

## The Absence of War

by Carol Homden

The opening of *The Absence of War*, the concluding part of David Hare's trilogy on the state of the nation, sees today's politicians gathered around the cenotaph to lead the tribute to Britain's war dead. In this image lies the complex framework of historical inheritance and institutional respectability which stands behind Hare's ostensible subject of the Labour Party's loss of the 1992 election and which has informed the work of one of Britain's leading playwrights for two decades.

In times of war people do what needs to be done; in its absence there is nothing but keeping busy. In anticipation of the election, the private office of the Labour leader is hiring a new advertising agent with a clear-eyed appreciation that Labour could not win, can never win, on the Tory high-ground of the economy, especially by telling the truth about it.

The central character in the *Absence of War*, Labour leader, George Jones, has brought the party to the point where victory might again be possible. Streamlined and image-built, he has paid a terrible price, the price of respectability. Jones now scripts all his speeches and has suppressed what made him leader, his eloquence in expressing a passionate belief in hope. After a disastrous television interview, he attempts to claw back lost ground by returning to his old campaigning style only to find that the well has dried up. The new style is not working and the old has died.

At the heart of Hare's trilogy is the question of how best to fight if it is not enough simply to do good like the hard-working parish priests in *Racing Demon* (1990) or the liberal barrister in the midst of a professionalised legal system in *Murmuring Judges* (1991). In Hare's earlier work, individuals - like Andrew May in *Pravda*, Susan Traherne in *Plenty*, and Isobel Glass in *The Secret Rapture* - are either absorbed, sent mad, or destroyed.

You cannot fight without institutions - the church, the law, or the Labour Party.

In *The Absence of War*, the Labour Party is shown to have lost its roots without sending out new shoots; there are no Labour schools to go to and the communities which once supported the Trades Unions are in terminal decline. Constituency parties and Labour voters are conspicuous by their absence. As revolutionary words grow old and ridiculous, the Party has no language of its own, its all-consuming obsession with the



enemy leaving nothing distinctive.

To spend time, as many critics did, analysing the precise ways in which Jones "is" Neil Kinnock becomes ultimately a way of avoiding the issues. The situation of Kinnock and the fictional George Jones parallel each other, just as in earlier plays Hare had used John Poulson, the Borgias, and Rupert Murdoch. He chose these figures, however, because they - in their very specificity - reflect what he sees as eternal dilemmas of corruption, of acquisitiveness, of leadership.

It was in his first play on a main stage, *Brassneck* (1973), that Hare first brought fact and fiction together in his own relativistic drama. Written with Howard Brenton, it demonstrated how the hope of 1945 went down the middle as property developers and the new rich helped the Right to regroup. The Left, only too aware of their betrayal, asked "Ow can we ever forgive ourselves?"

If they were all lined up,

Britain's war dead from this century would stretch from London to Edinburgh. It was in the first war that morality fragmented in the face of the squalid destruction in the trenches; and in the second that the opening up of society generated the most successful government of the century - a Labour government. Hare opens his trilogy with the image because it is this inheritance which is for him the touchstone of modern Britain.

After *Brassneck*, Hare went on to try to find a model of successful revolution in China in *Fanshen* (1975). As a result, "political theatre" labels have resolutely stuck to his writing. He continued, however, to expose the manipulation of the media which began in wartime propaganda in *Licking Hitler* and, increasingly, to focus on the personal cost of dissent in the post-war period in *Plenty*, and the search for moral value in art in *A Map of the World* (1983) and *The Bay at Nice* (1986).

By 1985 and *Pravda*, Lambert Le Roux, the Murdoch-Maxwell-Goldsmith figure, was buying the establishment along with *The Times*. In that play (also written with Howard Brenton) lay the start of Hare's confrontation with the New Right, which continued in the new Tory women of *Paris By Night* and *The Secret Rapture* (1986). For Hare, this exploration, concluded in the Trilogy, has been a painful one, laying bare what he sees as the failure of opposition in this country.

Hare once complained that he had got used to the clamour for a simpler morality; that clamour is still to be heard today, demanding that the trilogy resolve itself into a call for action to fill the vacuum left by the Thatcherite eighties. Hare has, however, planted the thought that the illusion of action might be the biggest temptation of all until we can answer the questions: "Is this history? Is everything history? Could we have done more? Was it possible? And how shall we know?"

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## The Rationality of Genocide

by René Lemarchand

The image of Rwanda conveyed by the media is that of a society gone amok. How else to explain the collective insanity that led to the butchering of half a million civilians, men, women and children? Seen in the broader context of twentieth-century genocides, the Rwandan tragedy underscores the universality - one might say the "normality" - of the African phenomenon. The logic that set in motion the infernal machine of the Rwanda killings is no less "rational" than that which presided over the extermination of millions in Hitler's Germany or Pol Pot's Cambodia. The implication, lucidly stated by Helen Fein in a recent publication of the Institute for the Study of Genocide, is worth bearing in mind: "Genocide is preventable because it is usually a rational act: that is, the perpetrators calculate the likelihood of success, given their values and objectives".

The Rwandan genocide is neither reducible to a tribal meltdown rooted in atavistic hatreds nor to a spontaneous outburst of blind fury set off by the shooting down of the presidential plane on April 6th last year as officials of the Habyalimana regime have repeatedly claimed. However widespread, both views are travesties of reality. What they mask is the political manipulation that lies behind the systematic massacre of a civilian population. Planned annihilation, not the sudden eruption of long-simmering hatreds, is the key to the Rwandan tragedy.

While there is general agreement among Rwanda specialists that the roots of conflict lie in the transformation of ethnic identities that accompanied the advent of colonial rule, the chain of events leading to the killings begins with the Hutu revolution of 1959-62. This revolution would have quickly fizzled out had it not been for the sustained political, moral and logistical assistance of the Catholic church and the tulle authorities

to the insurgents. The result was a radical shift of power from Tutsis to Hutu and the exodus of thousands of Tutsi families to neighbouring territories such as Uganda. The sons of the refugee Diaspora in Uganda form the nucleus of the Tutsi-dominated politico-military organisation, the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), which invaded Rwanda on October 1, 1990. The RPF did not anticipate the massive military support that President Juvenal Habyalimana was about to receive from the French. Nor did they foresee the catalytic effect of the invasion on Hutu solidarities, to manipulate ethnic hatreds for political advantage

Different levels of meaning can be read into the invasion of Rwanda by the RPF, each corresponding to a distinctive set of actors. What the French saw as an intolerable Anglo-Saxon threat to their *chasse gardée*, the "Fachoda syndrome", the hard-liners in the Habyalimana camp did not hesitate to denounce as a brazen attempt by externally supported counter-revolutionaries to turn the clock back to the pre-revolutionary era, when Tutsi hegemony was the order of the day.

The "Hamitic" frame of reference added yet another ominous dimension to the counter-revolutionary image projected by the invaders. This is where the legacy of missionary historiography, evolving from speculation about cultural affinities between Hamites and Coptic Christianity to politicised dogma about the Ethiopian origins of the Tutsi, now referred to as "feodo-Hamites", contributed a distinctively racist edge to the discourse of Hutu politicians. Already the ideological stock-in-trade of Hutu revolutionaries in the fifties, official references to the Hamitic peril gained renewed salience in the wake of the invasion. Thus Leon Mugesera, the Hutu "boss" from Gisenyi, in a much quoted statement, urged his followers to send the Tutsi back to their country of origin, Ethiopia, through the quickest route: via the Akanyaru river, known to have disgorged

countless Tutsi corpses into Lake Victoria.

What emerges from the urgings of Leon Mugesera, and the incitements to violence disseminated by Radio Mille Collines, is an image of the Tutsi as both alien and clever - not unlike the image of the Jew in Nazi propaganda. This alienness turns him into a permanent threat to the unsuspecting Hutu. Nothing short of physical liquidation can properly deal with such danger.

The persistent indifference of the international community in the face of organised murder, coupled with France's rising levels of military assistance to the murderers, were powerful inducements for the regime to further strengthen its organisational capacities. By 1992 the institutional apparatus of genocide was already in place. It involved four distinctive levels of activity or sets of actors: the *akazu* ("little house" in Kinyarwanda), that is the core group, consisting of Habyalimana's immediate entourage, including his wife, his three brothers-in-law, Zigiranyirazo, Rwabukumba and Sagatwa, and a sprinkling of trusted advisers, Nzirorera, Serubuga and Gashumba; about two to three hundred rural organisers; the militia (*interhamwe*), estimated at 30,000, in charge of the actual killing; and the presidential guard. Thus emerged an organisational structure ideally suited to the task at hand.

It is difficult to believe that the French were not aware of the potential for genocide created by the systematic manipulation of ethnic identities, by the mob killings of Tutsi over a period of years, and by the incitements to violence broadcast by Radio Mille Collines. If so, it defies Cartesian logic to comprehend how the self-styled *patrie des droits de l'homme* could sweep under the carpet such extreme human rights violations in the name of the threats posed to its higher geopolitical interests by the Trojan horse of Anglo-Saxon imperialism.

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*The above is an abstract from a paper presented at a CSD-hosted workshop on Rwanda on 12 December 1994. René Lemarchand works for USAID.*

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