

Yale historian Ben Kiernan finds disturbing similarities between genocidal regimes worldwide.

# Reins Of Terror

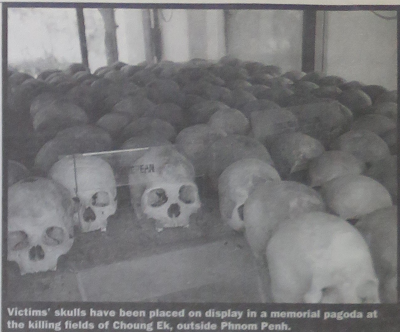
MANFRED HENNINGSEN

Future historians of the 20th century will point to genocide as one of its most remarkable and sickening features. The estimated 110 to 170 million vic-

tims of radical political regimes, from both the left and right, illustrate the extraordinary manifestation of the will to kill for ideological reasons. This will has manifested itself in the worst way in the German Nazi regime of terror, but the universality of ideologically motivated mass killings has been

demonstrated time and again all over the world. Rwanda's descent into hell in the six to eight weeks of 1994, when close to one million Tutsis were murdered on orders by Hutu President Habyarimana, represents the extreme African contribution to this trend.

One of the more extreme Asian il-



Victims' skulls have been placed on display in a memorial pagoda at the killing fields of Choung Ek, outside Phnom Penh.

lustrations of this phenomenon is certainly the killing regime of Pol Pot in

Cambodia. This week Yale historian Ben Kiernan, the author of the most detailed and conclusive study of that devastating period in Cambodian history, will lecture on "The Pol Pot Regime and Genocide in the 20th Century," drawing comparisons between that period, the Jewish holocaust and the Armenian genocide.

In the subtitle to his book, *The Pol Pot Regime*, Kiernan indicates how unconvincing he finds the conventional interpretations of the "killing fields." It reads, "Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979." An Australian citizen who once protested as a radical student against American (and Australian) intervention in Indochina, Kiernan has come a long way in identifying the strange amalgam of Maoist, Stalinist and fascist elements in the ideological thinking of Pol Pot and his revolutionary brotherhood.

The cleansing of the cities that began in April 1975 included from the beginning an obsession with the cleansing of Khmer society of all impure elements. The impurity of Cambodia was not limited to foreign Western influences and people. It extended to the Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai and all the non-Khmer people who had resided in Cambodia for centuries. These people and their religions, cultures, languages and cuisines had to be removed from Khmer society. In true Nazi fashion, close to 2 million of the 8 million people living in Cambodia were killed.

Kiernan's book has raised troubling questions about the similarity of left and right regimes of genocidal terror in this century. Having established a Cambodia genocide research center at Yale University and helped to create the Documentation Center in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh (which will play the major supporting function for a planned international war crimes and crimes against humanity tribunal in that city), Kiernan is now working on a study of comparative genocide regimes in this century. His lecture at UH-Mānoa is a first report on his ongoing research. ■

Manfred Henningsen is a professor of political Science at UH-Mānoa.



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