The Rwandan genocide story has no Canadian heroes
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Canadian commentators often claim more Tutsi were killed in the genocide than lived in Rwanda. Since it aligns with Washington, London and Kigali’s interests, as well as liberal nationalist Canadian ideology, the statistical inflation passes with little comment.

A Tyee story last month described the “slaughter of” over 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda” between April–July 1994. An earlier Globe and Mail profile of Roméo Dallaire cited a higher number. It noted, “over the next” few months, Hutu activists and militias, supplemented by police officers and military commanders, killed an estimated 800,000 to 1 million Tutsis.”

Even self-declared experts on the subject cite these outlandish statistics. In the Globe and Mail and Rabble last year Gerald Caplan wrote that, “despite” his [Dallaire] best efforts, perhaps a million people of the Tutsi minority were slaughtered in 100 days.”

With ties to the regime [5] in Kigali, Caplan pulled this number out of thin air. It’s improbable there were a million Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994 and no one believes every single Tutsi was killed.

While the exact figure is unknown and somewhat contested, Rwanda’s 1991 Census calculated 596,387 Tutsi [6]. Initially sponsored by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the GenoDynamics [7] project by the Dean of the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of Virginia, Allan Stam, and University of Michigan political science professor, Christian Davenport, put the number slightly lower at 500,000 [8]. Others claim the Hutu-government of the time sought to suppress Tutsi population statistics and estimate a few hundred thousand more Rwandan Tutsi.

But, a significant number of Tutsi survived the hundred days of killing. Tutsi survivors’ umbrella group IBUKA (“Remember”) initially concluded that 300,000 survived [9] the genocidal killings, which they later increased to “nearer to 400,000”.

For 800,000–1 million Tutsi to have perished there would have had to been at least 1.1 million and probably closer to 1.4 million Tutsi. That’s twice the official calculation.

Notwithstanding the three examples mentioned at the top, the most commonly cited formulation of the number of deaths in 1994 is the more vague “800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu”. A 1999 UN report concluded, “approximately 800,000” persons were killed during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.” As time passes, however, the regime in Kigali increases the death toll. In 2004 the Rwandan Ministry of Local Government, Community Development and Social Affairs claimed 1,074,017 [12] died and in 2008 the government-backed Genocide Survivors Students Association of Rwanda put the number at 1,952,087 [13].

But, the higher the death toll one cites for the genocidal violence the greater the number and
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percentage of Hutu victims. In the 2014 BBC documentary Rwanda's Untold Story [8] Stam explains, “if a million people died in Rwanda in 1994 — and that’s certainly possible — there is no way that the majority of them could be Tutsi... Because there weren’t enough Tutsi in the country.”

The idea there was as many, or even more, Hutu killed complicates the ‘long planned genocide’ narrative pushed by the regime in Kigali and its Anglo-Saxon backers. So does the fact that overwhelming evidence and logic points to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) as culprits for blowing up the plane of the Hutu presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, as well as much of the Hutu-led Rwandan military command, which sparked the mass killings.

Washington and London’s support for the RPF, as well as Paul Kagame’s more than two-decade long control of Kigali, explains the dominance of a highly simplistic account of Rwanda’s genocide. But, a tertiary reason for the strength of the fairy tale is it aligns with the nationalist mythology of another G7 state. A wealthy, educated, population speaking the world’s two main colonial languages, Canadians have pumped out innumerable articles, books, songs, plays, poems, movies, etc. about our noble General’s effort to save Rwandans. Yet the Romeo Dallaire saviour story largely promoted by Left/liberals is based on a one-sided account of Rwanda’s tragedy.

Two of the articles mentioned at the top celebrate Dallaire. One of the stories that inflates the Tutsi death toll was a Globe and Mail profile [3] upon the former general’s retirement from the Senate and in the other Caplan writes, “the personal [14] relationship so many Canadians feel with Rwanda can be explained in two words: Roméo Dallaire ... [who] did all in his limited power to stop the killings.”

A Monthly Review article I discovered recently provides a stark example of how Left Canadian nationalists have warped understanding of Rwanda’s tragedy to fit their ideology. The third paragraph of the venerable New York-based Marxist journal’s 2003 review of When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda and A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide begins: “A Canadian [15], General Roméo Dallaire, is the hero of the Rwandan tragedy.”

Canadian reviewer Hugh Lukin Robinson’s main criticism of Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani’s When Victims Become Killers is that he downplays the importance of the Canadian commander of the UN military force. Robinson writes, “[Mamdani’s] disinterest in the international betrayal of Rwanda is illustrated by his single reference to General Dallaire, whose name he misspells and whom he refers to as ‘the Belgian commander in charge of UN forces in Rwanda’. In contrast, Linda Melvern marshals the evidence which amply justifies the title of her book.”

But, Melvern is a leading advocate of the Kigali sponsored fairy tale about the genocide. Drawing on Dallaire’s purported “genocide fax [16]”, she promotes the ‘long planned genocide’ narrative. Simultaneously, Melvern ignores (or downplays) the role Uganda’s 1990 invasion, structural adjustment policies and the October 1993 assassination of the first ever Hutu president in Burundi played in the mass killing of spring 1994. Melvern also diminishes RPF killings and their responsibility for shooting down the plane carrying Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana and the Rwandan military high command.

Robinson was impressed with Melvern’s praise for Canada’s military man. “Dallaire had trained and risen through the ranks of an army proud of its tradition of peacekeeping”, Robinson quotes from Melvern’s writing. “He was a committed internationalist and had first hand experience of UN missions. He was a hard worker. And he was obstinate.” But, the “committed internationalist” admits he didn’t know where Rwanda was before his appointment to that country. Nor did Dallaire have much experience with the UN. “Dallaire was what [17] military people call a NATO man,” explained CBC journalist Carole Off in a biography of the General. “His defence knowledge was predicated almost exclusively on the needs of the NATO alliance.”

More significantly, a number of the UN officials involved in Rwanda — head of UNAMIR troops in Kigali Luc Marchal, intelligence officer Amadou Deme, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, etc. — have challenged Dallaire’s interpretation of events, contradicted his claims or criticized his actions. Dallaire’s civilian commander on UNAMIR published a book accusing the Canadian General of bias towards the Uganda/US/Britain backed RPF. In his 2005 book Le Patron de Dallaire Parle.
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[18] (The Boss of Dallaire Speaks), Jacques-Roger Booh Booh, a former Cameroon foreign minister and overall head of UNAMIR, criticizes Dallaire’s actions in Rwanda and challenges his interpretation of events.

In one of two footnotes Robinson ended his Monthly Review article on a Canadian nationalist note. The former labour researcher writes: “There is another account of the Rwanda tragedy for which two Canadians can take a great deal of credit. In 1997, the Organization for African Unity (OAU) appointed an International Panel of Eminent Persons to report on what had happened. Stephen Lewis was a member of the Panel and Gerald Caplan was its principal writer and author of the report, Rwanda —The Preventable Genocide. It confirms all the main facts and conclusions of Linda Melvern’s book.”

While paying lip service to the complex interplay of ethnic, class and regional politics, as well as international pressures, that spurred the ‘Rwandan Genocide’, the 300-page report is premised on the unsubstantiated claim their was a high level plan by the Hutu government to kill all Tutsi. It ignores the overwhelming evidence (and logic) pointing to Paul Kagame’s RPF as the culprit in shooting down the presidential plane, which sparked the genocidal killings. It also emphasizes Dallaire’s perspective. A word search of the report finds 100 mentions of “Dallaire”, five times more than “Booh-Booh”, the overall commander of the UN mission.

Rather than a compelling overview of the Rwandan tragedy, the OAU report highlights Canada’s power within international bodies. In a Walrus story Caplan described, “waiting for the flight back to Toronto, where I would do all my reading and writing” on a report “I called … ‘The Preventable Genocide’”. Partly funded [19] by Canada, the entire initiative was instigated [20] by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Caplan is a staunch advocate of the noble Canadian general story. In 2017 Caplan, who started an organization with Kagame’s long-standing foreign minister, Louise Mushikiwabo, called Dallaire “surely among [21] Canada’s most admired citizens, if not the most admired.”

Praise for Dallaire’s role in Rwanda is based on a highly simplistic account of what transpired in 1994. In their haste to promote a Canadian saviour in Africa, left/liberals have confused international understanding of the Rwandan tragedy, which has propped up Kagame’s dictatorship and enabled his violence in the Congo.

When commentators are claiming more Tutsi were killed than lived in the country it’s time to reevaluate popular discussion of Rwanda’s tragedy.

* YVES ENGLER is the author of ‘Canada in Africa: 300 years of aid and exploitation’.

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Article-Summary:
Washington and London’s support for Paul Kagame’s more than two-decade long control of Kigali explains the dominance of a highly simplistic account of Rwanda’s genocide. But a tertiary reason for the strength of the fairy tale is it aligns with the nationalist mythology of another G7 state: Canada.

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