

Synopsis :

Nord Kivu, 15 years of war

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The conflicts in the Regions of Kivu, frontiers between Burundi, Rwanda and the current Democratic Republic of Congo, have been ongoing for the past 15 years. Like a scar that doesn't heal. They started after the conquest of Rwanda by Paul Kagamé's Rwandan Patriotic Front (R.P.F.) which put an end to the genocide in 1994. There would been between 3 and 5 million direct and indirect victims of the wars despite 17.000 U.N. Blue Berets on the spot. The true reasons of the struggle are to be found in the exploitation of many mining resources in the Region against the backdrop of ethnic rivalries and territorial claims.

1994. The assassination attempt against Rwandan President Habyarimana was the signal for the Tutsi genocide by the Hutu extremists. After five months of struggle, the R.P.F. troupes overthrew the government. A big part of the population took refuge in Zaire in the hills of Kivu at the frontier. Among them, the Interahamwe -Hutu paramilitary organization- at the head of the genocide and the soldiers of the regular army.

Rwandan capital city Kigali's new government led by Paul Kagamé violates unhesitantly the frontiers to pursue the militias responsible for the genocide in Congo. They still represent a threat to their country's security and requires to bring them before the criminal court. The first African war started and will last 2 years. Six African countries support several armed groups targeting control of the major mining sites in the East and Center of Zaire. More than 10 million people have run away from the fighting and are displaced in their own country. The Rwandan government supports at the same time the Congolese rebellion conducted by Laurent Désiré Kabila which will lead to Mobutu's downfall, in power for 30 years. Zaire became the Democratic Republic of Congo.

End of the first African war. Beginning of the second one. Kigali's government demands a war debt and took over the mining sites of the Kivu Region. Kabila changed sides and decided to free his country from the supervision that brought him to power. He starts a second war. He needs new allies. Angola and genocidal Rwandan Hutus reformed in the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (D.F.L.R.). The second war, the war for the reconquest of the country, will last 4 years. In 2002 an agreement was signed in Sun City (South Africa) to officially end it. Congo promised to disarm the D.F.L.R. organization. Under international pressure of economic penalties, Rwanda and all the other countries implicated in the war agreed to withdraw their troops and stop the looting of the mining resources.

The matter is maybe exclusively that one. In 2001, U.N. experts revealed that *“the access, control and trade in most mining resources: diamonds, copper, cobalt, gold and mostly coltan and cassiterite”* was the origin of the conflict. Two ores used in computer and cell phone electronic circuits which have expanded rapidly in the last decade. And that *“the systematic exploitation of natural resources by a foreign army created a situation from which all the belligerents are winners”*. Including the regular army officers that exploited the Congolese population they were supposed to protect. In June 2006, NGO Global Witness confirmed that « the looting of the natural resources of the country by the State, powerful people and rebel groups still goes on” and the “looting intensified as fast as the term of the government of political transition came to an end.”

Seven years later, the process has no solution. Congo puts forward army difficulties while Rwanda accuses them of protecting “their allies” recalling that the D.F.L.R. organization still represents a real threat for its stability and that their leaders should be brought before the Court of justice for their taking part in the genocide in 1994. The war is now between armed groups. Rwanda supported until 2008 Laurent Nkunda’s National Congress for the Defence of the People (N.C.D.P.) which officially fought for the security of the Tutsi born in Congo. Actually, Nkunda was used as a bridgehead in Rwanda to continue the exploitation of the mining resources in the region. In November 2008, he has the nerve to challenge the Congolese army and the powerless Blue Berets of the Mission of the U. N. O. in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (M.U.N.O.C.) stopping at the entrance to Goma, provincial capital of Nord-Kivu. According to the U. N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (U.N.O.C.H.A.), more than one million people were displaced in less than a year, over 3.500 women were raped, mass executions were perpetrated and humanitarian conditions were disastrous. In a more and more uncontrollable situation and Paul Kagamé’s power being tarnished, Rwanda decided to have Nkunda arrested while underlining Congo’s incompetence to deal with its “domestic” affairs. Congo hasn’t yet handed Nkunda over to the Congolese justice.

Today the war still goes on. The joint military operations led by the new agreements between Rwanda and Congo to stop the D.F.L.R. organization have not the expected results. According to NGO Human Rights Watch, the consequences of the struggles continue to be terrible on the population.

In response to Congo’s changing of side, the D.F.L.R. organization takes their revenge on the population, particularly on women and use them as human shields, slaves or carriers. And the youth keeps on being enlisted.

Chaos theory. Chaos that puts together its own geometry and that needs to be maintained.

These photos were taken between 2004 and 2008. They show a little known but most deadly conflict in the past decades on the continent. The struggle penetrates all the flesh. Political manipulation are in everyone’s mind and suspicion in every look. ***“We are sacrificed for economic interests. To make jewellery and cell phones!”***