

Timothy Snyder: The War in Ukraine and the Question of Genocide

Genocide is underway. If we don't see it, the failure is ours

Boston University, 28. 10. 2022

<https://snyder.substack.com/p/the-war-in-ukraine-and-the-question#details>

„We will kill one million, we will kill 5 million, we will obliterate them all.“

„We will drive the children to the raging river, we will throw the children into burning huts“.

„They should not exist at all, we should execute them by firing squad.“ [0:35]

It's an honor to be here at Boston University today to take part in the inauguration of this new major "Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights". I come to this program, this university and this topic, the topic being "The War in Ukraine and the Question of Genocide", as a historian. Genocide is a legal term. I'm going to be speaking to you about that legal term, but I also like to remind you and ask you to keep in mind that genocide is also a human test. That the legal character of the word "Genocide" can also provide us ways of escaping what might seem to be the human obligations. [1:22]

Before I make this argument I want to acknowledge that I would not be speaking to you here today about this topic were it not for the basic fact that Ukrainians have chosen to resist a genocidal war. This discussion and all other discussions about genocide, human rights and for that matter democracy and it's future have been radically changed and in deed enabled by the fact that Ukraine is now resisting Russia. And the arguments that I will make depend to a very large degree on the work of Ukrainian journalists, who are working under conditions of great risk, as well as the work of Ukrainian and other historians. [2:02]

So history is many things. It's the search for patterns, it's the search for the telling detail, it's the search for the patterns and the details that allow us to shake ourselves out of the everyday, it's the search for the patterns and the details that allow us to see something, maybe something very important that otherwise we might not see. And seeing is important, because if we do see, for example a genocide, that makes it impossible for us to be a bystander. Once you see a genocide, you could no longer stand by, either you're on the side of the perpetrators or you're on the side of the victims. Once you see it. And therefore much of our mental energy goes into not seeing genocides. [2:50]

My thesis in this lecture about the war in Ukraine and the question of genocide is that this war has been a genocidal war from the beginning. That it was announced as a genocidal war, that it's been prosecuted as a genocidal war, and in deed today, as I speak to you right now, it is being prosecuted as a genocidal war. [3:14]

I'm gonna structure this talk around the objections to this thesis, because, as I've just said, the easier thing to do is not to see. So what I'd like to do is address five of the ways that we tend to avoid seeing, and as I do that, make the case that what is happening is genocide. And along the way I'll be speaking to that somehow very simple, but nevertheless evasive question, what does the word genocide actually mean. [3:44]

So the first objection to saying that what is happening in Ukraine is genocide is to say "*but there are other crimes as well*". And that's of course true, I agree. The great Philippe Sands speaks of the quartet of war aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. All the boots are legally distinct concepts. I agree that it is possible to characterize the events in Ukraine in other ways. I agree with Philippe Sands that war of aggression is probably the easiest to prosecute. But the fact that something is the easiest to prosecute doesn't exclude the reality of other kinds of violations. There is also genocide going on. [4:31]

Which leads me to the second objection which one very often hears to the thesis that what is happening in Ukraine now is genocide. The second objection is that "*we can't prosecute, no one has jurisdiction, there is no venue, we'll never capture the perpetrators, we can't prosecute*". It strikes me though, that's an evasion, that's a way of not seeing what is happening. Obviously, you would care very much to know that there is a murderer loose in your neighborhood. And that would be different than there is a manslaughter in the second degree loose. So what might seem to be a simple legal distinction actually captures a very important difference. Whether we describe it as genocide now is a description of what is happening – it's not just laying the foundations for some kind of future prosecution. [5:26]

It also has to do with how we will remember this later. Because it's the sad truth, as those of you who stay in still know, that most genocides are forgotten. And the reason why they were forgotten is that they were never noted in the first place. So if you don't note that a genocide is happening in the first place, you're asking a lot of future generations to remember it, to record it, to evaluate it later on. [5:49]

The third objection - and again I'm hoping to crowd out all possible questions, so that there will simply be silence at the end of this lecture (audience laughing). The third possible objection is that this doesn't feel like genocide. That when I say genocide there is a kind of elemental objection that this doesn't feel like a genocide. And it rarely does, from the outside, it rarely does. I think almost never does it feel like genocide from the outside. When I was in Ukraine a month ago I was in a school building, an elementary school building in a little village called Jerhidne in Chernihiv oblast, north of Kyiv, where the Russians had occupied for about a month before been driven out in march. And in this school building on the ground floor, which the Russian soldiers had used as their local base, there was their graffiti left behind. And their graffiti said among other things, Ukrainians – it's a slang term for Ukrainians, but – Ukrainians are devils, Ukrainians are Satan. That's the ground floor. In the basement of that school, or I should say former school because after what happened there it will never be used as a school again, in the basement of this former school, in this school building, all of the inhabitants of the village, every man, woman and child, was held for a month without regular access to food or water or hygiene or toilets. In those conditions many people died and during that time a number of people were executed. So when I was in that building looking at the drawings that the children left on the wall, looking at the notations that the adults made of the people who had been shot and other people who had died from exhaustion, from that perspective it did feel more like a genocide. I'm gonna submit if we're talking about feelings we might want to privilege that perspective over the one that we have from the outside.

More broadly, if you're Ukrainian you are being told daily that you do not exist as a people, that you have no right to exist as a people. Ukrainians have been deported on the scale of the millions, according to Russians own boasts, four million Ukrainians have been deported from the territory of Ukraine. They have been killed on the scale of hundreds of thousands. Their children had been kidnapped on the scale of at least the tens of thousands. Their water, their energy supplies are deliberately being destroyed. But that's there. That's not here. And what I'm trying to say in response to this objection is that very sense of distance, that very lack of solidarity, which is an integral element of genocide itself. That feeling that somehow this isn't genocide can actually be part of the genocide. It's a way in which it's impossible to be a bystander, right? If you choose not to see something that's happening you are taking part. You are taking part. But that feeling, I know it's a pervasive feeling, it takes many forms, that feeling that *"we're not sure, maybe it's complicated, maybe the perpetrator is actually the victim, who knows, time will tell, maybe our own consciences aren't perfectly clean, maybe it can't be happening while we ignore it, because we're not the sort of people who would ignore it while it's happening"* – that kind of circular reasoning is very powerful. *"We couldn't possibly be bystanders and therefore it's not a genocide"* is the way that we very often think. *"It can't be a genocide because it doesn't feel to us like a genocide and we're not the kind of people who would be bystanders"*. But we are of course. We are of course. We are the kind of people who would be bystanders. And it's by this very logic that we become the bystanders. [9:58]

So genocide is a test. It's a legal term, but it's also a human test. My part here is to make the case as the historian who's honored to open this mayor, to make the legal case that this term genocide actually describes the crime that's being committed. My task is to show that a genocidal war has been under way for eight months. That the experiences of Ukrainians plus the intentions of Russians equal a genocide. And then we can ask about ourselves. [10:31]

The fourth objection would be to ask *"but are the deeds genocidal"*? Are the deeds genocidal? Are what Russians are doing in Ukraine, does that actually amount to a genocide? And here we're once up against a dilemma which those of you, who work in this field, will be very familiar with, namely the difference between vernacular understandings of genocide and legal understandings of genocide. In the vernacular, the word genocide is often used to mean *"They killed every single person"*. But that's not what the word genocide means legally. And if, by the way, if genocide means *"they killed every single person"*, that word wouldn't have much application. Even the Holocaust doesn't come close to *"they killed every single person"*. The definition of genocide, and now I'm going to do the boring thing, which is indispensable, of reading to a couple of paragraphs of the law out loud. They're short. Genocide means according to the 1948 convention, which codified Raphael Lemkins word into international law, it means the following actions: [11:46]

1. *"Killing members of the group"*. By the way: Genocide is met if any of the following crimes have been committed. And so the first one is *"killing members of the group"*. This is obviously happened. The war itself, the bombing from the sky, the missiles and the drones directed at civilians. In Mariupol alone it looks like more than 100.000 civilians were killed, in one city alone, the executions everywhere in the Russia-occupied territory, the death pits which are found again and again in small and medium sized places that the Russians occupied, the targeted killings of people regardless being active in Ukrainian civil society, the filtration camps, in which people regardless politically active or simply men of a certain age, are taken out and killed. All of these things amount to killing members of a group. [12:44]

2. Second genocidal crime in the law, I'm quoting again: "*Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group*". Here one could mention systematic torture. Everywhere that the Russians occupy, and is de-occupied, the Ukrainians find torture chambers. Torture is an absolutely ordinary part of the Russian regime in Russia and used far more frequently in the occupied territories in the Ukraine. This has been true, by the way, since 2014 in the occupied territories of Ukraine, it's just now that territories there are being de-occupied and the actual physical evidence can be recovered. The bombings of hospitals and clinics and schools also cause serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group. I would also say the deportation, or to use a term we sometimes use, "*ethnic cleansing*", is a form of bodily or mental harm. And I'd like to emphasize the scale of these deportations: According to claims that the Russians themselves make regularly, about four million people have been deported. Four million Ukrainian citizens have been deported from Ukraine. That is about ten percent of the total population of the country. If you like to imagine the scale of that, imagine that all of New England, all of New York State, all of Pennsylvania have been entirely physically depopulated, stripped clean of every single person. Then you have a sense of the scale of deportations in Ukraine. That's the percentage, ten percent. So I think that's obviously met. [14:26]
3. The third criterion of genocidal crime is "*Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about it's physical destruction in whole or in part*". Again, this is obviously the case. The deliberate destruction of whole cities, the campaign which is unfolding right now to deny Ukrainians access to water and electricity over the winter. Those are the conditions of life. And again, Russian propaganda, Russian politicians make no secret about this. They boast that this is what they are doing, they say it openly. [15:06]
4. The fourth criterion, the fourth example of a genocidal crime: "*Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group*". The genocide convention of 1948 does not explicitly mention rape. But I would maintain that rape is an example of bodily or mental harm as above. In the campaign of systematic rape inside Ukraine carried out by Russian soldiers, in the voices of those Russian soldiers we often find a specific political overtone or specific genocidal purpose, that after the trauma of rape Ukrainian women would not wish to raise Ukrainian children, would never wish to bear children. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group also applies to the filtration camps and the deportation. In the filtration camps, in the deportation that follows, the Russians are screening for fertile women and children. They are sending the fertile women and children propoundedly to Russia, scattering them deep into Russia, with the idea that this will prevent the birth of Ukrainian children but it will allow the birth of Russian children. That is quite literally genocide according to this criterion. [16:26]
5. The fifth is, an I quote again: "*Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group*". Hundreds of thousands Ukrainian children have been deported to the Russian Federation during this war for adoption by individual Russian families spread across the vast territory of the Russian Federation, so that they can never form a Ukrainian community again. The New York Times referred to children recently as the "*booty of war*", which I believe is correct. Russia has been boasting about kidnapping Ukrainian children and assimilating them from the beginning of the war – this is been an openly declared goal of the war. As I am speaking to you, children are being deported from

Kherson Oblast, as Russia withdraws from Kherson. Thousands of children are being deported right now. [17:17]

The fifth objection – so I hope I've made the case that all of the crimes of genocide, the sub crimes of genocide are taking place. And to remind you: Only one of them need taking place for this [unintelligible], but all of them are taking place. [17:32]

The fifth objection would be: "*What about intention? Genocide is about intention.*" That's true. The language of the convention, again to quote, is "*The act must be committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such*". Here we find an opportunity to look away, because we can say "*How do we know about intention? We can never get inside someone else's mind, so how can we be a hundred percent sure about intention?*" That's what we say when we're pushed, when the evidence of the crimes is indisputable, we move to saying "*But how can we be sure about intention?*" And this is where a lot of the conversation about genocide is right now. How can we know about intention? [18:31]

But of course, if we took this view of intention, then intention requires my looking inside your mind. No law, involving for example murder or a number of other crimes, that we prosecute every day, would be possible. We make all the time in everyday jurisprudence, in every day trials we make judgments about intention. And we do it without telepathy all the time. I think there is a reason why we apply the telepathy standard to genocide and not to other crimes, which is that we would prefer to think, it's not genocide. We would prefer to think, that a genocide is not happening as we look away. If the telepathy standard were the right standard, then the 1948 Genocide Convention would of course be meaningless. There would be no sense in having a law forbidding genocide, if intention really meant that you have to make mental contact with someone else. [19:28]

I'll talk more, and this will be the rest of the talk in fact, I'll talk more about how as a historian we do establish intention around mass crimes, around mass murders. But here I wanna note another way that people deal with intention or try to resist intention. People will say: "*There is no piece of paper, where the leader of the country specifically confesses to the detailed intention to carry out exactly the crime that is taking place. There is no piece of paper which proves it*". And that's true. There is not. There never is. There isn't one for the Holocaust, there is no order from Hitler where he says this is such and such exactly to happen from the Jews. But there are all kinds of other pieces of evidence, which using basic historical or legal judgment we can, I think, quite reasonably establish, that Hitler had this sort of intention that many other people did too. [20:29]

The case I wanna make in the rest of this talk, is that the problem is not that we lack evidence of intention. I think, if anything, the problem is that we are overwhelmed by the evidence of intention. What happens is that, as we hear more and more evidence of intentions, some of which I will supplied you with, as we hear more and more of it, what we do is, we ratchet up the standard for what would actually qualify as intention. Right? That's the temptation. The more we hear about Russian intentions, the more we say "*well, I just got used to that and so now I want something even more shocking to prove that it was genocide*". [21:21]

„*They should not exist at all, we should execute them by firing squad.*“

„*We will kill one million, we will kill 5 million, we will obliterate them all.*“

„We will drown the children in the raging river, we will throw the children into burning wooden huts“. [21:42]

You might have thought these quotations were from some distant historical case. They're all from Russian State television in the last few days. Russian State television is controlled directly by the President of the Russian Federation. There are thousands of similar statements made to tens of millions of Russians on a regular basis on media, that they and we know, is controlled personally by the President of the Russian Federation. As I say, the problem is not the lack of intent, it's the super-abundance of evidence of genocidal intent. Which makes us raise the standard, and that becomes another way of looking away. [22:33]

What I wanna do, rather than bombard you with more quotations of this kind, of which there is in fact a kind of unending supply, is to take a different tack. I wanna give you nine examples of how a historian would evaluate intention. I could just for the rest of my time read a list of statements, that are some worse than I just read, but rather than doing that I want to respond to the challenge that I've said, which is, how do you actually evaluate intent? How could you become comfortable with saying that someone intended to do something? Different sorts of people, judges, psychologists and so on, will do this in different ways. I'm gonna do it as a historian who has written about mass killing. [23:19]

So, the nine classifications, that I would choose, the nine ways of thinking about the language, that's been used, and seeing it and understanding it as genocidal, that I propose, are going to be, number one - and it's gonna be an earnest undergraduate in deed, who writes these all down and, no doubt, you will get extra-credit if you do [audience laughing] - number one - I can promise that because I don't teach here [audience laughing] -

1. Colonial
2. Apologist
3. Dehumanizing
4. Narcissistic
5. Escalatory
6. Metaphysical
7. Fascist
8. Replacement and
9. Exceptionalist

Now I will try to make sense of this. [24:13]

1. **Colonial** Language. Much of historical genocide is associated with the phenomenon of European and other colonialism. The language that Putin has used since 2011 about Ukraine has specifically invoked the category of "Civilization", the central category of colonialism. For the last ten years, but with greater intensity in the last two or so, Putin has made the claim, that Russia of course exists as a state and nation, but Ukraine of course does not exist as a state and nation. That is the absolutely predictable normal

way that European colonial powers refer to the political and social groups that they encounter. The power of the colonial stance allows you to say who exists and who doesn't exist, it also allows you to declare "*Always*" and "*Never*". So, the Russian language, which far too many people take on and still use, to the effect that "*Crimea was always Russia*" or that "*Ukraine and Russia were always together*" is an example of this sort of imperial usage. These "*Always-es*" imply "*Nevers*". If "*Ukraine was always together with Russia*", and we can dismiss not only the Ukrainians and their self-conscious political history, which actually goes back hundreds of years, but we can dismiss anything that seems to challenge a Russian narrative. If "*Crimea were always Russia*", then we can forget about the six hundred years, in which there was a different state in Crimea, which by the way is longer than the United States has lasted or any Russian entity has lasted, we can dismiss that. We can entirely forget about the indigenous people of the Crimean peninsula, the Crimean Tatars, who were dispersed in late 18th century, when Russia absorbed the first time the peninsula and who were forcibly ethnically cleansed, every single one of them, in the spring of 1944 under Stalin. If "*Crimea and Russia were always together*", then we can just forget about those people, upon whom what we would now call genocide was very often perpetrated. [26:25]

2. Which leads me to the second kind of classification, which is **apology** or **apologism**. Where your attitude towards a specific event in the past reveals your specific intent to change the future. What do I mean? The example of Neonazis will be familiar, I'm sure, to many people. What does Neonazis often say about the Holocaust? They often say about the Holocaust that it didn't happen. What do they mean, when they say, the Holocaust didn't happen? They mean, they would like for it to happen again. That is the meaning of that. When you deny a specific crime, that people with whom we identify, carried out in the past, you're affirming that crime. And the victims always understand that, the victims never get that wrong, right? Or the intended victims.

So, in this war Russia begins the war by reaffirming a memory law, which makes a crime in Russia to recall that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were allies in 1939, thereby exporting any possible Nazi-ness to other people. During the course of the war Russia has destroyed monuments to the Holodomor, which is the mass political famine in Ukraine in 1932 and 1933. The way that the Russians discuss that political famine while taking down the monuments is very interesting. Because what they say is, "*there was no intention there, it was just nature, there was a famine. Maybe there were some administrative mistakes*". And during the very days that they take down the monuments, they are also deliberately trying to destroy Ukrainian water supply and Ukrainian power supply. And of course once you do that, anything that happens afterwards is just nature. It's just nature. There was no intention there, it was just nature taking it's course. Just like it did in 1932 and 1933, when four million Ukrainians starved to death. So the way that you talk about specific mass killings in the past is also revelatory at specific intentions in the present. [28:35]

3. The third kind of language that helps us to identify intent could be called **dehumanizing** language. And there is a very specific way in which Putin claims that Ukrainians don't exist. So the colonial bid is, they're not there, they're not a state, they're not a nation. But there is a very specific way, and it's familiar I think to scholars of Holocaust, that Putin talks about Ukrainians not existing. They don't exist, because the people who claim to be Ukrainians are not really from here. They're not really attached

to the land. They are alienated from the soil. The people who call themselves Ukrainians, who mistakenly believe themselves to be Ukrainians – and it's a mistake, because there is no such thing as Ukraine and the Ukrainians – these people had been seduced by Habsburgs, or Germans, or Poles, or the European Union, or the Americans, or the Jews. They'd been seduced by some outsider. And that is where the sense of Ukrainianess comes from. They misunderstand themselves, they have false consciousness, they don't know who they are, they have ideas which come from the outside. And that makes them very dangerous. Now – there is an echo here of Hitler's version of the Jews, which is that they're not attached to the land, they come from outside, they don't have a real homeland, they don't belong here. And as with the logic of the Jews, so with the logic of the Ukrainians, as Putin sees them. Where do they belong then? Where do they belong? They belong nowhere. They belong nowhere.

And this kind of logic, where you would say that the people I'm talking about, only exist because of an alien threat – that is the source of their existence. The source of their existence is the Habsburg, Polish, German, EU, American, Jewish, whatever it might be, foreign threat. They only instantiate themselves as a foreign threat. That means that we have to destroy the top level of society. And that was in fact the Russian war plan. The Russian war plan in the very beginning was genocidal specifically in the intent of killing and rounding up the elite Ukrainians, the people who were thought to be the ones who ran everything. And the idea of course was that there were not many of this people, and it would be relatively easy to do, right? This is what Putin meant when he talked about De-Ukrainisation. That we can just wipe clear the top of society, and then the rest of the happy masses, who do know who they are and who are attached to the land and so on, they will remember that they're Russians and everything will spring back into a natural reality. This is what Russian propaganda said at the time. RIA Novosti, which is a very popular official tabloid, published accidentally not long after the war started a long essay about the Russian victory. It was a text that had been prepared on the assumption that Russia would win the war in three days, an assumption which was widely shared, not just in Moscow. And what this text, which was accidentally published, said, is that "we have destroyed the top level, the aliens, the elites, and the happy Ukrainian masses, who attached the land and joyfully joining this larger Russian state. The genocidal logic was spelled that absolutely clear. [32:09]

4. The fourth criterion, the fourth way to interpret some of this language, is what I would call the **narcissistic**. I would call it [inaudible], but that's really obscure. What I mean by the narcissistic is: *"You don't know who you are, until you look at someone else"*. Genocide is all about you, and it's all about your need for self-definition. And this may seem rather harsh, but it is quite possible to define yourself in opposition to others. And perpetrating a genocide is a way of defining yourself. When Putin says that he's carrying out "*De-Ukrainisation*" or "*De-Nazification*" or "*De-Satanisation*" – which I'll turn to that later, it's a fruitful term – what he is saying is that *"we Russians exist, insofar as we're carrying out this project of correcting some other people, or destroying some other people"*. In none of these terms and in deed in none of this war can one find the language about what Russia is. There's been a lot of head-waving and like hand-wringing about what is Ukraine – I think there are some pretty easy answers to that – but what's really in doubt during this war on the basis of official Russian statements, is, what is Russia? What's the Russian future, what are Russian purposes? During this war the definition of Russia has been narrowed by the Russian

leadership itself to the project of destroying Ukraine. So, this is what I mean by the narcissism: The genocide is necessary because it teaches us, who we are. And you can't take it away from us for that reason.

This is of course also what scholars of fascism would call a politics of "Us" and "Them", and I'm gonna return to that theme. We know who we are, when we destroy someone else. When we name the enemy, as Carl Schmitt put it – Carl Schmitt, the most famous and the most talented Nazi legal theorist. Politics begins, when we name the enemy. We can name him Satan, we can name him Nazi, it doesn't really matter, we name the other in some firm way and then we aim to destroy the other, and that's how politics begins. If you are the leading Nazi legal theorist, that's how politics begins. And that's not an idle reference, because the 1948 Genocide Convention was designed to anchor and re-strengthen another kind of legal tradition, right? The Nazi legal tradition was very real and very powerful and very persuasive in its context and its time, and the convention that we're talking about, from 1948, just a few years after the war, was meant to do something entirely different. [35:07]

5. The fifth kind of contextual argument, to contextualization, is what I would call the **escalatory**. And again, this will be familiar to scholars of the Holocaust and others. When Hitler in late 1941 and [inaudible] in 1942 made a whole cluster of statements about the necessity of exterminating all of the Jews. When "solving the Jewish Question once and for all", the overall context was the coming defeat of the Wehrmacht and particular the alliance between the American, the British and the Soviets, which Hitler argued, could only be the work of the Jews. It's so improbable, how could the capitalist, the communist, Wall Street, Fleet Street, the Kremlin, how could they all be together – it's because of the Jews, says Hitler. There is something slightly similar going on in the way that Russian officials describe Ukraine. *"We weren't able to defeat them right away, and what does that mean? It conforms what we said before. It just proves that these Ukrainians are agents of international powers, because look, the international powers have hastened to help them. And that only proves, that they're not really Ukrainians, but agents of international powers. And therefore we are all the more correct in seeking to destroy them."*

There's another escalatory logic which goes like this: *"We thought in the beginning it wins war by killing the top level of the Ukrainian society. It turns out, that there are more of these self-conscious Ukrainians than we thought. That does not lead us to question our initial assumption, instead it simply means that we have to kill more Ukrainians."* And that by the way is what Pavel Gubarov, the soldier that I quoted earlier, specifically meant when he said *"we'll kill one million, we'll kill five million, we'll obliterate them all"*. What he meant was, the more people there are who continue to say, they're Ukrainians, the more of them we will have to kill. So there are more than you think, but you don't adjust your assumptions, you just continue to kill or you kill more people. [37:21]

6. These assumptions, and here I'm gonna get to the deeper part of the argument, these assumptions are, and this is my sixth way of interpreting, the assumptions are **metaphysical**. That reality is not really what it seems to be. I mean, the verdict gone pretty far with this, with the idea the Ukraine isn't a state and Ukraine is not a nation. But there is a kind of alternative reality which side everyone can see. And again here you find some interesting Nazi themes, like the idea that Jews spread mental illness.

The Jews are the cause of mental illness. A frequent argument in Russian propaganda is that the Ukrainians are Russians who are mentally ill. And can only be cured of this mental illness by the application of violence. "*They do not know who they are*", which of course is an imperial claim. If I say "*you do not know who you are*", right, I'm asserting my power to define, who you are. But alongside the mental illness idea there is a related idea which has a quasi religious source. And that is the idea that the Ukrainians are possessed by Satan. Now I say that, and some of you chuckle, but this is actually a fairly mainstream argument. Gubarov, who I quoted before, who appeared by the way in front of millions and millions of people saying this, when he said, "we'll kill on million, five million, obliterate them all", the justification that he gave was that the Ukrainians are possessed by Satan. And that is the reason why they don't know they're Russians. And so we can try to exorcise Satan, but if we fail, we then have no choice but to kill them. That's what he said. You might think this is some kind of outlier as an argument, but it's not. It's actually rather mainstream.

I admit, it didn't fit into all those arguments about how Putin is really a rational technocrat, that we heard for a long time. But in Putin's own discussions about Ukraine for ten years there has been this idea, that Russia and Ukraine were united by God. And therefore anyone who challenges this connection must be on the other side. Putin said, when he visited Kyiv for the last time in 2013, that Ukraine and Russia were connected as a matter of Gods will. In his historical of the Ukraine – I hesitate to use the word "historical" – but in his discussions of the Ukrainian past he repeatedly makes the argument that Russia and Ukraine must be together forever, because of a baptism which took place in the year 988. Now as a historian this pains me and it forces me into long explanations about how in the year 988 there weren't related modern nations and the person, who was baptized – maybe – the person who was baptized was a Scandinavian warlord who was from a clan that was fresh of a career in slave trading and so on and so forth... - but I don't wanna be forced into that now. The point that I wanna make about this is slightly different, which is that the appeal to Baptism as a ritual of cleansing, which determines, who is always right forever, is what matters here. The idea is that - It's not that Russians go to church, which by the way, statistically speaking, they don't, where, statistically speaking, Ukrainians do, which is like the 75th irony in all of this – the point is that, would you make this kind of claim about Russia and associate it with eternal purity, what you're saying is, that the other side is Satanist.

And when I say what you're saying – I'm not extracting this logic myself. This is deep in the thinking of the most important Russian christian fascist thinker, a man called Ivan Ilyin, who Putin has been citing regularly for more than a decade, who he cited most recently on September 30th during his speech about annexation. It is deep in Russian media culture. Solovjov, who is perhaps the most important television propagandist, couple of weeks ago, at the end of his program, said "*what are we fighting against? We are fighting against Satanism*". A member of the Security Council of Russia, which is the highest organ of the Russian state, reported on in TASS of all places – and those of you who are old Soviet hands remember what TASS used to be, you know this will be all the more extraordinary – TASS reported, yesterday, I think, it was, that a member of the Security Council of Russia has defined the task of the Russian Army in Ukraine as De-Satanisation. De-Satanisation. The same description of the war was echoed by Ramzan Kadyrov, who is the leader of Chechnya in Russia and one of the most

important political figures in Russia, who also said, that the problem in Ukraine is Satanism, and followed that up with the claim that all of the Ukrainian cities have to be destroyed. [42:35]

7. So that's the metaphysic. And in metaphysic there's a word for this metaphysic, which is a familiar word: That is a **fascist** metaphysic. So, one doesn't have to have fascism to have genocide. There can be genocide without fascism. But part of the interpretive context here is, I'm afraid, fascism. Those of you who work on Russia or on fascism or on the Holocaust or on the Jews will of course know perfectly well, what the reference to Satan is all about and who is meant in that reference to Satan. Specifically in the tradition of Russian antisemitism, but also in "Der Stürmer" and in all visual Nazi propaganda. The association of Satan with the Jew is front and center. To say that our mission is De-Satanisation in describing a country whose president is Jewish is a resonance which no one, at least in that part of the world, is going to miss.

But this metaphysic is also fascist in a deeper way, which speaks to a tradition of christian fascism, which is interesting, intellectually, it appears in Romania, it also appears in Russia. And in this tradition, which is, I've already said, Putin reads and cites, the idea is that the world is been fragmented, the world is spoiled, right? And there is only one way to heal this... What does spoiled means? Spoiled means, there are facts, and there are values, and you can't bring everything together into one beautiful whole. Russia's mission as the only unspoiled country is to bring the world back to a kind of totality. This is, what this fascist tradition says. And what this means in practice – and you'll see immediately the relevance for Russian practice and especially propaganda in this – what this means in practice is that, no matter what Russia seems to be doing, it's good or at least forgivable. Because it's part of this mission to restore the entire world. Right?

Another thing which this means is that, since there's no such thing as true, it's fine to lie. Right? And so this thing about Russia today, which we describe, I think, perfectly correctly as postmodern, the weaponization of the idea that there is no truth actually has another origin, which is not postmodern at all. Which is this fascist view that there is no truth to begin with and therefore if you're lying in the service of Russia what you're doing is actually good. And I repeat something I said earlier because I think it's important: In this kind of argument, Russia is always innocent. It's not just that Russia is forgiven, Russia is always innocent, because Russia is the only hope for the restoration of the rest of the world. And once you believe that, then a whole lot of other things start to fall into place. [45:37]

8. Number eight is **replacement theory**. Replacement theory is – I mention this because it's a present day theory which is very well known in the Far Right in this country and elsewhere. President Putin is a replacement theorist, he worries aloud and often that his race is going to be overwhelmed by the numbers of Non-Russians and Non-Orthodox and so on. In the Telegram channels of the mercenary group Wagner – Wagner is named to Wagner by the way because the person who named it thinks that Hitlers favorite composer was Wagner, but at this point of the talk you would not be surprised by that – in the Telegram channels of the Wagner mercenaries replacement theory talk is ubiquitous.

In the practice of this war there is in fact an attempt to undo what fascists call "*replacement*". It is not just as I said before, that a Russian war aim is the kidnapping

en masse of fertile Ukrainian women and Ukrainian children, who can be assimilated into Russia, right? That is of course to undo the notion that there aren't enough Russians, by taking away people, who you can call Russian. It is also the case simultaneously, that Russia in hugely disproportionate numbers sends the young men of it's own indigenous groups, from the Caucasus and from Asia, to die in Ukraine. So the attempt to undo what they see as replacement goes in both directions, and you could also point out, that the genocidal intent here is not directed only at Ukrainians. If the young men from these, what are already often very small groups are being sent to die in disproportionate numbers, this will affect the future of those groups. A specifically – I mean, all these cases are sad, but one that I find specifically sad, is the case of the Crimean Tatars, who were targeted for complete ethnic cleansing under Stalin. After 1991 many of them made their way back, rather the children, the grandchildren made their way back to what was then Ukrainian Crimea. Crimea was then invaded by Russia in 2014 and the Crimean Tatars lost all the rights they enjoyed in the Ukrainian state and were subjects to specific [inaudible] oppression, which now after this invasion in 2022 include being mobilized to go and die in Ukraine. The specific attack on the indigenous males of the Non-Russian nationalities, I think, is also an example of the operationalization of replacement theory. [48:11]

9. Number nine, and here I'm coming to a close, is the idea of **exceptionalism**. That *"the rules don't apply to us"*. So that *"you might say, that this is a genocide. But who made the rules anyway?"* That's a quotation, from Mr. Putin's speech of September 30th. Who made the rules anyway. *"The rules does not apply to Russia, because Russia is a millennial civilization"* – that is also a quotation from that speech. Now, this kind of talk is consistent with the Nazi legal theory, which I referred to earlier, which says that law is not about universal rules, law... Oh, this is a different point: Same theorist Carl Schmitt - Carl Schmitt says: *"Power begins from the ability to make an exception"*. Right? *"He who can make an exception is he, who rules"*, says Carl Schmitt. So what is Putin doing when he stands up in September 30th and says, *"what are these rules anyway [inaudible] being made up? And they don't apply to us, because we are a millennial civilization"*? He's trying to make an exception. And that kind of exceptionalism opens the way for the perpetration of genocide. It's also imperial, it's also fascistic, it's also narcissistic. But it's exceptionalism. Because the Genocide Convention is of course a rule. [49:45]

So in conclusion what I wanna say – I mean first of all I hope that I've made the case, that both parts of the Genocide Convention should be seen as applying here: We can see the intention, not because we can see into somebody's mind, because we can't, not because there is a confessional letter from the ruler, which there isn't and there never has been and never will be, but because with the help of historical and other forms of interpretation we can make reasonable arguments about what is actually intended. [50:14]

I hope also that I have made the case, that the facts on the ground in Ukraine correspond to all of the forms of genocidal crimes as defined in the Convention.

If we are resisting all of this – I suspect that is, because there is just too much evidence and that we are becoming jaded. Or one final thought: If we are resisting this, it might be because we are saying to ourselves and some other *"Well, it's not the Holocaust, isn't it? It's not the Holocaust"*. And of course it isn't, but I think it's very important, as we speak about in sequence the "Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights" to think of the Holocaust not as a tool

of forgetting, but as a tool of remembrance. Not as a way of dismissing other events, but as a way of helping to see other events, as they take place. If we place the Holocaust outside of history, by saying that it's unique or special, then, what we're doing is, we're trying to demonstrate our own virtue. *"We're virtuous, because we say that the Holocaust is outside of history"*. But that's the opposite of virtuous. Because once we say the Holocaust is outside of history, what we're really doing is, we're saying *"Nothing's like it, there is no genocide going on right now, and therefore I'm not responsible"*. And in that way, in a few quick [finger snapping] psychologically appealing bits of reasoning, we find ourselves ignoring the genocides that happen before our eyes. History is meant, I think, to help us with this, to resist these kinds of temptations. History is the search for patterns, it's the search for the telling detail, the search for self-awareness, it's the knowledge that allows us to see or not see. And then once we see, then we know that we're doing. One way or another, on one side or another, we're doing.

Like the Holocaust, the category of genocide can offer us ways out. We can say *"Surely not now, surely not here, surely not on my watch, surely the intention is not clear, surely the actions are insufficient"*. But in this case, everything is absolutely clear and sufficient, and has been from the beginning. All that remains is us, and what we do next...

„They should not exist at all, we should execute them by firing squad.“

„We will drive the children into the raging river, we will throw the children into burning wooden huts“.

„We will kill one million, we will kill 5 million, we will obliterate them all.“

Thank you.