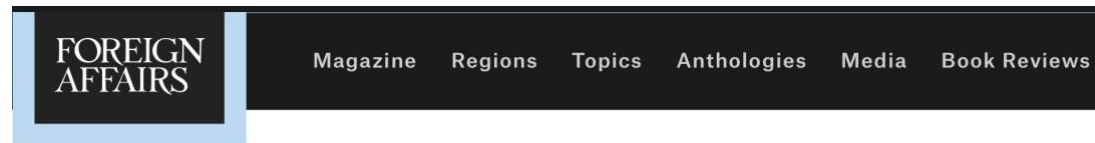


Book Review

***From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994* by André Guichaoua**

1. **Nicolas van de Walle, Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa; From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994, Review, *Foreign Affairs*, The Council on Foreign Relations, New York, May/June 2016 Issue.....2**
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>
2. **Laura Seay, Is Rwanda’s authoritarian state sustainable?, *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2016..... 4**
 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/06/03/is-rwandas-authoritarian-state-sustainable/?utm_term=.c1c9476cf247)
3. **Alex de Waal, “The Big Man”, *London Review of Books*, Vol 38, n°21, 3 November 2016, pp. 28-29.....9**
4. **Jennie E. Burnet, From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994 by André Guichaoua (Review), *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review*, Volume 7, Number 2, Fall 2017, pp. 119-122.....13**
5. **Erin Jessee, Book Review: From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990-1994, *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, Volume 11 | 2017 Issue 2 | Article 14.....17**
6. **René Lemarchand, in *Violence de masse et Résistance - Rwanda the state of Research*, SiencesPo, Paris, 25 June 2018, p. 20-21. (Updated version, first version published 27 May 2013)21**
 (https:// www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance)
7. **Bert Ingelaere, From War To Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990–1994; Humanitarian Aid, Genocide and Mass Killings: Médecins Sans Frontières, The Rwandan Experience, 1982–97, Book Reviews, *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 7 October 2018..... 25**
 (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00083968.2018.1514693)

1. Nicolas van de Walle, *Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa; From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994*, Review, *Foreign Affairs*, The Council on Foreign Relations, New York, May/June 2016 Issue.



CAPSULE REVIEW May/June 2016 Issue

Africa Security

Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa; From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994

Scott Straus, André Guichaoua; translated by Don E. Webster.

Reviewed by Nicolas van de Walle

Making and Unmaking Nations: War, Leadership, and Genocide in Modern Africa; From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994

Nicolas van de Walle

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Straus' previous book was a penetrating analysis of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Here, he returns to the issue of large-scale ethnic violence in Africa, demonstrating an impressive command of the historical material to contrast the cases of Rwanda and Sudan, where genocides took place, with three cases in which ethnic conflict did not reach that point (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Senegal). In the end, he concludes, whether interethnic strife results in genocide depends almost entirely on national leadership. Straus argues that African genocides occur during civil wars when governing elites prove willing and able to mobilize the majority of the population and the state apparatus to commit systematic violence against an ethnic minority. That is what happened in Rwanda and Sudan; in the other three countries, leaders instead embraced a pluralistic nationalism that made space for ethnic minorities and sought to end their civil wars through negotiation.

Readers left unsatisfied by Straus' relatively short chapter on the Rwandan civil war and genocide should turn to Guichaoua's magisterial account. Guichaoua shares Straus' view that the genocide was not premeditated or even preplanned by Hutu extremists but rather evolved from the chaos and violence of the civil war. Through a careful reconstruction of events, and with great attention to the actions of both domestic and international actors, Guichaoua makes a compelling case that the scaling up of violence to genocidal levels was progressive and tied at least in part to the escalation of the civil war and the timid and ineffectual international response to the initial violence. A profound implication of this revisionist history is that individual decisions on the part of both Rwandans and outsiders could have prevented the genocide even weeks after the onset of ethnic-based mass killing. 🌍

2. Laura Seay, Is Rwanda's authoritarian state sustainable?, *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2016.



Is Rwanda's authoritarian state sustainable?

By Laura Seay

June 3, 2016



From left: Tony Blair, former British prime minister, Rwandan President Paul Kagame and Howard G. Buffett, chairman and chief executive of the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, at the World Economic Forum in Kigali, Rwanda, on May 12, 2016. (Cyril Ndegeya/AFP via Getty Images)

Rwanda is the great success story of a post-conflict state in Africa. The country's preferred narrative — one of redemption and renewal after the experience of unspeakable atrocities during the 1994 genocide — is an irresistibly inspiring one that has won Kagame and his leadership team friends in high places around the globe. Whether it is a response to an experienced journalist pointing out the Rwandan military forces' role in perpetrating mass killings in Zaire/DRC after the genocide or Kagame's backing of the Congolese M23 rebel movement, Kagame can count on support from his powerful friends to defend his behavior and his interests, regardless of how undemocratic and human rights-violating his behavior might be.

Kagame's defenders tend to focus on the substantial economic and development gains Rwanda has made under his leadership over the last 15 years. The country's official development statistics are impressive. Its poverty rate dropped from 56.7 percent in 2005 to 44.9 percent in 2010. Primary school enrollment has skyrocketed, and life expectancy is steadily growing. Modeling the country on Singapore and using the same authoritarian techniques that allow virtually no public dissent, Rwanda's leaders have re-created Kigali as a model African city. Most visitors, upon arriving for the first time, are delighted by the city's clean and well-paved streets, its Western-style coffee shops and restaurants, and smooth access to incredible tourist adventures such as communing with the country's mountain gorillas during a high-end safari.

All this perfection comes at a cost. Kigali itself is now largely devoid of "unsightly" poor people, thanks to forced removals from the city and locking away "undesirables" in a harsh detention center. The highly touted improvements in development outcomes are unevenly distributed, with those in urban areas having far more access to improved services and opportunities while those opportunities are often much harder to access or absent in rural spaces.

Two new books address the context in which both Rwanda's genocide and its post-genocide, authoritarian development state developed with considerable nuance. Both should be read by everyone who deals with conflict, development and the most challenging questions at the intersection of the two issues.

In "Bad News: Last Journalists in a Dictatorship," journalist and author Anjan Sundaram tells the story of his ill-fated attempt to bolster journalists and their trade in Rwanda's increasingly authoritarian environment. His memoir is a page-turner that reads like a suspense novel, with a growing sense of dread through a narrative that confirms the reader's worst fears time and time again.

In the book, Sundaram details the ways in which Rwanda's regime uses a combination of propaganda, repression and drummed-up fear to force every person in the country to comply with its goals. He compares Rwanda to a theater in which everyone knows the script and must perform their part, because the punishment for "forgetting" one's lines is harsh.

One excuse Kagame's supporters often give for continuing to back his rule is that in the post-genocide context, a strong hand is necessary to guide the country out of conflict and into prosperity. Sundaram shows that the regime's rule has long gone past the point of restoring order into outright abuse of the citizenry. Whether it is destroying a farmer's mature crop because he grew the yams he wanted rather than the beans the authorities ordered or requiring every workplace to keep flowers inside, Rwanda's leaders have a seemingly incessant ability to dominate even the least significant aspects of citizens' lives:

Small, arbitrary and superficial rules were given such prominence. Facts were turned into beliefs in support of the government, and the government's beliefs had become facts.

These petty policies exist only to reinforce the government's power and ability to control the narrative, serving as a sign to citizens that they have no escape from even the most ridiculous of requirements. Other, more serious penalties encourage family members to turn one another in to authorities if they were disloyal. Even the bond between mother and son is not safe from this psychological domination; Sundaram describes meeting with one mother whose son was executed after she turned him in but who nonetheless said her lines as a performer in a play: "He deserved it."

This psychological domination has consequences. An astute observer of the realities that lie just beneath the facade of Rwanda's all-too-perfect, Potemkin villages, Sundaram details numerous examples of a phenomenon by which, Rwandans, forced into submission and knowing that the penalties for dissent are high, will take actions against their own better judgment and all reason. He details one trip to a village in southern Rwanda where officials suddenly ordered all residents to remove the grass roofs from their huts as part of a housing modernization scheme, then left without providing new roofs or any kind of alternative housing. Afraid to defy orders, the villagers complied within hours and had been living exposed to the elements ever since, with elderly, young and other vulnerable people quickly becoming ill and dying in those conditions. Yet the villagers stick to the script with Sundaram. One elderly woman lying ill with malaria on a soaking-wet bed relayed that "the president was a visionary for destroying these roofs, and that this was a sign of progress coming to Rwanda."

Sundaram has harsh words for the diplomats and aid workers who so readily enable the Rwandan regime by funding projects despite having full knowledge of the repressive tactics in which Kagame and his allies engage. He details all manner of absurd ways in which Rwanda violates human rights and democratic norms — in one instance, a journalist correctly predicts the outcome of the 2011 presidential election down to the percentage points because these percentages were predetermined by the state — yet Rwanda never faces serious consequences from its donors, such as significant cuts to the budget support they provide.

Rwanda's defenders — and those who see it as a complicated place — often argue that cutting budget support to Rwanda would directly harm ordinary citizens who benefit from health, education and economic development activities. Development experts and researchers love Rwanda; the government is fully committed to technocratic solutions to poverty and will gladly order its citizens to sleep under bed nets, deliver babies in clinics and get vaccinated — and they will let researchers closely measure and evaluate results. Some of those actions are no doubt for the greater good — avoiding malaria, surviving childbirth and saving lives are unequivocal goods. But forcing a woman, to, say, begin taking contraceptives when she has no real choice is another matter. As Sundaram notes in a discussion of a controversial mothers' health program he had with a Rwandan journalist:

"Women across the country were being directed to government hospitals. And despite their fears of how medical staff would manipulate their bodies, of what they were injected with and what medication they were asked to take, the participation rate was climbing. The women were posing in photos showing they were happy at the hospitals. Gibson told me, "If we refuse, or even ask questions, they say we are against the will of the state."

Perhaps most harrowing is the appendix tucked in the back of the book, where Sundaram documents the arrests, murders and "disappearances" of more than 60 Rwandan journalists.

How did the Rwanda described by Sundaram come to exist?

Many clues can be found in André Guichaoua's "From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990-1994." This seminal 2010 work is newly available in English for the first time. Guichaoua, a sociologist who served as an expert witness at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and in other trials relating to crimes of the genocide, details the complex environment in which the 1994 genocide emerged. It is a meticulously detailed account that challenges both the Tutsi-controlled Rwandan government's official narrative about the causes, events and consequences of the genocide as well as elements of the

international community's consensus narrative and the denialist accounts of Hutu extremists who still seek to enact their hateful ideology from abroad.

Indeed, what is most striking about "From War to Genocide" is how it dispels myth after myth about the Rwandan genocide and Rwandan history. Guichaoua quickly dispenses with the false "ancient hatreds between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups" narrative that was peddled by most media organizations in 1994. He also rejects the idea that is still common knowledge now: that the genocide was meticulously pre-planned and executed according to a master design. Instead, Guichaoua shows how the extremists' decision to pursue genocide evolved over time, especially during the first week after April 6, when the president's plane was shot down. He shows that Hutu elites were embroiled in a struggle over what to do and how far to extend the killing until about April 12, when the decision to pursue genocide moved forward. This does not mean that planning for such horrors had not already been done by some, but Guichaoua skillfully shows how genocide was one option among many considered, and how the most extreme Hutu leaders forced the decision in their preferred direction through negotiation, intimidation and force.

Central to Guichaoua's argument is the fact that the Rwandan genocide didn't just happen spontaneously: It was the culmination of never-resolved struggles for power and control of economic resources (especially land) that have plagued the country from the late colonial period until today. His discussion of the 1990-94 civil war between the then-Hutu-controlled Rwandan government and the Rwandan Patriotic Front/Army (RPF/RPA), which is now the political party controlling the country, is particularly compelling. As Guichaoua shows, the war erupted amid difficult-to-resolve issues that had been left to fester, including those about ethnic identity and power, clientelism, international pressure for democratic consolidation as the Cold War was ending, and the status of Rwanda's refugees, some of whom had been outside the country for nearly three decades by 1990.

Neither side could win the war, but the power-sharing arrangement they reached at Arusha, Tanzania, was supposed to resolve these issues. When the plane carrying Rwanda and Burundi's presidents was shot down on its landing approach to Kigali airport on April 6, 1994, however, hopes for that peaceful resolution ended, with the war devolving into genocide, the RPF/A advancing on Kigali and taking control within three months, and, eventually, the spillover of Rwanda's war into Zaire/Congo, where its vestiges still continue today.

Taken together, Guichaoua's historical analysis and Sundaram's contemporary analysis raise significant questions about Rwanda today, and whether the facade erected by the RPF in the post-genocide period is sustainable. The parallels between what Guichaoua describes and the current situation are alarming: A small minority of one ethnic group controls almost all of political, economic and social life; there are virtually no avenues for meaningful, peaceful dissent about the country's direction or its leaders; and, as Sundaram shows, information flows are controlled and manipulated by elites.

Rwanda's future, RPF officials are fond of claiming, should be left up to Rwandans. The problem is that given the country's political climate, it is almost impossible to ascertain who Rwandans actually want to lead their country. In consultations over the now-approved decision to allow Kagame a third term in office, lawmakers claimed to have spoken with millions of Rwandans and only found 10 who thought extending his rule was a bad idea. Ten dissents in a population of 12 million is a remarkable finding indeed, so remarkable that it is almost certainly false.

We simply don't know the truth about what Rwandans want from their political leaders. What we do know is that authoritarianism — and its lack of meaningful choices for ordinary people — rarely works indefinitely. Whether — and for how long — Rwandans and Kagame's international friends continue to accept the trade-off of no political freedom for uneven development and unresolved power struggles is still an open question.

3. Alex de Waal, “The Big Man”, *The Big Man: The Rwandan Genocide*, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 38, n°21, 3 November 2016, pp. 28-29.

Alex de Waal, “The Big Man”, *London Review of Books*, Vol 38, n°21, 3 November 2016, pp 28-29.

From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990-94 by André Guichaoua, translated by Don Webster, Wisconsin, 424 pp, £73.95, October 2015, ISBN 978 0 299 29820 3

Did the Rwanda genocide happen because a few army officers and politicians, squabbling over whom they should appoint as leader, casually used mass murder as a means of obtaining a temporary consensus? The idea that the largest mass murder of the last 25 years came about through banal politicking is perhaps even more disturbing than the notion that it was the enactment of a grand ideological project.

Trying to make sense of the massacres in Rwanda while they were taking place, many writers – including me – were anxious to rebut the popular narrative that they were the result of ancient tribal hatreds that had turned more or less spontaneously into violence. Instead, determined that the crime should be classified as genocide, and the génocidaires defeated and eventually prosecuted, we stressed that this campaign of mass murder was a state project, which could only have been brought about by a conspiracy at the highest levels. We assumed that such a crime demanded significant planning and preparation, ideological commitment and mobilisation, as well as thorough implementation. We sought out key pieces of evidence: the arming of the Interahamwe militia, the racist tracts of the extremist press, the massacres committed against the Tutsis in previous years. This version of events, forged in the heat of the moment, became the dominant narrative, and indeed it is the basis of the state ideology of President Paul Kagame, who heads the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which took power by overthrowing the genocidal regime. It suits Kagame because it justifies his seizure of the state and his determination not to cede power. The basic fact – that the genocide was an organised state crime – also happens to be true.

André Guichaoua, who spent much of the last twenty years working for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, has compiled a meticulous account of the politics of the civil war of 1990-94 and the genocide that followed. He recounts, day by day and sometimes hour by hour, what the main actors were doing. He describes a political class very similar to those found in other small nations. Some of its members are brave, some are indecisive, some rash, some cruel, some more capable than others. They know one another intimately through family, school, university, military college and the village-style politics of a small capital city. This is the story of a tightly regulated political business, run by the Hutu president Juvénal Habyarimana and his wife, Agathe Kanziga, disintegrating under the simultaneous pressures of a military invasion mounted by the exiles of the RPF, the end of single-party rule, the demand for democracy, and an economic crisis which meant that the standard practice of co-opting every political aspirant by offering jobs and money was becoming unworkable. As his ruling party, the

Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement (MRND) fragmented, Habyarimana got businessmen and the heads of parastatal companies to finance a new MRND youth wing, loyal to him, in anticipation of the need to mobilise the vote – and intimidate the opposition – in the scheduled multi-party elections. Meanwhile, others sensed an opportunity, including ethnic extremists and leaders of groups marginalised by the cabal around the president's wife, Agathe, known as the Akazu, or 'little house'. Some bargained with the leaders of the RPF, who by their invasion of the country in 1990 and subsequent guerrilla actions had shown themselves militarily capable, others tried to find a middle way between these two groupings. Meanwhile, the army officer corps was fractious, since the peace accords signed with the RPF in Arusha in 1993 required the retirement of a large number of senior officers so that the RPF could take up half the posts in the army.

The outcome was a volatile politics of continual repositioning, second-guessing, prevarication and manoeuvre, spiced with assassinations. There was certainly a determined effort to kill every Tutsi in Rwanda between April and June 1994, and it was state policy. But it was a hastily improvised policy, cobbled together a few days after the assassination of Habyarimana, whose presidential jet was shot down near Kigali Airport on 6 April, when the decapitation of the government led to the panicked radicalisation of the regime's lieutenants.

Guichaoua's account explains some of the mysteries of the Rwanda genocide. Why did Théodore Sindikubwabo, a lethargic man of little renown, become interim head of state during the genocide? Why did Agathe, the leader of the best organised and most ruthless political machine in the country, spend the few weeks after her husband's death making a panicked attempt to flee the country? Why was a retired colonel called Théoneste Bagosora, the engineer of the assassinations of the moderate political establishment in the days after Habyarimana's death, convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda of acts of genocide, but acquitted of conspiracy to commit genocide?

The outline of Guichaoua's story is roughly as follows. The two key sets of political players – the coteries around the president and the RPF leadership – believed that the Arusha peace agreement was unsustainable, that power-sharing was not feasible. Both were preparing for the military option. The RPF struck first, bringing down Habyarimana's plane. (Guichaoua discusses the idea that Hutu extremists shot down the plane, unhappy at the concessions that Habyarimana had made in the peace talks, and dismisses it on grounds of lack of evidence and improbability of motive.) The RPF expected a quick military takeover; the human cost – Guichaoua quotes one senior RPF cadre who anticipated that 'maybe five thousand, at the most, twenty thousand' Tutsi civilians would die as a result – was a price they were prepared to pay.

The assassination of the president, along with some key army officers including the chief of staff, did indeed jam the state machine. The struggle over who would replace them resulted, as anticipated, in violence. Colonel Bagosora seized the initiative, ordering the assassination of the figures who, according to the constitution, should have succeeded to senior office, including the prime minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana. In this he had the enthusiastic backing of Agathe Kanziga and the members of the Akazu. The daughter of the dead president's doctor, who was with the family after the assassination,

reported that ‘during the day of 7 April 1994, we noticed that the entire family that was present, including the nuns, rejoiced whenever the death of an opponent was announced. It was the presidential guards who announced such when they returned from carrying out murder.’

The assassinations – including the murder of ten Belgian peacekeepers – continued for three days. Bagosora’s intent was to position himself as kingmaker. His problem was that he didn’t engineer the political succession smoothly enough, and the army high command didn’t support him, and in fact remained opposed to the genocide for some days. But the generals were no better at asserting control: they didn’t control either the presidential guard or the Interahamwe, the Hutu paramilitary organisation founded by Bagosora, and so there was no counter-coup. Bagosora and his accomplices decided to give themselves time to agree on a successor by establishing a government with a mandate of only ninety days. Just about any Hutu politician associated with ‘Hutu Power’ would do as a leader, and so Sindikubwabo was chosen. And, to insure themselves against the new government calling them to account for their crimes, they enlisted the likely members of that government in organising massacres of Tutsi civilians in their home regions. Guichaoua describes the bizarre banality of government members’ daily activities after they moved from Kigali to a supposedly safer small town:

And while there, constantly monitoring each other’s comings and goings, they passed their time in countless cabinet meetings, round-table discussions, sidebars ... interminable arguments, flaring into deadly rivalries and the hatching of plots. It is through the prism of these political games and wagers, whether sophisticated or hare-brained, that they learned about the war and massacres they had directed, with a stunning detachment in the face of their horrific immediacy.

The policy of massacre was ‘simply the price that MRND leaders accepted to pay Col. Théoneste Bagosora in exchange for his withdrawal and to ensure his impunity.’

For the extremist leaders, devoting their military and organisational resources to massacring civilians was a suicidal decision: it meant that whatever chance they had had of halting the RPF’s military advance and achieving international respectability was irretrievably gone. But the spirit of vengeance that led them to celebrate the murder of the political elite was evident in their determination that the RPF victory, now fore-ordained, would be at the cost of the annihilation of the Tutsi population. For the remainder of the political class who’d been corralled into government, the primary issue remained who would succeed the dead president?

If genocide was the product of confusion, error and politicking founded on personal interest, rather than a long-thought-out plan, we require a framework that enables us to understand how everyday politics can turn to violence. During the 1980s, the Habyarimana regime had dominated a closed domestic political marketplace, using patronage funds (aid and export revenues from parastatals) and regulating by coercion. This model collapsed in 1990. The RPF threatened to take over and run the country using the same model. Unfortunately for Habyarimana, political liberalisation – demanded by both the population and aid donors, especially France – became inevitable at precisely this point, and so members of the political elite felt able to choose between

his party and the RPF. Many of them took democratisation and the peace accords seriously, and assumed that the model of political competition regulated by elections and the rule of law would prevail. The price of their loyalty shot up.

Just as important, an element of uncertainty was added to political bargaining. The system of centralised and depoliticised patronage had been remarkably straightforward for the previous twenty years, but now things were more complicated. Western donors were drafting one set of rules, Habyarimana was trying to adapt the old system, and the RPF was promising (or threatening) a different model again.

At this point Habyarimana's political budget – the resources earmarked for efficient patronage management – shrank due to the collapse in the price of coffee and the costs of war. This was the reason he decided to mobilise the party youth wing, as a cheaper way of regulating the political market – intimidating rivals in the short term, winning the elections in the medium term. All of this is familiar from other countries that have experienced deregulation, a shrinking budget and war. A similar set of events brought about the overthrow of the Nimeiri dictatorship in Sudan, the collapse of the Somali state and the regression of multi-party politics in Kenya into intercommunal violence.

The assassination of 'high-value targets' usually leads to an escalation of violence and often to the radicalisation of those who dispense it. After the death of Habyarimana his immediate subordinates instigated the killings, settling scores now that the big man was no longer in charge. When no new leader emerged, a temporary system was instituted to ensure that the political elite did not direct violence at its own members, but instead at those outside their circle: Tutsi civilians. Deregulated and competitive killing of the Tutsi became a mechanism for regulating internal political bargaining over who should take charge.

Three months later, on 4 July 1994, the RPF took power in a ruined land. The survivors of the genocide are well aware of the painful paradox that, without the war waged by the RPF on Habyarimana there would have been no genocide, but also that, without the RPF in power, the risks of renewed ethnic killings are very high. Inside and outside the country, Kagame's government is seen as a Tutsi government, ruling on behalf of the ethnic minority. But in the first months of RPF government, that wasn't the way it acted: it was the survivors' organisation that demanded a national day of mourning to commemorate the genocide, pushing the RPF into dropping its plan to celebrate victory day on 4 July. Rather than a Tutsi regime, the Kagame government is an efficiently run business venture. Over twenty years, Kagame has proved a skilled and ruthless leader. He makes sure no other figure attracts loyalty, and keeps things that way through assassination, or the threat of it. This frees up funds for investment in public goods. But the country's institutions are, if anything, less robust than they were 25 years ago. There is no mechanism for regulating political competition other than the actions of the president himself. There is no mechanism for an orderly transition to another political model or another leader – the same shortcomings that brought about the escalatory competitive political killings of 1994.

4. Jennie E. Burnet, *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994* by André Guichaoua (review), *African Conflict & Peace-building Review*, Volume 7, Number 2, Fall 2017, pp. 119-122

From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994 by
André Guichaoua

Jennie E. Burnet

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Law No. 40/2013 of 16/06/2013 Governing Land of Rwanda.

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André Guichaoua. *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990–1994*.

Translated by Don E. Webster. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015. lx–416 pp. Notes. References. Index.

US\$79.95 (hardcover), ISBN: 9780299298203. US\$26.95 (paper), ISBN: 9780299298241.

From War to Genocide is the most detailed and nuanced history of the 1994 genocide of Tutsis published to date. Originally published in French under the title *Rwanda, de la guerre au génocide les politiques criminelles au Rwanda (1990–1994)*, the book has been abridged by the author and translated by Don Webster. The book eschews simplistic explanations of the 1994 genocide either as ancient, “tribal” hatred, or as a carefully orchestrated genocide plan whose foundations were laid decades ahead. Instead, the author, French sociologist André Guichaoua, carefully considers the growing body of empirical evidence that demonstrates that the genocide followed different trajectories in communities across the country and that the genocide of Tutsis as a coherent national policy emerged in the first five days after the shooting down of president Juvénal Habyarimana’s plane. Anyone with an interest in Rwanda, the African Great Lakes region, or genocide and mass atrocities should read this book. As a scholar who has focused on Rwanda and the genocide for twenty years, I learned something new on nearly every page.

A sociologist of development studies, Guichaoua conducted research in Rwanda throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. In fact, he happened to be in the capital, Kigali, during the first few days of the genocide until he was evacuated (p. 144). He then became a leading expert witness before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in the years following the genocide. He worked closely with the ICTR prosecutor’s office and had exceptional access to documents and evidence amassed by the court. In preparing the book, Guichaoua also relied on his own network of Rwandan informants who lived inside and outside the country and whom he interviewed over the years. The author’s long-term experience in and knowledge of the country allow him to interpret the subtle power dynamics that led to the genocide, which include affinities based on regionalism, kin, soccer clubs, and church congregations as much as ethnicity. His trove of evidence remains archived on a website for others to access.

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119

African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review volume 7 issue 2

In this ground-breaking book, André Guichaoua squares off against the history of the 1994 genocide of Tutsis disseminated by the current Rwandan government, led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and against counter-narratives to this history disseminated by former leaders of the Rwandan government and exiled opponents of the RPF government. As a social scientist and empiricist Guichaoua rejects the canonical story endorsed by the RPF, which argues that the genocide began as an ideological project dating back to the revolution of 1959 that was “periodically revived” through genocidal practices and the development of a genocidal ideology culminating in the planning and implementation of the events of 1994 (p. 231). Instead, Guichaoua shows the ways in which the assassination of President Habyarimana simultaneously set in motion political machinations among an inner circle of Hutu elite who had created a parallel power

structure to the government and spontaneous, but organized, massacres led by the Interahamwe militias. While Guichaoua rejects the RPF's history of a long-standing genocidal plan, he also clearly opposes the notion that the "events of 1994" and massacres of civilians were not genocide as many former political and military leaders and some Hutus insist. Instead, Guichaoua embraces a theory that fits empirical fact: the genocide of Tutsis did not begin as a *fait accompli*. It emerged to become national policy over several days as Hutu extremist politicians, military officers, and businessmen jockeyed for position and took over the government. This conclusion is particularly important to social scientists who study genocide and mass atrocities and policymakers who want to intervene to circumvent or stop it.

Another of the author's ground-breaking conclusions is that the RPF was responsible for shooting down President Habyarimana's plane. The polarizing question of responsibility for this act starkly divides supporters of the RPF from their opponents, who include not only genocide deniers, but also many Rwandans, both Hutu and Tutsi, who live in exile and who blame the RPF for triggering the catastrophic events that followed. In chapter seven Guichaoua documents the main hypotheses regarding the downing of the plane. According to the first hypothesis, insiders in Habyarimana's government and the Hutu Power Movement organized the killing of the president because they believed that he was conceding too much to the RPF and opposition parties in the peace negotiations. This hypothesis features prominently in the current RPF-led government's dominant narrative about the genocide and its causes.

120

According to the second hypothesis, the RPF shot down the plane believing that it would create a power vacuum at the head of the government and military, thus giving the RPF a strategic advantage to relaunch and win the war. This hypothesis is the lynchpin in genocide deniers' assertions that the RPF caused the massacres and resumed the civil war resulting in mass atrocities on all sides, which deniers claim did not constitute genocide. Several scholars of the genocide have quietly contemplated this hypothesis but have been wary of endorsing it publicly due to lack of conclusive evidence and for fear of fueling genocide deniers' claims. Guichaoua recognizes the perilousness of his claim, which already rendered him *persona non grata* in Rwanda. As a result, he describes in detail the evolution in his thinking on the issue over the past twenty plus years and explains the evidence that led him to conclude that an inner circle of RPF officers, including President Kagame, ordered the shooting down of the president's plane with a surface-to-air missile (pp. 144–47).

The book is largely structured chronologically. Chapters one through five lay out the social and political context for the genocide, explore the impasse over Rwandan refugees and their right of return, examine the impact of multiparty politics and the liberalization of Rwanda's single-party system, and investigate the impact of the ongoing peace negotiations on political power inside the country. In chapter six, the author presents novel insights about the founding of the Interahamwe militias, who became the primary leaders of mass violence in 1994. Guichaoua rejects wholeheartedly the proposition from former MRND and CDR leaders that the militias created themselves. Instead, he documents how they were founded by a core group of young Hutu and Tutsi MRND partisans, who were members of the Loisirs football team, to support the MRND and "counter the attacks on

MRND members then occurring in certain neighborhoods of Kigali” (pp. 125–26). MRND elites then managed and used these groups to manifest their power in communities across the country and enforce unofficial policies through violence and intimidation.

Chapters seven through ten document in extensive detail the series of events and decisions that became genocide and resulted in the mass mobilization of the Rwandan population in the project of genocide. Guichaoua describes how the massacres began by targeting “enemies of the state,” and “accomplices” or “infiltrators” of the RPF who had been identified well in advance, as well as those who were hiding people targeted (p. 217). They then broadened to become genocide as the militias began to target all Tutsis regardless of their political affiliation. Guichaoua’s conclusion complies wholly with neither the dominant narrative disseminated by the RPF government nor the counter-narrative of genocide deniers.

121

African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review volume 7 issue 2

Instead, he lays out the complex processes that became the 1994 genocide of Tutsis. President Habyarimana’s killing sparked intense violent reactions from the Interahamwe whose spontaneous efforts were then guided by a secret parallel power structure centered around Theoneste Bagasora, Tharcisse Renzaho, and other members of the Akazu (pp. 255–56). This secret parallel power structure managed to install and manage the interim government to seek its desired outcome of solving the “RPF problem” and maintaining its hold on power by eliminating Tutsis and any internal opposition.

Guichaoua concludes the book by considering the challenges presented by truth, justice, and the politics of memory in the wake of the genocide. This chapter focuses on the politics surrounding the ICTR and its relations with the RPF-led government in Kigali. In particular this chapter focuses on the problems the ICTR prosecutor faced in pursuing the part of its mandate to investigate and prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by the RPF. In addition, he examines the epistemological differences between researchers’ “truth” and judges’ “truth.”

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5. Erin Jessee, Book Review: From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990-1994, *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, Volume 11 | 2017 Issue 2 | Article 14.



Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal

Volume 11 | 2017 Issue 2 | Article 14

Book Review: From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990-1994

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From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990-1994

André Guichaoua, translated by Don E. Webster Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2015, 416 Pages; Price: \$79.95 Paperback

Reviewed by Erin Jessee

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André Guichaoua's *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990-1994* is an important addition to English-language scholarship on the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, during which an estimated 800,000 Rwandan civilians—most of whom were members of the nation's ethnic Tutsi minority—were murdered by Hutu Power extremists and their collaborators. Previously available only in French (2010) and now clearly rendered into English by Don Webster, the book draws upon an impressive range of evidence collected by the Office of the Prosecution for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) as part of its efforts to hold accountable those individuals with primary criminal responsibility for the genocide. As the former lead expert witness for the prosecution at the ICTR, Guichaoua had unprecedented access to these materials, which he then supplemented with his own interviews and related fieldwork among Rwandans who had been close to Presidents Juvénal Habyarimana (r. 1973-1994) and Théodore Sindikubwabo (r. April- July 1994), the interim President who took power following Habyarimana's assassination, but not complicit in the 1994 genocide. The outcome is a comprehensive overview of the civil war and genocide in Rwanda and one that speaks to several key points of controversy among experts on the conflict.

The book is organized chronologically according to thirteen phases in Rwanda's recent history. Chapter 1 offers a brief overview of the social and political context in Rwanda under the Habyarimana regime. Chapter 2 then shifts to Uganda to consider how the political climate in Rwanda under Habyarimana's leadership—dominated by Hutu from northern Rwanda—prompted a cohort of predominantly Tutsi Rwandan refugees based in Uganda to organize, militarize, and invade Rwanda in 1990, triggering a civil war and initiating a period of political transition detailed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 subsequently explains how escalating political tensions and violence between Habyarimana's military and the invading Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) necessitated the Arusha Peace Process, overseen by the international community, and led to the Arusha Accords—the subject of Chapter 5—as a means of promoting a peaceful transition to a multi-party democratic state that would include representation by the RPF. In Chapter 6, however, Guichaoua outlines how the Arusha Accords ultimately prompted a growing cohort of Hutu Power extremists close to Habyarimana to begin organizing militia groups initially aimed at ensuring adequate civil defense mechanisms were in place to protect Rwandan communities from a potential RPF advance.

With Habyarimana's assassination on 6 April 1994—an act of aggression that Guichaoua argues in Chapter 7 was likely orchestrated by the leader of the RPF and current President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame—the gradual increase in anti-RPF sentiments among the general population and the infiltration of key Rwandan institutions by Hutu Power extremists set the stage for the extermination of the political opposition, but not necessarily targeted massacres of Tutsi civilians at this juncture. Of particular relevance for scholarship on the Rwandan genocide, the

evidence outlined in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 suggests the genocide was not planned in advance by the interim government officials who took control following Habyarimana's death, as is commonly argued in the literature and in present-day Rwanda. Instead, Guichaoua finds the genocide emerged rather suddenly as part of a desperate attempt by the interim government to thwart an increasingly inevitable RPF military victory by inciting chaos among the civilian population, most notably after the interim government was forced to abandon the nation's capital, Kigali, to the RPF military advance, around 12 April 1994. After this date, interim government officials from their new seat near Gitarama in southern Rwanda began actively encouraging massacres of Tutsi civilians by militia groups, a shift in strategy that is outlined in Chapter 11 and which led to an escalation in specifically anti-Tutsi violence despite varied responses among the Hutu civilians who were expected to participate in this new 'civil defense' policy. Chapter 12 then focuses on the last days of the war between the disintegrating interim government and advancing RPF forces, and the accompanying genocide, with particular emphasis placed on understanding the legal consequences of particular interim government officials' decisions to incite genocide in a desperate attempt to advance their political ambitions.

In Chapter 13, Guichaoua turns his attention to how the eventual RPF military victory has led to a sustained effort among both extremist supporters of the interim government and the RPF to revise Rwanda's history in a manner that reinforces their political agendas in the present. Those extremists who would dismiss the 1994 genocide as an accident or the unfortunate side-effect of a civil war are rarely taken seriously beyond the more polarized members of Rwanda's political opposition in exile. The RPF has been largely successful in its efforts to demonize the Habyarimana regime and rewrite Rwanda's history such that the genocide can be understood as the inevitable outcome of decades of anti-Tutsi hatred that was manipulated by Hutu politicians to distract citizens from the corruption that plagued Rwanda during the First and Second Hutu Republics. The international community has been quick to adopt the RPF's version of events, as evidenced by the ICTR's decisions to only prosecute crimes committed from January to December 1994, and focus on prosecuting high-level officials within the interim government who were responsible for perpetrating war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, while ignoring those RPF officials who allegedly also engaged in war crimes and crimes against humanity against Hutu civilians or who were arguably complicit in Habyarimana's assassination, for example. Guichaoua concludes his study by highlighting the resulting disconnect in Rwanda between "judicial truth" and the "researcher's truth" and calls upon future researchers to "rise to the intellectual challenge of closely examining the unfolding of the war and the inception of genocide" to reveal "the specificities of this major human tragedy, which was unexpected yet failed to surprise the majority of those involved."¹

Taken together, *From War to Genocide* offers a thorough overview of the rapidly shifting political climate in Rwanda during the civil war and genocide grounded almost entirely in primary sources² and Guichaoua's extensive knowledge of Rwandan politics. Guichaoua painstakingly reconstructs a controversial period in Rwanda's history, highlighting along the way the actions of key government officials within the Habyarimana regime and subsequent interim government as they fought to maintain control of Rwanda amid civil war and genocide. To this end, Guichaoua strikes an effective balance between exploring the complex and increasingly desperate decision-making processes which following Habyarimana's death prompted the interim government to first seek vengeance against Rwanda's political opposition regardless of ethnicity, and subsequently incite genocide against Rwanda's minority Tutsi population, and nonetheless holding these officials accountable for their crimes. Nonetheless, it is likely to strike a negative chord with supporters of the Kagame regime who maintain that Kagame and the RPF was in no way responsible for assassinating Habyarimana, and that the genocide was the inevitable result of a long plan on the part of the Habyarimana regime and the interim government to exterminate Rwanda's Tutsi minority population. However, given the rigor that Guichaoua applies in analyzing the evidence that was collected by the Office of the Prosecutor for the ICTR and balancing it against the politics of memory and history that surround Rwanda's civil war and genocide, there is no doubt that for many scholars and experts on Rwanda his book will become the final word on the subject, at least until new sources of evidence are uncovered.

¹ André Guichaoua, *From War to Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda, 1990-1994*, trans. Don E. Webster (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 336.

² Many of which are available online at the book's website, <http://rwandadelaguerraugenocide.univ-paris1.fr/home/>.

6. René Lemarchand, in *Violence de masse et Résistance - Rwanda the state of Research*, SiencesPo, Paris, 25 June 2018, p. 20-21.

(Updated version, first version published 27 May 2013)

SciencesPo

René Lemarchand, in *Violence de masse et Résistance - Rwanda the state of Research*, 25 June 2018.

(Updated version, first version published 27 May 2013)

Publié sur le site : Violence de masse et Résistance ([https:// www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance](https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance)), p. 20-21.

New Research Dimensions

Among other attempts to shed new light on the genocide, the works of Jean-Paul Kimonyo, Timothy Longman, Scott Straus and André Guichaoua, among others, draw attention to a range of significant new breakthroughs. As a point of entry into their works one major article stands out: Claudine Vidal's "Enquêtes au Rwanda: Questions de recherche sur le génocide Tutsi (Vidal 2014). Besides turning a critical eye to some of the contributions discussed below, she examines the different levels at which research is proceeding, ie. national, prefectoral, communal and individual, and shows how specific angles of vision helped illuminate the dynamics of mass murder at each level. The variable operating at the national level (in this case political parties) are analyzed in considerable detail by Kimonyo (2008); Guichaoua (2005) brings out the decisive impact of extremist "entrepreneurs" in the Butare prefecture; Strauss turns the spotlight on the local-level commonalities and specificities among five different communes; and the individual motivations behind the killings are perhaps best captured by Lee Ann Fuji (2009). In her commentary on each of the foregoing Vidal raises important questions about the issues that still need to be explored, and by what kinds of methodologies. Especially arresting are her conclusive thoughts, in which she draws from the works of Jacques Revel and Giovanni Levi on the epistemology of micro-histories: one of the key issues, she argues, is to comprehend the process by which causal reconfigurations are shaped by the manner in which grass- roots realities are perceived or observed ("les échelles d'observation").

The Local Dynamics of Mass Murder

Scott Straus's *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda* must be seen as a landmark in the social science scholarship on Rwanda. His argument revolves around the mutually reinforcing interactions between the racial myths surrounding issues of ethnicity, the role of the state as an instrument of power, and the civil war as a key contextual variable. The double entendre quality of "order" appears deliberate: genocide as involving orders from above, but also a certain logic. Obeying orders is not to be confused with blind obedience; it is better understood as a rational choice based on the risks involved in refusing to comply with the hard liners incitements to violence. "What the evidence suggests", he writes, "is that acute insecurity and orders from above ignited a categorical logic of race and ethnicity". Neighbors became enemies in war and under the authorities direction (p. 173). He shows how the collective fears born of the civil war, reached a new pitch of intensity with the crash of Habyarimana's plane, thus opening a space of opportunity for power struggles at the local level, while drastically transforming perceptions of "the other". The transition from civil war to

genocide is indeed inseparable from what must be seen as the tipping point in the process of escalation: the shooting down of Habyarimana's plane. One of the striking conclusions to emerge from Straus's interviews with convicted killers is their near unanimous perception of that event as the moment when Tutsi are globally defined as the enemy: "I understood that the Tutsi was the enemy because the president had died" ; "If (the RPF) had not killed the president there would have been no killing" ; "The origin of this is the death of Habyarimana" (Straus 2006a, 39, 40, 46). Although radicalization and violence had been building up long before, with the crash of the presidential plane a critical threshold was crossed that marked the shift to genocide. In the constellation of factors behind "le passage à l'acte" (Sémelin 2005), this is the one that most starkly framed the logic of the security dilemma: either we'll kill them first, or else we'll be killed.

On the basis on open-ended interviews with local respondents and prison inmates Straus pieces together a captivating narrative of the local struggles that presided over the capture of power at the communal level. In one of his most illuminating chapters the author turns the spotlight on local dynamics and shows why, so far from being a sudden, uniformly orchestrated butchery, the genocide is best understood as the outcome of "a play for power among Hutu" (p. 65). Out of the deadly confrontations between moderates and extremists a pattern emerges, where violence spread as a cascade of tipping points, and each tipping point was the outcome of local, intra-ethnic contests for dominance (p. 93). On the basis of data drawn from five communes (Gafunzo, Kayove, Kanzense, Musambira and Giti), the author identifies the processes through which genocidal violence penetrated communal arenas: mobilization from above by civilian authorities, intra-communal challenge to existing authorities by subordinates, military mobilization of civilian authorities and local elites, and invasion from outside the commune either to remove or pressure recalcitrant officials. (p. 66). Seen through the prism of these intra-mural struggles the Rwanda genocide thus unfolds as a deadly competition for power among Hutu, rather than as a straightforward Hutu-Tutsi confrontation. Much the same conclusion emerges from his discussion of the genocidaires and their motivations: from all the evidence intra-Hutu pressures and out-group fear or revenge were the major variables, with radio incitements to commit murder, the benefits of looting, and ethnic enmities assuming secondary significance. With exemplary methodological sophistication, ranging from regression analyses to triangulation, and lengthy citations from his interviews, the author conclusively demonstrates the central role played by intra-Hutu threats in the spectrum of motivations behind the killings.

Many of the theories spawned by the Rwanda case end up demolished, casualties of Straus's probe into the dynamics of violence. One after another, the author refutes (or seriously qualifies) the notion of a planned total genocide, the myth of long-standing ethnic hatreds, the contention that the ideology of genocide propagated by the media lies at the heart of the killings, the cliché phrase of a culture of obedience. While opening up new critical perspectives on the Rwanda genocide, on some specific points questions arise. This is particularly true of the chapter on Rwanda's Leviathan, which brings out the role of the state in the killings. Of the historic centrality of the Rwandan state system, and its enduring relevance through the colonial and post-colonial period, there can be no doubt. Whether the genocide can be seen as conclusive proof of the efficacy of the strong state syndrome is debatable, however. Indeed much of the evidence set forth by the author in his analysis of the challenges faced by hard-liners at the local level suggests a rather weaker state than some might imagine. In the days immediately following the crash of the presidential plane the Rwandan Leviathan was effectively shot to bits, opening a "space of opportunity" occupied by non-state actors. True, in matter of days, an interim government came into being, which proceeded to re-appropriate what was left of the lame Leviathan; but surely this new state system, propped up by gangs of killers and army men, was a far cry from the republican mwamiships of Kayibanda and Habyarimana.

The book, however, is thin on references to the plethora of works by Rwandans - ranging from eyewitness accounts to court testimonies and first person narratives. Admittedly, this literature is of uneven quality, but it is illustrative of how the experience of genocide has been perceived and internalized by victims and actors. An unfortunate omission, given the author's special attention to the case of Giti - the only commune where genocide did not happen - is Léonard Nduwayo's account (Nduwayo 2002), which offers a different interpretation of the Giti exception: for Nduwayo, a native of Giti, the absence of violence there is traceable to the specificity of the commune's socio-historical context, and therefore has little to do with the timely arrival of the RPF, as Straus argues. If anything, says Nduwayo, the worst killings were committed after the arrival of the RPF, mostly in the form of revenge killings. The case of Giti remains something of an enigma.

Again, despite his efforts to lay bare the killers social background characteristics and motivations, the author has relatively little to say about the individual profiles of the murderous big men who set in motion the wheels of the killing machine, their connections to the militias and communal authorities. Repeated references to faceless "hardliners" (the term appears like a leitmotiv in the conclusion) prompts further questions about their social identities, resource-base, mobilizing strategies, local and regional ties: while there is little question about the central role played by the Bagosoras, Nziroreras, and Ngirumpatses, to cite but the most notorious, in orchestrating the carnage, little is said of the networks through which collective violence became operational at the communal and prefectural level. This is where Guichaoua's anatomy of mass murder in Butare fills some important gaps in the Strausian frame of analysis.

"Struggles for Power at the Top"

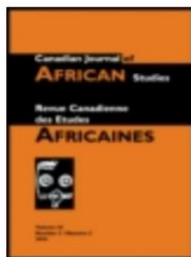
The closest we come to an understanding of how local nets linked up with the bosses in charge of running the killing machine is found in Guichaoua's *Rwanda 1994: Les politiques du génocide à Butare*, an analysis of how the genocide came into effect in the southern prefecture of Butare despite considerable initial resistance (Guichaoua 2005). Central to his analysis is the detailed description of the political trajectories of certain key local actors, how they were able to establish close personal links among themselves, and with armed networks, the latter ranging from armed refugees from Burundi to presidential guards, gendarmes and party militias. He shows how the leading actors involved in the killings (including the omnipresent Pauline Nyiramasuhuko and Callixte Kalimanzira) were able to overcome the resistance of the Tutsi prefect by mobilizing radical support groups through patron-client ties running from the capital city to Butare and its environs. The result is a remarkably instructive case study of the politics of genocide at the prefectural level. Guichaoua's conclusion is consistent with the pattern described by Straus in his discussion of how outside intervention helped neutralize local resistance, but it paints a much fuller picture of the mobilization strategies employed by certain key personalities to transform the territorial administration into obedient clienteles of the killers. The wealth of empirical data unearthed by Guichaoua thus provides a crucially important addendum to Straus's chapter on "local dynamics".

The role of agency in the genocide is the subject of his more recent work, *Rwanda: De la guerre au génocide. Les politiques criminelles au Rwanda (1990-1994)*, now available in English in a much reduced version as *From War to Genocide : Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990-1994* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2015). Besides calling into question many of the assumptions underlying the literature on the genocide, including the notion of a carefully premeditated, long-standing plan to annihilate the Tutsi population, the book offers a detailed analysis of how the context of civil war, political and military, helps us understand the dynamics of mass murder. His argument draws heavily from the documents and testimonies presented before the ICTR, and interviews with key actors. Furthermore, the author brings to his subject the benefit of years of observation of the politics of the Great Lakes region as well as his experience on the ground on the fateful date of April 6 1994. His book is an invitation to take a fresh look at the events leading to the genocide.

In contrast with most other works on the subject the author goes to great lengths to analyze the internal discords and rivalries that accompanied the decision to engage in a total genocide. He distinguishes among the different phases leading to the ultimate catastrophe, beginning with politicide as the preface to genocide, i.e. the killing of opposition government officials and civil servants by elements of the presidential guard, including the prime minister; this first phase was immediately followed by the informal meeting of the army high command, the setting up of a military crisis committee, and the appointment of an interim government. Through each phase massacres of Tutsi civilians went on, with the militias doing all the "work". Not until April 12, when the interim government moved to Gitarama, did the genocide option win the day against the pacification policy advocated by the interim authorities. What clinched this decision was the ability of a small group of extremists to gain full control over the militias and the army. Directly involved in this "final solution" strategy were Joseph Nzirorera and Mathieu Ndirumpatse, respectively national secretary and president of the ruling party, along with Théoneste Bagosora, chef de cabinet in the Ministry of Defense. As the author convincingly demonstrates, among the many bearing responsibility for the extermination of over half a million Tutsi, those three deserve pride of place.

What the book shows is not the absence of planning behind the killings, but the somewhat improvised, belated attempt at planning made by a handful of actors to organize a final solution, against the consensus of the pro-pacification moderates. The Rwanda genocide thus emerges as a process involving a convergence of factors and circumstances, but whose outcome was by no means foreordained by the existence of a long-standing conspiracy to kill all the Tutsi. What comes into focus out of the welter of personalities, institutions, faction, bloody encounters and settlements of accounts described by the author is not the image of an all-powerful state rooted in the pre-colonial past but the crucial role played by individual personalities. Agency, in short, is the name of the game. No one trying to get a handle on the complexity of the Rwanda tragedy can ignore this monumental addition to the existing literature.

7. Bert Ingelaere, From War To Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990–1994; Humanitarian Aid, Genocide and Mass Killings: Médecins Sans Frontières, The Rwandan Experience, 1982–97, Book Review, *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, 7 October 2018.



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From War To Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990–1994; Humanitarian Aid, Genocide and Mass Killings: Médecins Sans Frontières, The Rwandan Experience, 1982–97

Bert Ingelaere

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BOOK REVIEW

From War To Genocide: Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990–1994, by André Guichaoua, Madison, USA, University of Wisconsin Press, 2015, lx + 416 pp.

Humanitarian Aid, Genocide and Mass Killings: Médecins Sans Frontières, The Rwandan Experience, 1982–97, by Jean-Hervé Bradol and Marc Le Pape, Manchester, UK, Manchester University Press, 2017, x + 146 pp.

Although much has been written on the 1994 genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda, two recent volumes offer fresh perspectives and add considerable insights. Guichaoua's *From War to Genocide. Criminal Politics in Rwanda 1990-1994* takes the reader deep into the belly of the beast. The book describes and analyzes the *real politics* of the politics of genocide based on extraordinary detailed evidence with respect to the strategies and tactics of key military and political players. Bradol and Le Pape's *Humanitarian Aid, Genocide and Mass Killings. Médecins Sans Frontières. The Rwandan Experience, 1982-97* offers a unique understanding of the consequences of this murderous political game from the point of view of humanitarian aid workers in general and the NGO Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières - MSF) in particular.

At times political thriller, at times personal witness, *From War to Genocide* is above all a rigorous historical account of one of the biggest tragedies of the 20th century. Guichaoua combines his deep understanding of the Rwandan cultural, economic and socio-political context – building on scholarly expertise as well as a vast network of sources acquired before the nineties – with the insights he developed as expert witness for the International Criminal Tribunal For Rwanda (ICTR).

The book contains thirteen chapters and a conclusion. The first six chapters cover the period preceding April 6 1994, the moment the presidential plane was shot over the skies of Kigali. An event immediately followed by the start of the killings. This first part of the book is about political power and how (not) to share it. Rwanda's political landscape fragmented with the introduction of a multiparty system (chapter 3) and the start of the civil war with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in October 1994 (chapter 2). A multitude of actors jockeyed for power, previously exclusively held by a single political party, the Mouvement révolutionnaire national pour le développement (MRND) and, in particular, the presidential clan hailing from the north of the country. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 deal with the so-called Arusha negotiations and agreements. Interestingly, Guichaoua's rich information allows for a detailed analysis of the fissures, differences and shifting alliances within what are often considered to be monolithic blocs of actors.

"In reality, there was a "third" and a "fourth" force, one aligned with the "hardliners" of the mouvance présidentielle, the other aligned with the RPF, each situated at opposite ends of the political continuum. The only thing they had in common was their opposition to the Arusha Peace Accords (70)."

In the background of this first part looms the question that stands at the heart of the chapters (7 to 12) that follow: was there a plan to commit genocide? In fact, Guichaoua comes to the

conclusion that planning – for instance in analogy to what is known about the Holocaust – did not exist in the case of Rwanda. This is the most revealing and controversial claim of the book since it challenges the dominant narrative on the origins and execution of the genocide against Tutsi. That narrative suggest that the extermination of the Tutsi has foundational dimensions dating back to colonial influences and Rwanda's independence in the sixties. This genocidal project reached its organizational climax in the early nineties with all the necessary ingredients: propaganda, training of militia, distribution of weapons, mobilization of the population and the identification, separation and extermination of the targeted group. Instead, Guichaoua concludes: "In fact, leaving aside partisan arguments and a posteriori evidence, it is difficult to demonstrate the existence of a genocidal "conspiracy", to delineate stages in its unfolding, and to specifically identify its participant and practical organization. (231-32)" Evidently, the author does not claim there was no genocide but he takes aim at the questions of 'conspiracy' and 'planning'. In doing so, he follows the main thrust of the legal reasoning of the judges at the ICTR where key figures like Colonel Bagosora were convicted for genocide crimes but not for (conspiracy in) its planning. Why? "If the theory of the masterminds appears so weak today, it is because the day-to-day genocide was the product of multifarious decisions that cannot be traced back to a single "proponent" or to a timeless project (303)." And this is what the book lays bare to the bone, namely how a combination of what are contingent factors came together in a complex political chess game that ultimately resulted in a policy of genocide.

Bradol and Le Pape allow the reader to perceive the unfolding of this policy of genocide and its aftermath "through the eyes of field teams' members" (1), meaning the teams of humanitarian aid organizations. Also here, the book can be read from different angles: it's a political sociology of aid organizations, a contribution to the historical record of the genocide and mass killings that engulfed central Africa in the nineties and, foremost, an invitation to reflect on the ethical challenges at the heart of humanitarian intervention. The authors make their objectives clear from the start:

"How to comprehend, in the midst of an emergency, the political and social dynamics unique to each situation of extreme violence? How to avoid falling victim to or becoming accomplices of criminal forces? How to remain effective in such situations? (13)".

They aim to answer these question by mainly relying on available archives of MSF and personal testimony of humanitarian aid workers.

The book has four chapters, an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter provides the historical background with a discussion of the genesis of the Rwandan Patriotic Front in Uganda's refugee camps. This chapter also deals with the unfolding of the genocide policy. In line with the authors' objectives, all of this is discussed from the perspective of humanitarian aid workers. A central concern is whether, why and how decisions with huge ethical ramifications were made:

"The dilemma was as simple as it was cruel: agree to support the work carried out in these facilities [hospitals and camps] at the risk of being caught up in spiral of violence or refuse to work and deprive those trying to survive there of outside help (32)."

A key notion emerging in this first chapter is the camp. To no surprise since humanitarian work is closely tied with refugees and displaced people who are generally grouped together in camps in times of mass violence. The camp is therefore also omnipresent in the chapters dealing with the aftermath of the genocide. Chapter 2 focuses on the work of humanitarian organizations in the vast camps in Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire at the time) where millions of Rwandans had sought refuge fleeing the genocide and, mostly, the advancing RPF troops. Chapter 3 shifts attention to the situation inside Rwanda and especially also the camps of internally displaced Hutus but also pays attention to the situation in prisons

and the efforts to contribute to rebuilding the country's health infrastructure. Chapter 4 deals with the violent emptying of the camps in the Congo and the flight of refugees deep into the forests of the Congo.

Two important observations emerge from these chapters. First, humanitarian aid agencies – despite their claims of neutrality - (need to take) decisions of a deep political nature. Does one assist refugees in the camps bordering Rwanda knowing that the leadership that had executed the genocide had a considerable influence over the camps' population and their organization (chapter 2)? Does and how does one speak out against the massacre of several thousands of people by RPF forces and the increasing repression inside Rwanda knowing that the new power holders wielded considerable international influence for having halted the genocide (chapter 3)? How not to be misused by military actors hunting down refugees in the dense forests of the Congo (chapter 4)? Second, although it's not their main task, humanitarian aid workers are also the record keepers of history. The events described in chapters 2, 3 and 4 are officially denied – or at least downplayed – by those responsible and have never found a decent international, regional or national response, namely to hold perpetrators accountable or recognize the victims. But the records of humanitarian aid agencies and testimony of their workers makes sure these events did not vanish into thin air.

Both books show how archives – whether from tribunals or aid agencies - are an important tool to thicken the historical record, also for the understanding of mass killings. But here lies also the limitation of both works. The ICTR gathered evidence in order to satisfy specific standards of proof. A tribunal is not a truth commission. And the focus of the humanitarian reports is primarily the victims, their sheer number and whereabouts as well as their health condition. The authors are well aware of these limitations and discuss the strength and weaknesses of their sources and aptly reflect on their shifting roles of researchers, witness or humanitarian.

When you think you understand the unfolding of the Rwandan genocide, read *From War to Genocide* and you will have to reconsider much of what has become taken for granted. Readers with varying interest will find what they need. The (un)making of peace agreements, Rwanda's political culture, how genocide policy develops, the *passage à l'acte* in cases of mass violence, the definition of genocide or the working of international criminal tribunals, the book covers a vast terrain. When you think the work of the staff of humanitarian aid agencies is pretty straightforward, namely saving lives, read *Humanitarian Aid, Genocide and Mass Killings* and you will start to appreciate their complex navigation of what Primo Levi called the grey zone of saving while equally being part of doing harm. The book is an invitation to further develop this awareness and provide some clues for doing things differently for upcoming complex emergencies around the globe.

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