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Czechs or Rwandans, or even, for that matter, the Guag, are anything as well known and documented as the "Final Solution", a fact that is not only due to the relative absence of documentation in the other cases. An important component of our enduring, almost obsessive, drive to account for the Shoah's horrors and transgressions resides in a certain (partially praiseworthy) Eurocentrism: the abiding astonishment that Germany, an industrial, allegedly civilized society - in its own traditional estimation, the quintessential Kulturnation - could thusdeport itself. This was no primitive act; the fascination resides precisely in its streamlined modernity. Killing was now bureaucratized, cerebral, minutely calculated (elements that endow the "Final Solution" with its ongoing horror).

We are, I suggest, less likely to be taken back by (or to take an interest in) atrocities removed from the imagined Western, Enlightened "core" - even from the Guag, because this occurred in what our mental maps regard as a not fully civilized hali-Asien. And if this is so, then - Cold War attitudes notwithstanding - the politicides (or what some observers in the journal call "democides") perpetrated by other even more geographically distant Communist regimes - those of Pol Pot, Mao - become somehow diminished, "Third World" affairs. It is precisely because Nazi atrocities, as George Steiner has put it, "did not spring up in the Gobi desert or the rain forests of the Amazon", that they retain their indelibly scandalous nature. By extension, when barbarous events occur in places removed from the European centre - say, in Indonesia or the Sudan - one is sadly less likely to be appalled, less able emphatically to connect. Are not brutalities expected in remote places? As Hannah Arendt once put it about native tribes on the Dark Continent, senseless massacres are integral parts of such local traditions! Emathy, as recent events seem to indicate, typically follows civilizational failiures.

The background outlined here should also increase one's appreciation for the project under review, for it brings to a larger public a factual and analytic global panorama of the many other, shockingly less known and less researched genocides of the late nineteenth century (earlier cases pertaining to the ancient and early modern world - such as the wiping out of First Nation Peoples in Latin and North America in the wake of European colonialisms - are mentioned, but are not the typical focus of attention). The murder of the Herero, Australian Aborigines, Armenians, the Gypsies (Sinti and Roma), and the Cambodian, Indonesian, Sudanese, Rwandan and Serbian horrors are all given attention.

The Journal of Genocide Research also variously addresses the relationship of genocide to nationalism; gender (Helene Fein's treatment of this question is nuanced and balanced); the motivations of the perpetrators; the possibilities of the coexistence of victims and survivors within the same society after the event (Mark A. Drumbil's piece on Rwanda is exemplary in this regard), and so on. More problematically, it posits "genocide" not just as a comparative, historical reality but as an object of theoretical study, a heuristic "entity". Necessarily, it grapples with problems of definition. Thus it seeks to distinguish genocide from other crimes of mass killing (described variously in the journal as "politicide", "democide", "populicide", even "auto-genocide" (the neologisms are not always easy on the ear). The political and ideologicalkillings which involved the largest number of victims - as carried out under Stalin and Mao - were murders perpetrated by regimes on their own citizens and in which ethnic identity played little or no part (although there was a strong element of ethnic cleansing in Inner Mongolia). The Indonesian massacre of Communists in 1965 and 1966 was free of ethnic considerations (and yet, as Robert Cribb in his illuminating study comments, it displayed similar patterns of stereotyping by treating Communist "as a permanent, semi-hereditary condition which might affect even people born after 1965"). Other examples provide a more mixed picture. In the Pol Pot slaughters (between 1975 and 1979, over one-and-a-half million Cambodians perished under Khmer rule), and the horrific killings perpetrated by the Sudanese Islamists, the main victims were over the south (excellently elucidated in the journal by Paul Bartrop), ethnicity was a factor, although not always a determinant one.

Is it possible (or desirable) to distinguish qualitatively between these types of killings, to move from a sharp distinction between genocides, as Hutttenbach puts it? In most cases of politicide, a plausible argument can be made about the complete innocence of the victims. And, as Cribb, argues, if scale is to be the criterion, very little can be said about the estimated deaths - about 30 million Chinese - for the Great Leap Forward of the 1950s and the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. The 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide excluded political murder on the grounds of the inherent mutability of political groupings, which seemed less amenable to definition than ethnic and religious groups. Moreover, the classic definition of genocide as "entailing ethnic murder possesses a "horror which transcended the crime of killing people for their political views and activities". The issue of what to include under this rubric becomes even more complicated if one acknowledges that certain civil wars - the Congo represents the most extreme and perhaps least-known current example - approximate to a kind of democide. Still, one may wish to hold on to the "existential" definition suggested by Hutttenbach, for it helps maintain some kind of distinction between genocide and politicide. For the former to apply, he remarks, an extermination thought and/ or deed must apply to "the existential realm where collective being is confronted by the danger of oblivion". Whether or not this solves the problem of definition, there can be no doubt that, from the beginning, divergent political interests have contested the matter; both the Soviet Union and the United States expressed dissatisfaction with the Convention - the latter sought to include political as well as religious and ethnic groups as potential victims of genocide (thus rendering Stalinist policies culpable), while the former wanted to include indigenous peoples as a category (thus rendering the US culpable for its treatment of Native American tribes).

The journal has its teething problems. There is an unevenness in the quality of analyses, a lack of polish, and occasions where the theorizing is both mechanical and reductionist. Still, it provides a platform for airing alternative views on issues and events that has hitherto been lacking. One is left with the overwhelming impression, all attempts at classification and definition notwithstanding, that there is no taxonomic tidiness to be had. Genocide and politicide, mass murders of enormous dimensions, cannot be simply fixed to a modern or premodern impetus or set of actions; nor can they be ideologically confined to the Left or the Right, to Communist or anti-Communist versions. This is a history that encompasses both secular and religious regimes and world-views (in the present political climate, it is important to note that in the post-Second World War era, Mass limits have been both perpetrators and victims; the former in Indonesia and Sudan, the latter in the Serbian catastrophe). Moreover, no consensus prevails as to whether or not there was an Armenian genocide, hence, it defines the deaths in the Guag, how to locate the fate of Native American tribes, and so on.

The journal’s salutary insistence on broadening the perspective, chronicling the global manifestations of genocide, is not merely academic. It is also animated, once senses, by the classical Enlightenment belief that somehow knowledge and understanding of evil can prevent, or at least ameliorate, its repetition. But the record presents of human cruelty and murderousness, while perhaps making us reach ever more desperately for our liberal ideals and hopes, must, surely, tend to undermine the typically optimistic assumptions of that philosophy. Recent events make the mood even darker.

STEVEN E. ASCHHEIM

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