

Genocidal Imaginations



by Theodore Dalrymple

The sight of thousands of young people in London celebrating the massacres that Hamas committed in Israel unsurprisingly made many people's blood run cold. The demonstrators rejoiced not despite the brutality of what was done but because of it.

What must the celebrants have believed to celebrate in this fashion? It was impossible that they were uninformed as to some of the details of what Hamas had done; nor did they deny the reality of these atrocities. If Hamas had merely sent rockets into Israel that destroyed some, or even many, buildings, there would not have been the same rejoicing. It was the brutality and sadism—the beheaded or burnt babies—that made the difference and was the cause of so much pleasure and joy.

A friend who has spent many years talking to Arabic-speaking supporters of the Palestinian cause in Britain (he is a professional translator) told me that he was not in the least surprised by the celebrations. The supporters had long had what might be called a genocidal imagination. Annihilation of a population, not victory over a state, was their dreamed-of solution.

There has long been a tendency in some intellectual circles to believe that the justice of a cause must be proportional to the lengths that people are willing to go to promote it. Only very desperate people, the argument goes, would do such things; therefore, since they do such things, they must be desperate.

The truth is otherwise. As one of the most efficient genocides in history, that of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994 proved, genocide can be fun. People in Rwanda hunted and killed their neighbors and then spent the evenings celebrating, feasting, singing, and dancing. They were happy with their day's work and couldn't wait to resume it. In fact, it was the time of their lives.

Intellectual support in the West for the Soviet Union was at its height when the regime was at its worst. Its atrocities were known and obvious. It was only when the Soviet Union moderated its repression and seemed to have lost the courage of its brutality that support for it in the West waned. Moscow was no longer a model for intellectuals that they deemed worthy of imitation once they had attained power. It had become grey and banal rather than vivid, exciting, and experimentally utopian.

Some years after the fall of the Argentinian junta, which was no stranger to sadistic brutality, a book was published with the title *Nunca Más* (*Never Again*), an inquiry into the number of people "disappeared" by the junta. A better title, perhaps, would have been *Siempre Más*, or *Always Again*, for the idea

that mass cruelty has been banished forever from the human repertoire is as illusory as the hope that we are done with stock market bubbles.

The latest example of the attraction of mass genocidal cruelty, not merely to the perpetrators but to the hearts and minds of large numbers of people, is more than usually chilling. As ever, the barbarians are within the gates. France has just banned pro-Palestinian demonstrations on its soil, and Britain is likely to follow suit. However justified this measure may be, it is not exactly a vote of confidence in the fundamental decency of what has become a significant portion of the population.

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