture splits people into two groups – those who can participate as consumers and those who cannot. Naturally this means that the new poor are not equal to the consumers, who are valued more. It is interesting to note that the postmodern habitat is often thought of as an environment that encourages equality, and yet it fails miserably in this regard. People are only equal insofar as they can participate as consumers. Those who cannot are automatically excluded from the realm of equality.

It was mentioned before that postmodernity is a reaction to the failures of modernity. One such a failure is the modern drive to order and control the world and the loss of freedom that occurred as a result. For this reason one would be forgiven for thinking that postmodernity would promote greater freedom for all people. Yet this does not seem to be the case. Postmodernity claims to promote freedom, but Bauman notes that it does not promote true freedom. The version of freedom that is promoted by postmodernity is the freedom of consumers in a consumer culture. This means that we are free, yes, but only free as consumers in a consumer culture. In this way, postmodernity has succeeded in eliminating all other options – one is either a consumer or one is not. The fact that the position of the new poor is so unfavourable means that people will forever try to be consumers rather than a



member of the new poor. According to this way of thinking, we are free to do whatever we want, but within the parameters set by the system. We therefore think that we have more freedom than we had under modern conditions since we have more choices, but these choices are the choices of consumers. We are not really free to step outside the consumer culture. The dismal position of the new poor illustrates this quite acutely.

Lastly, what of respect for the Other and postmodernity? Bauman notes that postmodernity is thought to promote respect between ourselves and the Other, and yet this respect is not always sincere or effective. In the postmodern habitat, people tolerate each other, but for the most part this takes the form of mere tolerance (as noted in chapter five). This means that we think that all people should be able to do and believe what they want, but at the same time we remain convinced that our beliefs are correct, and theirs wrong. This amounts to a situation in which the spectacle of tolerance is maintained but not truly believed in (Bauman 1991: 275). This can easily lead to an attitude of indifference towards the Other. Such a situation in which only the appearance of tolerance is upheld is not so different from the situation under modern conditions. In modernity, uniformity was given great importance and as a result differences were not tolerated. In the postmodern habitat, differences are seemingly tolerated, yet every agent actually views the Other's differences as alien and in many cases incorrect. Bauman notes that we need to respect the Other's differences in order to prevent this superficial tolerance from turning into indifference. This means that we need to view these differences as just as relevant and valuable as our own. Indifference can easily lead to social domination, as people stop caring about the Other.

Does postmodernity therefore promote a greater responsibility for the Other? Looking at the ways in which postmodernity fails to promote those requirements necessary for our responsibility for the Other, it is clear that postmodernity does not provide a better alternative to modernity. This is surprising. From the start, postmodernity was hailed by many as the solution to all the problems of modernity and all the questions opened up by modernity's destructive nature. Yet postmodernity does not live up to these expectations. Instead of solving the problems of modernity, postmodernity presents us with the same underlying problems, only presented in different forms. The only thing that postmodernity manages to do adequately is to cancel out or remove specific features of modernity that were problematic and led to horrors like the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide of 1994. In spite of this, postmodernity is also quick to replace the modern problems it removed with postmodern

problems of its own. According to Bauman “it is a general feature of social change that while it puts right or attenuates the wrongs of yesterday, it also ushers in new wrongs bound to become a target of curative efforts tomorrow” (1994: 223). This can be seen with respect to the postmodern life-strategies mentioned by Bauman.

As mentioned in chapter five, the aim of the postmodern life-strategies (that of the vagabond, the tourist, the player and the stroller) is to avoid any long-term association with the Other and by implication, any responsibility for the Other. These life-strategies fragment human life and human relationships so that the agent is free to move on to the next place or game or relationship at any time. As soon as things get too complicated or as soon as the agent feels like he is being held responsible for the Other, he cuts all his ties and starts over again. This means that just like under modern conditions, postmodernity does not promote our responsibility for the Other and as such we yet again have no defence against the onslaught of evil. Traditional Western forms of morality failed under ordered modern conditions, and I think that it is therefore a fair assumption that they would also fail under the fragmented conditions of the postmodern habitat. We are therefore back at square one.

Is it therefore still fair to assume that morality can provide a sufficient defence against evil? In chapter three I noted that I do not believe that human beings are inherently good or evil. In line with Bauman, I am inclined to state that human beings are moral – in other words, human beings are capable of making a choice between good and evil. This choice can, however, be influenced by the societies they find themselves in and the structures at work within those societies. This was illustrated by Haas in his study on the Nazi ethic. In chapter four, I mentioned Kant and Hume’s views on morality. They both believed that morality is founded in human nature itself and that the knowledge of how to act morally is accessible to everyone. Hobbes on the other hand, was of the opinion that human beings are inherently selfish, and in a state of nature they are ruled by their appetites and aversions. It is only once human beings give up some of their freedom and enter a social contract, that they begin to resemble moral human beings. Hobbes argues that in a state of nature, man will always desire those things that will lead to his preservation, and avoid those things that would lead to our destruction. Bauman’s view of morality as responsibility for the Other is more or less in line with Kant and Hume’s view that morality is tied to human nature. As mentioned in chapter four, Bauman rejects the Durkheimian view that morality is an outcome of society. Since Durkheim’s view sounds familiar to that of Hobbes, it is apt to conclude that Bauman would

also have rejected the Hobbesian view of man. We would all like to believe that Bauman is correct. We want to believe that we are inherently moral and given the correct circumstances, we would all take up our responsibility for the Other. Yet we have seen that the correct circumstances cannot be found in the modern or postmodern system. Can we therefore still maintain that Bauman is correct?

I would argue that Bauman is wrong. If morality was somehow inherent to human nature, in our inherent responsibility for the Other, then why have we yet to see any trace of this? Under modern and postmodern conditions, we have seen that morality (in the sense that Bauman suggests) failed to make any significant impact. Under pre-modern conditions, people certainly did not act more morally, or take up their inherent responsibility for the Other more readily than modern or postmodern man. Under pre-modern conditions, the Other was classified and contained behind the high walls of the ghettos. The average peasant or even a member of the ruling elite would rarely (if ever) have taken responsibility for the Other. Modernity manipulated morality by means of bureaucracy, adiaphorization and the replacement of morality with an ethic. Postmodernity fragmented the habitat and the lives of individuals to such an extent that any kind of long-term association with and responsibility for the Other is avoided at all costs. If Bauman is correct and morality is located in human nature, then it can certainly be influenced quite easily. Therefore, either Bauman is wrong or our inherent sense of morality is so weak that it would not provide a sufficient defence against evil.

I would, therefore, argue that the position taken up by Hobbes is more correct than that of Kant and Hume. The Hobbesian man lives in a cruel state of nature in which he is driven by appetites and aversions. It is only once he enters a social contract, and society, that he starts to take other people and their rights into consideration and acts in a way that resembles a moral human being. Society is therefore the source of morality, not the individual. One of the main sources of criticism levelled against Hobbes is the fact that no one has ever met a Hobbesian man. As far as we can remember, and as far as history can indicate to us, we have always lived in societies of some sort. Many people therefore argue that it is difficult to believe Hobbes' claim that a human being outside of society is akin to an animal. We are therefore led to believe that morality is inherent to human nature. Yet in this case, the fact that we have never met a Hobbesian man can also serve as proof against such a claim. If the fact that we have never met a Hobbesian man can be used as proof against the fact that

human beings are immoral outside of society, then one can also argue that since we have always lived in societies, we can never know whether or not human beings are inherently moral. And given the atrocities that have been perpetrated in the last century, it is difficult to claim that human beings are inherently moral. Yes, modernity played an important role in the processes that led to the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, but if individual morality can be overcome so easily, what hope do we have of it prevailing in the future? I agree with Bauman that the Holocaust was a product of modernity and not an aberration, and that we need to take seriously the unexpected by-products and destructive potential of modernity. I also, however, believe that morality is a product of society.

If we view morality in such a way, it can help us to understand why morality failed to protect us from evil. If societies produce our morality, then the way we act and the choices we make are inherently tied to the kind of society we live in. We generally have an idea of what perfect moral behaviour entails, and the majority of societies try to facilitate and promote this kind of behaviour. In the case of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, we can therefore argue that what we view as an aberration or manipulation of morality was simply a change from one kind of society to another. The rulers of Nazi Germany and post-colonial Rwanda were bent on the destruction of a certain group of people, but this was not always the case. German and Rwandan society and the values it promoted changed. It is therefore plausible that the kind of morality that these societies encouraged also changed. Morality, in the way that we usually conceive of it, failed because it was no longer the kind of morality that was being promoted. The fact that morality is tied to society does not mean that it provides a better defence against evil, on the contrary. We have seen how easily morality can be manipulated. Individual morality is also not a viable option, since its very existence has been called into question. We therefore cannot maintain that morality provides an adequate defence against evil. Morality, seen as inherent to the individual, is questionable, and morality as a product of society is too closely related to the aspects of society that produce evil. We have therefore dismissed the claim that morality can provide a defence against evil. What now? Are we supposed to simply accept the fact that we have no defence against evil? I do not think that this is the case.

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to show that modernity can be held responsible for some of the most horrific crimes in human history. There is simply no denying that no matter what positive things have come out of the modern era, it also has the potential for incredible

destruction and cruelty. With regard to postmodernity, it was shown that by focussing so heavily on consumerism and capitalism, the postmodern system does not achieve the desired equality and (true) freedom that had been expected of it. Even though I differ from Bauman with respect to the origin of morality, I still believe that his (and Levinas') conception of morality as responsibility to the Other has merit. As noted earlier, there are certain requirements that a society or system needs to meet in order to promote responsibility for the Other. We may in future find ourselves in a society where all of these requirements are met with genuine sincerity, yet we cannot simply sit around and wait for that day to arrive. Evil is a reality and we desperately need to find a defence against its onslaught, or we will soon find that we have become perpetrators of evil. In the face of the kind of modern and postmodern strategies that suppress and avoid taking moral responsibility for the Other, I believe that in order to defend ourselves against evil, we need more responsibility.

How are we going to achieve this? As mentioned above, we could wait around for the perfect society or system that promotes this kind of responsibility to arise, but this would be foolish. Bauman argues that our responsibility for the Other may not be present right now, but we should not see it as weak. It has been anaesthetized, not amputated (Bauman 1994: 249). It is still there, and so long as it remains intact, we have a weapon against the forces of evil. Says Bauman: "It is still there, dormant perhaps, often stunned, sometimes shamed into silence – but capable of being awoken" (1994: 249). In the absence of the perfect society or system that would promote responsibility for the Other, how would we awaken it?

I would suggest that we look very seriously at the value we attach to human beings. If there is one thing that modernity and postmodernity has made very clear, it is that we do not value the Other as much as we should. We do not value other people as people. We constantly attach different increments of value to each person. This can also be seen on a global scale. Citizens of certain countries (mostly developed nations) are often seen as being more important than citizens of other countries (mostly developing nations). A good example can be found in the case of the Rwandan genocide of 1994. As soon as the genocide broke out, Western countries evacuated their citizens from Rwanda, leaving the native inhabitants behind to die. In order to awaken our responsibility for the Other, we need to become aware of the way in which we value other people. We need not wait for the perfect society to do so. In our own lives we tend not to value people equally. We therefore need to rediscover the fact that all human beings, regardless of origin, race, religion or economic value, are human beings first, and

therefore worth taking responsibility for. Personal awareness of this fact is the only way in which we can defend ourselves against the onslaught of evil, and prevent the twenty-first century from being as bloody as the twentieth century. If we can stop seeing the Other in terms of gain or usefulness, then we will be a little bit closer to vindicating the deaths of the millions of victims of modern genocide.

There is therefore no quick fix for the problems of the twentieth century. There is no magical system or society that can fix the problems that lead to the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. Postmodernity was hailed by many as the answer to the problems of modernity. It was going to remove all the aspects of modernity that led to the suffering and deaths of millions of people throughout the course of the twentieth century. Postmodernity did succeed in removing those aspects, but it did not succeed in rooting out those underlying problems that make evil possible. Instead it replaced the problems of modernity with problems of its own. We still do not afford equality, respect and value to the Other, and while we briefly interact with them under the guise of tolerance, this tolerance is superficial. Even though we now believe that people should be able to do and believe whatever they want, we are still of the opinion that what we do, how we act and what we believe are correct, and that 'they' are wrong. This is not akin to respect for the Other. It amounts to nothing more than indifference, the very thing that was responsible for the deaths of millions of Jews and Tutsis. Where modernity had to generate indifference, indifference is a part of our everyday lives under postmodern conditions. This does not bode well for the Other, nor does it bode well for ourselves. If we are indifferent towards the Other in our everyday lives, then we could also easily be indifferent towards the extermination of the Other. Postmodernity has therefore not lived up to expectation, and has in fact, made it easier to participate in evil. Our only defence is to realise that the Other does have value, not because of what he can do or what I can gain from him, but because he is a human being. We need to believe in the equal value of the Other again. It is only when we can do this all the time, that we will stand a chance of defending ourselves against the evil that tainted the twentieth century. Until then, the fate of the twenty-first century looks to be more of the same.

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