

## The Anatomy of Violence: Terror, Ethnogenesis and Factionalism in the Great Lakes

**By Mads Fleckner**

*„And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die... For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from of the face off the earth.”<sup>1</sup>*

One of the first written and documented crimes against humanity on a large scale is found in the bible. In the Old Testament god is disappointed with his creation and wants to make a clear cut and start all over with a selected species of man, namely Noah. Would it live up to the derogatory term of genocide?

This is not intended to go deeper into a historical religious debate but simply rise and motivate the question of the nature of violence as an instrument for moral and political attainments.

The globalization with its rapid transferring of information and the shameful experiences of instrumentalized violence of mankind throughout history has painfully compelled the need of a paradigm shift from legitimate violence to legitimate politics; a game that includes the export of the idea of democracy, human rights and trade as stabilizing factors in a still intractable world.

In the case of Africa the future will show to what extend the Western Powers will succeed in their developmental intensions (or the lack of it) with the inevitable consequence that the most of the continent will have to go through a process of evolution on an extremely compressed time scale that request the necessity of a viable all-embracing political design from the very start.

It is the author's intension with this paper to analyze the phenomena of violence carried out by groups or nations, and its moral and political intensions through comparisons by selected cases from the Sub-Saharan African continent. This is because the phenomenon of political group violence is one of the worst producers of death, famine and mass deceases, and thereby one of the major key obstacles towards the political construction of those regions.

### **Ethnogenesis and Ethnic Politics: A Deadly Tool**

One important factor that is a major element in this Sub-Saharan region is that the time just before and after independence created some circumstances and root causes that is the bitter fact of today's events. The tensions between the Tutsi and Hutu are a case in point. The two major groups are spread through out the Great Lakes region and has fuelled the ongoing conflict endlessly to an extend that makes the conflict an evil spiral with an ever self birth giving violently outcome.

Ethnicity and the creation of myth have served as an important and crucial instrument of violence in many conflicts. One can not neglect the fact that the Great Lakes area in Sub-Saharan

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible: numbers 1.38 – 1.39.

Africa leaves out no exception on this matter. In post second world war time the Rwandan Genocide on an estimated 800.000 ethnic Tutsis seems to overshadow any other war crime up to date. Still the involved politicians and decision makers around the international community are evaluating their actions (and defectiveness) during those horrible months in the spring and summer of 1994. The question that arises incontrovertibly from the dust of this event is: how could this have been carried out with such a “success”, and to such a magnitude? And: how could it have been prevented?

To answer the last one first, it is clear now that a number of warning signals was ignored from the international community, and that USA, because of the “chock” in Somalia (1992 – 94), had fought their last war on African soil<sup>2</sup>. Further more the Balkan conflict in the backyard of Europe had become a fully grown war that left the European decision makers perplexed and divided that to a certain extend let to some kind of irresolution that again let to the interference of the USA. After all it is possible not far from reality that nobody around the international community could imagine the magnitude of the outcome in death tolls; it was simply to imaginable that an act of strictly organized crime aimed at one group of the Rwandan society on that scale could happen.

How the genocide could have been carried out to such a large extend must be seen in a broader context of conflicting elements that includes the whole area of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC. Despite an attempt from Rwandan side to make claims on parts of the two bordering eastern Congolese regions of South- and North Kivu with basis on borderlines from pre-colonial time, the two dominating ethnic groups, Hutu and Tutsi, are spread over this area. During the Belgian colonial period (1908 – 1960 in the case of DRC, and 1916 – 1962 in the case of Rwanda) in Rwanda the small minority of Tutsi was given advantages such as jobs in the colonial administration and access to land that led the Tutsi population to an advantageous position in the Rwandan society. This historical rooted social imbalance has created a gab between the two dominate ethnic groups that came to an outbreak of violence in the 59’ rebellion in Rwanda. An estimated 200.000 Tutsi people fled to the bordering countries and settled there permanently. This ethnic group is often referred to as the Tutsi “fifty niners”, or the Banyamulenge Tutsi. The Tutsi diaspora have showed great skills in political organising, a quality that often have provided them with great power opportunities to make political influence on their homelands as well as their host countries. The Hutu are as well spread through out these regions and this has led to a geographical extension of the conflict.

Largely overseen and to a certain extend overshadowed by the Rwandan genocide in 1994 is the killings of approximately 100.000 – 200.000 Hutu by the Tutsi in Burundi 1972. What has made the investigations of genocides difficult have been the complete denial from both sides according to the intensions of killings (or elimination of the other group).

### **Factionalism, fragile borders and stateless societies**

To understand the nature of group violence in African conflicts one must look deeper into the concept of factionalism. What indeed has made the area around the Great Rift Valley the worst conflict tormented area on the African continent is the complexity created by alliances of military and political origins. No other African region has managed to put up with death tolls like the ones here. The genocidal scenarios have been a constant factor since the early days of independence in the early sixties.

The motivations for young people to join the conflicts are the simple fact of anger and alienation from the surrounding society. War thorn regions like the Great Lakes neither does nor

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<sup>2</sup> USA had no major economic interests in Africa, and wasn’t prepared for major casualties. They received unexpected resistance from the Somalian soldiers that resulted in a decision to withdraw and more or less leave the African muddle to others.

present a range of possibilities for education or jobs. There is a large group of unemployed young people who struggles not only for basic needs, but is faced with the reality of an uncertain future without the prospect of acknowledgement or recognition from their surroundings. Furthermore, when faced with the more or less failed national politics and an economically vacuum, joining a local militia seems like a rational choice. As a case in point the economically profit made out of exploitation of the mineral resources (especially in DRC) doesn't provide tax money for making schools but are disappearing in the pockets of local elites as warlords and local business men.

The Marginalisation and urbanization as a consequence of the globalization has created a radical change in the social landscape. Things that in the past seemed important as traditional values of families and identity have suffered a severe breakdown with a sense of nihilism as a consequence<sup>3</sup>.

It is also not to be neglected that the simple fact of being in possession of a Kalashnikov and the power that follows has a certain quality among those young people (in fact all people). People respect you and are scared enough to give you all you want. The frustrations of having no prospects of establishing a family and getting married because of the lack of social and economically status are easily replaced by a "just take what you want".

Examples of youth militias are many. The Mai Mai in Eastern DRC is a faction that consists of a variety of young combatants with different backgrounds and origins, and has been used by the former president Laurent Kabila in his fighting against the Rwandan intervention in DRC from 96. A faction that calls them selves Simba (Lion on Swahili) is another example, and is originated further south in the Katanga province. The most mysterious phenomenon of violent factions must be the Lords Resistance Army operating in Northern Uganda. It is headed by Joseph Coney who is guilty of mass killings, rapes and other war crimes on a large scale against innocent civilians. It has its name because of its interpretation of the Ten Commandments. It was created out of Alice Akwema's Holy Spirit Movement and almost succeeded in taking over the power in Uganda in 2002. It is actually listed as a terrorist group.

In the case of Eastern DRC another fact to take notice of is that the game condition of the conflict and the scenario of actors, strongmen etc. have changed significantly since 1996 where the present DRC-conflict started. The arisen of the stateless societies in the eastern zones of the country is an outcome of the national power shift in the Congolese government, but has during the years developed into some more local and individual based agendas motivated by the prospects of economically, military and political power.

The national agendas and strategies that once gave birth to the conflict has transformed into individual warfare where politics are military based, based on violence, and driven by profit<sup>4</sup>. This has created a fragmentation in the political landscape, and by this the conflict is complex. The Eastern parts of DRC has been a breeding ground for warlordism and have served as a perfect shelter for the creation of factions with the outcome of violent militarized politics influencing the whole area around the Great Lakes. This has partly been possible because of the failure from the central government in Kinshasa to control and administrate those regions with the result of parallel political structures to the ones in the capitol Kinshasa that are based on local elites such as powerful businessmen and military leaders.

Another key element is that the overpopulated Rwanda with an estimated 8 millions inhabitants, and also to some extend Burundi with its 6 millions sees the fertile soil in DRC as an attractive alternative for getting more space to rural cultivation. This problem based on the simple

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<sup>3</sup> Moeller, Bjoern: "Angry Young Men and Africa's Violent Conflicts", in: *Angry Young Men? Globalization, marginalization and mobilization* (2004), pp. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Vlassenroot, Koen: "The Formation of Centres of Profit, Power and Protection, Conflict and Social Transformation in Eastern DR Congo (2005), pp. 5.

question of space is especially influential on those two countries because the local economies are based on agricultural profits and thereby the urgent need for agricultural space.

Another fact of the conflicting elements is the fragile borders. A recent example was the case of the strike on the Gatumba transit centre in the bordering Burundi August 13. 2004 on 163 ethnic Banyamulenge Tutsi presumably by Hutu militants (the Interahamwe) living in exile in DRC. Besides the constant ethnic hatred some of the refugee camps in the region are simply placed too close to the national borders, and have not been placed at least in a distance of 100 kilometres away as the international guidelines prescribe. Secondly the refugee camps have served as recruitment bases for the Rwandan Interahamwe militia and other military factions. And thirdly the MONUC<sup>5</sup> has simply failed to control the national borders properly mostly because of undermanned power (most important for arms-trafficking and troops-transportation).

The tensions between DRC and neighbouring Rwanda produce a constant threat of partly interventions as was the case in June 2004 when a Rwandan backed faction of 2-3000 soldiers headed by two Rwandan renegade commanders, took over the city of Bukavu in South Kivu in DRC from June 2 to June 9. The MONUC was unprepared for this event and could only muster 600 troops which resulted in a complete surrender of that town.

Taking into consideration that Paul Kagame's strong (Tutsi-) leadership and his holdings in at least 10 mines in DRC, and that the basic economy of the Rwandan capital Kigali is based on DRC-resources, a full scale intervention from the Rwandan side is not a fanciful notion. A possible violent outcome of the tensions is further more likely to become a reality, when taking into account the aftermath of the Rwandan 94-genocide in consideration. Besides the killings the number of refugees spread to the neighbouring countries has changed the socioeconomic balance drastically, as is the case of the other ethnic killings and rates on civilians that appear from time to time in that region. By example the key argument in August 2004 from a high ranked Rwandan officer was that if not DRC could track down the Hutu militia, Interahamwe, that had been the main perpetrators during the Rwandan 94' genocide, and now hiding on Congolese territory, "Rwanda must go in and take them out"<sup>6</sup>; this has actually often been the main argument from the Rwandan side in their partly time-to-time occupying, while the underlying reasons are based on the profitable situation that the Congolese chaos have provided in extracting DRC-resources.

The provinces of Ituri and North and South Kivu are highly explosive areas with ongoing disputes among ethnicities and groups about land ownership, access to mineral resources and political participation in decision making. According to some observers the peace process never had the expected impact on the eastern parts of the country. Ethnic clashes continuously break out. One of the reasons for these violent conditions on the DRC side are the continuous mass-killings between combatants and on innocent civilians. The old hatred and tensions between the Hema and Lendu tribes, who also are related to the Tutsi and Hutu, erupted in a large scale killing in 1999 where the first wave of violence killed 7000 people and resulted in 150.000 refugees and displaced persons in the neighbouring regions and countries.

The physical condition for the possibilities of such local actions is also provided by the international community represented by UN in the area. The establishing of refugee camps and the concentration of displaced persons creates some problems in general. It changes the social and economic landscape dramatically, and dissolves the once existing social and economic structures into a complete dependence of external actors as the aid organizations and UN.

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<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

<sup>6</sup> Official statement from Rwandan military officer (...).

## The Eclipse of Peace

In many ways the game of peace-building is lost when conflicts arises. One might state that the options of peace have seriously declined as soon as tensions between groups of people occur. The key word of modern conflict resolution must however be prevention. Conflict-prevention is undoubtedly the most successful peace solution, which introduces the ultimate elimination of expensive, and violently behaviour<sup>7</sup>.

The international community with its hi tech apparatus has generated and traditionalized a culture of reaction as a simple stimulus/response reaction to appearances; an idea caused out from centuries of military and warfare thinking. The real and utmost important obstacle in the perspective of future peace-building is to transform this historical fostered way of thinking and instead develop a culture of prevention through the creation of a wider political environment aimed on including the grass root level to a larger extend.

Studies and statistics of conflicts show that 40 percent of ended conflicts world wide occur again<sup>8</sup>. Civil wars ended by negotiated settlements are more likely to lead to the recurrence of armed conflict than those ended by military victories. On the other hand those ended by military victories are more likely to lead to genocide<sup>9</sup>.

These features of genocidal violence on a large scale and its moral motives throw long shadows backwards. But they are likewise casting long shadows into the future, and become the crucial factor that terminates whether it shall reiterate it self. About the inevitable question of guilt it appears to be subtler than a clear line that separates the good ones from the bad ones. René Lemarchand has expressed it very exact:

*„The hope that the full truth and nothing but the truth will eventually emerge from the record is a chimera; what is anything but fanciful, however, is the notion that enough will be known about the facts of genocide to bring out the underlying moral truth – that there are no good guys and bad guys lined up on each side of an ethnic fault line, only more criminals on one side than the other, and more innocents than criminals on both sides”*<sup>10</sup>

The ongoing conflict in DRC and Sudan carries some elements of genocide because some of the killings are carried out against groups of people with a specific ethnic affiliation. What is positive on the side of the international community is that both conflicts are on the agenda of the ICC<sup>11</sup>. What is “positive” about the Rwandan 94’genocde is that it placed the small country of Rwanda on the international community’s political map, and generated an interest among researchers and journalists on the African peculiarity of violent phenomena.

The militarized violent conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi and ex-Yugoslavia have to a certain extend been brought to an end; but what not has been brought to an end is the political unwillingness among the contending parties to seek the true root causes for the ethno political tensions and an ongoing process of understanding put into a larger political context which emphasizes the opinions among the civil population. Somehow it seems like the motivations for genocidal actions are still present, and fills the aftermath of those genocidal conflicts.

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<sup>7</sup> The term ‘conflict’ is in this context interpreted as ‘violent conflict’; Conflicts in general does not necessarily include violence and may in some cases lead to new and better solutions for the conflicting parts.

<sup>8</sup> Number given by International Crisis Group.

<sup>9</sup> Licklider in: *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflict* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999). pp. 154.

<sup>10</sup> Lemarchand, René: “Comparing the Killing Fields: Rwanda, Cambodia and Bosnia”, in: *Genocide: Cases, Comparisons and Contemporary Debates* (2003), pp. 171.

<sup>11</sup> ICC – International Criminal Court.

The breeding ground for ethnocentricity is still a factor that is permeated with hatred. It is, like some have described it a “growing tumour and spreading like cancer”. This has become the true obstacle for fundamental peace and stability in the political and economical fragile regions that the Sub-Saharan Africa presents.

### **The Question of Genocide**

To end this discussion about these violent issues it is relevant to take a look at the UN Genocide Convention and its definition of the crime of Genocide in its article II.

*Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:*

- (a) Killings members of the group;*
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;*
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
- (d) Imposing measures to prevent births within the group;*
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.*

The issue of genocide is interesting according to the responsibility of the international community represented in UN, and other international institutions. Where the term of ‘ethnic cleansing’ (as seen in the Balkan conflict) not necessarily includes killings, but might include violence (and/or killings as well as deportations or mass displacements) to scare groups of people to move out of targeted areas the act of genocide includes the intention of reducing the number of a group with a common ethnic affiliation.

The high rate of rapes is a noticeable factor in the Great Lakes conflicts as well as in all other African conflicts, and is a highly “successful” instrument for violent perpetrators in gaining power. It is as well relevant in the discussion of the definition of genocide. Sex can and has been used as a political instrument since it is directed towards the female gender that is in position of the reproduction and the symbolizing of the nation<sup>12</sup>. The mix of violence and sex is not only an instrument capable of paralyzing a whole civilian population and villages, but can also be seen as young men’s frustration and anger canalized out in sadistic tendencies in a symbiosis with pure regular horniness.

In the creation of the definitions of genocide a very narrow set of definitions has been generated. Ironically the issues of political persecutions are not included in the convention, probably because it simply will open up for a range of possibilities of prosecutorial scenarios that could be aimed at the most powerful nations represented in the UN.

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<sup>12</sup> Moeller, Bjoern: “Angry Young Men and Africa’s violent Conflicts”, in: *Angry Young Men? Globalization, marginalization and mobilization* (2004), pp. 20.