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# Genocide as predation☆

Bradley Campbell

*California State University, Los Angeles, USA*

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**Abstract**

Donald Black (1983) distinguishes between moralistic violence, which occurs in response to conflict, and predatory violence, which enables exploitation. Genocide, I have argued in previous work (Campbell, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013), is moralistic. It is a form of social control that occurs in response to ethnic conflicts. But as I argue here, genocide is partly predatory. The perpetrators of genocide kill in response to grievances, but they may also rob and rape their targets, take their land, or force them to labor. Pure sociological theories of social control and predation can explain both aspects of genocide. The social conditions conducive to extreme moralism and extreme predation are similar, and so the targets of genocide are treated both as enemies to be eliminated and resources to be plundered.


*Keywords:* Genocide; Pure sociology; Predation; Social control

## 1. Introduction

Most violence is *moralistic*. It is a form of social control, occurring in the course of conflict (Black, 1983, 1998: 27–42, 74–79, 2004b: 126). But violence may also be *predatory*, occurring in the course of exploitation.[1] Moralism and predation are logically distinct,

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*E-mail address:* bcampbe3@calstatela.edu

[1]Sociologist Donald Black (2004b), who developed this typology of violence, notes that violence may also be *recreational*—occurring in the course of sport or amusement—or *ritualistic*—occurring in the course of a ceremony.

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and much of the time they occur in different contexts. Most homicides, for example, arise from conflict and involve no exploitation. In one case a man shoots his next-door neighbor's visiting uncle because he has parked in front of his driveway and refuses to move (Katz, 1988: 16). In another a man stabs his wife, who when asked to consider what she is doing to their children, declares she does not "give a damn about the children" (Katz, 1988: 15). Such homicides, according to sociologist Jack Katz, can be seen as "righteous slaughters" arising from "moralistic rage" (1988: 12). The killers, he says, are engaged in a "defense of the Good" (1988: 15; see also Black, 1983: 36). In contrast, most armed robberies arise not out of conflict, but out of a "pressing need for cash" (Wright and Decker, 1997: 33). Robbers use violence not to "defend the Good," but to obtain money, often to buy recreational drugs. So while the logic of the righteous slaughter is moralistic—it involves punishing a wrongdoer—the logic of the armed robbery is predatory—it involves exploiting a victim. But moralistic and predatory violence may overlap. They sometimes occur closely together, as when predatory violence, such as a robbery, is subject to violent social control (Cooney and Phillips, 2002: 93–94).[2] Other acts of violence are simultaneously moralistic and predatory, as is the case when a robbery occurs in response to a conflict (Cooney and Phillips, 2002: 93; cf. Cooney, 1997: 180).[3]

Moralism and predation overlap not only during robberies and other violence between individuals, but also during violence between large groups and nations. Consider, for example, genocide—or *unilateral, ethnically based mass killing* (Campbell, 2011: 589). Genocide is primarily moralistic. It is a response to ethnic conflict, and it punishes members of an ethnic group or eliminates a threat they are said to pose. In previous work I have focused on this aspect of genocide. My theory uses sociologist Donald Black's strategy of *pure sociology*, which Black and others have used to explain multiple forms of human behavior, including scientific discovery (Black, 2002), medicine (Black, 1998: 164–165), conflict (Black, 2011), and various forms of social control, such as law (Black, 1976), compensation (Black, 1998: 47–64), avoidance (Black, 1998: 79–83), homicide (Cooney, 1998), suicide (Manning, 2012), collective violence (Senechal de la Roche, 1996), and terrorism (Black, 2004b). The pure sociology of social control explains the reaction to a conflict with the social characteristics of those involved—called the *social geometry* of the conflict. Conflicts characterized by equality and independence between the disputants, for example, may be handled with avoidance (Baumgartner, 1988: 11; Black, 1998: 80), and those characterized by inequality and interdependence with suicide (Manning, 2012). Genocide, I have argued, occurs in response to ethnic conflicts characterized by social distance and inequality (Campbell, 2009: 160, 2010: 303). It is more likely when the antagonists lack cultural similarity, intimacy, interdependence, and other forms of social closeness, and when the aggressors have more authority, military power, and other forms of status than the targets. This is a theory of genocide as social control, and it can explain the occurrence of genocide (Campbell, 2009), the type of genocide (Campbell, 2011), and variation in participation and rescue (Campbell, 2009, 2010).[4] But most genocides also

[2]Often, for example, the target of a robbery fights back. In such cases, as sociologists Mark Cooney and Scott Phillips note, "the robber's violence is predatory, but the would-be victim's violent response is moralistic" (2002: 94).

[3]For example, Black (1983: 37) tells of a case in which a man robbed his girlfriend's sister to collect a debt for a baby carriage he had bought her. And criminologists Richard Wright and Scott Decker (1997: 69) found that on the rare occasions when armed robbers targeted someone they knew well, the targets were people they disliked or had fallen out with.

[4]Since it is a theory of social control, though, it does not explain the conflicts themselves—the conflicts that give rise to genocide. But recently I have drawn from Black's (2011) new theory of conflict to do just that (see Campbell, 2013).