

Fixation with apartheid obscures other racial atrocities. (1988, September 2). *The Citizen*.

2 SEPT 88

Fixation with apartheid obscures other racial atrocities

The slow, steady disintegration of apartheid in South Africa does not get a high profile in the western media. Even less often is it noticed by our heroic politicians. In fact, I suspect that the critics of South Africa — capitalist and marxist alike — would be slightly saddened if apartheid were to finally disappear. What a shining opportunity it has been to present ourselves as unshakeable fighters for equality.

We have gone so far in this direction that we now tend to ignore the fact that public transportation, banking, sports and even some aspects of the external office in South Africa are now desegregated.

Let me stress that I have always been a vigorous opponent of the racist régime in Pretoria — tens of my articles are witness. It is somewhat ironic that I need to recall these anti-apartheid credentials in order to justify my right — indeed, my duty — to point out the flaws in our attitudes. While we are being so self-righteous and self-serving in our frontal attack against South Africa, we ignore, intentionally or unintentionally, hundreds of thousands of victims of ethnic and tribal conflicts in Africa and other parts of the world, as if they don't deserve our protection or sympathy, or a truthful description of their lives.

The massacre of the Hutu tribe in Burundi has attracted only brief international attention compared to that directed toward apartheid. The Tutsi tribe, which comprises about 15 per cent of the country's population, occupies almost all government and bureaucratic positions, plus



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the army and police. This apparatus is used against the Hutu — despite the fact that, like the blacks in South Africa, they make up the overwhelming majority of the population.

While the public has every right to ignore the events of the last two decades in Africa, expert political observers should not pretend, as they appear to now, that the tragic events in Burundi are a sad novelty. Such massacres are, in fact, part of a permanent reality.

In 1972, more than 100,000 Hutu were exterminated by the Burundian army and police because they demanded equality with the ruling minority. If we believe that a human life has the same value whether a child is killed in Paris, downtown Johannesburg or the streets of Burundian cities, we ought to react with the same indignation and anger we so often display toward South Africa. Only then will we be able to say that our desire to fight apartheid is dictated by sympathy and solidarity with the victims, rather than by a desire to show how "progressive" we are.

The white tribe in South Africa participates in the tribal war that sweeps the world today. This tribe uses its industrial might and ideological fanaticism to prevent the majority of the population from voting and taking part in the governing of the country. The world is rightly on the side of those whom the white tribe continues to oppress.

But what about those whom we have so comfortably forgotten? The Kurds in Iraq are one example. They form about 20 per cent of the Iraqi population. This mathematical fact hasn't saved them from chemical attack by the Iraqi army. Children, women and elderly are dying daily in Iraqi Kurdistan, murdered by a weapon that was banned by international law long ago.

The population of East Timor, occupied by Indonesia, has shrunk by 45 per cent in the last decade. People were shot, buried alive, burned and starved to death by the victorious Indonesian army. The protests of the international community have been vague — almost a whisper. After all, Indonesia is a big country with whom the western world and the communist bloc have excellent relations.

Three years ago, almost one million Turks in Bulgaria were ordered to change their names from Turkish to Bulgarian versions. Their national dress was banned, their schools closed down and their newspapers forbidden. The authorities justified their actions — which included murder — by "research" that was based on measuring the skulls of the "former Turks." The measuring was supposed

to prove that the skulls were Slavonic, not Asiatic.

Appeals by Turkish intellectuals and politicians to international public opinion were virtually ignored.

Nowadays we concentrate our emotions on South Africa. Such strong emotion, combined with lack of objectivity, discourages our politicians and public figures from doing the necessary analytical work. For example, it is interesting to note that trade and economic co-operation between black Africa and South Africa is increasing. Pretoria is the biggest economic partner of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi and Lesotho. Whenever Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe proclaims another crusade against Pretoria, it is a sign that another economic agreement between the two countries is about to be signed.

The near-war situation between dominating and oppressed tribes in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan, Iraq, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka should attract the attention of the international community. At a time when the superpowers have successfully learned that compromise and negotiations can help control missiles and bombs, tribal conflicts have become the biggest danger to peace.

They involve chemical weapons, the massacre of hundreds of thousands of innocents, and finally the risk of drawing the major military blocs into an escalating competition.

It doesn't matter what color the tribe is — it should be prevented from killing others.