

The politics of denialism: The strange case of Rwanda

Gerald Caplan

June 17, 2010

Review of ‘The Politics of Genocide’. The 1994 genocide of the Rwandan Tutsi never happened. This is this unfounded and disturbing allegation at the heart of a new book by Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, writes Gerald Caplan. Instead the authors claim that that it was part of an elaborate American conspiracy to “gain a strong military presence in Central Africa, a diminution of its European rivals’ influence, proxy armies to serve its interests, and access to the raw material-rich Democratic Republic of the Congo”. Why they want to create such gratuitous hurt for the survivors of the genocide in Rwanda is ‘impossible to fathom’, says Caplan, but their ‘egregious views’ ‘relegate them squarely to the lunatic fringe’.

This is a review of Edward S. Herman and David Peterson’s ‘The Politics of Genocide’, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2010.

Edward Herman is a professor emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania and David Peterson is described as a Chicago-based journalist and researcher. Those who have read Herman’s work, some of it in collaboration

with Noam Chomsky, will only partly know what to expect from his latest book. Herman and Peterson argue that in a world controlled by the American empire and its media and intellectual lackeys, genocide has become a political construct largely manipulated by Washington and its allies. The claim of genocide becomes an excuse for so-called humanitarian intervention that disguises malevolent imperial motives : ‘The Western establishment rushed to proclaim “genocide” in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, Kosovo, and Darfur... In contrast, its silence over the crimes committed by its own regimes against the peoples of Southeast Asia, Central America, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa is deafening. This is the “politics of genocide”’

Herman and Peterson give some examples that should be familiar to all who reject the notion of the US as a unparalleled force for good in the world. The suffering of Iraqis under US-led sanctions in the 1990s, American support for Israel’s repression in Gaza and destruction in Lebanon, the American role in the brutal massacres of Guatemalans and Salvadorans in the 1980s, America’s backing for Indonesia’s blood bath in East Timor

– all are true, all are appalling, and all have been thoroughly documented. No doubt it's good for a new generation to be reminded of these atrocities, invariably distorted or ignored by the mainstream media. But I'm not at all sure that it's helpful to explore these issues against a frame of genocide, and it's supremely destructive that incontrovertible incidents of American crimes, such as the above, are included with bizarre fictions that have poisoned the authors' minds, such as below. This was decidedly unexpected from Edward Herman.

Playing the 'Expert' Card in Rwanda

To this stage, this little volume might on balance just be considered recommended reading. Despite its strange biases and excesses in belabouring its thesis, it's a useful reminder of American double standards that should not be forgotten (particularly given the disappointing record of the Obama administration).

But all of this is mere preliminary for Herman and Peterson. Their main target, which is none of the cases mentioned so far, can be found squarely in the heart of the book. It's chapter 4, the longest single section, and its purpose is to show that the 1994 genocide of the Rwandan Tutsi never happened. In fact the entire 'genocide' in Rwanda is an elaborate American conspiracy to 'gain a strong military presence in Central Africa, a diminution of its European rivals' influence, proxy armies to serve its interests, and access to the raw material-rich Democratic Republic of the Congo'. The authors' greatest bete noir is Paul Kagame, commander of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)

rebels during the 1990-94 civil war and 1994 genocide, long-time president of post-genocide Rwanda – and leading Yankee stooge.

Yes, in order to blame the American empire for every ill on earth, Herman and Peterson, two dedicated anti-imperialists, have sunk to the level of genocide deniers. And the 'evidence' they adduce to back up their delusional tale rests solidly on a foundation of other deniers, statements by genocidaires, fabrications, distortions, innuendo and gross ignorance. In this Grimm fairy tale, everyone who contradicts their fantasies is an American/RPF pawn – Paul Kagame, human rights investigator Alison des Forges, the head of the UN military mission in Rwanda during the genocide General Romeo Dallaire, and entire human rights organisations.

The main authorities on whom the authors rest their fabrications are a tiny number of long-time American and Canadian genocide deniers, who gleefully drink each other's putrid bath water. Each solemnly cites the others' works to document his fabrications – Robin Philpot, Christopher Black, Christian Davenport, Allan Stam, Peter Erlinder. It's as if a Holocaust denier cited as supporting evidence the testimonies of David Irving, David Duke, Robert Faurisson or Ernest Zundel. Be confident Herman and Peterson are now being quoted as authoritative sources on the genocide by Robin Philpot, Christopher Black, Davenport and Stam, Peter Erlinder.

In reality, there is only a relative handful of these American deniers, but the vast power of the internet makes them seem ubiquitous and forceful. Any online search for 'Rwanda genocide' gives them a vastly dispro-

portionate pride of place. Besides the five cited by Herman and Peterson, this rogue's gallery of American deniers also includes Keith Harmon Snow and Wayne Madsen, who will bitterly resent the authors for failing to invoke them in their book.

Let me take a moment on Peter Erlinder, since he's been in the news recently. (I wrote about the case the other day in the *Globe and Mail*). As of this writing, Erlinder is in prison in Rwanda, charged, apparently to his great surprise, with genocide denial. I regret this decision by the Kagame government. I wish it had simply denied him entry when he provocatively showed up as counsel for Victoire Ingabire, a declared presidential candidate who is also controversially accused of being a denier. But no one could really be surprised at his arrest – especially Erlinder himself.

For Erlinder has explicitly conceded, more than once, that he knows he has broken Rwandan laws on genocide denial, and not in his work as a defence counsel at the International Criminal Tribunal For Rwanda (ICTR). For example, in a February 2008 article titled 'Genocide Cover-up', Erlinder writes that 'under the laws of Rwanda I too am a criminal "negationist" for writing this essay.' And in a May 2008 article, 'Victor's Impunity', he agrees that 'Under the laws of Rwanda, I have violated the ban against "negationism" by questioning the Kagame version of events.' Of course he considers the laws he violated to be unjust. Nevertheless, he chose to enter Rwanda aware he had broken them. Was this not daring the Rwanda government to lock him up? Why would they not when he had confessed his guilt?

That was by no means his only pro-

vocation. Erlinder flew to Rwanda last month directly from a conference in Brussels that was notable for its collection of deniers and accused genocidaires. So extreme was the composition of the conference that one of the world's most rabid Kagame-haters withdrew his participation. Indeed, shortly after the conference French authorities arrested one of the participants, Dr Eugene Rwamucyo, accused of taking part in the genocide.

Perhaps even worse, Erlinder has shamelessly distorted a ruling of the ICTR on which he's based so many of his attacks on Kagame and company beyond the Tribunal. A 2008 judgment ruled that there was not sufficient evidence to find that Colonel Theoneste Bagosora, seen by many as the mastermind of the genocide, had engaged in a conspiracy to exterminate all Tutsi. In a series of speeches and writings, including one of his better-known articles 'Rwanda : No Conspiracy, No Genocide Planning... No Conspiracy?' (Jurist, Dec. 24, 2008), Erlinder milked the decision for all he could. The title of the article said it all, and the question mark of course really doesn't exist in his mind. As he said shortly before leaving America, there 'was no conspiracy or planning to commit genocide or other crime'. No planning, no genocide. What could be simpler? (Once arrested, however, he found it far more prudent to declare that he in fact did not deny the genocide.)

Yet in none of his frequent references to this judgment has Erlinder thought it worth including the following statements from the judgment : 1. 'Indeed, these preparations [by the accused] are completely consistent with a plan to commit genocide.' 2. 'It cannot be excluded that the extended cam-

paign of violence directed against Tutsis, as such, became an added or an altered component of these preparations.' Readers can judge for themselves whether this kind of intellectual dishonesty makes Erlinder a credible witness on any aspect of Rwanda history.

On the other hand, there are other writers on Rwanda on whom Herman and Peterson do not rely. They are many in number and they are totally ignored, except for the late Alison Des Forges, who is shabbily denigrated. In fact they include the overwhelming number of those who have ever written about the genocide. They include academics, human rights activists, journalists who were in Rwanda during the genocide or soon after, and others whose work brought them in close proximity to the events of 1994. Without exception, every single one agrees there was a genocide planned and executed by a cabal of leading Hutu extremists against Rwanda's Tutsi minority. Except for Des Forges, plus Linda Melvern, whose indispensable oeuvre merits a lonely footnote, not a single one of the following authors is cited by Herman and Peterson :

Alison Des Forges
Linda Melvern
Alex de Waal
Rakiya Omaar
Gerard Prunier
Romeo Dallaire
Peter Uvin
Rene Lemarchand
Scott Straus
Andrew Wallis
Jean Hatzfeld
Samuel Totten
Mahmood Mamdani
Scott Peterson

William Schabas
Timothy Longman
Christian Jennings
Fergal Keane
Howard Adelman
Astri Suhrke
Villia Jefremovas
Michael Barnett
Alain Destexhe
John Berry and Carol Berry
Wendy Whitworth
Allan Thompson
Kingsley Moghalu
Susan Cook
Philip Gourevitch
Carol Rittner
John Roth
Henry Anyidoho
Patrick de Saint-Exupery
Frank Chalk
Bill Berkeley
Colette Braeckman
Jean-Pierre Chrétien
Bruce D. Jones
Hugh McCullum
Ingvar Carlsson
James Smith
Shaharyar Khan
Elizabeth Neuffer
Alan Kuperman

Before we dismiss all these authors as tools of Yanky imperialism, it needs to be added that several of the most prominent – Des Forges, Uvin, Prunier, Lemarchand, Kuperman – are (or were) fierce critics of the post-genocide Kagame government in Rwanda. Yet none has thought to retract their original views on the reality of the genocide.

There are of course also the many grim testimonies of both Tutsi who somehow survived and Hutu who are confessed genocidaires. Both kinds are now widely available in published collections or online ; the three volumes by French journalist Jean Hatzfeld are a

good beginning. Not a single such testimony or collection is referred to in ‘The Politics of Genocide’, and in fact I’ve never yet met a denier who had the guts to make his case before an audience of survivors.

Nor is a single mention made of the testimonies of the few outsiders who remained in Rwanda through all or much of the 100 days :

Romeo Dallaire (UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda–UNAMIR)

James Orbinski (Medicins Sans Frontières)

Phillippe Gaillard (International Committee of the Red Cross)

Carl Wilkens (Adventist Development and Relief Agency International)

Henry Anyidoho (UNAMIR)

As it happens, I know all of the above and none has the slightest doubt, having lived through it, that a genocide organised against the Tutsi took place. Three of them – Dallaire, Orbinski and Anyidoho – have written about their experiences. Of course, some of Herman and Peterson’s most treasured sources like Robin Philpot insist that General Dallaire was also an American puppet. So we can obviously ignore Dallaire’s views completely.

How Deniers Handle Inconvenient Opinions

As for Alison Des Forges, until her untimely death perhaps the most prominent scholar and activist on the Rwanda file, she is dismissed as following : ‘[Prior to 1993], des Forges had worked for the US Department of State and National Security Council.’ Nothing more is said to disqualify des Forges, so we must conclude that simply working for these bodies demonstrates the unreliability of her views on

the genocide. That her MA and Ph.D. theses were on Rwandan history, that she knew the country for 30 years before the genocide, that she was among a tiny number of outsiders who spoke Kinyarwanda, that she spent five years after 1994 researching the crisis, that her ‘Leave None to Tell the Story’ is a highly-respected encyclopaedic history of the genocide – all this is irrelevant to Herman and Peterson. In their obsessive anti-Americanism, they blithely smear des Forges entire life : ‘Alison Des Forge’s career is best understood in terms of the services she performed on behalf of US power-projection in Central Africa, with this policy-oriented work couched in the rhetoric of ‘human rights’. In the process, Des Forges badly misinformed a whole generation of scholars, activists, and the cause of peace and justice.’ But if she was such a loyal American hack, why was she such an unrestrained critic of America’s great ally Kagame? This obvious contradiction is of no apparent interest to Herman and Peterson.

The work of the 1993 International Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Abuses in Rwanda is similarly dismissed. The Inquiry brought together four well-known human rights organisations whose investigation led them to conclude that the Habyarimana government was deliberately targeting Tutsi for massacre, that extremists anti-Tutsi rhetoric was growing and that anti-Tutsi militia were being formed. Yet none of this needs to be taken seriously. Why? Because the Commission was little more than an RPF front, ‘either directly funded by the RPF or infiltrated by it’. The sole source for this very serious accusation – made by no others of whom

I'm aware – is Robin Philpot, Canada's preeminent denier of the genocide.

Is Philpot's charge remotely credible? Has he exposed some deep conspiracy no one else has ever detected? By coincidence, I know both the person who initiated the Commission of Inquiry, Ed Broadbent, and one of its members, William Schabas. (Alison Des Forges was another member, representing Human Rights Watch.) Instead of just dismissing the Philpot charge, I asked each of them about the Commission. Broadbent, a former leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada, was then the president of Rights and Democracy, an independent Canadian-based international human rights organisation funded by the Conservative government of the day. I spoke to him by phone. Rumours of foul doings in Rwanda took him to the country in 1992, he told me, and he was so shaken by the evidence he found of violence and discrimination against the Tutsi minority that he organised and mostly funded the International Commission to follow up his work. He told me he is simply incredulous that anyone would claim a role for the RPF in its work, since it wasn't true.

Broadbent asked William Schabas, then professor of human rights law at the Université du Québec à Montréal, to represent Rights and Democracy in this investigation. Schabas is now director of the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland in Galway, where he also holds the chair in human rights law. In an email, Schabas told me he had never been to Rwanda before this mission and knew nothing about the country. 'I certainly never detected any pro-RPF sentiment from Ed... There was one member who seemed to be a sympa-

thiser of the RPF... Otherwise, many members were quite openly critical of or hostile to the RPF.'

Is this just a case of 'he said—they said'? Does an open-minded reader consider that the accusations of Robin Philpot, a man who also believes General Dallaire was an American stooge, are as worthy of consideration as the two statements by Ed Broadbent and William Schabas? Are both Broadbent and Schabas, 17 years later, blatantly lying to me, just as Dallaire's entire life for the past 17 years must be a lie?

Or does one rather draw another conclusion about how the deniers operate? If there are views that contradict your own, you simply dismiss them as tools of either the US State Department or the RPF. Further proof is not required.

The Ugly Americans Are Everywhere

Let me cite the authors themselves to assure readers I haven't exaggerated or distorted their extraordinary rewriting of history. Chapter 4 of their little book is devoted to Rwanda and the Congo and its 18 pages constitute far and away their longest case study.

They begin by asserting that 'the Western establishment [has] swallowed a propaganda line on Rwanda that turned perpetrator and victim upside-down'. In their Rwanda story, it's not Hutu extremists, the Presidential Guard, the post-Habyarimana interim government and the interahamwe militia who were the 'prime genocidaires'. It was the RPF. As a matter of fact, 'the Hutu members of Rwanda's power-sharing government couldn't possibly have planned a genocide against the Tutsi.' In fact, Pre-

sident Habyarimana repeatedly refused, until literally the end of his life, to implement the power-sharing agreement set out in the Arusha Accords. In any event, why the Hutu members of the government 'couldn't possibly have planned a genocide against the Tutsi' is never remotely explained.

Next : The 1990 invasion of Rwanda from Uganda was carried out not by Rwandans but by Ugandan forces under Ugandan President Museveni, the RPF being 'a wing of the Ugandan army'. There is no source given for this assertion, which contradicts almost all other histories of the invasion.

'It is clear that Museveni and the RPF were perceived as serving US interests and that the government of President Habyarimana was targeted for ouster... The Ugandan army and the RPF were doing what the United States wanted done in Rwanda.' This is the central thesis of the entire chapter on Rwanda, but the only source who actually 'perceives' matters this way seems to be Robin Philpot, the Canadian who denies the genocide, since he is the only source offered for this categorical assertion. No other historian of the genocide of whom I'm aware makes this claim and no evidence for it exists.

Turning Linda Melvern's seminal book 'Conspiracy to Murder' on its head, the authors give us 'an RPF conspiracy' to overthrow the Hutu government and capture the state for themselves. Since one of their sources, Christopher Black, considers Melvern part of the 'RPF-US propaganda machine', she too can be dismissed. But then why, they want to know, has the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda(ICTR) 'never once entertained the question of this conspiracy?'

This is indeed a reasonable question ; I wondered about it myself. Here is their answer : 'This, we believe, flows from US and allied support of the RPF, reflected in media coverage, humanitarian intellectuals' and NGO activism, as well as the ICTR's jurisprudence.' In other words, a giant US-led conspiracy is at work here.

Dupes like me and most other writers believe the US and its allies betrayed Rwanda by refusing to reinforce the UN military mission there, as general Dallaire was pleading with them to do. Eyewitnesses in Rwanda believed they witnessed for themselves what was developing. The media actually played a deplorable role in the first month of the genocide, confusing a planned extermination with racist views of 'primordial African savagery'. And the many different ICTR judges over 15 years, from around the globe, all pretended to base their findings on the legal evidence. Yet in reality, all this time everyone was subtly being manipulated by the United States. Indeed, so subtle was the manipulation that the devilishly cunning Yanks left no proof of it. Moreover, every leading member of the Clinton administration, including the president himself, Hillary Clinton and Madeleine Albright, after her stint as ambassador to the UN as Clinton's Secretary of State, have shamefacedly admitted abandoning the Tutsi. Each claims to consider it perhaps the greatest regret of his/her time in office, merely demonstrating, of course, what unconscionable hypocrites they are.

Herman and Peterson hammer their charge home : 'Paul Kagame and the RPF were creatures of US power from their origins in Uganda in the 1980s'. They have the undis-

puted evidence. From Allan Stam, ‘a Rwanda scholar who once served with the US Army Special Forces,’ they learn that Kagame ‘had spent some time at Fort Leavenworth. . . not too far before the 1994 genocide.’ Fort Leavenworth, Stam explains, is ‘where rising stars of the US military and other places go to get training. . . The training that they get there is on planning large-scale operations. It’s not planning small-scale logistics. It’s not tactics. It’s about how do you plan an invasion. And apparently [Kagame] did very well.’

This crucial paragraph deserves a little parsing. To begin, it’s absolutely no secret that Kagame was briefly at Fort Leavenworth, though Stam doesn’t mention how very brief his stay was. Kagame himself has never kept it a secret. Note too that Allan Stam’s credibility is based on two factors. First, that he is a ‘Rwanda scholar,’ though I believe not a single scholar listed above ever cites his work. Second, that he ‘once served with the US Army Special Forces’. Presumably this service gives him special insight into how the US army works. Yet he presents not a single specific detail about Kagame’s few weeks at Fort Leavenworth that ties him to American interest in and plans for Rwanda, which no one has ever documented. And since thousands of officers from nations around the world have passed through Fort Leavenworth, you’d think that the thousands of large-scale invasions they would return home and orchestrate would be better-known to the world than they are.

Stam’s curious thought processes are on display again, thanks to another citation by Herman and Peterson. By 1994, Stam has written, Kagame’s

‘sophisticated plan for seizing power in Rwanda. . . looks staggeringly like the United States’ invasion of Iraq in 1991.’ Perhaps it’s my failing, but I have no idea what this means.

The Hutu Genocidaires Become the Dead Hutu Victims

Herman and Peterson now take their argument further. They have concluded that the all-important conventionally-accepted truth about the 100 days of genocide is all wrong. In fact this was no genocide at all against the Tutsi in which at a minimum 500,000/600,000 and perhaps as many as a million unarmed Tutsi were slaughtered, along with many Hutu who wouldn’t cooperate with the extremists’ genocidal conspiracy. On the contrary. They cite the sensational estimate by Christian Davenport and Allan Stam that one million deaths occurred from April to July 1994, and that ‘the majority of victims are likely Hutu and not Tutsi.’ That the methodology employed to arrive at such an Orwellian assertion has been totally discredited is of no interest to our authors and never mentioned.

Indeed, even a million dead, mostly Hutu, isn’t good enough for them. They refer to ‘a number of observers as well as participants in the events of 1994 [who] claim that the great majority of deaths were Hutu, with some estimates as high as two million.’ With Herman and Peterson, you always have to watch your wallets. Checking the endnote for this rather extravagant statement, we find the figure comes from ‘a former RPF military officer Christophe Hakizimana’ in

a letter to the 1999 UN Commission of Inquiry into the genocide. But that Commission, chaired by former Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson, hadn't the slightest doubt that genocide against the Tutsi had taken place and their report harshly criticised the US and its allies for refusing to intervene to stop it. So it's hardly surprising that the Inquiry's report never mentions Hakizimana and his accusations.

So how did our authors know about it? 'We base this on personal communications with the international criminal lawyer Christopher Black of Toronto.' It will by this time come as no surprise to readers to learn that Christopher Black is prominent among the small notorious band of deniers who cite each other so faithfully and who alone are the sources for Herman and Peterson's chapter 4. Even among the lunatic fringe of deniers, Black inhabits a universe of his own. Not only is the genocide of the Tutsi a 'myth', not only did France have nothing to do with it, not only did the RPF rampage 'across the country massacring hundreds of thousands of Hutu and any Tutsi who were seen as non-reliable.' As well, he asserts, before 1994 there was no ethnic problem in Rwanda, then 'a semi-socialist country considered a model for Africa'. For perspective, I note that this authority on Rwanda visited North Korea in 2003 and emerged to describe it as 'a progressive, socialist country deserving the support of all progressive peoples around the world.' Black also considered Slobodan Milosevic completely innocent of the charges brought against him and believes Milosevic was consistently committed to a multi-ethnic Yugoslavia during his time in government.

Do I belabour the obvious by poin-

ting out that not a single one of the long list of authors cited above mention either Christophe Hakizimana or Christopher Black? Yet they are the two sources Herman and Peterson give for their stunning statement that 'a number of observers as well as participants in the events of 1994 claim that the great majority of deaths were Hutu, with some estimates as high as two million.'

The authors simply dismiss out of hand the widely-accepted facts about the genocide. 'The established narrative's 800,000 or more largely Tutsi deaths resulting from a "preprogrammed genocide" committed by "Hutu Power" appears to have no basis in any facts beyond the early claims by Kagame's RPF and its politically motivated Western sponsors and propagandists.' With this single sentence, and with no further amplification of any kind, the question of the number of Tutsi murdered is closed.

But there's much more about murdered Hutu. It is no surprise to the authors that the RFP killed so many people. After all, 'the RPF was the only well-organised killing force within Rwanda in 1994...Clearly the chief responsibility for Rwanda political violence belongs to the RPF, and not to the ousted coalition government, the FAR [Rwandan army], or any Hutu-related group.' So much for the inter-ahamwe, apparently figments of everyone's imagination. And for the Hutu Power and Zero Network hit lists, which many diplomats actually saw. And for the explicit public threats against the Tutsi from RTLH hate radio and Kangura magazine. In the report I wrote for the International Panel of Eminent Persons appointed by the Organization of African Unity to inves-

tigate the genocide, there is a chapter titled ‘The Eve of the Genocide : What the World Knew’. The report, published in 2000 and called ‘Rwanda : The Preventable Genocide’, is still available online, so readers can access it in full, as indeed could Herman and Peterson.

Chapter 9 includes (among much else) the notorious 1990 racist document ‘Ten Commandments of the Hutu’; the dramatic increase in Habyarimana’s military budget; the formation of the extremist radical Hutu party CDR; the beginning of military training for the youth wings of both Habyarimana’s party (the interahamwe) and the CDR; Leon Mugesera’s speech inciting annihilation of the Tutsi; the repudiation by Habyarimana and many of his officials and officers of the Arusha peace agreement; the opening of RTLTM hate radio in mid-1993, funded by Habyarimana’s inner circle; the report by Belgian intelligence at the end of 1993 that ‘The interahamwe are armed to the teeth and on alert...each of them has ammunition, grenades, mines and knives. They are all waiting for the right moment to act’; the Dallaire ‘genocide fax’ of 11 January 1994; the constant flow of new arms to Habyarimana’s forces from France or from South Africa and Egypt paid by France; RTLTM’s broadcast on March 1, as reported by the Belgian ambassador in Kigali, of ‘inflammatory statements calling for the hatred—indeed for the extermination of the Tutsi’; the late March statement by the officer in charge of intelligence for the Rwanda army that ‘if Arusha were implemented, they [the Rwanda army] were ready to liquidate the Tutsi’; the several RTLTM and Kangura statements in the last days of March and

early April that something major and dramatic was going to happen within the next few days; the public threat uttered on 4 April, two days before the genocide began, by Colonel Theoneste Bagosora, widely considered the ringleader of the Hutu extremist conspirators, that ‘The only plausible solution for Rwanda appears to be the extermination of the Tutsi.’

Can every one of these well-documented points actually be some fantastically clever component of the American conspiracy behind Kagame’s RPF? Don’t bother asking Herman and Peterson; they don’t even try to explain them all away. They simply ignore hundreds of different pieces of evidence pointing to a developing Hutu extremist plot to annihilate the country’s Tutsi.

Instead, they focus on the crimes of the RPF. Despite recklessly throwing around figures such as a million or even two million Hutu killed, the numbers they seem to take more seriously total some 25,000 to 45,000 Hutu massacred from April to July 1994. As evidence they cite the investigation led by Robert Gersony for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and even though Gersony’s report mysteriously vanished, both UNHCR and the US State Department seem to have found these figures credible.

Typically, Herman and Peterson refer to the Gersony Report as ‘a whole body of important but suppressed research’. Maybe this reflects the problem of only reading other deniers. Yet look at chapter 22 of ‘Rwanda : The Preventable Genocide’, the report of the OAU-appointed panel, titled ‘The RPF and Human Rights’. It points out that while the actual Gersony report seemed to be missing, Alison

Des Forges of Human Rights Watch had uncovered confidential notes based on briefings by Gersony and his colleagues. On p.253, the panel describes the supposedly ‘suppressed research’: ‘Gersony reportedly estimated that during the months from April to August, the RPF killed between 25,000 and 45,000 persons.’

After reviewing all the other evidence we could, the panel approved the following paragraph: ‘Our own conclusion, based on the available evidence, is that it is quite unrealistic to deny RPF responsibility for serious human rights abuses in the months during and after the genocide. They were tough soldiers in the middle of a murderous civil war made infinitely more vicious by the genocide directed by their enemies against their ethnic kin... Some had lost family and were aggressively looking for revenge. But none of these factors excuse the excesses of which they [the RPF] were guilty.’

So in fact the so-called suppressed research by Gersony has been well-known for years. But the panel also knew this: The fact of the genocide against the Tutsi was proved beyond any question, and while 25-45,000 deaths is a huge and gruesome number, it pales beside the genocide being executed at the same time. As noted earlier, the lowest estimate by serious scholars of Tutsi killed during the 100 days is 500,000–600,000; some believe it could be closer to a million.

Beyond that, the reason the catastrophe is called a genocide is precisely because it meets the definition laid down in the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: ‘acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or

religious group’. That’s what qualitatively distinguishes the organised and systematic campaign led by a cabal of well-placed Hutu extremists in government and the military from the terrible killings by the RPF. That’s why the ICTR has deemed its priority to be the trial of accused genocidaire rather than of accused RPF soldiers. It’s the well-understood distinction between the Nazis and the fire-bombers of Dresden and Hamburg. All are horrific crimes. But genocide is, in our world, the crime of crimes, and it comes first.

Final Aspects of the Great American Conspiracy in Rwanda

Let me address only two remaining points that are integral to the authors’ case.

Almost every well-known writer on the genocide condemns the international community, led by the US, for refusing to intervene to stop the massacres of the Tutsi. Richard Barnett’s book ‘Eyewitness to a Genocide’, for example, describes his year as a staffer at the US Mission to the UN – it happened to be 1994 – watching as the US and the entire UN chose to abandon Rwanda’s Tutsi to its inexorable fate. Samantha Power found a large number of President Clinton’s senior advisers who contritely explained to her why they failed to support General Dallaire’s urgent cries for reinforcements. Madeleine Albright, Clinton’s ambassador to the UN, has abjectly apologised for her role in leading the Security Council to decimate Dallaire’s puny military mission, and has righteously claimed that behind the scenes

she attempted to get the White House to change its position. Non-permanent members of the Security Council later complained they were kept in the dark about the real situation in Rwanda by those who resisted intervention, including UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali. All of this is now well known.

Here's what Herman and Peterson have to say : 'What the United States and its Western allies (Britain, Canada and Belgium) really did was sponsor the US-trained Kagame, support his invasion from Uganda and the massive ethnic cleansing prior to April 1994, weaken the Rwandan state by forcing an economic recession and the RPF's penetration of the government and throughout the country, and then press for the complete removal of UN troops because they didn't want UN troops to stand in the way of Kagame's conquest of the country, even though Rwanda's Hutu authorities were urging the dispatch of more [sic] UN troops.'

The endnote for this dramatic paragraph gives as the source 'the Rwandan UN ambassador Jean-Damascene Bizimana'. Presumably, though, it's only the last part of the sentence that comes from Bizimana. Bizimana had been appointed by President Habyarimana. When the President's plane was shot down on 6 April, an interim government of Hutu extremists was formed under Theoneste Bagosora. Bizimana remained in his post. In one of the many mind-boggling sidebars of the genocide story, 1994 happened to be Rwanda's turn to fill a rotating Security Council seat. So Bizimana ended up representing a genocidaire government on the Council throughout the entire genocide. Soon after the plane

crash and the start of the genocide, Bizimana reported to his Security Council peers that the Rwandan military and its people had 'reacted spontaneously' and were attacking those suspected of being responsible for killing their president. Bizimana's peers eventually understood the obscenity of having a spokesperson for the genocidal regime sitting among them, but as the British ambassador told Linda Melvern, there was no procedure for getting rid of him.

The 6 April plane crash, as is entirely predictable, features prominently in Herman and Peterson's Orwellian version of Rwanda. The plane, a gift from French President Mitterrand to Habyarimana, was bringing from Dar es Salaam to Kigali not only Habyarimana but the President of Burundi as well. Both were killed, along with everyone else on board. In what we have seen is a typical trick of the authors, they state that 'It has also been important to suppress the fact that that the first Hutu president of Burundi, Melchior Ndadaye, had been assassinated by Tutsi officers of his army in October 1993.' That this assassination happened is true; that anyone has ever tried to suppress it is ludicrous. Why Herman and Peterson insist on it is incomprehensible. For the record, this incident is included in my own report, 'Rwanda : The Preventable Genocide', in Rene Lemarchand's chapter on Rwanda in 'Century of Genocide', in Gerard Prunier's 'The Rwanda Crisis : History of a Genocide', in Stephen Kinzer's 'A Thousand Hills', and in Linda Melvern's 'A People Betrayed', just to mention the few volumes that I took down at random. Far from being suppressed, virtually everyone who writes about Rwanda reco-

gnises the great impetus given to Hutu Power advocates in Rwanda by Ndaye's untimely murder.

Herman and Peterson have no doubt that the RPF shot down Habyarimana's plane. In fact they go that extra mile and add that 'the United States and its close allies. . . very possibly aided the assassins in the shoot-down.' The sole source for this 'very possible' charge is Robin Philpot. As for the crash itself, the authors invoke the familiar figures of Michael Hourigan and Jean-Louis Bruguiere. Hourigan is a one-time ICTR investigator who found a few disaffected RPF soldiers who accused the RPF and Kagame personally of responsibility for the crash. Bruguiere is a French magistrate who used some of the same informants as Hourigan, as well as the testimonies of accused genocidaires being held in Arusha, Tanzania, whom he took the trouble to visit (though he never went to Rwanda or spoke to a single RPF official). He too concluded that the RPF and Kagame were guilty. Alas for both of them, their case fell apart when several key informants retracted their entire testimonies, some declaring they had never said anything like what they were quoted as saying. This is all public knowledge, yet the authors never even hint that the basis of Bruguiere's conclusions had been substantially undermined.

It has always seemed most plausible to a majority of those studying the genocide that Hutu extremists and not the RPF shot down the President's plane. But proof was never available and the issue remained moot. It's been one of the great unsolved mysteries of our time. At the beginning of this year, however, a new report appeared by an Independent Committee of Ex-

perts appointed by the government of Rwanda, with the explicit title Report of the Investigation into the Causes and Circumstances of and Responsibility for the Attack of 06/04/1994 against the Falcon 50 Rwandan Presidential Aeroplane [sic], Registration Number 9XR-NN. The head of the 7-person committee was Dr Jean Mutsinzi, former Justice of the Supreme Court of Rwanda, now a judge of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Mutsinzi Report is available at mutsinzireport.com, and my review of the report can be found at Pambazuka News 466, January 21, 2010.

While my review regretted that the Rwandan government hadn't sought an independent investigation to take place, and while the Committee had obvious pro-RPF biases, I nevertheless found their comprehensive report highly persuasive. They also smartly included a ballistics report from staff at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom based at Cranfield University that supported their conclusions. The report demonstrates why the RPF could not have been in a position to launch the fatal missiles while elements of the Rwandan army and Presidential Guard had the capacity, the means and the will to do so.

The report also documents the only logical motive for the attack, one that many other scholars had already anticipated. In the Dar es Salaam meeting of regional presidents that he attended on his final day, 6 April, Habyarimana announced what he had just told his own senior advisors. After stalling for months (a fact Herman and Peterson seem not to grasp at all), he was finally about to implement the Arusha Accords. That meant power-

sharing in government and the full integration of the Rwandan and RPF armies. The personal consequences for many Hutu government and military officials would be disastrous. The latter had long sworn, publicly and privately, that they would accept Arusha over their dead bodies, and had pressured Habyarimana not to succumb to external pleas to implement. Finally, however, he decided he had no recourse but honour the agreement, and the extremists decided to nullify Arusha over their president's dead body.

Any reasonable person open to the evidence, including the likely motivation for the deed, will find the Mutsinzi Report credible. But I don't expect for a second that Messrs. Peterson or Herman or Black or Erlinder or Stam or Davenport or Philpot to accept a single word of it. No more do I expect them to agree with a single word in this review. They are well beyond evidence or reason or commonsense. They live in a different universe of witness and evidence, enough to satisfy themselves that the world has gotten Rwanda wrong and only they in the world have got it right.

The Tragedy of American Anti-Imperialism

Edward Herman and David Peterson have written a very short book that's not nearly short enough. It should never have seen the light of day. It brings shame to its two American authors, its publisher Monthly Review, and all those who have provided enthusiastic jacket blurbs, many of them prominent in progressive circles – Noam Chomsky, John Pilger, Norman Solomon, David Barsamian. If this is what Anglo-American Marxism, or so-

cialism, or anti-imperialism has degenerated into, we can hang our heads in shame for the future of the left.

Why a lifetime anti-imperialist leftist like Herman (and presumably Peterson) wants to exculpate the Serbs of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia of crimes against humanity is beyond my understanding. Why would it not have been enough to point out that appalling crimes were committed by all sides, but in every case Serbs were one of those sides? The only conceivable reason seems to be that the US and its allies singled out the Serbs for attack, which ipso facto makes them the real victims. Indeed, the authors' ally Christopher Black perversely sees Milosevic as an heroic figure.

As we've already seen, hyperbole and slipperiness are cherished tools of the authors, and not just in regards to Rwanda. 'The leading mainstream experts on "genocide" and mass-atrocity crimes today,' they assert, 'still carefully exclude from consideration the US attacks on Indo-China as well as the 1965-1966 Indonesian massacres within that country'. First note the way they add 'mass atrocity crimes' to genocidal crimes. In fact, in many circles it surely remains widely accepted that the US was guilty of appalling atrocities in its aggressions against Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia. As for the 'exclusion from consideration' of those Indonesian massacres, chapter 7 of Totten and Parson's popular volume 'Century of Genocide', is titled 'The Indonesian Massacres'.

Two other similar examples : In true conspiratorial fashion, they argue that the crisis in Darfur was exaggerated to distract attention from America's real African interest, the mineral resources of the Congo. Why

both weren't worthy of serious attention is beyond me. Nonetheless, they insist that Darfur solidarity activists dishonestly succeeded in framing Darfur as the 'unnoticed genocide', though many, including me, have long understood that it's been the best publicised international crisis in decades. And they charge that it's the calamity in eastern Congo that 'has been truly ignored', even though numerous celebrities, including playwright Eve Ensler (*The Vagina Monologues*), actor Ben Affleck (at least four times), UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have all made high-profile visits to the Kivus. When the US Secretary of State visits a small province in eastern Congo, you know it's the opposite of being ignored.

Many of the Rwanda deniers flaunt their left-wing credentials. As this essay makes clear, they are driven by their anti-Americanism. Certainly I agree that every progressive necessarily must be anti-American to some degree or other. But this little band has driven over the edge. As Peter Erlinder once wrote, America is 'the most dangerous Empire the world has ever seen'. Everything bad must be America's responsibility. There's not even room for others to share that responsibility, though the French government's

complicity in the Rwandan genocide, for example, has been definitively documented and is now even implicitly accepted by President Sarkozy and his foreign minister Bernard Kouchner.

Why the deniers are so determined, so passionate, so intransigent, so absolutely certain, so satisfied to remain part of a tiny minority of cranks, is completely unknown to me. Why they want to create such gratuitous, almost sadistic hurt for the survivors of the genocide in Rwanda is impossible to fathom. But in the end, it's irrelevant what furies drive their obsessions. It's their egregious views – not their motives – that matter. And their views relegate them squarely to the lunatic fringe.

Brought to you by Pambazuka News

* Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, 'The Politics of Genocide', Monthly Review Press, New York, 2010, 112 pages plus endnotes and index, ISBN : 978-1-58367-212-9.

* Gerald Caplan has a PhD in African history. He recently published *The Betrayal of Africa*.

* Please send comments to editor@pambazuka.org or comment online at Pambazuka News.