

Trompe l'Oeil in Genocide.

The False Message of Pacification in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide

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Introduction

After the 1994 genocide in Rwanda had ended researchers of Human Rights Watch found a document entitled '*Note Relative à la Propagande d'Expansion et de Recrutement*' in the university city of Butare. It contained a detailed analysis of a book written by propaganda expert Roger Mucchieli in 1970, called *Psychologie de la publicité et de la propaganda*. The author of the *Note* claimed that lessons could be learned from this book and from Lenin and Goebbels. He proposed the use of lies, exaggeration and ridicule to attack the opponent, in both his public and his private life. It is not honest, the author admits, but it works well; a propagandist can persuade the public that they are being attacked and are justified in taking whatever measures are necessary 'for legitimate [self-] defence.'²

Although it would be difficult to determine whether the officials and propagandists who deliberately spread false information during the genocide in Rwanda were familiar with this particular document, the techniques described in the *Note* were regularly used and, according to historian and Human Rights Watch researcher Alison Des Forges, worked 'extremely well'. Manipulating facts and spreading rumours to frighten citizens was a strategy that was used on many occasions, even before April 1994. In each case similar elements were involved: the spread of rumours, the creation of a fear, the violence directed

¹ War crimes researcher at the National Public Prosecutors Office in the Netherlands.

² Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story. Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999, digital edition). For a discussion of the *Note*, see also Jean-Pierre Chretien, 'RTLM propaganda; the democratic Alibi', in Allan Thompson (ed), *The Media and the Rwandan Genocide* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

against Tutsi civilians and the explanation by authorities that the violence had been spontaneous and they simply had lacked the resources to control it.³

During the 1994 genocide in Rwanda the scope of these propaganda tactics was enlarged with a policy of the newly installed interim government known as ‘pacification’. Similar to the ways in which local authorities responded to the pogroms and other instances of orchestrated violence against Tutsi prior to the carnage of 1994, officials preaching ‘restoring security’ announced the end of the killings. Ministers and party leaders toured the country repeating the new national motto of pacification. Directives were given and prefects were ordered to hold ‘security meetings’.

But pacification was not what it seemed. Pacification in fact marked a period of extreme violence, which was part of a nation-wide campaign of extermination that lasted 100 days and ended in July 1994. During this period it is estimated that 800,000 people, Tutsi and moderate Hutu, were killed. The state-sponsored policies of pacification and restoring security spearheaded the nationwide campaign of killing Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda. Pacification shows how Rwandan elites appropriated propaganda techniques and concepts from the West to influence the international community and to create an environment of terror and extermination in Rwanda. Pacification in Rwanda marked a phase wherein the interim government installed by the pro-MRND politico-military faction backed by the presidential family in April 1994, and which bombastically referred to itself as the ‘government of saviours’ (*abatabazi* in Kinyarwanda), succeeded, at last, in bringing the extermination of Tutsi under state control.⁴

³ ICTR Trial Testimony Alison Des Forges in the case of Augustin Ndindiliyimana, 18 September 2006, p.53.

⁴ I draw extensively on the work Alison Des Forges, in particular *Leave None to Tell the Story*, which is a landmark analysis of genocidal violence in Rwanda. I would also like to draw the reader’s attention to the lesser known, but equally valuable contributions Des Forges made as an expert of the International Criminal Tribunal

‘War’ propaganda in Rwanda

Prior to the 1994 genocide, Rwanda too had its ‘false flag’ operations. Just two weeks after the rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) attacked Rwanda on October 1, 1990, approximately 300 Tutsi civilians were killed in the *commune* of Kibilira (Gisenyi). According to the local authorities, the people had risen up in fear because they believed the Tutsi citizens were RPF agents or accomplices. What happened was that local leaders had created an atmosphere of fear by spreading rumours that the RPF was on the next hill. It was alleged that the RPF had killed a senior military officer from the region and that the RPF was planning to attack the school and kill children. In 1993 witnesses told the International Commission of Investigation on Human Rights Violations in Rwanda that local authorities and state employees directed the attacks. More than 550 houses were burned down. Those accused of the attack were detained only briefly.⁵

In January 1991, the RPF attacked the northern town of Ruhengeri. Authorities accused the Bagogwe Tutsi of having helped the RPF stage the attack. Government soldiers then staged a fake assault on the military camp in the region. The consequences were devastating as Hutu civilians attacked *en masse* their Tutsi neighbours. In March 1992, Radio Rwanda repeatedly announced that, according to a ‘human rights group in Nairobi’, Tutsi planned the assassination of Hutu political leaders in Bugesera. Some Hutu believed this was

for Rwanda. The numerous expert opinions and trial testimonies of Des Forges show how her views on the organization of the genocide developed ever since the publication of *Leave None to Tell the Story*. As far as the intricacies of Rwandan politics are concerned, I am indebted to the work of André Guichaoua, in particular *Rwanda. De la guerre au génocide. La politique criminelles au Rwanda (1990-1994)* (Paris : Éditions La Découverte, 2010), and *Rwanda 1994. Les politiques du génocide à Butaré* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2005). For an overview of the scholarly literature on the Rwandan genocide, see Rene Lemarchand, ‘Rwanda. The State of Research’, *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, 2013, available at: <http://www.massviolence.org/rwanda-the-state-of-research.742>, retrieved 16 June 2015.

⁵ International Commission of Investigation on Human Rights Violations in Rwanda since October 1, 1990, January 7-21, 1993, Final Report, March 1993.

true and the following night, the slaughter of Tutsi in Bugesera began. In December 1992 local authorities in north-western Rwanda warned that killers were hiding in the Gishwati forest and ordered the population to ‘clear the brush’, referring to the Tutsi who were thought to provide cover to the RPF slipping into Rwanda without being noticed.⁶

War provided the context for genocidal violence in Rwanda. It triggered the use of violence and led specialists in violence (hardliners within the army and militias) to enter the domestic political arena.⁷ Those radicals who wished to defend the republic by ‘all possible means’ had specific ‘ideas of war’, to use the words of Martin Shaw.⁸ They offered a ‘racial reading’ of the war situation based on a deliberate conflation of two enemy figures, one external (the RPF rebels) and the other internal (the Tutsi). Their message: the Hutu nation is at war and every Hutu must be vigilant and protect himself against an enemy who is at his doorstep.

By equating the Tutsi with the enemy, propagandists attempted to erase in the minds of the people the distinction between combatant and non-combatant and, subsequently, expose ordinary civilians to slaughter and rape. For example, the propagandists claimed that the enemy was ‘not necessarily a combatant, was not necessarily wearing a uniform, was not necessarily carrying an arm; the enemy could be anyone.’ People were told to be constantly ‘awake’, always alert and always looking for this enemy. In this context the appeal to self defence and restoring security was very compelling for Rwanda’s society, which was mostly illiterate in 1994.⁹ The claims of Hutu Power gained credibility in the context of war. As a student interviewed in the Benaco refugee camp in Tanzania explained: ‘They hear over and

⁶ Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, p. 71.

⁷ Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide. Race, power, and war in Rwanda* (New York, Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁸ Martin Shaw, War and genocide. A sociological approach, Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence, 2007, available at www.massviolence.org/war-and-genocide-a-sociological-approach, retrieved 28 June 2015

⁹ ICTR trial testimony of Alison Desforges in the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko et al., 15 June 2004, p.39.

over that the Tutsis are out to kill them, and that is the reality. So they act not out of hate as fear. They think they have only the choice to kill or be killed'.¹⁰

Above all, this cultivated fear was deliberately fuelled by the propagandists of the Hutu Power movement, who depicted 'the' Tutsi – men, women and children alike – as necessarily being complicit with an enemy military force. Perhaps the aim was political, i.e. to unite a fragmented Hutu population behind a clique of northern elites who had dominated Rwanda politically and economically throughout the 70s and 80s.¹¹ Yet the method used was the extermination of a race. Hassan Ngeze, editor in chief of the extremist weekly *Kangura*, wrote in January 1994: 'Let's hope the *Inyenzi* will have the courage to understand what is going to happen and realize that if they make a small mistake, they will be exterminated; if they make the mistake of attacking again, there will be none of them left in Rwanda, not even a single accomplice. All the Hutus are united...'¹² Propagandists turned mundane events into evidence of an enemy plot. The 'discovery' of the plot, presented as proof of a Tutsi subversion, generated paranoia. The propagandists aimed to spread an atmosphere of fear and anxiety among the Hutu population. During the genocide, killing the 'other', the Tutsi, became a way of eliminating this threat; it was believed to be an act of self-protection.

Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) played its part in the attempt to manipulate public opinion and generate unfounded hostility towards the Tutsi population. RTLM broadcasted what it referred to as 'well-known facts', for instance that Tutsi in Rwanda held a disproportionate share of the wealth because of their historical privilege. RTLM journalist Kantano Habimana claimed in December of 1993 that 'they are the ones who have all the money'. The Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for

¹⁰ Mahmood Mamdani, *When victims become killers. Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 191

¹¹ Chrétien, RTLM propaganda.

¹² Cited in ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Ferdinand Nahimana et al., December 3, 2003, para 215.

Rwanda (ICTR) in so-called media trial observed that false statements like these can be considered inflammatory; at the very least they convey something beyond information, and can be presented, for example, with the purpose of promoting ethnic hatred.¹³ As early as 1992 Rwandan radio was instrumental in spreading false information and orchestrating massacres of Tutsis in the region of Bugesera. Ferdinand Nahimana, chief of the Rwandan Office of Information (ORINFOR), sacked afterwards but in 1993 he co-founded a private radio station called RTLM. Felicien Kabuga, shareholder and president of RTLM, was to sign the Agreement for Establishment and Use of Radio and Television, which stipulated that RTLM 'shall not broadcast any programs of a nature to incite hatred, violence or any form of division' and that the 'broadcaster must refrain from telling lies or giving out information that may mislead the public'. This was not of much help. RTLM played a key role in the dissemination of false information to the public.¹⁴

Intellectuals and the power of the imaginary

In the years preceding the genocide, Rwanda suffered from a disastrous economic situation, huge social inequalities, political tensions, and overpopulation largely caused by the fact that people were fleeing the warzones in the north. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that these circumstances in themselves, unavoidably led to the massacres of Tutsi. Nor was the anti-Tutsi propaganda RTLM poured over Rwanda in 1993 and 1994 solely responsible. Political scientist Scott Straus as reminded us of the fact that in some places in Rwanda, large-scale massacres of Tutsi did not take place at all.¹⁵ The killings in the prefecture of Butare only started two weeks after the death of President Habyarimana, when the Tutsi prefect was

¹³ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Ferdinand Nahimana et al., 3 December 2003, para 470.

¹⁴ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Ferdinand Nahimana et al., para 569.

¹⁵ Straus, *The Order of Genocide*.

replaced by a pro-government official. In general, local administrators, politicians, businessmen and clergy were tremendously important in the kick-off of the slaughtering. Large-scale massacres require opinion leaders, officials and politicians to suggest a certain interpretation, that is, a type of discourse that can set the stage for mass violence and accompany it.¹⁶

Hutu power leaders in Rwanda were afraid that the collapse of the Rwandan state may deprive the ruling elite of any security it once had.¹⁷ The invasion of the RPF rebel forces in October 1990 failed because France and Zaire sent in forces to protect their ally. But it was a terrifying thought for the Hutu elite that the Rwandan government forces were unable to resist the attacks and that the regime's survival was now in the hands of the foreigners, and France in particular. This created a condition of paranoia among the ruling elite.

In Rwanda, northern intellectuals with a political agenda assumed the task of explaining the 'nature of the war'. Against the backdrop of frustrated attempts to unite the Hutu population since the introduction of a multi-party system in 1991, they claimed that Rwanda faced both external and internal attacks and that ordinary citizens within the country (i.e. the Tutsi) are the 'enemies within', accomplices of the RPF rebels. Most outspoken was MRND-party ideologue Léon Mugesera. In a speech he delivered at an MRND party meeting in November 1992, he prophesied the extermination of the Tutsis. Intellectuals who advocated ideas about race and the war against the RPF were usually educated in the West.¹⁸

The extremist weekly Kangura called upon intellectuals to spread the word: 'Rwandan

¹⁶ Jacques Semelin, *Purity and destroy. The political uses of massacre and violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp.13-21.

¹⁷ Cited in Ben Kiernan, 'Twentieth-century genocides. Underlying ideological themes from Armenia to East Timor, in Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (eds), *The Specter of Genocide. Mass murder in historical perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 37.

¹⁸ Claudine Vidal, 'Le génocide des Rwandais Tutsi; trois questions d'histoire', *Afrique Contemporaine*, no 174, 1995. An example of intellectuals who took fierce stances against the 'enemy' was the Cercle des Republicains (CRP), a discussion group of primarily people from the north and who met on occasional basis to debate political issues. CRP members, of whom Ferdinand Nahimana is the best known, strived for the creations of a pan-Hutu movement that goes beyond any single-party line, a philosophy that resembled the political programme of the extremist Hutu party CDR formed in February 1992. ICTR Trial Testimony of Alison Des Forges, 21 May 2002.

intellectuals, summon courage, get your act together and go on the air. Grab your pens and help president Habyarimana to get rid of the accomplices inside the country and defend our motherland'.¹⁹

An apocalyptic depiction of a 'monstrous enemy' accompanied the racial portrayal of the enemy. In December 1990, just two months after the RPF attacked Rwanda, Kangura alleged that the Tutsi had prepared a war that 'would leave no survivors.' In February 1991, Léon Mugesera claimed that the RPF wanted to restore the dictatorship by 'a genocide, the extermination of the Hutu majority'. MDR-Power leader Shingiro Mbonyumutwa, son of the president of the first Rwandan Republic, told the listeners of Radio Rwanda that the Tutsi intended to carry out a genocide of the Hutu: 'They are going to exterminate you until they are the only ones left in this country, so that the power which their fathers kept for four hundred years, they can keep for a thousand years!'.²⁰ The Hutu party Coalition pour la Défense de la République (CDR), another mouthpiece of the Hutu Power tendency, claimed that RPF atrocities were directed solely against the Hutu populations. In a tract entitled '*La démocratie ne survivre pas aux Accords d'Arusha*', Jean-Bosco Barayagwize, Director of Political Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and founding member of the CDR, alleged that in the regions the RPF controlled the Hutu were segregated in 'concentration camps' and were subjected to 'forced labor'. These allegations were never proven. Nor was Barayagwiza's claim that 'hundreds of thousands of Hutu' were killed in the regions controlled by the RPF: 'What happened to the two million Hutus who disappeared? Where are the 700,000 Hutu inhabitants of Byumba? Who massacred the 300,000 Hutu surrounded by the FPR in the prefecture of Kibungu in the month of May? What happened to the inhabitants of Bugesera, Gitarama, Butera and Gikongore... are we to believe that the blood

¹⁹ Excerpts from Kangura 5, available at www.rwandafile.com. Retrieved 24 April 2015.

²⁰ Cited in Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, p. 178.

of Hutu isn't red?'²¹ In a similar vein, Ferdinand Nahimana, a university lecturer and MRND-party propagandist who strongly condemned 'the Tutsi league' with its plan for a 'Hima empire', insisted that the elite must not remain 'unconcerned' but rather work with local administrators to alert the population to the danger of war.

The research carried out by the French sociologist Claudine Vidal prior to start of the civil war contains strong evidence that contradicts the claims that racism is firmly rooted in the minds of the Rwandans. Claudine Vidal observed that 'ethnic hate' as such was virtually non-existent. Certainly, the older Rwandan farmers remembered that under colonial rule they had suffered from the exactions of Tutsi chiefs, but these memories of hardship per se did not generate anti-Tutsi sentiments. However, these views were not commonly shared in all strata of the population. Some of the European-styled intellectuals Claudine Vidal met in Kigali emphasized that in the past the Tutsi had invaded Rwanda and subjugated its (Hutu) population. These intellectuals had outspoken racist ideas – Tutsi were 'profiteers' who cunningly divided the Hutu – and used history to explain why.²²

On 14 May 1994, at the height of the genocide, Prime Minister Jean Kambanda visited the University of Butare, the country's intellectual capital. At a meeting arranged by the vice-rector of the university, Kambanda thanked the intellectuals of the university for the ideas and other support they had provided in the past. For example, these intellectuals had informed him of the importance of a rapid media response to RPF charges against the government, the political usefulness of the claim that foreign nations were supporting the RPF, and the need for civilians to help the army fight the war. These ideas appeared in the government's press releases. Moreover, the university administration did not hesitate to contribute to a special fund for 'civilian self-defence'. Runyinya Barabwizira, a former

²¹ Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, *Le sang Hutu est-il rouge. Vérités cachées sur les massacres*. (Yaoundé, 1995) pp.32-33.

²² Claudine Vidal, *Sociologie des passions. Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris: Karthala, 1991).

botanist and university lecturer and Habyirimana's aide, claimed that the civilian self-defence programme, which in 1994 formed the institutional framework for the extermination campaign, was his brainchild.

The Butare university premises were important killing fields during the 1994 genocide. Butare's population had the highest percentage of Tutsi in the country and Jean-Baptiste Habyalimana, the Butare *préfet*, was Rwanda's only Tutsi *préfet* until he was replaced by Nsabimana, a Hutu, around 19 April 1994. Many people sought refuge in the Butare University hospital where the Red Cross and MSF provided healthcare to wounded persons, mainly Tutsi, during the genocide. In April and May 1994 Arsène Ntahobali, son of Maurice Ntahobaly, rector of the University of Butare and Pauline Nyiramasuhoko, minister of Family and Women's Development under the interim government, went to Butare's university hospital with a view to select, kidnap and kill Tutsis who had sought treatment or refuge there. A witness related that she saw Doctor Gatera and Ntahobali removing blankets from patients to check their identity. Other witnesses testified that patients disappeared during the night abductions conducted by *Interahamwe* and that Tutsis were removed from the hospital. Those who had been expelled were killed elsewhere.²³ Arsène Ntahobaly was also in charge of a roadblock situated in front of his father's house in Butare where Tutsis were abducted and killed.²⁴ Human Rights Watch estimated that in 1994 no less than 75 percent of the Tutsi population in the Butare prefecture were killed.²⁵

Misrepresentation and deceit: pacification campaign

²³ ICTR Trial Chamber, Judgement and sentence in the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko et al., 24 June 2011, para 2104-2147.

²⁴ ICTR Trial Chamber Judgement and sentence in the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko et al., 24 June 2011, para 3128.

²⁵ Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, p. 17.

A chilling example of misrepresentation and deceit is what had been announced by the new authorities as the ‘pacification campaign’. This crucial episode of the Rwandan genocide was decided upon at a meeting of political leaders and members of the interim government held on or about 10 April 1994 at the Hotel des Diplomates in Kigali. The same day, a *communiqué* broadcasted on Radio Rwanda stated that the political parties had called on administrative bodies to make every possible effort to immediately end the ‘disturbances’, massacres and looting throughout the country.

Théoneste Bagosora, Chef de Cabinet at the Ministry of Defence, was possibly the official who gave the order to start the ‘pacification operation’. On 7 April, the day after the downing of Habyarimana’s plane, Bagosora, Habyarimana’s former protégé, met with the MRND leadership to appoint a new president and arranged a meeting of political officials to form a new government. They reached an agreement to establish an interim government with representatives of the Hutu Power factions of their parties. These representatives were opposed to the Arusha Peace Accord. Tutsis were excluded from the new government. Jean Kambanda, an MDR politician from Butare, was appointed Prime Minister and Theodore Sindikubwabo, also hailing from Butare, was appointed as President. The same day Bagosora presented the new government to the Military Crisis Committee.²⁶ On 7 April 1994, Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana had already been killed, as well as the Belgian soldiers of UNAMIR who tried to protect her. Other opposition members, accused of ‘selling out’ the northern territories to the RPF during negotiations in Arusha, were hunted down and eliminated by elements of the elite units of the Rwandan army Bagosora controlled. Western embassies decided to evacuate their nationals.²⁷

²⁶ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Théoneste Bagosora et al., 18 December 2008, para 1286 – 1314.

²⁷ Guichaoua, *De la guerre au génocide*, p.422.

Sensitive to international journalists' reports on the widespread killings, the Rwandan ambassador in Brussels released a statement detailing the 'pacifying' efforts of the interim government. The interim government suspected Belgium to be behind the call on all nations to provide no further arms or military aid. Receiving concrete military assistance would depend on improving the Rwandan image abroad.²⁸

On April 7, Bagosora issued a press release saying that the military was 'to stabilize the situation in the country rapidly.' While the soldiers of the elite units of the Rwandan army were engaged in large-scale slaughter in Kigali, Bagosora called upon the armed forces to 'restore order in the country'. Knowing that the presidential guards had already assassinated Prime Minister Agathe Uwingiyimana and other officials not belonging to Habyarimana's clique, he asked the government in power to do its job.²⁹

At a meeting at the Hotel des Diplomates in Kigali, the new authorities asked the *Interahamwe* leaders to control their men and to conduct a pacification tour of the roadblocks to persuade the militias and others manning the roadblocks to organize the removal of corpses from the streets. Ephrem Nkezabera, head of the Commercial Banque of Rwanda and part-time treasurer for the *Interahamwe* national committee, was one of the leaders who toured the roadblocks. Caught in Belgium after being indicted by the ICTR, he admitted to having encouraged and congratulated militia erecting the roadblocks and of having delivered arms to them on 11 and 12 April. He confessed that people were killed in front of him by militias and by individuals from his immediate circle.

The pacification tour itself was a flop. The killings in Kigali did not stop, militiamen were not disarmed (they were not asked to) and the roadblocks were not dismantled. While the *Interahamwe* leaders asked their men to restrain themselves, elsewhere in Kigali *Interahamwe* militias and government soldiers took the lead in the slaughter campaign. For

²⁸ Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, pp.187-224.

²⁹ Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story*, pp. 150-1.

example, an estimated 2,000 refugees, mainly Tutsi, sheltering at the École Technique Officielle (ETO) in Kigali were savagely killed during a joint operation of elements of the Para Commando Battalion and *Interahamwe* at Nyanza Hill on 11 April 1994.³⁰ Army soldiers of Habyarimana's native soil, in particular, were totally committed to the killings. Some of them even refused to fight against the RPF, for their sole objective was the extermination of Tutsi.³¹ Military officers who did not support the killing of Tutsi were removed.

Faced with 'resistance' in their neighbourhoods, the militias asked for weapons to defend themselves, which they received. In so doing, Joseph Nzirorera and Théoneste Bagosora, the *Akazu* protégés who determined the course of the events during the 100-days of genocide, 'authorized' the continuation and even intensification of the massacres and pillaging. In the streets, power was now in the hands of the militias, *maître d'oeuvre* of the genocide, backed by Hutu Power leaders and their allies in the elite units of the national army.

Although the campaign was officially announced as one of pacification, the interim government did not seriously try to end the killings. Instead, messages announcing an end to the slaughter were meant to lure Tutsi out of hiding or to give them a false sense of security before the militias launched a new attack.³² Chief of Staff Augustin Bizimungu's 'call for peace', broadcasted on hate radio RTLM on April 17, is telling in this respect: 'They [authorities] have to organize meetings of the people and encourage them to live in peace with one another, to protect themselves more and look for the enemy wherever he may be and defeat him once and for all.'³³ Eliézer Niyitegeka's pacification speech given on 30 April

³⁰ ICTR Trial Chamber, judgement and sentence in the case of Théoneste Bagosora, para 1340.

³¹ Guichaoua, *De la guerre au génocide*.

³² Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, p. 219.

³³ Transcription of RTLM broadcast of 17 April 1994, available at <http://migs.concordia.ca>. Retrieved 16 April 2015.

1994 in Butare also shows how the interim government tried to take control of the genocide:

‘We are sincerely asking you to make peace. We are asking you to safeguard peace and security... We know that the enemy is present here in the country. We know that there are accomplices even here in Butare. If you see an accomplice or someone who resembles an accomplice, or if you suspect that someone is an accomplice, tell the authorities’.³⁴

With pacification at the heart of government policy, informal power structures that always existed under the old regime in Rwanda could finally come to the fore. Perhaps the clearest sign of this was the efforts to gain control over *Interahamwe* militias and, by so doing, bypass the competent authorities (police and gendarmerie) charged with law and order. The *Interahamwe* movement had never been formally affiliated with the MRND, though the militias received orders from MRND leaders and especially from members of the National Committee.³⁵ During the genocide, the new authorities gave unconditional support to the *Interahamwe* and others who were to mobilise for ‘unmasking the enemy and its accomplices’.³⁶ In the commune of Taba (Gitarama), the *Interahamwe* leader was officially in charge of pacification.³⁷ During his trial at the ICTR, former Taba bourgmestre Jean-Paul Akayesu claimed that he could not prevent the killings of Tutsi in his commune. With only 10 policemen at his disposal he was outnumbered and overpowered by the *Interahamwe* in his commune.³⁸

Just as the conservative wing of the MRND, the new government considered the *Interahamwe* as the lifeline to mobilize popular support for the genocide. Civil Defence, the

³⁴ Transcription of Radio Rwanda broadcast of 30 April 1994. Available at: http://www.concordia.ca/research/migs/links/documents/RR_30Apr94_eng_K023-8739-K023-8758.pdf. Retrieved on 27 April 2015.

³⁵ Francois-Xavier Nsanzuwera, Expert Report for Testimony in Georges Rutaganda Case, 21 June 1997; ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Édouard Karemera and Matthieu Ndirumapatse, 2 February 2012, para 259.

³⁶ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Édouard Karemera and Matthieu Ndirumapatse, 2 February 2012, para 1081.

³⁷ ICTR Trial Testimony Alison Des Forges in the case of Casimir Bizimungu, 2 June 2005, p 66.

³⁸ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement in the Jean-Paul Akayesu 2 September 1998 para 30.

operational side of pacification which turned ordinary men in militias, established the *de jure* recognition of the *Interahamwe* movement. Calling on them to continue combating the enemy was nothing less than inciting the audience to physically attack and destroy Tutsi as a group.³⁹

Other venues maintained authority as well: the elite units of the national army, the local party structures most of the time controlled by wealthy individuals linked to the entourage of presidential family and who paid for the much-needed ‘refreshments’ for the militiamen. Major decisions were made in Gisenyi where the almighty presidential family resided that determined to a large extent the events during the genocide.⁴⁰ However, the sometimes fierce competition between those still acting in the political arena was no help for the victims for they shared a common ambition: eliminating the enemy.

Restoring security: genocide legalized by the State

With the aim of enlarging the pacification policy to a national scale, Prime Minister Jean Kambanda issued the *Instructions to Restore Security in the Country* on 27 April 1994. It contained a number of instructions to be followed by all levels in charge of security to ensure that calm would return quickly. The *préfets* were requested to organise so-called security meetings and to tackle the security problem. Kambanda insisted that the population ‘must remain watchful in order to unmask the enemy and his accomplices and hand them over to the authorities.’ The *préfets* were requested

³⁹ ICTR/Trial Chamber judgement and sentence Édouard Karemera & Matthieu Ndirumapatse, 2 February 2012, para 992.

⁴⁰ Guichaoua, *De la guerre au génocide*.

to sensitize the population to give their full support to their government and to collaborate with the Rwandan Armed Forces.⁴¹

A pacification campaign schedule was drawn up, according to which members of the interim government, who in fact had very little political weight and were eager to assert their authority, would meet *préfets, bourgmestres, conseillers* and various stakeholders on specific days. Ministers were given responsibility for pacification in specified prefectures under government control. At her trial in Arusha, former minister Pauline Nyiramasuhuko explained that wherever the ministers went they made observations regarding Kambanda's instructions, noting potential difficulties and suggestions for better implementation. It was deemed necessary to repeat the message contained in the instructions day after day. Hence the message was read out loud so that people could understand. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko stated that she attended pacification meetings held on 4 May 1994 in Kigali-rural and on 6 May 1994 in Ruhengeri.⁴² Human Rights Watch documented pacification meetings in Gitarama, in Kigali Rural, in Butare, in Gikongoro and in Kibuye. Pacification was clearly a way of getting the administration of the territories under government control.

Kambanda's Instructions, a confirmation of the original decision to restore security made by the Council of Ministers on 23 April 1994,⁴³ read as a call to stop the violence and to restore calm. But 'restoring security' also meant eliminating the threat, *i.e.* the Tutsi enemy.⁴⁴ In the instructions, not a single word is uttered about the killings of Tutsi, which was already

⁴¹ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence Édouard Karemera & Matthieu Ngirumpatse, 2 February 2012, para 1026-1029.

⁴² ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko et al., 24 June 2011, para 492-493.

⁴³ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement in the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko et al., 24 June 2011, para 1940.

⁴⁴ In her expert opinion and trial testimony Des Forges pointed at the importance of semantics of the term pacification. The literal translation of the Kinyarwanda term commonly translated as "pacification" was in fact "restoring security", which could mean ending violence but could also encompass eliminating the enemy who is a threat to security, *i.e.* the Tutsi. In Des Forges' view the surface message was apparently to restore calm, but there is a distinction between restoring peace and restoring security – restoring security means eliminating the threat, *i.e.* the enemy who is the Tutsi. ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko et al., 24 June 2011 para 487-488.

three weeks underway and extended to all corners of Rwanda. The judges in the Karemera trial took this ‘omission’ very seriously: ‘... any individual or organisation, which opposed the killings and wished to restore peace to the country, would have stated in much more obvious and emphatic terms that the mass slaughter of innocent civilians of mostly Tutsi ethnicity must end immediately. Instead, the letter employs incomprehensibly distant language in all passages that purport to urge the population to restore peace in the country.’⁴⁵

With an estimated 200,000 Tutsi already killed by the time Kambanda issued his directive, the distant language and the persistent use of the term ‘security’ is hair-raising. The judges concluded that Kambanda’s instructions were ‘...a thinly-veiled attempt to deliver a false message of pacification for the purpose of hiding, at the very least, the interim government’s implicit approval of the genocide from the world and from posterity.’⁴⁶

Echoes of Kambanda’s call for the restoration of peace could be heard elsewhere in Rwanda. In Bwakira the burgomaster ordered the people to stop the killings. He appeared to be mindful of the fact that ‘all the ammunition used against the RPF is imported’ but the problem was that the Belgian government wanted to impose an arms embargo on Rwanda. The burgomaster explained his concerns as follows: ‘You must enforce security. Some people imagine that what happens on their hills is not known because they do not know that there are satellites in the sky which take pictures. Killings must stop for good. The councillors must transmit these orders in meetings with the population’. While telling the people to stop the killing, the burgomaster also related that an RPF soldier had been caught in the neighbouring commune of Gitesi. And when he was searched they found he was carrying an unidentified white powder’. When he was forced to eat it, he died immediately, so rumour had it. Des Forges commented on this incident as follows: ‘This supposed incident replicated

⁴⁵ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Édouard Karemera & Matthieu Ndirumapatse, 2 February 2012, para 1039.

⁴⁶ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Édouard Karemera & Matthieu Ndirumapatse, 2 February 2012, para 1044.

the features of the scare tactics used since October 1990: a soldier is purportedly found in the vicinity—near enough to be threatening but not so near as to permit easy verification of the story—in possession of the means to kill people and apparently on a mission to do so. The burgomaster in the next breath said that people must do patrols conscientiously at night to catch such infiltrators’.⁴⁷ During the genocide, stories about Tutsi conspiracies were relentlessly repeated.

The Janus-faced concept of pacification enabled the authorities to adopt a public posture vis-à-vis the international community while simultaneously propagating a policy of genocide among the population ‘not yet invaded’. Did it work? What we know for sure is that, at least in the early days of the genocide, the U.N. Secretary-General and his staff ignored the genocidal character of the slaughter. Notes from the briefings of U.N. council members indicate that the role of the Rwandan government in the organization of the violence was completely ignored. The large-scale massacres were rarely mentioned. Roger Booh-Booh, the Secretary-General’s special representative, attributed the worsening of the security situation to intensified fighting between the Rwandan army and the RPF. The U.N. Secretary-General, in the first formal report on the situation in Rwanda on April 20, similarly avoided a clear description of the genocide. By suggesting the killings stemmed from ‘chaos’ and the usual violence accompanying war, the U.N. Secretary-General seemed to reproduce the language of the interim government.⁴⁸

The *atmosphère intellectuelle* at the Élysée in Paris was not much different. The archives of the Élysée analysed by Maison Rafaëlle indicate that French President Francois Mitterrand and his advisors, who firmly supported the Habyarimana regime, shared the vocabulary and arguments Rwandan hardliners employed in denouncing the RPF rebels. For example, the legitimate claim of the majority people (90%), the cleverness and manipulation

⁴⁷ Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story*, p.225.

⁴⁸ Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story*, p. 479.

of the Tutsi and their alleged control of the international media, and the Tutsis' supposed quest for a 'tutsiland' were all themes borrowed directly from the discourse of Hutu hardliners and repeated over the airwaves by RTLM during the genocide.⁴⁹

Minister Pauline Nyiramasuhuko's notes on the cabinet meeting of 9 April contained the phrase '[v]ery important media contact with diplomats', followed by 'Tanzania, Zaire, France, Kenya, UNAMIR'.⁵⁰ RTLM announcer Kantano Habimana stated: 'Since we have begun to restrain ourselves, the international community will certainly not fail to notice and will say, "Those Hutu are really disciplined, we should understand them and help them, hum!"' Three days later, he announced that France had promised to begin aiding Rwanda again.

The stench of pacification

Faced with those pockets which opposed the killings or were deemed 'inactive', the interim government decided to tour the hills and to bring the message of 'restoring security' to the people.⁵¹ A minister from each prefecture was appointed to be responsible for pacification. The ministers were then dispatched to their prefectures of origin 'to incite further killings'.⁵²

These pacification tours were nothing less than an effort to mobilize as many people as possible for genocide. National radio covered the events and broadcasted the speeches delivered at the meetings. All residents were informed of the scheduled meetings. Whistles and drums were used to summon the population 'so that no one will be absent'.⁵³ In Gisenyi,

⁴⁹ Maison Rafaëlle, 'Que dissent les archives de l'Élysée', *Esprit*, 2010/5 Mai, pp.135-159.

⁵⁰ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Pauline Nyiramasuhuko et al., 24 June 2011, para 510.

⁵¹ Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story*, p.176.

⁵² ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Édouard Karemera & Matthieu Ndirumapatse, 2 February 2012, para 911.

⁵³ Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story*, p.182.

all shops were to be closed and attendance was said to be compulsory.⁵⁴ State-sponsored genocide in Rwanda was meant to be everyone's concern.

At the initiative of the interim government, an important government meeting was held in the provincial town of Kibuye on 3 May 1994. Administrators, officials and representatives of political parties, churches and civil society attended the meeting. The meeting was called ostensibly for pacification purposes. In his speech, Eliézer Niyitegeka, the minister of Information and a notorious anti-Tutsi extremist,⁵⁵ made comments that characterized Tutsi children as the enemy. Edouard Karemera, who spoke on behalf of the MRND and who was later appointed as minister, thanked the Prime Minister and the government for visiting Kibuye prefecture 'with a message of peace'. He paid tribute to the *Interahamwe* and called upon them to 'flush out, stop and combat the enemy' in collaboration with the youth wings of the other parties. Recall that the prefecture of Kibuye, where in the mountains of Bisesero many Tutsi had fled, had its share of rumours about RPF attacks. For instance, it was claimed that the RPF would launch a helicopter strike to free the Tutsi gathered in the stadium. Tutsi residents in Kibuye town were accused of having grenades stored in their toilets and *inkotanyi* in their homes.⁵⁶

The ICTR convicted both Eliézer Niyitegeka and Edouard Karemera of genocide. During Karemera's trial the judges visited Kibuye prefecture and observed that the prefecture office where the pacification meeting was held was 'only minutes away' from the location of the Gatwaro Stadium and other places where massacres occurred just two weeks before the 3 May 1994 meeting. The mass graves for the victims had only been completed two days prior to the arrival of the ministers. The judges observed that it would have been 'utterly

⁵⁴ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Théoneste Bagosora et al., 18 December 2008, para 1267.

⁵⁵ The ICTR Trial Chamber convicted Eliézer Niyitegeka for, *inter alia*, shooting and killing a teenage girl in Bisesero on 20 May 1994. ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Eliezer Niyitegeka, 16 May 2003, para 302.

⁵⁶ Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story*, p.194.

impossible for the interim government officials to be unaware of the killings that had occurred.’ A pestilential stench was still present as a result of the killings of the civilian population that had occurred prior to the meeting. Nonetheless, the speakers did not comment on the killings. Instead, Karemera and the interim government officials only provided abstract rhetoric about restoring peace in the country without referring to the reports that had been circulated regarding the events occurring in Kibuye, the mass graves surrounding the meeting venue, or, what must have been, the unbearable stench of decomposing bodies. The chamber found that ‘...with such a backdrop, these words can only be understood as an unequivocal endorsement of the killings... the Chamber is convinced that Karemera encouraged the audience to physically attack and destroy Tutsi as a group’.

During the 3 May meeting, a doctor of the Kibuye hospital raised questions about the security of a group of people, including children, who had taken refuge at the Kibuye hospital. He requested the interim-government officials to take measures to ensure they would be protected from assailants and to get food and medical supplies to them. Eliézer Niyitegeka and MDR Power leader Donat Murego responded that the questions were futile and that the doctor ‘had no idea concerning the state of the country’.

The children the doctor referred to, still alive during the meeting, were subsequently killed.⁵⁷ Immediately after the 3 May meeting, the Tutsi survivors who were hiding at the Kibuye hospital were also killed. Just two weeks after the meeting large-scale attacks took place at Muyira Hill, as a result of which a large number of Tutsi refugees were killed. A number of people who had attended the 3 May meeting were among the attackers who set off to kill the Tutsi at Muyira Hill. The judges in the trial of Eliezer Niyitegeka concluded that from the content of the discussions and the accused’s conduct and words spoken at the

⁵⁷ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Édouard Karemera & Matthieu Ndirumapfse, 2 February 2012, para 968.

meeting, that the accused supported actions or inaction in failing to protect the Tutsi population, which resulted in the deaths of many Tutsi victims.⁵⁸

During the trial of Colonel Tharcisse Renzaho, former prefect of Kigali-Ville prefecture, a Tutsi woman testified that she was identified as an *inkotanyi* during a pacification meeting which was held near the house of a local administrator in the Rugenge *secteur* in Kigali. Renzaho reportedly stated that she should not be killed because she was a woman and was ‘food for the militiamen’. Having been forced to attend that meeting by *Interahamwe*, the witness was returned to her house where militias, soldiers and policemen continued to rape her.⁵⁹ In his 1996 report the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Rwanda stated that during the Rwandan genocide ‘rape was the rule and its absence the exception’.⁶⁰

Concluding remarks

Genocidal regimes in search for international respectability strive to make lies credible to the outside world.⁶¹ At a press conference in Nairobi on 3 June 1994, when the majority of the Tutsi in Rwanda had already been exterminated, two Rwandan bishops claimed that the RPF army was in fact a ‘big hindrance to the work of pacification by the interim government, the church and other peace-lovers’. Journalists were so disgusted at this presentation of the cronies of the genocidal government that they left the conference.⁶²

While spokesmen of the Hutu Power regime tried hard to shield off the genocide from the Western media, in Rwanda itself there were hardly any efforts to hide the killings. Tutsi were hacked to death in broad daylight, right in the open. Sites of large-scale massacres

⁵⁸ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Eliezer Niyitegeka, 16 May 2003, para 250.

⁵⁹ ICTR Trial Chamber judgement and sentence in the case of Tharcisse Renzaho, 14 July 2009, para 709.

⁶⁰ Cited in *Shattered lives. Sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996), p.24.

⁶¹ See on this subject Hannah Arendt, *The origins of totalitarianism* (New York: A Harvest Book, 1976), p.429.

⁶² Des Forges, *Leave none to tell the story*, p. 189.

(schools, churches and hospitals) were not hidden in remote areas; there were no trains destined for unknown Treblinka. The scene captured by the British cameraman Nick Hughes on 11 April 1994 of a victim praying for mercy just before he is hacked to death by men holding machetes and clubs standing on a dirt road in the Gikondo neighbourhood in Kigali is a telling illustration. Yet, as far as we know, this is the only footage of 'perpetrators in action' so to speak that was available to Western news agencies during the genocide.

We should be careful not to dismiss this whole fantasy construction that accompany genocide as some sort of bizarre exceptionality.⁶³ The importance of disinformation as intentional propaganda is an essential element of genocide and genocidal violence. Perpetrators often held genuinely convictions that they really are confronted with forces that could wipe them of the face of the earth. They do not come to their conclusions about the nature of threat in a complete vacuum. Genocides usually take place in the context of war, political crisis or struggles for the control of land and resources, which are genuinely real, intense and threatening. At the time when the Rwandan population was increasingly confronted with immense suffering because of the civil war that had started in October 1990, the whole fantasy construction around the supposed Tutsi threat had its moment of crystallisation. The assassination of President Habyarimana, in the eyes of many the 'father of the nation', on 6 April 1994, and the subsequent blaming on the Tutsi, was nothing less than a take-off in the direction of genocide.

All of this left only a few Rwandans 'unconcerned'. With a military defeat looming on the horizon Hutu radicals succeeded at convincing ordinary citizens to kill innocent human beings, who were physically so close but 'spiritually infinitely remote', to use Zygmunt Bauman's words.⁶⁴ The 'kill or be killed' doctrine became the only salient frame of reference

⁶³ Mark Levene, *Genocide in the age of the nation state. Volume I. The meaning of genocide* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co LTD., 2005) p.136.

⁶⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

perpetrators had to understand what was going on around them. Pacification, the antidote to the 'war of the Tutsi', had a banalizing effect on extermination and surrounded the whole genocidal enterprise with a mist of 'normality'. It offered perpetrators a semblance of common sense that made extermination sounds reasonable in a surrealistic world in which patent forgeries offered infinite possibilities for crimes.

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