

# Rwanda Genocide Took Four Years To Plan

Alex De Waal

The Times, June 18, 1994

The killing in Rwanda is different, in magnitude and nature, from the all-too-familiar scenes from contemporary Africa. It is the ugliest of all human crimes, genocide, committed by Hutu extremists against the Tutsi minority and Hutu who stand for compromise.

Preparations for mass killing began in 1990, when the regime of the late President Habyarimana first faced the simultaneous threats of rebellion by the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the transition to multi-party rule. Starting in 1991, members of the now-notorious interahamwe militia were mobilised from every community in the country.

Pushed by his own hardline coterie, who saw that peace proposals of aid agencies and neighbouring states led inexorably to the loss of their unfettered power and privilege, the President repeatedly stalled. Finally, the extremists mounted their putsch and the United Nations promptly quit.

When the signal was given on the night of April 6-7, the Presidential Guard set about murdering opposition politicians and dissidents, following a prepared list. The senior politicians and generals who are orchestrating the massacres are known, and should be indicted for genocide. However, it does not explain why a small cabal has been able to mobilise thousands of people to hack their neighbours to death simply because they are different.

Their extremist allies are tapping widespread Hutu frustrations and playing on the economic desperation of young peasants. Rwanda is overcrowded to the point of claustrophobia.

At a deeper level, the extremists have used a racist ideology that would be dismissed as laughable were it not so demonically powerful. This has used a discredited racial theory to incite anti-Tutsi violence. The origins of the "Hamitic theory" lie in the refusal of European explorers to believe that

Bantu Africans could have developed sophisticated kingdoms such as pre-colonial Rwanda. Hence they invented a new race of "African Aryans" the Hamites who had supposedly migrated from Ethiopia, bringing civilisation. Colonial rule turned traditional African kingship by the Tutsi elite into a rigid caste system cruel and sanctified by racial theory.

Although it is 35 years since the demise of Tutsi supremacy, the theory lives on, turned round by Hutu extremists to justify killing their erstwhile masters. The reason why thousands of corpses have floated as far as Lake Victoria is that a Hutu ideologue made a well-publicised speech

in 1992, in which he called for the Hutu to "return" the Tutsi to Ethiopia via the short-cut of the Nyabarongo river. This peculiar racial ideology is almost certainly what transformed the crisis into full-scale genocide.

Meanwhile, dictators are watching events, and the international community's response. Revulsion is tempered, in some cases, with admiration for the sheer audacity of what the Hutu extremists are attempting to do. If they succeed, and retain legitimacy, Rwanda is an advertisement for genocide.

Alex de Waal is co-director of African Rights, a human rights organisation based in London.