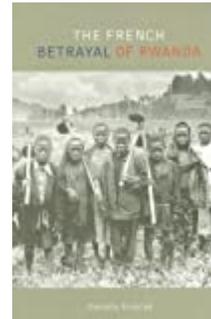




Daniela Kroslak. *The French Betrayal of Rwanda.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. 322 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21974-9.



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Another Book on the West's, and France's, Scandalous Failings during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide

In her book *The French Betrayal of Rwanda*, Daniela Kroslak evaluates the responsibility of the French government for the 1994 Rwandan genocide. France is widely known to have been the closest ally of the Rwandan regime of then-President Juvénal Habyarimana—a regime that planned and carried out, in public, a genocide, which Kroslak convincingly argues the world and the French in particular did virtually nothing to stop.

Kroslak outlines in chapter 1 three pillars for determining responsibility and devotes the bulk of the book to evaluating each of the three, first in the years leading to the genocide and then while the genocide was unfolding. The first pillar is France's knowledge of what was going on, knowledge that she shows was both comprehensive and up to date. The second pillar, France's level of direct involvement, relates to the depth of French relations with the Rwandan government and their exact nature; the French are shown to have had extensive contacts within the Habyarimana regime and demonstrable influence over it, but they remained largely supportive of their Rwandan allies throughout the 1990-94 period.

In this vein, Kroslak chastises France's consistent view of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) Tutsi rebels as external aggressors instead of Rwandan refugees with a potentially legitimate cause to be fighting the Habyarimana regime. The third pillar deals with political and military capacity, both of which were readily available to French decision makers though neither was used to prevent or curb the massacres once they had started. This was the case even after the French military reentered Rwanda to mount a controversial humanitarian operation, Operation Turquoise, in June 1994. Indeed, massacres in the French-controlled Safe Humanitarian Zone did not stop, and armed perpetrators were allowed to circulate freely and ultimately to retreat into eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo [DR Congo]), where they continued the genocide.

From this damning litany she concludes that the French were indeed responsible for crimes of omission and commission in Rwanda. Perhaps naturally, given the emphasis of this book, it is only at this stage that the obvious is stated: that it was not the French them-

selves who held the machetes that killed several hundred thousand Rwandans, but rather other Rwandans. Yet, no matter how different France's responsibility may be from that of a perpetrators', it is a substantial responsibility nonetheless and one that no French official has to date publicly acknowledged. Krosiak includes a spirited but very short critique of the RPF-dominated regime in her last pages. She states that the new authorities in Kigali, whose armed movement won a military victory over the genocidal regime, thus ending the genocide, should not be held to different or more lax international human rights standards by a guilt-ridden international community. Indeed, the RPF government's destabilizing role in eastern DR Congo, which has been at war almost continuously since 1996, and its human rights abuses and authoritarian practices in Rwanda itself, have consistently been overlooked by the United Kingdom and the United States, the RPF's key international partners (diplomatic relations with France, always rocky since 1994, were broken in 2006).

In making the convincing case that the French bear great responsibility for the 1994 genocide, Krosiak is on well-trodden ground: Gérard Prunier's *The Rwanda Crisis* (1995), Alison DesForges's *Leave None to Tell the Story* (1999), Linda Melvern's *A People Betrayed* (2000), and Roméo Dallaire's *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2004) are among the best known English-language books that make similar revelations. Though these books look at the international community's failings more generally, Patrick de Saint-Exupéry wrote the best known French-language book specifically dedicated to examining France's role (*L'inavouable, la France au Rwanda*, published in 2000). And the French Parliament (*Assemblée Nationale*) established a commission of enquiry to look into French actions in Rwanda, which published an extensive (over four hundred pages long) report in 1998, remarkable for the disjuncture between the incriminating facts it uncovers and the anodyne conclusions it reaches regarding French responsibility.[1] Krosiak relies heavily on these and other studies to make key assertions throughout her book. In other words, most of the claims Krosiak makes are not new. Though she does also bring out evidence collected during her own interviews, including with such high-ups as former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (who held the post during the genocide), these do not yield any new revelations that the above-mentioned previously published body of work did not already contain.

The value of Krosiak's study no doubt lies in the non-negligible task of bringing all the evidence pertaining to

France's specific role together, and contextualizing and analyzing it for the reader. In doing this she probably overstates the importance of French fear of Anglophone intrusion into its Francophone sphere of influence as a key motivator for Paris's alliance with the Habyarimana regime. It is more likely that indifference and a lack of vital national interests were much more influential in determining French action and inaction in Rwanda—at least for the bulk of the period under review. She also misses an opportunity to make the important case that ultimately, France's and the international community's record in Rwanda has not engendered any real substantive change in the way diplomacy, economic development cooperation, or military support are carried out. The doctrine of "Responsibility to Protect," which Krosiak curiously does not refer to by name but which she alludes to indirectly several times, remains an aspiration at best, and there has still been no "extension of moral boundaries" of obligations toward all of humanity, as she calls for in her opening pages.[2] There also continues to be an international schizophrenia, about which Krosiak would have been well placed to remark. This schizophrenia allows the international community to look at legalistic agreements between warring parties as progress even as violence and massacres continue to be perpetrated by one or both parties on the ground. Iqbal Riza (head of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations during the genocide) is quoted as saying of the 1994 period, as massacres and preparations for more systematic killings were already known to the United Nations, France, and others: "the conviction was that if they had a political solution, the violence would subside" (p. 94). Such willing disjuncture, between agreements at the negotiating table and facts on the ground, describes perfectly the international community's posture toward the DR Congo throughout 2008, for example.

Lastly, though France's role before and during the genocide is by now well documented by this book and the others mentioned above, there has been to my knowledge no thorough discussion of France's actions since 1994. This would have been worthwhile, particularly given the known complexity and opaqueness of France's ties with African leaders: Why does France continue to host President Habyarimana's widow and known hardliner Agathe Habyarimana and her entourage? What were the dynamics that led to the ambiguous 1998 Parliament report that names France's role but does not appear to shame it? What about judge Jean-Louis Bruguière's arrest warrants against influential RPF leaders for the April 6, 1994, shooting down of the plane carrying Juvénal Habyari-

mana (considered the spark that ignited the genocide and an event for which the RPF blames the French)? And how seriously should we take President Nicolas Sarkozy's announced "rupture" with old Francafrique practices?

A more careful editing job would have been welcomed, as there are enough typos, and some inconsistent information in the annexes, to prove to be a distraction for the reader. Moreover the structure of the book is clunky, with each of the three responsibility pillars being covered in two noncontiguous chapters, one dealing with the run-up to the genocide, the second with the period during the genocide. Overall, the book is nevertheless well written and includes some excellent passages. In her overview of Rwandan history leading up to the genocide (chapter 2), for example, Krosiak renders a nuanced account of the nature and evolution of the Hutu/Tutsi "ethnic" divide under colonial rule (1885-1962) and postindependence dictatorships. Though I have read many such overviews of Rwandan history, hers is both succinct and comprehensive, as well as poignantly written. Her chapter on "What the French Could Have Done" (chapter 9) once the genocide had started is particularly devastating,

because she shows clearly that they could have done a great deal with resources that were not only available but also already present in Rwanda: there is a consensus among military experts, for example, that using the troops present on the ground (the hapless UN peace-keeping troops, United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda) and the French (and Belgian) troops sent to evacuate internationals (which arrived two days after the genocide began, on April 8-9) would have at the very least seriously mitigated the killings if not reversed the course of the genocide altogether. It is difficult to read such passages and remain unmoved.

Notes

[1]. Assemblée Nationale, *Mission d'information commune: Enquête sur la tragédie rwandaise (1990-1994)* (Paris: Assemblée Nationale, 1998).

[2]. On the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine, see International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001).

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