

"Heart of Darkness"?

Genocide in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Abstract

Recent violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been controversially labeled genocide by some media and humanitarian sources. I argue that the conflict is being undertaken with genocidal intent by numerous government armies, rebel groups, and local militia, but that it is being convoluted and prolonged by alternative political and economic motives. In addition, I examine the moral imperatives associated with acknowledging genocide in a region and how these political implications have shaped international response to the conflict.

Résumé

La violence récente dans la République de la Congo a été marquée comme génocide par certaines médias et groupes humanitaires. Je présente que le conflit a été entrepris par les armées du gouvernement, les groupes rebelles et les milices locales avec intention génocidaire, mais que ce conflit est en train d'être convoluted et prolongé par d'autres motivations politiques et économiques. En outre, j'examine les impératifs moraux liés à la reconnaissance du génocide dans un conflit et comment ces implications politiques ont formé la réponse internationale au conflit.

With global attention drawn by the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the current conflict in Sudan, many media outlets and international organization are warning that genocide is occurring in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). News sources such as BBC News¹, the Observer International², and the non-governmental organization Genocide Watch³ have raised the region's profile and attempted to stimulate international demands for action. Over three million civilians are estimated to have been killed by the conflict, 2.3 million continue to be displaced, and tens of thousands of brutal rapes and sexual mutilations have been reported⁴.

While the evidence of mass violence is undeniable, its diagnosis as genocide is debatable. An investigation of human rights violations in the eastern region by the United Nations mission in the DRC concluded, contrary to local civilian and military claims, that "no genocide took place there".⁵ So given the conflicting reports, does the mass violence in the DRC constitute genocide? The conflict has degenerated

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¹ BBC News. "UN Warned of DR Congo genocide." *BBC News*. 20 May 2001.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1340266.stm>.

² James Astill, "Congo: Genocide as militias battle to seize power," *The Observer International*. 15 June 2003.

³ Genocide Watch, "Genocide Emergency: Ituri, Eastern Congo." *Genocide Watch*. May 2003. <http://www.genocidewatch.org/GenocideEmergencyIturi.htm>.

⁴ Global IDP Project. "IDPs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Causes and Background of Displacement." *Norwegian Refugee Council*. 25 October 2004. <http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSur->

[vey.nsf/wCountriesb/Democratic+Republic+of+the+CongoP.](http://www.un.org/apps/news/storyAr.asp?NewsID=11070&Cr=democratic&Cr1=congo&Kw1=Congo&Kw2=genocide&Kw3=)

⁵ UN News Centre. "No genocide took place in eastern DR of Congo, UN mission says." *UN News Centre*. 27 November 2004.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/storyAr.asp?NewsID=11070&Cr=democratic&Cr1=congo&Kw1=Congo&Kw2=genocide&Kw3=>.

into an extremely complex, transcontinental bloodbath. It comprises of a Great Lakes rivalry between Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi and Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. Both the violent national civil wars of Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Angola, and the DRC itself, as well as ethnic feuding massacres are being fought on Congolese soil⁶. The quickly shifting alliances and underlying motives of the state and non-state actors encompassing traditional ethnic hatred, regional power dynamics, and economic opportunism all complicate the nature and intent of the violence.⁷

Through examination of genocide theory, historical analysis of the conflict, and recent ethnicization campaigns, I will argue that much of the mass violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo is being committed by numerous government armies, rebel groups, and local militia; all with genocidal intent. I will present the various state and non-state actors in the conflict and contend that their alternate motives for conflict, primarily economic, encourage a predatory, genocidal environment by contributing to the polarization, escalation, and legitimization of violence. Finally, I will examine the political motivations and implications for the use of the term 'genocide' and how it has shaped international response to the conflict.

GENOCIDE THEORY

The application of the term 'genocide' has become so widespread and politically loaded that its meaning is increasingly ambiguous. Ranging from anti-abortion rallies to partisan debates on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the term's overuse in popular news and rhetoric has contributed to international confusion and desensitization.⁸ In addition to the exploitation of 'genocide' as a conven-

ient catchphrase, the field has also been littered by the proliferation of nearly identical alternative labels. Stuart Stein, Director of the Genocide Web Documentation Centre, for example, has identified 48 distinct terminologies significantly overlapping in their attempts to accurately describe atrocities of this nature.⁹

Genocide is defined under Article II of the United Nations Genocide Convention as:

any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.¹⁰

The UN definition has provided anchorage for genocide studies and has spawned many theoretical extrapolations. Few scholars accept the Article II definition of genocide as adequate due to the definitions' limited scope, which does not include political, economic, gender, culture, or other groups, and difficulty of ascertaining the nature and presence of intent.¹¹ While the '-cide' suffix connotes the mass murder most commonly associated with genocide, it is increasingly argued that genocidal objectives may include disintegration of a particular group's language, culture, liberty, health, dignity, economic viability, and political and social institutions.¹² Adam Jones, author and editor of some of the most progressive and in-

6 Ch. Didier Gondola, *The History of Congo*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.

7 Paul S. Orogun, "Crisis of Government, Ethnic Schisms, Civil War, and Regional Destabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *World Affairs*. 165.1 (Washington: Summer 2002): 25-41.

8 Helen Fein, "Genocide: A Sociological Perspective," *Genocide: An Anthropological Reader*. Ed. Alexander Laban Hinton. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002.

9 Stuart Stein, "Geno and Other Cides: A Cautionary Note on Knowledge Accumulation," *Genocide and Genocide*. Ed. Adam Jones. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004.

10 OHCHR "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide." *International Law*. 1946.

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/genocide.htm>.

11 Ibid.

12 Raphaël Lemkin, "Genocide: A New Term and New Conception for Destruction of Nations," *Genocide: An Anthropological Reader*. Ed. Alexander Laban Hinton. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002.

fluent recent texts on genocide and gendercide, has created a more specific foundation for his own research. Jones defines genocide as "the actualization of the intent, however successfully carried out, to murder in whole or insubstantial part any national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, social, gender or economic group, as these groups are defined by the perpetrator, by whatever means".¹³

HISTORICAL CONFLICT IN THE CONGO

Initial tension in the Eastern DRC arose in the North and South Kivu provinces between self-professed "indigenous" ethnic groups and the Banyarwanda group, which comprises of Hutu and Tutsi who speak Kinyarwanda and were accused of post-colonial immigration from Rwanda.¹⁴ Under Mobutu Seso Seke's 1981 Citizenship Law, all Banyarwanda who immigrated after the 1885 establishment of colonial boundaries were classified as non-citizens. The common Banyarwanda organization Umoja was formed in protest to the Citizenship Law, but it disintegrated by 1988 due to intra-ethnic tensions and was antagonistically replaced by the Hutu organization Maghrivi and the Tutsi organization SIDER. By the mid 1990s, Hutu and Tutsi were diametrically organized in regions across the Congo, and Hutu and Tutsi associations began to cross state boundaries and function as regional networks.¹⁵

After the 1994 Rwandan genocide, one million refugees caused an explosion of Kinyarwanda-speakers in the Kivu provinces and contributed to rapidly escalating ethnic conflict. Hutu refugee camps, controlled by the Interhamwe génocidaires, rapidly converted into armed and ethnically-volatile camps to train refugees for excursions back into Rwanda or against local Congolese Tutsi, commonly distinguished

as the Banyamulenge.¹⁶ Many young Banyamulenge crossed into Rwanda to be trained in response to the Hutu threat by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), lending public credibility to the Maghrivi claim that Congolese Tutsi were culturally and politically allied to Rwanda. In increasing resemblance to pre-genocidal militarization and polarization in Rwanda, militia generically known as "Mayi Mayi" began to form in almost every municipality in Kivu.¹⁷

As personal health problems and internal and external discontent lead to the decay of Mobutu Seso Seke's regime, a May 1997 coup d'état comprised of Rwandan and Ugandan troops, along with "indigenous" Mayi Mayi militia and Banyamulenge forces, installed Laurent Kabila as President of the DRC. The violence was fed by the eagerness of Banyamulenge to settle scores with Maghrivi Hutu, killing 6000 Hutu in Goma (North Kivu) in one week. In addition, Rwandese Tutsi's hatred of génocidaires was generalized to all Hutu and to the "indigenous" Kivu population, seeing them as willing hosts to the génocidaires. As a result, there was indiscriminate slaughter of Interhamwe, unarmed Hutu refugees, Maghrivi Hutu, and local Hutu not even connected to Maghrivi.¹⁸

The Mayi Mayi began to oppose the rebellion when it appeared to be leading an imminent Rwandan occupation. The Rwandese army commander was appointed commander of the Congolese National Army, which began to actively support Congolese Tutsi demands for a separate Native Authority in South Kivu and for the Hutu head of the Rutshuru (North Kivu) Native Authority be replaced by a Tutsi. The Mayi Mayi fed public hysteria that the Banyamulenge would annex Kivu province to Rwanda.¹⁹

13 Adam Jones, "Gendercide and Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 2.2 (June 2000) 186.

14 Christian P. Scherrer, *War in the Congo*. Venlo, The Netherlands: Vrijzenboom, 2001.

15 Mahmood Mamdani, "Citizenship Crisis in Eastern Congo," *When Victims Become Killers*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001.

16 Human Rights Watch, *The War within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002.

17 Mahmood Mamdani, 2001.

18 Astri Suhrke, *The Path of a Genocide*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1999.

19 Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila, A People's History*. New York: Zed Book Ltd., 2002.

Plagued by continuing civil war and accusations of puppetry by Rwandan Tutsis, Kabila tried to consolidate his authority in a public order on 27 July 1998 to oust "foreigners," comprising of Rwandans, Ugandans, and Banyamulenge.²⁰ The outrage from these factions that had originally lifted Kabila, once a Cuban-supported guerrilla leader and gold-smuggler, to power incited a Second Rebellion against the Kinshasa government. In response, Kabila encouraged the "indigenous" population in Kivu to indiscriminately slaughter the Rwandan invading forces, all Congolese Banyamulenge involved in the rebellion, and even all Congolese Tutsi civilians.²¹ Rwanda armed additional Banyamulenge to aid the Second Rebellion, and the Kabila government responded by arming Congolese Hutu. Civil politics and opportunities for peaceful solutions were reduced to militarization and armed politics, which crystallized volatile Hutu and Tutsi regional diasporas determined to have their extremist demands met or exterminate their ethnic opposition.

SYSTEMATIC ETHNICIZATION CAMPAIGN

The conflict from the opposing sides of the DRC leadership struggle has become increasingly centered on ethnic rivalry and extermination. The Banyamulenge have traditionally been politically persecuted and marginalized in the DRC. Furthermore, Kabila is using propaganda to stir ethnic hatred against all Tutsis by labeling them as foreign invaders and calling for Congolese to arm themselves for "a total war to totally wipe the Rwandans out".²² The Kabila government's propaganda has centered on dehumanization of the Banyamulenge, such as Kabila's public announcement, "In every village the people must get armed . . . and exterminate the enemy, for not becoming the slaves of the Tutsi".²³ Kabila also encouraged state radio listeners to use "a ma-

chete, a spear, an arrow, a hoe, spades, rakes, nails, truncheons, electric irons, barbed wire to kill the Rwandan Tutsi,"²⁴ thereby resulting in a witch-hunt against all eastern Congolese and perceived followers, often determined by facial features. In addition, the foreign minister Abdoulaye Yerodia warned "loyal citizens . . . they [the Tutsi] are like insects, and even microbes must methodically and resolutely be exterminated".²⁵ This discourse echoes the Interhamwe labeling Rwandan Tutsis as *inyenzi*, cockroaches, and encouraging their extermination before and during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. In Kinshasa alone, the state-sponsored Force de l'Autodéfense Populaire (FAP) openly massacred twelve hundred Banyamulenge, with widespread reports of public cannibalism.²⁶

As recently as August 13, 2004, a massacre at Gatumba refugee center in Burundi explicitly targeted 147 of the 152 Congolese Tutsi refugees. They were hacked, bludgeoned, or burned to death; another 106 were wounded. Eleven of the fifteen Banyamulenge refugee tents, housing mostly women and children, were totally or partially burned and riddled with bullet holes, while none of the sixteen Burundian refugee tents were touched.²⁷ Commander Laurent Nkunda published a communiqué 16 August 2004 stating the attack, "confirms there is an extermination plan against the Banyamulenge"²⁸ and condemning his military withdrawal from Bukavu under international pressure a deadly mistake. While attackers are accused of being comprised from the DRC army, ex-FAR, Interhamwe, and Mayi Mayi, other sources allude that financial and strategic support may have come from external actors involved in the Great Lakes conflict with interests in destabilizing

20 Christian P. Scherrer, 2001.

21 Ibid.

22 Kevin C. Dunn, *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Christian P. Scherrer, 2001.

26 Ibid.

27 MONUC Newswire, "Burundi refugee massacre part of genocidal plan: Rwanda," August 14, 2004. MONUC Newswire.

<http://www.monuc.org/News.aspx?newsID=3517>.

28 UN Security Council, "Joint report of the UN Mission in the DR Congo," *United Nations*. 17 October 17 2004.

attempts at demilitarization of the region.²⁹

CONGO COMBATANTS

The conflict in the DRC is comprised of three interconnected antagonisms: conflict between an alliance of the Great Lakes region's Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi versus that of Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia; violent national civil wars of Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Angola, and the Congo itself; and finally, explosive bloodshed over the Congo's own ethnic feuding.³⁰ Each of the conflicts escalates and reinforces the others, and is also motivated by the extremely profitable opportunities for resource smuggling and concessions throughout the crisis.

Because Kabila betrayed their earlier support, Rwanda and Uganda switched their allegiance during the Second Rebellion to the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) and the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) rebel groups. The states also sought to end joint border insecurity allowing the continual Interhamwe raids to terrorize their citizens, and to protect the Congolese Tutsi Banyamulenge. The Rwandan Interhamwe gained control of Hutu refugee camps in the Congolese province of Kivu, operating as génocidaires to attack Rwandan territory. The Congo is subsequently suffering "kin country syndrome," where ethnic conflict crosses national boundaries and escalates transnational violence.³¹

Burundi, similarly characterized by a bipolar Hutu-Tutsi population, joined the force rebelling against the Kabila regime. The Kinshasa government would have been ousted if not for the support of Angola, Namibia, Sudan, Chad, and especially Zimbabwe. The fighting is additionally complicated by the civil wars of many of the countries being fought on Congolese soil, with national rebel groups fighting with the opposing force in a "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" mentality.³² Finally, the Mayi Mayi have transformed into numerous

armed local groups committed to defense of communities against external soldiers of any side.³³

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNISM

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is extremely resource-rich, and economic opportunism both by foreign powers and internal rebel groups has contributed to escalation of the conflict and has also provided motivation for continuation of the chaos. African states fighting to maintain the Kabila regime have substantial economic interests in the DRC. Namibian President Sam Nujoma, for instance, has plans to divert water from the river Congo across Angola to northern Namibia.³⁴ Similarly, Angola intervened in the Matadi corridor to protect oil interests in its enclave of Cabinda, which produces 70% of Angola's oil and almost all of its foreign exchange earnings.³⁵ Zimbabwe is an especially potent example of military adventurism, and expects to recoup the \$40-\$200 million for military assistance owed by Kabila in concessions in the copper mines of Katanga province and the diamond fields of Mbuji-Mayi.³⁶ And similarly, Uganda is benefiting from the DRC conflict by plundering and exporting Congolese resources. For example, Uganda reaped US\$1,263,385 from diamond exports in 2000, despite having no diamond resources, and Ugandan gold production was 0.0044 tons but 10.83 tons were exported.³⁷ Overall, the 'invited' countries are pillaging the Congo's resources so successfully that they are able to repay themselves Kabila's debts from the 1997 coup, fund the current war, and turn a profit.

Increasingly, however, the economic interests in the DRC are shifting from gold, copper, and diamonds, to the highly heat-resistant metal columbite-tantalite. 'Col-

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Christian P. Scherrer, 2001.

36 Paul S. Orogun, 2002.

37 UN Security Council, "Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the DR Congo," *United Nations*.

<http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/323/54/IMG/N0132354.pdf?OpenElement>.

29 Ibid.

30 Ch. Didier Gondola, 2002.

31 Paul S. Orogun, 2002.

32 Ibid.

tan,' for short, is essential in the manufacturing of miniature circuit boards, such as those found in almost every cell phone, laptop, and VCR in the world. Since coltan demand skyrocketed in 2000, a temporary worldwide shortage resulted in a ten-fold increase in its price. Africa contains eighty percent of the world's coltan, of which at least eighty percent is located in the DRC. From numerous illegal mines, especially in the Kivu province, rebel groups sell the ore directly to multinational corporations, and Rwandan, Burundian, and Ugandan occupational forces smuggle it back to their respective countries for export. Uganda, for example, displayed a staggering increase in coltan exports, from 2.5 tons in 1997 to 70 tons only two years later.³⁸

The continuing decline of centralized authority in the Congo permits ongoing predatory practices by its neighbors. In addition, foreign economic interests, including American and Canadian multinational mining corporations, provide valuable incentives for conflict to continue.³⁹ Overall, the DRC's high population density, shortage of arable land, and lack of economic opportunities have fueled ethnic conflicts. The motives of many combatants, conversely, are convoluted by economic opportunism, which may subvert ethnic prerogatives.

APPLICABILITY OF GENOCIDE THEORY

The conflict in the DRC is less clear-cut than 'traditional' genocides, such as Armenia, the Holocaust, and Rwanda, where there is a common tendency to acknowledge a single distinguishable 'villain.' In contrast to this simplistic view of victimization, combatants in the DRC display reciprocal genocidal intent. The region is significantly characterized by the eight progressive stages of genocide delineated by Genocide Watch President Dr. Gregory H. Stanton: "classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, extermination, and denial".⁴⁰

The conflict is additionally complicated as economic and political motives overlap ethnicization and quickly shift alliances. It therefore becomes essential to distinguish intent from motive. There may be multiple motives for conflict in the DRC, including territorial integrity, political power, and economic gain, but the designation of genocide depends on a pattern of systematic action with the intent to destroy a particular group. There alternatives motives, however, may enhance the perpetuation of genocide by inspiring competition among different ethnic groups situated in economically impoverished, highly populated regions.

In addition to ulterior motives to the violence, it is difficult to differentiate between rape and murder in the DRC with genocidal origins and that which is inspired by a violent environment and encouraged by an absence of rule of law. Opportunistic violence and genocide are not mutually exclusive, but reinforce each other's power to terrorize and subjugate a single person or an entire race. While not all conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is genocidal, these elements encourage a predatory environment by contributing to the polarization, escalation, and legitimization of violence.

CONCLUSION

The term 'genocide' has been widely utilized both in pop culture and theoretical analysis because of the moral imperative attached to it, and has developed, according to Berel Lang, to mean "a set of actions extraordinary in malevolence and heinousness".⁴¹ Attaching the genocide label has become a benchmark of moral and academic importance, and of political danger or utility. Therefore, analyses of mass killings, such as this paper, are often focused on establishing "genocidal credentials" or their absence.⁴²

As a result of its ethical implications, political acknowledgement of a con-

38 Ch. Didier Gondola, 2002.

39 Ibid.

40 Gregory H. Stanton, "Eight Stages of Genocide,"

Genocide Watch, 1996.

<http://www.genocidewatch.org/8stages.htm>.

41 Stuart Stein, 2004.

42 Ibid.

flict as genocide carries substantial obligation to act. Unwilling or unable to commit a more extensive and effective peacekeeping force in the Great Lakes region, the United Nations has carefully avoided any discussion of genocide in relation to the DRC at the same time as mournfully observing the tenth anniversary of Rwanda and pledging "never again." Alternatively, perhaps the United States has been vocal in condemning the conflict in Sudan as genocide because it has become politically expedient to galvanize international military action against Arabic governments.

The definition of the events in the Congo brings focus back to the importance of words and discourse for not only identifying but also shaping events. Joseph Conrad's representation of the Congo as the "Heart of Darkness": implicitly primitive, chaotic, and uncivilizable, has directly influenced political policies towards the Great Lakes region.⁴³ *The East African* newspaper censured that President Clinton's aim during his 1998 visit to Rwanda was to condemn the 1994 genocide and to stress that ethnic killing must be rooted out of the African psyche.⁴⁴ Ignorance of African culture and history leads to ethnocentric assumptions that violence is an irrevocable part of indigenous African tribalism.

The label of genocide similarly determines both external and internal events. The Lusaka Peace Agreement, signed July 10, 1999 ordered the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Congo, a respect for Congolese sovereignty, UN peacekeeping deployment, militia disarmament, and convening of a national dialogue. The idealistic assumption was that through an inclusive inter-Congolese dialogue "shall emerge agreement on the composition of a new national army, a new constitution, and free elections".⁴⁵ The United Nations, however,

failed to acknowledge and address the presence of genocidal intent within the conflict, and under the simplistic provisions all factions failed to obey the agreement, and the war continued by other means.

Labeling the violence in the DRC as purely genocidal, however, may have the undesirable effect of simplifying the situation, blaming chaos on irresolvable ethnic tensions, rather than examining the deeper citizenship and land crises, political manipulation, and external polarizing forces and economic adventurism that contribute to the situation. International acknowledgment of the conflict, however, as an ongoing atrocity encompassing multi-lateral crimes against humanity is essential before an opportunity can be reached in the DRC for sustainable disarmament and development.

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⁴³ Kevin C. Dunn, 2003.

⁴⁴ J. E. Lassiter, "African Culture and Personality: Bad Social Science, Effective Social Activism, or a Call to Reinvent Ethnology?" *African Studies Quarterly*. 1999. 3(2). <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v3/v3i2a1.htm>.

⁴⁵ Africa Recovery. "Key provisions of the Lusaka cease-fire agreement." *United Nations*. April 2000.
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UN Security Council. "Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo." 2000. *United Nations*. <http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/323/54/IMG/N0132354.pdf?OpenElement>.

UN Security Council. "Joint report of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Operation in Burundi, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights into the Gatumba massacre." *United Nations*. 17 October 17 2004. <http://www.monuc.org/downloads/UNen.pdf>

be radically transformed in order to secure women's unique role in society. I approached this paper on the basis that citizenship in contemporary society is measured by material participation in the work force within the underlying principle of Carol Pateman's essay.

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