



Borders versus People: Part III - Games within a Game

By Kalundi Serumaga



The peeping game

In 2017, some sharp-eyed IT managers at the African Union (AU) realized that bugging devices had been planted in the computer servers and conference rooms of the shiny new headquarters building. It was only inevitable that the Chinese were to be seen as prime suspects, given that it was them that had so kindly met the cost and physical labour of putting up the building.

In the ensuing debates, only then incoming AU chairperson, Rwanda's president Paul Kagame, was unbothered.

"I don't think spying is the specialty of the Chinese. We have spies all over the place in this world," the chairman said. His only concern was that Africa had not got its act together. "We should have been able to build our own building." but even then, he mused: "if you bring people to build for you, they may still spy on you."

Such candour was refreshing, and brings another context about the mutual accusations of spying, subterfuge and intrigue being exchanged between the regimes of Rwanda and Uganda.

Mid-August regional media reports -to the extent that they can be relied upon, given the greatly

partisan atmosphere- tell us that the mounting tension in the Uganda-Congo-Rwanda border region may have finally spilled over into open fighting, with Rwanda seeking to eliminate what it has been saying is an armed threat from a Uganda-backed rebel group based in the Democratic Republic of Congo (again), and led by former Kigali insiders.

A source close to the Kigali regime recently assured me that reports of the Rwanda Special Forces decimating a significant encampment of Rwandan National Congress (RNC) rebel forces are completely true, based on photographic evidence he claimed to have seen.

Since then: a frosty diplomatic process facilitated by the state of Angola, has sought to de-escalate tensions, by coaxing the presidents of the two countries into signing a 21st August Memorandum of Understanding. Its key points are: respecting mutual sovereignty; no acts of subversion in the territory of the other party, as well as third countries (read Congo); do nothing to create the impression of an interest in such destabilization, thereby eliminating all factors that may create such perception; and respecting the civic rights and freedoms of each other's visiting citizens.

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The last clause is critical here. It clearly refers to the many Rwandan citizens that Kigali says are and have been held for long periods of time -some up to two years- by Uganda intelligence operatives, and subjected to inhuman treatment.

The Rwandan state, and its regional media allies point the finger squarely at Uganda's historically notorious Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI).

The facts are that the CMI acquired this fearsome reputation well back in the early days of President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) 1986 ascension to power. Known then as the Directorate of Military Intelligence (as its Rwanda counterpart is now called), it was the grinding stone against which many a rebellion, coup attempt and even simple civilian political agitation was ground to dust by very brutally efficient methods of murder, torture, deception, intrusion, and intimidation.

This accusation comes weighed down with a most striking irony: in those early days, the Directorate's deputy Director was one Paul Kagame, still incarnate as an officer of the NRA.

All this tells us quite a few things.

First, that the accusation that CMI is illegally apprehending and then torturing Rwandans is entirely credible, given its history, particularly of the early days of basically physically crushing the armed resistance that had sprung up in northern Uganda. These episodes are not particularly well-known, as the global human rights NGO police, and rising Ugandan corporate feminist movement and the Western diplomatic community seemed to see many opportunities in the freshly-minted NRA regime, and chose to simply "not see", what was going on. In addition, in the subsequent decade, many of the regime insiders in Uganda who were to become leading opposition voices after the falling out, also seem to have difficulty in making specific references to this foundational period of the regime. This could well be because they were in positions where they were much better informed than others back then, to now claim ignorance.



Read Also: Borders versus People - Part I:
The Tribe Conundrum

This focus on Rwandans could even be considered an act of inclusivity, given that CMI stood accused of torturing everyone else in the days when it was heavily staffed by Rwandans of various citizenship.

Secondly, it is entirely possible, and in fact quite logical, that Rwanda's government would seek to maintain an information-gathering network inside Uganda. Given President Kagame's reaction to the AU scandal, it would be naïve to assume that he did not see a need to also build a Rwandan "back door" in the Ugandan intelligence outfit he helped to build. This, as the AU chairman pointed out in that context, is how the spying game works.

By the same token it would be entirely logical and natural to assume that if the Rwanda regime is in fact deploying its spies to Uganda that the Ugandan regime's security apparatus would endeavor to seek out and apprehend any such person.

Naturally, it would also be quite logical that the human resource of any such network would comprise Rwanda nationals, Uganda nationals of Rwandan descent, and of course even other Ugandan nationals seeking pecuniary or other gain.

So, for any Rwandan national to now find themselves captive of a Ugandan organization designed in part by his or her president, this is a very ironical kind of homecoming indeed, as clearly, those institutional habits did not begin only after (now President) Paul Kagame left.

Thirdly, given the long public record established by President Museveni in renegeing on agreements - and also President Kagame's knowledge of this from his time as a high-level enforcer of Museveni's will during his own time as a Uganda regime apparatchik- observers would be wise to see the Luanda MOU as the latest stage in a continuing feud, as opposed to the beginning of its end.

The intelligence, combat and diplomatic shenanigans are therefore neither a cause nor a solution to this game; they are merely details in a game still being played out. We need to look deeper.

The labelling game

Since the difference between Ugandan and Rwandans -from throne to commoner- have never really been as real as the current Kigali-Kampala standoff have made it, there can be perhaps no greater

illustration of the appearance of Birds fighting their reflection in a window pane. If anything, the dispute is a critical example of how similar the two political cultures -old and new- are.

The concept of Rwandan immigration to “Uganda” is a rather fluid one. Rwanda existed long before Uganda ever did, and before either colony was created. In some sense, anyone in south western Uganda could be considered Rwandan just as anyone in certainly northern Rwanda could be considered “Ugandan”.

And Rwandan indigenous communities are organized along lines followed also by communities in south and south-western Uganda, not to mention Burundi, right down to often having the same clans. There are families -some now quite prominent- in what is now south-western Uganda, whose ancestry can be traced to migration from Rwanda as far back as the 16th Century.

Perhaps we should therefore see the colonial project, and this neo-colonial one now being held together by these bickering presidents, as an interruption and distortion to those historical relations.

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Subsequent to colonization, there were groups of people who migrated to Uganda, who were now being called Rwandan. The first known such group was a group of embattled aristocrats from the Rwandan royal court, who had to leave following an internal political upheaval. The eventually settled in Namutamba, mid-western Buganda.

There followed a few waves of economic migration, due to the growth of Uganda’s colonial economy. It should be noted that it was the district authorities in Western Uganda that first passed laws restricting migration from Rwanda, followed eventually by the colonial government as a whole.

The migrations culminated in the almost exclusively Tutsi influx that followed the 1959 Hutu “revolution” mentioned in [part II](#).

Many prominent Ugandans can be traced to all these developments.

The actor-playwright Deborah Asiimwe, proprietor of the Kampala International Theatre Festival once told me of her grandmother whose speaks very fluent Luganda as a result of having lived in the Buganda royal court in the 1930s, where she had been expected to become a wife to then Kabaka Daudi Cwa, whose reign ended in 1939.

The late Dede Majoro (d. 1995), perhaps the most gifted guitarist this region has ever seen, also lived for a while in Buganda royal court in the reign of Kabaka Edward Muteesa (1939-1966), along with many of his siblings. Kabaka Muteesa provided them sanctuary after their father Silas Majoro (and former schoolmate at Buddo), a senior advisor to the deposed Rwandan King Kigeli (1936-2016), who had been assassinated by Belgian agents in their process of actively supporting the Hutu “revolution”. Dede’s sister, Grace Kaboyo was until recently one of President Museveni’s district commissioners.

Mr Robert Kalumba is a very visible public relations officer at Kampala City Council Authority, whose grandfather was granted a tidy parcel of land in Buganda by the sister of Edward Muteesa.

Another member of the Rwanda royal family who also fled to Uganda and married a Ugandan woman. They were to have a son who went on to marry one of Edward Muteesa's daughters. He went on to become a very senior immigration officer. I went to school with him.

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The deposed King Kigeli himself took refuge in Uganda for a while. As a child, I recall our mother pointing out to us his very tall frame walking along the street, as she drove us passed the apartment block he lived in, near the city centre.

In short, the problem has never been the presence of Rwandans in Uganda as such, since there have always been Rwandans in Uganda even before Uganda became Uganda (and then took parts of what was independent north Rwanda with it). The problem is the political culture that comes with that presence, given the historical record that continues to show that the biggest single persecutors and killers of Rwandans have always been other Rwandans.

In his play *A Time of Fire* Uganda writer Charles Mulekwa reflects on the common failing of political peoples fleeing war and persecution of actually bringing the causes of the war with them. It is a case of a refugee and migrant community that has "learned nothing, and forgotten nothing", as was said of the early 1800s French Bourbon dynasty exile who, having taken back power in France, then proceeded to replicate all the political mistakes that had caused them to lose power in the first place.

It is a challenge of political culture of Rwanda. Of the stubbornness of old habits, which, as is said, die hard.

But where did it start?

The imposter game

In the biblical tale of Naboth's vineyard, an unwitting King finds himself in possession of a vineyard he has coveted for a long time. It belonged to his neighbour Naboth, who had declined to sell it, as it was part of his own inheritance from his father, and according to Jewish custom could not be disposed of in such a way.

Wife Jezebel had her own plan to cheer up the frustrated monarch. She had Naboth framed, murdered, and his property seized. The King learns of this only when confronted by the Judges of his Kingdom. For them the real sacrilege is that beyond the murder, the perpetrator then assumes the place of the victim, in the form of claiming to be the rightful owner of his inheritance. This is the true meaning of the verse: "Have you killed and also taken possession?" (Kings 21:19), now colloquially known as the syndrome of "Naboth's vineyard".

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In the biblical story, the King repents and atones. In the real world of African politics, many a murderous usurper has simply soldiered on regardless, with this disastrous game.

But now, the moment of truth is fast arriving, and we are all about to be found out.

With Uganda, the fraudulent nature of the three-decade-old government is better known and a lot more explicit.

In the case of Rwanda, we must begin with a similar usurpation, by one Kanjogera, dowager in the Royal House of Rwanda in 1896, who conspires with the encroaching Germans to have the then monarch murdered in favour of Musinga her own biological son. This is an event replete with the kinds of abominations that shocked the judges in Naboth's case.

One Muhumuza, mother of the murdered monarch led the initial resistance to this usurpation.

Despite it having been seen as a movement among very ordinary people, Muhumuza became an adherent of the Nyabinghi movement.

Nyabinghi was the sovereign of the 16th Century kingdom of Karagwe, which name now lives on as a district in northern Tanzania.

She was murdered by her husband Ruhinda, king of the Mpororo just to the north, in his attempt to take over her throne.

Her spirit was to haunt him and his accomplices for years afterwards, and became the foundation of a "cult", that passed it down the generations through initiating young women into its priesthood. The Nyabinghi belief-system soon spread to neighbouring regions, and was taken up by persons nursing deep grievances against existing authority, making it a target for state repression.

This became a particularly acute problem in pre-colonised Rwanda -which included what is now parts of south-western Uganda- where the various Kings had tried to stamp it out.

She can be said to be the African patron saint of the betrayed.

Naturally enough, the anti-colonial sentiments in Rwanda, sparked by Kanjogera's allegedly German-backed coup, found a home among the Nyabinghi movement.

Having been inducted into the Nyabinghi priesthood, Muhumuza became the incarnation of the spirit of the long-dead queen. This set the stage for the showdown that sucked in the German, British and later Belgian colonial authorities.

"These fanatical women are a curse to the country." One colonial official reportedly complained.

This was nothing unusual, except for the times it was dealing with. It is something of a tradition here to literally channel a long-passed on leader's spirit when faced with an extreme leadership challenge.

During the 1953-1955 British exiling of Kabaka Muteesa, a man called Kiganira declared himself the reincarnation of Kibuuka, Buganda's Achilles-like war-spirit, and began agitations that led to his arrest and execution.

The spirit of a long-dead Shona monarch Nehanda, also inspired the initial resistance to the British colonizing mission. It has been handed down to possess generations of women in particular family lines. At the time of the colonizing invasions, it was held by Charwe Nyakasikana, whose invocation of it was instrumental in the initial anti-colonial resistance, until she and her companion were captured by the British and hanged in 1898.

The colony of Rwanda comes into existence and is later inherited by Belgium. In that success, these imposed imposter states show that illegitimacy can be made to work. Kogonjera's usurpation becomes an understanding of politics, and produces a form of white Pan-Africanism:

Muhumuza is captured by the colonisers and exiled to be held captive in colonial Kampala, until her passing in 1944.

The history game

The past matters. And this is why those in the present always seek to control it.

With the rise of later African nationalism, old tales of the initial German conquest, as well as current experiences of the apartheid system were mined to design a toxic mix of hate, and racist anthropology history which become an official mantra of PARMEHUTU, a party led by one Gregoire Kayibanda; a man until recently the private secretary to the Belgian head of the Roman Catholic Church in Rwanda. This Hate History lays the foundation of the Hutu "revolution" of 1959, that created the mass exodus of Tutsi into neighboring countries. Kayibanda becomes president, and Hate History remained taught.

His victory is cut short when his army chief of staff Juvenal Habyarimana, overthrows him and then allegedly has him and his wife starved to death while in detention (thus taking possession and then killing, in his case).

Similar betrayals dogged the rebellion organized from exile against this new set of imposters, and vicious, internecine conflict seemed to have characterized its journey all the way to victory over the Habyarimana regime.

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Historically, the monarchy had seemed to be the focal point around which all Rwandans within its ambit organised their various identities. There seemed to have been a push within the rebellion to put the monarchy question back on the table.

The standing accusation, best documented by the writer Timothy Kalyegira, is that those now in power in Kigali, first hijacked the initial rebellion, and the formation of RPF was in itself a usurpation of an earlier initiative organised by Rwandan exiles not embedded in the Uganda state, against the Rwandan Habyarimana regime that the current leadership of the RPF suppressed using their then high positions within the Ugandan NRA security apparatus. This initial initiative may have been known as *inkotanyi*.

This can be framed as a continuation of Kanjogera's coup: usurpation upon usurpation, and a legacy of illegitimate political inheritances.

The most prominent example of this of course would be the assassination of (former NRA bush war veteran, and Uganda government deputy minister of Defence) Col. Fred Rwigyema who, as first field commander of the RPF invasion, suffered the ignominy of being shot dead within 24 hours of crossing into his country.

Illegitimate power cannot rule legitimately, and remains permanently insecure, in crisis or near failure.

It is often aware of this, and as a remedy, seeks to clothe itself with the garments of legitimacy. Kanjogera commits regicide, but then seeks refuge in a “neo-traditionalist” gambit of continuing the same monarchy in the form of her son, so as to hide behind the legitimacy of a throne, despite having just desecrated it.

And given the chance, imperial power will always seek to enter a society, and tilt the balance of power away from the most legitimate in favour of the least legitimate, which must then depend on it to one extent or another. This remains the story of Africa’s domination.

Nearly every historic victory of rebel organisations on our continent holds a record of being tempted by Western powers to reach for absolute power, where a peace-making coalition may have worked more in the mass interest instead.



Read Also: Borders versus People – Part II:
Congo – A Classic African Tragedy

In Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi’s minority Tigrayan People’s’ Liberation Front was able to militarily dominate the broader anti-Mengistu resistance, and subsequent regime, through the significant logistical resources delivered to it under the cover of Western famine relief, once the West realized that Mengistu’s days were numbered.

Museveni’s NRA dragged out the Nairobi 1985 Nairobi Peace Talks for months on end while using material support channeled by the West through the notorious LONRHO corporation to increase the size of the army nearly ten-fold, before storming the capital.

All Africans are advised: look again at your resident liberators; how exactly did they come to power?

This is essentially a crisis of legitimacy. For both sides. Illegitimate power cannot rule legitimately, and remains permanently insecure, in crisis and in need of self-validation.

It is often aware of this, and as a remedy, seeks to clothe itself with the garments of legitimacy. Yoweri Museveni’s National Resistance Army brought an exceptional level of illegitimacy to our politics in the way it seized power in 1986, through series of opportunistic exploitation of every old and current political grievance it could harness, and has held on to it. As mentioned in part II, it came carrying the seeds of the Rwanda Patriotic Front in its womb.

The 1993 wholesale invasion of Rwanda by the RPF was therefore -amongst other things- the exportation of that habit of illegitimacy to another country. As said, this was to be the fate of the DRC, even later.

The strategic resources game

This long and twisted story continues. It will create new approaches to known facts, and then bring unknown facts into creation.

I insist that this remains a struggle to be the principal conduit -broker, even- through which to channel the latest generation of strategic minerals, to Western corporations.

This is not just an African story. In the history of the conflicts of the modern world, certain zones stand out as having suffered from the accident of being located where strategic resources were to be found. Before the DRC, there was Western Europe and the Middle East.

Underneath the usual romanticisation of European conflict lies the story of coal and iron. Until perhaps the 1960s, the Alsace-Lorraine region, which lies where the lands of France and Germany meet, held the largest known deposits of iron ore in the world. Together with the abundant supplies of the coal in the neighbouring regions, this created the opportunity for the bulk production of perhaps the most significant material to the emergent industrial revolution: steel.

Three significant wars linked to this region have been fought in Western Europe: the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 which ended with a German occupation; the 1914-1918 British-German war in France; and the 1939-1945 British-French-American-Russian war against Germany and Japan that left much of the continent and beyond devastated.

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This recurrent conflict was only suspended for the last eighty years with the creation of a trade mechanism that enabled countries from all parts of the continent to access those and later other resources for their domestic industries, without having to also physically control the territory.

This mechanism was named the European Coal and Steel Commission, which became the European Economic Commission, which became the European Commission, and which is now known today as the European Union. Its core function is to prevent the buildup of the economic pressures that lead to war.

From the 1890s, the military forces of Western Europe and increasingly, the United States and underwent an extensive debate regarding the relative advantages of continuing to rely on steam-powered engines fueled by the burning of coal, over the emergent liquid fuels. By 1912, the liquid fuels camp had won the debate: oil was easier to excavate, transport, store and deliver. It was scalable, yielded more energy per unit, and did not require the maintenance of a global network of "coaling stations" dependent of a small fleet of labour-intensive "coaling ships" supplying their navies.

It did however, require the establishment of a guaranteed supply. This is how the entire middle east, with its vast, accessible oilfields, increasingly became the focus of rival empires seeking to gain a foothold on this strategic reserve.

The British navy, for example, decided to strategically switch from coal in the period just before the 1914-1918 war.

The subsequent dismantling of the Turkish Ottoman empire, leading to the carve up of its Arab dominions into the unstable oil-producing region known today, is one visible result.

Then came the dawn of nuclear energy, particularly its use in warfare, heralded by the 1945 American destruction of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Atomic weapons were being developed by all sides during that war. They came as the logical outcome of the war's increasing dependence on widespread destruction of cities and the civilian hinterland as a way of hampering the physical capacity of the enemy to maintain war. An atomic bomb offered the opportunity to impose strategic paralysis on an enemy through wiping out an entire city with one devastating operation.

A person no less than Albert Einstein, a refugee from Hitler's Germany, as well as pioneer of nuclear science was among the voices that advised the then US President to ensure it got and stayed ahead in the coming nuclear arms race, by developing the first bomb before Germany, or anyone else did. For this, they advised, the US was going to need a reliable supply of good quality Uranium.

"The United States has only very poor ores of uranium in moderate quantities" they warned in a 1939 letter: "There is some good ore in Canada and the former Czechoslovakia, while the most important source of uranium is Belgian Congo."

This is where the fate of what we now know as the DRC was sealed. In retrospect, it was clear that Patrice Lumumba barely stood a chance. As early as 1947, the newly formed US Central Intelligence Agency had already dispatched agents to establish the viability of Uranium supply from Congo, and how to work with Belgian mining corporations there, to secure it. A truly independent Congo was seen as a threat to that objective, with US president Eisenhower even developing something of a personal obsession with Lumumba,

"The Shinkolobwe stockpile was about 200 times purer than average uranium sources at the time." Notes Kenyan journalist Parselelo Kantai, who has researched this subject extensively.

What followed is not just known history, but a continuing story.

Western capitalism still holds a vision for the future: a fully automated world, in which goods and services are made, sorted and delivered by unmanned machinery, and paid for electronically.

This means an administrative layer of control and co-ordination. The vision therefore, is for a fully wired world, centralized around digital, online control, tracking everything from production levels, to individual consumer preferences.

This is the essence of the 5G "fourth industrial revolution": digital technology stepping up to a level of broad-span interconnectivity primed to a speed and versatility previously unseen.

We are encouraged to think of a "cloud", but this whole information infrastructure is not ephemeral. It requires physical warehousing and relies therefore on earth-bound space and technologies: wires, server farms hosting acres of capacity, routing stations, transmitters, communication devices and the like.

Three materials among many, are absolutely critical to all of this: copper, coltan and fiberglass. Of the three, Coltan is the most highly valuable. It makes the heat-resistant circuitry in all devices. Its global trade expected only to expand exponentially as the 5G revolution takes root.

And once again, the unfortunate Democratic Republic of Congo finds itself as the primary future source for all this bounty. DRC may hold the single largest known reserves (estimated by some to be

up 60% of the global supply) of the mineral.

My point is simple: once a strategic resource of the future has been identified, then the region that has them is in for decades, if not centuries of war and destabilization. Control the DRC (or at least part of it), and you control the oils and uraniums of the future. Welcome back to the new Alsace-Lorraine or middle east. Or the old Congo.

As I said in part II of this series, no place deserves a break from this relentless plunder as does the DRC.

Key government figures in Uganda and Rwanda have long been accused of orchestrating this plunder. First directly, during their respective armies' invasions and occupation there, and then late indirectly, through the proxy militias they propped up and left behind.

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Despite furious denials, these accusations have been given substance by both the United Nations, as well as a whole host of campaigning organisations. And the fact remains that hundreds of thousands of Congolese, including children, are now living and dying as exploited artisanal miners of the ore of these and other precious minerals.

But once dug up and loaded, this valuable cargo has to go somewhere. Who talks to whom? Who gets to be the middleman? Whose borders will have to be crossed -or closed- to settle those questions?

The answer lies in the answers to those questions.

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