The Forgotten Genocide: The Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Political violence has many different definitions and occurs in many places in the world, but Africa is a hotbed for violence. Violence in Africa ranges from Islamic extremists to decades old ethnic conflicts. A good number of the modern genocides since World War II have occurred there. The Democratic Republic of Congo has suffered through a genocide during the last few decades, but receives very little attention from the international community. Some of this lack of attention is due to other genocides in Africa, in Rwanda and Darfur. The other reason for lack of attention to the genocide in the Congo is because the U.N. has turned its head the other way not wanting to recognize that it has failed to prevent a genocide that has killed over 5 million people.¹ Regardless of the little attention on the Congo, the turmoil in Rwanda and Darfur has spilled over into the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This turmoil highlights much of the political strife widespread in Africa and explains the various kinds of violence that have engulfed the continent.

The genocide that occurred in the Congo was an extension of the genocide in Rwanda. After the end of the Rwandan genocide, the targeted Hutus fled to neighboring countries, including the Congo. “Following the invasion of the DRC in 1996, military forces of the Tutsi-led Government of Rwanda along with their Congolese allies of AFDL undertook a systematic

tracking down of military and civilian Hutus in the DRC.”

The AFDL is the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo. The fighting has been located in the eastern portion of the country, where there are vast amounts of natural resources including tin, gold, and coltan, which yield elements used in laptops and cellphones.

Besides the fight for control of natural resources, the battle for political power over the Congo has caused major ethnic conflict. This is because many of the different leaders who fought for control for the Congo, from the 1960’s up until the 1990’s, were all backed by different ethnic groups. Assassinations of political leaders in the Congo were common highlighting the ethnic tension that has been in place since Belgium took over the country at the turn of the 20th century. When Belgium took over the Congo for natural resources in 1886, King Leopold exploited the native ethnic groups killing any African who refused to pay taxes and work for the Belgium crown. This exploitation created ethnic division between groups loyal to Belgium and groups that supported a pro-Congo state. This division in turned created political strife in the country even after Belgium left the country.

The political strife in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the violence brought over from Rwanda gained the attention of the U.N., as reports of war crimes flooded into the council. The UN conducted a mapping exercise in Congo that identified where acts of genocide had taken place. They specifically emphasized only the most serious crimes, including killings and rapes of Hutus. “The 566-page document lists only 617 of the most serious violations of

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3 Raghavan, “in volatile Congo.”
human rights, professionally collected and documented.”\(^5\) The report also cited addition incidents of torture, burning, and blocking humanitarian supplies aimed to help the Hutus. This acts were pre-meditated, according to the report, and went beyond the elements of war.\(^6\)

The genocide in the Congo is a microcosm for the continent of Africa. Political violence has shaped African politics for the last three decades, with acts of genocides being the most common form of political violence. Africa sits on many fields of valuable, natural resources, which involves lots of money and outside influences coming into African countries. African is also home to different ethnic groups that have decades long conflicts with each other. The influence of European countries have increased these conflicts. Africa is a major source of political violence in the world and the reasons why are most simple, natural resources, and complex, ethnic disputes, but the international community needs to do a better job intervening when acts of genocides occur.

\(^6\) Okosun and Kibiswa, “Human rights violations.”
Bibliography

