

The “Genocost” and the DRC’s War “Against Rwanda”

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“GENOCOST” is a politically constructed conspiracy theory masquerading as historical and legal truth. The term is being promoted by the current Congolese government and amplified by activists despite lacking recognition as an established historical or legal concept.

In 2022, amid heightened tensions between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, the Congolese government launched commemoration of “GENOCOST,” to be observed on the 2nd August each year. It is a concept that the DRC government seeks to have recognised internationally and is spearheaded by the National Fund

for Victims’ Reparations (FONAREV), an institution that has continually faced allegations of corruption, mismanagement, and embezzlement of public funds. “GENOCOST” attempts to establish a link between the violence committed in the DRC and the exploitation of the country’s natural resources, thereby associating the notions of “genocide” with “economic exploitation.”

Over the years, the concept of “GENOCOST” has become a key element in the strategy of denial regarding the genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in Rwanda, as well as part of the DRC’s political discourse of confrontation with Rwanda. It portrays Rwanda not only as responsible, for “GENOCOST” but also as the sole party responsible for the crimes attributed to it.

FONAREV presents “GENOCOST” as a concept that competes with well-evidenced history of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, the international recognition of which is perceived within part of Congolese civil society as an example of preferential treatment granted to Rwanda but not the DRC. There were some DRC victims it is true, but estimates of the number of victims attributed to

“GENOCOST” vary considerably depending on the source, fuelling criticism of the concept’s credibility and concerns about competition between collective memories.

The 1948 United Nations Convention defines genocide as any of the acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such. The term “GENOCOST” does not meet this legal framing for several reasons.

First, a specific intent (*dolus specialis*) has not been established. Under international law, the death of a large number of people is not, in itself, sufficient to constitute genocide; it must be demonstrated that there was a deliberate intent to exterminate a protected group because of its identity.

Second, the victims of the 1990s wars encompass an extremely diverse range of actors. The conflicts in eastern DRC have affected numerous ethnic and national communities, as well as civilian populations, without any particular distinction – they were not directed at one community.

Third, the causes of death are multiple. A significant proportion of the recorded deaths resulted indirectly from the armed conflicts, including disease, forced displacement, malnutrition, the collapse of already failed healthcare infrastructure, and chronic insecurity.

Fourth, given that the conflicts in eastern DRC involve a multitude of actors—including national and regional armies, Congolese and foreign rebel groups, local militias, and criminal networks—it is difficult to identify the existence of a coordinated plan aimed at destroying a specific protected group. It is

even more unreasonable to attribute all the crimes committed over the past thirty years to a single actor, namely Rwanda.

FONAREV suggests that these were “massacres of Bantus by Tutsi,” an ethnic framing that reverses the well-documented reality of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. From an anthropological perspective, however, the term “Bantu” is inappropriate for designating an ethnic group, as it refers to a linguistic classification that applies also to Kinyarwanda speakers, including the Tutsi of the DRC and Rwandans. This terminology is therefore scientifically wrong.

The concept of “genocide” used by FONAREV is applied selectively, with temporal boundaries regarded as arbitrary. It highlights certain crimes while overlooking others committed by other actors, including Congolese officials involved in the conflicts of the 1990s and 2000s, and some political figures who are currently part of the Congolese government or close to those in power in the DRC.

If economic predation constitutes the central criterion of “GENOCOST,” then the role of all responsible—Congolese and foreign alike—should be considered equally. Otherwise, the concept appears to be little more than a selective political instrument. The reliability of the evidence put forward, its coherence, universality, and credibility of this concept as a tool for remembrance, justice, or political mobilisation, is highly questionable.

The Genocost narrative criminalises either Rwanda or certain leaders of former rebel movements, primarily on the basis of their

ethnicity, while absolving others of responsibility despite their involvement in the same conflicts.

“GENOCOST” is neither a legal concept nor a judicial body. It therefore cannot serve as a basis for attributing collective responsibility to a community or a State. Only international investigations and judicial decisions can establish responsibility for international crimes. The debate initiated by FONAREV remains primarily political in nature, and the use of the term “genocide” risks weakening its

legal significance.

The aim of this analysis is not to minimise the suffering endured by the Congolese people – we must not underestimate the magnitude of the humanitarian catastrophe they have experienced. However, it is important to distinguish between acknowledging these tragedies and accurately applying a legal classification to the crimes committed.

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