

Revisiting the 'Rwandan Genocide' Resurrecting Ghosts, or Exorcising Demons?

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As the trial of the alleged Hutu war criminal Désiré Munyaneza unfolds in Montréal, ghosts are being resurrected which have for some time been lingering about the Rwandan conflict of the 1990s. But these ghosts are not merely the restless spirits of 1994 haunting us for recognition – despite what that quivering little quisling Romeo Dallaire would have us believe in his *Shake Hands with the Devil* (the autobiography or the documentary). No, the devil – if there is one which can be identified and exorcised – possesses neither that chapter of Rwandan history ranging from April to July 1994, nor any Rwandan Hutu whom Dallaire may have 'shook hands with' in 1994.

Lest I be accused of slipping into that form of colonialist tongue which has for centuries operated through the application of dehumanizing metaphors to colonized subjects, let me just be clear that the demons in need of exorcising here have nothing to do with the colonized and subordinated bodies. If there is any demon to be exorcised, it is that utterly foreign spirit which has possessed the corpus of Central African history which has come to be known as the 'Rwandan genocide' – a hideous beast of a story concocted by imperialism. Hideous not only because of what happened between the months of April and July 1994, but hideous for how the tales told about those few months in Rwanda have served to mask the role imperialism has played in Central Africa at large throughout the 1990s. The tales told about the 'Rwandan genocide' are intended to disarm critical reason and deflect attention away from the even larger atrocities and the even greater war criminals that Western imperialism is trying to hide. Therefore, as all these old ghost tales are called forth yet again with the trial of the alleged Hutu war criminal Désiré Munyaneza, Canadians need to be asking the question of what is the real story behind the so-called 'Rwandan genocide'.

The Causes of the Rwandan Civil War

To the extent that Westerners know anything about Rwanda today, it is thanks to the Rwandan genocide entertainment industry which has proliferated in recent years (*Hotel Rwanda*, *Shakes Hands with the Devil*, *Un Dimanche à Kigali*, to name only a few). According to the myth propagated in these and many other films, books, and documentaries, the conflict really only begins in April 1994 with the shooting down of Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana's plane. As the mainstream discourse goes, 'extremist'

Hutus shot down their own president's plane in order to justify the slaughter of the country's ethnic Tutsi minority. But if the conflict can be so easily periodized at all, one should really begin the story in late 1980s when the *current* Rwandan President Paul Kagame was head of the Ugandan army's military intelligence under the American-backed dictatorship of Yoweri Museveni.

In late September 1990, while both the presidents of Rwanda (Habyarimana) and Uganda (Museveni) were away in New York attending a UNICEF meeting, 4000 soldiers and high ranking officers from the Ugandan National Army 'mutinied' and invaded Rwanda.¹ Immediately after the invasion, Paul Kagame – who was in the United States at the time of the invasion being trained by the U.S. military in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas – returned to Uganda to take up a position as the commander of invading Ugandan forces (soon to be known as the Rwandan Patriotic Forces (RPF)).²

For the next three years, Museveni allowed his former troops to move freely across the Rwanda-Uganda border as the RPF terrorized and dispossessed hundreds of thousands of Hutu peasants in northern Rwanda of the most fertile land in the country. Robin Philpot, who has written a damning exposé on the Western role played in the Rwandan civil war, has written that within "two and a half years after the invasion, only 1800 people lived in an area of northern Rwanda that previously had a population of 800,000."³ In other circumstances, this act has been called 'ethnic cleansing', if not genocide. But such victims are not worthy of mention when Western imperialism has had a hand in such acts. Conspiracies of silence most often shroud their histories.

In a testimony submitted to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, one source recites that

from 1989 onwards, America supported joint RPF-Ugandan attacks upon Rwanda... There were at least 56 'situation reports' in (US) State Department files in 1991... As American and British relations with Uganda and the RPF strengthened, so hostilities between Uganda and Rwanda escalated... By August 1990 the RPF had begun preparing an invasion with the full knowledge and approval of British intelligence.⁴

At a time when the Western presses were expressing harsh indignation at Saddam Hussein for invading Kuwait, the international community was giving little attention to the RPF's war crimes. Instead, it was the Habyarimana government that was being condemned by the world for its responses to the invasion and occupation (not unlike the way the Iraqi people are being demonized today for fighting back against their own occupation). In response to the October 1990 invasion, the Rwandan government had some 8000 suspected collaborators arrested, holding them for periods ranging from a few days to a few months. And without taking into consideration the state of emergency which gave rise to these arrests, human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch, as Philpot reports, ignorantly claimed that "the arrests

provided verifiable proof of serious human rights violations...proof of the genocidal intentions of the Rwandan Government leaders".⁵ But no mention of the genocidal intentions of the RPF were made by Human Rights Watch.

Aside from the attacks being lodged by NGOs, Habyarimana was facing a host of other destabilizing forces from without. The 'international community' was pressuring Habyarimana to hold multiparty elections (while under occupation); and the IMF was imposing a Structural Adjustment Program that ended up leading to a harsh devaluation of the Rwandan Franc.⁶

By August 1993, with pressures escalating from all sides, the Habyarimana government buckled, signing the Arusha accords which allowed for a near parity of military and political forces between the Habyarimana government and the RPF forces.

In the same period in neighbouring Burundi, the first democratically elected Hutu president Melchior Ndadaye was assassinated by Tutsi officers in the Burundian army shortly after taking office. As a consequence, 375,000 Hutu refugees fled from Burundi to Rwanda to add to the one million Hutus internally displaced by the RPF.⁷ One cannot underestimate the level of resentment Hutus would have been experiencing at this point as they were being unilaterally victimized in a conflict, with the world siding with the RPF. Up until 1994, the refugee crisis in Rwanda was one that solely affected Hutus, thus intensifying the ethnic animosities between the 85-90% Hutu majority and Tutsi minority.

The precipitating cause for what came to be known as the Rwandan genocide came on April 6, 1994 when the plane carrying President Habyarimana and the president of Burundi Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down with a shoulder rocket. But this is not how the world would come to know this event: not as an assassination of two heads of state deeming a global outcry and an appropriate response by the United Nations, but rather a 'plane crash', brought down by unknown perpetrators, likely 'Hutu extremists' looking for a pretext to execute their genocidal plot. But no evidence has ever been brought against any Hutu extremists for this crime. In fact, all evidence that has been gathered on the case points to the RPF and Paul Kagame.

With the creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in November 1994, the United Nations Security Council mandated that *all* violations of international human rights committed in Rwanda during 1994 be investigated. This was a convenient timeframe for the United States and Britain, whose support for the war crimes of the RPF against Hutus *prior to* 1994 – and what they probably estimated would continue long after 1994 – would go uninvestigated.

In its investigations, the Tribunal delegated a completely separate team to investigate the assassination alone. After years of investigation and once the official inquiry began to compile substantial evidence suggesting that it was indeed Paul Kagame and the RPF who were responsible for the downing

of the plane, Chief Prosecutor for the Tribunal Louise Arbour shut down the investigation and put a gag order on its investigators.⁸ As if proscribing the mandate of the ICTR to 1994 was not discriminatory enough, Louise Arbour shut down the investigation into the assassination of the two presidents lest the world learn that the RPF were not the saviours that the media made them out to be. **Were Kagame and the RPF found guilty of triggering the events of 1994, the whole Manichean narrative concerning the evil Hutu génocidaires and innocent Tutsi victims would be thrown into question.** To date, despite all the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Tutsi forces, from 1990 to the present, not a single RPF member or official of the Kagame government has stood trial at the ICTR.

While these accounts of the Rwandan civil war will almost certainly not correspond with the account most people have come to know from sources like *Hotel Rwanda*, the real-life hero of that film, Paul Rusesabagina himself, has called for the arrest of Paul Kagame and the RPF forces.⁹ Rusesabagina's call is in line with a recent issuance by the French judge Jean-Louis Bruguière of 23 November 23, 2006, which put out arrest warrants for nine close collaborators of the Kagame regime on the charges of downing the presidential aircraft on April 6, 1994, which killed everyone on board including three French citizens. (Bruguière was constitutionally prohibited from issuing an arrest warrant for Kagame because he is still the head of state.)¹⁰

While Bruguière's case begins to shed some light on the untold horrors of the Rwandan civil war and Western complicity therein, the horrible consequences of the West's support for the RPF were only just beginning with Kagame's seizure of power in July 1994.

The Consequences of the Rwandan Civil War:

Holocaust and Plunder in the Congo

The motivations for the Western-supported coups in Uganda (1986) and Rwanda (1994) become perfectly clear in hindsight when we look to how events have unfolded in the Great Lakes Region of Africa over the last two decades, particularly with respect to Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). One of the reasons for strong Western support in Uganda was to create a strong military and ideological bulwark against the spreading influence of Islam in Sudan. After coming to power, Museveni of Uganda aided the insurgency in the south of Sudan led by John Garang of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army. The civil war generated by Western subversion in south Sudan left two million dead. And of course, now there is the related and similarly foreign-generated conflict ensuing in the Darfur region of Sudan.¹¹ But even more directly and with even greater destruction and plunder have the puppet governments of Rwanda and Uganda been involved the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In the wake of the events of 1994 in Rwanda, with the coming to power

of the RPF, some 1,300,000 Rwandan refugees fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (at that time, still Mobuto's Zaïre). Upon the justification that Hutu génocidaires who had fled to the eastern region of Zaïre needed to be eliminated, Rwanda and Uganda invaded and occupied the eastern regions of Zaïre. In an oral report provided by investigative journalist Wayne Madsen to the U.S. congress, he claims that U.S. intelligence and satellite imagery aided Rwanda and Uganda in carrying out their genocidal assaults in the refugee camps where hundreds of thousands of Hutus were living. Meanwhile, the U.S., Rwanda, and Uganda were all supporting Laurent Kabila and his paramilitary squad, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL-CZ) against the Mobutu government. While all this was carried out under the pretense of hunting down Hutu génocidaires, as Madsen writes,

America's early support for Laurent Kabila, which was aided by U.S. allies in Rwanda and Uganda, had less to do with getting rid of the Mobutu regime than it did in opening up Congo's vast mineral riches to North American based mining companies.

The series of reports drafted by the United Nations Security Council concerning the illegal exploitation of resources in the DRC confirms this claim with a great degree of specificity. The first in the series of these reports, from 12 April 2001, extensively details the role that the occupying forces of Rwanda and Uganda have played in carrying out the systematic plundering of natural resources and the continuation of civil strife in the DRC. The report itself provides enough details of the personal relationships and business connections involved in perpetuating the conflict in the DRC (which has killed millions since 1996, with estimates ranging from 5-10 million) to easily justify an international criminal tribunal for the DRC. In its concluding recommendations, the Panel of the report indeed recommends that the Security Council consider establishing an international mechanism that will investigate and prosecute individuals involved in economic criminal activities...[and] companies and government officials whose economic and financial activities directly or indirectly harm powerless people and weak economies.¹²

Yet, despite how damning the report is of the Anglo-American puppets in the region, the report barely scratches at the surface of the role played by Western imperialism in fomenting the conflicts in the DRC. The report reads as if the only parties to whom economic benefits of the conflict in the DRC accrued were the Rwandan and Ugandan economies, thus casting the conflict as merely another born-in-Africa affair to which Western parties and corporations have unwittingly been pulled into. (The most recent depiction of this myth I can think of is in the film *Blood Diamond*, which puts forward the idea that it is the West who is victim, the beguiled victim of the illicit market of 'blood diamonds'). Only on one page of the 57-page report are 'developed countries' referenced for their role in supporting Rwandan and Ugandan operations in the DRC:

- “The Panel also has indications of the direct and indirect involvement of some staff of the embassies and cooperation of agencies of developed countries. They have facilitated the purchase of illegal minerals”
- “The rush to profit of some foreign companies that were ready to do business regardless of elements of unlawfulness and irregularities”
- “The political legitimization provided by some developed countries.”¹³

The most telling statement made by the report on the same page was how “the main bilateral donors to Rwanda and Uganda have been the U.K., Denmark, Germany, and the U.S.” and how such bilateral aid has helped free up the recipient countries to spend more on their militaries while foreign aid took care of the social needs of the population. (I wonder what all those yuppie-do-gooder NGO workers administering humanitarian aid – feeding children, building schools – would say if one were to tell them that they were actually just freeing up the resources of the host government to carry out a genocidal conflict in the next country?) The report asks the critical question “while such [humanitarian] support is legitimate...Were these savings used to finance this war?”¹⁴ However, the report does not draw out this question to its logical conclusions, because to do so would be to suggest that imperialist countries like the U.K. and the U.S. indirectly funded the Rwandan and Ugandan militaries by freeing up the national budgets of those countries through bilateral humanitarian provisions. This has been a clever and safe way for the West to distance itself from the conflict in the DRC which has claimed to life of millions of Congolese.

Show Trials Intended to Rewrite History

Notwithstanding the intentional shortsightedness of the report – afterall, who could have expected a U.N. Security Council-commissioned report to indict its veto-wielding members U.S. and U.K.? – there is enough information in that report alone to show just how criminal are the Western-backed regimes of Paul Kagame in Rwanda and Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, and, more importantly, what Anglo-American imperialism had in mind when it brought these regimes to power. The death, destruction, and plunder of the DRC since the 1996 invasion by Uganda and Rwanda pales in comparison to what unfolded in Rwanda from April to July 1994. Yet, the whole International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)-process and its domestic counterpart in Canada in the form of the Modern War Crimes Program has been directed solely at the persecution of the Hutus who backed the Habyarimana government in the 1994-period of the Rwandan conflict. Justice is not as blind and impartial as we are led to believe.

With the evidence referenced above, it is clear that the ongoing trial of Désiré Munyaneza in Montréal is intended as nothing more than a show trial intended to further entrench the mainstream myth of the ‘Rwandan genocide’. I am not suggesting that people like Munyaneza should not face justice for the crimes of rape and murder, if indeed people like him are

responsible for these acts. But he should be held no less to account than the Tutsi-RPF war criminals who have carried out ten-times the carnage in Central Africa; and most certainly the imperialist players who have brought such conditions to bear upon the African continent.

The trial of Munyaneza is nothing but a show trial, a spectacle which sustains the mainstream myth about the 'Rwandan genocide', collectively diverting the attention of Western audiences from the greatest war criminals of them all. From the kangaroo courts of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia to the trial of Saddam Hussein, and the ongoing unilateral persecution of Hutus involved in Rwandan civil war, for one to condemn unilateral persecutions is not necessarily to rush blindly to the defense of a figure like Saddam Hussein, but to aspire to the ideal that Lady Justice ought to remain blindfolded. The greatest war criminals of the late twentieth century — those imperialist powers who destabilized and waged war against Yugoslavia and Rwanda to those who continue to do the same with Iraq and the DRC today — have escaped justice altogether. The Law in a time of ceaseless war and plunder cannot but be a reflection of the configurations of power which put the Law into place. And with respect to Canada, its persecution of Désiré Munyaneza is no exception to this rule.

Notes

¹ Robin Philpot, *Rwanda 1994: Colonialism Dies Hard*. Available Online: http://www.taylor-report.com/Rwanda_1994/. p.8.

² *Ibid*, p.12

³ *Ibid*, p.16.

⁴ Michel Chossudovsky, "Rwanda: Installing a US Protectorate In Central Africa", 8 May 2003. Available Online: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/CHO305A.html>.

⁵ Philpot, p.13.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.16.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.35.

⁸ See interview with one of the investigators from the ICTR, Michael Hourigan, on the *Taylor Report*, 17 July 2006. Available online in Audio form at < http://www.taylor-report.com/audio/mp3/Taylor_Report-2006-07-17.mp3>.

⁹ "Hero of Hotel Rwanda Calls Kagame a War Criminal", *Taylor Report*, 11 Dec 2006. Available online: <<http://www.taylor-report.com/articles/index.php?id=28>>.

¹⁰ "Rwanda Cuts Relations with France", *BBC World Service*, 24 Nov 2006. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6179436.stm> .

¹¹ For one particularly detailed account of the conflict in Darfur and imperialist interests in Sudan, see Keith Harmon Snow's extensive report, "Oil in Darfur? Special Ops in Somalia? The New Old "Humanitarian" Warfare in Africa", Available at www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=%20SN20070207&articleId=471. Snow has also written extensively on the DRC, Uganda, Rwanda, Sudan, and Somalia, and his ground-breaking research can be found at www.allthingspass.com.

¹² "Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the DRC", United Nations Security Council Report, 12 April 2001. Available at http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.glKWLeMTIsG/b.1313223/k.F0B5/January_2006BRGreat_Lakes_Initiative.htm. p.44-45.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.38.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.38.

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