

Africa Genocide

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John Daniels established the Russell Press. He discusses Michael Deibert's The Democratic Republic of Congo: Between Hope and Despair and Robin Philpot's Rwanda and the Scramble for Africa.

Two books on Central Africa, specifically the two nations of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Rwanda, complement each other, as the reader will soon discover. It will become clear why Rwanda, such a relatively small country (at least by African standards), has had such a profound effect on the vastness that is the Congo. Paramount in this context we should remember the enormous resources that are to be found in the Congo and how important they are to the modern Western way of life, not forgetting the relatively recent Chinese interest. The list of mineral resources illustrates the Congo's riches: gold, diamonds, cobalt, coltan, copper, cassiterite and, of course, timber from the extensive rainforest. These assets alone are enough to provoke the interest of the economically powerful. Could it be that this very 'interest' might be the primary reason for the Congo's travails with its poverty, killings, famines and endemic diseases, many of which are easily cured; that these very resources are a curse rather than a blessing?

Reviewing another book on the Congo, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, *The Economist* magazine states 'Five million people have died in the Congo in a war that no one understands'. After reading Michael Deibert's book you will understand a lot more about the political history of the Congo, particularly over the last 20 years. The first European contact was with Dutch and Portuguese traders in what was then the Kingdom of Kongo. Although its geographical extent did not exactly correspond to the present day republic stretching over what are now adjacent

countries, the interlopers would have found a relatively advanced society. As one would expect, this kingdom, given a great river and an outlet to the sea, was a centre for trade and therefore politically and economically powerful. The horrific and cruel slave trade was an important source of wealth creation for the kingdom's rulers and their Western overlords. Intensive resource exploitation, however, started with the period of Belgian rule. As a personal fiefdom of Leopold II, the Congo became a byword for the worst kind of imperialist exploitation with forced labour, killings, famines, mutilation and torture.

The Democratic Republic of Congo opens the modern period in 1960 with the declaration of the Congo's independence from Belgium, and the bestial treatment and eventual death of the man who could possibly have stopped the Congo's descent into a manmade hell – Patrice Lumumba. He headed the largest party, the *Mouvement National Congolais* (MNC), and was made Prime Minister of a coalition government. Lumumba, it became clear, was to be no neo-colonial lackey and committed the ultimate sin for those Cold War times: he asked for Soviet military and economic assistance. Of course, such a move was calculated to bring down the ire of not only Belgium and its European allies (Britain included), but also, crucially, the United States. With internal tensions rising, a shaky coalition government, and the secessionist activities of Moïse Tshombe and the Belgian mining company, Union Minière, in Katanga, the outlook after independence seemed very difficult. These factors, together with a Congolese army of questionable loyalties, being under almost complete command of Belgian officers, had Lumumba with his back to the wall. Neither were UN peacekeepers any help; quite the contrary, in fact. They had been drafted in by the Security Council, arriving, ominously, in US transport aircraft on the 15th July 1960. The first Congolese President was Joseph Kasa-Vubu, and his party was in a distinctly uneasy government coalition with the MNC. In September 1960, Kasa-Vubu dismissed Lumumba and, later that year, placed him under house arrest. Lumumba escaped, but was recaptured and handed back to government troops who received the direct order, probably from Mobutu, then head of the army, and Kasa-Vubu to dispatch him to the tender mercies of Moïse Tshombe in Katanga. Undoubtedly, all the plotters, both national and international, have blood on their hands, being aware that they were sending Lumumba to his certain death. From the inception of their capture, Lumumba and two party colleagues captured with him, were mercilessly beaten and tortured with little or no attempt to disguise the fact. The horrendous tale of Lumumba's last days can be read in *The Assassination of Lumumba* by

Ludo De Witte (Verso, 2001). This makes clear that his death was connived at or tacitly agreed by the Belgian Government, President Eisenhower, JFK, Allen Dulles (head of the CIA), Harold Macmillan, King Baudouin, and probably elements in the UN.

After Lumumba's death, Mobutu, Chief of Staff of the Congolese Army, became the real power in the land, with Kasa-Vubu still President, and with Tshombe as Prime Minister for a time. Kasa-Vubu's charade staggered on for some three years but, as Deibert states, he was left 'presiding over a series of weak governments, with Mobutu largely pulling the strings behind the scenes'. An uprising by Lumumba's supporters, known as the Simba Rebellion, overran nearly half the country, but was crushed by a combination of the National Congolese Army led by mercenaries, UN and Belgian troops, and US air-power. Two participants in the rebellion were Laurent Kabila (of whom more later) and the Cuban revolutionary, Che Guevara. Kasa-Vubu dismissed Tshombe and Mobutu, sensing the time was propitious, and seized direct executive power. Thus began the reign of Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu wa Za Banga who, renaming the nation Zaire, was to rule for 32 years. The book goes into some detail about Mobutu's rule, painting a picture of a repressive dictatorship, with contempt for human rights and the wellbeing of its people. Killings, poverty and torture typified his regime, whilst he always kept on the right side of the Western powers through a combination of tolerance towards foreign economic exploitation and virulent anti-communism. There is one feature of Mobutu's rule that by its degree was exceptional: corruption. Such was its extent that, towards the end of his regime, the state infrastructure hardly functioned at all. The system was not just corrupt; corruption *was* the system. Mutinies amongst ordinary soldiers, often over pay, were frequent, leading to riots, looting and killing. At the same time, some officers, perhaps showing misdirected entrepreneurial zeal, were privately selling off their equipment and weaponry. Politically, however, by the 1990s, the world had changed and it was no longer enough to be a bastion of anti-communism to win favour with the West.

Having set the scene in the earlier chapters, the text now becomes enveloped in the labyrinthine world of Congo's political, military and ethnic factionalism which, together with the regional and international factors, has helped to manufacture and intensify its descent into a cauldron of unspeakable horrors. Deibert carefully relates the intricacies of the history of this period which, in their complexity, make it impossible to summarise here. We can only pick out the major players and events. The key event is the invasion of the Eastern Congo by Rwandan forces, and its

bringing together of the different anti-Mobutu forces under the leadership of Laurent Kabila. This bringing together of the disparate opposition in the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL) signified a period of intensive warfare.

The invasion by Rwandan forces was ostensibly to halt incursions into Rwanda by Hutu *interahamwe* and to stop the latter's control of Hutu refugee camps in Zaire. Mobutu, terminally ill and without either popular support or a loyal and well-armed fighting force at his disposal, fled and, in 1997, Kabila was installed as President of a newly named Democratic Republic of Congo. Mobutu, having served the interests of the West loyally for so long, must have become more and more of an embarrassment with his outlandish peccadilloes so the US was happy for their trusted lieutenants, Kagame and Museveni, to unseat him, even if it meant the deaths of millions. Later in 1998, Kabila demanded the withdrawal of all foreign forces, his former allies, from Congolese territory. Rwandan and Ugandan forces advanced on the capital, Kinshasa, but were repulsed by a combined military force consisting of troops from Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Subsequently, peace treaties and declarations were made against a background of continuing conflict, with Ugandan and Rwandan proclamations of withdrawal accompanied by accusations that they had left surrogate anti-Kinshasa movements to continue the conflict.

On top of all this were ethnic conflicts, particularly the Hutu-Tutsi killings, which now spilled over from Rwanda into the Congo, fanned by factional differences and the problem of Tutsis that had lived for several generations in the Eastern Congo, the so-called *Banyamulenge* people. Other elements that make up this tangle of interests are the local defence forces, the Mai-Mai, who probably had no permanent relationships with other groups and movements but functioned on a purely local basis. Local warlords and politicians often associated with them, or possessing their own armed supporters, made for further factional violence. The political-military situation might be confusing, but there is clarity about the horror that was inflicted on the people of the Congo. All parties were capable of carrying out unbelievable levels of killing, sexual violence and general destruction of infrastructure. A UN observer comments on the massacres carried out by the *Rwanda Patriotic Army* and the AFDL on Hutu refugees:

‘... the apparent systematic nature of the massacres ... suggests that the numerous deaths cannot be attributed to the hazards of war or seen as collateral damage. The majority of the victims were children, women and elderly people and the sick, who were often undernourished and posed no threat to the attacking force.’ (page 60)

In January 2001, Laurent Kabila was assassinated by one of his bodyguards and, after a shaky start, his son Joseph took over as President. Four of the main opposition groups were co-opted into drawing up a new constitution and, in 2006, elections confirmed Joseph Kabila as President. All this time the conflict and mayhem continued in the East of the country. All the twists and turns of the history of these events are carefully catalogued by Deibert, but it is easy to get lost in this thicket of information. This again is not helped by the impossibility of remembering a total of 108 organisational groupings, there being three-and-a-half pages of acronyms! As to the reason for all these conflicts, and particularly the level of violence towards civilians, the author manages to avoid the usual stereotypical reasons used to explain it, such as the barbarism of the 'dark continent'. Not that he underplays the violence, using in the moving prologue the testimony of a farmer who had to endure the loss of most of his family and village to the actions of a group of marauding soldiers. *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Between Hope and Despair* has relatively little to say about the responsibility of the great powers for the turmoil in Central Africa after the fall of Mobutu, but it does mention debt and the imposition of structural adjustment strategies imposed on the Congo. Criticism is also made of the inept UN forces in the Congo, who were incapable of keeping the warring factions apart with the inadequate manpower at their disposal, despite being the largest peace-keeping force under the UN's control.

Not only was this recent period in the Congo's history one of violent turmoil and struggle for power, but also, as the author states, one of 'armed robbery of epic proportions'. This 'robbery' was committed by neighbouring countries, Congolese officials and, of course, the international business community. This country 'containing 1,100 different mineral substances' should have been, according to the author, 'an economic and political powerhouse' which 'should stride across the continent'. Alas, this is far from the case and violence still rumbles on in the East with clashes between the Mai-Mai militias, M23, the Lord's Resistance Army, and other armed groups with government forces.

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Rwanda, such a small country in comparison with its neighbour, has had and continues to have an enormous influence on the Democratic Republic of Congo. Robin Philpot's book, *Rwanda and the Scramble for Africa: From Tragedy to Useful Imperial Fiction*, is a far more polemical tract and the author has little hesitation in contradicting what he calls the

'Information Dominance' of the mainly Western media when it comes to the facts about the 'Rwanda Genocide'. Briefly, most journalistic and political opinion favours the idea that the killings in Rwanda were planned by elements in the Hutu government and were genocidal in nature. The word genocide, often used to describe the events of 1994 in Rwanda, may have lost some of its resonance through over-use, but that upwards of 500,000 Rwandans lost their lives is indisputable. Philpot is concerned that these events have not been truthfully reported: that we have been misled as to where responsibility lies for both the context and the reasons that ignited the orgy of killings. Firstly, he seeks to deny that the *Rwandan Patriotic Front* (RPF) and its charismatic leader, Paul Kagame, represented a force that halted the killings; in fact, the killing continues but has transferred to the Eastern Congo. Kagame received his initial military training with the Ugandan rebel forces led by Yoweri Museveni against Milton Obote's dictatorial regime. He rose to be Museveni's head of intelligence and later received further military education at the US Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth. He was later to become Vice-President, is now the President of Rwanda, and stands accused of acting ruthlessly against former political allies and oppositionists.

Although acute violence between the two ethnic groups had begun in the 1960s, the present cycle of violence commenced in 1990 when Tutsis living in Uganda formed the *Rwandan Patriotic Army* (RPA), according to Philpot really an adjunct to the Ugandan army. They were equipped with the latest modern weapons and therefore had little difficulty in invading and occupying the northern part of Rwanda, causing about 800,000 Hutu small farmers to move south, thus becoming internal refugees. In 1993, the government of Rwanda's President Habyarimana was forced by events and Western pressure to agree to a ceasefire and a power-sharing agreement with the RPA invaders. The Habyarimana Government has been accused of being systematically corrupt (Andy Storey, 'Structural Adjustment, State Power & Genocide: the World Bank & Rwanda', *Review of African Political Economy* No. 89, 2001), but Rwanda during his period of office had to endure the benefice of the World Bank and a structural adjustment package. In 1994, the plane carrying the Hutu presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down, killing both of them and the crew. Philpot makes the case that the ceasefire allowed the Rwandan Patriotic Army to infiltrate support cells into the villages and towns and that, after the plane was shot down, they participated in the mass violence that took place. It was therefore not a simple case of Hutus killing Tutsis. The author and an increasing number of commentators also think that whoever was

responsible for the assassination and the downing of the plane must have realised that this would lead to a bloodbath. Additionally, it would also have given the Rwandan Patriotic Army an excuse to break the ceasefire and advance on Kigali, ostensibly to halt the mayhem.

The Hutu killers, the *interahamwe*, were forced to flee across the border to Zaire, along with probably 2 million mostly innocent Hutus, who were fearful that they might be accused of complicity in the killings. The new government in Rwanda claimed that in order to capture and put on trial the *interahamwe*, and to prevent hit-and-run cross-border incursions, it was necessary that the Rwandan Patriotic Army should invade that area of the Congo where the Rwandan refugees were located. Of course, publicly, Kagame and the RPA asked the refugees to return if they were innocent but few actually did so, opting to stay in the Congo even if it meant terrible suffering at the hands of the armed groups. In the supposed hunt for the *interahamwe*, as Deibert also makes clear in his book, the atrocities endured by those inhabiting the Eastern Congo were almost beyond belief. Distasteful as it is, the balance sheet of killing (probably over 5 million) shows a much higher number for Rwandans and others being killed in the Congo in comparison with the Rwandan 'genocide'. Many of the attacks on the Hutu camps in Zaire are documented in the Deibert book.

Tutsis represented some 15 per cent of the Rwandan population, but they had always occupied a leading position in colonial society (after the colonisers themselves). They were selected by both the Belgian and German colonists for administrative, business and other leading roles in the colonies of Rwanda and Burundi. Philpot suggests that, because they were a minority, the Tutsis could never realise their goal through electoral mechanisms and, as a result, opted to gain what they could by force. Philpot sees the 1990 military encroachment by the Rwandan Patriotic Army from Uganda, aided by Yoweri Museveni, as invasion by another country (the primary war crime as defined by the Nuremberg hearings) and a direct attack on the democratic rights of the Hutu majority. Not only had they granted power-sharing during the meeting at Arusha in Tanzania, but they also agreed to a UN mission to monitor the agreement. As far as the Habyarimana government was concerned, the civil war was over – and then came the assassinations!

Boutros Boutros-Gali has spoken out publicly about the Rwanda killings, stating that 'the Rwanda genocide was 100 per cent American responsibility', so it is no surprise that the US fought tooth and nail to have the UN Secretary General restricted to only one term of office when two was the norm. This is what Philpot's book aims to expose: the covert

activities of the US to cement a controlling interest in Central Africa, which means harnessing its vast material resources, thus placing the US in a competitive situation *vis-à-vis* the dominant colonial power, France. American influence and pressure from the International Monetary Fund had already caused the abandonment of a more enlightened programme of social action in place of the usual structural adjustment provisions. The book tackles head-on the assertions of the mainstream narrative, which has been so successfully cultivated by Paul Kagame, whose presentational skills must have received top marks when he was on his military course at Fort Leavenworth. It was Kagame who led the Rwandan Patriotic Front in its invasion of Northern Rwanda, causing some 800,000 Hutu small-scale farmers to become internal refugees in their own country. In this context the legitimate government was pressurised by Western governments to accept power-sharing with the RPF forces, which was a largely Ugandan equipped and drafted force. For Philpot, the fate of the Rwandan Government was sealed at the Arusha Peace Accords in 1993 as they were forced to carry out policies which undermined their own power base.

Philpot takes to task some of the many non-governmental organisations that had begun to proliferate in Rwanda after Arusha, as many were supportive of the mainstream view, siding with the Rwandan Patriotic Front. A number of these NGOs set up a commission to investigate the human rights abuses by the Rwandan Government of Habyarimana. Philpot has made a number of telling criticisms of the methodology of the Commission, but the most glaring omission was its failure to say anything at all about the charge of aggression, which could be levelled at those who invaded another country and thus started the conflict. As the author points out, this was the primary charge faced by the Nazi leaders at the Nuremberg trials: that they started a war of aggression. Particularly vociferous on behalf of supporting the Commission and its findings were two propagandists (there were many others) with the ear of the media: Alison des Forges and Phillip Gourevitch, the former a consultant at the US State Department and the latter the brother-in-law of Jamie Rubin, Madeleine Albright's public relations advisor. This assortment of scribes has, Philpot asserts, managed to foist upon the public a questionable narrative which this book helps to unpick. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) stated after detailed investigation that Kagame and the Rwandan Patriotic Front were responsible for some of the killings after the presidential plane was downed. This was the opinion of the principal investigator, Michael Hourigan. When the evidence was presented to the Tribunal, prosecutor Louise Arbour (her appointment

vetted by Madeleine Albright) closed down the investigation. The other service this book does is to resist the temptation to belittle Africa and African experience with nostrums of the colonial past. It focuses in particular on the conduct of the Tribunal and the fact that it has yet to find evidence of the Habyarimana Government plotting to organise 'genocide' against the Tutsi minority.

Robin Philpot is a Canadian, as was the head of the ineffective UN mission (ineffective in the sense that it did little to halt the killings), the force commander Romeo Dallaire, who aligned himself firmly with US machinations and whose hostility to the French was palpable. He refused offers of help from competent French investigators available nearby to examine the wreckage of the plane that was shot down, killing the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi. He did this knowing that French nationals were also passengers on the plane, saying he had already spoken to the Americans and an investigative team was to be sent from Germany. The Western media soon began to speak of a 'plane crash' and, although the matter was raised in the UN Security Council and a thorough investigation demanded, we are still waiting for the truth of who was responsible. This was undoubtedly the trigger for the killings, as the perpetrators must have been aware. Paul Kagame has been held personally responsible by two 'former colleagues', according to the text. Kagame has vigorously denied he was responsible, so much so that in 2002 he brought a court case against his accuser, but the case seems to have been left in abeyance. Philpot makes a strong assertion that without the assassinations there would be a lot more people alive today, and even more if there had been a timely and massive enlargement of UN peace-keeping troops. In fact, the Americans made every effort to force the UN to withdraw what meagre troops were actually in position. The only reason for this could have been the need to allow the Rwandan Patriotic Front to get on with a swift advance on Kigali, the Rwandan capital. With its modern equipment generously supplied by its Western backers, the RPF was certainly capable of doing that and swept aside any Rwandan government troops in their path. With the advance of the RPF on the Rwandan capital, thousands fled into Zaire, away from the approaching army of vengeance, but, as Philpot and Deibert both make clear, the Congo was to be no safe haven, but a charnel house. Estimates of those killed in the Congo dwarf numerically those murdered in the massacres in Rwanda – a terrible vengeance was exacted on the vast numbers of innocents who had taken refuge there.

Justice should be seen to be done, and the undistorted truth should be available to all. However, De Witte's book about Lumumba's murder

makes it clear that, until state documents are opened, particularly those of the Western powers that were involved, we will have only a partial picture.

Deibert and Philpot's books briefly mention commercial interests, but it would have been useful to have more detail on these, both indigenous and foreign capital. This is of particular importance when looking at the Congo. Of course, we are all aware of the evocative term 'blood diamonds', trade in which was extensive in Eastern Congo. Even Hollywood got in on the act with a major feature film called, aptly enough, 'Blood Diamond'. Now there is a new scramble for Africa, as the subtitle of the Rwanda book, *From Tragedy to Useful Imperial Fiction*, asserts. For example, the G8's *New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition*, with its encouragement of the multinationals to invest in African agriculture, provides a guise for corporate expansion into the food markets of Africa at the expense of small-scale indigenous farmers. This will be dressed up with the usual verbiage, but the benefits to Africa will be few.

No doubt, these two books will be criticised by many media commentators, both from left and right. Judging by the treatment dished out to an earlier dissident publication which discussed the Rwanda 'Genocide' (*The Politics of Genocide* by Herman and Peterson, published by Monthly Review Press in 2010), it will not be long in coming. *The Politics of Genocide* was strongly attacked by George Monbiot, who is usually eminently sensible. Deibert and Philpot's books are an important contribution to the debate about what happened and is happening in Central Africa. They are polemical, but they are also compassionate and well aware of the tragedy which has enveloped this area of Africa. In spite of a blanket of media obfuscation, slowly but surely the message is beginning to get through that this is no simple tribal conflict and that there is something wrong with the dominant narrative. Western interests have moulded much of the context within which the drama has taken place, and to the present day continue to have a negative effect on a continent that has suffered so much.

Michael Deibert, The Democratic Republic of Congo: Between Hope and Despair, Zed Books, 260 pages, ISBN 978178032 345 9 paperback ISBN 9781780323466 £12.99, hardback £60.00

Robin Philpot, Rwanda and the Scramble for Africa: From Tragedy to Useful Imperial Fiction, Baraka Books of Montreal, 274 pages, paperback ISBN 9781926824949 \$24.95

Postscript

On 24 September 2014, a remarkable documentary, *This World – Rwanda the Untold Story*, was broadcast on BBC2, presented and produced by Jane Corbin. It reinforces most of the argument and information provided in the two titles under review, and adds to the weight of evidence that Paul Kagame was responsible for downing the aircraft with the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi aboard, together with policies and actions that resulted in the deaths of millions. It also provided evidence obtained by two US academics, Stam and Davenport of the University of Michigan, that when it came to genocide, the Hutus suffered numerically far more than the Tutsis. Also interviewed were dissident former members of Kagame's inner circle including his former military Chief of Staff, General Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa. The latter was present at meetings where the downing of the presidential plane and the invasion of the Congo were actively discussed and initiated. Today, Rwanda is a fiercely repressive state where dissidents are murdered or silenced at home and in exile, and where 'democratic' elections are fixed to make sure that Kagame and his stooges are elected. Meanwhile, Kagame is lauded by Western politicians and much of the media, as a great democrat and an example to all of Africa, who stopped the genocide of 1994. The myths built up around Kagame are worthy of comparison with Joseph Stalin's falsification of history and personality cult. The documentary has truly nauseating footage of Tony Blair praising Kagame to the rooftops. Blair and former UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, together with Bill Clinton, all participated in a rally in Rwanda to commemorate their version of the 1994 genocide.

The story of Africa has been one of exploitation and pillage, which has intensified over the last few decades, and we need to understand what is happening and counter the present thrust of neo-liberal policies. These policies have led to the impoverishment and erosion of state infrastructures, exemplified by thousands of lives lost in the present Ebola outbreak.