

Review Essay

The Devil Redux

Roméo Dallaire

Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda
Toronto: Random House Canada, 2003

Judi Rever

In Praise of Blood: The Crimes of the Rwandan Patriotic Front
Toronto: Random House Canada, 2018

Jean Hatzfeld (trans. from French by Joshua David Jordan)

Blood Papa: Rwanda's New Generation
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018

Reviewed by Howard A. Doughty

Death by the Numbers

Since we will soon be mentioning matters of mutilation, torture, disaster, sickness and death, let us first play with some numbers. The chilling observation that “the death of one man is a human tragedy, but the death of a million is merely a statistic” is commonly, if inaccurately, attributed to Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvilli (better known to friends and foes alike as Joseph Stalin), the former Soviet Union’s “man of steel” (Solovyova, 1997). If that is so, then there have been far too many “statistics.”

<p>There are three types of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics – attributed to Benjamin Disraeli</p>

The trade in such large numbers is frequently occasioned by estimates of death tolls in catastrophic natural disasters and epidemics of disease. In the twentieth century, nine of the “top ten” natural disasters occurred in Asia. Direct human complicity was involved in at least one such case—the Banqiao Dam failure due to Typhoon Nina in 1975. It caused almost 250,000 deaths. It was one of five that took place in China. The worst was the flood of 1931. Rough estimates suggest that between one and four million people died. That was the only incident among many caused by volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, draughts, cyclones, tornadoes, hurricanes, typhoons and tsunamis that resulted in over a million fatalities.

The quantitative data, of course, vary according to how we count, whom we count and who does the counting. For example, official figures reveal that Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico killed almost 3,000 people in 2017; US President Trump, however, is sticking to his story that the number was less than twenty (Politi, 2018). Perspective and political interests often “count” more than accuracy or the attempt to achieve it.

Horrible as catastrophic atmospheric and geological events are, epidemic diseases account for many more human deaths. The “Black Death” which peaked between 1347 and 1351 may have resulted in between 75 and 200 million deaths in Europe (between 30% and 60% of the European population at the time). As well, the so-called “Spanish” flu of 1918, which most likely originated in France (Oxford, 2012), infected as many as 500 million people (Kuczynski, 1928)—as much as one-quarter of the human population at the time—and killed somewhere between twenty and fifty million people. By comparison, less than 700,000 have perished from the HIV/AIDS epidemic over the past forty years.

Statistics can be informative, but they rarely provide an adequate, accurate and comprehensive description or a proper understanding of what has happened when thousands or millions of people perish under extraordinary circumstances. They also fail to show how those deaths affected the survivors. Too often, as well, news of horrible human tragedies is received with indifference and the abhorrent comment that “life is cheap ... *over there.*”

3000 people did not die in the two hurricanes ... This was done by the Democrats to make me look bad.

– Donald Trump tweet, September 13, 2018

In any case, regardless of how meticulously collected and methodically compared, all numbers that claim to record the quantity of human dead and injured in either broadly natural or in obviously “man-made” cataclysms are necessarily approximate and must be treated cautiously.

One additional reason for prudence is that the line between deaths in combat and “war-related” casualties resulting from disease and starvation is often blurred. The previously mentioned influenza epidemic, for example, was caused by a strain of the H1N1 virus that is similar to those that cause ordinary influenza outbreaks today. The mortality rate, however, was enormously inflated because of the contributing post-war factors of malnourishment, poor sanitation, and overcrowded hospitals (Brundage and Shanks, 2007; Morens and Fauci, 2007). Choosing which to blame—war, famine or disease—is often a matter of political choice.

Another methodological problem is that it is next to impossible to determine accurate death counts when fighting involves guerrilla operations taking place in remote locations or when tactics include indiscriminate saturation, carpet, area, or (somewhat less euphemistically) obliteration bombing. It is understandably hard even to speculate about how many people perish when the battles involve bombing densely populated cities. Early examples such as London, Hamburg, Dresden and Tokyo come prominently to mind. Recently, Aleppo has been one of many cities expected for the list (Specia, 2018); but, even if it is somehow spared (Agencies, 2018), it will not be the last.

Speaking of the various categories of “non-combatants,” the number of civilian deaths in armed conflicts including everything from declared wars among recognized nation states to sporadic insurrections is frequently and consciously underestimated—partly to keep up morale among the survivors and partly to deflect accusations of inhumanity against the perpetrators. For obvious reasons, body counts in annihilated cities such as Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bound to be only educated guesses, but so are estimates of the casualties in all conflicts wherein civilians are targeted, incendiary bombs, cluster munitions, biological and chemical weapons are deployed.

Especially in the second Iraq war that was initiated by the United States in 2003 and is ongoing in various derivative forms, there is a tremendous disparity between high and low estimates. Seemingly credible sources have insisted that the number of deaths range from less than 170,000 to more than 1,000,000. A partial explanation for the discrepancy can be found in the fact that death seems to have had different meanings; it depends on who counts and what gets counted. So, for example, US calculators once explained that, if the American authorities “cannot determine the source of a sectarian attack, that assault does not make it into the database” (Baker et al., 2006, p. 95). As well, casualties from a roadside bomb or a rocket or mortar attack that doesn't hurt U.S. personnel do not get counted. Low-balling the numbers apparently has its advantages.

Lest there be any among you who go and serve the gods of other nations, the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against him, and all the curses in this book shall lie upon him ... and the whole land [shall be] like Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and in his wrath.

– Deuteronomy, *The Bible*, 29: 18-24

Interpretation also matters—especially when it comes to assigning culpability. Curiously, although our distant ancestors may have believed that huge floods, devastating plagues and other calamities were adequate evidence of the wrath of God, not many people in the early twentieth century interpreted death by influenza as a sign of retribution by a vengeful deity. In our modern age of science that sort of explanation might be thought to have been properly retired to a museum of mythologies where it might rest (or fester) alongside such Biblical tales as Noah's flood (Genesis 7: 7-24) or the destruction of the Midianites (Numbers 31: 2-54)—arguably among the first genocides in recorded history. Nonetheless, the moralistic denunciation of homosexuality was a noticeable theme almost a century after the influenza pandemic when HIV/AIDs was first detected in the early 1980s and linked to sexual practices deemed to be “sinful” by popular “fundamentalist” Christian leaders. Likewise, shared use of hypodermic needles heroin addicts who were almost equally disclaimed by certain religious sects were cited as instruments of the deity's disapproval (Airhihenbuwa & Webster, 2004); Cleworth, 2012; Jonson & Stryker, 1993). It seems that statistics, even when accurate, seldom tell the whole story.

Humanity's greatest foe, however, is surely humanity itself. After all, neither volcanoes and hurricanes nor viruses and bacteria intentionally harm human beings. They bear us no malice. They are not even sentient, much less capable of forming what lawyers calls *mens rea* or “guilty intent.” So, even when we occasionally fall victim to a hungry carnivorous or even a ferocious angry mammal, there is no personal, political or religious *animus* involved in our demise. Their motivation is simple survival. We, on the other hand, seem to be the only species that can be goaded into killing its own kind for ideational and ideological reasons. We, alone, are inspired by symbolic abstractions to justify lethal actions. While others might resort to violence to protect their mates, their offspring or their immediate communities, we alone fight for freedom, fascism, or “for King and country.” and for what we righteously consider to be God's will. A few mammals and some other primates may make it personal—as in the case of rivalries between so-called *alpha* males or among defined communities such as a whoop of chimpanzees and so on; humanity alone, however, allows mere ideas to justify the slaughter of innocents. It is, I suppose, a mark of our higher “intelligence.”

Leaving aside the postulated but still contested claim (Banerjee, 2018); Brannen, 2018) that we are currently witnessing a uniquely human-caused Anthropocene extinction—the sixth and ongoing mass extermination of species in the history of the planet (Kolbert, 2014) following the Ordovician, Devonian, Permian, Triassic and Cretaceous die-offs—and ignoring the specific threats to human civilization arising from proven anthropogenic climate change (IPCC, 2018), there are many data sets that describe the murderous rampages that we glorify as “war.” Over our recorded history, organized military conflicts, colonial suppressions and associated civilian extirpations bear responsibility for more human deaths than either the most intensely destructive short-term geological and meteorological events, or the most deadly epidemics and devastating pandemics and plagues.

Could it not be contrived to Send the Small Pox among those Disaffected Tribes of Indians? We must, on this occasion, Use Every Stratagem in our power to Reduce them."
– Jeffrey Amherst to Henry Bouquet, 1763

Sometimes, of course, diseases can be used as weapons of conquest. Long before scientists began experimenting with biological weapons of mass destruction, for instance, there was a massive depopulation of Mexico. When Cortés and his army arrived in 1519, it is estimated that over thirty million people were living in Mexico. Over the next century, depopulation due largely to a series of smallpox epidemics reduced the indigenous population to between 1.5 and 3 million, a population reduction of over 90% (Barton, 2018). It takes little imagination to happen upon the hypothesis that the spread of the disease using infected blankets was intentional—notoriously, for example, at Fort Pitt (later Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) in 1763 (Bouquet, 1763; Fenn, 2000).

More recently, World War I resulted in about seventeen million deaths—admittedly far fewer than the “flu”; but, when combined with its intimately related successor, World War II, the combination outdid the world’s mightiest influenza outbreak with best estimates putting total mortality from the Second World War alone at over sixty million. Incidentally and in retrospect, World War I has increasingly come to be regarded as an act of collective madness; World War II, on the other hand, is still remembered as a “just war,” particularly by the allied nations of Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The haunted, melancholy claim made by T. W. Adorno (1983, p. 34) that “after Auschwitz, writing poetry is barbarism” notwithstanding, opinions (even Adorno’s) as well as perceptions change.

In the case of the genocide in Rwanda, there is little justified confidence in the accuracy of any estimates of the dead—either within the generally accepted narrow timeline of one hundred days of the genocide of the Tutsi population by the Hutu majority between April 7 and July 15, 1994, or in the aftermath including the subsequent refugee crisis, a lengthy Hutu insurgency and two related Congo wars that would lead to the overthrow of the government of Zaire and establish the Democratic Republic of Congo. These related conflicts also involved other African countries such as Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola and continued until 2003. The loose estimate of between 500,000 and 1,000,000 is given for the genocide itself, and the subsequent death toll in Congo is said to be in excess of five million (Coghlan et al., 2007). No one knows. No one will ever know.

I mention all of this to highlight the fact that many members of our species, which is so deadly to itself, other life forms and the ecology of the Earth itself, can get extraordinarily squeamish when confronted with the consequences of its actions. We build up enormously

effective ways to hide from ourselves the raw effects of what we do as a matter of course whenever we pay income taxes to fund the purchase and deployment of hideous weapons of mass or individual destruction or neglect to notice the toxic effects of our purchases of bottled water.

The Bush and Clinton administrations lavished development and military aid on dictators who in turn funnelled weapons to insurgents in Sudan, Rwanda, and Congo.
– Helen Epstein, 2018a

This is not the first time that the Rwanda genocide has been discussed in these pages. Three years ago (Doughty, 2015), I reviewed Joshua James Kassner’s book, *Rwanda and the Moral Obligation of Humanitarian Intervention*. At the time, I said that the “case of Rwanda cannot just be put away in the moldy file cabinet of history or flushed permanently down our collective memory hole.” Apparently, I was wrong. I ought to have said that “it *should* not.”

Although the quantity and intensity of the slaughter in Rwanda was enough to capture (albeit belatedly) the attention of global leaders and followers alike, internal strife and external intervention remain among the most compelling problems in world affairs, yet they are regularly ignored or evaded, especially if the strategic interests of one or another major power are involved. The problem is that, from Burma to the Central African Republic, there is very little evidence that governments and the people they represent are actually being forced to alter their behaviour. As ever, we are quick with words of consolation, slow with actions of amelioration and all but absent when considering the cessation of conflict.

One Man’s Passion

Roméo Dallaire’s autobiographical account of the Rwandan genocide need not be rehearsed here in detail. It has been thoroughly discussed at length and is now an almost historical (if not a sentimental antiquarian) document. It does, however, put the current volume under review into a sort of context.

Dallaire famously gave expression to an emotional and highly personal anguish. For those unfamiliar with the man and his well-publicized case, he is the son of a Canadian non-commissioned officer and a Dutch nurse. He was born in the Netherlands in 1946, soon after the end of World War II. He was raised in Montréal, joined the Canadian Army in 1963, graduated from the Royal Military College in 1970, worked his way up through the ranks and was promoted to Brigadier-General in 1989. Four years later he was put in charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda. He was ordered to implement the Arusha Accords, which were intended to put an end to a Civil War in Rwanda—an independent African kingdom that had been colonized by Germany in 1884, taken over by Belgium in 1916 and declared independent in 1962. It almost immediately became a dictatorship and, by 1990, had degenerated into civil conflict.

Of some interest are the contradictory views of the book and its author upon its initial publication. Writing in *The International Journal*, the seventy-one-year-old publication of the Canadian Institute for International Affairs, Roger Sarty (2004, p. 447) wrote of Dallaire that “his brilliant career seem[ed] happily to intersect with a moment of hope in Rwanda. In 1993, he was

offered the plum of an opportunity for any professional officer: command of an overseas mission that had the makings of success.”

The basic axiom is to be followed by individuals as well as great nations, by Losers and Winners alike. We have demonstrated the workability of the axiom in Vietnam, in Bangladesh, in Biafra, in Palestinian refugee camps, in our own ghettos, in our migrant labor camps, on our Indian reservations, in our institutions for the defective and the deformed and the aged. This is it: Ignore agony.
– Kurt Vonnegut, 1973

If such a rosy picture could then have been painted, it soon faded. The complex story of the contending parties—tribal factions, competing military interests and rival political groups—is artfully told by General Dallaire. That he returned home a psychologically broken man, was treated for his emotional distress, spent time in the Senate of Canada but resigned in 2014 to do research on (and cope with his continuing struggles with) post-traumatic stress disorder (Dallaire, 2016) as well as to campaign actively for the end of the use of “child soldiers” through his Roméo Dallaire Child Soldiers Initiative (Dallaire, 2010) is sufficient testimony to his courage and to his frustration with the inability or unwillingness of governments (his own and all the others) to find innovative solutions to obviously overarching problems of human complicity in pure evil.

Conflicting Perspectives

There are enduring controversies about the roles of the key individuals and organizations, especially Robert Kagame and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Kagame’s family joined over 300,000 Tutsis and fled their homeland after the Rwandan Revolution. He enlisted in a rebel army, became a senior Ugandan army officer after the rebel victory led to Yoweri Museveni’s assumption of the presidency, and then joined the RPF which invaded Rwanda in 1990. The RPF controlled significant territory when a ceasefire was negotiated in 1993. The ceasefire was followed first by the assassination of Hutu dictator Juvénal Habyarimana in April, 1994, and then the genocide of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Kagame’s role in the genocide was and remains a topic of controversy. He has been President of Rwanda since 2000. In his most recent election, he garnered 98.79% of the vote. It might be unkind to call him a dictator, but being satisfied to label an authoritarian might take kindness too far. He is currently the Chair of the Organization of African Union. He is well-liked by most important national leaders. He has kept Rwanda “stable” for almost two decades.

For some, Kagame was responsible for ending the genocide; for others, he enabled its continuation for his own political purposes. Gerald Caplan (author of the report on the events on behalf of an independent, international commission to investigate the genocide, *Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide*, 2000) relates, it is “bizarre” to blame Kagame for a “military strategy [that was] brilliantly conducted to conquer the country [but which] also allowed the Hutu *genocidaires* more time to slaughter Tutsis.” In other words, if Dallaire had been given the authority and troops he had requested (or, rather, begged, beseeched and pleaded for), Dallaire might well have prevented Kagame from continuing the war. That, of course, remains an unanswerable historical hypothetical.

While it is plain that the United Nations was negligent in failing to respond properly to the situation in which it had assumed some moral responsibility, it is less certain upon whom the principal blame should fall: Kagame? The *genocidaires*? The United Nations? The United States? Caplan (2005) argues that the Clinton administration was “determined that Dallaire never get reinforcements.” That decision, he went on, “guaranteed that UNAMIR never had any capacity to intervene against the genocide with appropriate force.” Together with outside powers like France, Belgium and the United Kingdom, the United States was complicit in making the genocide possible and then in allowing it to be executed.

In 1998, President Clinton apologized. Upon arriving for a state visit at the airport in Kigali, he was greeted by the President (Pasteur Bizimungu) and Vice-President of Rwanda (Robert Kagame), There he spoke with obvious regret, if not with sincere remorse (Clinton, 1998; Ryle, 1998):

Together with nations in Africa, we must bear its share of the responsibility for this tragedy ... We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe havens for the killers. We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide.'

Dredging about in the detritus of multiple calumnies might not seem to be the most useful project to which energy and expertise should be put. If, however, the pertinent parties are not identified and the structure of decision making is not properly described, then the legacy and lesson of Rwanda will be identical to the summary judgement of a long forgotten Dutch historian who finished his multivolume history of the Dutch East Indies in 1899 with the despondent remark, “Everything forgotten, nothing learned.”

The Aftermath

Hoping to learn from history and not to repeat it, people in Rwanda today struggle with all the common difficulties of a small land-locked African country but find them complicated by a legacy of butchery just one generation in the past. It has achieved remarkable economic growth, but remains poor. It's authoritarian leadership has, in one view, “turned Rwanda into an “African Singapore.” Kigali is “clean and orderly.” Paul Kagame “is the toast of places like Davos and Aspen.” In an effort to “create stability, [he] has wisely phased out all reference to ethnicity” (French, 2018).

There appears to have been no effort to attempt a new beginning by a version of South Africa's “truth and reconciliation” initiatives. There seems to have been nothing akin to Germany's effort to come to grips with its Nazi past, and thereby to overcome its past. Paul Hatzfeld is a career journalist and correspondent for the French newspaper *Libération*. He has been covering Rwanda for twenty-five years and is uniquely positioned to describe its fate and its future to those who have become aware of it only through media reports of the genocide.

<p>We young people are going to have to choose how to live as neighbors—in other words to choose between bitter words and mutual support. Our future? I don't know. The threat of massacres hangs over the hills. But I still don't believe in any curse. – Fabiola Mukayishimire, a 19-year-old Hutu.</p>
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Blood Papa is his third book on the subject. The first two, rendered in English as *Life Laid Bare* (2000) and *Machete Season* (2003) dealt with the Tutsi victims and the Hutu killers. They are largely based on interviews with the participants. Throughout Hatzfeld listened carefully and reported honestly on the experiences, feelings and understandings of their experiences and their reflections. Insofar as such an attitude is possible, he remained non-judgemental (which is not the same as “objective”). In this volume, he once again brings readers the story of the contemporary relations between the two dominant ethnic communities and the prospects for things to come.

As a reporter, not an analyst, Hatzfeld’s book has the limits of any venture of this sort which tries to enlighten through the windows of other people’s perceptions. This is made doubly difficult by the reluctance of the people to open up fully to anyone, much less to a foreign observer, no matter how familiar he is with the country, as well as the fear that the ever-observant government of Rwanda induces a fear of repercussions against reporters and their sources alike. The fact that Hatzfeld was able to gather such a trove of detailed, private recollections and confessions and assemble them in a coherent narrative more than makes up for the lack of expert political, economic, social and cultural theorizing.

I keep from discussing the genocide with my Hutu classmates. Not one of them has ever come up to me and suggested talking about it. I think they are too uncomfortable ... Hutu children don’t talk about these things as much ... They reject the chance to be consoled. – Immaculé Feza, daughter of a Tutsi survivor

To some reviewers, a more serious flaw is the limitation of the book to the genocide inside Rwanda in which Hutus slaughtered Tutsis, but nothing is said about the subsequent slaughter of Hutus who had fled to Zaire (now the ill-named Democratic Republic of the Congo) by the victorious Tutsis under Kagame.

These reservations, however, should not unduly detract from Hatzfeld’s account as it is—a remarkable set of insights into the hearts, souls and minds of people caught up in horror and living in conditions that could justifiably be called evil from almost any perspective, yet surviving and carrying on after a fashion in what almost seems, at least to an outsider making futile, preposterous attempts to empathize with what it must be like to inhabit a prolonged cultural state of shock or, perhaps better a state of purgatory.

The Lessons of Genocide

Whether considering events in Rwanda or in East Timor following the Indonesian invasion in 1975, Pol Pot’s takeover of Cambodia also in 1975, the implosion of what is euphemistically called “the former Yugoslavia” in the mid-1990s, the final destruction of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka in 2009, to say nothing of the ongoing devastation from Libya to Darfur to Yemen to Iraq and to Syria in the decade and a half of bombing, invasion, occupation and civil war following President Bush’s attack on Iraq in 2003 or, indeed, of any of the other hideous conflict during the seventy years of “peace” among the major powers, it is plain that something is radically amiss.

Forty years after Paul Tibbets piloted the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, he sat down to lunch with David Remnick of the *Washington Post*. Tibbets ordered quiche. As they ate and talked in a relaxed setting he remembered that just after the Japanese surrender he traveled to Nagasaki to observe the devastation there. He bought some handcarved trays, he told Remnick, and a few handmade rice bowls. “The trays split,” he said, “but the rice bowls, I still have those.”
– Henry S. Kariel, 1989

It is stunning, for example, that optimists/apologists like Steven Pinker (2011) can write so presumptuously and seemingly complacently about the progress toward peace and the renunciation of violence that he sees, chiefly as a result of the balance of terror that has kept nuclear war or any war between the “great powers” from breaking out since the end of World War II. It is true that mutual annihilation has been avoided so far as a result of the “mad” strategy of “mutually assured destruction” in any major nuclear war, but it **also** seems that we are prepared to allow military forces “to do whatever they want with no regard for civilian life or international law, in utter secrecy, and in defiance of international opinion” (Stack, 2019, p. 18) as long as they keep the torture and the butchery on the margins of modernity. In the process, we continue to “show the world how to undo every ethical and moral value” that we purport to hold. In the panorama of “new wars spinning off from old ones in a perverse global breeding ground of destabilization” (Stack, 2018, p. 19), it is difficult to keep an up-to-date inventory of destruction.

If ever there was a need for innovative thinking, not in terms of imagining or implementing new ideas in weaponry, military strategies, guerrilla tactics, popular mobilization through propaganda and proselytizing in support of various nationalisms, this is surely it. In saying this, of course, I must guard against despair, however, when I recall two recent events, one large and one small.

The large event was the recent funeral of George H. W. Bush. It is understandable that he would be highly praised in light of the aura of common decency and civility which his admirers believe he exemplified. It is understandable as well that the several speakers were respectful to the point of being reverential, especially when his personality and demeanour were compared, as they frequently were, to the current American President. This aura of veneration seeped out into the mass media as it, too, lavished praise on the forty-first president of the United States.

Windows 95 opens out into the dominant ideology and privileged life position of digital flesh. It installs the new codes of the master occupants of virtual worlds: frenzied devotion to cyber-business, life in a multimedia context. digital tunnel vision, and, most of all, embedded deep in the cerebral cortex of the virtual elite, an I-chip: I, that is. for complete indifference. Technological acceleration is accompanied by a big shutting down of ethical perception .
– Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, 1996, p. 36

In the shadows, however, some journalists took another view. William Rivers Pitt (2018, December 4) was one who took a dimmer view. It was true, he acknowledged, that “George H.W. Bush was president when the Cold War ended”; but, he quickly added, “Bush Sr. was a Cold Warrior of the first order, actively involved in a number of genuine atrocities that spanned the globe.” He was, according to Pitt “one of the more shameless war profiteers of the 21st century.”

He also benefited brazenly from the racist “war on drugs” and the racist Willie Horton campaign ad, delayed the response to HIV/AIDS, covered up the Iran-Contra, created the hideous Guantánamo Bay facility, wantonly invaded Panama and was arguably responsible for the “first Gulf War” after giving Saddam Hussein at least a mixed message, if not a green light, to take Kuwait (Niman, 2018). And all of this moved neither political leaders nor political followers to empathy, much less to action. Desensitization is an appropriately pseudo-technical term for moral nihilism for the indifference to evil found in vast technological empires.

At a minimum, the hagiography festival put on in his honour obscured not only his personal record, but the context in which a number of global trends took a sharp turn for the worse under his watch. This is worrisome because it reveals once again that we are not prepared to acknowledge reality or, at least, to give it moral weight as long as the tragedies happen only to “them.” We may therefore be helpless to respond creatively to solve or at least to ameliorate any of the problems—ecological, economic or political—for no necessary reason other than our own reluctance to become engaged with the world in other ways than force of arms, sanctions or vapid talk of incremental progress in the form of palliatives that do not palliate.

In technology as in life, every opening is also a closing, and what it closed down by the tech hype of Windows 95 is consciousness of surplus flesh. That’s Srbenica: the surplus flesh of Bosnian Muslims who do not have anything to contribute to virtual worlds: fit subjects only to be ethnically, and physically, disappeared. They can be ethnically cleansed because they have first been technically cleansed. They are surplus to world domination in a cyber-box.

– Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, 1996, p. 36.

The small event was a conversation that I had earlier this year with my Member of Parliament, Leona Alleslev. She spoke of the need to deal creatively with the multiple challenges of foreign and defence policy in a world of increasingly dangerous instability. Soon after she resigned from the Liberal Party and crossed the floor of the House of Commons to join the Conservative Party of Canada, she shared her several reasons for doing so with her constituents and the Canadian public (Alleslev, 2018). Her explanation included the fact that Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs had criticized Saudi Arabia for holding and flogging a journalist whose family resides in Québec and who had intimated some criticism of the current President of the United States. Such behaviour, she said, could hurt Canadian economic prospects, especially trade. As well, she was upset that the governing party had not committed sufficient funds to weaponry and she was especially concerned both that it had not been tardy in replacing its supply of jet fighters and that the replacements it had in mind were forty-year-old used Australian aircraft that are older than the ones they are intended to replace.

So, Ms. Alleslev has joined a party unlikely to give offence to Saudi Arabia (even after the brutal murder of a *Washington Post* journalist) or to the American president. I am not, I assure you, taking a partisan position on this matter. After all, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau still refuses to join the 122 United Nations’ members that voted to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Roche, 2018; Thurlow, 2018), saying that he was not interested in merely symbolic gestures. The fact is that neither the governing party nor the official opposition party seems ready to engage in genuinely innovative thinking. Trudeau’s foreign policy choices have therefore been rightly criticized as a warmed-over version of those of his predecessor Stephen

Harper, just as President Trump's foreign affairs (bombastic remarks and theatrical displays of pique and promises notwithstanding, are (so far) being conducted well within the pattern established by Presidents Obama and George W. Bush before. In neither case, however, are genuinely innovative global initiatives being contemplated, much less undertaken.

Whether the public or the public service will display the requisite imagination and inspiration to compel even incremental steps toward sanity is uncertain. Time, as we are constantly reminded, will tell. There is, however, some urgency about the matter, for time may soon run out.

Coda

T. W. Adorno was never the life of the party. He was a man who took critical theory a step too far into *unnecessary* pessimism. In a 1949 essay, "Cultural Criticism and Society," he famously declared that "after Auschwitz, writing poetry is barbaric." He might have said the same about music or worse about humour. He did back off (in his peculiar way) a little later. In 1969, he admitted that "it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems" (Adorno, 1983), but he followed this admission with the even harsher question of whether it was possible to go on living at all—no steps forward, two steps back.

At some point, if only out of desperation, it seems only proper to turn to humour of the most self-deprecating kind in order to protect what's left of our sanity. The lessons of Rwanda may not have been learned by anyone in authority, but they may yet be available at the fringes of absurdity for anyone with the courage to laugh. I turn therefore for advice to Kurt Vonnegut, who survived the allied fire-bombing of Dresden in 1945 as a prisoner of war, while Adorno was safely ensconced in the New School for Social Research in New York City—the Frankfurt School's home-away-from-home. In *Cat's Cradle* (1963), his wonderful though belated MA thesis for the Department of Anthropology the University of Chicago), Vonnegut created a fantasy about the end of the world. It featured a Melville-inspired narrator ("Call me Jonah") and a variety of unusual and not always likeable people who inadvertently gather to put an end to life on Earth. Backgrounding the story is a phony religion dreamt up by two itinerant Americans on a poverty-stricken Caribbean island. One adopts the name "Bokonon" and creates a whole vocabulary rooted in nonsense. Here is an example:

Sometimes the *pool-pah*," Bokonon tells us, "exceeds the power of humans to comment." Bokonon translates *pool-pah* at one point in *The Books of Bokonon* as 'shit storm' and at another point as 'wrath of God.'

Anyone offended by such an exercise in making light of the end of life on this planet ought not to indulge in some moralistic conceit or feign outrage at the inhumanity of turning such an event into a joke. Even the current German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has used that vulgarism for describe criticism leveled against her for calling the Internet "uncharted territory" (Eddy, 2018, IN2). The end of our species—and presumably the end of *all* animal and plant species, for the denouement of the book involves the turning of all the water on Earth into ice—is no laughing matter. But, instead of wasting valuable moral outrage on the chronicler or the comedian, attention might better be paid to practical measures directed toward making pacifism imperative. Second only to reversing the degradation of the biosphere or, as we are now learning to call it, the

anthroposphere, it is surely the most necessary task that our species must complete. What the Rwandan and all other genocides teach us is the capacity for abominable intra-species cruelty of *Homo sapiens*. What these books accomplish is the presentation of information—both factual and emotional—about one instance in which we have shown ourselves at our worst. Authentic public sector innovation, beginning with a rethinking and repurposing of methods and practices in international affairs must surely be our common commitment, not for the first time but perhaps for the first time to be taken seriously.

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