

Africa

Blood on their hands

REVIEWED BY RW JOHNSON

SILENT ACCOMPLICE: The Untold Story of France's Role in the Rwandan Genocide
by Andrew Wallis
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France has recently infuriated Turkey by making it illegal to deny the Turkish massacre of the Armenians in 1915. But if Turkey is in denial, so is France, which bears a central responsibility for the 1994 genocide of 937,000 Tutsis in Rwanda. On occasion, as he tells this terrible story, Andrew Wallis's indignation gets the better of him, causing him to lapse into heavy-handed infelicities. These do not, however, weaken the power of what he has to say.

For those unfamiliar with French policy in Africa, it may seem almost incredible how far it is still driven by imperial rivalry with Britain and a sort of bitter fury at the triumph of les Anglo-Saxons, producing a defensive rallying of *Françafrique*, and roping into it Rwanda and Zaire, abandoned by the Belgians. Such attitudes are by no means confined to Gaullists — it was François Mitterrand who, as minister of justice in 1957, explained French problems with its West African colonies: "It is British agents who have made all our difficulties." So while Charles de Gaulle first welcomed Rwanda into *Franç-afrique*, blithely ignoring the massacre of Tutsis carried out by President Gregoire Kayibanda in 1963, so Mitterrand as president adopted exactly the same attitude to President Juvenal Habyarimana, who had deposed (and killed) Kayibanda in 1973. Habyarimana became his personal friend, and Habyarimana's wife, Agathe, a sort of African Imelda Marcos, became a constant visitor to his household and close friend of the first lady, Danielle. Agathe is the founder of the extremist Hutu society, Akazu, whose network (*le clan de madame*) is credited with much of the responsibility for the genocide. Its power is still greatly feared today.

After the earlier massacres, many Tutsis had fled into Uganda where, under Paul Kagame, they fought alongside Yoweri Museveni against Idi Amin

and Milton Obote. When Museveni won, Kagame led the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) back into Rwanda in 1990. It was immediately clear that the RPF was fully a match for the Rwandan army (FAR), and French troops were promptly dispatched to prop up Habyarimana — for Kagame was Anglophone and American-educated. The French insisted that Kagame was a CIA agent, that the RPF was really just the Ugandan army, and that the plan was to evict France's client and instal an Anglophone regime instead. Their opposition to such an outcome was such that they were willing to encourage their Hutu protégés to do anything, including genocide, to stop it. Two Frenchmen in succession were put in as the effective heads of FAR and, blithely ignoring EU directives about "ethical" arms sales, they arranged huge supplies of arms for the Hutu regime, much of it routed through Egypt with the help of their ally in the Cairo foreign office, Boutros Boutros-Ghali. It was an even greater coup when, in 1991, Mitterrand was able to push in Boutros-Ghali as UN secretary-general.

By this time, the first massacres of Tutsis had begun, and a furious Kagame flew to Paris where Paul Dijoud, African affairs director at the Quai d'Orsay, seems to have threatened that, if he did not withdraw the RPF, "you will not see your brothers and your family again, because they will all have been massacred". In fact, Wallis produces plentiful evidence that some French officers were training the Hutus how to capture and tie up prisoners, how to slit their bellies so that their bodies wouldn't float and in general preaching that "if you let them (Tutsis) carry on producing children . . . you'll never be done with them". And it seems there are many eyewitnesses of French troops assisting at torture sessions and catching Tutsis and handing them over to Hutus who hacked them to death before their eyes.

These early massacres were as nothing compared to the all-out genocide launched upon Habyarimana's death in April 1994. The new government, with key genocidaires, was, it appears, formed by the French ambassador at a meeting in the French embassy. The man the French had put in charge, Colonel Théoneste Bagosora, apparently made no secret of his plans: "I have come back to declare the apocalypse," he said. The French, well aware of what was about to happen, then got out. The calculation was that any peace deal would mean a power-sharing agreement with Kagame — which was anathema.

Better let the Hutus continue the genocide to completion if that allowed them to stay in power, but in that case France, having armed, trained and encouraged its protégés towards such an outcome, had to get clear of the carnage. As the evidence of the holocaust thus unleashed became overwhelming Bruno Delaye, the Elysée's Africa boss, is reputed to have said that "that's the way Africans are". When asked how he could have entertained genocidaires in his office, he seems to have replied that he'd had 400 assassins and 2,000 drug dealers through his doors: "You can't deal with Africa without getting your hands dirty." Mitterrand shrugged off the killings with "Dans ces pays-la, un genocide ce n'est pas trop important" and cynically concocted the notion of a "double genocide", ie that the Tutsis were just as guilty, which was rather like saying the Jews and the Nazis were as bad as one another. When the surrounding states tried to hold an emergency meeting on the situation in Tanzania, Paris angrily torpedoed it: "We can't let Anglophone countries decide on the future of a Francophone one."

And so it continued to its dreadful end. Ultimately, Kagame and the RPF won and the French sent troops in to get their Hutu protégés into Zaire where they could reform and rearm for a fight that has thus far cost 4m lives. Mitterrand angrily refused to invite Kagame's Rwanda to his last Françafrique summit and made sure the genocide was not even discussed. Several genocidaires still live happily in France where a parliamentary inquiry, headed by one of Mitterrand's former ministers, is accused of whitewashing the whole operation. Jacques Chirac and Dominique de Villepin have wholly backed this all up, for the French elite are as one in wishing to continue to celebrate France as the home of democracy and human rights.

It is only in the past few years that French responsibility for the deportation of 100,000 Jews in the second world war has been acknowledged, and nobody yet admits that French eagerness to damage Anglophone Nigeria by lending surreptitious support to Biafra cost many hundreds of thousands of lives. But all this is dwarfed by the enormity of what happened in Rwanda — an enormity so great that neither Britain nor any of France's partners seem keen to broach the matter.

This book (and the news that France is to declassify some documents relating to the genocide) are at least a start. The leading presidential contender, Nicolas Sarkozy, is fond of

talking of the need for a frank “rupture” with the past. There is no part of the French past that needs honesty and a clean break more than this.

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