A lot has already been written on the genocide in Rwanda, its root causes in the construction and mobilization of ethnic identity. The new wave of the international community in the aftermath of the events of 1994 took place. While reference will be made to this historical background for the events that had 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 of Central Africa, and in particular of the 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 precolonial past. Ethnic identity construction between 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 alliances. The Hutu became a triple identity: the ideological rationalization of the concept of ethnicity to a point today people have internalized the nineteenth-century European concept of ethnie, mainly the thinking of 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 in the mid-1950s, when Tutsi and Hutu leaders championed 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 le Rwanda-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 missions to throw the tide of nationalist sentiment in Rwanda and Burundi, by promoting a Hutu counter-elite against their erstwhile Tutsi allies. It is interesting in this respect to look back at the role played by leaders with a great vision for the future of the three territories and Africa in general, Lumumba of the Congo and Prince Louis Rwagasore of Burundi who were assassinated.

A member of the Tutsi elite, Prince Rwagasore was immensely popular among the Hutu masses in Rwanda. In the death in mysterious circumstances of Mwami Mute Mwadi Rudahugira in July 1959 came the spark of the violent conflict that eventually ended the Tutsi monarchy. The Kabayan massacre in July 1962, carried out by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) of the RPF, and the more numerous Hutu into the Interahamwe militia.

The fourth and last major root cause of the genocide was the formation of the new PREDP regime. Today, under the common grouping of the Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the Interahamwe, a claim that has also been used to cover up the more sinister intents of past and present 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 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, but that this was a turning point in international reaction 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 commit the most heinous abuses.

Mubutu’s generals and other cronies were actively involved in arms trafficking in favor of the rebels, to whom they even resold weapons and materiel meant for restitution to Rwandan authorities. In addition to 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 Congolese Tutsi 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 UNHR refugee camps in the town of the Interahamwe and the ex-FAR. Angola, and a few other countries either joined or supported this war effort as a common effort against the non-African and Muslim Mubutu regime. Amatorial mistake in this strategy was to see 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 that 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 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 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 valuable 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 area 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. 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 was still operating as one of the political leaders in the quadrupartite 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 Kinshasa 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 Bunyamulenge 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.

Afrique centrale : crises économiques et mécanismes de survie sous la direction de Didier Picika Mukawa et Gérard Tchouassi

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Ce livre donc a scruté les crises prolongées qui ont secoué la sous-région aux fins de cerner leurs origines et leurs dimensions, ainsi que la situation passée, actuelle et de perspectives futures pour les pays de la sous-région et l’intégration en Afrique centrale. Ce livre donc de défier les crises prolongées qui ont secoué la sous-région aux fins de cerner leurs origines et leurs dimensions, ainsi que la situation passée, actuelle et de perspectives futures pour les pays de la sous-région et l’intégration en Afrique centrale.

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/2002/583); 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.