

Britain's hidden role in Rwandan state violence

Hazel Cameron explores how an idealised history of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide has provided cover for Britain's role in violence abroad.

Stan Cohen noted how in Stalinist Russia, 'the past has to conform to the present to establish a version of history (a master narrative) to legitimate current policy' (Cohen, 2001). In Rwanda, Paul Kagame has skilfully orchestrated a 'master narrative' that has resulted in the West's selective amnesia of historical and ongoing human rights violations perpetrated initially by the Kagame-led rebel guerrilla force known as the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), and latterly the government of Rwanda of which he is President.

As part of this mythological history of Rwanda, Kagame has successfully created an over-simplified dichotomy of victim and perpetrator, the category of 'victim' necessarily including the former Tutsi guerrilla army of the RPA. The effect of this has been to obfuscate the extent of RPA atrocities throughout the past two decades and consolidate its governmental rule following their 'victory' in 1994. The atrocities committed by the Rwandan regime include massacres in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which 'reveal a number of damning elements that, if proven before a competent court, could be classified as crimes of genocide' (United Nations, 2010).

There is a long history of Anglophone–Francophone rivalry in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Historically, French foreign policy in the Great Lakes crisis clearly reflected a very real fear that Britain and the United States would supplant French influence in the biggest Francophone country in Africa, namely Zaire/DRC. The Anglo-French rivalry in Africa has historically been rooted in economic

and geopolitical concerns as well as mutual paranoia and deep ideological and cultural divisions (Cameron, 2011).

In 1986, the Rwandan Tutsi refugees in exile in Anglophone Uganda formed a rebel guerrilla organisation in opposition to the Francophone government of Rwanda. Its military wing became known as the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) and the political section, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). In his capacity as Uganda's head of military intelligence from November 1989 until June 1990, RPA leader Paul Kagame received training in advanced military tactics and intelligence methods at the US Army's Fort Leavenworth Command and General Staff College in Kansas. Military training for the guerrilla RPA in Uganda was also provided by British forces at their base in Jinja (Destexhe, 1995). A British intelligence network with the RPA developed in Uganda after the formation of the rebel force and was sustained throughout the 1990s (Cameron, 2011).

On 1 October 1990, the guerrilla RPA invaded the north of Rwanda but, with the assistance of a rapid French military intervention, the government of Rwanda (GoR) repelled the attack. Evidence indicates that the order for this aggression against the GoR was made with the full knowledge and approval of the British and American intelligence services (ibid). This failed incursion prompted almost four years of civil war between the Hutu-dominated GoR, overtly supported by the French government, and the Kagame-led Tutsi guerrilla rebels of the RPA, supported somewhat less

overtly by the British and US governments. It is arguable that the civil war continued for such a lengthy period due primarily to the substantial Western assistance granted to both forces.

The final three months of the civil war coincided with the period of the Rwandan genocide perpetrated by Hutu extremists against the Tutsi and moderate Hutu of Rwanda. Throughout the period of the genocide, the RPA's relationship with British intelligence networks permitted their political representatives to assert some influence in respect of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) at United Nations Security Council discussions. The genocide and civil war ended in Kigali in July 1994 with the victory of the guerrilla RPA who immediately established a Government of National Unity. Kagame later took over the Presidency of the RPF government of Rwanda.

Since their formation, the RPA have been responsible for grave human rights violations. Studies indicate that the RPA massacred tens of thousands of civilians in what has been described as summary executions, between April and September 1994 giving rise to speculation of a double genocide. Documentation from August, September, and October 1994, which includes memos to Secretary of State Warren Christopher, describe a conscious attempt by Western government officials to 'cover-up' reports of RPF killings.

Both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented mass rape, murder, and other gross human rights abuses as a result of the Rwandan presence in the then-Zaire from November 1996 until May 1997. A recently drafted UN report documents the most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed within the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March 1993 and June 2003 (United Nations, 2010). The report reveals over 600 crimes, the majority of which have been committed by Rwandan government forces headed

by Paul Kagame. It indicates that several of the crimes perpetrated by the RPA in the Congo during the period of the study, 'point to circumstances and facts' from which a court could infer genocidal intention (ibid, p. 12). The RPA, with the knowledge and support of Paul Kagame, used hoes, bayonets, and axes to massacre Rwandan and Congolese Hutus, and in many other cases the victims were raped, burned alive, or shot dead.

According to a report published by the United Nations in 2001, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is rich in raw materials and 'Rwanda's military appears to be benefiting directly from the conflict' (United Nations, 2001, para. 126). Tin is playing a leading role in an upsurge in mineral exports from Rwanda, some of which are exported through Rwanda illegally and unlawfully. The country's total mineral export earnings in 2009 exceeded \$100 million and are on course to exceed returns of \$200 million in 2010. The other major export minerals from Rwanda are wolfram, coltan, and gold. Rwanda is actively involved in the illegal export of quantities of tin

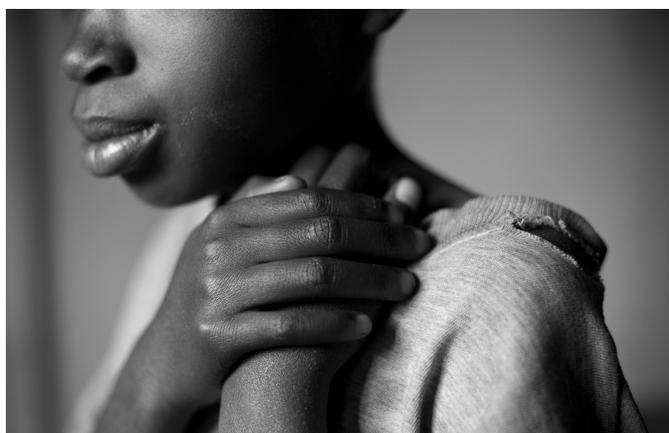
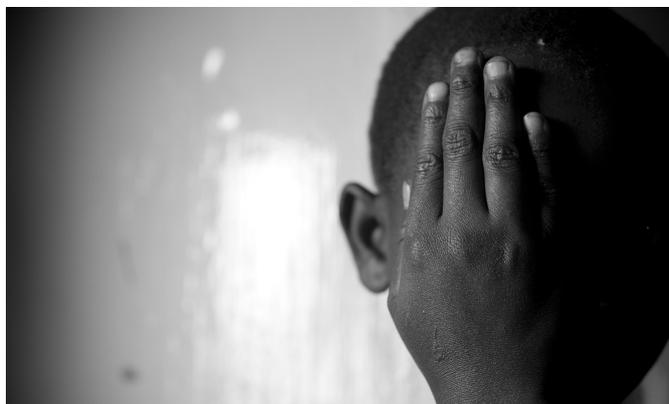
and tantalum to Asia via Rwanda. British companies facilitate this trade by importing minerals from the DRC via Rwanda. Moreover, numerous British businesses have violated the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises. According to the UN report a number of business enterprises were considered by the Panel of Experts to be in violation of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (UN, 2002).

The United Nations reports of 2001 and 2002 query whether UK development aid to Rwanda has in fact partially financed the Congo wars, thereby passively facilitating the exploitation of the resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the continuation of the conflict, either willingly or otherwise. They further evidence that aggression against the DRC, sanctioned by both Kagame and Museveni for the purposes of the unlawful removal of valuable raw materials in the Congo, has received the support of the governments of Britain and the United States and their respective corporate interests since 1996. At stake in these military operations in the Congo are the extensive mining

resources of Eastern and Southern Zaire, including strategic reserves of cobalt, which is of crucial importance for the US defence industry.

Since the formation of the post-genocide government of Rwanda, the United Kingdom has been one of President Kagame's staunchest allies and is the country's largest financial donor, committing around £850 million to date. Throughout the past two decades, the British military has also provided training and strategic/tactical advice to Rwanda in respect of their incursions into the DRC. This support is regardless of Rwanda being a country where journalists and indeed international lawyers face arrest, intimidation, harassment, and violence and human rights advocates are forced to flee the country for fear of persecution or arbitrary arrest.

It is clear that former Prime Minister Blair had full knowledge of the UK's 'passive' role in war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possibly genocide in the Great Lakes of Africa over the past two decades. Post-premiership Tony Blair has maintained his relationship with Paul Kagame, announcing his official role



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Victims of violence in the DRC: Orphans at Mamam Jeanne Orphanage, Goma, North Kivu 2009

as Kagame's unpaid personal adviser. Blair has also developed a charity 'Africa Governance Initiative' that pays for a nine-strong team of staff to work permanently in Kigali, many in the president's office. During a 2009 visit to Rwanda, Blair stated 'I'm delighted to be back in Rwanda working with my good friend Paul Kagame.... Whether you want to start a small business or construct a complex multi-million dollar deal, the government of Rwanda is serious about helping people do that' (Blair, 2009).

On 27 February 2010, in the face of unprecedented negative reporting of rising repression and abuse of human rights in Rwanda in the build up to elections, the governments of Rwanda and the United Kingdom signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a three year programme of assistance worth £2 million to promote increased regional integration and trade for Rwanda in the East African Community. The UK also continues to provide apparently unconditional military and diplomatic support to Rwanda.

The objective of British foreign policy towards Rwanda throughout the previous two decades has arguably been motivated by the advancement of the interrelated goals of maintaining power status and ensuring economic interests in key areas (Cameron, forthcoming). One must question whether such an objective is compatible with the legal obligations of the United Kingdom in terms of international law, since the evidence available to date infers a degree of complicity in the criminogenic behaviour of the guerrilla force of the RPA until 1994 and latterly the RPF government of Rwanda currently presided over by Paul Kagame. ■

Hazel Cameron is an Associate Member of the International State Crime Initiative, King's College London. She is currently writing a monograph of her systematic and detailed socio-legal analysis of the policies of the British and French Governments towards four years of civil unrest in Rwanda culminating in genocide in 1994.

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Complicity

The Hidden Role of Britain and France in Rwanda's Genocide

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Complicity: The Hidden Role of Britain and France in Rwanda's Genocide examines the role of these countries as external bystanders to the crime of genocide, and particularly their complicity - in violation of international criminal laws - in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. As prevailing accounts confine themselves to the role and actions of the United States and the United Nations, the full picture of Rwanda's genocide has yet to be revealed. And, Hazel Cameron demonstrates, it is the unravelling of the criminal role and actions of the British and French Governments that illuminates the answer to the question of 'why' the genocide in Rwanda occurred. In this book, she provides a systematic and detailed analysis of the policies of the British and French Governments towards civil unrest in Rwanda throughout the 1990s, which culminated in genocide. Utilising documentary evidence obtained as a result of Freedom of Information requests to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as well as material obtained through extensive interviews - with British government cabinet members, diplomats, Ambassadors to the United Nations Security Council, prisoners in Rwanda convicted of being leaders and organisers of genocide, and victims and survivors of genocide in Rwanda - she finds that the actions of the British and French governments, both before and during the Rwandan genocide of 1994, were disassociated from human rights norms. These actions, the book argues, are clearly definable as complicity in genocide. This incisive and ethically uncompromising account of the moral culpability of the powerful within the corridors of government in both London and Paris will be of interest to anyone concerned with the misuse of state power.

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