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GENOCIDE STUDIES PROGRAM

Genocide in the Great Lakes:  
*Which Genocide? Whose Genocide?*

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USAID/Accra

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# Genocide in the Great Lakes: Which Genocide? Whose Genocide?

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## Genocide in the Great Lakes: Which Genocide? Whose Genocide?

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The question raised by the title of this article is deliberately provocative. Can there be any doubt about the responsibility of the government of the late President Juvenal Habyalimana of Rwanda for what has been described as the biggest genocide of the end of the century? Can one seriously question the active involvement of high-ranking officials, the presidential guard, the local authorities and the militias in the planning and execution of a carnage that took the lives of an estimated 800,000 people, three fourths of them Tutsi? Would anyone deny the critical role played by the Hutu-controlled media in providing incitements to genocide? The answer is clearly in the negative.

But there is another side to the story, inscribed in the very different perceptions that many Hutu politicians and intellectuals have of what is and what is not genocide, who are the real genocidaires and who are the victims. From their perspective the central question is whether the Tutsi invaders, under the banner of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), were not also involved in the genocidal killing of innocent Hutu civilians, and this even before massive reciprocation was visited upon the Tutsi. If so, not one but two genocides have been committed, a genocide of Tutsi against Hutu, and of Hutu against Tutsi. More recently, human rights groups, most notably Human Rights Watch<sup>1</sup>, have provided crushing evidence of massive human rights violations against Hutu refugees in eastern Congo by units of the all-Tutsi Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA), thus adding a third genocidal massacre to the record.

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(\*) None of the views set forth in this article are to be attributed to USAID or any other agency of the US government. I claim full responsibility for all errors of fact and interpretation.

Regardless of whether it makes any sense, morally or intellectually, to hold a brief for the Hutu as a group, the issues it raises cannot be dismissed out of hand: Would the genocide have occurred if the RPF invasion had not taken place,

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<sup>1</sup> See "Democratic Republic of the Congo: What Kabila is Hiding. Civilian Killings and Impunity in Congo", Human Rights Watch/Africa and Federation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), October 1997, Vol. 9, No. 5, pp. 39; and "Investigations in Eastern Congo and Western Rwanda" A Report by Physicians for Human Rights, July 16, 1997, pp. 18. For further evidence, see the special issue of Dialogue, "Le Refugies Rwandais: Le drame Persiste", No. 198 (May-June 1997).

threatening both the heritage of the 1959-62 Hutu revolution, and the state born of the revolution? Why should the genocide of the Tutsi, and their presumptive allies among the Hutu population, mask the countless atrocities committed by the RPF in the course of their military operations in Rwanda? Can one turn a blind eye to the systematic killing of tens of thousands of Hutu refugees in eastern Congo by the RPA?

And what of Burundi? Can one seriously maintain, against every shred of evidence, that the only genuine genocide suffered by this God-forsaken land was the genocide of Tutsi by Hutu in October 1993? If, as Presidents Museveni and Kabila insist, historical depth is the essential condition for a fair investigation of the 1997 massacres of refugees, why not expand the mandate of the UN Commission of Inquiry back to the 1972 genocide of Hutu by Tutsi, so as to bring out the chain of causality between past and present atrocities?

These are not meant to be rhetorical questions. They go to the heart of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict, and bring to light important aspects of the continuing crisis in the Great Lakes. What makes these questions so highly controversial is not that there are no answers, but that the answers given by Hutu and Tutsi point to radically different interpretations of the same ghastly events. The focus here is on the distortions inscribed in the cognitive maps of both victims and perpetrators, i.e. how a given historical reality is twisted or "forgotten" by a selective collective memory, in response to the exigencies of the moment, in turn providing justification for further killings.

To move beyond the realm of conventional historical description is therefore essential if we are to properly grasp the moral rupture involved in genocide. By the same token, failure to take this critical aspect into account -- how the horrors of genocide profoundly alter the image that one has of the "other" -- must be seen as a key factor behind the inability of "peace-makers" to come to terms with the psychological roots of ethnic conflict. The case of Burundi -- the site of a fourth, yet seldom mentioned genocide -- is a case in point.

### A Forgotten Genocide

No other country in the continent has received more assiduous attention from so many conflict-resolution experts than Burundi over the last three years -- and with so few results<sup>2</sup>. Since the assassination of its first elected Hutu President, Melchior

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<sup>2</sup> Between 1993 and 1996, the following NGOs, international organizations and Research Institutes have all been involved, in one way or another, in seeking solutions to the Burundi crisis: The African-American Institute (Washington), International Alert (London), the International Peace Academy (New York), the United States Institute of Peace (Washington), Codesria (Dakar), the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies (Uppsala), Newick Park Initiative (London), Physicians for Human Rights (Boston), Human Rights Watch/Africa (Washington), the Institut des Droits de l'Homme (Montpellier), Cooperation Internationale pour la Democratie (Montpellier), Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

Ndadaye, at the hands of the army on October 23, 1993, countless conferences, seminars, workshops and peace missions have been organized by governmental and non-governmental organizations to prevent the country from sinking ever deeper into chaos. Whether the aim was to "structure the peace process", "initiate a dialogue to break the power of terror", "encourage the participation of citizens in peace-making" or "confidence-building", the hope was that sanity would ultimately prevail, that a compromise would be reached and the killing would stop.

That so many well intended "peace-makers" failed to come anywhere near achieving any of these objectives is not too surprising if one considers the depth of the antagonisms pitting Hutu against Tutsi. The anomaly lies in the failure of the peace-makers to see genocide as the central issue that underlies civil strife in both Burundi and Rwanda. The 1972 genocide in Burundi, like the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, is indeed the cataclysmic event which lies at the root of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict. This is where the historical experience of Burundi (and Rwanda) differs markedly from that of most other war-torn societies in Africa. Dealing with "post-conflict" situations is one thing; healing the wounds of genocide is a very different matter.

Amazingly, the 1972 killings of Hutu by Tutsi -- what Stephen Weissman calls "the first clear genocide since the Holocaust" (Weissman 1997, 55) -- have sunk into near oblivion. The most obvious explanation for this extraordinary case of historical amnesia is the conspiracy of silence which, to this day, surrounds the circumstances of the killings, their scale, and their impact on subsequent developments<sup>3</sup>. Remarkably few observers seem to realize that the first genocide to be recorded in the annals of independent Africa occurred not in Rwanda but in Burundi, in the wake of an aborted Hutu-instigated uprising that caused the

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(Ebenhausen), Centre National pour la Cooperation au Developpement (Brussels), the Danish Burundi Committee (Copenhagen), Aktion Courage (Bonn).

<sup>3</sup>A notable exception -- along with our report to the London-based Minority Rights Group (Lemarchand and Martin 1974) -- was the 1973 report published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, whose title -- "Passing By" -- accurately captured the degree of concern of the international community in the face of massive human rights violations. Illustrative of the very low priority accorded human rights issues at the time is the mildness of the protest note delivered by Western Embassies to President Michel Micombero: "As true friends of Burundi we have followed closely with anxiety and uneasiness the events of the last few weeks. Thus we are comforted by your having constituted groups of wise men (elders) to pacify the country, and by the commands which you have given, to repress arbitrary actions and groups, the private vengeance and excesses of authority". (Quoted in Weissman, 1997, 55) Seldom has diplomatic double-talk served to conceal a more hideous reality.

deaths of hundreds if not thousands of Tutsi civilians. Estimates of the number of Hutu killed during the ensuing repression range from 100,000 to 200,000 Hutu. The killings lasted from April to November 1972, resulting in the death or flight into exile of almost every educated Hutu. Day after day truckloads of Hutu young men -- primary and secondary school children, university students, teachers, agronomists, civil servants -- were sent to their graves<sup>4</sup>.

Why dredge out of the shadows of history a carnage that took place twenty five years ago?

For at least two major reasons, both equally pertinent to an understanding of the present crisis in Burundi -- and Rwanda. For one thing, the 1972 genocide provides the historical thread that enables us to make sense of subsequent developments. It explains the rise of a radical Hutu movement among Tanzanian refugees, and the very difficult problems raised by the resettlement of refugees in the days following Ndadaye's election; it helps us understand why, after twenty one years of unfettered control of the state, and of the nation's wealth, many Tutsi in positions of influence within and outside the army refused to contemplate a transfer of power to Hutu claimants, and why, ultimately, so few shrank from the use of violence to reverse the verdict of the elections; more important still, memories of the 1972 killings among Hutu are the critical frame of reference for understanding their violent reactions against their Tutsi neighbors upon hearing the news of Ndadaye's assassination. It is estimated that 20,000 Tutsi died at the hands of Hutu in October and November 1993, in an uncontrolled outburst of ethnic anger, accompanied by widespread anticipation of a replay of the 1972 genocide. An equal number of Hutu were killed by the all-Tutsi army in the course of the ensuing repression, with an estimated 250,000 seeking refuge in neighbouring Rwanda. Although the evidence is scanty, it is easy to see why some of the refugees from Burundi needed little prodding to join the Hutu militias, the so-called interhamwe, when the Rwanda genocide got underway. What emerges from all this is not just a peculiarly ignominious episode in the history of the country, but one whose repercussions on recent events have been profound.

Moreover, in what must be seen as the epitome of inversionary discourse, today the concept of genocide is increasingly used as a tool of power by the perpetrators (Tutsi) against the victims (Hutu). Nothing is more revealing of the interplay between power and ideology in contemporary Burundi than the way in which accusations of genocide are being used by Tutsi extremists to discredit Hutu politicians, the better to consolidate their grip on what is left of the state. For this

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to the invaluable documentation made available to me by Michael Hoyt, who served as deputy chief of mission at the US Embassy in Bujumbura at the time of the genocide, I was able to substantially revise, and expand upon my earlier report on the 1972 genocide to the Minority Rights Group (Lemarchand and Martin, 1974); for a fuller treatment, see Lemarchand 1996, pp. 89-105. The Hoyt collection, consisting of over a hundred diplomatic cables, is available from the Melville Kerskovits Library at Northwestern University.

particular fringe group -- whose views, however, are becoming increasingly shared by the Tutsi community -- the 1972 genocide never took place. Only the Hutu qualify as "genocidaires". Proof of their genocidal intentions, we are told, is provided by the October 1993 massacre of Tutsi: to see the killings of Tutsi as a violent reaction of Hutu to the assassination of Ndadaye is simply inaccurate; the truth of the matter is that the top leadership of Hutu-led Front Democratique du Burundi (Frodebu), was all along involved in a gigantic genocidal plot against the Tutsi. Which is why the army had to intervene, and kill Ndadaye, the chief planner of the genocide, in order to prevent an even more devastating bloodbath. In short, "what happened to our country is not accident, but a catastrophe engineered by the Frodebu". (Lemarchand 1996, p. xv) In plain language, don't blame the army for our predicament; the fault lies entirely with the Frodebu.

### Myth-Making: Through the Lens of Ethnicity

No group has a monopoly on myth-making. As we tried to show elsewhere, the manipulation of the past in an effort to control the present was certainly very much in evidence in the writings of some Hutu ideologues associated with the Parti pour la Liberation du Peuple Hutu (Palipehutu), a stridently anti-Tutsi party born in 1980 in the refugee camps of Tanzania (Lemarchand 1996, 144 ff). Genocide, we argued, leaves a profound imprint on the processes by which people write, or rewrite history, on what is being remembered and what is being forgotten. What is being remembered by many Hutu is an apocalypse that has forever altered their perceptions of the Tutsi, now seen as the historic incarnation of evil; what many Tutsi have forgotten, or refuse to acknowledge, is that they, and not the Hutu, were the first to use genocide in order to consolidate their hold on the state.

Nor is Burundi the exception. Much the same sort of hiatus between perception and reality can be seen in Rwanda and eastern Congo. Consider the case of Rwanda: astounding as it may sound, to this day many Hutu will vehemently deny the reality of a genocide that killed an estimated 800,000 people (of whom approximately one fourth were Hutu from the south-central regions). Not that they would deny the existence of massacres; that they were systematically planned and executed is what they contest. The war, they say, was the principal cause of the massacres. Had the RPF not invaded the country, on October 1, 1990, the massacres would not have taken place. The onus of guilt, therefore, lies entirely with the RPF.

Rejecting this extreme view (even though most would agree that there is reason to view the RPF invasion as the root cause of the genocide, just as the abortive Hutu uprising was also the triggering factor behind the 1972 genocide in Burundi), others among the Hutu community in exile claim that there was not one but two genocides, a genocide of Tutsi by Hutu, and a "counter-genocide" of Hutu by Tutsi (Gasana 1997, 123). The first received sustained attention in the media; the other -- for which the RPF bears full responsibility -- went virtually unreported. The RPF troops, they claim, were wholly responsible for the wanton killing of thousands Hutu civilians in the course of their military campaign, as they were for the killing of some 5,000 unarmed Hutu refugees at Kibeho in 1995, and, more



recently, for wiping out tens of thousands of refugees in eastern Congo.<sup>5</sup> In short, the greatest disservice that the international community could render to the cause of peace, they say, would be to impute genocide only to the Hutu, as if the "good guy-bad guy" dichotomy were largely synonymous with the Hutu-Tutsi split.

Typically, and with utter disregard for the evidence, Tutsi officials generally advance the following counter-argument: (a) although there were Hutu civilians among battlefield casualties, at no time have RPF troops engaged in cold-blooded executions of civilian populations; (b) the Kibeho killings involved at the most 300 persons, most of whom were former interhamwe, which is why they refused to return to their communes of origin; (c) the search and destroy operations conducted in eastern Congo against Hutu refugees were targeted against interhamwe and ex-FAR, and did not involve civilians.

Although the evidence collected by impartial observers casts serious doubts on each of these assertions, the more important point to stress is the tendency on the part of a growing number of Tutsi elites to substitute collective guilt for individual

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<sup>5</sup> On each of these counts the evidence is irrefutable, even though precise figures are nowhere to be found. Unfortunately, many leading Hutu politicians have discredited themselves by making claims which clearly belong to the realm of fantasy. For example, projecting the present into the past, James K. Gasana, Minister of Defense in the Habyalimana government, writes that the RPF's "policy of terror as a strategy of a minority group to remain in power" is reminiscent of the tactics employed by the Rwanda kings (bami), like Mutara Rwoyera and Kigeli Rwabugiri, to maintain Tutsi supremacy". (Gasana 1997, 123). Writing in 1995, the same Gasana claims that "it is estimated that between 1.5 and 2 million Rwandans were killed in the Tutsi genocide and the Hutu counter-genocide that the international community is not yet willing to investigate" (ibid., p. 105, n.1). If so, the number of Hutu killed by the RPF exceeds the number of Tutsi and Hutu killed by the interhamwe and ex-Forces Armees Rwandaises (FAR) in 1994, which is clearly untenable; so, also, is the notion of a historical continuity between the 1994 killings and the "terror tactics" used by pre-colonial kings. Typical of the attitude of a great many Hutu intellectuals and politicians in exile, the tendency to grossly inflate the number of Hutu killed by the RPF, and to see in the human rights violations committed by the Tutsi a normal extension of the pre-colonial past into the present, can only generate derision and distrust on the part of their Tutsi interlocutors. For a more sober appraisal, see Stephen Smith, "Le nouveau regime de Kigali serait responsable de plus de 100,000 morts", Liberation, February 27, 1996. Smith estimates that in the prefecture of Gitarama alone some 25,000 Hutu were killed by the RPF between May and September 1994, a figure established on the basis of the lists of victims drawn up in eleven communes; for the whole of Rwanda, a conservative estimate of Hutu victims would be 100,000.

responsibility, and to affix the label "genocidaire" to the Hutu community as a group. It is at this level that an ominous parallel emerges between the discourse of Tutsi extremists in Rwanda, within and outside the army, and their counterparts in Burundi: by attributing responsibility for genocide not to individuals but to a whole community -- lumping together the perpetrators of genocide and innocent civilians, including those Hutu who risked their own lives to save those of their Tutsi neighbors -- the result has been to create those very conditions that impel some Hutu to become rebels, and ultimately "genocidaires"

What it all means from the standpoint of everyday relations between Hutu and Tutsi is nowhere more painfully conveyed than in the words of an American visitor after a brief visit to Bujumbura, in September of this year:

The more I deal with Burundi the more I see and feel that the Hutu-Tutsi divide is not bridgeable in the foreseeable future, and may even have been deepened by events of recent years. A sort of caste system is definitely there and those who have been accustomed to being on top are ready to do anything to maintain the social and political order as it is... It is disturbing to me to see the very disdain even ordinary Tutsi have for Hutu, and how the ordinary Hutu accept meekly their status. I see how the ordinary Tutsi read the riot act to ordinary Hutu for even the most mundane infractions, or for nothing at all, when they would never do the same to another Tutsi. The poor Hutu just stand there and take it... Another time I was in the Bwiza quarter with photocopies of photos appearing in your book. I was showing these to people and they were commenting on them. The last photo was of President Ndadaye. When this photo appeared, all the small children surrounding us pounced quickly on it and began hitting it. I was really taken aback by this visceral, hateful reaction, and greatly disturbed as these children tore the photo into dozens of pieces. How have even the small children learned such hate? What does this say about peace and reconciliation in our lifetime in Burundi?... The people in the neighborhood still relish talking about how the pregnant Tutsi woman married to a Hutu man living in this compound was burnt to death. They recount in gory detail how the flesh burnt until the foetus was visible. Is this a sick country or what? (Personal communication, Sept. 15, 1997)

### Violence as Discourse

If the symptoms of Burundi's "sickness" are easy to detect, the causes of the malady are more difficult to identify. To invoke "ethnic hatreds" does not carry us very far. Asking ourselves what impels people to kill each other brings to mind Paul Richard's analysis of violence in Sierra Leone as a form of discourse which, in the absence of alternative outlets, seeks expression in bloodshed. To quote:

"War itself is a type of text -- a violent attempt to tell a story or to 'cut in on the conversation' of others from whose company the belligerents feel excluded. Understanding war as

text and discourse is not an intellectual affectation but a vital necessity, because only when 'war talk' is fully comprehended is it possible for conciliators to outline more pacific options in softer tones". (Richards 1996, xxiv)

David Apter makes a somewhat similar argument: "Violence", he writes, "is itself a mode of interpretation, with interpretation leading to violent events: protest, insurrection, terrorism". (Apter 1989, 23)

Looked at from this perspective, a certain logic begins to emerge in what otherwise could be dismissed as a case of tribal insanity. It is a logic which challenges some of the myths discussed earlier (e.g. the myth of Hutu as global genocidaires or the myth of Ndadaye's assassination as a pre-emptive strike made necessary to save the Tutsi of an impending genocide); by the same token, however, the violence through which this "text" expresses itself in turn becomes the source of an "interpretation" which generates further violence.

Let us return for a moment to Burundi, and take a closer look at the outburst of anti-Tutsi violence triggered by the news of Ndadaye's death: inscribed in the unspeakable atrocities<sup>6</sup> committed by Hutu against Tutsi was a very clear interpretation of Ndadaye's assassination as the harbinger of a replay of the 1972 carnage. In the words of one Hutu, shortly after the news of Ndadaye's death had reached his commune, "back in 1972 they got us, but this time they wont' !" (en 1972 ils nous ont eus; ils ne nous auront plus!). Again: "since 1972 it is our blood that's being spilled! Now we hear that President Ndadaye has been killed. If they did that, that means we are next." (Lemarchand 1995, xiv). What all this adds up to is an unshakable conviction that the 1972 scenario was about to repeat itself.

From the vantage point of extremist elements within the Tutsi community such an interpretation carries little or no conviction. The Tutsi "text" conveys a very different scenario, which might be summed up as follows: "the wanton killing of innocent Tutsi families by their Hutu neighbors is traceable to a carefully planned attempt to annihilate the Tutsi community; the brains behind this dastardly plot are the Frodebu leaders; the most dangerous of the Frodebistes are those elements who joined Leonard Nyangoma's National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD) and its armed wing, the Front for the Defense of Democracy (FDD); only by physically eliminating the genocidaires within and outside the Frodebu can the Tutsi minority protect itself against genocide". Thus, with the Rwanda scenario held up as an omen of what the future holds in store, anticipation of genocide becomes justification for killing the potential genocidaires. There can be little

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<sup>6</sup> The worst of such atrocities were committed on October 21 in Kibimba (Gitega province) when 70 Tutsi students were burnt alive; on October 22 some 90 Tutsi were killed in Muruta (Kayanza province) on the orders of a local civil servant. In a number of cases, though by no means everywhere, there is irrefutable evidence of the involvement of local communal authorities in the massacre of Tutsi populations. See "Burundi: La communauté internationale se doit d'agir", Amnesty International, May 17 1994.

question about the fear of the Tutsi minority that, if given the opportunity, the Hutu would not hesitate a moment to wipe them out, as happened in Rwanda. Meanwhile, as the number of Hutu officials killed increases, the threat of retaliation rises in proportion<sup>7</sup>.

By imputing genocidal motives to many key Frodebu leaders, by using scare tactics and assassination to exclude them from positions of responsibility in the National Assembly and the government, and by consistently denying them the status of legitimate interlocutors in the ongoing search for a negotiated solution, their accusers in effect gave them no other choice than to have recourse to violence, and indeed genocide: a case in point is the horrendous killing of over 300 innocent Tutsi in Bugendana, on July 20 1996, by bands of Hutu terrorists; such gratuitous carnage cannot be described otherwise than as a genocidal massacre<sup>8</sup>.

With the growing polarization of ethnic feelings, extremists at both ends of the spectrum are redoubling their efforts to make their voices heard, most of the time violently. On the Hutu side Leonard Nyangoma's CNDD insists that peace and reconciliation are contingent upon a return to the status quo ante, that is to the pre-1993 coup situation, when the Frodebu held a majority of the seats in parliament, in government and in the provincial administration. Any suggestion that power-sharing is the quickest path to reconciliation is rejected out of hand as unacceptable. Not only is the 1993 coup seen as a flagrant breach of constitutional legality; so, also, are the subsequent power-sharing arrangements worked out by party representatives. Buyoya's coup of July 1996 merely prolongs the state of illegality created by the 1993 putsch. To paraphrase Richards, cutting in on the conversation of others (i.e. mainly Frodebistes and Upronistes) from whose company he feels excluded, Nyangoma's position can be reduced to the following propositions: (a) one does not negotiate with assassins; (b) the men

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<sup>7</sup> According to a Frodebu document, among a total of some one hundred and fifty Hutu officials, party leaders, journalists, and priests killed by mid-1996 were 13 deputies, 6 provincial governors, 7 advisors to provincial governors and 18 communal administrators (the equivalent of mayors). During the night of June 6, 1995, 27 students, all Hutu, were assassinated on the campus of the University of Burundi. Today the student body and faculty are virtually bereft of Hutu elements. There is a strong presumption that the same is true of the secondary schools that still operational.

<sup>8</sup> The Frodebu has consistently denied responsibility for the massacre, pointing instead to the Palipehutu or Front de Liberation National (Frolinat), two of the most violent groupuscules spawned by the 1993 coup. To this day the evidence has yet to be produced that would incriminate one or the other of these presumptive culprits. What is beyond doubt is that the Bugendana massacre was the precipitant factor behind the coup that transferred the presidency from Sylvestre Ntibantuganya (a Hutu) to Pierre Buyoya (a Tutsi), on July 25, 1996.

responsible for Ndadaye's assassination must be brought to justice; (c) nothing short of a return to the pre-coup legality can bring peace to the country.

Tutsi extremists, likewise, reject any thought of power-sharing, but for different reasons. Nyangoma's mantra that one does not negotiate with criminals finds an echo in the Tutsi militia's insistence that one does not negotiate with genocidaires, a position also endorsed by the extremist wing of the predominantly Tutsi Union pour le Progres National (Uprona). Since the label is now used to designate almost every Frodebu politician, as well as the CNDD/FDD leadership, it is difficult to see how a negotiated solution can be arrived at when virtually every Hutu of any standing is excluded from the negotiation by virtue of his participation in an alleged genocide.

The notion of collective guilt is the principal obstacle to national reconciliation. To hold all Tutsi collectively responsible for human rights violations is hardly more convincing than to assume that the hundreds of thousands of Hutu refugees in eastern Congo were all involved in the 1994 genocide. Nothing is more specious than the argument that after the destruction of the refugee camps in November 1996, and the return perhaps as many as half a million refugees to Rwanda, the only Hutu left behind were the genocidaires, and therefore that it was entirely legitimate for the Rwandan army to kill them in order prevent them from doing further harm. And yet this is precisely the subliminal "text" that underlies the cleansing operations of the Rwandan military in eastern Congo.

### Healing and Dealing

In coming to terms with the crises in Burundi and Rwanda two different strategies are being tested: one focuses on the concept of healing, and draws its inspiration from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu; the other puts the emphasis on the pursuit of negotiations aimed at a power-sharing formula. Though by no means mutually exclusive, neither strategy has yet given proper attention to the different versions of the "truth" about genocide. Which may be the reason why the results, so far, have been somewhat less than impressive.

The limitations of "power-sharing" as a way of promoting overarching cooperation at the elite level are nowhere more cruelly evident than in the disastrous outcome of the so-called Government Convention of September 1994. After endless rounds of negotiations it was finally agreed that 55 per cent of cabinet posts and civil service positions would go to the Hutu-dominated Forces du Changement Democratique (FCD) -- of which the Frodebu was the key component -- and 45 per cent to the Tutsi-controlled Coalition des Partis Politiques de l'Opposition (CPPO)<sup>9</sup> -- led by the Uprona --, while vesting all decision-making powers in a

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<sup>9</sup> According to the Protocole d'Accord leading to the agreement, the CPPO would control the nomination of governors in 7 provinces, and the FCD in 9; at the communal level the CPPO would control the nomination of 48 administrateurs communaux, and the FCD 74. For a

National Security Council (NSC) made up of a majority of CPPO elements. That the Convention turned out to be a less than ideal solution is not surprising if one considers that the net result was to rob the Frodebu of its electoral victory while reducing the constitution to a mere scrap of paper. As Filip Reyntjens correctly noted, "the Government Convention is the institutional translation of the October 1993 coup: the constitution has been shelved and the outcome of both the presidential and parliamentary elections swept aside as the president and parliament are placed under the tutelage of an unconstitutional body". (Reyntjens 1995, 19) It is one thing to share power, and quite another to surrender power under the pressure of extremist militias and urban mobs.

The immediate priority, in these conditions, is not to cut a consociational deal with the opposition, but to redraw the moral boundaries between Hutu and Tutsi. This is where significant lessons can be learned from South Africa's TRC.

It is in Rwanda that healing strategies have been applied most consistently, if not always successfully, by Church groups. At the heart of such strategies is the belief that unless people are willing to confess their crimes and ask forgiveness, there can be no basis for reconciliation. Negotiations, no matter how carefully orchestrated, are no substitute for healing. In the words of Frank Chikane, former Secretary-General of the South African Conference of Churches, "negotiations can result from political pressures or from a mutual decision by parties to avoid a war because the costs are too great. This does not necessarily mean that the parties have had a change of heart -- they are simply relocating the battleground to the negotiation table". (quoted in Mamdani 1996, 3)

But how can a "change of heart" come about where there is neither truth nor justice, or, better still, when justice is intended to reflect the victor's "truth"?

The closest that Rwanda has come to heeding Chikane's advice, and putting into practice the precepts of the TRC, is through the so-called Detmold Confession, following a meeting of concerned Christians of Hutu, Tutsi and European origins in the town of Detmold (Germany), from December 7-12, 1996. The Detmold Confession is perhaps best seen as a collective and reciprocal act of contrition, the Hutu asking forgiveness to the Tutsi for "the crime of genocide", and the Tutsi asking forgiveness to the Hutu for "the blind vengeance and repression meted out by our people", and for "certain arrogant and contemptuous attitudes displayed towards them in the course of our history" (Dialogue 1997, 58-9).

The document, reproduced in the review Dialogue, met with a generally positive reaction from most readers, but not without revealing substantial disagreements between Hutu and Tutsi as to which of the two communities should bear the onus of guilt. Consider the following comments, by Nkiko Nsengimana (a Hutu): "The confession lacks a sense of balance. The death of a large number of Hutu populations goes far beyond the framework of "vengeance and blind repression"... What we're dealing with here are crimes against humanity." Where Nsengimana

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critical commentary, see Reyntjens 1995, p. 19.

sees a lack of balance, Privat Rutazibwa (a Tutsi) blames the Confession for suggesting an even balance of guilt between Hutu and Tutsi, for its "souci d'équilibre": his argument is that the power structure of Rwanda under Habyalimana was suffused by an "idéologie ethniste Hutiste", whereas political organizations like... the RPF, often identified with the Tutsi, are neither extremist nor enclined to incite ethnic hatreds". Thus there is simply no common measure between the RPF discourse, "open, patriotic, constructive and mobilizing", and an "ethnist ideology" that seeks to nurture a "genocidal mentality". (*Dialogue* 1997, 37-44) That the Detmold Confession fell short of eliciting universal enthusiasm is easy to comprehend when one considers the irreducible differences in the cognitive maps of Hutu and Tutsi.

In a fascinating discussion of the conditions for peace in Rwanda and South Africa, Mahmood Mamdani notes that in South Africa the TRC "exemplifies the dilemma involved in the pursuit of reconciliation without justice", whereas Rwanda "exemplifies the opposite: the pursuit of justice without reconciliation". (Mamdani 1996, 4) One wonders, however, whether the parody of justice observable in Rwanda, and in Burundi, is not the main reason why the prospects for genuine reconciliation remain so bleak. This is not the place for a sustained inquest into their legal systems, only to note that there are reasons to doubt whether fair justice can be rendered where lawyers and magistrates are predominantly drawn from the Tutsi community, without recourse to a jury, and where the verdicts of the courts are overwhelmingly biased on the side of official "truths".

Could amnesty succeed where the justice system has failed? For Alex Boraine, the TRC's vice-chair, it is "morally defensible to argue that amnesty is the price that we had to pay for peace and stability". (quoted in Stremlau 1997, 22) Very few people in Rwanda or Burundi, Tutsi or Hutu, would agree. There is simply no parallel in the recent history of South Africa for the scale of the genocidal killings experienced by Rwanda and Burundi, and this in turn brings an important qualifier to Boraine's argument: the point is not that amnesty is not defensible or desirable, but only if it is applied selectively, for unless impunity is brought to an end, unless the organizers of the Rwanda genocide, and the authors of the 1993 coup in Burundi, among others, are brought to justice, peace and stability will not be achieved.

Amnesty for the "rank and file" of the genocidaires, for the hundreds and thousands who may have killed because they had no other choice, would serve a salutary purpose if conducted along the lines of the TRC, with full disclosure of their deeds by the killers. This is where the mandate of South Africa's TRC holds important lessons. Again to quote from Boraine, "essentially the TRC is committed to the development of a human rights culture and a respect for the rule of law... In attempting to do this, I believe that there is an irreducible minimum and that is a commitment to truth". (Stremlau 1997, 23) It is doubtful that the full truth will ever be known about the circumstances and scale of the atrocities committed in former Belgian Africa, but unless a concerted effort is made to get closer to the facts and move out of the fantasy-land of official mythologies, the collective

memory of Hutu and Tutsi will continue to enshrine the same myths, with little hope in sight that the killing may stop.

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