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Book Review

Andrew Wallis. *Silent Accomplice: The Untold Story of France's Role in the Rwandan Genocide*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006. Pp. 242, cloth. \$44.00 US.

Susan Cook, ed. *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda: New Perspectives*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006. Pp. 299, paper. \$24.95 US. Pp. 299, cloth. \$49.95 US.

Nigel Eltringham. *Accounting for Horror: Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda*. London: Pluto Press, 2004. Pp. 232, paper. \$24.95 US. Pp. 232, cloth. \$79.95 US.

Reviewed by Gerald Caplan, *Independent Scholar, Toronto, ON*

New studies of genocide continue to materialize at a modest but regular pace. Of course, there is nothing like the Holocaust publishing phenomenon, with a small flood of books and articles appearing month after month. A long lifetime devoted to nothing but reading about the Holocaust would barely begin to scratch the surface of the available studies. But it is gratifying, if obviously frustrating, to report that it is now quite impossible to keep up with all the literature on other genocides and on genocide as such.

Nonetheless, the universe of those one Israeli on the fringes affectionately calls “genocide freaks” remains distinctly small. It is no fluke that I know, at least as acquaintances if not as dear friends, two of the three authors under review. This leads to the situation that always prevails when a field is so small and intimate—the difficulty of candor and criticism in reviewing the work of peers, if only because there is at least a reasonable possibility that they may one day be called on to review one of your efforts. It is easier to pretend that this is not an issue, but it is. And all we can do is disclose this implicit conflict of interest.

As it happens, I have problems with all three books under review. The author I do not know at all is Andrew Wallis, identified on the jacket flap as a journalist and a researcher in the Department of Peace Studies at Bradford University. Wallis’s book is the most timely of the three, and probably the most important, but it is also the most disappointing. The role of France in the Rwandan Genocide remains a blur to many in the English-speaking world. The division in the field of genocide studies between monolingual French and English speakers is almost scandalously unbridged; the two simply do not share the same universe of information. Nowhere is this more true than in books and articles on Rwanda, where—with notable exceptions, such as Linda Melvern—two solitudes can be said to exist. There is a good deal of writing related to the genocide by francophone Rwandan academics and other francophone writers, including the indispensable Belgian journalist Colette Braeckman, that remains a blank slate to most Anglophones. (Braeckman feels so divorced from the

Gerald Caplan, review of *Silent Accomplice: The Untold Story of France's Role in the Rwandan Genocide* by Andrew Wallis; *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda: New Perspectives* edited by Susan Cook; *Accounting for Horror: Post-Genocide Debates in Rwanda* by Nigel Eltringham. *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 3, 1 (April 2008): 153–157. © 2008 *Genocide Studies and Prevention*. doi: 10.3138/gsp.3.1.153

agenda-setting Anglophone world, she told me, that she will never again write a book that is not translated into English.)

Wallis's signal contribution is to pull together the most important work extant in both English and French on France's role in the genocide, from the many reports of Human Rights Watch (HRW) to the writings of Patrick de St. Exupery and François-Xavier Verschave. Noting that the usual criticism of the "international community" is that it has failed to intervene to stop atrocities perpetrated by Africans against each other, he reminds us of the real truth: "genocide often occurs because of too much, not too little, Western interference" (x). Following the lead of HRW, he asks exactly the right question: Would the genocide of the Rwandan Tutsi have happened at all without French President François Mitterrand's consistent support for Rwanda's Hutu extremists and his attempts to undermine the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) before, during and after the genocide? Unfortunately, *Silent Accomplice* addresses events only up to and shortly after the genocide was ended by the RPF victory, and, as a result, Wallis fails to pose the next logical question: Would the terrible conflicts that have devastated the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for the past decade have happened if the French military had not allowed so many leading *génocidaires* to flee Rwanda for the DRC in the dying days of the genocide?

The RPF invaded Rwanda from Uganda on 1 October 1990. Mitterrand responded to Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana's plea for support immediately. From that moment on, there was no aspect of Rwandan life in which France did not intervene—from supplying weapons to training elite soldiers and youth militias to providing intelligence to providing financial support to devising military strategy to acting as international spin doctors to leading the Rwandan armed forces to manning roadblocks and asking for the notorious ID cards that revealed citizens' ethnic origin. Almost no authority believes that the Rwandan army could have held off the rebels for three years without French support, and if the Habyarimana gang had been overthrown, there would have been no genocide.

French politicians, French diplomats, and French soldiers blatantly lied about everything that was happening in Rwanda. George Orwell never had more faithful disciples in turning the truth completely on its head. They said they were in Rwanda only to protect French citizens. They said they were there only as a humanitarian service to Rwandans. They said they were there to protect victims of the genocide. They said the RPF disemboweled children. They said that each pogrom against the Tutsi from 1991 to April 1994 was the responsibility of the RPF. They said that the only obstacle to peace was the RPF.

After the genocide, Mitterrand called Habyarimana a true democrat. He said it was the United Nations, not his government, that had restored the power of a flailing Mobutu Sese Seko. France also did all it could to withhold European Union funds from the new RPF-led government after the genocide. The 1998 inquiry by the French National Assembly documented France's myriad sins in Rwanda and concluded that the chief culprit was the United States. Mitterrand liked talking about "genocides," in the plural, blaming the RPF as much as the *génocidaires*. As late as 2003, then foreign minister Dominique de Villepin spoke of the "Rwandan genocides." To this day, the French government continues to hide accused *génocidaires* and to embrace denial of the genocide.

All this adds up to a deep, vast sickness. France has long seen francophone Africa as its backyard, its *pré carré*, just as the United States saw Latin America as its natural neocolonial turf. Without the support of its former African colonies, under any

number of tyrants and sadists, any pretense of France to be even a second-tier world power would evaporate. That is why language and culture obsess the French establishment so profoundly. But nothing remotely rational quite explains the pathological depths of French hostility to the RPF, or the complicity and villainy that characterize its role in the Rwandan Genocide. In a just world, French officials would be among the very first defendants before the International Criminal Court.

So, while Wallis's book fills a large gap, it is inadequate in too many ways. There are all the obvious errors: Stephen Lewis was not UN Envoy to Africa but Envoy for AIDS in Africa; former chief prosecutor Jean de Dieux Mucyo is not Mueyo. There was no OAU report on the genocide; there was a report by an independent panel appointed by the OAU. A death site is a charnel house, not a carnal house, for heaven's sake! Several references have no relation to the item being referenced, and some key points are supported by no references at all. There is an unacceptable reliance on RPF officials as a source of negative information on France; material relating to 2005 is sourced to a 1994 newspaper story. The writing is often sophomorically heavy-handed and childishly ironic. Foolish liberties are taken to hammer home obvious points—French politicians are said to have been so surprised by a Mitterrand maneuver, for example, that they “no doubt spluttered in their Perrier water” (122). Where have all the editors gone?

Among the slanders French officials heaped on the RPF was the label “Khmer Noir”—the African equivalent of the genocidal Khmer Rouge. The slur offers one connection to Cambodia. So does Wallis's statement that “genocide often occurs because of too much, not too little, Western interference” (x). Note his deliberate choice of the word “often.” He is not speaking only of the French in Rwanda. Just look at the secret bombing of Cambodia launched illegally by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, another of their crimes against humanity. It was the destabilization of Cambodia that enabled Pol Pot's troops to take over the country so easily and to impose its demented, deadly ideology.

Academically, too, there is a curious parallel to the Francophone–Anglophone split over Rwanda: by and large, with important exceptions, those who concentrate on either Rwanda or Cambodia usually are not well versed in the other. All the more reason to welcome a collection like Susan Cook's, which explicitly deals with both.

Most edited collections are uneven, but Cook's (*Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda: New Perspectives*) is more uneven than many. That said, I found most of the contributions more or less worthwhile and informative. But the volume is less than the sum of its parts, when it should be more. Cook claims to be offering a “comparative study of genocide,” but, in fact, many of the essays are entirely stand-alone pieces, lending themselves to no particular comparisons at all. The problem is that they emerged from research done for the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University, and, while all the authors may have asked similar questions of different genocidal episodes, as Cook maintains, there was apparently only a limited attempt to compare specific aspects of the two experiences systematically. Cook herself has published comparative articles on the role of ethnicity in each case, but they are not reproduced in this volume.

A real flaw is the absence of any conceptual comparisons of the two as genocides at all, which surely would have been the place to begin a comparative study of two “genocides.” In fact, because the Khmer Rouge were exactly like those they murdered so blithely, while Tutsi and Hutu were distinguished by ethnicity and modern history, many scholars of genocide question whether the Khmer Rouge in fact

perpetrated a genocide. Some argue that the real genocide in Cambodia was by the Khmer of several small ethnic and religious minorities, not the massive slaughter of the killing fields. For Rwanda, only a minority of outright deniers and their French allies doubt what every authority who has studied the subject agrees: Rwanda's Tutsi stand with the Herero, the Armenians, and the Jews of Europe as one of the purest Genocide Convention genocides in modern history. This book would have been far more valuable had it taken on this defining issue.

Two of the chapters on Cambodia (Dmitry Mosyakov's "The Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese Communists" and Puangthong Rungswasdisab's "Thailand's Response to the Cambodian Genocide") shed light on the Khmer Rouge's relationships with the Vietnamese Communists and with neighboring Thailand, both of which significantly influenced the course of events in the region. Here is where a real comparative study would have made an important contribution, by examining Habyarimana's relations with other African states and with the rich world, apart from France, before his assassination in 1994 ignited the genocide. In the Cambodian case, two American administrations claimed to fear the "domino effect" in Southeast Asia of a Viet Cong victory in South Vietnam, and perhaps the CIA had, as usual, proffered false intelligence. In fact, Hanoi and the Khmer Rouge enjoyed a poisonous relationship, as did the USSR and China, and, since Russia was Hanoi's ally, China backed the Khmer Rouge. None of these positions had anything at all to do with the bestial nature of the Khmer Rouge government.

What was the Rwandan equivalent? Why did the OAU refuse to condemn the genocide, instead taking the same neutral line as the UN and demanding that both sides cease the fighting? What was Mobutu's role as Habyarimana's mentor? The francophone African dictators showed the expected solidarity. Why did Kenya's Daniel Arap Moi at first refuse to hand over accused *génocidaires* hiding in his country? The makings of a genuinely comparative and revealing study lie in these questions.

Anyone studying the Rwandan Genocide emerges shell-shocked from the behavior of the international community throughout. I have written often about twenty-five things the powers-that-be were responsible for, during those few years, that even today are almost impossible to believe. But nothing that happened to Rwanda can trump the support and recognition given by the West and China to the Khmer Rouge after its ouster by the Vietnamese Communists in 1979. Kelvin Rowley's essay on the subject, "Second Life, Second Death: The Khmer Rouge after 1978," reminds us that there are no apparent limits on the depths to which states will sink in the pursuit of their own self-interest, even if it means embracing one of the most psychopathic gangs of mass murderers the world has ever seen.

On a different but significant editorial note, I must state that to publish such a book with no maps is frustrating and beyond forgiveness.

In the end, Cook's book, like Wallis's on France, reinforces the harsh reality that the struggle to prevent genocide and to find even a modicum of justice in this world will always be a Sisyphean one.

Justice and mass murderers are also among the themes of Nigel Eltringham's short work on Rwanda, *Accounting for Horror*. Eltringham offers a good deal of useful information and a considerable number of insights. But intellectual honesty compels me to confess immediately that I did not understand much of this book. Very likely that reflects my own intellectual limitations. But, as I read through, I often did not know what Eltringham was getting at, became confused when I tried to figure out why he was discussing certain topics and not discussing others, and, to the end, never

grasped how the various issues he deals with hang together. Perhaps there is a special skill to deciphering the jargon and style of anthropologists these days that I have not yet mastered. I was also thunderstruck to find that, like the Cook volume, this one had no map, making the discussion almost impossible to follow in some places. Maybe publishers no longer employ editors.

Accounting for Horror was published in 2004 but is based on interviews with Rwandans in Rwanda in 1998 and in Europe in 1999. Since that is about the same time my own work in Rwanda began, I know how very long ago, in relative terms, it was—less than five years after the genocide. In many ways, a different Rwanda exists today than existed seven or eight years ago, and Eltringham's book suffers accordingly. Still, some of the debates that he examines remain both pertinent and highly controversial. He analyzes in great and convincing detail allegations of atrocities and human-rights abuses against the RPF before, during, and after the genocide, finding that they escalated from relatively few to massive. Although the RPF government has long denied any culpability for the crimes against humanity that were committed in the forests of Zaire/DRC, Eltringham goes a long way toward confirming what many of us have feared to be true. But he makes no effort to explain why he spends twenty-five pages dissecting the years between 1995 and 1997 and only one paragraph on the violent, rapacious years from 1998 to 2001. During this period, in the name of fighting the *génocidaires*, Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers plundered the valuable mineral resources of the DRC for the enrichment of their own ruling elites, which the latter naturally denied completely. In the process, as Ugandans and Rwandans engaged in open warfare against each other on Congolese soil, millions of Congolese civilians were displaced or died from violence, illness, or starvation.

Eltringham also deals at some length with the deeply divisive politics of Rwandan history. Official histories are always tendentious, and in Rwanda their purpose proved fatal. Clashing Hutu and Tutsi versions of the past, often based on the work of white missionaries and colonialists, were invoked repeatedly in the past century to justify the most appalling of atrocities, culminating in the genocide itself. Eltringham is at his analytic best in deconstructing the debate over these conflicting interpretations and the malevolent uses to which they were put.

These debates, as well as others, will not soon fade, either in Cambodia or in Rwanda. With a long-awaited tribunal to judge the Khmer Rouge finally about to begin work in Cambodia, with the government of Paul Kagame imposing its own very precise view of Rwanda's past, with the wretched French still attempting to bring down Kagame over the plane crash that killed his predecessor and triggered the genocide, with denial of the Rwandan Genocide rife as ever in France and Belgium, genocide scholars and genocide preventionists will find a rich abundance of material to work on for decades to come.