

Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa

By Jason Stearns

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Jason Stearns' *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War of Africa* discusses a number of topics related to the conflict in Congo. The author is a political activist and a journalist who had been worked on the conflict for the past ten years as well as working with a Congolese human rights group. Later he worked for both, the International Crisis Group and the United Nations peacekeeping operation.

The author traces the evolution of the conflict, which began in 1996, has continued intermittently until today. Stearns provides a clear theoretical analysis of the causes that led the heart of Africa, Congo, to bleed. Also, he used powerful stories from real life to keep things revival and interesting for the reader. He wrote this book in order to grasp the roots of the brutal war and violence that has engulfed in Congo. At least nine governments and twenty various rebel groups have been involved in this conflict. It has cost a staggering five million lives. Nevertheless, this enormous war has received little media coverage, particularly in the Western press. The author attempts to answer why, for example, the conflict in Darfur has received more than four times the conflict in Congo, though the death rate in Congo is more than ten times that in Darfur.

Moreover, the author attempts to view the conflict through the lens of its participants as well as protagonists and comprehend why war is more powerful than peace. Furthermore, to grasp the reasons that led the regional political elites appear

to be more concerned with the opportunities (economic and otherwise) presented by the conflict than in actually solving this enduring crisis. Stearns argues that the conflict is a result of the interaction between important regional, national and local actors. Similarly, the author focuses on the actors involved in the continuation of the conflict more so than the victims of the conflict and "the politicians and army commanders more than the refugees and rape survivors". (Stearns, 8) Furthermore, the book looks at how the decisions of the key political actors were constrained by the political system, limiting the choices they made and the opportunities to resolve the conflict peacefully. In short, the author maintains that important political players did not have the opportunity to work toward peaceful ends without significant risk to their personal interests. Thus, the author takes the view that the conflict is an elite-driven, political war; though its victims were more often ordinary Congolese that killing became part of their daily lives and sexual violence happens to "every" woman.

He uses a variety of sources to support his arguments. He draws on information from academic studies, journalistic reports in addition to extensive primary source research including numerous interviews, with key participants like diplomats, Congolese ministers, former child soldiers, refugees and army commanders such as Jean Mbuyu, the national security advisor, Edy Kapend, Kabila's military advisor, military of interior, Mwenze Kongolo in Kinasha, Congo, the

senator Wamba dia Wamba . Also, Beatrice Umutesi and Patrick Karegeya, the lieutenant Rwandan colonel who directed many of Rwanda's operations in Congo. Those people who have been involved in the conflict speak about themselves, their personal experiences and how they justify the conflict to themselves.

The book is divided into three chronological parts: the period before the war, the First War, and the Second War. The prewar section discusses the colonial origin off the present conflict. It also links the war in Congo with the Rwandan Civil war, contending that the war in Congo is a continuation of the Rwandan conflict. As a result, it led the Hutu to flee during the violence to Kivu region in Congo. Nevertheless, the genocide targeted the minority community, Tutsi "until they are finished and completely out of the country" (Stearns, 15). This situation angered the nascent Rwandan government, which viewed the international community's, including the United Nations, response as hypocritical and ineffective. Moreover, the government in Congo failed act and may have even provided support to the Rwanda's exiled government.

The first war section begins in 1996 when various rebel groups began targeting the government regime, in addition to Rwandan Hutus. The collapse of Zaire was another important factor. It was essentially a failed and a weak state. It could not even maintain its armed forces; its military required the outside support of Uganda, Tanzania, Eritrea, and others including mercenaries as a result of its Belgian colonization.

The second war period begins in 1998, and focuses on the poor leadership of Kabila and the splintering into factions of the Uganda's and Rwanda's armies. Additionally, the author focuses on the war economies, looking specifically at how nature resources assets played an important role in perpetuating the war. The Congo is called a "geographical scandal" since diamonds and rare earth mineral financed the fighting and enriched only important political players in the process.

Thus the poor Congolese people do not benefit from the mineral wealth of their country.

Stearns concludes by discussing the failure of the media to bring attention to this horrible conflict. He notes that one reason may be the complexity of the conflict and the inability of the media to fashion a straightforward perspective of the conflict. In other wars the lack of coverage and the silence of the media are attributed to the fact that "the conflict is a mess that eludes simple definition, with many interlocking narrative stands." (Stearns, 5) Congo's war officially ended with a peace deal in 2002 but fighting is still going on in addition to corruption, poverty, refugees and brutality and horror of violence. Consequently this war is "neither war nor peace". It is much more complicated.

The significance of the work is that the author contributes to an almost no existence literature. Why has the media been silent on this important conflict? Why do we find tons of literature of the Israelis-Arab conflict and Second World War and not the conflict in Congo? Is it a racial problem: because the Africans are not like "them", the Occidentals? The author suggests that this conflict has not received enough attention as a result of its complexity and inability to fit neatly within a traditional media narrative; I would add that race and long-standing prejudices against Africans may also be a factor.