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The Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda: Origins, causes, implementation, consequences, and the post-genocide era

Donatien Nikuze *

Research and Documentation Center on Genocide, National Commission for the Fight against Genocid, Republic of Rwanda

Abstract

Within one hundred days of the Genocide against the Tutsi, more than one million Tutsi were killed by their compatriots on behalf of the Hutu. This genocide was the result of a long-established discrimination, divisionism, and an ideology of hatred that encouraged the Hutu ruling regimes to consider the Tutsi as invasive foreigners. They were considered as Hutu oppressors who should be gotten rid of definitively. This ideology spurred sporadic killings of the Tutsi, pogroms, exiles and humiliations of all kinds, culminating in the Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994. This genocide, committed by Rwandans against Rwandans, destroyed social bonds between Rwandans and damaged economic institutions. Despite this, the survivors, the genocide perpetrators and their respective families now have to live together in order to overcome their painful history, as they envision an optimistic future.

Keywords: Rwanda; Genocide; ethnic; Tutsi; Hutu

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* Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* nikuzedonatien@hotmail.com

1. Introduction

Throughout the pre-colonial period, the Hutu and the Tutsi were one people who spoke the same language and lived amongst each other. When the Belgian colonists arrived in 1916, they treated the Hutu and the Tutsi as separate groups. The colonial power further polarized the groups by classifying Rwandans into ethnic groups and making it obligatory for them to carry ethnic identity cards classifying people according to their ethnicity. The Belgians deemed the Tutsi to be superior to the Hutu and thus Tutsi were favoured in administrative positions, education and jobs in the modern sector (Newbury, 1995).

However, resentment among the Hutu gradually built up, culminating in a series of riots in 1959 which caused power to fall into the hands of the Hutu who gained independence for Rwanda in 1962. After independence, the newly established political regime actively engaged in anti-Tutsi propaganda. Leaders based their political ideology on Hutu majority rule, which ultimately led to the exclusion of the Tutsi from the political sphere and massive violations of human rights. Hundreds of thousands of Tutsi were sporadically killed during a series of massacres that were followed eventually by the Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994. In this genocide, more than one million Tutsi were killed for the sole reason of being Tutsi. This genocide damaged and destroyed the social cohesion and make up of Rwandan society. It destroyed the unity that Rwandans had developed and relied upon for centuries.

After the genocide, the new Government of Rwanda implemented different mechanisms that deal with the consequences of genocide while contributing to the '*Never Again*' campaign against future atrocities. It is in this regard that this paper helps to promote a greater understanding of the tragedy of the Genocide against the Tutsi and its effects, as well as highlighting different mechanisms being used to unify Rwandans in the aftermath of the genocide.

2. Rwandans: A united people throughout the pre-colonial era

During the pre-colonial era, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa were commonly known as Rwandans. From time immemorial, they lived together on the same territory, had the same culture and used the same language: "*Ikinyarwanda*". Those ties were an important element of social cohesion. Individuals recognized one another as being Rwandans and each recognized the other as having the right to be a Rwandan. At that time the first Rwandan identity reference was the clan¹. Belonging to the same clan implied that the concerned persons were of the same origin and shared the same distant ancestor.

The myths related to the origin of Rwandans made Hutu, Tutsi and Twa sons of the same ancestral father, called "*Kanyarwanda*". Other accounts give the name of '*Gihanga*' to the ancestral father of all Rwandans. That relationship akin to brotherhood placed the three entities -Hutu, Tutsi and Twa - in the same family (Sebasoni, 2000). Both Hutu and Tutsi enjoyed their rights and lived peacefully, working together, marrying one another and having children together.

¹ **Clan** refers to social group whose members shared the common ancestor. This ancestor is often fictitious or mythical

3. Origins of Rwandan ethnic conflicts

The pre-colonial period saw Rwanda as a united state. Under their King, Rwandans profited from the leadership of the monarch and exercised their rights fully. The Hutu, Tutsi and Twa socio-economic stratifications of Rwanda human groups swore allegiance to the same monarch. They were one people, spoke the same language and shared the same territory and neighbourhood, the same culture and history.

Upon their arrival, Belgian colonists misinterpreted the existing socio-economic stratifications in Rwanda. Colonial powers transformed the three existing socio-economic stratifications into ethnic groups. Referring to the Hamitic² ideology, they divided Rwandans into a “conquering” race (the Tutsi), a Bantu³ race (the Hutu), and pygmoids (the Twa). The Hamitic ideology supported the idea that the Tutsi belonged to the Nilotic⁴-Hamitic family while the Hutu belonged to the Bantu family. In 1931, Belgian colonial powers introduced ethnic identity cards indicating which ethnic group each Rwandan citizen belonged to.

Colonial powers treated Hutu and Tutsi differently. They described the Tutsi as alien, the superior ethnic group, and as natural leaders who should thus make up the entire ruling class, while the inferior Hutu, the indigenous people, should become a permanent underclass. Consequently, Hutu chiefs were systematically demoted and Tutsi were promoted. In addition, the educational system was unequal, developed in line with the established ethnic groups with Tutsi superiority. As Sebarenzi (2009) wrote, “admission to schools that prepared government leaders was reserved predominantly for Tutsi; only a handful of Hutu could go. The only truly accessible education for Hutu was the Seminary”. The following table shows an example of the school enrollment by ethnic origin for Astrida (Butare) College prior to independence.

Table 1. School Enrollment by ethnic origin for Astrida (Butare) College

Years	Tutsi Pupils	Hutu Pupils
1932	45	9
1945	46	3
1954	63	19
1959	279	143

Prunier (1997, 33)

² **Hamitic** is an historical term for the people supposedly descended from Noah's son Ham (Gen. ix.18-27). In the mid 19th century, the term Hamitic acquired a new meaning from European writers linked to the actual ancient migrations of a supposed Middle-Eastern sub-group of the Caucasian race. As a result, the Hamitic became a sub-group of the Caucasian race, alongside the Semitic race, grouping the non-Semitic population native to North Africa, the Horn of Africa and South Arabia, including the Ancient Egyptians (Sanders, 1969).

³ The term **Bantu** is used as a general label for Africans who speak Bantu languages, distributed from Cameroon east across Central Africa and Eastern Africa to Southern Africa.

⁴ The term **Nilotic** originates from the term Nile. It refers to ethnic groups mainly inhabiting the Nile Valley or originated in the Nile Valley.

Injustice in administrative positions, jobs in the modern sector and in education reinforced hatred and ethnic division between Hutu and Tutsi. It crushed the belief of having common roots and caused Hutu and Tutsi to see each other as different. At the same time, they learned that the former was an inferior race and the latter a superior race, which was enough to arouse resentment and frustration on the one hand and conceit on the other hand. It was this historic event that marked the origins of the conflicts among Rwandans.

In brief, colonial powers contributed to earlier tensions between Tutsi and Hutu that helped create the foundations of genocide. The origin of the violence that transpired in Rwanda during the latter half of the twentieth century is tied to the ways in which Hutu and Tutsi were treated differently by the colonial masters.

4. Discrimination and Hatred ideology: The main cause of the Genocide against the Tutsi

Colonial ethnic practices and hypotheses about the distant origins of Hutu and Tutsi raised the ethnic consciousness of Rwandans. The racialisation of their relations, the ethnic divisions in their occupation of leadership positions, unequal in education system and the use and the manipulation of identity cards allowed Hutu and Tutsi see each other as distinct.

When power fell into the hands of the Hutu after the abolition of the monarchy, ethnic divisions were reinforced and manipulated for political purposes. The policy of discrimination and hatred towards the Tutsi population became the cornerstone of the Hutu ruling regimes. The Hutu now became the privileged group in the entire domain of the Country. Tutsi were considered the enemy of the Hutu, outsiders, invaders, and oppressors of Rwanda. Hatred towards Tutsi persisted throughout the decades that the Hutu remained in power. In 1992, Hutu radicals called for the Tutsi to be “sent back to Abyssinia via the Nyabarongo River”⁵, a reference to their supposed homeland.

Against a backdrop of divisive and hateful ideology, repeated massacres and the persistent problems of refugees; Tutsi refugees formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and launched the liberation war on October 1st, 1990. Their aim was to secure their right to return to their homeland. Therefore, the Rwandan government, led by Hutu, intensively propagated an ideology of hatred, divisionism and discrimination through the mass media, like *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM) and Kangura⁶ journal. Hutu artists such as Bikindi and many others also helped spread propaganda. Tutsi were considered as the common enemy of the Hutu who want to re-establish the repressive regime of the colonial era and re-enslave the Hutu. It was for this reason that the Hutu Ten Commandments were created and published in Kangura, No. 6 (December 1990). The intent of the Ten Commandments was to rid the Hutu of their obligation to moral decency and facilitate future killings.

⁵Speech made by Mr. Leo Mugesera at a meeting of the ruling political party of Rwanda from 1975 to 1994, the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND), held in Kabaya on November 22nd, 1992

⁶ Kinyarwanda term for “wake others up.” It refers to a Hutu extremist newspaper that served to fuel ethnic hatred.

4.1. Hutu Ten Commandments published in Kangura, No. 6 (December 1990)

- Every Hutu must know that the Tutsi woman, wherever she may be, is working for the Tutsi ethnic cause. In consequence, any Hutu is a traitor who acquires a Tutsi wife, acquires a Tutsi concubine or acquires a Tutsi secretary or protégée.
- Every Hutu must know that our Hutu daughters are more worthy and more conscientious as women, as wives and as mothers. Aren't they lovely, excellent secretaries, and more honest!
- Hutu women, be vigilant and make sure that your husbands, brothers and sons see reason.
- All Hutu must know that all Tutsi are dishonest in business. Their only goal is ethnic superiority. We have learned this from experience. In consequence, any Hutu is a traitor who forms a business alliance with a Tutsi, invests his own funds or public funds in a Tutsi enterprise, borrows money from or loans money to a Tutsi or grants favors to Tutsis (import licenses, bank loans, land for construction, public markets...).
- Strategic positions such as politics, administration, economics, the military and security must be restricted to the Hutu.
- A Hutu majority must prevail throughout the educational system (pupils, scholars and teachers).
- The Rwandan Army must be exclusively Hutu. The war of October 1990 has taught us that. No soldier may marry a Tutsi woman.
- Hutu must stop taking pity on the Tutsi.
- Hutu wherever they are must stand united, in solidarity, and concerned with the fate of their Hutu brothers. Hutu within and without Rwanda must constantly search for friends and allies to the Hutu Cause, beginning with their Bantu brothers. Hutu must constantly counter Tutsi propaganda. Hutu must stand firm and vigilant against their common enemy: the Tutsi.
- The Social Revolution of 1959, the Referendum of 1961 and the Hutu Ideology must be taught to Hutu of every age. Every Hutu must spread the word wherever he goes. Any Hutu who persecutes his brother Hutu for spreading and teaching this ideology is a traitor.

5. Contributory causes of the Genocide against the Tutsi

5.1. The denial of the right of the Tutsi refugees to return to their homeland

Fearful of the violence they would face in Rwanda, a great number of Tutsi fled the country in 1959 to neighboring lands such as Uganda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Afterwards, the ruling regime of the 1990s refused to address the issue of refugees. President Juvenal Habyarimana (President 1973-1994) turned a deaf ear to the pleas of refugees who yearned to return to their homeland. He adamantly refused to allow their return, insisting that Rwanda was already too crowded and had too little land and food for them.

President Habyarimana's claim was false. There was enough free space to accommodate refugees back into their homeland. The argument of overpopulation in this case was not relevant. In response, a group of

young refugees grouped into the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) decided to come back by force. Supported by moderate Hutus, they launched a protracted liberation war on October 1st, 1990.

The 1990 liberation war became a pretext for the government to propagate an ideology of hatred and engage in a range of human rights abuses, including mass killings of Tutsi inside the country (in Kibirira, Bugesera, and Bagogwe) and the mass detention of suspected political opponents all over the country. All the Tutsi inside and outside the country were considered to be enemies of the ruling regime and, ipso facto, the enemy of all Hutu. As stated by African Rights (1995), the enemy refers to “Tutsi inside or outside the country, who are extremist or nostalgic for power, who have never recognized the realities of the social revolution of 1959 and who want to take power in Rwanda by any means including by force”.

5.2. Wrestling to maintain power by the Hutu extremist government

As the liberation war continued, the Arusha Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Rwanda and the Rwandan Patriotic Front was signed at Arusha, on August 3rd, 1993. Wage, David and Lois Haigh (2004) state that:

The peace agreement was the culmination of fourteen months of negotiation and mediation by the Tanzanian government, in conjunction with the Organization of African Unity and the governments of France, Belgium and the United States. The agreement was supposed to end a three year civil war and sought to end Hutu political hegemony over the Tutsi, integrate thousands of Tutsi exiles into Rwandan society and democratize the Rwandan government, which had been dominated for over 30 years by an elite group of Hutu.

However, the President Habyarimana would not commit to the agreement. Stettenheim (2002) avows that “He called the Arusha Accords ‘mere pieces of paper’”.

At the time the President Habyalimana resisted to obey to the peace agreement, the Rwandan Patriotic Front continued the armed struggle against the Habyalimana regime and proved to be a skilled fighting force on the battlefields. When they gained more ground into the country, the ruling regime felt increasing pressure and panicked at the prospect of losing power. Seeing that RPF force its way into the country, President Habyarimana and his supporters perceived it as a major threat to the ruling regime’s opportunity to maintain its political position. Habyarimana chose to exploit this threat as a way to bring dissidents Hutu back to his side. Wage, David and Lois Haigh (2004) affirm that “Habyarimana sought to deflect the growing dissatisfaction with his government and bring Hutu back into his camp by espousing nationalistic Hutu ideology”. Hutu were sensitized that the RPF, aided by their accomplices and collaborator Tutsi inside Rwanda, were planning to exterminate them and that a preemptive attack was the only way to save their own lives. Therefore, incitements to violence through Media such as RTLM, public meetings were encouraged. Brown and Karim (1995) vowed that “Propaganda stressed the cleverness of the Tutsi and insisted that they would somehow manage to gain mastery of the country and re-institute the repressive regime of the colonial era”. Habyarimana and his supporters Hutu extremists propagated hatred ideology that the Tutsi intended to

re-enslave the Hutu and must be resisted at all costs. Consequently, pre-meditated by the ruling Hutu-led government, the genocide was deliberately perpetrated in an attempt to maintain power.

6. Implementation of the Genocide against the Tutsi

The ideology of hatred sparked the participation of Hutu extremists in the Genocide against the Tutsi. This was the result of long-term encouragement by the ruling regime, and public and private institutions to kill the Tutsi. As published in *Kangura Journal* on December 10th, 1990, "the Bahutu should stop having mercy on the Batutsi". The Tutsi were vilified and dehumanized. The Hutu referred to them as "cockroaches" and "snakes". This was a planned annihilation of an enemy who was demonized; no mercy was to be shown to any Tutsi man, woman or child.

After the crash of the presidential plane on April 6th, 1994, Hutu extremists took over the government, blamed the Tutsi for the assassination of the president, and started the slaughter. Extremist Hutu leaders and informal armed militia groups called "Interahamwe" launched a campaign of massive extermination against the Tutsi. The Hutu extremists were made up from the bottom-up, from civilians to those in the highest level of government (Pine, 2008). This structure gave the Hutu extremists absolute power in orchestrating the genocide. As the Hutu extremists were in control of every aspect of Rwandan society including the media, they spread their ideology through the radio. Radio stations broadcast different messages like the "RPF is the enemy as long as they fight. We know where their supporters are in every commune" (African rights, 1995).

On April 7th, after the crash of the presidential plane, Hutu extremists began purging the government of their political opponents. Both Tutsi and even some moderate Hutu were killed, including Prime Minister Agathe Uwiringiyimana. Over the following days and weeks, the killings and violence spread all over the country and, since the government had already established the names and addresses of nearly all Tutsi living in Rwanda, the killers were able to go door to door, slaughtering the Tutsi. Men, women, and children were murdered. Since bullets were expensive, most Tutsi were killed with other weapons such as machetes or clubs. Many were tortured before being killed, often by neighbors who knew them well. In addition, rape and other forms of sexual violence were also used as a weapon of genocide and directed against the Tutsi women (Catherine, 1995). During the genocide, rape was widespread (Munyandamutsa, 2001). Tens of thousands of Tutsi women were individually raped, gang-raped, and raped with objects such as sharpened sticks or gun barrels (Samuel, 2009). Frequently, Tutsi women and girls were killed immediately following the rape while some others were sexually enslaved for weeks (African Rights, 2004). Sometimes, rapes were followed by torture before being killed, including mutilation of the vagina and pelvic area with machetes, knives, sticks, having their breasts cut off (Des Forges, 1999). In the space of only 100 days of such atrocities, more than one million Tutsi were murdered solely because they were Tutsi.

As the United Nations and the international community chose not to intervene, this genocide did not end until the RPF pushed the extremist Hutu and their genocidal interim government out of the country, gaining full control of Rwanda in July, 1994.

7. Consequences

The Genocide against the Tutsi has done a lot of harm to Rwandan society. It was a dramatic historical event that opened a new dark page for Rwanda. In a three months period, more than one million Tutsi were killed. In addition, hundreds of thousands of survivors became orphaned, wounded, disabled, widowed, aids victims, and/or were forced to live without shelter. Moreover, the genocide caused practical and psychological consequences as a result of the horrors of the macabre acts to which genocide survivors were subjected throughout the genocide. This genocide damaged and destroyed the social cohesion and make up of Rwandan society. It destroyed the mutual trust and the unity that Rwandans had developed and relied upon for centuries. The genocide against the Tutsi led people to separate from one another based off of fear, suspicion, mistrust, hatred and misperception reinforced (Burgess, 2003).

After the genocide ended, the country was on the brink of economic collapse. All the farms and agriculture of the country were destroyed, and most of the state infrastructure including schools, hospitals and clinics, roads, homes, business centers and more were almost completely destroyed. Many Rwandans became refugees or internally displaced persons.

Furthermore, this genocide generated a large number of prisoners, which created a heavy burden on the Rwandan Government, as it had a duty to feed them.

8. Post-genocide era

After the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, the main concern of the new government was how to re-build the Nation and the State. Was Rwanda going to remain a unitary state, or a state divided into 'Hutuland' and 'Tutsiland'? Was the new victorious force going to allow massive extermination of genocide perpetrators or establish the rule of law? How were they to ensure coexistence between Hutu and Tutsi after such extreme violence?

Despite the consequences of the magnitude of the genocide, the new government has been working hard to eradicate discrimination with the introduction of the philosophy of national unity and reconciliation. The emphasis was to create core values that can bind Rwandans together. In addition, the new government upholds its responsibility to protect Rwandan population and ensure a future forever free of impunity and genocide as contribution to the vow of 'never again' campaign. In this regard, other nations of the world are encouraged to share responsibility and do their best to prosecute criminals, protect civilians, and ensure that evil of this magnitude never happens again.

In combating impunity while unifying Rwandans, the international community responded by establishing the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to try those who planned the genocide and its instigators. In another attempt to impart justice, the Rwandan Government developed the modern Gacaca courts system⁷, based on the traditional Gacaca process, to try suspected genocide perpetrators while unifying Rwandans.

⁷ Gacaca Courts is an adaptation of a traditional form of resolving disputes between members of a community where people used to sit together in '*agacaca* (*kind of grass*)' and settle their disputes.

The Gacaca courts allowed swift trials with popular participation. They reduced prison overpopulation and facilitated a better understanding of what happened during the genocide. In addition, Gacaca courts contributed in locating and identifying bodies of the victims, and reducing the ethnic tensions between genocide survivors, perpetrators and their respective families.

In order to mend the destroyed social fabric of Rwanda, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission was created in accordance with the law N°03/99 of March 12th, 1999. The ultimate aim of this commission was to re-build a culture of national citizenship as opposed to one of ethnic identity. Under this governing institution, a number of local mechanisms that foster reconciliation, including *Itorero*⁸, *Ingando*⁹, *Ubudehe*¹⁰, *Girinka*¹¹ and a unity and reconciliation week, were enacted. Building upon this, the '*Ndi Umunyarwanda*'¹² (I am Rwandan) program was initiated to create core values that can bind Rwandans together. The *Ndi Umunyarwanda* program encourages Rwandans to have a continual dialogue in the framework of sharing their history and, from bad experiences, building an optimistic future. The outputs of these home grown solutions are observable. Today Rwandans are mobilized and have understood the importance of unity and reconciliation as a pillar for peace, stability and development. Today, survivors of genocide live side by side with genocide perpetrators. For that unbelievable achievement, Rwanda is to be commended for such efforts towards reconciliation, as well as for its continued willingness to welcome back into the country many of those who participated in the '*Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda* (FDLR)¹³, whose members never ceased to organise and to direct terrorist acts towards the Rwandan population.

Despite past efforts in unit and reconciliation, and reconstruction in post-genocide Rwanda, the country is still suffering from the wounds of the genocide. The survivors of the genocide must confront their own traumatic experiences on a daily basis.

9. Conclusion

This paper shows how the origin of the violence that transpired in Rwanda during the latter half of the twentieth century is tied to the ways in which Hutu and Tutsi were treated differently by the colonial masters.

⁸ *Itorero* is a type of civic education emphasizing positive values of patriotism, human respect, human rights, love of work, etc, with a view to achieve lasting peace and development.

⁹ *Ingando* is taken from the Rwandese verb '*Kuganda*' that refers to halting normal activities to reflect on and find solutions to national challenges. Today, it aims at clarifying the history of Rwanda by analyzing and understanding the origin of divisions among the population in order to eradicate them.

¹⁰ *Ubudehe* is a Rwandan traditional practice that defines the collective effort employed towards solving social and economic problems.

¹¹ *Girinka* translated as 'may you have a cow' describes a Rwandan traditional practice whereby a cow was given by one person to another, either as a sign of respect and gratitude or as a marriage dowry.

¹² *Ndi Umunyarwanda (I am Rwandan) program* is a platform through which Rwandans give testimonies of what happened, did, or omitted to do. It aims at building Confidence Bridge which would then bring about national cohesion and unity of purpose void of suspicion /pretence.

¹³FDLR refers to a Hutu armed force operating in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It counts among its number the original members of the *Interahamwe* that carried out the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994.

This crushed the existing relationship between Hutu and Tutsi and caused to see each other as different. At the same time, it marked the origins of hatred between Hutu and Tutsi and conflicts between them.

By the time the power fell into the hand of the Hutu, many Tutsi were massacred, and hundreds of thousands fled into the neighboring countries of Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The remaining Tutsi inside the country were sporadically killed and accused of being accomplices or supporters of exiled Tutsi. For decades, the regime remained a Hutu one while many Tutsi remained in exile and marginalized within the country.

Towards the beginning of the 1990s, the Habyarimana regime had lost momentum under attack from an invasion by Rwandan Patriotic Front during the liberation war. In an attempt to maintain their power, the Hutu extremist government deliberately carried out the Genocide against the Tutsi. This paper demonstrates that an ideology of hatred, denying the rights of refugees to return to their homeland, and the Hutu extremists' struggle to maintain power were forces that led to the genocide. This genocide had its origins in the colonial era, where Hutu and Tutsi were treated differently; generating earlier tensions that helped create the foundations of genocide.

The Genocide against the Tutsi cost the lives of more than one million Tutsi, created hundreds of thousands of orphans, wounded, disabled people, widows, aids victims, and victims without shelter. Importantly, it also resulted in practical and psychological consequences for genocide survivors, and destroyed the country's infrastructure.

After the genocide, the post-genocide ruling regime created the possibility of combating impunity and human rights violations while unifying Rwandans, and therefore brings a hope of peace and a brighter tomorrow. To that end, we must make sure that 'never again' means 'never again'.

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