

A lot has already been written on the genocide in Rwanda, its root causes in the construction and mobilization of ethnic identity under colonial rule, and the international context in which the awful events of 1994 took place. While reference will be made to this historical background for purposes of elucidating what has happened during the last ten years, the main purpose of this article is to review the repercussions of the genocide in the Great Lakes region in general, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in particular.

The Historical Context and its Lessons for the Present

That Hutu and Tutsi should hate and kill each other is neither natural nor a product of ancient enmities inherited from the pre-colonial past. Ethnic identity construction into two separate and eventually antagonistic groups took place under colonialism, with the strong support of Belgian colonial authorities, the Roman Catholic Church, and colonially embedded anthropologists. The impact of this triple origin is the ideological ramification of ethnicity to a point where today people have internalized the nineteenth century European racist concepts of placing human groups in dichotomous categories such as those of superior and inferior, civilized and backward, and hardworking and lazy. Having convinced both Hutu and Tutsi that they were different people, in spite of their common language, culture and homeland, the Europeans proceeded to use the Tutsi as their auxiliaries in the dirty business of imperial domination and rule.

The love affair between the Belgians and the Tutsi ended in the mid-1950s, when Tutsi intellectuals began to champion the cause of independence, and gave strong support to the radical nationalism of Patrice Lumumba in the Belgian Congo, with which Rwanda and Burundi were governed as a single colonial entity known as “Le Congo Belge et le Ruanda-Urundi,” with a single governor-general in Kinshasa (then Léopoldville) and a single army, the *Force publique*. The rise of Hutu political consciousness was a direct result of efforts by Belgian colonial authorities and Catholic Church leaders to stem the tide of nationalism in Rwanda and Burundi by promoting a Hutu counter-elite against their erstwhile Tutsi allies. It is interesting in this regard that the two nationalist leaders with a great vision for the future of the three territories and Africa as a whole, Lumumba of the Congo and Prince Louis Rwagasore of Burundi, were both assassinated. A member of the Tutsi elite, Prince Rwagasore was immensely popular among the Hutu masses.

In Rwanda, the death in mysterious circumstances of Mwami Mutare Rudahigwa in July 1959 became the spark of the violent conflict that eventually ended the Tutsi monarchy in what is known as the “Rwandan Revolution,” or more correctly the “Hutu Revolution.” As Grégoire Kayibanda, the onetime private secretary to Monsignor André Perraudin, the Swiss vicar apostolic of Rwanda, and one of the authors of the Hutu Manifesto of 1957 began to consolidate Hutu power, thousands of Tutsi fled Rwanda to seek refuge in Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and the Congo. And it is out of the Tutsi diaspora in Uganda that the current leadership in Rwanda emerged. The Hutu takeover in Rwanda was a peculiar revolution, in that it took place under colonial rule but left the basic colonial power structure intact. The Belgian colonialists

The Great Lakes Region since the Genocide of 1994 in Rwanda*

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were present and stood by as massacres were taking place. Kayibanda became president at independence in 1962, and ruled the country until he was overthrown in a military coup on 5 July 1973 led by army chief Juvénal Habyarimana.

Under President Habyarimana, who ruled as a dictator until his death in a plane crash on the eve of the genocide on 6 April 1994, a new factor was added to ethnic identity construction and mobilization as a second root cause of the genocide. This was the backlash of authoritarian rulers against the democracy movement, or violence against democracy. We are talking here about developments that were common to the Great Lakes region and beyond in the early 1990s, as the people of Africa were rising against one-party or military rule to demand the restoration of the democratic rights and institutions they had gained at independence. In Rwanda, the power behind the throne was in the hands of a small group of people known as the *Akazu*, which was made up of Madame Agathe Habyarimana, the president's wife, her three brothers, several colonels, and leaders of the northwestern business mafia. As strong advocates of Hutu power, they were opposed to the Arusha process and determined to undermine the peace accords between the regime and the predominantly Tutsi Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF).

The third root cause of the genocide is the lessons that the Hutu of Rwanda drew from the political situation in neighboring Burundi, where Tutsi minority rule had already resulted in a genocide of the Hutu in 1972. Faced with the possibility of the RPF and its military organization becoming part of the government, they could not be reassured by what took place in October 1993 in Bujumbura. There, Melchior Ndadaye, the first democratically elected president of Burundi and a Hutu, was killed after merely 100 days in office. He was assassinated by Tutsi military officers, who controlled the Burundian army. Moreover, since the perpetrators of this crime were never brought to justice and punished, Ndadaye's assassination reinforced the reality of impunity in the entire region, as it sent yet another clear signal to mischief-makers that they can get away with murder. This was a double stimulant for the *Akazu*. On the one hand, they were reinforced in their faith in the self-fulfilling prophecy that you cannot trust the Tutsi. On the other, they were comforted in their belief in impunity. Since both Rwanda and Burundi have a similar ethnic make-up, major developments in one country are likely to have an impact in the other.

The fourth and last major root cause of the genocide was the deteriorating social and economic conditions. With falling world prices for coffee, the country's main export commodity, and growing demographic pressure on the land, the economic situation in Rwanda could no longer sustain a population of 7 million on a total surface of 26,000 square kilometres. More importantly, it had created a great deal of discontent and unrest among young men who, in their majority, could no longer hope of fulfilling their educational aspirations, nor find the steady jobs or farming land they needed to establish themselves and thus qualify for matrimony. Unemployed school leavers without much hope for the future, these young men constituted a fertile recruiting

ground for ethnic mobilization into the politico-military movements, the Tutsi into the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) of the RPF, and the more numerous Hutu into the Interahamwe militia.

As for the circumstances in which the genocide itself took place, their regional and international contexts are relevant for understanding its repercussions and long-term effects in the Great Lakes region. First, there is the support that President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire gave to Habyarimana, including sending his elite troops to help the Rwandan president resist the RPF invasion of the country in 1990. Belgium and France had also intervened on this occasion on Habyarimana's side, but it was France as the regional power in Central Africa that went all the way to prop up the Hutu power regime, including training members of its extremist militia. It was therefore not surprising that France should once again decide to intervene in June 1994 through the UN-approved *Opération Turquoise*, not to end the genocide, as the regime of President François Mitterrand wanted the world to think, but to rescue its erstwhile allies, who were allowed to move into the Zaire/Congo with all the weapons at their disposal.

Thus, officers and soldiers of the former *Forces armées rwandaises* (FAR) and the Interahamwe could regroup on Congolese soil to stage raids into Rwanda against the newly established RPF regime. Today, under the common grouping of the *Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda* (FDLR), these two groups continue to threaten state security in Rwanda from their bases in the Congo. This situation has given rise to Rwanda's claim of legitimate defense in invading the Congo to destroy the “negative forces” of the ex-FAR and Interahamwe, a claim that has also been used to cover up the more sinister intents of partition and plunder.

With respect to the international context, the most relevant factor in terms of the repercussions of the genocide in the region since 1994 is the failure of the international community in general, and the United Nations in particular, to prevent the genocide or to stop it once it had begun. By now everyone certainly knows about the famous fax from General Romeo Dallaire, the UN force commander in Rwanda, in which he sought permission from his superiors at UN Headquarters in New York to destroy the arms caches of the Hutu extremists before the genocide. The permission was denied on the ground that this was not part of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR).

When the genocide started, the United States government did its best to prevent the UN Security Council from declaring the killings a genocide, as this would have legally required the international community to act. Instead of increasing the UN military presence in Rwanda and use it to stop the genocide, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was actually compelled to reduce the number of troops in the already small force of 2,800 blue helmets! Years later, President William Clinton would atone for this sin in Kigali. His mea culpa exemplifies the guilt feeling of the entire international community vis-à-vis the Tutsi-dominated regime in Rwanda, the major implications for the region being that the RPF regime is

allowed to get away with murder because of the world's failure to stop the 1994 genocide. The RPF slaughtered tens of thousands of civilians in the course of defeating the FAR and Interahamwe in Rwanda, and went on to kill many more old men, women and children, both Rwandan and Congolese, in its pursuit of Hutu refugees across the vast expanse of the Equatorial Forest in the Congo basin.

Post-Genocide Developments in the DRC

While all the countries of the Great Lakes region did feel the impact of the genocide in Rwanda, at least in terms of the refugee flow, the Congo or former Zaire has witnessed its most tragic repercussions. First of all, most of the two million Rwandans who fled the country in fear of RPF reprisals were settled in UNHCR refugee camps in North and South Kivu at Goma, Bukavu and Uvira. Secondly, nearly 4 million Congolese have died as a result of the consequences of the war waged by Rwanda in the Congo since 1998, supposedly “to stop another genocide.” This is the rationale that Rwandan authorities invoked in August 1998 when they sent troops into the Congo to overthrow President Laurent-Désiré Kabila, a former ally that they now suspected of working with the Rwandan rebels against Kigali.

In the immediate post-genocide period, the most astonishing fact was how world attention was more clearly focused on the Hutu refugees in the Congo than on the victims of the genocide in Rwanda. Approximately one million US dollars were spent each day to care for this population, which included the organizers of the genocide and the armed killers. Little or no attention was paid to the people of the Congo, who suffered from the adverse effects of the refugee influx, including ecological damage, increased criminality, and cholera and other infectious diseases. In their zeal to cope with the humanitarian disaster, both UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs gave no thought to violations of international law arising from the location of the refugee camps too close to the Rwandan border and to the definition of who in fact was entitled to refugee status and protection. Known killers who remained engaged in armed activities – flying to other parts of Africa and purchasing and bringing arms into the refugee camps – continued to control the camps in full view of the UN and humanitarian agencies.

Mobutu's generals and other cronies were actively involved in arms trafficking in favour of the rebels, to whom they even resold weapons and materiel meant for restitution to Rwandan authorities. In addition to enjoying freedom of movement, the *génocidaires* imported their genocide ideology into the Congo and unleashed a reign of terror and ethnic cleansing against the Congolese Tutsi in North Kivu. The international community failed to heed the request of Rwanda, and even that of the Kinshasa authorities under Prime Minister Léon Kengo wa Dondo, to stop these rebel activities. When Kengo tried to expel the refugees, he was prevented from doing so by President Mobutu and the international community.

This situation resulted in the first Rwandan invasion of the Congo in October 1996, with the aim of destroying the UNHCR refugee camps and, with them, the bases of the Interahamwe and the ex-FAR. Angola, Uganda and a few other countries either joined or supported this war effort as a common African strategy to overthrow the hated Mobutu regime. A major mistake in this strategy was these countries' choice of Laurent-

Désiré Kabila, a former revolutionary turned business entrepreneur, as leader of the national struggle against Mobutu. This was all the more negative for two major reasons. On the one hand, Kabila had no political constituency, no vision for the future of the country, and no military organization capable of defeating the otherwise weak and demoralized army of Field Marshall Mobutu. On the other hand, this was a move backward to the times of externally imposed or self-appointed rulers, at the very time that the Congolese people had, through the Sovereign National Conference of 1991-92 reaffirmed the principle that national leaders ought to be chosen democratically by the primary sovereign power, the people.

Kabila turned out not to be the man Rwanda, Uganda and others had hoped for; hence Kigali and Kampala set out to oust him and find other puppets to promote their interests in the Congo. Thus, the inter-African war of 1998-2003 in the Congo was not a civil war but a war of partition and plunder waged both directly by Rwanda and Uganda and indirectly through Congolese proxies. The two major Congolese rebel movements were created *after* Rwandan troops crossed the border on 2 August 1998 and Major General James Kabarebe started commandeering planes to ferry troops and materiel to the former Belgian military base of Kitona in southwestern Congo, more than 2000 km away from the Rwandan border. If Rwanda and Uganda were concerned about rebel incursions in their respective countries from the Congo, what were they seeking by attempting to take over the international port of Matadi, the hydroelectric complex of Inga, and the capital city of Kinshasa, so far away from their borders? Having failed to place a trusted ally in power in Kinshasa, Rwandan and Ugandan authorities worked to secure a buffer zone of political and economic security in Eastern Congo. Rwanda created

the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie* (RCD), better known today as RCD-Goma because of the split that took place within the group in May 1999, and Uganda set up the *Mouvement de libération congolais* (MLC).

To fight the invaders, the Congolese government obtained support from Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and, briefly, Chad. The intervention of these countries, Angola and Zimbabwe in particular, prevented the takeover of Kinshasa by the invading forces and succeeded in creating a stalemate in the fighting. This situation allowed the mediation efforts of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to succeed in obtaining the Lusaka Accord in July 1999, which provided for a cease-fire, the disarmament of the negative forces mentioned above by the international community through a Chapter VII UN peacekeeping operation, and the organization of an inter-Congolese dialogue to resolve the institutional problems of the democratic transition confronting the country since 1990.

Very little fighting occurred between the invading forces and the armies supporting the Kinshasa regime between 1999 and 2003. Ironically, the bitterest fighting erupted on three separate occasions in 1999 and 2000 between erstwhile allies Rwanda and Uganda in Kisangani. Through this turf war against each other, Rwanda and Uganda proved to the whole world that the main reason for their military presence in the Congo was to plunder the country of its mineral resources and other forms of wealth. As Kisangani was the nerve center of the regional trade in precious commodities such as gold, diamonds and Colombo-tantalite (coltan), in addition to the timber, coffee and other resources of the northeast, it was a strategic location worth controlling. Investigations between 2000 and 2003 by a panel of experts mandated by the UN Security Council have

revealed widespread looting of the natural resources and other forms of wealth of the Congo not only by Rwanda and Uganda, but also by Congo's allies such as Zimbabwe and high-ranking Congolese officials.¹

This is the legacy of patrimonialism, as most of the Congolese, Rwandan, Ugandan and Zimbabwean officials singled out for sanctions in the report were members of the immediate entourage of their respective heads of state. A major difference was that while the plunder was centrally organized to benefit the state in Rwanda, in the other countries it was individuals, and not the state, that reaped the gains of the pillage. That individual and factional interests should continue to take precedence over national interests is one of the main reasons why the Congo has not succeeded in establishing a credible national army since Laurent Kabila came to power in 1997. While his assassination in 2001 created space for the inter-Congolese dialogue under the supervision of the United Nations and South Africa, his son and successor Joseph Kabila is still operating as one of the factional leaders in the quadripartite government of transition, in which he shares power with the RCD-Goma, the MLC and representatives of the unarmed opposition, including civil society.

As this article is being written, there are reports, denied by Rwanda, that its troops had entered the DRC in early December 2004 to fight the FDLR, following a public threat to this effect by President Paul Kagame. Since the Rwandan army has left traces of its passage through a number of Congolese villages and then disappeared, what seems to have happened is that a quick strike force did enter the country to search and destroy some of the FDLR bases and then retreated back into Rwanda after accomplishing its mission. However, there is danger of a wider

war, since those Congolese who continue to deny citizenship rights to Kinyarwanda speakers in North and South Kivu have seized on this apparent incursion to intensify their campaign against all Congolese of Rwandan origin. Resistance by the latter could, as in the Banyamulenge case of 1996, give a welcome pretext for Rwanda once again to invade, occupy and plunder the Congo.

* The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not engage the United Nations or any of its agencies.

Notes

1. The panel's report has been issued in five installments: the first version on 12 April 2001 (S/2001/357); an addendum to the report on 10 November 2001 (S/2001/1072); an interim report on 22 May 2002 (S/2002/565); a final report on 16 October 2002 (S/2002/1146); and another final version for purposes of verifying, reinforcing and updating the panel's earlier findings on 23 October 2003. Of the five reports issued by the panel, the most comprehensive is the October 2002 report, which contains invaluable data in its findings and annexes: UN Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2002/1146, New York, 16 October 2002.



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