

## Encountering Humanity's Dark Side: A Conversation about Perpetrators

Uğur Ümit Üngör

**O**n the occasion of the publication of Alex Hinton and Tony Robben's new book *Perpetrators: Encountering Humanity's Dark Side* (Stanford University Press, 2023), I conducted this interview over e-mail with the two authors about their new book. As two of the leading anthropologists in the field of violence research, they both have contributed immensely to the field of perpetrator studies. Alex Hinton has been facing and interviewing perpetrators ever since he set foot in Cambodia for his PhD research decades ago, and his seminal books *Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer* (2016) and *Why did they kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (2005) set the standard for perpetrator research. The same can be said for Tony Robben, who has sat across from Argentine generals and torturers and written about their perspectives in groundbreaking books such as *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (2005) and *Argentina Betrayed: Memory, Mourning, and Accountability* (2018), as well as the edited volume *Iraq at a Distance: What Anthropologists Can Teach Us About the War* (2011). In *Perpetrators: Encountering Humanity's Dark Side*, Hinton and Robben go beyond research and offer a glimpse into their methodological and theoretical reflections, as well as practical wisdom for the benefit of other researchers who face ruthless perpetrators and experience turbulent emotions when listening to perpetrators and their victims. What makes this book different from many others is its focus not only on the actual perpetration itself, or even the recently popular studies that examine methodological issues, but on how researchers cope with studying perpetration and perpetrators. In other words, it deals not only with the signal, but also with the noise, and as such, it does an admirable job in holding a mirror up to the researcher as well as their subjects.

**Uğur:** I'm so glad to have this conversation about your new book *Perpetrators: Encountering Humanity's Dark Side* because it touches upon several issues I have been dealing with for many years. In the spring of 2011, I published two books on the 1915 Armenian Genocide, which included sections and chapters on its perpetrators. The lack of primary sources on

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these men had always frustrated me, and I envied colleagues who had up close and personal access to perpetrators. Around that time, I began watching online video clips of the mass demonstrations in Syrian cities, clips that invariably ended with the Assad regime's armed men arresting, beating, and killing demonstrators in broad daylight. Now, I could witness the behavior of perpetrators online, and knew it was only a matter of time before there were opportunities to speak to them directly. In the meantime, we launched the *Journal of Perpetrator Research* in 2017, I wrote a book on paramilitarism, and finished the book *Assad's Militias and Mass Violence in Syria* (Cambridge University Press, 2023) focusing specifically on Syrian perpetrators. That book consists of interviews with Assad's paramilitaries (the *Shabbiha*), eyewitnesses and survivors of their massacres, unique leaked videos, and open source materials on the internet.

In 2018, I mustered my courage and contacted a young Syrian refugee whose Facebook profile featured photos of him holding an AK-47 in Damascus in 2011. Judging from his profile, I suspected he had taken part in the *Shabbiha* militias that Assad had unleashed on his society to violently repress the uprising. He was said to have been active in the neighborhood of al-Qusoor, from where the *Shabbiha* emerged to beat, arrest, and shoot demonstrators in the neighboring communities of Jobar. To my surprise, he agreed to meet me, and we had a cordial first meeting at a café. He came across as an apolitical young party animal whose hypermasculinity and need for 'living on the edge' was a mismatch with the dull Dutch town that the immigration authorities had assigned him to live in. I explained to him that I was writing a book on the wartime experiences of Syrians, concealing my true intentions of specifically researching Assad's perpetrators. After all, the reality of much perpetrator research is that its details are arcana, and one's inner thoughts and judgments are best kept from informants at the risk of rejection, threat, or worse. When we parted, in typically Syrian fashion, he invited me to have dinner at his place next time. A month later, I made my way to a colorless terraced house on the edge of town. A huge Staffordshire terrier greeted me in the doorway. It stared intensely into my eyes and silently began to growl. In a split-second, I realized it: this dog knew what my research was *really* about.

Your current book offers a profound and highly original reflection, indeed meditation, both on the field of perpetrator research, and on the researchers themselves. All politics is personal, goes a familiar jingle; but all scholarship certainly also is. Never before have such personal insights been combined with cutting-edge observations and sharp analyses of

the perpetration of mass violence. For me, too, perpetrator research became deeply personal when, like you both, I began having dreams about perpetrators.

Issam Zahreddin (1961-2017) was a Major-General of the Syrian Republican Guard, the elite shock troops who played a major role in the Assad regime's repression of the uprising and counterinsurgency campaign against the rebels. A dashing, herculean Druze from the southern region of Suwayda, Zahreddin had the reputation of a brutal, mid-level perpetrator, who shelled neighborhoods, besieged cities, dismembered bodies, and had entire groups of demonstrators executed. After a few weeks of intensive research on his crimes, I had a vivid dream. I am living in Suwayda amid the war, married to a local woman. But that relationship had been souring and I am on the edge of divorce, when I meet a young woman at a local bazaar. We start talking and get along well, and the dream gives me the warm comforting feeling of early courtship. We aren't dating yet, but with most men either dead, draft-dodging, or stuck at the front (it was unclear why I wasn't fighting), women's chances of finding a suitable partner are slim. So I think I have a good hand, but I am clearly underestimating the sectarian anxieties that are heightened during the conflict. One day, walking back from the market, a stranger approaches me and says: 'Hey man, you better watch out, General Issam is looking for you.' I freeze, and ask him why. 'You're not Druze. You think you can just come in here and date our women?' Terrified, I drop my shopping bags, run home, and get ready to leave Suwayda forever. A friend calls me on the phone: 'Dude, you're screwed, the whole town is talking about how General Issam is on his way to beat you up.' Frantically, I pack my bags, collect my money, run downstairs, and when I open the apartment gate, there he stands in the doorway. General Issam Zahreddin.

In light of my dream about General Issam and the field dreams which you analyze in your book, I wonder if dreaming about your fieldwork on violence and perpetrators is a professional deformation, a necessary evil, or even secondary traumatization. How have you interpreted your own dreams throughout time?

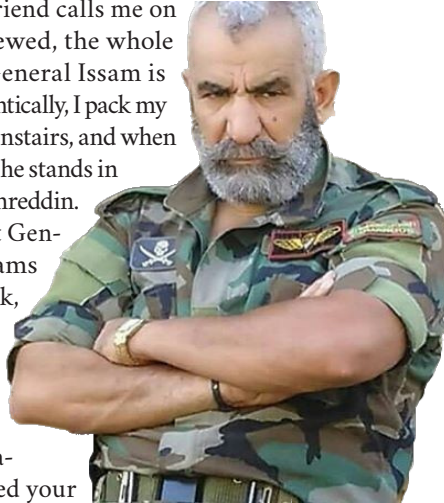


Figure 1: Colonel in the Syrian Republican Guard, Issam Zahreddin (1961-2017) Image by SANA Syrian Arab News Agency

**Alex:** Uğur, we want to thank you in advance for acting as the moderator of a conversation about our new book, and what a great question to start things off. As I talk about in our book chapter, 'Ruin,' there is a direct way in which perpetrator researchers are in a sense 'ruined' by what they study and grapple with each day. So too, I imagine, are people working in emotionally challenging places ranging from forensic crime scenes to emergency rooms - as dramatically revealed by those working on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. For many in such fields, like those working on perpetrator research, bad dreams come with the turf. But, as I emphasize in the chapter on 'Curation,' difficult dreams, even those that chill you upon waking from sleep or that emerge as full-blown nightmares, also provide a path to self-growth and a greater understanding of the human condition.

In terms of your question about how I have dealt with dreams throughout time, I have to return to my childhood. My father is a Jungian psychiatrist and dreams were a part of daily conversation. In our household, it was normal to write down, analyze, and talk about dream symbolism. This childhood attention to psychic process has stuck with me into adulthood and has informed my ongoing interpretation of dreams, including those I have had while undertaking fieldwork. But it's not easy. And while doing perpetrator research, I have had awful, violent dreams. Sometimes I go through phases where I don't remember my dreams at all, the battle we all wage with repression and the processing of difficult emotions.

Whatever the state of my dreams, they remain a sort of analytical, ethical, and psychological compass that helps guide me through perpetrator research. I think Tony's chapter on dreams underscores this point in a compelling and fascinating way, and I'll be curious to hear his reply to your question.

**Tony:** Alex's lifelong affinity with dreams is highly unusual in the anthropological and perpetrator research communities, Uğur. Few anthropologists are interested in dreams - neither the dreams of the people they study nor their own. This was very different during the first half of the twentieth century. Especially American anthropologists were influenced by Freud's dream theory and searched for cultural patterns in the dreams of their informants. The study of the unconscious received a boost during the Second World War. Anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, and Geoffrey Gorer collaborated with psychologists like Erich Fromm and Erik Erikson to help the war effort by

interpreting the 'national character' of their enemies and allies. Other scholars studied Hitler's personality. These national character studies continued into the Cold War. I guess that the growing critique of this too-often-reductionist approach and its neglect of intracultural diversity led anthropologists to turn away from the study of dreams, which Freud hailed as the royal road to the unconscious.

So even though dreaming about violence and perpetrators during fieldwork might be inevitable, as Alex suggests, this doesn't mean that anthropologists are in the habit of examining or even remembering their dreams. It was only after I entered psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires to understand its cultural significance through participant observation that I developed the ability to recall my dreams in the morning and write them down for the next consultation hour. I never dared ask Argentine perpetrators about their dreams. To do so was too personal and suspect in a country where dream analysis is common.

Fortunately, unlike Alex, I never had nightmares. I assume that the writing of fieldnotes and figuring out people's tragic lives, aside from my analysis three times a week, helped to avert the harmful consequences of studying violence. I continued recording dreams related to my fieldwork after I left Argentina, but they dropped off very quickly. Occasional dreams about perpetrators emerge when I'm writing, but their content revolves mostly around concerns about the writing process.

**Uğur:** Let's turn to a different specter that influences our thinking on perpetrators. Tony writes that he dreamt about Hitler, and his uncle was imprisoned in Auschwitz. Alex's research focus, S-21 prison, is often construed as the 'Cambodian Auschwitz.' Your research shows that Argentine officers and Khmer Rouge cadres reject such comparisons. How do you think Holocaust templates continue to inform and constrain academics' and perpetrators' imagination of perpetration?

**Alex:** Absolutely. The field of perpetrator studies is very much rooted in the study of Nazi atrocities, even as there are many other currents and streams that inform it. Freud is a good example. He thought deeply about pathology and motivation but not so much about the ideas of criminality, victimization, and violation that inform the construct of perpetration.

The Nuremberg, Auschwitz, and especially Eichmann trials were groundbreaking events that helped lay the ground for the study of perpetrators. This historical connection to Nazi atrocities is both a strength and a weakness of the field of perpetrator studies. It is important to

recognize how the field of genocide studies is informed by the Holocaust - condensed in the image of Auschwitz - that provides conceptual affordances but also blinds researchers and overly restricts the purview of the field.

The same is true of perpetrator studies. Holocaust templates are now global and pervade a wide range of discourses - not just scholarly work but also popular culture, ethics, and the politics of memory. The horrors of the Holocaust echo discursively around much of the world, taking local form in places like Cambodia Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum while also framed in relation to global norms, such as the 'never again' and 'never forget' imperatives.

It is notable that there are researchers in both genocide studies and perpetrator studies - and there is much overlap with those fields along with Holocaust studies - which are approaching perpetration with a much-needed critical lens. Your work on paramilitaries, Uğur, clearly fits in this critical tradition - as does Tony's work in Argentina. For me, the key is to always look for the ways in which we have become conceptually frozen or fear to look. This opens space for reimagining a field.

**Tony:** This is a challenging question, Uğur. The Holocaust is the most studied genocide in the world. The vast scholarly and literary work about the Holocaust has been a source of inspiration for me to understand other forms of mass violence. Also, the Holocaust is never far away in the Netherlands. My neighbor's house was requisitioned by SS officers during the Second World War. Down the street, there was a kindergarten run by students who succeeded in saving 150 Jewish children from deportation, and during a renovation in my house a hiding place was discovered under the bathroom floor. This familiarity with the Holocaust has helped but also hindered my study of Argentina's mass violence because the Holocaust has become a universal paradigm of evil and suffering, also in Argentina.

Argentine human rights activists and some judges and scholars have drawn parallels between Nazi Germany and dictatorial Argentina by using terms such as 'concentration camp' and 'genocidal perpetrators' to denounce the regime's enforced disappearances. In 1981, the prominent newspaper director Jacobo Timerman published an account of his four-day disappearance. The book became an international best seller and sealed the portrayal of Argentine officers as Nazis because Timerman equated the junta's ideology with Nazism. Several Argentine scholars and most human rights activists eventually embraced this compari-

son to interpret the systematic disappearances as genocide - mistakenly, in my opinion. I explain their adoption of the genocide frame as a means to mourn the immense losses experienced by the victim-survivors and the bereaved relatives. They cope with their suffering by imagining the disappearances as the most extreme form of violence known to humankind: genocide. In this way, the Argentine scholars who advocate the Holocaust template enter into a moral alliance with victims and survivors.

Argentine perpetrators uniformly reject a comparison of Argentina's disappearances and the Holocaust, which according to them occurred in historically different times and involved different ideologies, rationales, organizational structures, and operating procedures. Veterans of the military dictatorship don't want to be seen as the paradigmatic example of evil, especially when they are convinced that they saved the Argentine people from a communism that caused tens of millions of dead in China and the Soviet Union and that brought on the Cambodian killing fields analyzed with so much depth by Alex.

**Uğur:** Claude Lanzmann famously recorded some interviews with Nazi perpetrators secretly, and General Díaz Bessone was 'unintentionally taped' confessing to the rationale behind the disappearances. The Indian magazine *Tehelka* managed to uncover crucial facts and details about the 2002 Gujarat massacre, only by recording the perpetrators secretly. I wonder whether this is always a violation of anthropology's code of ethics, so I'd like to ask you about a major methodological issue, that of dissimulation and pretense. What is the role of dissimulation in interviewing perpetrators? Alex uses an 'indirect method of questioning' and Tony writes: 'I pretended to accept their discourse at face value and probed further into their justification.' But in an authoritarian context, it seems we should go even farther, since there are such clear (and deadly) limits to sitting down with a perpetrator and having an open, recorded interview. Why should we accord the perpetrators the ethical deference anyway, and what stops us from launching a sting operation or following Scheper-Hughes' method of 'undercover ethnography'?

**Tony:** Many thanks, Uğur, for asking yet again a question that touches upon the heart of perpetrator research. We are facing interlocutors who tend to hide their darkest secrets because they want to leave a favorable impression and certainly don't want to incriminate themselves. This deception raises epistemological and ethical issues. Will covert research reveal unique insights, and what are the consequences of such an approach?



Let me start with addressing the epistemological issue. Scholars have a tendency to attribute much value to data that are hard to get. Anthropologists have submitted themselves to painful initiation rituals to learn secret knowledge. This raises questions about how we can access the darker side of perpetrators and what we have learned once we do.

Let me give an example. On one occasion, an Argentine officer gestured that I should stop the tape recorder. He then told me something off the record which later turned out to be completely false. It makes me wonder about the reliability of confidential information and whether covert ethnographic research will yield data that could not be obtained otherwise.

I believe that, aside from the proverbial smoking gun, a great deal of information can be acquired in other ways. This has been shown for decades by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and by the investigative journalists of Bellingcat who have used the internet to document human rights violations by the Syrian government.

At the same time, I realize that undercover ethnography may sometimes lead to shocking revelations that help provide a better understanding and may even provide legal evidence of serious crimes. Nancy Scheper-Hughes succeeded in putting several organ traffickers behind bars thanks to her covert work. In no way do I condemn her or have any doubts about her good intentions, but I worry about the wider consequences if this approach becomes common practice. Will the secretly taped perpetrators ever talk to the ethnographer again after discovering they were tricked, and for that matter, will other perpetrators ever talk to any researcher again? Is the veil of suspicion cast over researchers worth the short-term gain? Please, don't misunderstand: I'm not against public and engaged anthropology, providing expert testimonies in court, or sharing information with human rights organizations, but I do have grave doubts about covert fieldwork because I continue to believe in the ethics of transparency. We should do our utmost to uncover the violence ordered and inflicted by perpetrators, but we are not criminal investigators or human rights monitors. I don't feel any moral obligation to protect the reputation of proven perpetrators, as I show in our book, but I do feel ethically obligated to my colleagues and our discipline for not jeopardizing future research projects. What are your thoughts on this, Alex?

**Alex:** It's hard to know where to begin since the dilemma raised by Tony about undercover fieldwork has so many layers to it. But perhaps I can



start with a figuration discussed in Chapter 1, the chimera, the imaginary of the perpetrator as monster that stands as a first obstacle to research, covert or not. Let's set aside the question of professional ethics for the moment and just consider how having an already coalesced view of the person being interviewed - as a perpetrator-monster - skews research.

A key to perpetrator research is to try to understand such preconceptions we might have and seek, as best as we are able and while being aware of the dynamics of the interview situation, to meet our interviewee, regardless of what they have done, on the ground of shared humanity. It's a bit ironic, I know, given that perpetrators destroy the humanity of their victims. But it is only on this ground, I have found, that we can begin to better understand perpetrators and perpetration.

I'm not one to condemn others on the basis of institutional ethics. After years of research on genocide and mass violence, I'm very wary of moralisms and the way they are too often bound up with ideologies of hate. But it's important to bear in mind the history of human subject protections, which, despite their bureaucratization, excesses, absurdities, and enmeshment with the fear of lawsuits, are meant to serve as a buffer against harming other human beings. These concerns emerged out of a backdrop of research that damaged the subjects in the name of science - not just the Nazi and Japanese medical experiments during World War II but also situations like Philip Zimbardo's Stanford prison experiments in the 1970s.

All of this is a long way of noting that there are good reasons to be cautious about surreptitious research methods that are claimed to be legitimate because the other is 'a perpetrator.' This figuration involves a loaded set of assumptions that may lead to a few good quotes but more often bad perpetrator research. The research encounter is never neutral, but we can strive to meet on the grounds of humanity, where understanding hopefully emerges from dialogue. Along these lines, I'm reminded of the US debate about torturing suspected terrorists after 9/11. Harsh and deceptive interrogation techniques rarely worked. Instead, the best information was achieved through patiently built-up rapport, although a rapport of acknowledgment (of humanity) not one of emotional closeness.

**Uğur:** One of the earliest books on genocide that inspired me was *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide* (2002), which was edited by Alex, so let's focus on the notion of difference for a minute. We often assume, rather schematically, the interchangeable nature of

perpetrators in significantly different 'cultures' (in the broadest sense of the concept). But what does an illiterate Cambodian villager have in common with an Argentine army bureaucrat? In which ways does the former become a perpetrator differently from the latter?

**Tony:** This is a tough question because of the major status differences among the two perpetrators and the cultural, historical, and political variations between the two countries. Perpetrators are not one-dimensional violent actors but have particular functions, personalities, social backgrounds, and goals in life. Yet, as you and Kjell Anderson have shown in your illuminating tripartite model, perpetrators can nevertheless be classified from high to low on the organizational scale, irrespective of the national circumstances. An Argentine or Cambodian torturer differs in many ways from Lieutenant-General Videla or Prime Minister Pol Pot. Perpetrators make those distinctions themselves. Once, I told an Argentine general that I had interviewed a lieutenant-colonel who had tortured captives. I forgot to say that he was a first lieutenant during the dictatorship. The general burst out: 'A lieutenant-colonel? Then he must be a sadist!' It was obvious to him that low-ranking officers may torture people but not when they move up the ladder. This prompts the question of what low- and mid-level perpetrators have in common. Can we compare the Holocaust's principal organizer Adolf Eichmann to the concentration camp guard John Demjanjuk?

We should be careful not to concentrate exclusively on violence. A framework that centers narrowly on, say, genocide or hate crimes ignores the gradual process through which perpetrators are coaxed into acts of violence on behalf of the state, a terrorist organization, or a racist group. A singular focus on violent action leads to a biased portrayal of perpetrators. Instead, we must give thought to the multiple facets of perpetrators that emerge under complex personal and political circumstances.

Researchers need to extend the meaning of the term perpetrator to those who are participants in atrocity crimes that are committed to serve a greater cause at whichever organizational and operational level. This includes guards, physicians, informers, and hate preachers without whose support the atrocious crimes would not have taken place. I'm aware that this delimitation is debatable. There are no universal criteria. Researchers need to weigh each and every case. Still, I maintain that the types of perpetrators we are discussing in our book are always political actors, in the sense that they don't act primarily for personal motives. Perpetrators exercise power over others in positions organized and

approved by their comrades or superiors. They may steal for personal enrichment, but theft is an ordinary criminal act.

Another commonality among perpetrators is that they dehumanize people. When people are regarded as 'cockroaches,' as happened to the Tutsis during the Rwandan genocide, or as class enemies who pose an existential threat, as was common in the Soviet Union and communist Cambodia, then perpetrators feel morally justified to harm others. The same is of course true for policemen who regard migrant workers and homeless people as 'animals,' or for Islamist jihadists who defend indiscriminate attacks on Jews and Christians considered 'infidels.'

**Alex:** Thanks for this great question, Uğur. It goes straight to the heart of one of the areas in which perpetrator research often becomes conceptually frozen. How do we produce our analytical and conceptual differentiations and what are the entailments? Perpetrator studies has a particular problem with typological hypostasis in this regard. It is a field predicated on a figuration - the perpetrator - and its doppelgänger, ranging from the monster to the 'ordinary man.' 'Man or Monster?' as the refrain goes. My book on Duch, the head of the S-21 interrogation center, plays on this trope while reworking Hannah Arendt to consider the banality of everyday thought, or how one of the key microdynamics of violence involves the erasures that are part of the way human beings - individually and institutionally - articulate their realities, including differentiating constructions of us and them.

This idea speaks directly to the notion of difference you mention, but in terms of process. Perpetrator studies too often gets stuck in static typologies due to the figuration with which the field is bound, one of which is to juxtapose the perpetrator as a 'monster' to the perpetrator as 'an ordinary human being' like you or me. Another figuration that has had much influence on the field is Hannah Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann as the embodiment of the banality of evil. There is, of course, great diversity in the field and some scholars focus on dynamics and process. But quite a bit of perpetrator research is informed by 'the perpetrator' figuration with its criminal overtones - and by implication the objectivity and rationality of perpetrator research.

How has the field sought to deal with this? One common move, and we make it our introduction, is to deploy analytical difference to distinguish between the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels or the parallel scheme of killers, organizers, and architects developed by you and Kjell Anderson. While these schemes can be used in different ways, including dynamic

ones, they may also lead to the assumption that the killers are somehow categorically different from the architects. And even these terms inflect our attention in a particular direction, foregrounding and backgrounding issues - such as the 'killer' category, which erases related forms of violence, ranging from torture to those who detain and guard victims, which is not in line with the executioner connotations of killers, which is why we prefer the term 'facilitators.' So, to return full circle, I would urge researchers to focus on process and be very careful with typologies, even as they can, when used with care (as you and Kjell do in your excellent essay, 'From Perpetrators to Perpetration: Definitions, Typologies, and Processes'), be useful analytical containers and facilitate research. The problem arises when we get stuck in the language of these perpetrator containers and can't see out of them.

The issue of culture speaks further to this point, since the very idea of perpetrator is enmeshed in a particular linguistic tradition and intellectual genealogy. What would it mean if we began our research with local glosses for perpetrator? It would, I would wager, disrupt our disciplinary assumptions and enable us to see the perpetrator in different sorts of ways. Like Tony, I'm biased in this regard as an anthropologist, and I always ask myself how global or transitional justice is understood by people on the ground. I have taken this line of analysis in my research at times, such as in my book *The Justice Facade: Trials of Transition in Cambodia* (2018), which asks how 'global justice' is understood by people on the ground, for whom such imaginaries may not be primary and, for some, not very relevant at all.

**Uğur:** I was always taught that detached analysis is the only reliable way for academic knowledge production. But I have come to see non-academic approaches such as literature, art, and film as valuable contributions to our understanding of violence and perpetration, because they begin exactly where scholarship can no longer probe deeper. For example, Vasily Grossman, Edgar Hilsenrath, or Jonathan Littell have imagined perpetration in their literary work. Considering the multifarious silences in violence, such as the perpetrators' tendency not to leave a paper trail, or the victims' tendency to keep silent in fear or shame, how can we mobilize the human imagination to enter that darkness?

**Alex:** What a perfect question as our discussion draws to a close. You touch on an issue that traverses all of our work but also the chapters of our book.

With regard to the former, and I'll be curious to see what Tony has to say, I was trained in exactly the same manner. If, when I was a graduate student, the grounds of anthropological research were shifting due to postmodernism, which included experimental writing strategies, it was still for many, if not most, anthropologists' 'research' in the end - even if there were demands for reflexivity and positioning that became standard.

If I was wary of some of the more extreme entailments of postmodernism, especially given my commitment to what is now called public anthropology, I was influenced by postmodernism's experimentation and disruptiveness in the sense of unsettling assumptions. I started off writing in a more traditional ethnographic style and undertook these last two dimensions of postmodernism in much of my more recent work. These influences also undergird our book to an extent. It weaves together different sorts of writing, both more traditional academic expository prose and literary forms, which are underscored by the interludes. It is this sort of open-ended and dialogic style of writing, as opposed to the door shutting of detached analysis, which is more needed in much of academia but especially in perpetrator studies, given the acts that are the focus of its attention.

I would suggest that, along with traditional exposition, which has its place, we very much need to write in ways that mobilize the imagination and promote critical self-awareness in the sense of Adorno and the Frankfurt School. Seemingly detached 'scientific' analysis often impedes such critical thinking. We should impart knowledge and insight but in a way that doesn't foreclose thinking but instead opens new doors that readers step through on their own, making their own creative and imaginative act. Our scholarship needs to unloosen and unfreeze, not petrify.

**Tony:** Uğur, you are touching a problem that troubles us all as scholars, whether we are astrophysicists, historians, or anthropologists. Scientific work inevitably involves imagination, which I understand as the leap of interpretation beyond a limited grasp of the world. We draw inferences from our theories and generalize on the basis of a partial knowledge of what is, in our research, principally a human-made reality. Writing about perpetrators and perpetratorhood is challenging because mass violence is overdetermined. It has personal, psychological, social, political, and cultural ramifications that interact with one another. This is why genocide and mass violence can sometimes traumatize entire societies, as I elaborated in my book *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*. A common characteristic of traumatized societies is the compulsive remem-

bering of indelible atrocities in a desperate effort to give them meaning. This search will run up against representational difficulties. Even such formidable writers as Tadeusz Borowski, Primo Levi, and Elie Wiesel had to admit defeat when describing their experiences in Nazi concentration camps. At the same time, there are authors, such as Martin Amis and Jonathan Littell, who have provided impressive literary accounts of the Holocaust and its perpetrators. Or think of the devastating film *Son of Saul* about Auschwitz made by László Nemes when he was only in his thirties. Such artistic expressions hover over and inspire our writing. At the same time, artistic creations rely very much on the testimonies of survivors and the systematic work of scholars.

Until recently, I have been reluctant to incorporate literary sources in my work and have shied away from experimental writing. I tried to remain as close as possible to my oral and written sources whose more conventional narration involves already sufficient ethnographic imagination. Writing as a scholar about mass violence based on face-to-face encounters with perpetrators and victim-survivors requires an ethical responsibility to truthfulness - partial though it may be - that reduces the room for interpretational freedom. At the same time, I acknowledge that creative writing can convey emotions and experiences that expository writing cannot. I have tried to do so in ghostwriting our book's interludes about Argentina, by including a bit of family history in the analysis of my dreams about perpetrators, and by drawing on the novel *The Stranger* by Albert Camus to show how perpetrators can be represented as contradictory human beings instead of immoral, one-dimensional figures.

Thank you again, Uğur, for these wonderful questions. We really appreciate your taking the time to carefully read and deeply engage with *Perpetrators: Encountering Humanity's Dark Side*, and hope that we can continue this fruitful conversation in the future.

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