

ESC-Bologna-proposal

Title: Joining Mass Crime: Experiences and Trajectories of Four Former Serbian Perpetrators in the Recent Yugoslav Wars.

Samuel Tanner – Ph. D. Candidate

International Center for Comparative Criminology – University of Montreal

samuel.tanner@umontrea.ca

My concern is to focus on one type of perpetrators that contributed to the mass crimes that occurred in former Yugoslavia during the 90s, namely Serbian volunteers. A volunteer is defined as a citizen who essentially comes from civil society and freely, and without any constraint, joins an armed organization to promote its interest, whether it is of political, cultural, national or criminal nature. The use of force is common for such furtherance.

I spent 6 months in the Balkans in 2006 and conducted extensive interviews with individuals who participated as volunteers in mass violence in Croatia and Bosnia. Based on a conceptual framework designed both around sociological institutionalism and Charles Tilly's approach of "contentious dynamics", I analyze these four volunteers' experiences and trajectories in mass crimes. Committing mass violence represents the most worrisome of actions. Yet these acts of violence are the outcome of a sequence of events that are not always violent, and decisions that are not systematically nationalistic or ethnic-based. More specifically, I focus on the underlying social configurations, frames of interpretation, and regulatory scripts that characterize such sequences, or institutionalization, on a grassroots level.

I show that political opportunities, diverging nationalist attitudes, proximity to growing violence in killing fields, former parallel criminal activities and interactions with these volunteers' community networks united to legitimize and enable their personal commitment to the mass crimes that occurred in the former Yugoslavia during the 90s. I hope to shed some new light on episodes too long considered as strictly ethnic, hatred, religious or "top-down" orchestrated.