

# Understanding Western racism and colonial legacy in context of the Genocide against the Tutsi

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The New Times, October 24, 2024



Former French President François Mitterrand, who played a particularly egregious role in enabling genocidaires, was once quoted as saying « In countries like that, genocide is not too important » by French daily Le Figaro. Net phot

Until I read Kehinde Andrews' book — *'The New Age of Empire: How Racism and Colonialism Still Rule the World,'*— I failed to grasp how Western countries approach genocides, particularly the Genocide against the Tutsi, in down right contrast to the Holocaust. Andrews' powerful analysis sheds light on the deep-rooted historical and systemic injustices that continue to shape the Western

world.

His work brilliantly articulates that “the West was birthed by genocide and relied on the slaughter of millions of Black and Brown bodies to develop and enrich itself.” He convincingly argues that genocide and Western expansion are inextricably linked, with the West emerging as “by far the most brutal, violent, and murderous system to ever grace the globe.”

This bold statement compelled me to reevaluate how Western nations not only shaped their societies through violence but also how they frame their moral and legal responses to genocide. Western discourse, particularly after the Holocaust, has often treated genocides outside of Europe as peripheral to global history, despite the unprecedented scale of colonial violence. Andrews points out that while the Holocaust was rightfully memorialized and prosecuted in the international legal system, the systematic extermination of Indigenous peoples, Africans, and others during colonial rule did not merit the same recognition.

Andrews brings up the Jewish lawyer

Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide” after losing about fifty family members in the Holocaust. However, as Andrews highlights, “the systemic killing of hundreds of millions of ‘savages’ in the colonies did not merit the creation of a new concept.” The systemic killing of millions of people in the colonies — the so-called ‘savages’ — never spurred the creation of a legal framework to protect their lives.

The large-scale massacres that wiped out Indigenous peoples in the Americas, Australia, and Tasmania, or the colonial extermination campaigns against the Nama and Herero in Namibia, were dismissed without the need for international outrage. Yet, when genocide was perpetrated against white Europeans in Europe, the world responded by formulating a new concept: genocide, along with a legal framework to punish and prevent it. This reflects a longstanding pattern in which the suffering of non-white populations is minimized or rendered invisible in global discourse.

## Uncivilized world

The 1948 Genocide Convention is often hailed as a crucial step in recognizing and combating mass atrocities. Yet, its existence feels hollow when viewed in the context of the history of violence inflicted on non-white peoples. The Convention acknowledges the crime of genocide, but its enforcement has often failed, particularly in cases involving European colonial powers.

The massacre of millions during the

Transatlantic Slave Trade, the deaths of over ten million Congolese under the megalomaniacal—King Leopold II’s reign, or the millions slaughtered in the name of Christianity during the Crusades, were never met with the same moral outrage or international intervention.

The preamble of the Genocide Convention expresses lofty ideals, stating that “genocide is a crime under international law... condemned by the civilized world.” However, this notion of a ‘civilized world’ is fraught with hypocrisy. The very nations that profess to uphold this condemnation were once the architects of colonial genocides and systemic violence. Their role in the extermination of indigenous peoples, the perpetration of slavery, and the economic and social devastation wrought upon colonized lands is undeniable.

The genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda is a glaring example of how the international community’s commitment to preventing genocide has often failed in practice. The 1994 genocide, which claimed over a million lives in just 100 days, was not only met with international indifference but also with complicity from European powers like Belgium and France, who supported those responsible for the killings.

Despite the condescending promises of the Genocide Convention, the world stood by, proving that the ‘odious scourge’ of genocide, as condemned by the UN, still persists—often aided or ignored by those who claim to defend ‘civilized’ values. The cycle of violence and recurrent genocides against the Tutsi, which began in 1959, illustrates the emptiness of the international community’s promises, as

even the so-called "civilized world" became bystanders or collaborators in this heinous crime.

Andrews links the logic behind the Holocaust to the very ideologies that justified colonialism, slavery, and genocide in the colonies. He notes that "Nazis justified the Holocaust using the same racial science that legitimized genocide, slavery, and colonialism in the colonies." This racial science, which produced the notions of "civilized world" and "Enlightenment" was not isolated to the fringes of German nationalism but was rooted in Western ideas of racial superiority that permeated imperial policies.

The colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and Africa laid the groundwork for the systematic extermination of populations deemed racially inferior, both in Europe and beyond. By connecting these atrocities, Andrews forces us to see the West's involvement in the Holocaust not as an anomaly, but as the logical extension of its imperial practices.

## **You can't create poverty and equality**

In addition to the historical analysis, Andrews tackles the ongoing role of the West in perpetuating global inequality. He argues that "the West can never be the solution to global poverty because it is the cause of it." This critique of Western intervention in the Global South underlines how institutions such as the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) and the World Bank continue to enforce racial capitalism through exploitative economic policies. While these organizations claim to aid developing nations, Andrews reveals that their primary function is to maintain the West's global dominance and to perpetuate the impoverishment of formerly colonized nations.

The most striking aspect of Andrews' work is his unflinching critique of Western democracy and capitalism. These systems, often celebrated as symbols of progress, were built on the exploitation of Black and Brown bodies. Andrews points out that the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution—the pillars of modern Western society—were only possible due to the wealth extracted from slavery. The rise of democracy in the West coincided with the subjugation of millions of people through colonial rule. This contradiction highlights the hypocrisy in the West's claim to be a beacon of human rights and freedom.

This framework helped me understand why the Genocide against the Tutsi, like other atrocities outside Europe, has often been treated with less urgency or empathy in Western countries. The West's legal and moral frameworks are rooted in its own imperial logic, which prioritizes the lives and suffering of white populations over those of colonized peoples. The international community's response to the Holocaust was a landmark moment in the recognition of genocide, but it has not been accompanied by an equally robust framework for addressing genocides in Africa, Asia, or the Americas.

Andrews' work is a call to reevaluate how

we remember, confront, and address genocide in all its forms. It also urges us to question the role of the West in shaping these narratives and to acknowledge the long history of violence and oppression that continues to shape the modern world. As Andrews writes, “we have not progressed as much as we would like to believe.” The structural foundations of racial capitalism, colonialism, and genocide remain intact, embedded within the very institutions that claim to promote peace and equality.

Reading ‘*The New Age of Empire...*’ has transformed my understanding of global history and genocide. The author exposes the uncomfortable truth that Western prosperity was built on genocide, and its legal and moral responses to mass atrocities are selective, shaped by racial and geopolitical interests. The legacy of colonialism and the ongoing exploitation of the Global South challenge the idea that the West can be a force for global justice. It is only by confronting these histories honestly and fully that we can hope to build a fairer and more equitable world.

## On Rwanda, Kehinde complements Romeo

Kehinde Andrews, delivers a sharp critique of how colonialism’s legacy continues to pervade Western thought and action. His arguments find validation not just in historical accounts, but also in recent reflections by figures like the Canadian General Romeo Dallaire, a man who was on the ground during one of the most

horrifying atrocities of the 20th century: The Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994.

Dallaire’s own observations and experiences, as recounted in his piece titled *Why the West Refused to Stop the Rwandan Genocide And Why It Still Matters*, published by *The Walrus* on March 26, 2024, offer a distressing testament to the enduring racism and colonial mentality that Andrews discusses.

General Dallaire, who served as the Force Commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), witnessed firsthand the moral indifference and racial prejudice that underpinned Western inaction during the genocide. He recounts his frustration as Western nations prioritized their own political and economic interests over the lives of Rwandans, whom they deemed less important.

One of the most striking moments of Dallaire’s piece is his recollection of how international reconnaissance teams, sent to assess the situation in Rwanda at the beginning of the killings, responded to the crisis. He was told, “General, we’re going to recommend that no one get involved in this complicated mess. It may only be tribal and it may not last too long.” Another official chillingly remarked, “You know, there’s nothing here for us. No strategic resources. The only thing here is people, and there are too many of them anyway.”

Dallaire understood that these statements were not simply expressions of strategic disinterest, but were steeped in racist undertones. He sharply observes: “Why did no one come? Because there was ‘nothing there.’” This sentiment, Dallaire argues, re-

vealed the grotesque devaluation of African lives by Western nations, a theme that Andrews tackles that—arguing Western imperialism was built on the subjugation of non-European peoples, and that the same logic of racial hierarchy and exploitation still governs Western foreign policy today.

The Genocide against the Tutsi is a devastating example of this, where Western nations, by and large, turned their backs on a crisis because it did not serve their interests. Dallaire's reflections on the indifference of the international community are deeply resonant with Andrews' analysis of how colonialist attitudes continue to shape the West's relationship with Africa.

One of Dallaire's most powerful insights is when he compares the world's response to the plight of Rwanda's human population with its concern for endangered species: "In my many dark moments, I have raged that if Rwanda's 350 mountain gorillas had been at risk, I would have received more support from the international community than I had with a million human lives on the line."

The General's indignation stems from the painful realization that Western indifference was not simply a result of ignorance or logistical challenges, but a direct consequence of the dehumanization of Africans. The comment that Dallaire would hear repeatedly — "We just need to step back and let them slaughter each other for a few weeks, and then go in and pick up the pieces" — reveals a callous disregard for African lives that echoes colonial attitudes towards African nations as savage, chaotic, and unworthy of the same level of concern afforded to European conflicts.

This mindset was further demonstrated by the actions of Western powers during the genocide. Dallaire highlights the rapid deployment of French and Belgian paratroopers to evacuate expatriates at the outset of the killings. Their readiness to protect their own nationals stands in unambiguous contrast to the West's refusal to intervene on behalf of Rwandans. "They took the warning signs seriously enough to save their own people but not to do something for the millions of Rwandans at risk of violence," Dallaire writes. This blatant double standard, where the lives of white expatriates were valued above the lives of Black Rwandans, is a manifestation of the "grotesque pecking order of humanity" that Dallaire decries.

Kehinde Andrews' thesis that the West still operates on a deeply ingrained racial hierarchy is further substantiated by Dallaire's comparison of the international responses to Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Between 1992 and 1996, tens of thousands of peacekeeping troops were sent to prevent "ethnic cleansing" in Yugoslavia. Yet, when more people were being raped, killed, and displaced in Rwanda in just three months than in four years of war in Bosnia, the international community balked. Dallaire notes: "The clear message: Black Africans were less important, less precious, less deserving of assistance and sacrifice than other human beings. This was both disinterest and hypocrisy writ large."

Dallaire's searing critique of Western hypocrisy aligns with Andrews' argument that the West's self-image as a promoter of human rights is built on a foundation of racial exploitation and exclusion. The fact that

Western nations could respond swiftly and effectively to crises in Europe while allowing millions to die in Rwanda underscores the enduring power of racism in global politics. Dallaire does not mince words when he declares, “The world had decided which people count and which don’t.”

The colonial mindset that Andrews dissects in *‘The New Age of Empire’* was also evident in the role of France during the genocide. France, under President François Mitterrand, played a particularly egregious role in enabling the genocidaires. Dallaire recounts how, in 1988, Mitterrand was quoted by a French daily *Le Figaro* as saying, “In countries like that, genocide is not too important.”

This casual dismissal of mass murder reveals the racist logic that guided France’s foreign policy towards Rwanda. Jean-Christophe Mitterrand, the president’s son, headed France’s “Africa cell” and was a close friend of the Habyarimana family, which orchestrated the genocide. In a statement that epitomizes the intersection of racism and genocide denial, Jean-Christophe claimed that there could not have been a genocide in Rwanda because “Africans are not that organised.”

Dallaire’s piece, while focused on the spe-

cific events of the Genocide against the Tutsi, speaks to a broader truth about the nature of Western supremacist posturing. He notes that “during the colonial era, native populations and entire ethnic groups were wiped out by European nations at the same time that those nations were supporting human rights reforms at home.” This observation reinforces Andrews’ argument that the human rights discourses of the West have always been selective, designed to protect the interests of white Europeans while ignoring or justifying the oppression of non-white peoples.

Ultimately, Dallaire’s reflections offer a powerful indictment of the West’s failure to reckon with its colonial past and its continued complicity in the suffering of African nations. He writes, “The lack of empathy from the international community and the international media to the monumental violence in Rwanda shocked me to my core.” This shock, however, is not surprising in light of Andrews’ argument that the West’s relationship with Africa has always been one of exploitation, indifference, and dehumanization. The genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda, as Dallaire so eloquently argues, was not an anomaly — it was the inevitable consequence of a world order built on racism and colonialism.