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ARMY, THE GENOCIDE WORKFORCE"**

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“RWANDA: ARMY, THE GENOCIDE WORKFORCE”

According to Alison Desforges of Human Rights Watch, the massacre had been planned for a year

Historian and specialist on Rwanda, Alison Desforges, gave up her university chair in New York in 1994, when genocide occurred in the “pays des mille collines” [country of thousands hills], so as to fully devote herself to her role of adviser to Human Rights Watch, an American NGO for the defence of human rights. The result of four years of investigations, conducted jointly with the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), the report of over 900 pages that she has just written, is published under the title *Leave none to tell the story*, by Editions Karthala (*Libération of 31 March*). This book, which so far is the most exhaustive, corrects at several important points, the perception of the extermination work in Rwanda, which claimed more than 500,000 Tutsi victims.

Genocide has often been described as a conflagration, a bushfire, which allegedly engulfed the whole of Rwanda. Your research contradicts this impression.

Completely. There was a core of convinced persons, planners of the genocide, who had been working for a year to prepare the extermination of the Tutsi minority. But they were not very many. Then there was a much larger circle of people who bought the *Hutu Power* ideology, that is, the supremacy of the Hutus, which needed to be protected against the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front, the Tutsi-armed opposition to the Habyarimana’s regime, editor’s note). At the beginning, these people were not prepared to act, to kill. Lastly, there was a third group, composed of all those who rejected the *Hutu Power* ideology. Yet, at the outset of the genocide, organized militia in the capital had about 2,000 members. Outside Kigali, there were certainly other extremism strongholds like Gisenyi, Gikongoro, Kibongo and Cyangugu. But elsewhere, particularly, in central Rwanda, a stronghold of the MDR (*Mouvement Démocratique Républicain* of the moderate Hutus, editor’s note), the genocide organizers were not sure to receive support.

Like, for instance, in Butare, the major town in the South, where you conducted investigations. How was the genocide carried out there?

We noted that its spread is different in relation to Kigali, likewise the propelling role played by the armed forces dispatched from the capital. Contrary to the common perception of the Rwandan genocide, it was not the peasants armed with machetes and bludgeons that killed the most, but rather the soldiers, gendarmes and communal policemen armed with Kalachnikovs and grenades. In the first wave, they started the genocide and largely executed it, for the peasants came in only later – as it was then said – “to complete the work”. Sometimes, it is true. Civilians were used for the first attacks. But almost always, the soldiers did most of the “work” and were indeed the genocide workforce.

During the very first days, the genocide was not known as such in the South ...

Exactly. On the hills, we met many Hutu witnesses, who described to us how they had fled – together with their Tutsi neighbours – the political killings, the news of which got to them from the capital. During four or five days, thousands of moderate Hutus were killed and other Hutus even if they did not necessarily share the same political ideas, took fright, indeed, feared for their lives. Along with the Tutsis, they took refuge in churches, schools, public buildings. It was only 12 April 1994, that is, five days after the massacres started in Kigali, that the national Radio clearly announced that the Tutsis were those targeted for killing. In the meantime, the genocide organizers who, at first, could not count on the Presidential Guard and a few elite units had succeeded, on 8 and 9 April 1994, in having a grip on the entire army and then on the State apparatus on the 11th. Finally, on the 12 April, they received support from the MDR, of the *Hutu Power* leanings. It was then that the Ministry of Defence specified, in a broadcast press statement, that there was only one enemy: the Tutsis.

Another surprise, you found many written traces of the genocide, an entire bureaucracy for the mass killings.

Yes. It is quite surprising to see how many documents, directory of the genocide are still existing. It is also striking to note the uniformity in what was said, indeed even in what was left unsaid. Thus, it was not written that it was necessary to kill the Tutsis. Rather, they talked of “*self-defence*”, the “*search for hidden weapons*”, etc. There was a coded language, a common vocabulary used throughout the country. During the genocide, there was some dramatization of events, which were termed “*fabricated events*” (alleged discovery of arms caches, infiltrators, subversive documents) which succeeded in overcoming the initial reluctance of the common people to kill. This dramatization overcame the inhibitions.

And there was reluctance. You cite minutes of communal council meetings, which raised, in the heat of the genocide, questions as to the reaction of the international community.

I would not have believed had I not personally seen these minutes. Locally, there was concern about the attitude of foreign donors! On reflection, it is however not that surprising. Rwanda, a very poor country, depended largely on foreign aid, and two or three years before the genocide, the national government had decentralized cooperation with foreign partners. At the level of the communes, it was therefore usual to deal directly with foreign donors and there, the degree of dependency was accurately measured. This is the effect of globalization: at the very end of the hills, people lived with eyes riveted on the West. Unfortunately, the international community did not take advantage of that attention. **If, at the very outset, the outside world had clearly denounced the genocide, it might have been prevented.** It all happened simply because there were people sufficiently in Rwanda who knew that by participating in the killings they would never get money any more.

Interview conducted by Stephen Smith.

“The country was not pacified”

The Africanist, Filip Reyntjens, makes a severe assessment of the years under the new regime and makes no distinction of positive measures likely to bring the two communities together.

INTERVIEW

CONDUCTED BY GERALD PAPY

Filip Reyntjens, Professor at the Universities of Antwerp and Brussels (ULB), assesses developments in Rwanda over five years.

Politically, how has the new regime managed Rwanda?

I have always been very critical of the new regime, even before it came to power. Any objective observer will obviously note violent instability both within the country and the region, because the Rwandan conflict has spread in concentric circles to the entire region. The country has not been pacified even if it should be said that since the Congo operation, the rebellion in the North West has clearly reduced in intensity. A combination of the war in Congo, the policy to regroup the population of Gisenyi and Ruhengeri and attempts to sensitize the population to the problem of insecurity, has helped reduce insecurity considerably. But it may be said that this war is today being fought in Congo.

Does this a posteriori justify the presence of Rwandan forces in the Congo?

Undoubtedly, from the viewpoint of the Rwandan regime. The regime has obtained what it wanted. But in the long term, it's not the solution. On the contrary, it does not bring lasting peace because “antitutsim” – for it should be called thus – in East Congo is clearly a lot greater today than it was two years ago. And this is partly due to those called in this region as “soldiers without borders”, the RPA (editor's note: Rwandan Patriotic Army). In fact, this is plunging the whole region into hell.

But other problems exist. There is the problem of excluding not only the Hutus but also the Tutsis within the country. The administrative, judicial, educational, security and army apparatus is increasingly concentrated into the hands of a very small group. Today, the term “akazu” is still used to distinguish it. A journalist, moreover close to the RPA, Jean Pierre Mugabe, Editor of the “*Tribun du Peuple*”, has gone into exile, hardly three weeks ago, in the United States where he affirmed that the system practises corruption, nepotism, embezzlements, large-scale appropriation of lands. As regards the integration of most Rwandans and good governance, the balance sheet appears to me negative.

How do you assess the recently held local elections?

There are two possible explanations: Either it was an operation meant essentially for foreign consumption, for when the RPF took power in July 1994, a five-year transitional period was announced, which period has just expired; or it was another charitable explanation, for it is a lot easier to control the country if the local authorities have the confidence of the people and if the elections are considered as a means to bring peace. It should not be forgotten that for this regime, the key word is "control". It is a regime that manages political space in a military manner and which considers the control of the population and the territory as absolutely crucial.

Concerning the elections themselves, to have people vote by standing behind the candidate raises the obvious problem of the absence of a secret ballot and the free choice of a closely watched and, socially, a very conformist population. But I dare not take a stand on this subject, for we don't yet know who has been elected.

Do you consider this mode of "democracy" similar to the Ugandan model?

Precisely, for two reasons. First, because these elections were held without any activities by political parties, which reminds us of the Ugandan-styled politics without political parties. Similarly, in Uganda, they started in Kampala from the bottom, by setting up five-tier "local councils".

Have significant efforts be made towards the cohabitation of the communities?

No. I find no example of positive measures, apart from preaching the word of God. For instance, the mass politics of the "tutsization" of the entire public sector is, indeed, politics that works against any reconciliation. The fact that RPF officers, responsible for war crimes, are not prosecuted and punished, is another factor that works against a policy on reconciliation and strengthens the long practice of impunity which, in this region, has cost many human lives.

“In Rwanda, only justice can lead to reconciliation”

***“N’aie pas peur de savoir”* [Don’t be afraid to know], Doctors without Borders launch an information and mobilization campaign on the Rwandan genocide. In the spotlight: a very powerful itinerant photo-exhibition.**

Doctors without Borders (MSF) launch a 100-days’ campaign: *“N’aie pas peur de savoir”* [Don’t be afraid to know]. Aim: to allow the Rwandan genocide survivors to speak, and to inform and mobilize public opinion and political leaders. *“We have a duty to keep the memory of the Rwandan genocide alive. We must act as citizens and as humanitarian persons”*, Axel Parizel, MSF Managing Director, explains. Why 100 days? That’s the duration of the genocide during which between 500,000 and one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were assassinated.

“N’aie pas peur de savoir” is also the title of a recent book by Yolande Mukagasana (ed. Lafont), whose husband and three children were killed in Rwanda. Along with Alain Kazinierakis, she returned to her country to meet the victims and perpetrators. *“Only the genocide perpetrators know how the genocide was planned. Hence, they should be allowed to speak”*, she explains. *“Today, the perpetrators and victims continue to live together. Some genocide perpetrators are still killing. Personally, it was very difficult to listen without passing judgement. Justice is the only way that leads to reconciliation”*. Yolande listened. Alain took the pictures. The result is an itinerant photo-exhibition, entitled *“Les blessures du silence”* [Wounds of Silence], displayed in a bus, which will tour 25 towns and communes in Belgium as well as in Italy, Germany and Scandinavia. The portrait of a survivor giving a testimony will be displayed on each seat. Enos N. was 10 years old when he was killed. *“I am an assassin and no longer a child”*, he said. *“Inform and mobilize to fight against impunity”*, Axel Parizel, added. *“Two days ago, the Belgian law of 10 February 1999 introduced genocide and crimes against humanity in our law. Any Belgian Judge, if seized thereof, may thus prosecute this type of criminals.”* The MSF, which considers that our justice has so far not been pro-active, is filing a petition with the Belgian authorities for an investigation into the activities and property of the genocide perpetrators living freely in Belgium.

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