



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Boekbespreking van: Contemporary Genocides

Wilde, J. de

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The third question regards the recruitment for these new councils. Many national MPs wanted to get, of course, a position in these new councils. Did they anticipate their candidature? Did this ambition affect their behaviour in the last double parliament? The more specific fourth question is: what did the national MPs say and do during the plenary debates, both in general and on the issue of power transfer? The fifth question of research (and one which receives least attention) is about the attitudes and perceptions of the Belgian citizens regarding the parliamentary institutionalization of regionalism in Belgium.

Some of the authors' major conclusions are the following. There is not one particular model of parliament or set of functions typically valid for the Belgian parliament. In fact the authors say: more research is needed. During the last years of the double parliament the volume of activities declined; it rose rapidly in the new councils. The MPs with a double mandate (national and sub-national) were most active. Half the membership wanted to get a position in the sub-national council and most got it. This ambition was reflected in their contribution to the plenary debates. The Belgian citizen, however, appears not to be informed about or interested in all this sub-national institutionalization. Belgian politics, apparently, is far from home.

What do we learn from reading the book? The authors' objective is very interesting: the description of a partially terminal parliament. However, their approach is loose and limited. The various chapters or research questions are not an integrated whole, but a loose collection of papers. There is imbalance in the collection. For example, dozens of pages are devoted to the counting of activities (even in hours per MP), while only a few pages cover the represented people or citizens. There are also many limitations. The chapter on models and functions is highly traditional and without any empirical testing. The measurement of activities is limited to formal activities, such as posing questions, motions, interpellations, etcetera. The findings are interpreted in terms of power or influence relationship. This, of course, is incorrect because it neglects all sorts of inspired questions and especially the informal activities behind the scenes, which are highly important in Belgian politics. Similar doubts can be raised against the interpretations of the findings on the plenary debates. What do "Words, words, words" (the title of that chapter) really say? Who is the real audience: the government, the opposition, the party rank-and-file, the television ...? The survey among the citizens is small by size and length and certainly not sufficient to justify any conclusion.

Anything is better than nothing, however. At least some data has been collected and presented on a fascinating case of parliamentary loss of power. And the authors have indeed proven that more research is needed.

M.P.C.M. van Schendelen

Albert J. Jongman (ed.), *Contemporary Genocides: Causes, Cases, Consequences*. PLOOM, Leiden, 1996, ISBN 90-71042-84-7

In one of Euripides' plays the women of the defeated Troy mourn for the dead. The city had been sacked, the men had been killed, the women had been killed or raped, and the survivors were now waiting, together with their children, to be shipped off as slaves to unknown lands. Throughout history, such war related grief has been recorded, and there is no end to it. It is, however, only since World War I that peoples and states publicly commemorate the victims of organized violence rather than the organizers. Monuments are for the dead, rather than for the generals. The war memorials in Northern France and Belgium; the memorials in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the concentration camps in Europe; the Vietnam war memorial in Washington; these and many, many more mark a turning point in history: they have pushed the Nelsons of history and the Arcs de Triomphe aside.

Sheer numbers may have brought the change. This century, some 38.5 million deaths from war have been counted. Additionally, partly overlapping with the previous number, genocides have taken a similar toll of about 38.5 million victims, according to the various records presented in this volume. Another turning point is that attempts to put those responsible for crimes against humanity to fair trial have been made since 1945.

This book analyses these dark sides of civilizations and the recent attempts to deal with them. The effort is coordinated by PLOOM, the 'interdisciplinary research programme on root causes of human rights violations' at Leiden University. PLOOM should be praised for this volume, if not for its work in general. Human rights issues tend to fall between academic disciplinary chairs. They are a sub-field of international law (with respect to the various human rights charters and tribunals on war crimes); of international relations studies (with respect to structural imbalances in the international system); of sociology (with respect to enmity/amity patterns, and grassroots movements); of psychology and psychiatry (with respect to individual motives); and history (with respect to tracking the tragic records of genocides). As a consequence, the subject is too overwhelming and comprehensive for most faculties. Its marginalization is a result. In The Netherlands, PLOOM is one of the few attempts to escape this fate, and the insights provided by *Contemporary Genocides* show how well this pays off. Moreover, the subject is politically sensitive. This is indicated by the fact that the costs of the book have been covered mainly by non-governmental organizations (Novib and Kerken in Aktie, in addition to PLOOM itself), while the most explicit political statements about the consequences of the facts revealed in this book are made by a politician: the Dutch Minister for International Cooperation, Jan Pronk.

His conclusions in the excellent 16 page Preface are, that humanitarian interventions in failed states are a duty, that development cooperation has a role to play in prevention, and that a permanent criminal court for crimes against humanity should be established.

The next chapters take us, predictably, into hair-splitting academic debates about definitions of, types of, and variants of genocides. Surprisingly, Jongman's opening chapter shows that, in contrast to most of such debates, an authoritative way to settle the abstract, theoretical side of the story is on its way: genocide has been defined by Helen Fein (not writing in this book) as "sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members." (p. 2) Five necessary conditions are mentioned for its identification. This way genocide can be distinguished from *democide* (a concept used by Rudolf Rummel in Chapter 2) and from *politicide* (Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr in Chapter 3).

The most interesting reason for setting such academic criteria is to save the term genocide. Observers can not discuss what is happening unless the term has been properly defined and operationalized. Subsequently, international law can be applied. The 1948 UN Genocide Convention will be marginal as long as victims of violence cry out 'genocide' too soon and as long as diplomats can circumvent the term at convenience. To illustrate the latter: up to 25 May 1994, when the media finally showed the slaughtered bodies drifting into Lake Victoria, American officials were ordered not to use the word genocide for what was happening in Rwanda.

But even if international law is backed up by sober scientific criteria, the process of defining genocides in practice and accepting the collective responsibility to stop them remains a controversial affair. Part 2 of the book describes three cases of genocides (Cambodia, Iraq, Bangladesh; with contributions by Roel Burger, Jason Abrams & Steven Ratner, Mia Bloom and Ziauddin Ahmed) and Part 3 various attempts to deal with them by intervention (most notably the one in Rwanda; with contributions by Barbara Harff, Milton Leitenberg, Antonio Donini and Jean Biramvu). The main question is what we can learn from these accurate descriptive analyses. One lesson seems to be that early warning is crucial, as are various forms of preventive action both at the diplomatic and the grassroots levels.

There is, however, a 'catch-22' at the basis of the entire debate. How do you recognize a genocide that did not happen? How can you ascribe this success to timely intervention? If the 'international community' (for example, the UN Security Council) acts in time, it could also be accused of acting out of proportion. Or, at the other end of the scale, how do you know, for example, whether the 'international community' (grassroots movements and the OSCE) has prevented ethnic cleansing in FYROM (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)?

Not only does this catch-22 make it difficult to answer questions of proportionality in the case of intervention, it also hampers the process of social learning. On the basis of his own involvement, Jean Biramvu (Chapter 10) describes the role of local human rights organizations in Rwanda, and he concludes that this role remains fundamental in the prevention of genocide. But this conclusion is about the aftermath and the chances of a repetition. In terms of prevention, Rwanda is a case where local human rights organizations have failed.

In a sense, the same problems exist for the tribunals on the Former Yugoslavia and on Rwanda. Even a permanent UN court will hardly deter future (would-be) regimes from gross human rights violations. Tribunals have their roles to play in the aftermath – they may help to structure the debate for future generations – but their deterrence value is probably insignificant. Nevertheless, even if their success is limited, a larger role for tribunals would add stages to the escalation ladder. They can also help societies to learn how to deal with their past.

The final Part of this book is devoted to this problem. It is about the paradox of how to remember what you want to forget. In a rather random tour, the editor guides us from a chapter on the historiography of Dutch collaboration with the Germans in the Jewish genocide (by Connie Kristel) via transitional problems in Argentina (by Ronald Crelinsten) and similar problems of transitional regimes in Belgium, the Netherlands and France after 1945 and in Eastern Europe after 1989 (by Luc Huyse) to an evaluation of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg (by Richard Goldstone).

Nuremberg has "set a new standard for international justice", Goldstone rightly emphasizes (p.223); studies like the ones collected in this book are valuable contributions to the development of these historically young standards.

Jaap de Wilde

Hans Keman (ed.), *The Politics of Problem-Solving in Postwar Democracies*. Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1997, ISBN 0-312-15818-1

This is a remarkable book because it was jointly written by members of the Faculty of Political Science at the Free University in Amsterdam. Nonetheless, it takes a while before you understand what it is about. Except for the introduction and a resuming chapter by the editor, it includes a critical evaluation of Lijphart's dichotomy of majoritarian and consensus democracies (Paul Pennings), a subsequent piece by the same author on factors causing variation in socio-economic problem-solving, one by Jaap Woldendorp on corporatism, two connected pieces on centre-space politics (Keman) and Christian democracy (Kees van Kersbergen), as well as a related one on cabinet formation with and without a strong central party by Peter van Roozendaal. All contributions are comparative. They centre on consensus versus adversarial politics, institutional frameworks facilitating either of these, corporatism, and the important role of centre parties as a condition for a peaceful political process. And, according to Keman's introduction, all pieces share an institutionalist approach. A clear, leading question, however, is missing. Or should it be the question formulated on the first page: "how does one account for apparent consensus in a situation where the seeds of conflict are expected to prevail?" This (see also p.182) indeed seems to announce the main direction in which the argument is developing in most chapters.