7 November 2014

Dear PPW members:

The following is a draft chapter from a book manuscript entitled “Acts of Killing: The logic of violent display.” It is therefore organized more as an interior chapter in a book, and not a stand-alone article.

I look forward to your comments.

Best,

Lee Ann
Mostly our conversations underscored that to be a kamajor was a performance. (Hoffman 2011, 56)

Imagine a cellist playing, head bent, arms angled, eyes and ears glued to the sounds that come from pressing bow and fingers to strings in just the right way. The scene is a concert hall. The dress is black.

Now imagine this same man, dressed in black, but instead of an elegant recital hall, he is sitting atop the bombed out wreckage of an historic building or among mounds of fresh dirt in an old city graveyard. He plays in these specifically chosen spots, so emblematic of war everywhere, on a regular basis, despite the snipers and death that surround him.

Both scenes feature cellists playing their instrument but one is recognizable while the other is jarring. Why? What accounts for the difference? What is it about the second that makes us look twice?

The difference lies in the meaning of the two scenes. The first evokes a performance, an occasion focused on the music and skill of the musician. The second evokes something more. It is a kind of performance but one that is no longer about the music or skill of the musician. The man’s playing atop war rubble violates our expectation of where and why musicians play and for whom. His playing looks out-of-place in the middle of a war that has destroyed countless buildings and killed thousands of innocents. His playing is a way for him to talk back to the war and disrupt the new normal the war has created. I call this second scene a performative because of the way it alters, shifts, or transforms our understanding of social reality.

Performatives are not reducible to or synonymous with performances, even if they involve embodied speech and action that we might associate with a concert or play. The importance of performatives is how specific forms of embodied speech and action create a scene that transforms social reality. A swearing-in ceremony confers power on a new president. A wedding turns two singles into a married couple. A declaration of war sets in motion sanctioned destruction and violence on a massive scale. Performatives, in short, summon into being a new reality through people doing and saying things a certain way.
In the cello-playing scene, for example, the very act of playing amidst war recalls a part of everyday life that existed before the war, and by doing so, renders the war as absurdly out-of-place, rather than the other way around.

In this chapter, I am interested in violent displays as performatives. I define violent displays as violent acts actors stage for others to see, experience, notice, or take in. Like the cellist playing atop war rubble, violent display is about much more than numbers killed or the analytic category (e.g., genocide, lynching) into which a case of violence fits. Violent displays are about inscribing meaning about power, belonging, dominance, and hierarchy. Through violent display, individuals gain social status and exercise authority (Danner 2004; Bourke 1999; Norton 2011); states express power (Coronil and Skurski 1991) and counter-elites their opposition (Fabricant 2009); and social and political groups generate new identities (Frake 1998), gain recognition (Goldstein 2004), or create certainty about who is really who (Pohlman 2012; Appadurai 1998).

In violent displays, be they spectacle lynchings or prison tortures, meaning arises not through the actions of a few but the participation of the many. Violent displays not only draw people’s attention, they also cast those who look on in the display itself. These literal “shows” of violence assign roles to everyone and everyone to a role. The process of putting violence on display gives pride of place to onlookers, gawkers, and witnesses, for what is a display without an audience? What is a spectacle without a crowd?

In the episodes I trace below, the violent displays are rewriting the basis for claiming membership in the dominant group. The displays redraw the color line by stipulating a certain type of violence as the basis for belonging. Those who take part, however willingly or unwittingly, become part of the new order; those who do not must fall in line or risk becoming targets themselves.

To understand violent displays as performatives requires tracing the various things people do and say that help to turn a moment into a display. One way to understand the performative potential of doing and saying things a certain way is to consider how lynchers are able to turn acts of murder and desecration into an act of moral urgency and legitimacy. Remarkably, their words and deeds do not depend on whether the victim is alive or not. The case study literature is replete with evidence that crowds are not focused on when the victim dies but rather on how. In one famous case, that of Sam Hose in Georgia in 1899, those who seized Hose were protective of their “prize” out of fear that “some crazed outsider would shoot” him (Hale 1999, 212).

In a case that occurred in Honey Grove, Texas in May 1930, the fact that the lynching victim had already been killed did not deter the lynchers in the least. After a shoot-out with the victim, law enforcement went to claim the body but a crowd quickly “snatched it up,” then dragged the body across a field to the road and tied the body to the back of a truck, face down. Drivers dragged the body for miles in a line of vehicles. The procession ended up in the black section of town, where the crowd hung the body from a tree (also head down) in front of a black church. The crowd then soaked it with gasoline and burned it (Raper
1933, 359). That the victim was already dead did not undermine the project of lynching in the least, which suggests that what turns an act of desecration into a community-sanctioned moment called a lynching is how and what people do and say and not necessarily the opportunity to execute an alleged wrong-doer.

As these examples also underscore, people enact what is meaningful, not meaningless. In Honey Grove, Texas, people were intent on lynching a black man who had violated a community norm around white supremacy, which mandated a particular kind of community response. The shooting by police did not obviate the need to exact rough justice on the victim. One kind of “justice” was no substitute for the other. In Newnan, Georgia, the lynchers worked harder to make sure that rough justice was the only kind of punishment that Sam Hose would receive.

What these examples also illustrate is the variety of ways that people participate in violent displays. Those involved in snatching the body from police in Honey Grove are no more important to the display as those who bring the rope or drive the cars that make up the procession. By watching, gawking, provisioning, or driving, people help to create the scene, as do those that provision the scene with vehicles and “props.” Like film directors who add “atmosphere” in the form of extras and walk-ons costumed and directed to move or stand at specific moments and in specific ways to create a certain kind of street scene, those playing “minor” roles in Newnan, Georgia, Honey Grove, Texas, Marianna, Florida, or Marion, Indiana are crucial to turning the scenes of violence into an expression of whiteness par excellence.¹

**Lynching of George Armwood in the Eastern Shore**

Wednesday, the eighteenth of October 1933 turned out to be a warm fall day in the Lower Eastern Shore, the easternmost portion of Maryland that abuts the Chesapeake Bay and borders Delaware to the north and Virginia to the south. Temperatures ranged from sixty degrees Fahrenheit in Salisbury to the high forties in nearby Princess Anne.²

Throughout the day, rumors of a lynching had been circulating, ever since Baltimore State Police had driven George Armwood back from Baltimore to Princess Anne in Somerset County. Whites in the area accused Armwood, a 22-year-old, black farmhand, of having assaulted an elderly white woman two days before. Many whites assumed that “assault” automatically meant rape.

The hunt for Armwood began almost immediately after a road crew had found Mary Denston, a 71-year old white woman, about 10 o’clock in the morning on Monday, 16 October 1933. She was by the side of a road, alone and nearly naked. She explained that she had been walking to her daughter’s farm nearby when an assailant dragged her into the woods and raped her, tearing off

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¹ Marianna, Florida was the site of the Claude Neal lynching which occurred in October 1934. (McGovern 1982). Marion, Indiana was the site of the double lynching of Tommy Shipp and Abe Smith in August 1930 (Madison 2003).

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her dress in the process. Suspicion turned immediately to George Armwood, whose mother and sister lived close by ("Officers" 1933; "Rush" 1933).

The hunt for Armwood involved local and State Police as well as hundreds of white people who joined in the pursuit with whatever moving vehicle they could muster—cars, trucks, tractors, and other farm machines. Police and posse scoured the county for hours. State Police finally located Armwood at a house about twenty miles away from where the assault took place. Armwood had been doing work for the family.

State Police headed first to Salisbury in neighboring Wicomico County but when they encountered a large crowd at the jail in Salisbury, police continued immediately to Baltimore ("Prisoner snatched" 1933; "Rush" 1933) ("Negro admits" 1933). Taking Armwood to Baltimore for safekeeping was the same precautionary step they had taken after the arrest of Euel Lee, a black man accused of having murdered a white family of four two years before. Police arrived with Armwood in Baltimore in the early morning hours of Tuesday, October 17, 1933, after a five-hour drive from the Lower Eastern Shore.

In the morning, Armwood awoke in a Baltimore jail cell, scared and tired, perhaps, but otherwise physically unharmed. Detectives began interrogating him at 9:30, asking Armwood pointed questions about the details of the assault and his timeline the morning of Monday, 16 October 1933. They interrogated Armwood again at 4:30 pm. This time the questioning was around Armwood’s drinking before the assault. Armwood answered all the officers’ questions though some of responses directly contradicted others.3 Despite the contradictions in his statements, local newspapers all reported that Armwood had confessed to the crime ("Assailant confesses" 1933).

Sometime after this second interrogation, State’s Attorney John Robins asked that State Police return Armwood to Somerset County, where the assault occurred. For reasons unknown, Baltimore authorities acceded to the request. A procession of cars carrying thirty-nine state police and Somerset County officials left Baltimore at 10:15 that night and arrived at the small jail in Princess Anne, the county seat, around 3 o’clock in the morning on Wednesday, 18 October (Robins 1933; "Police" 1933).

Jailers placed Armwood in the Negro section of the jail, on the second floor of the small, two-story building. In addition to Armwood, a dozen or so other prisoners, both black and white, were spending the night in jail.

When the sun rose, rumors began circulating about a possible lynching. The rumors were credible enough that officials for both the black and white schools in Princess Anne let out school early. Some teachers told the children what was happening. One black woman, for example, who was fourteen at the

3 The transcripts of the two police interrogations come from the private papers of John B. Robins, IV, who kept his great-grandfather’s file related to this case in near perfect condition over the decades. I thank Mr. Robins for kindly providing them to me. I refer to the page numbers on the original transcript, which start with Sheet 1 and end with Sheet 20. A copy of the full transcript is available from the author upon request.
time, said that the teachers “told us there was going to be a lynching.” Other students already knew what the early dismissal was about. A white man who was thirteen at the time said no one needed to tell him why the students were being let out early—he knew why.\footnote{The difference in knowledge about an impending lynching between this black woman and white man who were about the same age may also indicate how widely the rumors circulated within the white community, so widely that even school-age children knew what was going on, but not at all within the black}

Frank Spencer, a man from out-of-town provided an outsider’s account of the atmosphere in downtown Princess Anne the afternoon of Wednesday, 18 October 1933. Spencer identified himself as a 39-year old, unemployed chef from California who was in Princess Anne visiting a friend. Spencer related his story to a reporter from the Afro-American, a black newspaper based in Baltimore. Spencer recalls that while he was doing errands in downtown Princess Anne, people were gathering as early as noon and talking openly about plans to lynch Armwood that evening. They talked about the lynching in front of police officers.

The talk centered not only around what townspeople were planning to do that evening, but also around another lynching that had occurred nearly two years before in Salisbury, a town fifteen miles away. A large mob in Salisbury had lynched Matthew Williams, a young black man, for allegedly shooting and killing his white boss. Spencer overheard different people make reference to the Matthew Williams lynching. Spencer was standing with one group of men, for example, when another walked up to the group and said, “We’ll have a bigger lynching here than when Williams was lynched two years ago.” Later, at the jail, Spencer heard another say, “Let’s give him the same dose we gave Williams” (Spencer 1933).

By mid-afternoon, people began gathering in ever larger numbers in front of the jail. A handful of State Police maintained a police line in front of the jail entrance. From their vantage point, the officers could closely observe and track the activity of the crowd. At some point, recalled one officer, it began to rain, but that did not deter people from coming in larger and larger numbers ("Ritchie" 1933, 334, 415).\footnote{State Police accounts come from sworn affidavits police gave after the lynching. Page numbers refer to those in the original source. Hereinafter I refer to the source as “Police Statements” for brevity.}

The crowd was diverse. Most simply watched expectantly, while a few continually tested the resiliency of the police line. As the number of people grew, the pushing and shoving that occurred at the front, between those intent on breaking through the line and the police intent on holding it, had the effect of dislodging the entire crowd. As one officer described the scene:

One man would break away or step over the line and would have to be pushed back, and then another man would break away and

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step over the line and have to be pushed back. It was this crowd that forced Officer Bohler and myself back to Captain Johnson’s car.

... The mob at this time was jammed up close, so close that those in front kind of leaned back so that they were not pushed through. As one would go across the officer would grab him and push him back (Police Statement, 324).

Those who kept trying to push through the line were would-be leaders of the mob or people who were interested in steering the scene in a particular direction. One man, for example, drove his truck up to the alley next to the jail, saying he had “eight cases of dynamite, if they needed it” (Police Statement, 236).

At some point early in the evening, Judge Duer, a county-level judge who lived in Princess Anne, stopped by to address the crowd. He stood atop one of the police cars (Police Statement, 348) and told people to go home and let the legal system do its job. He assured the crowd that Armwood would be tried quickly ("Mob storms" 1933). One man yelled back, “Euel Lee6 cost our county $20,000 and you people don’t want to have to do that” (Police Statement, 431). Another officer recalled the comment in more vivid language, quoting the man as saying, “You are a God damned liar, you told us that in the Euel Lee case” (Police Statement, 446-47).

After giving his first speech, Judge Duer left and drove “through the mob and turned around and came back and stopped at the north end” where he addressed the crowd once more (Police Statement, 447). He also spoke to particular individuals whom he recognized in the crowd. He asked one man, for example, “Why don’t you go home a take a lot of these home with you.” The man replied, “Well, there is a lot of fellows here, police here, and I guess they want company so I think I will stay with them. ... They will have a lot of fun throwing gas, etc. and I think I will stay with them.” The officer who observed this exchange said that the man “practically ignored” the judge (Police Statement, 402). As a prominent member of the community, Judge Duer was not used to being ignored, but this night was already unlike any other. Wednesday was not the usual night that people made the trip into town and when they did, they did not make a practice of gathering in large numbers in front of the small jail.

Various would-be leaders stood out to police, including relatives of Mary Denston, the woman whom Armwood allegedly raped.7 Police recalled seeing

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6 Euel Lee was a black man tried and convicted for the murder of a white family of four in a neighboring county two years before the Armwood lynching. The reason Lee was not lynched is because State Police kept him in Baltimore and never returned him to Worcester County, where the crime had occurred (Ifill 2007; Moore 2006). At the time of Armwood’s lynching, Lee was awaiting his execution by hanging, scheduled for

7 An Afro reporter also overheard mention of a relative who was present; it is not clear if the name he overheard, “Bines,” is the name of Denston’s brother or another relative (“Name woman’s relative as a mob member” 1933).-
her brother. He was dressed in “baggy” clothes, which “looked like he had been working in them.” He appeared to be drunk (Police Statement, 429, 435).

To goad people into acting, the man in baggy clothes came to the front and urged the crowd to follow him by appealing to their moral outrage over what Armwood had supposedly done to his sister. Despite the man’s best efforts, the crowd did not respond. As one officer observed:

He was standing around hollering, “Come on, you yellow sons of bitches, haven’t you got a sister, haven’t you got a mother,” and he attempted to be a leader, and he said, “If you follow me I will get into the jail.” At that time no one followed him. He would walk out a little ways, and then we would push him out in line again (Police Statement, 393).

In addition to the brother of Mary Denston, her son also came to the jail, having travelled all the way from the Philadelphia mainline, where he worked as a patrolman. One Maryland State Police officer who talked with the son recalled him saying, “My mother is alone in the large old home, and I am doing this to protect her” (Police Statement, 436). Denston’s son assumed wrongly that his fellow officers would simply let the crowd through. As the officer who spoke with him observed, “He went up and banged on the [jail] door, some conversation ensued, and in substance he said, ‘Well, if you won’t let us in, why, we will break in’” (Police Statement, 436). Several times the officer had to push the son off the front steps of the jail.

Yet another relative showed up at the jail as well. This relative was a young woman, around twenty years old. According to Frank Spencer, the man who had been visiting from out-of-town, “She was there that night, too, pacing back and forth, urging the mob on.” Spencer recalled that “she was the worst of the bunch” but noticed that she was the only person in the crowd who never used the word “nigger,” referring to Armwood instead as a “colored man” (Spencer 1933).

Other individuals in the crowd were also trying to assert their leadership. One man was William H. Thompson, the owner of a local drugstore in Princess Anne (Police Statement, 414); another was Rusty Heath who was so drunk “he could hardly stand” (Police Statement, 422, 426-7, 430). Another was Irving Adkins, a farmer, who “jumped in the centre of the crowd and had his hat in his hand, and with his hand up in the air, and he hollered, ‘Follow me’, or, ‘Go get him’, or words to that effect” (Police Statement, 426). The multiplicity of individuals attempting to take charge is striking. Like the manhunt, the assembly in front of the jail enabled different people to try to make themselves into mob leaders or “stars” of the lynching. What is also striking is the fact that the crowd did not move or act impulsively or immediately.

Eventually, a clear leader did emerge, according to police. He was a large man, better dressed than the others, who kept yelling, “Come on, let’s go” (Police
Statement, 385, 389, 391). The well-dressed man turned out to be William P. Hearn, the owner of a trucking business from nearby Salisbury. Like the man in baggy clothes and Rusty Heath, Hearns also appeared to have been drinking heavily, his breath smelling of alcohol (Police Statement, 391-92).

He was standing back talking to the crowd. I remember him saying positively—telling the crowd to come on, that they could not shoot you. The next thing I saw of him the crowd had closed around and he was right at the head of the step [of the jail] and he was what you might call number 1 man in that bunch (Police Statement, 390).

It was not enough to have people’s attention, however. The crowd did not automatically follow Hearn, which suggests that people were aware of the enormity of the next step. Hearn was persistent, however, and continued trying to break through the police line. Finally, he succeeded with the help of a subgroup that was willing to follow him. As another officer recounted:

This man [Hearn] was the first leader of the crowd out at that point. He would go back sometimes quite a distance back in the street, get together a crowd up to around 50, and would lead them on to the police line. He would continue to holler, “Let’s go”, and would lead this crowd right up against the police, and would step over, apparently expecting the crowd to follow him, and when he saw no crowd was following him he would go back in the crowd behind, being grabbed by the officer, and then would proceed to organize another crowd, yelling, “Let’s go”, and lead them. Up until the time I saw this man did not appear to have any leadership. He and his crowd were the ones who finally, by their activities, broke through the line and caused Officer Bohler and myself to fall back. He assumed leadership of the entire crowd at that point (Police Statement, 325-26).

A short while later, about 9 pm, the crowd did act (Player 1933). Using a fifteen-foot piece of timber as a battering ram that some had obtained from a nearby lumberyard (Police Statement, 414), the crowd broke through the police line (Police Statement, 378). One officer standing in front of the jail door refused to budge. A small confrontation ensued, indicating that even at this point, the lynching was not inevitable. As this officer explained in his affidavit:

I was directly in front of the door with my back to the door, down one step from the door, when a ram was brought up. I would recognize the first man on this ram. The ram extended out in front of me. This man said, “Are you going to get out of the road?” Down the line several people yelled, “Aren’t you going to get out
of the road?” I said, “No, and the next thing I know, I was rammed in the stomach with the ram. I reeled and kind of turned to get up a step when I was rammed in the back and in the legs (Police Statement, 424).

Frank Spencer, the man from San Francisco, remembered the scene differently. As Spencer told the Afro reporter: “I was within 200 feet of the mob when they rushed the jail door and I saw that battering ram pass in between the policemen, merely brushing their uniforms.” According to Spencer, the claim by some officers that they were struck by the battering ram were fabricated (Spencer 1933).

After breaking down the front door of the jail, the crowd rushed up the circular, metal staircase to the second floor Negro section. They went directly to the “murder cell,” where, according to Deputy Sheriff Norman Dryden, the worst offenders were locked up (“Testimony Given Before Coroner Edgar A. Jones, at the Inquest of George Armwood on October 24, 1933” 1933, 20). The

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8 Page numbers refer to those in the original. Hereinafter, I refer to this document as “Inquest.”
crowd packed itself into the small space. As one prisoner stated at the Inquest when asked how many were in the crowd: “Just as many as could get up there. They kept coming one after the other as fast as they could come up” (Inquest, 26).

Crowd members assured the other prisoners that they were after only one man, George Armwood (Inquest, 40). One black prisoner, who, like the others kept his head down while the mob seized Armwood, testified that he heard “hollering.” As he explained at the Inquest: “I don’t know hardly what they were saying. I heard them saying, ‘let’s go get him’” (Inquest, 28).

Once the crowd had seized Armwood, it dragged him down the metal staircase, then out the front door. Once outside, a young man jumped on Armwood’s back and cut off his ear; another hit Armwood and knocked him to the ground at which point a woman ran over and kicked him in his stomach (Spencer 1933).

The crowd then threw a rope around Armwood’s neck, tied him to the back of a car, and dragged Armwood through town toward the residential district (Spencer 1933). The crowd headed directly to the home of Judge Duer, the same judge who earlier that evening had urged the crowd to go home and let justice take its course.

As the crowd wound its way through town, neighbors, both black and white, could hear the cacophony of sounds the crowd was making. As one black woman recalled,

I was at a church that night. They were having a revival. I heard the tin cans. They were dragging him behind a car. The preacher said, “There’s a lynching. We have to get down on our knees and pray.”

This woman was only six years old at the time, but her memory of that night was sharp. She continued:

They were yelling and screaming. The white people were cheering: ‘This is great.’ I could hear it. It was close by. I’ll never forget that. She [the preacher] told us to get down on our knees and pray. We sat there a while before we left.

When I asked this woman, whether she understood what a lynching was at such a young age, she responded, “I did. A six-year old could understand when someone was being treated badly. A six-year old can understand that” [interview, 21 October 2011].

Once the crowd reached Judge Duer’s house, a woman came out and begged the mob not to hang Armwood there. The crowd obliged and hung Armwood from a tree in front of a nearby house (Police Statement, 443). There is some evidence that the crowd mutilated Armwood as he hung from the tree. One woman who attended the lynching recalled that someone pulled Armwood’s
pants down while he was hanging, which struck her as “a funny thing to do” [interview]. The police who followed the crowd recognized those holding the rope; one was Rusty Heath, whom police had identified earlier as one of the men trying to break the police line in front of the jail (Police Statement, 395, 410). Despite not being able to lead the mob into the jail, Heath seems to have found a way to be front and center once the violence began.

After hanging Armwood near Judge Duer’s house, the crowd took Armwood’s body down, but it was not yet finished. As one officer recounted:

The colored fellow had been laid down on the ground and they were standing there holding the rope before the crowd pulled it out of their hands and pulled the fellow up the street again (Police Statement, 397).

The crowd dragged Armwood several blocks back in the direction of the jail and stopped at the main downtown intersection, near the courthouse. Someone threw the rope over one of the few electricity cables that hung in the small downtown (Police Statement, 439). The crowd then strung up Armwood yet again. Someone secured gasoline, which crowd members used to burn the body. A burning body against the night-time sky would have been a sight to see. In the only photo of the event, one can make out the profile of the crowd riveted by the scene.

At some point, the mob let the body down and it lay in the street. Frank Spencer recalled the macabre behavior that followed:

After, while his burning body lay in the street, filling the breeze with the stench of burning flesh, the mob, men, women, young girls and boys, joined hands and danced around and around his prostrate body, singing ‘John Brown’s Body’ and ‘Give me Something to Remember You By’ (Spencer 1933).

Spencer left the scene, sickened by all that he had witnessed. Unable to sleep, he returned about forty-five minutes later, at which point the crowd was beginning to disperse.

Early the next morning, a reporter from the Baltimore-based black newspaper called The Afro-American, would find the mutilated and burned body of George Armwood in the lumberyard, possibly the same lumberyard from which the crowd had first obtained the battering ram it used to break open the jail. Afro reporter, Clarence Mitchell, covered the body with burlap sacks before taking a photo of it. The photo appeared on the front page of the black newspaper under a six-inch, red-hued headline that read simply “BURN.”
Why kill Armwood by lynching him so publicly and with so much extra-lethal violence? Why not shoot him or beat him to death?

The pretext for the lynching was the allegation that Armwood, a black man, had raped Mary Denston, a white woman. But this charge did not always or inevitably lead to lynching in this region. Twenty years before the Armwood lynching, a town in the Virginia Eastern Shore made sure that their prisoner would not be lynched, despite the charge that the prisoner had raped a young white woman in a neighboring Maryland county (Barnes 2006). The lynching of Armwood helped to construct its own raison d’être, by affirming the idea that an attack by a black man against a white woman necessarily demanded a particular kind of response from the community.

The Armwood lynching reasserted a specific notion of whiteness. It helped to reestablish the prerogatives of whiteness vis-à-vis black persons and bodies. Such whiteness was based on whites exercising total and absolute control over any and all black bodies, and particularly those black bodies that threatened to pollute symbols of white purity, embodied by white women anywhere and everywhere.

While Jim Crow established an etiquette of black deference to anyone designated as white and accorded spatial privileges to whites (Harris 1995; Apel and Smith 2008), it did not grant white people total control over black bodies. Indeed, one of the ironic consequences of legal segregation was the creation of all-black spaces in which black men and women could exercise autonomy, the very kind of autonomy from whites that Jim Crow was supposed to limit and constrain {Hale, 1999 #928, 199-200}.

Segregation was thus an imperfect system of hierarchy and a poor substitution for the institution of chattel slavery, which conferred on white masters unlimited power over and access to black bodies, both male and female. Lynching re-established whiteness to imply boundless power over and unimpeded access to black bodies. From beginning to end, the lynching showed what this power looked like and provided anyone who came the opportunity to experience this power first-hand. One need not have cut off an ear or strung up the rope to be part of the scene. It was enough to join in the manhunt, pass along a rumor, assemble at the jail, cheer, clap, or follow the mob as it dragged Armwood through the streets to become part of the show. And to be part of the show was to experience first-hand the brand of whiteness the lynching was inscribing through and on the body of George Armwood.

The kind of whiteness that the lynching inscribed was one that would go to any lengths to preserve its power. Such whiteness was not beholden to the law or the interests of elites, such as Judge Duer. Judge Duer did not embody the type of whiteness lynchers were constructing, nor did the police officers who tried to keep the mob from storming the jail. These individuals represented a system of law that threatened the absolute power of whiteness, for the law clearly accorded black criminals too many rights and privileges. It enabled a man like Euel Lee, whom whites believed to be guilty of murdering a white family of
four, to be saved from being lynched by State Police and then, through clever lawyering delay justice for over two years before he was finally executed by the state.\textsuperscript{9}  

The lynching of Armwood helped to right that wrong. It helped to reaffirm white people’s prerogative to take matters into their own hands regardless of what the letter or spirit of the law said. That prerogative was itself an expression of a brand of whiteness that knew no bounds when it came to protecting its moral authority and social power.

That the lynching itself was the mechanism for communicating this notion of whiteness is clear from the actions the mob took. The lynching gave people license to engage in all manner of transgressions, but the violence never became a free-for-all. There was an order to it. It was part of a repertoire that people were familiar with; indeed, many may well have taken part in the lynching of Matthew Williams almost two years before, in Salisbury, a short drive away. After removing Armwood from the jail, for example, mob members did not hang him there; they first tied him to the back of a truck, then dragged him several blocks through town to a specific location—the home of Judge Duer. What greater and more emphatic rebuke to Duer’s earlier appeal to leave matters in the hands of the courts than a lynching on his front lawn? What louder or more insistent expression of whiteness-that-knows-no-bounds than dragging man through town tied by the neck to the back of a moving vehicle while a mob of thousands followed and cheered enthusiastically?

After hanging Armwood near Duer’s house, mob members could have easily stopped the proceedings there, but they did not. Instead, they dragged Armwood several blocks back into town to hang him in front of the courthouse, the other symbol of law and order, the same system of law and order that denied the people of Worcester County the opportunity to enact their own form of people’s justice on Euel Lee. The extra-lethal violence expressed this power to the fullest. It constituted whiteness as not only above the law, but also above any moral limits. It constituted those taking part as capable of taking “justice” into their own hands—literally—by skinning Armwood alive (through dragging) and mutilating his body repeatedly and sadistically. Transgressions to and with Armwood’s body, whether dead or alive, were the ultimate expression of whiteness that knows no bounds.

The crowd was both receptacle and bullhorn for broadcasting this power. Its cheers and screams constituted both encouragement and approval and helped to constitute the lynching as a spectacle. Without the large, active crowd, the same acts would have taken on a very different pall or meaning.

\textsuperscript{9} The Scottsboro trial was also taking place at the same time but there is no indication that Eastern Shore whites were following this case or linked it to Armwood. Elizabeth Hale (1999 \#928, 222) argues that the Scottsboro case did resonate for those involved in the lynching of Claude Neal in Marianna, Florida in 1934.
In constituting the display, the display, in turn, made it possible for any and all to become part of the show, regardless of whether they approved of the lynching or not. Such is the power of display to assign roles to everyone and everyone to a role. Even Frank Spencer, the man who in town from San Francisco, became part of the show, despite his disapproval and initial attempts to find a way to stop or prevent the lynching. By showing up, he, too, became part of the spectacle.

**Mass murder in Rwanda**

Roland, the head of a large family in Ngali, must have assumed that his children would be safe outside the capital, where killing of political moderates and Tutsi began immediately after the plane crash on 6 April 1994 that killed President Habyarimana. South of the capital, where Ngali was located, people had experienced very little of the war; it had started in October 1990 when the RPF rebel group attacked Rwanda from Uganda. Until the plane crash, however, the tumult and insecurity of the war had been limited to the north of the country.

After the plane crash, Ngali, like the rest of the central and southern portions of the country, remained tense but without violence (Kimonyo 2008; Guichaoua 2005; Des Forges 1999). During this period, information was scarce, rumors plentiful, and fear widespread. In the south of Butare, the southern-most province, some Tutsi were already trying to cross the border into Burundi before killing had even started in the region (Kabagema 2001, 16). But in Ngali, people were staying put and adjusting to rapidly shifting lines of authority and power.

Two weeks after the crash, violence began in Ngali. Two interviewees recalled a specific date when the violence began—Friday, 22 April 1994. Another recalled an earlier date of April 14, around the time when Jude declared himself the new official in charge of Ngali.

Like Roland, Jude was from a large and prominent family that owned a lot of land and cows, the principle markers of wealth and status in Rwanda. Both families were well liked in the community; and the two families had no quarrels or conflicts between them. When I asked one genocide survivor whether a child from one family could have married a child from the other before the war, he replied, “It was possible because they were on good terms” [interview, 3 Aug 2011].

Before the war, Jude had been the head of one of six cellules in Ngali, but with the growing extremism after the plane crash, Jude was able to declare himself the new leader in charge of Ngali, usurping the formal official in that position. Jude’s motives for assuming power in Ngali did not seem to stem from a hatred of Tutsi. No one ever described Jude as someone who harbored prejudices against Tutsi or any other group for that matter. He himself was married to a woman whose grandfather and father had changed their families’ identity cards from Tutsi to Hutu during the terminal colonial period (though it is not clear that he knew this part of her family’s history) (Fujii 2009).

When Roland sent his children to Ngali for safekeeping, he could have had no idea that the killing in Kigali would eventually start in other regions—not
all at once, but in piecemeal fashion, orchestrated, enacted, and put in place by the genocidal regime that appointed itself the new government within twenty-four hours of the plane crash [Straus, 2006 #239].

The violence in Ngali, as elsewhere, began with looting and burning of houses. During this time, both Hutu and Tutsi were unsure of the nature of the violence—who was behind it and who the targets were. Rumors had been circulating since the plane crash about threats emanating from different quarters. There were rumors about RPF soldiers and their resemblance to the devil, replete with long tails and pointy ears. There were rumors about possible attacks by people from Bugesera, a neighboring region; there were also rumors of threats from Burundian refugees, encamped at a nearby military base after having fled their own country in October 1993, following a military coup of Burundian president Melchior Ndadaye (Prunier 1995).

One resident recalled that those responsible for the burning and looting in his cellule had come from another cellule, on the far side of Ngali, where Jude lived. When these “outsiders” attacked this man’s cellule, some of his neighbors tried to stop the attackers while others fled out of fear. He himself fled to an adjacent commune and returned the next day when he learned that attackers were only burning and looting Tutsi homes [interview, 14 June 2004].

Given the uncertainty, confusion, and fear that the burning and looting generated in Ngali, it is not surprising that the first time an attack group or igitero (ibitero, pl.) came to Roland’s mother’s house, his mother believed the attackers were only out to steal from Tutsi, as had occurred in 1973, during the waning days of the Kayibanda regime. As one man in the igitero explained:

[She] was asking us to take three of the cows to eat so that she could save the other seven. She looked at the situation as similar to the events of 1973. She thought the attackers would just eat the cows but not attack the people. We refused to slaughter these cows at first but then little by little, as time went on, the war was turning into something else and the cows were taken and eaten [interview, 22 June 2009].

10 Straus (2006) shows that killing began in the regions where support for Habyarimana’s MRND party was strongest. See Dallaire (2004) for a first-person account of events in Kigali following the plane crash.

11 Distance in rural areas is best measured by how long it takes to walk somewhere. Though I never walked from one end of the secteur to the other, I did walk to various parts of the secteur, after parking my car in a central place. I estimate that it could easily take forty-five to sixty minutes from one side of the secteur to the other. Thus, when an interviewee referred to “outsiders,” I generally asked for clarification as to whether he or she meant people from outside Ngali or people from another cellule in Ngali. In this particular case, the man was referring to the latter.

12 Grégoire Kayibanda was the first president of Rwanda and was toppled in a coup in 1973 by Juvénal Habyarimana, who was then a young army officer.
Even before the killing started, the igitero (attack groups) were making their presence known, wearing banana leaves on their heads, singing the MDR Pawa song, or chanting “Abajepe twaje” which translates to “GP, here we come” (GP is the French acronym for Garde présidentielle, the elite, French trained, special force of the president). The threat of violence was clear through their gesticulations, costumes, and props.

Killing began a week after the burning and looting of Tutsi homes. Most took place in the two cellules where the majority of Tutsi lived. By mid-May, when most Tutsi had fled or been killed, Jude announced a meeting would be held at the administrative building for the secteur, a small wooden, single-story structure, centrally located along the main road that winds through Ngali.

Jude urged all Tutsi who were still in hiding to attend the meeting; he assured them that the killing was over and that they would receive recompense for stolen or lost property as well as new parcels of land if they came. Many heeded the call and came out of hiding to attend. Most were older women but a few men attended as well. One woman who was too sick to attend watched surreptitiously because she did not believe that the killing was really over. Her suspicions were well founded. Once people had assembled at the secteur office, killers butchered them all. Afterwards, killers began to chase down all those who were notably absent from the meeting, such as Roland’s mother and sister.

The two women had already fled to a neighboring commune but returned the day of the meeting to find that the killers had burned their house down. A relative told the women to take refuge in his mother’s house since the “killing of women had not yet been ordered.” The two hid there, but once the meeting was over, the killers located the two women at the house and killed them there.

Jude and one of his lieutenants led the attacks. The ibitero was large, consisting over one hundred men. According to one man forced to take part, the group was unusually large because Jude feared that Roland might own a gun.

Killers also hunted down Roland’s children. An even larger group—estimated at two to three hundred men—hunted down three of Roland’s youngest, who ranged in age from about seven to ten years old. The children were heading home from a neighboring commune when the killers found them. It was 10 o’clock in the morning.

The men who discovered the children brought them to a central spot, not far from the family’s home. The children were to be killed in front of the entire igitero, all two hundred or so men who had participated in their pursuit. The igitero had the children lie on the ground, face down. According to one man present, the children were silent. They did not beg for their lives. They did not cry. They did not try to run away. Jude then appointed specific individuals to act as executioner, one for each child. Jude told the men to get it over with, so the igitero could continue chasing down more victims. The three men bludgeoned the children quickly with clubs and hoes. The murders took only a few minutes.

13 “Pawa” was the appellation that all extremists, no matter their party affiliation, used; the MDR was the dominant political party in Ngali and the surrounding region.
Jude then ordered everyone to move on and leave the bodies where they were. Later in the day, he ordered the two leaders of the cellule where the children had been murdered to go back and have the bodies buried.

The same questions we asked in the Armwood lynching arise in this episode as well. Why did the men who found the children not just kill them on the spot, where and when they found them? Why take the time and effort to bring them together in front of the whole group to kill them?

The killing of Roland’s family, including his young children, was a large-scale production, involving hundreds of men. The unequivocal director of the production was Jude. It was he who organized the ibitero and it was he who directed how the ibitero would kill. Like the Armwood lynching, this was no free-for-all. The ibitero killed in a particular way. Jude neither allowed nor encouraged any deviations.

The killings were done in broad daylight, in front of a large group of attackers. The killing of women and children, however, did not require hundreds of men. Two or three would have sufficed. The size of the ibitero clearly carried other meaning. It was as if the size reflected the enormity of the task. To take down the biggest and richest family in the secteur was no small matter, whether or not the family owned a gun. Jude was not going to take any chances.

There is another meaning we might derive from the igitero’s size. The large numbers expressed the power that Jude exercised as leader of the genocide in Ngali. Whereas the Armwood lynching expressed the power of the community to act over and above the law, the killing of Roland’s family expressed Jude’s power to enact the genocide as he saw fit. Jude did not innovate the killing-by-group method; this was the pattern across many parts of the country (Straus 2006; Mironko 2004; Des Forges 1999). What he did decide, however, was who would be required to take part.

Staging the killings of the children such that everyone in the igitero came together to watch made Jude the arbiter of life and death. It was Jude who decided not only who would live and who would die, but also who would become executioner. According to several different interviewees, Jude often picked out people whose loyalties were suspect, either because they had ties to the victim through friendship or family or because they had not been seen doing the “work” of genocide, such as conducting night patrols, manning roadblocks, or joining their cellule’s igitero. For example, One of the men Jude ordered to kill one of the children was a man whose mother was related to Roland’s family and by extension, the child he was told to kill.

14 In a separate incident, a much smaller group killed another son of Roland’s at Roland’s mother’s house. It is not clear when this killing occurred in relation to the bogus “meeting” at the secteur office.
If Jude exercised the power to force people to kill relatives and friends, he had the power to reconfigure the social make-up of the secteur. By directing the genocide, Jude was rewriting the basis for belonging. The price was steep for those who hewed to existing ties with Tutsi friends and family members. As one active killer responded when I asked him if he ever tried to save anyone, “If you even suggested helping someone, they would make you kill that person yourself” (Fujii, 2009 #393). Violence quite literally defined who could belong in the new order and who could not.

That this order was defined by the logic of genocide—which identified all Tutsi as a mortal threat to Hutu—was the larger context in which Jude and all local leaders operated, but it was not necessarily the logic that drove violence at the local level. Violence in Ngali seemed to be more about constituting and consolidating Jude’s individual political power, rather than the power or reach of Hutu Pawa leaders. Jude himself did not always follow the directive to kill all Tutsi. In a few cases, he agreed to help protect Tutsi in exchange for payment of money and beer. He also had eleven Hutu killed. The reason is unclear but there is no indication that these killing were connected to the genocide at all. For Jude, genocide was about expressing and enhancing his own, individual and absolute power in Ngali, not that of any group, political, social or otherwise.

The mechanism for broadcasting power was the collective and public methods for hunting down and killing targets, particularly prominent targets like Roland’s family. Making the violence public helped to implicate people far and wide. People could not help but to see and hear the violence, even if they did not take direct part in it. It was literally all around them. Thus, whether one was “for” the genocide or not, one could not escape the violence or its meaning. The audience writ large was captive in every sense possible. There was no escape even if one tried because the evidence of violence was everywhere, from dead bodies left temporarily unburied to the large groups, whooping and hollering, and hunting down children and other important targets.

**Massacre in Bosnia**

It began early in the morning, 5 or 6 am, on a typically warm July day, so early that most people would still be inside their homes, eating breakfast, drinking coffee, and enjoying the cool morning temperatures (Samardžija trial 2006)\(^1\). As one man recalled, “They took us by surprise” (interview). The heat would soon descend on the village and reach the mid-80s by noon.\(^2\) It would linger until the evening when the cool air brought relief.

The fifteen to twenty soldiers were already in place at the meadow, following the plans laid the night before. Former history and geography teacher-

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15 Testimony was in Serbo-Croatian. I obtained audio files from the State Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which I had transcribed. The translations are my own with the help of Ajla Omerspahić.

turned-company\textsuperscript{17} commander, Marko Samardžija sent two messengers (kurir) to knock on the doors of all Muslim homes and instruct each household that the men must assemble at the meadow.

The order to assemble was not new. On two previous occasions in June, different army units from outside the region had ordered all Muslim men to gather. The soldiers then took the detained men to the school and not long after, told them to go home. On these occasions, the soldiers did not hold the men more than an hour. According to one local man, the soldiers from outside Selo were asking each other why the local soldiers had asked them to come (interview). What need was there for reinforcements to help herd a group of unarmed men to the local school and then set them free?

At his own trial, Sarmadžija recalled these earlier operations by the Sixth Sana Brigade but was unaware who ordered them. The dates he recalled were 16 June and 25 or 26 June, about two weeks before the current operation, of which he was now in charge (Sud Bosne i Hercegovine 2006, 28 September 15).\textsuperscript{18}

The night before this morning of mornings, there had been a meeting of military officers and local police. The meeting took place at a local restaurant called Lovac, the same name sported by countless other neighborhood watering holes across the country. Lovac means “hunter” in the local language, an ironic moniker given what was to happen that warm July day. Those at the meeting included local residents called up from the reserves as well as outsiders brought in to help create the new order of the breakaway regime, which had christened itself Republika Srpska (RS). The RS was carving out territory belonging to the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. To create itself as a separate state, the new RS authorities, with Radovan Karadžić at its head, appropriated, toppled, or shadowed existing government organs and entities (Hanson 2009).

At the meeting at Lovac, the higher-ups gave instructions for the mission to be carried out the next day. The soldiers were to have all Muslim males gather at a central collection point, then march the captives to a local elementary school, where military police would question the men. The pretext was a claim—unfounded but nonetheless effective—that local Muslims had been arming themselves and preparing for revolt or worse, take-over. Rumors had been circulating among Serbs that their Muslims neighbors had drawn up lists of people they were planning to kill. There had been much speculation about which of the Muslims’ neighbors were on those lists.

\textsuperscript{17} In the trial transcripts in the local language, attorneys use the word “vod” to refer to Samardžija’s unit, which can be translated as “squad” or “platoon” or even “company.” In an English language version of the proceedings from 28 September 2006, official translators refer to Samardžija as a “company” commander (2006) but the size his “company” seems to have been closer to a platoon in American military lexicon.

\textsuperscript{18} If available, I use the page numbers from the original written transcript obtained from the State Court of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In some cases, the copy I obtained was an audio tape which I had transcribed myself; in this case, I do not cite page numbers.
At sunrise the next morning, Sarmadžija was ready to do as ordered. As a long-time resident and teacher, Sarmadžija was well known and respected. He knew most of the people in the area and they knew him.

As instructed, Muslim men, young and old, gathered at the field. One of the soldiers in Sarmadžija’s unit who testified at Sarmadžija’s trial said he thought the mission had to do with issuing the Muslim men “permits” so that they could move around (Sud Bosne i Hercegovine 2006, 13 July). According to this same witness, the atmosphere at the meadow was relaxed.

Marko [Sarmadžija] headed over, talking among them, the people were listening to him, no one was making any problems, not at all, they were even heading out to piss, and coming back. I’m saying that nothing bad was happening there.

Soldiers had the captives empty their pockets but found nothing. The soldiers knew their captives, at least by sight, from years of casual contact or in some cases, close friendship (Samardžija trial 2006). Sarmadžija himself had close friends who were Muslim. His own kum (best man) had been a Muslim.

Once the Muslim men had assembled, the soldiers arranged their captives into two columns and marched them toward the school, about five hundred meters away. The atmosphere continued to be relaxed, according to this same soldier. The captives walked with their arms at their sides and the soldiers with their rifles slung on their backs, as if they expected no trouble. One of the captives remembers the scene differently. He recalls that the prisoners were ordered to march with their hands behind their heads with their eyes looking down so they could not recognize anyone. Whatever the case, the soldiers and their captives reached the school without incident.

In the courtyard in front of the school, military police were waiting. They were recognizable by their white belt buckles (Weiss 2000). The military police forced the captive men to line up single file and run a gauntlet before the entrance to the school. Once inside, the police forced the men into classrooms, which were already crowded with men from neighboring villages. The police searched the men’s clothing and pockets. They took what they wanted and threw out the rest. Then they took the captive men’s information: names, dates and places of birth.

Inside, the men waited in the heat, fearful and nervous; they had no idea what would happen next. Military police began taking men out of the classrooms in groups of five and forced them to run another gauntlet through the corridors. As one prisoner recalled, “So you went through the špalir [gauntlet] and they were beating us with everything—feet, guns, whatever they had.” As they beat the men, those in the gauntlet were calling them “balije,” a derogatory term for Muslims.

After several hours, buses pulled up in front of the school. The police loaded the men onto the vehicles. Military police swarmed the streets to make
sure that none of the neighbors was peaking through the curtains to watch what was happening. The buses began to leave, but every several meters, they stopped. Soldiers off-loaded the prisoners in groups of five and shot them. They continued until they had killed one hundred and twenty men in all.

What was this mission really about? Why herd unarmed men into a school and force them to run gauntlets only to kill them later? Why not kill them at the meadow and get the mission over with as fast as possible?

Like the other two episodes, the details of how this mission unfolded suggest that it was about more than just containing a potential threat. The men were unarmed; the region was firmly under Bosnian Serb control from the start of the war. By July 1992, Bosnian Serbs controlled the majority of the Bosanska Krajina, including the region’s two largest cities, Banja Luka and Prijedor (Helsinki Watch 1993, 30, 42).

Like the other two episodes, the episode was about showing and showing off RS power and the new order RS officials were creating. This order was based on a particular conception of Serbness, which did not accord with previous constructions. Before the war, Serbs in Selo, as elsewhere, not only lived alongside non-Serbs peaceably, but also formed close friendships and intermarried. Differences and distinctions were based on shared understandings of which practices constituted meaningful distinctions between Bosnian Croats, Serbs, and Muslims (Brina 1995). Differences were thus ways to express mutual respect, not sow the seeds of division or violence.

Like the Armwood lynching, the show of force was a literal enactment of what this new brand of Serbness looked like. Nationalist conceptions no longer countenanced mixed marriages and close friendships between Serb and non-Serb. This show of force cast “real” Serbs as those who willing to create the kind of Serbness that mixed marriages and friendships had sullied and drained of any meaning. This new brand was based not on segregation of Serbs from non-Serbs but on “cleansing” territories through mass murder and forced expulsion. To be a “real” Serb under the new political order meant being willing to participate in cleansing missions.

The public nature of the first part of the mission helped to broadcast the terms of the new order and what this new Serb power looked like. Like Armwood, the non-Serb men (in this case Muslim) were cast in the role of

19 Bihać was an exception; it was under the leadership of Fikret Abdić, a Muslim, who was not a member of the main Muslim party, the SDA, which was headed by Izetbegović. Abdić positioned himself as a rival to the SDA and struck a deal with Bosnian Serb forces, thereby maintaining his own brand of “home rule” over Bihać. Abdić’s presence meant that local Muslims who backed him had better access to food and security but it also meant that more Muslims in this area died at the hands of other Muslims than of Bosnian Serbs. For a superb analysis of the situation, see Christia (2008).
existential threat. Thus, to inscribe the new meanings, the soldiers and military police had to be seen eradicating the threat. These soldiers were no Stalins. They did not come in the middle of the night and take the men out to kill them behind the barn. The mission started at daylight when the assembly of Muslim men, the march to the school, and the gauntlet in the schoolyard would be most visible. As in the Armwood lynching, RS authorities were not so much communicating to non-Serbs as they were to other Serbs. The mission showed ordinary Serbs (who may or may have supported the new regime) what it now meant be a “real” Serb. Serbs who did not act accordingly were no longer “real” Serbs.

The Serbness the mission helped to inscribe was expressed in terms of hierarchy and power over non-Serbs. The forced assembly and march to the school were expressions of that hierarchy and power. The Muslim men did not come as prisoners—they were turned into prisoners through forced assembly and march to a place of confinement (the school).

While the soldiers turned their Muslim neighbors into prisoners, the military police at the school reduced the m to a further state of helplessness. As they began to brutalize the captives, they could show off a different kind of power, one that enabled them to brutalize their captives at will.

What is different about this episode as compared to the two others is that the killings themselves occurred off-camera, that is, out of sight. The police were patrolling the streets to make sure people were not watching through their windows. Unlike the other two violent displays, this episode involved strategies of revealing and hiding, which makes the portion that were clearly put on display all the more important for their meaning-making work.

Analysis

When viewing violent displays as performatives, the question is not what the displays accomplish, but rather what meanings they generate. What does it mean to kill a man by dragging, burning, hanging, and mutilating him in front of a crowd of thousands? What does it mean to kill the children of a large family by hunting them down in large groups then executing them in hundreds? What does it meant to massacre a group of over one hundred men by first parading them through the village, beating them in front of a school, then surreptitiously shooting them in small groups?

What is important in each of these episodes is not just the murder of a few or many, but the meanings inscribed through the violence. These meanings varied in their specifics but generally speaking, they were about the instantiation of a new order based on notions of belonging and entitlement that were in direct opposition to existing understandings and practices. Nationalist Serb conceptions of what it meant to be a “real” Serb had no relation to how people had lived in mixed villages across Bosnia for decades. In Maryland, the kind of whiteness lynchers were enacting was not the way most people on both sides of the color line lived, even under Jim Crow. In Rwanda, genocidal constructions had little if any resemblance to the way people lived prior to the war, be they Hutu or Tutsi.
In none of the three episodes did it matter whether people believed in the new brand of Serbness or whiteness or the new genocidal ideology that the display makers were inscribing and promoting. What mattered was the bodily enactment of those new orders. Each display assigned roles to everyone and everyone to a role. Even those who watched from behind curtains or heard the sounds from inside a church building, become part of the show, however unwittingly.

The displays also enabled those who took part willingly to take on new roles—to become stars of their own making, as Rusty Heath did when he held the rope from which Armwood hung, as Jude did when he declared himself the new leader of Ngali, and as Samardžija did when he took on the mission that eventuated in the killing of over one hundred Muslim men. These roles conferred instant status on particular individuals. Some, like Rusty Heath and Jude sought out this opportunity, while others, like Samardžija, seemed to have taken on the role without thinking of the consequences.

The displays “worked” through creating visually arresting scenes which drew an audience of active spectators; the presence of spectators helped to broadcast the power and message of the displays far and wide, for even those who were not there could hear about what happened through the telling and retelling by those who were there. Such is the power of display to upend the status quo by meting out violence on the backs, fronts, arms, and legs of victims as people looked on, and by doing so, radically transform social reality.

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