

Rwanda and the New Scramble for Africa: From Tragedy to Useful Imperial Fiction

Robin Philpot

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Controversial and harrowing, the plundering of Rwanda by the United States comes under fire in this compelling investigation.

The murders of hundreds of thousands of Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda from 1990-1994 was not the outcome of civil war but rather the result of brutal attacks by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, guerrillas located in Uganda. Robin Philpot, in this damning indictment of US foreign policy, claims that the Clinton administration fronted the funds for the RPF in large part because the US sought Rwanda's rich natural resources, including gold and diamonds—wealth the RPF would plunder in return for US recognition. Paul Kagame, the RPF's leader and the current president of Rwanda, was amenable and, according to the author, was responsible for the worst terrorist action of the 1990s: the plane crash that killed Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and President Cyprien Ntaryamira on April 6, 1994.

Philpot, a Canadian author of six books and co-author of *A People's History of Quebec*, is well versed in African affairs, having lived, taught, and traveled extensively throughout the continent. This controversial book will undoubtedly be challenged as Philpot implicates not only the US but also its allies, significantly Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, described here as the United States' man in Africa, despite his record of human-rights abuses, and the United Kingdom and Belgium, which shared the greed of the US.

Rwanda is a small, heavily populated nation of 11.5 million people, of whom 85 to 90 percent are Hutus and 10 to 15 percent are the ruling Tutsis allied with the US. The RPF supported the Tutsis, who never had the votes to win a national election. The US and its allies allowed the RPF attacks to continue from 1991-94, until the Tutsis could gain control, Philpot claims, which left a bitter legacy of more than one million Rwandans forced into overcrowded, disease-ridden refugee camps and the destruction of the Rwandan government, which had served its citizens well for thirty-five years, since 1960.

The author makes strong, compelling cases, but his blunt diatribes at times become tiresome and will not curry the reader's sympathy. He calls the US claim of bringing justice to Africa a "fairy tale" and concludes, without any documentation, that for "every Christian who promoted peace, at least ten have declared wars." Several chapters are devoted to bitter criticisms of four authors of "useful imperial fiction," authors whom Philpot views as RPF stooges, including American Philip Gourevitch, whose critically acclaimed bestseller, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*, is here dismissed as RPF "cheerleading." No doubt, Gourevitch and the others will have interesting rebuttals.

Philpot maintains that the UN could have prevented Rwanda's bloody fate but that President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright suppressed its action and instead promoted the 1993 "Report of the International Commission of Inquiry," which Philpot concludes was an inaccurate and deceitful attempt to justify RPF atrocities.

Rwanda and the New Scramble for Africa presents an illuminating investigation of the Rwandan crisis that will often grip the attention of serious readers and foreign policy experts.

KARL HELICHER (Spring 2014)

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