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The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to  
Zaire (review)

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Neither of these volumes could have been written but for the dogged grantsmanship of a small caucus of amateur gay historians in Berlin. Against all odds, they succeeded in securing generous underwriting from agencies such as the German Lottery and from the European Union. Such funding was essential for the investigation of the literally thousands of files that only a team could master, and it is unlikely to be repeated in the near future. We should therefore salute the enterprising authors of these contributions to our understanding of a complex issue.

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***The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire*, Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 414 pp., cloth \$49.95, pbk. \$29.95.**

The horrendous genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994 evoked enormous passions. Written in the immediate aftermath of that catastrophe, these essays show both the strengths and the weaknesses of writing in such an environment. This volume intends “to explain the failure of the international community to intervene and prevent or mitigate the genocide” (p. xviii); therefore, some of the strongest chapters concentrate on topics, actors, and institutions outside Rwanda, rather than on the genocide itself.

As with many collected works of this type, the output is of varying quality: in places the positions are partisan and lacking in nuance, and the work shows signs of hasty production. (For example, there are numerous misspellings of names of persons, places, and ethnic groups, sometimes even within the same sentence.) Nonetheless, this work possesses two great strengths. The first is a moral strength: a thorough recognition of the overwhelming importance of understanding genocide, as a political, cultural, and moral marker of human behavior. The second is an intellectual strength: an emphasis on the range of factors that must be accounted for—in this case some of the best and most original chapters deal with the regional and international factors.

Two chapters by Ogenga Otunnu are particularly insightful in addressing the Ugandan origins and subsequent evolution of the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a Rwandan refugee movement whose leaders are now the power holders in postgenocide Rwanda. These analyses discuss divisions within the refugee community, the refugees’ changing relations with the Ugandan state, and the complex factors accounting for the timing of the October 1990 attack on Rwanda by the RPF, an event critical to later developments. Two subsequent chapters, covering events in Zaire and Rwanda from the 1960s, illustrate how the passions of the postgenocide period can detract from historical analysis: they read more as partisan political tracts than as analytic histories.

By contrast, Frank Chalk provides an informative, well-researched, and clearly presented demonstration of how “hate” media in Rwanda were involved directly in orchestrating the killings. It does not sacrifice commitment for being also reasoned. Yet

this chapter might have been more powerful had it been juxtaposed with a later chapter, by Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus, on the U.S. media. By their very contrast—one of the chapters discusses media as a force mobilizing people to kill, the other views it as an impediment to peace—these two essays illustrate the powerful effects of the media, near and far, on the Rwandan genocide. The chapter on the American media shows how the lack of informed reporters, the physical obstacles to reporting, and viewers' ignorance combined to prevent adequate coverage of the destruction and therefore to deny any popular groundswell in the United States for political action. With an uncomprehending media presenting the genocide as simply "tribal warfare in Central Africa," the public and the government turned away.

A second section deals with preventative diplomacy. Amare Tekle's chapter on the Organization of African Unity (OAU) shows refreshing candor: "As in much of the rest of its activities, the record of the OAU in conflict resolution has been largely dismal" (p. 111). Though primarily a chronicle, the piece ends with a salutary reminder: "It is not fair to reproach the OAU or to evaluate and scrutinize the activities of the organization in the abstract when it is the member states who decide on its structure, character, functions, and resources" (p. 129). Another chapter, by Bruce Jones, offers an extremely useful analysis of the 1992 Arusha peace process, which, he argues, "was an extraordinary story of a sophisticated conflict resolution process which went disastrously wrong" (p. 136). Drawing both on formal documentation and on interviews with multiple participants, Jones clearly and convincingly shows how two powerful opponents—external invaders and internal extremists—backed the Rwandan government into a corner. Finally, among the two chapters devoted to policies in specific countries, Howard Adelman—writing on Canada—offers a well-argued and balanced analysis showing the importance of "middle powers" in the diplomatic process. Committed to "the principles and practices of peacekeeping" (p. 200), Canada became more deeply engaged than those states for which power alone served as the force guiding international relations. Canada viewed Rwanda as a tragedy; this attitude in itself differentiated that country from the "big" powers.

The final section of the book addresses peacekeeping. By showing how U.S. opposition to augmenting the peacekeeping force made it impossible for the UN to mount an effective presence in Rwanda, Turid Laegreid's useful chapter illustrates (again) that UN policy can be understood only by referring to the policies of its individual member states. Astri Suhrke's analysis of the Belgian role within the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) demonstrates how decisions taken by the Belgian peacekeeping forces became a powerful factor in the genocide. To gain political cover for its withdrawal from the mission, the Belgian government turned to other Western governments (especially the U.S. government, which was all too receptive) to pressure the UN to remove UNAMIR entirely. In the end, Suhrke shows that Western withdrawal was generated by local politics in the Western countries; in the process, these countries largely abandoned Rwandans to their fate.

But cynicism toward the genocide was not a Western monopoly. In a chapter on the search for a new cease-fire after the failure of the Arusha Accords, Jacques Castonguay examines the record of Rwandan actors. In the end, as Castonguay shows, neither side wanted a cease-fire: the RPF sought unencumbered power, while the Rwandan government forces of the day used the war to ensure that masses of Rwandan civilians would follow them into exile and serve as a future threat. Tragically, for both sides, ending the genocide became subordinate to continuing the war, and the number of victims dramatically increased. Cynicism followed upon cynicism, however. Gérard Prunier's chapter on the infamous "Opération Turquoise" shows how the French government tried to preserve its political presence under the guise of a humanitarian initiative. His account testifies to the perfidy, ignorance, and plain egotistical insolence that mark this tragic history.

The final two chapters cover the postgenocidal period. One examines the (contested) record of the UN in the Congo refugee camps. In an unorthodox, but well-informed and ultimately convincing presentation, Kate Halvorsen argues that the UN High Commission for Refugees took "a lead role on security issues when this was necessary to implement its mandate" (p. 320). Abbas Gnama discusses the collapse of the Congolese ruler Mobutu Sese Seko's "kleptocracy" in a chapter written either too soon, or from too far away to account fully for the flimsy façade of rebel leader Laurent Kabila's short flirtation with power in the wake of Mobutu's demise. As with many accounts, this chapter focuses only on the collapse of an already nearly collapsed state, and it misses the meaningful factors—Kabila's dependence on Rwanda made it impossible for him to address the real needs of the Congolese people and the huge human costs of Rwandan occupation of the country. Cloaking themselves in the mantle of victimhood within Rwanda, the new government in Kigali pursued in Congo a policy that looked suspiciously familiar: like a child of an abusive family, the new Rwandan regime perpetuated the atrocities that had marked its own development. As with too many of the essays here, however, this chapter fails to enter deeply enough into the regional dynamics to understand or communicate that underlying reality.

In the end, this book is better for what it tells us of other actors (those outside the region, or "peripheral" within it) than of the principal actors in the immediate region. This caveat aside, it nonetheless offers a valuable contribution. Books are often built upon in time, and this collection provides a good foundation for later construction. Intellectual authority comes piecemeal, and it does so especially in symposia: hence the insightful commentary that marks some of the studies in this book should not be extrapolated to lend authority to all of its chapters. It is an interesting volume, but let the reader beware.

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