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Daniela Krosiak, *The French Betrayal of Rwanda*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008. 330 pp. Glossary, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-253-21974-9.

Review by Berny Sèbe, University of Durham.

The third genocide of the twentieth century took place in the small and remote African country of Rwanda, at the crossroads between Central and Eastern Africa. Fifteen years after the events, the Rwandan genocide, which cost the lives of between 800,000 and a million people in less than four months (April-July 1994), remains one of the most passionately debated topics in African and international history. Several aspects of the event have generated intense scrutiny from a variety of scholars in various disciplines: the speed and scale of the massacres (about 10% of the entire Rwandan population was massacred); the ethnicization of political life under Belgian colonial rule (which 'constructed' ethnicity around the Hutu and Tutsi poles); the inability or unwillingness of the international community to stop the cycle of violence once it had started; and, France's responsibility in supporting the Hutu-dominated regime which ultimately orchestrated the genocide of part of the country's population (Tutsis and moderate Hutus). In *The French Betrayal of Rwanda*, Daniela Krosiak (who is also the author of *France's Role in the Rwandan Genocide*) looks at this last aspect. [1]

Following the widely accepted claim that 'the larger responsibility [for the Rwandan genocide] lay with France and with the UN', [2] two major strands of historiography have been very productive in the last ten years, one focussing on the UN's unwillingness or inability to stop the genocide, [3] and another aiming to demonstrate France's responsibility in supporting the Rwandan rulers who perpetrated the genocide and in failing to use its influence to stop them. [4] These works often display a journalistic (or even polemical) approach and do not always apply rigorous methodologies. Those looking at French involvement sometimes use this case-study as a means of vehemently denouncing *Françafrique*, namely the close links between Paris and a network of client African regimes which form France's *pré carré* (backyard) and are based on personal, cultural, linguistic, economic and military ties, regardless of the credentials of those who benefit from them. In the last few years, virulent charges have been made against French policy in Rwanda in the run-up to and during the genocide. Daniela Krosiak's book, which falls into this category, performs far better than some of its predecessors because it does not sacrifice its academic value to the temptation of French-bashing or activism. It also follows a clear, coherent and methodical plan which elegantly combines chronological and analytical approaches.

The book sets out to establish a methodology to 'evaluate the responsibility of the French government in Rwanda' through three criteria ('knowledge, involvement and capability' [p. 17]). The first chapter analyses not only how a collective actor can be held responsible, but also presents the bench-mark against which actions in Rwanda can be judged: the 'Genocide Convention'. The second chapter gives a concise yet accurate historical account of Rwandan history from the German (1892-1916) and Belgian (1916-1962) colonial rule until the departure of the French operation *Turquoise* in August 1994 in the immediate aftermath of the genocide. The author then attempts to present the 'complexity of French policy in Africa' in a chapter which looks at the political, cultural and economic features of French involvement in the continent, including the so-called 'Fashoda syndrome' (describing French anxiety

about an 'Anglo-Saxon' threat). The rest of the argument is divided into two major sections: the failure to *prevent* the genocide from happening (chapters four to six) and the failure to *stop* it (chapters seven to nine). Naturally, these two sections deserve particular attention.

Krosiak intends to demonstrate in three chapters the responsibility of the French government in failing to *prevent* the genocide. In "Preparing for the unimaginable: what the French knew", she argues that the French possessed enough channels of information to perceive the threat of genocide which had been brewing in the years before 1994 and had not been appeased by the 1993 Arusha peace accords. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the French political and military involvement with the Habyarimana government between 1990 and 1994, when the Hutu-dominated regular government was militarily challenged by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF, mainly constituted of Tutsi exiles and heavily supported by President Museveni's Uganda). The last chapter of this section (chapter six) looks more precisely at the French capability to prevent the genocide, by both political and military means, throughout the period.

The second major section looks at what Krosiak describes as the French government's '(in)actions' which prevented it from *stopping* the mass killings. Chapter seven analyses the knowledge of the genocide that the French government is bound to have gathered through repatriated personnel and citizens, secret services, NGOs, the press and the UN (through both the Security Council and the Secretary-General). The eighth chapter, whose title 'too little too late' makes the main argument clear, intends to analyse the reasons why the French clung so stubbornly to calls for a ceasefire, presenting this as the only solution to end the conflict in Rwanda. Moving into a more practical realm, this chapter also documents operations *Amaryllis* (8-14 April 1994) and *Turquoise* (16 June-21 August 1994), as well as possible French military support to the interim government between the two operations. On the verge of counter-factual history, the ninth chapter presents the author's view on 'what the French could have done' if they had decided to distance themselves from the interim government, had been more proactive at the UN Security Council, had merged operation *Amaryllis* and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), had agreed to contribute to the reinforcement of UNAMIR and, finally, if *Turquoise* had been more efficient at stopping the killings. While the tenth and last chapter of the book mainly criticises France for its 'refusal to acknowledge [its] responsibility' (p. 273), it interestingly touches upon 'British and American blindness towards the atrocities committed by the RPF in Rwanda and in the Congo' (p. 274). The book ends on a call for a critical evaluation of 'past mistakes' and the recognition of 'an external actor's responsibility in cases of genocide' (p. 275).

Sources remain a problem when dealing with such a recent and controversial subject, with many of the people involved still alive, international rivalries yet to be healed, and large room for interpretation and controversy. Linda Melvern has gained access to invaluable files and records of the Habyarimana and interim administrations found by the new RPF government upon entering Kigali.<sup>[5]</sup> Still, the French side remains difficult to document, except through interviews (with interviewees sometimes requesting anonymity as discussed below). The archives of the *Quai d'Orsay* and the *Hôtel de Brienne* should contain useful documents, but the thirty-year rule still applies to them (and historians might have to wait thirty more years or even more before the most important documents are declassified). The *Institut François Mitterrand* holds the archives of the Mitterrand Presidencies, but it is clearly not likely to grant historians access to compromising documents.

Given such obstacles, Daniela Krosiak's research is as much archive-based as it possibly could be at the time of writing: it includes references to official documents issued by the French Presidency, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the US Department of State and House of Representatives, and various NGOs (mostly *Médecins sans frontières* (MSF) and *Médecins du Monde*). It also makes use of a variety of reports (notably from the French National Assembly, the *Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme* and Human Rights Watch) and of UN Security Council archives, besides the usual reference to French, British and American newspapers (the absence of African newspapers is striking, though). The book also

relies on interviews with key actors such as Jean-Christophe Mitterrand, former head of the African Unit (*cellule africaine*) at the *Elysée* (1986-92), former French defence minister François Léotard, Rony Brauman (ex-President of MSF), ex-FAR officer Colonel Balthazar Ndengeyinka (who joined the Rwandan Patriotic Army in 1995 before fleeing Rwanda in 2003), Anastase Gasana (Habyarimana's former Foreign Minister), the UN secretary-general of the time Boutros Boutros-Ghali and even the current Rwandan President Paul Kagame. This significant body of oral material gives this book a depth that earlier similar enterprises lack. Slightly less useful are 'confidential interviews' (e.g. pp. 100, 219) or interviews with 'a Belgian diplomat' (p. 101), a 'French government official' (p. 109) or a 'UN official' (p. 254), which do not really allow the reader to evaluate the reliability and eventual bias of the source—especially when sweeping statements such as 'peacekeeping is not a French philosophy' are reported and would greatly benefit from being situated in context (p. 229).

Because, as the title indicates, *The French Betrayal of Rwanda* is mainly a *livre à charge*, some of its interpretations are debatable and the reader may sometimes long for a bit more nuance (although it may be argued that the sheer violence of the events dealt with leave little room for this). A few examples will follow.

First, the argument does not recognise the possibility of a gross misjudgement on the part of the French authorities in the years before the genocide. Although it mentions the 1963-64 massacre of 10,000 Rwandan Tutsis (which was already highly condemnable indeed), it does not consider that this precedent may have initially led Mitterrand to believe that history was repeating itself, therefore blurring the enormous scale difference. Similarly, the beginning of the full-scale massacres could be wrongly interpreted as repetitions of events that had happened in the early 1990s (described pp. 83-83). It is also worth noting the fact that the RPF was seen as the 'attacker' of a regular government (one may be tempted to say legitimate, if judged from the point of view of international institutions), and therefore it was not obvious that the advance of RPF troops could be considered as liberating the country. An anthropologist living in Rwanda in the 1990s remarked that Rwanda had become more violent in general following the failed 1990 RPF invasion: consequently, the mounting violence could be interpreted as a side effect of an external attack rather than an internal demoniac plan (which in the end it happened to be).<sup>[6]</sup> It is therefore not so evident that the French could foresee the scale of the events to come.

The international context, which might explain some decisions of the French government, also tends to be overlooked; this tends to distort some situations and increase the weight of French guilt. The fact that Rwanda was not the only African country in which Paris monitored events meant that French decision-makers were not necessarily *bound* to know exactly what was happening in Rwanda, as clearly argued by Gérard Prunier, an author whose other works are very often cited by Daniela Krosiak.<sup>[7]</sup> Similarly, there is no mention of the unsettling precedent of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which happened only a few months before the first large-scale attack launched by the RPF against the Habyarimana regime: the coincidence of the two conflicts led Mitterrand to see in the Museveni-supported and Uganda-based RPF the manoeuvre of a large country trying to impose its will upon a smaller, more vulnerable neighbour: the 'Kuwaiti prism' may have influenced French perception of the RPF.<sup>[8]</sup>

In stark contrast with the French attitude which is systematically condemned, criticisms of the RPF strategy are mostly absent from the book (apart from a few exceptions). For instance, Abdul Ruzibuzza has criticised RPF strategies, arguing that the Front made military choices which intended to ensure military victory, if necessary at the expense of the lives of many more Tutsis which could have been saved.<sup>[9]</sup> Although this work is listed in the bibliography, it is mentioned only once in the footnotes, and as a secondary reference (p. 202, footnote 36: 'see also').

More factual points remain also open to discussion. When the linguistic factor is mentioned as a reason

for French support to Habyarimana (pp. 100-101), it fails to consider that it was the same President who had stripped the French language from its official language status in Rwanda, and had removed it from the primary school curriculum.[10] The two pages on French military involvement between *Amaryllis* and *Turquoise* (pp. 226-27) are not convincing: a secure telephone and 'seventeen small radio sets' can hardly be termed a 'military involvement'! It is surprising that Prunier's detailed account of his role as a member of the Crisis Unit in charge of organising *Turquoise* has not been used to document the sections of the book on this operation. One can therefore read that there was 'no direct communication between the two sides [RPF and *Turquoise* forces]' (pp. 236-73), whereas Prunier expressly states that he established contact with RPF leaders and even put forward the idea of a 'telephone hotline' that would link the RPF General Staff and the Ministry of Defence in Paris.[11]

More crucially, the book could have benefited from a clearer analysis of the internal tensions within the French government, with François Mitterrand, Edouard Balladur and Jacques Chirac each pulling their own strings (the last one through Foreign Minister Alain Juppé) and following their own personal and electoral agenda. Although the book intends to analyse the *collective* responsibility of the French government, readers could have gained a better understanding of the internal processes of French decision-making (Prime Minister Edouard Balladur is even absent from the list of personalities).

The bibliography is very extensive (as can be expected for a subject which attracted so much attention from the very moment it happened), but it does not include (probably because they were not yet available at the time of publication) two recent books which readers will find particularly relevant. First, Andrew Wallis' much more virulent indictment of French policy in Rwanda, which sometimes indulges in French bashing.[12] Secondly, Olivier Lanotte's detailed study of the French role in Rwanda provides a more moderate and more comprehensive view than Daniela Krosiak's appraisal.[13] Although it is not customary to mention the nationality of an author in a scholarly review, it is important to stress here that Lanotte is Belgian and therefore cannot be suspected of defending French national self-interest. While it is fair to say that Daniela Krosiak has produced a valuable interpretation of the French role in Rwanda, those who do read French will find in Lanotte's book a more balanced, less partisan, point of view.

Perhaps the weakest point of Krosiak's book lies in its eye-catching title, excellent at selling copies, but not so good at conveying subtlety. It may be that the unbearable nature of the events which unfolded in Rwanda in the spring of 1994 are the reason why, even today, it is difficult to find a middle ground when writing on this subject. Events are not negotiable, but their interpretation can generate debate and this book is excellent at it—provocative, yet not as outrageously biased as others can be.

## NOTES

[1] Daniela Krosiak, *France's Role in the Rwandan Genocide* (London: Hurst, 2007). This book stemmed from its author's PhD dissertation (University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 2002).

[2] Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers. Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 254.

[3] Such as Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder. The Rwandan Genocide* (London: Verso Hardback, 2004). *A People Betrayed. The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide* (London: Zed Books, 2000); Michael Barnett, *Eye-witness to a Genocide. The United Nations and Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

[4] Such as Pascal Krop, *Le Génocide franco-africain. Faut-il juger les Mitterrands?* (Paris: Lattès, 1994); François-Xavier Verschave, *Complicité de génocide? La politique de la France au Rwanda* (Paris: La

Découverte, 1994); Mehdi Ba, *Rwanda, un génocide français* (Paris: L'Esprit frappeur, 1997); Jean-Paul Gouteux, *Un génocide secret d'Etat. La France et le Rwanda, 1990-1997* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1998); M. Sitbon, *Un génocide sur la conscience* (Paris: L'Esprit frappeur, 1998); Andrew Wallis, *Silent Accomplice. The Untold Story of France's Role in the Rwandan Genocide* (London: IB Tauris, 2006).

[5] Linda Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder. The Rwandan Genocide* (London: Verso, 2004).

[6] Christopher C. Taylor, *Sacrifice as Terror. The Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (Oxford: Berg, 1999). p. 157.

[7] Gérard Prunier, "Operation Turquoise: A Humanitarian Escape", in Howard Adelman, Astri Suhrke ed., *The Path of a Genocide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1999), p.302.

[8] Olivier Lanotte, *La France au Rwanda (1990-1994). Entre abstention impossible et engagement ambivalent* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 199.

[9] Abdul Ruzibiza, *Rwanda. L'histoire secrète* (Paris: Editions du Panama, 2005), p. 362.

[10] Colette Braeckman, *Rwanda. Histoire d'un génocide* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), p. 277.

[11] Gérard Prunier, "Operation Turquoise: A Humanitarian Escape", in Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke ed., *The Path of a Genocide* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1999), p. 293.

[12] Andrew Wallis, *Silent Accomplice. The Untold Story of France's Role in the Rwandan Genocide* (London: IB Tauris, 2006).

[13] Olivier Lanotte, *La France au Rwanda (1990-1994). Entre abstention impossible et engagement ambivalent* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007).

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