

CONCEPT INFLATION AND CRIMINALISATION OF DEBATE

I have already written that we live in a period of not only monetary inflation, but of concept and value inflation as well. In our time oaths have become worthless, while formerly a person who broke one lost not only all of his own power, but the capacity to represent his values and to participate in the public sphere as well. Nothing, other than his own person and his private life, remained. He no longer had the right to speak on behalf of either his group, his nation, or his society.

One's word of honour is becoming worthless, while formerly a person who did not keep it lost the capacity to merit even the slightest trust. Letters of recommendation are becoming worthless - the respect and trust in the person recommending used to determine the future of the person being recommended, while today we write letters of recommendation for people whom we not only do not know well, but whom we have probably never even seen.

Concepts as well are becoming worthless - they are no longer being preserved and used to describe unique experiences of humanity. Everything is becoming equally important or not important. I am becoming the centre of the universe simply because it is I. Ten years ago, articles in the American press on the annual holocaust of turkeys before Thanksgiving Day, struck me as the height of concept inflation. There are probably other, even more common examples of a lack of thinking and responsibility. Disrespect for concepts and language can only briefly mask the disrespect for people that will, sooner or later, emerge as well.

In the last decades, genocide has become one such dangerously devalued concept. Right from the start, I want to say that the devaluation of this concept comes not only from a lack of concern for all of humanity and humanitarianism - it is a symptom of the transformation of self into the centre of history and of the universe, as well as of insensitivity towards humanity. And to top it all off, the excessive use of this concept conceals the threat of repression of discussion.

Genocide is not only a philosophical, political, and sociological concept. It is also a legal concept clearly outlined in juridical UN documents, and clearly defined in international law. After the mass annihilation by the Nazis of national and ethnic groups, this manifestation began to be defined as the deliberate doctrine and implemented practice of the liquidation of a nation, or a religious

or ethnic group. Genocide is the destruction of a people or bloc, or of an entire racial entity - regardless of the class structure, dominating ideology, or internal social and cultural differences of the entity.

Genocide is not a battle against an enemy, which, under conditions of war or social revolution, is clearly defined in terms of class, military, ideological or political-doctrinal criteria. Otherwise, any revolution and its organised destruction of an enemy would have to be called genocide. Genocide is destruction without any selection. It happens when nothing, either theoretically or practically - not an ideological conversion or a religious apostasy, not even the betrayal of one's own people and desertion to the enemy side - can save the one being killed.

Let us agree that in this respect, neither the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in Paris in 1572 or the overall terrible and blood-thirsty killing of Huguenots in France, nor the terror of the Inquisition, nor the mass killing of women, "witches", "sorcerers", Jews, and homosexuals in the Middle Ages, nor the destruction of the Vandea and the liquidation of entire villages sent to the guillotine during the French Revolution in 1789-1794 - no matter how shocking they all were - were events of genocide. All of these people, no matter how terrible their fate, could have saved themselves by going over to the side of the enemy or persecutor.

Genocide is a theory and a practice (primarily a practice) that leaves no possibility, even by going over to the side of the enemy, for the condemned and massacred person to save himself. You are guilty for having been born, and only your annihilation can correct this fatal error and original sin and guilt - that is the metaphysics of total hatred and genocide. Only the total destruction of body, life, blood, and colour can resolve this problem.

So whether we like it or not, the Holocaust was the sole 100% genocide in the entire history of humanity. It was a unique event not only in its speed, terrible practice and industrialised methods of destruction, but also in its determination to carry out the Final Solution, for as long as one single Jew remained alive. Ultimately, this was not an ordinary mass killing, but the political decision of an industrial and civilised state, the carrying out of which required the subjugation of the entire economic, military, and industrial might and political propaganda of

the country. Other genocides of the 20th century thus need to be referred to with stipulations. Which by no means belittle the scale of their tragedy, nor diminish the responsibility of the killers in the face of God or the world.

Undoubtedly, other 20th century mass killings of peoples, no less horrifying despite the fact that they were perhaps more sporadic or less planned, did have characteristics of genocide.

The massacre of the Armenians during the First World War, the mass killing of Romanians during the Second World War, Stalin's Holodomor in Ukraine, the terrifying rapid destruction of a million Tutsis in Rwanda, and finally the mass killing of Bosnians (i.e., the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Albanians in former Yugoslavia - all of these macabre 20th century events are considered to be mass killings with characteristics of genocide.

In their ideological prevalence and on a practical scale these are not as global, and somewhat less internationalised genocides compared to the Holocaust, but nonetheless they are terrible, genocide-type annihilations and crimes against humanity. Attempts were made to destroy not individual groups of enemies or social strata, but to liquidate as many representatives of a people as possible.

Did Lithuania suffer a genocide? No. No matter how brutal the Soviet terror in the Baltic countries, desertion to the side of, and collaboration with, the occupier allowed a large number of Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians not only to save their own lives, it also guaranteed them a not insignificant administrative career under the conditions of the occupational regime, and unpunished atrocities, acts of revenge, and settling of scores in their own countries. There really was no proposal for the total destruction of the Baltic nations - it's doubtful that they would otherwise have survived. Which does not mean that I am diminishing the scale of the Soviet terror or the crimes against humanity committed by communism.

I will always protest any justification of this bloody and essentially criminal regime, or any minimisation of the scale of its crimes. But let's be honest and honourably admit the fact that, all the same, we did not experience true genocide.

It is not for nothing that the famous Soviet dissident and philosopher Grigori Pomerantz suggested that, rather than genocide,

the concept of straticide, i.e., the destruction not of the entire nation but of certain strata and classes, be applied to the Soviet terror. It was, after all, not the entire nation that was being destroyed as a racial or ethnic entity, but those strata that were the most enlightened, cultured, and conscious.

The Russians do not call the physical destruction of its intelligentsia and its bourgeois class genocide. In the same way as the cleansing of the Chinese "cultural revolution", which swept away the lives of tens of millions of Chinese people, is not called the genocide of the Chinese nation. Genocide is not an internal ideologically and politically motivated self-annihilation - if it were, then all civil wars would have to be called genocide.

In the case of genocide, one nation consciously destroys another nation, it does not strive to reform and subordinate it to a foreign doctrine, religion, or ideology.

So let's speak plainly and call things and events by their real name. The consequences of the social manoeuvres of a totalitarian revolution and its institutionalised regime, which sought to destroy the structure of a class society and to liquidate one of its classes, are no better than genocide, but revolution is not genocide. Thus the excessive and devalued utilisation of this word is far from an innocent occurrence. If you want to devalue or marginalise the Holocaust, you can talk about another genocide that took place in the very same country - even if it isn't provable according to legal criteria and concepts. If the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania isn't studying the Holocaust, then one might think to ask what it is studying, and what it is calling genocide.

The fact that Parliament is being presented with a proposal for a law according to which the denial of genocide by the Soviets would be tantamount to a crime raises some truly unhappy thoughts. It would then transpire that, should they doubt that a Soviet genocide of the Lithuanian nation took place - in the same way as it was carried out by the Nazis in the case of the Jews - historians, politicalologists, sociologists, lawyers and philosophers discussing the concept and historical occurrences of genocide, would risk ending up in Lukiškės prison. As they would should they dare, for example, to say that the concept of genocide is difficult to apply to the killings that took place

in Lithuania Minor.

Basically, the attempt to criminalise discussion sounds to me not only like a total misconception in a country that considers itself to be democratic, it is also a serious threat against freedom of thought and conscience, which could begin to be repressed under the guise of a threat to national security or to the nation's honour. Forgive me, but these are all simply melodies from the repertoire of an authoritarian regime. If I was told that the denial of the Holocaust is likewise forbidden and punished as a crime in Germany and Austria, my response would be that I hardly approve of such a practice. The criminalisation of Holocaust denial releases the conscience from the sphere of morality, safely removes the Holocaust, and shoves it into the sphere of rationally organised juridical and technical resolutions.

At the same time, revisionists and Holocaust deniers - whose dangerous ideas need to be vanquished by honest discussion, not by locking them away in a windowless cell - are given a victim's halo. Of course, one can bring to trial, and imprison someone who denies the historical tragedy of a people and a country, but that doesn't stop the demonstration of contempt and total insensitivity to the present-day of that people and that country.

And on the other hand, when leftist politicians and intellectuals in those countries do not permit the denial of the Holocaust, and even avoid any longer discussion on the topic, whilst at the same time happily denouncing Israel and calling it a fascist state, and the sufferings of the Palestinian Arabs a Holocaust, one starts to wonder whether the criminalisation of the denial of the Holocaust in Western Europe has happened step by step along with the consolidation of a new anti-Semitism - a politically correct, leftist, anti-globalistic anti-Semitism (one of whose branches is ideological anti-Americanism) - masked as criticism of Israel. What difference does it make if anti-Semitism is chased out the door, if it's allowed back in through the window?

Thus when talking about humanity's painful experiences, it is worth considering the dangers of our modern amoral and relativist culture. We will not recover the true meaning of concepts and values if we repress free and rational debate. And laws will be of no help here.

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"Lietuvos aidas",
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