




Rationalizing the Unthinkable: Bureaucracy, Data, and the Calculus of Death

Anastasia Kozlov, Natasha Sokolov, Anastasia Kozlov
Technology University, Buyan Island; Institute of Sciences,
Belovodye; Imperial University, Kitezkh



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Presentation Outline

A structured overview of our investigation into the bureaucratic rationalization of mass violence

Research Agenda

- ◆ **Introduction:** Conceptual instability of genocide definitions
- ◆ **Methodology:** Systematic conceptual analysis framework
- ◆ **Results:** Analysis of bureaucratic/data-driven systems enabling mass violence
- ◆ **Conclusion:** Calculus of death as mechanism transforming atrocities into administrative operations
- ◆ **Discussion:** Implications for contemporary governance and human rights

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Research Context

Situating the study within genocide studies and biopolitical theory

The Definitional Crisis of Genocide

Conceptual Instability

- ◆ Raphael Lemkin's original formulation (1944) emphasized systematic destruction of national groups
- ◆ UN Genocide Convention (1948) established legal framework but created definitional gaps
- ◆ Academic discourse split between contestability advocates and operational definition proponents
- ◆ Benjamin Meiches highlights discursive double binds in genocide recognition

Political Contestation

- ◆ Palestinian case exemplifies hyper-visibility through documentation alongside systematic denial
- ◆ Judith Butler's framework of "grievable lives" reveals power dynamics in recognition
- ◆ Procedural barriers transform substantive claims into endless evidentiary requirements
- ◆ Epistemological crisis: How do we recognize mass violence in data-driven era?

Motivation & Research Objectives

1

Core Research Question

How do bureaucratic and data-driven systems transform moral atrocities into administrative operations?

2

Primary Objective

Develop the 'calculus of death' analytic framework to trace rationalization of violence

3

Critical Focus

Expose how classification systems evolve from moral complexity to epistemic closure

4

Related Work & Theoretical Foundations

- ◆ **Foucault's Biopolitics (1978):** State power to "make live and let die" operationalized through administration
- ◆ **Lemkin's Genocide Theory:** Emphasis on systematic destruction of group existence
- ◆ **Weberian Bureaucracy:** Rational-legal authority enabling moral disengagement
- ◆ **Contemporary Surveillance Studies:** Algorithmic governance and predictive analytics
- ◆ **Critical Data Studies:** How data collection and classification shape social reality
- ◆ **Limitation:** Existing work often separates historical biopolitics from contemporary data systems

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Methodological Framework

Systematic conceptual analysis tracing historical to contemporary rationalization

Research Design & Approach



Detailed Methodology - Part 1

- ◆ **Systematic Conceptual Analysis:** Tracing evolution of classification systems from 19th century to present
- ◆ **Discourse Analysis:** Examining bureaucratic language in administrative documents and policy papers
- ◆ **Historical Comparative Method:** Analyzing continuity between colonial administration and contemporary data systems
- ◆ **Case Selection:** Palestinian context selected for extensive documentation and contemporary relevance
- ◆ **Data Sources:** UN reports, Israeli administrative documents, demographic surveys, predictive policing algorithms

Detailed Methodology - Part 2

Analytical Framework

- ◆ Three-level analysis: Conceptual, operational, technological
- ◆ Temporal analysis: Historical continuity and contemporary innovation
- ◆ Spatial analysis: Territorial administration and demographic management
- ◆ Epistemic analysis: How knowledge production enables/excludes recognition

Validation Approach

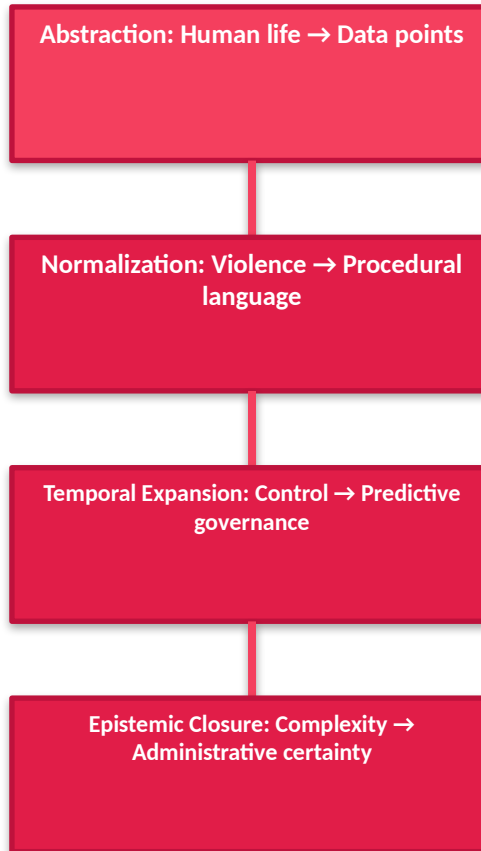
- ◆ Triangulation: Multiple data sources and methodological approaches
- ◆ Peer debriefing: Regular consultation with genocide studies experts
- ◆ Negative case analysis: Examining instances where recognition occurred
- ◆ Theoretical saturation: Continuing analysis until no new themes emerge

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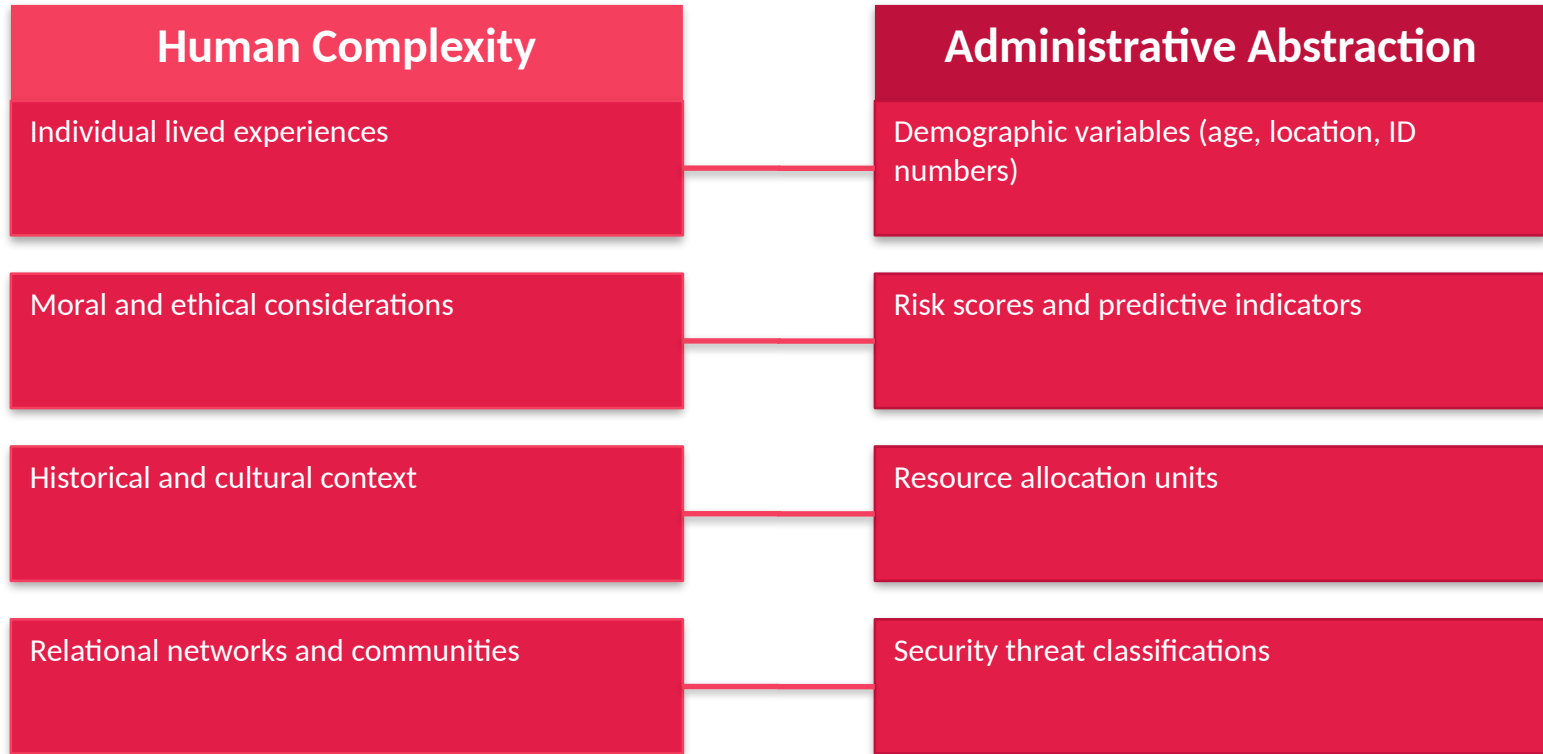
Analytical Framework

Introducing the 'calculus of death' as a mechanism for rationalizing violence

Framework Components & Processes



Process 1: Abstraction of Human Life



Process 2: Normalization Through Procedure

- ◆ **Bureaucratic Language:** "Administrative measures" replace "violence" or "atrocities"
- ◆ **Procedural Framing:** Focus on process compliance rather than substantive outcomes
- ◆ **Legal Technicalities:** Using jurisdictional arguments to avoid substantive engagement
- ◆ **Evidentiary Standards:** Requiring impossible levels of proof for recognition
- ◆ **Temporal Management:** Slowing recognition through procedural delays and appeals

Process 3: Temporal Expansion Through Prediction

1

Predictive Governance

Algorithmic systems anticipate future behaviors, justifying preemptive control

2

Demographic Analytics

Population management through birth rates, migration patterns, resource allocation

3

Security Forecasting

Risk assessment algorithms identifying "future threats" requiring intervention

4

Systemic Integration

Multiple predictive systems creating self-reinforcing control mechanisms

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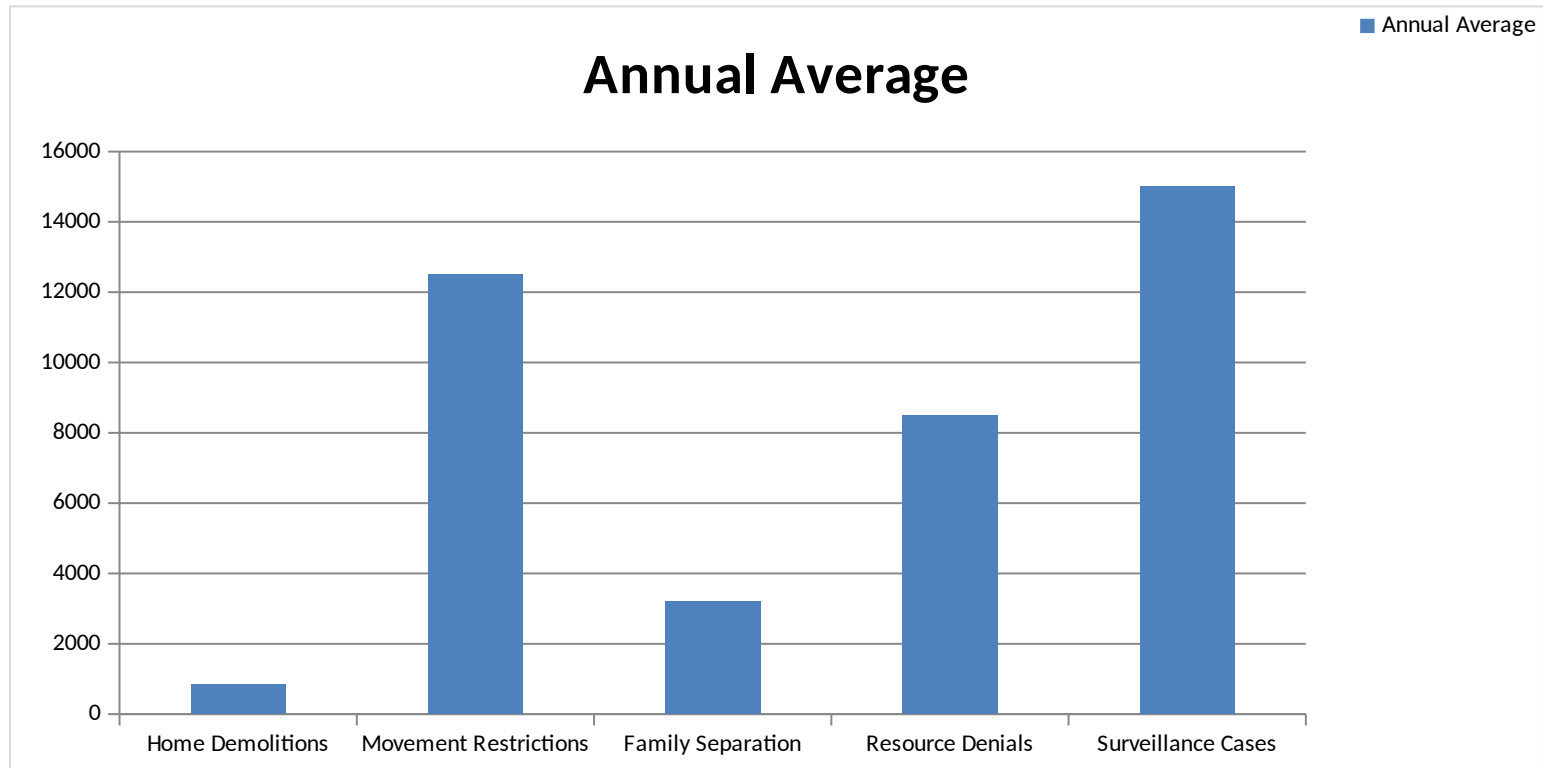
Empirical Analysis

Applying the framework to contemporary Palestinian demographic management

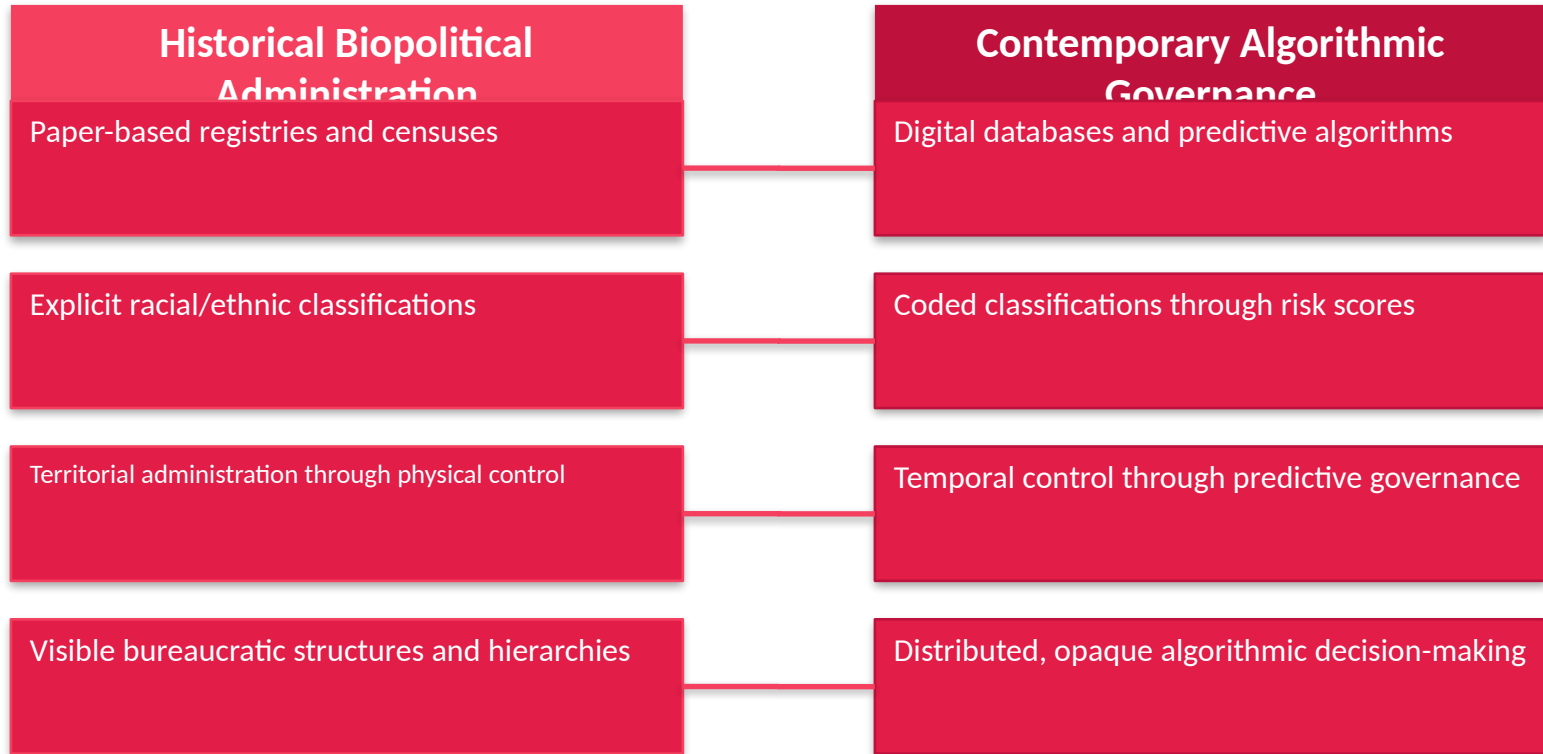
Administrative Systems in Practice

System Type	Administrative Function	Human Impact	Data Transformation
Population Registry	Demographic tracking and control	Restricted movement, family separation	Individuals → ID numbers with permissions
Planning Committees	Spatial allocation and development	Home demolitions, settlement expansion	Communities → zoning categories
Security Algorithms	Risk assessment and prediction	Targeted arrests, surveillance	Behaviors → threat scores
Resource Management	Water, electricity, building permits	Infrastructure deprivation	Needs → allocation formulas

Quantitative Analysis of Administrative Violence



Comparative Analysis: Historical to Contemporary



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Research Outcomes

Synthesizing insights from the calculus of death analysis

Major Contributions

1

Analytic Framework

Developed the 'calculus of death' framework connecting historical biopolitics to contemporary data systems

2

Conceptual Genealogy

Traced evolution from colonial administration to algorithmic surveillance systems

3

Process Identification

Identified three interconnected processes enabling rationalization of violence

4

Empirical Demonstration

Documented how predictive governance systematically erases Palestinian life

Limitations & Future Research

Current Limitations

- ◆ Primary focus on Palestinian context requires comparative validation
- ◆ Limited access to proprietary algorithmic systems and training data
- ◆ Historical analysis constrained by archival availability
- ◆ Methodological challenge of studying systems designed for opacity

Future Directions

- ◆ Comparative studies of other contexts using similar administrative systems
- ◆ Technical analysis of specific predictive algorithms and their training data
- ◆ Longitudinal study of classification system evolution over decades
- ◆ Development of counter-frameworks for recognizing violence in data systems

Conclusions & Implications

- ◆ The 'calculus of death' transforms moral atrocities into administrative operations through data abstraction
- ◆ Contemporary genocide recognition requires understanding algorithmic governance and predictive systems
- ◆ Bureaucratic rationality enables systematic violence while maintaining procedural legitimacy
- ◆ Palestinian case demonstrates hyper-visibility of suffering alongside systematic epistemic erasure
- ◆ Resistance requires challenging both substantive violence and the administrative systems that enable it

Thank You!

For questions: research@techuniv.bu

Project Archive: genocide-studies.org/calculus-of-death