

Chains of Command: From Eichmann to the Drone Operator – Moral Distance and the Bureaucratization of Killing

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Agenda

Overview of the presentation structure and key topics to be covered

Research Agenda & Structure

- ◆ **Introduction:** Genocide definition challenges and Palestinian case study
- ◆ Conceptual genealogy from Nazi bureaucracy to drone warfare
- ◆ Analysis of moral distancing mechanisms
- ◆ Institutional frameworks transforming violence into procedure
- ◆ **Conclusion:** Structural patterns in bureaucratic killing

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Research Context

Problem domain, current state of the field, and research gaps

Current State of the Field

- ◆ Extensive literature on bureaucratic violence (Arendt, Bauman, Weber)
- ◆ Growing research on technology-mediated warfare and drone ethics
- ◆ Legal scholarship on genocide definitions and contested applications
- ◆ Critical studies on language and discourse in conflict analysis
- ◆ Limited integration of historical bureaucracy with modern technological systems

Research Gap & Challenge

1

Conceptual Integration Gap

Lack of comprehensive framework connecting historical bureaucratic violence with contemporary technological mediation

2

Definitional Instability

Genocide as contested category creates analytical challenges in recognizing systematic violence

3

Procedural Absolution

How institutional frameworks transform ethical questions into administrative procedures

03

Motivation & Objectives

Why this research matters and what questions it seeks to answer

Research Motivation

- ◆ Examine how bureaucratic systems transform direct violence into administrative procedures
- ◆ Analyze the creation of moral distance that diffuses individual responsibility
- ◆ Understand difficulty in defining genocide and recognizing systematic violence
- ◆ Investigate contested cases like Palestine where violence becomes invisible or deniable
- ◆ Explore how institutional frameworks render ethical engagement systematically precluded

Key Research Questions

1

Genealogical Question

How does moral distance operate as structural mechanism from Nazi bureaucracy to drone warfare?

2

Transformational Question

How do classification systems transform from administration logic to erasure grammar?

3

Agency Question

How do command hierarchies disperse agency and preclude ethical engagement?

4

Discursive Question

How do discursive practices simultaneously acknowledge and deny violence?

04

Methodology

Research approach, design, and analytical framework

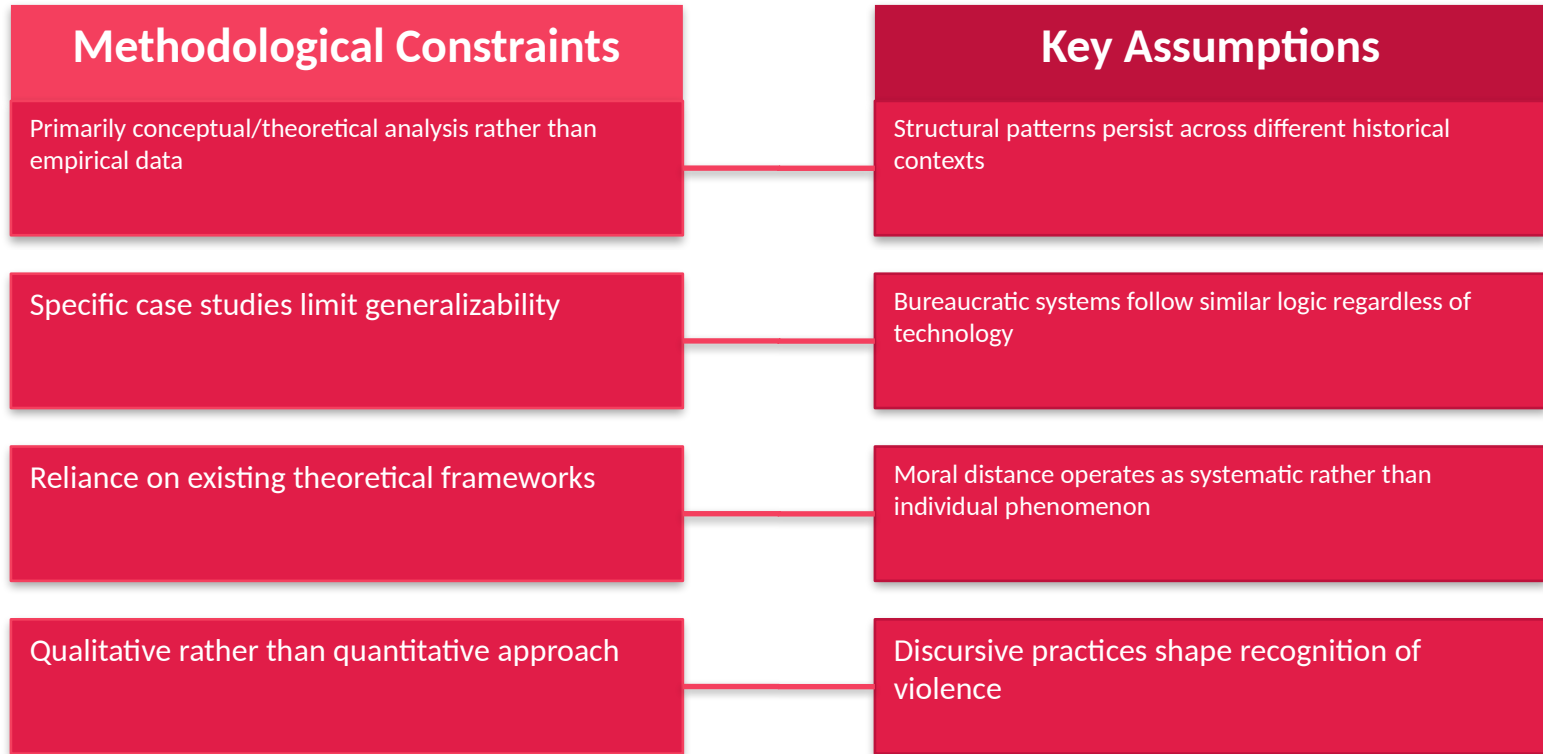
Research Approach & Design

- ◆ Conceptual genealogy tracing historical continuities in bureaucratic violence
- ◆ Comparative case study analysis (Nazi bureaucracy, drone warfare, Palestine)
- ◆ Discourse analysis of genocide definitions and contested applications
- ◆ Structural analysis of command hierarchies and procedural systems
- ◆ Theoretical framework building on Arendt, Bauman, and contemporary critical theory

Methodological Process



Methodological Constraints & Assumptions



Analytical Framework: Moral Distancing



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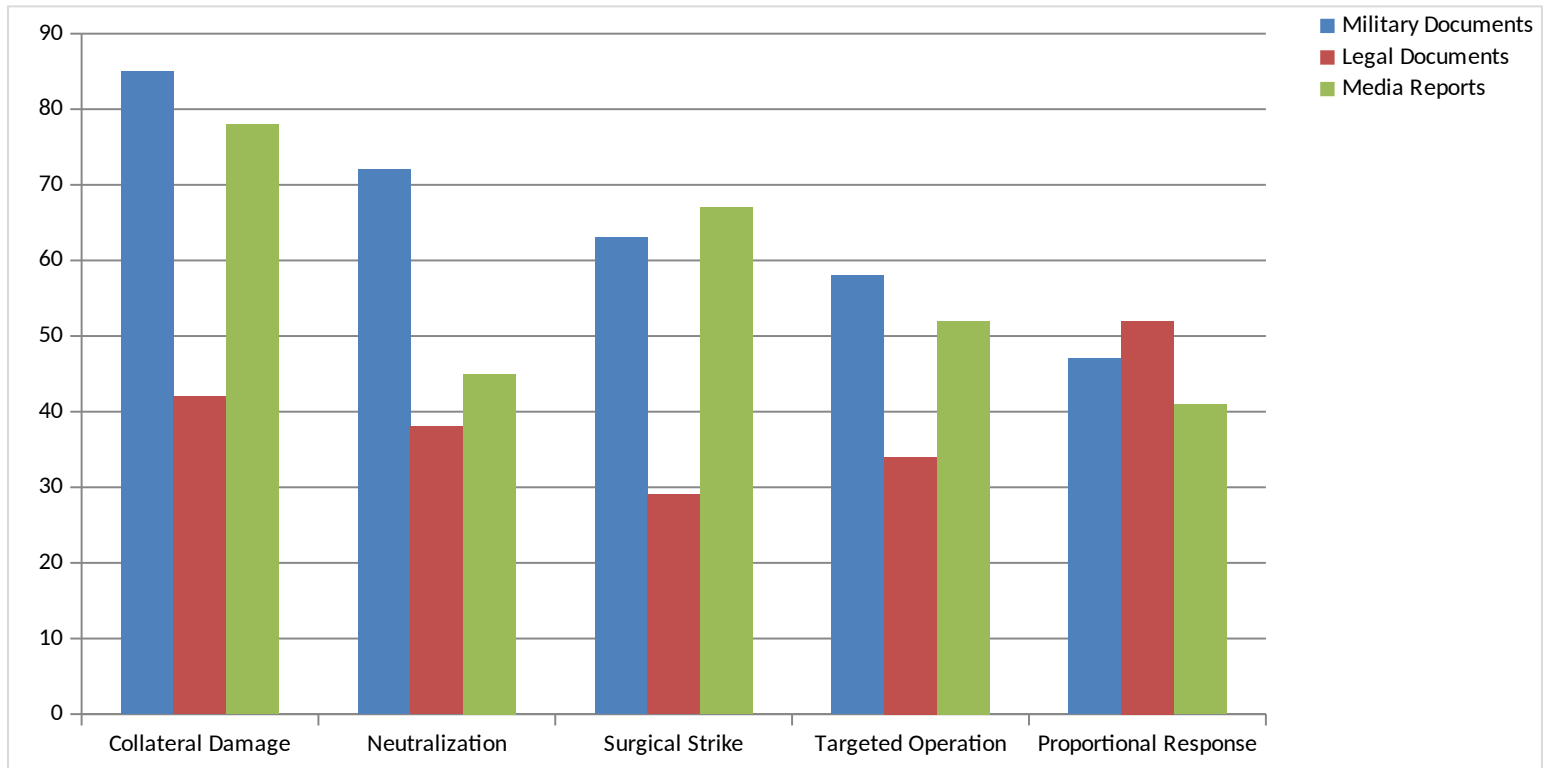
Results & Analysis

Main findings from the conceptual genealogy and case study analysis

Patterns of Bureaucratic Transformation

Historical Context	Bureaucratic Mechanism	Moral Distancing Effect	Contemporary Parallel
Nazi Administration	Classification & Categorization	Dehumanization through paperwork	Algorithmic target classification
Industrial Killing	Division of Labor	Diffusion of responsibility	Drone operator chain of command
Legal Frameworks	Procedural Compliance	Ethics replaced by rules	Rules of engagement protocols
Language Systems	Euphemistic Terminology	Violence linguistically obscured	Military technical jargon

Quantitative Analysis of Discursive Patterns



Case Study Analysis: Palestinian Context

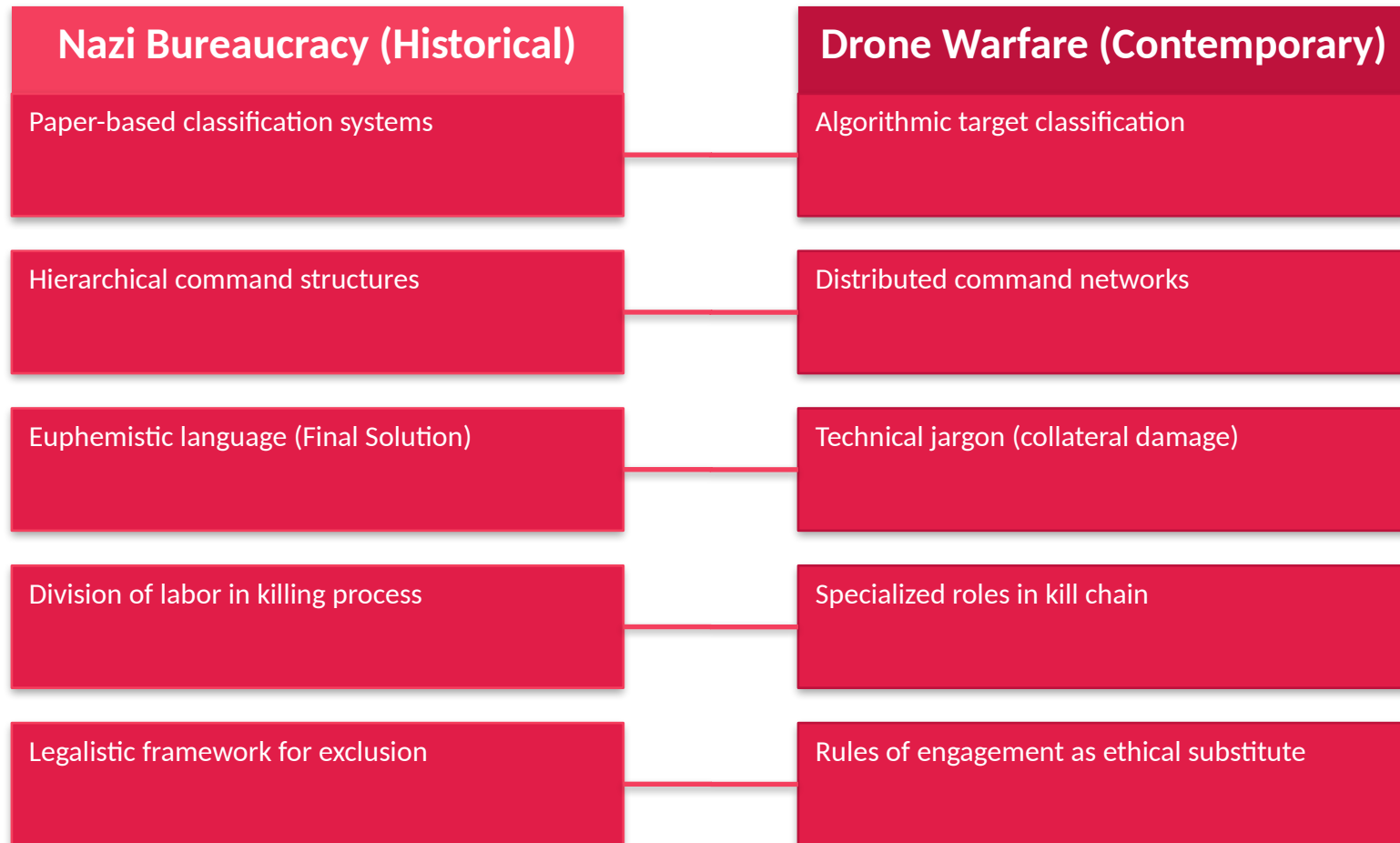
Discursive Mechanisms of Denial

- ◆ Perpetual debate over genocide definitions
- ◆ Focus on legal technicalities over human suffering
- ◆ Academic division creating analytical paralysis
- ◆ Media framing as 'conflict' rather than systematic violence

Structural Mechanisms of Erasure

- ◆ Bureaucratic classification of casualties as statistics
- ◆ Procedural frameworks that delay recognition
- ◆ Institutional hierarchies diffusing responsibility
- ◆ Technological mediation creating physical distance

Comparative Analysis: Historical vs Contemporary



Key Contributions Summary

1

Conceptual Genealogy

Traces continuity from Nazi bureaucracy to contemporary drone warfare, revealing persistent structural patterns

2

Moral Distancing Framework

Develops 'moral distancing' as systematic mechanism transforming killing into administrative procedure

3

Classification Analysis

Demonstrates how classification systems transform from administration logic to grammar of erasure

4

Agency Dispersion

Analyzes how command hierarchies disperse agency and systematically preclude ethical engagement

Limitations & Future Research Directions

Current Limitations

- ◆ Primarily conceptual analysis needs empirical validation
- ◆ Case study focus may limit generalizability
- ◆ Reliance on secondary historical sources
- ◆ Limited examination of resistance mechanisms

Future Research Directions

- ◆ Application to other contexts of systematic violence
- ◆ Examination of algorithmic command structures in modern warfare
- ◆ Investigation of resistance to bureaucratic moral distancing
- ◆ Empirical studies of drone operator psychology

Broader Implications & Applications

- ◆ Provides analytical framework for understanding modern warfare ethics
- ◆ Offers tools for recognizing bureaucratic violence in institutional settings
- ◆ Contributes to genocide studies methodology
- ◆ Informs policy on military command structures and accountability
- ◆ Supports legal frameworks for addressing diffused responsibility

Conclusions

- ◆ Moral distance operates as structural mechanism transforming killing into procedure
- ◆ Bureaucratic classification systems evolve from administration to erasure
- ◆ Command hierarchies systematically disperse agency and preclude ethical engagement
- ◆ Contemporary technological mediation reproduces historical patterns of bureaucratic violence
- ◆ The difficulty in defining responsibility stems from systematic architectures of command

References & Acknowledgments

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Thank You!

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Project Archive: github.com/bureaucratic-violence-study