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Aristotle was wrong when he wrote, "poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history" (*Poetics* 9:1451.5). History is more important. Further, when we try to mix poetry and history, it is very dangerous both in actual history and in interpreting that history. Thus, even though Gerard Prunier has written an excellent book on the internal Rwandese factors and French role in the genocide, four misleading claims require comment.

Though, Prunier challenges the widespread conviction, spread by the media, of the age-old mutual hatred and systematic violence between Tutsi and Hutu, he claimed that European and Rwandese modern mythmaking "in its hieratic greatness, was closer to H. Rider Haggard's realm of heroic fantasy in *King Solomon's Mines* than to the humbler realities of a small East African kingdom." It resulted in converting an antagonism between two peoples into passionate racial hatred. The Hutus and Tutsis, through mythology, were indoctrinated into hating one another. The Tutsis began to believe they were a superior race, and the Hutus, "told by everyone that they were inferiors who deserved their fate," began to believe it and, as a consequence, "began to hate all Tutsi." The major cause of the violence was not simply the result of those myths being translated into actual

administrative policies. Thus, although Prunier rejects the narrative of deep African roots of the antagonism, he does endorse the view that the major cause of the genocide was a result of deeply felt passions and hatreds instilled through imported European myths. The genocide was implemented effectively because of a centrally organized and coordinated plan.

Some of us who have studied the Rwandese and other genocides have come to an opposite conclusion – it is the organization of an ideology of racial hatred that is the root cause, and stirring up racial hatred between groups using mythology is the tool for advancing an ideology held by a small conspiratorial group. Tutsi and Hutu are not killing each other to affirm an identity resulting from mythology but because of the ideology, power, and material interests of a cult of leaders. Otherwise, just as one example, the peace process at Arusha, which Prunier documents, makes no sense; the opposition parties in Rwanda, in effect, allied with the Tutsi-dominated RPF military invaders to forge a peace plan which deprived the 'ideologues of hatred' from any participation in the new power structure.

Secondly, Prunier suggests that the Tutsi diaspora, produced as a result of the revolution of 1959 and the subsequent massacres, were imbued with a myth of return to a land of milk and honey, ignoring the problems of overpopulation, overgrazing, and soil erosion of their homeland. Consequently, the impression is left, as one reviewer put it (caught up in the myth of myth as the determining cause of historical events and actions), that the Tutsi in the diaspora devoted itself to returning to Rwanda. In fact, not only did the Tutsi as individuals and families have various degrees of success in adapting and succeeding in the diaspora, but the commitment of the Tutsi diaspora to return varied widely among the Tutsi in Zaire, Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda and overseas. In fact, as Prunier himself documents, the diaspora organization in the only community with some degree of militancy about return, RANU (Rwandese Alliance for National Unity), had to undergo a second dispersion from Uganda to Kenya with the coming to power of Obote. A combination of at least three critical factors allowed the militancy in Uganda

to coalesce into a small effective militant force. The first was the mistreatment by Obote of the Tutsi still in Uganda. Secondly, Museveni utilized the close friendships he had developed with Tutsis with whom he shared a political ideology – not of an ethnic myth of return but of left-leaning nationalism, suspicion of the West, hatred of dictatorships, and the Maoist doctrine of redemption through popular warfare – to defeat Obote and reward his Tutsi compatriots with positions of power. The third factor was the failure of Museveni to deliver on the promise of equal treatment of Tutsi, so that the Tutsi came to recognize by 1988 that they would always be second-class citizens in Uganda even though they occupied important positions after Museveni came to power in 1986. The circumstances in the diaspora interacting with ideological beliefs, all of which Prunier documents, not mythology constituted the prime cause leading to the invasion of Rwanda by the RPF on October 1, 1990.

The myth of Hutu and Tutsi origins, and the myth of return of the diaspora, combined with a third myth to reinforce European support for the dictatorial and ruthless Habyarimana regime, thus allowing Habyarimana to strengthen his regime and, initially, successfully resist the invading forces. “Now it was the foreign aid workers who collaborated in reinforcing the vision of a ‘democratic majority rule’ and who ended up admiring their own righteousness in helping such deserving Africans.” What is conveniently left out is that, whatever the political shortcomings of the Habyarimana dictatorship and though it failed to provide an opportunity for return, the government no longer persecuted Tutsis who had remained in the country. Further, it was an African regime which devoted the lowest percentage of its GDP to expenditures on the army. The Prunier account with respect to external players is only strong on the French role after 1990 and, in particular, on Operation Turquoise, the belated French military intervention in the genocide with which Prunier, as one of the planners, was so intimately familiar and which he documents so well. The performance of the Habyarimana regime as well as other factors not discussed in the book explain why foreign aid agencies made the Habyarimana regime its golden boy for the receipt

of overseas aid. Whatever else he did wrong, prior to 1986, Habyarimana did deal with aid monies honestly and effectively. Not myth but performance – as Prunier admits when he writes that the Habyarimana regime was the least bad in Africa based on its actions – explains why foreign aid agencies assisted the Habyarimana regime and turned a blind eye to his serious shortcomings. It is debatable whether, among those shortcomings, an intellectual ideology of Hutu supremacy and widespread and deeply felt hatred of the Tutsi lurked. Others are convinced that the key, primary factors ignored by the aid agencies were the extremists and the threat posed by the Arusha Accords to the power, positions, and authority of the northwestern Hutus.

Finally, Prunier deals with the role of France. But it is not the actual role of France that was so critical – after all, the French interventions were not so substantial or much different from elsewhere in Africa. Nor are the myths that the French held of Rwanda central. The French were cynical realists in advancing their own myths of French pride and glory to which Rwanda was only a minor contributor. Rather, the myths the Hutu leadership held of France made them believe that, whatever they did, France would come to their aid. Again, there is at least one alternative explanation for the Hutu extremists’ genocidal and self-destructive actions. It was not so much their mythology of France, as their desperation, lack of other alternatives, underestimation of the RPF, and, most seriously, their willingness, indeed eagerness, to leave a country empty of Tutsis even if the RPF did win.

Prunier provides an excellent account of the genocide in Rwanda. But he pays only sketchy attention to the role of outsiders, except for France, in that genocide. Further, he fails to consider or weigh other alternative, and, I believe, more plausible explanations than the domination of certain myths as the prevalent causal factors – an intellectual ideology that is so prevalent in the French mentalité school of historiography, the “New History” (*Nouvelle Histoire*) begun with the Annales school started by Bloch and Febvre and reaching its greatest heights in Braudel’s monumental works and which now dominates French historiography,

publishing, and even the media. Prunier's volume is superb, but it is also too salted with the intellectual mythology of which he is a product. Contrary to the ideology of much of that school which eschews narrative, Prunier tells an excellent story with wit, irony, and pungent moral outrage. However, the poetics of discourse and interpretive conventions which he inherited in the mythology of the dominant historiographical school of France interferes with the interpretation of history and the explanations offered of events and actions. In this case of a fourth generational descendent of this school, the Annales doctrine of the 'hidden other' is not as important as the mythological desire either to lionize the other or, in the other extreme, to relegate the other to permanent nonexistence, and which can be perceived as the prime mover in history. The irony is that Prunier's book is powerful as *mythos*, or recounting what happened, but very flawed in its *logos*, or explaining why it happened.