

Box 17: The principal stages in the genocide and the human costs

Figures quoted here concern the period of war from April to July 1994, even if very numerous victims can obviously be deducted since October 1st, 1990 (military victims of the FAR and the rebellion, civil victims of the war - localized massacres, attacks, murders, removals) and especially after the war itself because of the takeover of the whole territory by the FPR and the politics implemented to repatriate the millions of Hutu refugees settled along the borders and to ensure the control of nearby territories.

Massacres coupled with the various phases of the war

The Tutsi massacres and targeted murders committed by the diverse opponents and “the accomplices” in the districts of Kigali began as early as the night from 6 to 7 April, shortly after the attack against the president Habyarimana’s plane had been heard of. They affected the next day sectors and municipalities administered or controlled by ethnical pro-Hutu activists, especially in the northern and eastern prefectures, before extending to the whole country until July. Various phases can be distinguished according to the intensity of the slaughters.

On April 7th, 8th and 9th, in both residential and popular districts of Kigali, the Republican Guard men, “Paracommandos” and “Reconnaissance” battalions and other units led with the Interahamwe militiamen systematic attacks to the opponents’ and Tutsi places of residence, while the controls at barriers set up on the main highways prevented any flight. Those who tried to hide were chased away by the patrols, which searched ceilings, cupboards, under beds, latrines, car trunks, etc. Thousands of bodies were gathered and collected by the urban roads services on April 11th (some 20,000, according to the United Nations).

On April 12th, after two days of relative diminution, as embassies evacuated their last nationals and as the temporary Government was transferred to Gitarama, militias were armed and an all-out war was declared to the inside “enemies”. Massacres were indicated in almost all the prefectures of the country, generalized in those of the North and East, still localized in those of the Center and the South. On April 18th and 19th, the government held meetings in the prefectures of Gitarama, Gikongoro and Butare to deny and dislocate the authorities which still tried to oppose the massacres. The prefectures and municipalities where the proportions of Tutsi populations were higher were particularly concerned (Butare, the South of Kibuye, Gikongoro).

After April 20th, there were no more protected area left on the national territory. Everywhere, the public places (churches, schools, hospitals, municipal or prefectural buildings) where the authorities had invited Tutsi to gather were systematically affected and their occupants killed, often by thousands. Worried about the international echo of this politics of extermination and despoilment, the temporary Government then invited the local authorities to ensure a control of the mortiferous militia’s activity. However, the so-called “pacification” politics did not modify the pursued objective, even if the last days of April and the first two weeks May were marked by a sensitive ebb of the slaughters (the United Nations announced a number of 200,000 deaths at the end of April). The reasons were above all functional. Besides the killers’ growing tiredness, the main part of the “work”

was over and, except in the southern prefectures, it became more difficult to find “enemies” and “accomplices” to eliminate.

The massacres then knew a strong reflation during the second half of May, in an ultimate effort of “national resistance” face to the decisive military breakthroughs of the FPR; they were presented as the counterpart of these advances. Along with Édouard Karemera’s appointment at the head of the Ministry of the Interior, the May 25th governmental circulars on civil self-defense (see chapter 12) defined research and destruction of the “internal enemy” a national priority. In the prefectures of the Center, the South and the South-West, refugees’ increasing exodus fleeing the FPR advance contributed to the mobilization. The authorities wanted to finish the “work”, that is to eliminate those who, locally, had up to there been spared (elderlies, women, priests and nuns, medical staffs, etc.), in particular to definitely reduce the pockets of resistance which persisted on the hills of Biseseo, in the municipalities of Gishyita and Gisovu of the Kibuye prefecture. Everywhere and for the whole month of June, methodical searches were organized in fields, bush, swamps, forests and rivers to pursue the Tutsi survivors. From June 23rd, the establishment of a “safe humanitarian zone “ under French control fixed hundreds of thousands of removed populations and allowed the FPR troops to progress very quickly northward and to put the Tutsi genocide to an end.

Numerous and often contradictory calculations

The estimated number of victims of the genocide will forever remain approximate, between the lower and superior ranges of 500,000 to more than 2 million. Indeed, if all the calculations established by the United Nations, then by the new national authorities confirm the exceptional scale of the slaughter, none allows the strict validation of such or such estimation. The first figures mentioned at the end of the war were located around 500,000 and leaned on the 1991 Tutsi population census and on that of the survivors. Then followed diverse balance sheet established by the new authorities, the main results of which we will present:

- In December 1994, a report of the Census Division of the Ministry of the Interior of the new regime moved forward the figure of 2,100,000 victims of the genocide. The calculation as a starting point the total population numbers at this date on the territory (4,72 million), amounts to which were added that of the 1,2 million refugees, obtained by deducting the number of refugees brought in previously in Rwanda (800 000) by the total of 2 million of refugees listed outside the borders of Rwanda. The obtained total (5,92 million), representing the estimation of the “real” surviving population, was then compared with the “theoretical” figure which the total population should have reached without the war, calculated by applying the annual growth rate to the 7,2 million inhabitants listed on August 15th, 1991, that is 8,02 million.

- The ministry of Higher education, Scientific research and Culture constituted in 1995, a commission, which made diverse investigations in the municipalities. A Preliminary Report on the identification of genocide and massacres of April to July 1994 in Rwanda was made public in February 1996. The total number of victims listed in the prefectures then amounted to 1,364,020.

- Published in February 2002, at the end of a census led in July 2000, an official toll of the Rwandan ministry of Administration of the territory indicated that the genocide had made 1,074,017 deaths. However, only 934,218 victims had been identified with certainty. According to the inquiries, 93,7 % of the victims of the genocide had been killed because they were identified as Tutsi, 1 % because

they had relationships of kinship, marriage or friendship with Tutsi, 0,8 % because they had physical features similar to those of the Tutsi. Children and young people of less than 24 years old constituted the main part of the victims, with a 53,7 % proportion. Besides, men (56,4 %) had been much more affected than the women (43,3 %). On the social and occupational plan, the farmers were the most affected with 48,2 % of the victims, then came the Secondary education and Higher education students (21,2 %). The machete had been the most murderous weapon (37,9 % of the victims), followed by bludgeons (16,8 %) and firearms (14,8 %). Most of the slaughters had been committed on the hill of residence (59,3 %). Churches constituted the second place for big massacres (11,6 %). Finally, in terms of national distribution, the highest number of victims had been registered in the southern province of Butare (22,1 %), followed by rural Kigali (14,6 %) and of Gitarama in the center (12,1 %). The least affected provinces were those of Ruhengeri (1,3 %), Byumba (2,8 %) and Gisenyi (3,8 %). These figures recut the total Tutsi population estimations according to the prefectures.

- On the eve of the 2003 elections, based on calculation similar to that of December 1994, the authorities announced that the Rwandan total population amounted to 8,2 millions. Starting from the 1991 census' figures and a natural growth rate of 3,2 %, the "demographic deficit" due to the conflict was then esteemed at 2,3 million individuals.

- In April, 2004, a census made by the Rwandan ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports and covering the only temporal segment of the 1994 civil war fixed the "number of people killed during the hundred days (from April to June 1994) and for whom we were able to find the name, the age and the place of birth, at 937,000 Tutsi and Hutu opponents" (statement of Secretary Robert Bayigamba).

- Finally, according to a census published on October 29th, 2008 on the National department of the gacacas jurisdictions (SNJG), the number of victims of the genocide was estimated at 1 million.

A million for the Rwandan authorities or the ICRC and 800 000 according to the United Nations are both figures coming back from now on regularly in most of the analyses. No fundamentally new element will most probably affect in the future this estimation, besides compatible with the national demographic censuses and ground inquiries that were led on well bounded regions.

Discounting the victims of the genocide and the victims of the civil war

The approximations or the incoherence emerging from these inquiries are as much due to problems of method as to the definition of the victims. But, more fundamentally, two constraints cannot be really overtaken.

First of all, if both general censuses of 1978 and 1991 were considered as globally reliable, the ethnic enumerations only very imperfectly accounted for the filiations and real memberships. Approximations which the annual administrative censuses made by the municipalities raised partially but to introduce other biases due to the lack of rigor. So, the assertion according to which Tutsi were much more many than the listed official staff is naturally exact in the political context established by both republics, but no approach allows to measure the difference.

Secondly, the discount of the victims inevitably opens the debate on the number of deaths victims of the genocide and those who were victims of the civil war (fights between the APR and the FAR), then the massacres of the Hutu civilian population by the APR. As an example, on September 16th, 1994 at the international conference of The Hague on Rwanda, the president Pasteur Bizimungu

recognized that, “between 60 and 70 people committed acts of vengeance” based on “individual and isolated actions” before immediately specifying: “there is no crime which we left unpunished.” As he concluded it with good reason, the victims of these acts “cannot be considered on the same level as a million deaths of the genocide”, but all the collected testimonies and proofs accounted for tens of thousands Hutu victims, which proved that they didn’t result from isolated acts but from orders given at the highest level by the heads of the rebellion in the APR units. The line of these orders was not to take prisoners among the fighters, to release conquered zones of their population and, in many prefectures (Byumba, Kibungo, Gitarama, Butare), to gather in public places (stadiums), markets, etc.) the Hutu populations that had fled, for purposes of mass-massacres. As often, corpses were added to the existing common graves, and later counted with all the victims of the genocide. In spite of the systematic will to deny these practices and to erase the proofs, and according to the No witness should survive HRW / FIDH published work, “these partial and unconfirmed indications, account for at least 25,000 to 30,000 victims, which corresponds to the lowest Gersony estimation”. It remains that this estimation of the number of the Hutu persons killed by the APR is situated far below other calculations, which consider the treatment reserved for displaced populations of the Turquoise zone, when the FPR took control of it (in particular in the camp of Kibeho, in April 1995); refugees’ summary executions of forcedly repatriated populations from Zaire in 1996; the systematic massacres of the runaway refugees on their way to Kisangani and Kinshasa in 1996-1997 or the thousands of victims of the fight against the “infiltrated” in the prefectures of Gisenyi and Gitarama during year 1997. The calculations lead then to hundreds of thousands of dead: thus, many enumerations of the victims of the war and the genocide established by various authors (Filip Reyntjens, James Gasana, Abdul Joshua Ruzibiza, etc.), advance figures being located in general around 1,5 million.

With regard to the foreign speakers, let us still note the ten Belgian “blue helmets”, killed on April 7th, 1994. Thereafter, twelve other “blue helmets” died, as well as three military observers and a member of the civil police.

In spite of the abundance of information collected from multiple sources and having been the object of detailed files on behalf of the office of the TPIR prosecutor, the refusal to pursue the authors of war crimes and humanity crimes made by the APR didn’t allow to put an end to sharp and long-lasting polemics (see chapter 14).