

The Shroud Over Rwanda's Nightmare

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New York Times, January 9, 2014

The refusal by United Nations officials to approve the general's plan for raids on suspected arms caches has been widely condemned as paving the way for one of the worst genocides since the Holocaust. But evidence submitted to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, some of it still under seal, reveals a murkier, more complicated situation than has often been portrayed.

New details about the mysterious informant known to General Dallaire as "Jean-Pierre" serve as a reminder that history can take a long time to reveal its secrets. Important documents that could shed light on the unresolved mysteries and ambiguities of the Rwanda genocide remain under lock and key.

It is now commonly recognized that the international community failed miserably in its efforts to protect the people of Rwanda. But even 20 years later, there is still much to learn. While the new evidence does not absolve the United Nations and Western governments for failing to take timely action, Jean-Pierre's story illustrates the challenges that continue to vex decision-makers struggling to make sense of unfolding crises in countries like the Central African Republic or South Sudan.

The immediate trigger for the Rwandan genocide was the shooting

down of a plane carrying President Juvénal Habyarimana on April 6, 1994. Over the next hundred days, Hutu militia groups murdered at least half a million members of the Tutsi minority, along with tens of thousands of "moderate" Hutus. These massacres took place against the backdrop of a war that pitted the Hutu-dominated regime against Tutsi-led insurgents who had invaded Rwanda from neighboring Uganda.

Whether the genocide was planned, and was thus foreseeable, has been hotly debated by scholars, politicians and lawyers. The "genocide fax" has been a key part of this debate. Controversy has surrounded Jean-Pierre's motives for cooperating with General Dallaire, the reliability of his information, and his fate after his request for protection was rejected by the United Nations.

We now know a lot more about Jean-Pierre Abubakar Turatsinze (his full name was established by the war crimes tribunal). Half-Hutu and half-Tutsi, he operated on both sides of Rwanda's political and ethnic divide. While his prediction of mass murder of Tutsis by Hutu militia groups proved chillingly accurate, he misled United Nations peacekeepers on some key points.

Important details about his back-

ground and eventual fate are contained in a 2003 interview with his wife by tribunal investigators that has never been officially released but is now available. At the time of his marriage, in 1990, he worked as a driver for a senior Rwandan official. In the turmoil following the rebel invasion, Jean-Pierre used his connections to become an intermediary to the Interahamwe militia, whose principal goal was to defend the Hutu-dominated regime.

Curiously, the fact that he was married to a Tutsi and was the product of a mixed Tutsi-Hutu marriage does not seem to have affected his advancement in the Interahamwe, at least until the end of 1993. Around this time, he told his wife that he might have to kill her because the ruling party was planning to carry out “massacres.” As she told investigators, “because I am Tutsi and his mother was Tutsi, I understood this to mean that the massacres were going to be against the Tutsi population.”

Jean-Pierre told General Dallaire’s aides in January 1994 that he had been instructed to register “all Tutsis” living in Kigali, apparently for “their extermination.” He also said that the Rwandan Army had been supplying the Interahamwe with weapons, and identified several arms caches, including one in the headquarters of the ruling party. The Interahamwe went on to commit many of the murders during the genocide.

The Arusha-based international tribunal has found that the Rwandan Army channeled weapons to the Interahamwe and provided military training to militia members. But tribunal judges were not convinced that the purpose of that training was the “extermination” of Tutsis, as Jean-Pierre claimed, rather than preparation for

renewed hostilities with the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front. They found that the Interahamwe had drawn up lists of “suspected opponents of the regime,” but such lists were “not focused exclusively on ethnicity.”

Evidence submitted to the tribunal showed that Jean-Pierre may have had other motives for seeking United Nations protection. He had fallen out with party leaders who suspected him of selling arms to rebels in Burundi. Some witnesses believe he might have been an agent of the Rwandan Patriotic Front assigned to penetrate the Interahamwe.

While there is no reliable evidence to back the claim that he was an R.P.F. agent in January 1994, it is clear that he had connections to opposition parties allied with the Tutsi-led rebels. According to United Nations cables, a Hutu opposition leader named Faustin Twagiramungu served as Jean-Pierre’s conduit to General Dallaire. These connections caused French and Belgian analysts to suspect that Jean-Pierre might be spreading “disinformation.”

In his 2003 memoir, “Shake Hands With the Devil,” General Dallaire raised the possibility that his informant had “simply melted back into the Interahamwe, angry and disillusioned at our vacillation and ineffectiveness, and become a genocidaire.” Jean-Pierre told the general’s aides at their final meeting in February 1994 that he was planning to go to Zaire, for “commando training.”

Instead, he went to Tanzania where he joined the R.P.F., according to his wife. In late March, two weeks before the president’s assassination, he moved to a rebel-held enclave in northern Rwanda, where he was reported

to be “in very good books with senior members of the R.P.F.” In late 1994, a minister in Rwanda’s new Tutsi-led government informed the family that Jean-Pierre had been “killed in battle.”

The circumstances of his death remain a mystery. As his wife told investigators, “I do not know how he died and where.” She was unable even to establish whether he was “surely dead.”

General Dallaire has told the tribunal that he operated on “instinct” in sending the genocide fax, which was followed up by a series of warnings to New York in early 1994 that were rebuffed or ignored. He sensed that the peacekeeping force had to reassert its authority. But his superiors in New York needed something more than their field commander’s instincts to justify aggressive action.

Newly released State Department records show that United Nations officials briefed the United States, Belgium and France on the emerging cri-

sis, but there was zero enthusiasm in the Clinton administration following the “Black Hawk Down” debacle in Somalia in October 1993. Much stronger intelligence would have been necessary to disrupt the passivity of senior decision makers.

The “Jean-Pierre” revelations are a tantalizing indication of how much we still have to learn about the Rwandan genocide. Records that could shed light on whether it could have been prevented are still classified in Washington, New York, Paris, Brussels, Geneva, Arusha and Kigali — unavailable to the public despite pledges by international leaders to fully investigate the tragedy. In order to draw the correct lessons from history, we must first establish all the facts.

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