

## **CERS Working Paper**

### **Racism in Rwanda**

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The division between Hutu and Tutsi peoples in Rwanda has given rise to some of the most bloody violence seen anywhere in the world. However, this conflict has not always been part of Rwandan society. It is only in the last 150 years that the people of Rwanda have classified themselves upon such rigid racial lines. This paper will seek to examine factors throughout the history of Rwanda which have shaped the current racial climate of a country which is still in recovery. This paper will seek to argue that the West has played a leading role in contributing to the prevalence of racism in Rwanda in the last century. Both through the promotion of their pseudo-scientific theories of race to an uneducated society, and at the end of the twenty-first, century breaking the Genocide Convention and allowing atrocities to be committed unabated. Furthermore the West's approval of the current government in place will be criticised for ignoring key issues present throughout Rwandan society. Clearly there are several other factors we must look at which have contributed to such a fractured society but the West has certainly had an involvement in all aspects of Rwandan life from the dispersal of ideas to the distribution of aid and as a peacekeeping force.

Following the horror experienced in 1994 Rwanda has been viewed by many in the West as a success story as it has sought to recover and move forward. This paper will argue that this view is short sighted and, following the West's catastrophically inadequate response to the genocide; the attitudes of the West are once again failing to address the issues present in a fundamentally racist capitalist influenced society.

Rwanda was originally colonised by Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. These first missionaries and colonisers brought with them their obsession with the classification of human kind according to their race and origin. This Western Pseudo-Science was influenced by the work of Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution. Western settlers saw themselves as culturally superior to the savages they had discovered and were eager to document these three new found races. The Twa made up 1% of the population, the Tutsis approximately 15% and the Hutus over 80% of the population. We can see the simplicity of the observations made by the early missionaries who noted that the Twa is 'quite similar to the apes he chases in the forest' (Prunier, 1995). In contrast we see how the Germans obsessed over the superior Tutsi race with their 'Beautiful shining teeth' and tall thin physique making them very different to the majority of the Rwandese population. The colonial obsession with the Tutsi meant that they were favoured and allowed to govern the colony. Throughout the colonial period the Hutu majority was dominated by the Tutsi population and held jobs working the land while those Tutsi not part of the governing elite worked mainly with cattle which was seen as a superior occupation. This division of labour was enforced by those in power and was a 'political creation', according to Mahmood Mamdani (2001), rather than being the natural development of society.

The early influence of the colonisers cannot be dismissed when looking at present day issues of racism in Rwanda as this western ideology reshaped traditional Rwandan society and firmly implanting the seeds of racial thinking. Myths about the origins of the newly labelled superior Tutsi suggested they had migrated from as far away as Tibet and perhaps even made it to Iceland. It is telling that even today some Tutsis still believe that their origins are those stated by these colonisers. These racial ideas sewn in the west were exported to Rwanda and presented the Tutsi with a biological justification to dominate the 'native' Hutu population.

By 1959 the Tutsis, aided by the Germans and Belgians, dominated leadership as they occupied all but two out forty-five chief positions. Gerard Prunier (1995) states: 'harmless intellectuals created this myth of traditional Rwanda' and they had no idea that this new social structure would

ultimately lead to so much bloodshed. The hierarchy placed the Tutsi at the top but all the while the white colonisers were in Rwanda they, as 'superior race', had ultimate control over what they saw as a civilising mission. This is important as we cannot see the social structure put in place in Rwanda outside the context of the West. As powerful as the Tutsis were, or thought they were, and after independence the Hutus, the West has always been at the top of the hierarchy. The West has always believed that it can control events in Africa when it needs to through either military force or political influence. This attitude is part of a certain arrogance that modern capitalist society sees issues in developing countries as simple good versus evil issues that they, as a superior more developed society can solve. It is often the case that when issues around the world are raised, many query why the west don't 'sort it out', as though it is that simple. This is symptomatic of underlying racial issues in society.

We can see the long lasting effect of the colonial era on the way in which the Tutsis and Hutus elite have governed. Racial ideology was used as a lens through which socio-political issues where to be addressed, the BAHUTU Manifesto claimed Hutus were victims of a 'racial monopoly' as Hutu intellectuals appealed to the UN Mission arriving in Rwanda for help in the fight against their oppressors (Prunier, 1995). Where this should have been seen as an issue of an authoritarian single party minority oppressing the Hutu masses who required some form of representation as part of a multi party system, instead the situation is seen purely along the lines of the racial split enforced by the Colonial institutions. This situation continued after Rwanda gained independence as, although the emergent Hutu elites gained power from the Tutsis, this only inverted the old social structure and the issues they sought to tackle were once again addressed as purely racial rather than based upon issues of class. This approach unified all market identifies as the poor and the rich were seen to be fighting as part of the same struggle against the enemy. The Hutu middle class and elites used the plight of the poor Hutus, victimised by the Tutsi, as one of their main platforms to consolidate their control of the masses. This meant that the poor segments of Hutu society were forced to support the Hutu elite as failure to do so would be to betray your own people.

In the years leading up to 1994 we can see that racial ideology was still very much embodied in Rwandan society as political leaders continued to utilise the racial split to strengthen their position of power. President Habyarimana used the threat of a Tutsi invasion from Uganda to unite the Hutus against groups including the 'Clan De Madame' and various moderate factions seeking to remove him from power. This demonstrates that even in the 1990's the political elite was still using the colonial Western concept of traditional Rwandese society. This established the fault lines along which Rwandan society would polarise and adopt a culture of fear. President Habyarimana was able to broadcast anti-Tutsi propaganda to the Rwandan population which bred extremism despite the promise of peaceful coexistence following the signing of the Arusha Accords. The post-colonial framework of the myths of racial identity provided the platform upon which events from 1990 until 1994 would nurture the environment in which genocide would occur.

As we seek to explain how the divide between Hutu and Tutsi could have possibly led to violence on such a huge scale, political/economic frameworks and cultural theories which explain violence in a post-colonial world fall short (Mamdani, 2001). The genocide saw violence on a scale which cut through economic classes on an unprecedented scale. It was not a Marxist-style revolution of working classes rising up against the bourgeoisie; it was in fact an entire country carrying out unspeakable violence on behalf of a government that was seeking to maintain its position of power amid fears of an internal rebellion. In order to understand this we may study George Homans' Rational Choice Model. Habyarimana used the 'pre-existing ethnic divisions' within Rwanda as a tool to increase power. The Rational choice Model states that the ruling elite do not 'deceive their followers' but instead utilise the structure of laws and precedents in place within society. In the case of Rwanda we can see that this structure is the hangover from imperialist colonial rule which sees the Tutsi population as foreign invaders, once again threatening the Hutu majority, with intent to seize power. Genocidal violence is carried out as a form of risk aversion with a 'kill or be killed' mentality (Moise, 2006). There is a stark difference between the motivation for the genocide at a macro-level and a micro-level. At a macro level we can see the government's need to unite the

Hutu and shore up the power of the elite. However, at a micro-level we can see that people killed because they believed they were protecting their families in what were very difficult economic circumstances.

The seeds of the genocide clearly emanated from the upper echelons of Rwandan society, however, we must examine what it was that made the grass roots level of society so susceptible to the propaganda being broadcast by the Hutu Government. Rwanda was regarded by the international community to be an economic success story prior to 1994. Rwanda received large amounts of aid and was part of the IMF and World Bank's 'Structural Adjustment Program' (Salmon, 2004). However, the reality of the situation on the ground could not have been more different as 85% of the population lived below the poverty line. The coffee industry, the main source of income for the country as its primary export, had faced global crisis in the 1980's as prices fell by over 50%. This, coupled with the embedded corruption of leaders who withheld foreign aid from their own people for their own personal gain, meant that despite initial economic growth prior to 1980 the country was facing a huge crisis. Perhaps most alarmingly Rwanda at this time was the third largest importer of weapons despite being one of the poorest countries in the world. It seems baffling that this was not picked up on by the outside world who were so willing to, without question, inject money in to Rwanda's economy. This lack of Western understanding of the reality of the situation in Rwanda shows an inherent arrogance and underlying racism in the way that the Western powers deal with developing countries. By 1994 a downtrodden majority of the population had nothing to lose, the stage was set for genocidal ideology to be dispersed and the West was unwilling to address the situation.

Hutu propaganda reignited the division between Hutu and Tutsi as Rwanda saw the birth of 'Hutu Power' following the 1990 invasion of the RPF (Mamdani, 2001). The Hutu 'Ten Commandments' were published in '*Kangura*', a government funded magazine which published hate-inciting propaganda about the Tutsi. Documents such as these laid the foundations of genocidal thinking as it rekindled the ideas of the ethnic inequality between Hutu and Tutsi. The fourth commandment stated that 'every Tutsi is dishonest in business. His only aim is the supremacy of his ethnic group'. This clearly shows the government depicting the Tutsi as a threatening 'other' looking to reimpose themselves upon Rwandan society as they had done post-colonisation. The eighth commandment proclaimed the 'Hutu should stop having mercy on the Tutsi' (Berry, 1999), this is a terrifying sign of what was to come in the following years. The propagandists portrayed themselves as radical nationalists and through their portrayal of the Tutsi as dangerous foreigners they reaffirmed the racial split that the colonial powers had imposed decades before. Clearly we can see here an inability to escape the myth of the traditional Rwanda which was still a key influence in the way people thought. It was fear of the foreign Tutsi rather than a greed for power that allowed the population to be so easily manipulated (Mamdani, 2001).

The elites producing this propaganda were succeeding in alienating the Tutsi population and it was those at the very bottom of society that were most susceptible to manipulation. Radio et Television Libres des Mille Collines was a government funded private radio station set up in 1993 which opposed the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front and portrayed them as a threat of oppression which needed to be counteracted (BBC News, 2003).<sup>1</sup> This fits in with the Rational Choice model which sees genocidal violence as a form of risk aversion. One of the slogans repeated over a drum beat was 'defend your rights and rise up against those who want to oppress you' (Mamdani, 2001, p.191). Linda Melvern (2000) states that 'Among a largely illiterate population, the radio station had a large audience who found it immensely entertaining'. This radio station was manipulating the views of its audience and subconsciously preparing them for the impending genocide. The Tutsi population was dehumanised by the propaganda as the often drunk voices on the radio proclaimed the Tutsi 'are animals' and 'the Tutsi cockroaches are bloodthirsty murderers (Smith, 2003) The only remedy prescribed by the radio for this 'Tutsi problem' was 'Total extermination' (The Voice of

God: Propaganda and the Rwandan Genocide, 2011). All the while the world looked on and did nothing.

'The massive participation of the population in the Rwandan genocide is virtually without historical precedent.' (Office of The President, 1995) So far we have looked at the economic background to events which contributed to rising tensions which were drawn upon by the Hutu elites. This does not, however, explain how it came about that an entire Hutu population carried out such violence against the Tutsis. Firstly, genocidal ideology was so effortlessly imposed upon the Hutu population because the racial ideology of hierarchy had been imposed upon the Rwandan population since before independence - it had simply been inverted at the time of the independence (Mamdani, 2001). Traditional society in Rwanda has been inherently racist throughout the twentieth century and massacres of Tutsi and Hutu people had taken place throughout this period, albeit on a much smaller scale than the 1994 genocide. Massacre was used as a political weapon against the Tutsis between 1990 and 1994 and this can be seen as the preparation for the beginning of the genocide which, as we will see, went unchecked by the West. The massacres began the process of instilling fear in the population and making an example of the 'murderous Tutsi'. Mamdani (2001) combines this instilled racial attitude with the 'authoritarian traditions' of Rwanda's power structure which has through out history centred around the idea of absolute authority of leaders. The illiterate population of Rwanda listened to the Hutu propaganda unquestioningly and therefore, when they were encouraged to kill, they were already conditioned to answer the call.

We can see therefore that in 1994 the control of the genocide was entirely in the hands of the Hutu elites inciting hatred between the ethnic groups in Rwanda. They created a culture of fear within communities and made it clear to the people in the villages that if they did not kill then they would be killed as Tutsi sympathisers. The situation today is more stable but power is still in the hands of elites who operate a single party system which bans other political parties and exercises stringent control over the media.

#### Education in Rwanda

In the Western world education is commonly linked with notions of hope for the future. It is seen as a positive force in our society as we nurture today's children to become tomorrow's leaders. In other countries education has a very different function. In countries such as Rwanda the government run education system is part of the framework through which authoritarian ideology is dispersed in order to maintain the status quo (Salmon, 2004). Education has had a very sinister agenda and we see this when we examine the Hutu power structure in the build up to the Rwandan Genocide and also when we look back at the colonial period. It's main priorities were to foster new candidates to join the elite sections of society and to be an instrument of repression of either the Hutu in the pre-independence period or, after independence in 1962 the Tutsi. Peter Uvin (1998) states that the education system was a key component of the conditions of structural violence within Rwanda.

The segregation and quota systems in place both before and after Rwanda's independence did not contribute directly to the ethnic violence that took place through out the twentieth century, but it was certainly a major contributor to an acceptance of the status quo within a society. It has been reported that the racial divide was present in lessons as Maths teachers would pose problems to students: I have five Tutsis, if I kill three, how many Tutsis do I have? (Bird, 2003) With this kind of racial language being directed at such young children it is little wonder that racism has taken such a centre stage in Rwanda.

Just as education was such a negative contributor to the ethnic divide in Rwanda leading up to the genocide, it has played an even more important role since 1994. As the nation continues to rebuild, the way in which history is taught to students is of huge importance and has been a subject of much contention. Rwandans need to see themselves as a nation united as one identity rather than as separate opposing ethnic identities. Tony Blair's article (2014) for the Guardian, entitled "20 years after the genocide, Rwanda is a beacon of hope", praised the advances made by Rwanda in

the last 20 years. In it he points to the positive impact foreign aid has had in rebuilding the political system and increasing the number of children that are going to school - Rwanda has one of the highest rates of attendance in education in Africa. But these statistics, despite being impressive to the casual observer, do nothing to change the predisposition of Rwandans to view themselves along racial lines. One must remember that it was the educated elites who orchestrated the violence of the 1990's. Education can be used as a force for good in the world or it can be used by the state to further self-interest.

There have been reports of bullying among students as genocide survivors are singled out and harassed. In one secondary school there was graffiti found in the toilet saying that 'Tutsis are bad and they should die' (BBC News, 2008). The children in these schools are too young to have lived through the genocide so it is clear that their hatred must be being nurtured somewhere else. Some say that parents still think along the clear ethnic lines and so pass this ideological stance on to their children which allows the cycle set in motion by colonials all those years ago to continue. Teachers have also been arrested for not following the official guidelines of the curriculum set up by the ruling party. This version of history ignores the Hutu moderates that were killed during the genocide for sympathising with the Tutsi. This is dangerous as it is reminiscent of the repressive role education played pre-1994 in structural violence. If care is not taken it is possible that Rwanda will see a return of the racially motivated violence that tore its country apart. As Rwandans attempt to rebuild and their country the process of reconciliation is on going. In an interview with a Tutsi Man who had received an apology from his Hutu neighbour for killings his brother, he stated that he only accepted the apology because he was still scared of the man (History Channel). Clearly the feelings are still there.

I believe that this statistics-driven viewpoint from which Tony Blair and many others look at Africa is one of the reasons there are still problems. Investing money into a country does not solve social problems engrained in a society it merely puts paternalist capitalist minds at ease. The racial tensions present in Rwanda have not disappeared. President Kagame is praised by many political figures around the world but one only has to look at his actions in the DRC fighting against Hutu rebels to see that ethnic tensions are still present - hidden from global attention perhaps, but still present. Mysterious deaths of political figures such as Patrick Karegeya suggest that all is not what it seems and racial tensions still exist among the political elites as well as at a grassroots level. Furthermore, the single party system and tight control on the media further highlights potential room for problems to occur. The reasons for Kagame's tight control on the government are highlighted by the issues in Rwanda's education system. Ethnic tensions still run very high despite the \$1billion that has been invested into the education system. The wrong sort of education can clearly be as harmful as no education at all.

#### Role of the West

One of the main themes of this paper is the role that the West has played both actively and passively in Rwanda not only during the colonial period but also from the outside in the last 40 years. I would argue that through studying racism within Rwanda it is not only inter-ethnic rivalries that are highlighted but also the superiority complex of modern capitalist society and its underlying racist attitude.

Following the Holocaust the General Assembly of the United Nations decreed that the act of Genocide is a crime in international law.

**Article I:** *The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.*

**Article II:** *In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with 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.*

**Article III:** *The following acts shall be punishable:*

- (a) *Genocide;*
- (b) *Conspiracy to commit genocide;*
- (c) *Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;*
- (d) *Attempt to commit genocide;*
- (e) *Complicity in genocide.*

(Prevent Genocide International)

The first three articles cited above are very important to be aware of when we look at the events unfolding in Rwanda as it seems that this convention was completely ignored. Situation reports written by Romeo Dallaire and Jaques-Roger Booh Booh show that the West was warned that a genocide was being plotted as 'tension rose in Rwanda' and that the UNAMIR forces were inadequately equipped to deal with the impending crisis. Dallaire's 'sitrep' dated November 16 1993 sent to New York states that 'there is a latent tension within all of the opposition parties as ethnic points are coming to the fore' (Weekly Sitrep No.5, 1993). The Red Cross, at the end of the first week, reported to the United Nations Security Council that 10,000 civilians had been killed each day. The Situation Report documents were not released until April 7th 2014 and seem to point to the West being aware of the tense situation in Rwanda although the UK and the American government have declined requests to release further documents which would shed light on how much information from these reports was passed on the the decision making councils.

A report sent on the 10th April 1994 states that there were 10,000 refugees without food, many of them children, at King Faisal Hospital, 4,500 refugees at Amahoro Stadium and 300 at Hotel Milles Collines. It also states that a doctor had been informed that there would be a massacre at Milles Collines that evening (Special SitRep, 1994). All this information was provided to the U.N. and is clear evidence of rising ethnic tensions and represents a situation where the Western power should have felt obliged to take action under the terms of the Genocide Convention. However, Dallaire's request for more troops fell on deaf ears and he was left to work with the limited resources he had at his disposal.

The attitude of the West towards events in Rwanda is perhaps most disturbingly summed up as reports sent on a Friday would not be answered by the Government in New York until Monday. Dallaire was left to wonder 'how many thousand Rwandans would die that weekend?' (Gessen, 2005) The fact that those charged with orchestrating peace-keeping missions can put a genocide on hold for the weekend highlights the lack of interest paid to issues in countries which where outside the sphere of interest of the West. The former President of the U.N security council Colin Keating apologised on 16th April 2014 for refusing to recognise the genocide occurring in Rwanda and not acting appropriately. It has since emerged that Dallaire's cables were concealed and never put up for consideration by the United Nations Security Council. Rwanda's U.N. Ambassador Eugene-Richard Gasana said "the systematic slaughter of men, women and children was perpetrated in full view of the international community" (Lederer, 2014) Article III states that complicity in genocide is an act also punishable, yet the blame for failing to respond to the Rwandan genocide has never been placed upon anyone. The Human Rights Watch called upon the U.N. to recognise a genocide was taking place at the end of the first week after Belgium had withdrawn its troops. The U.N. ignored this request as 90% of the U.S. and U.N. security councils voted in favour of a troop withdrawal. The pleas of U.N.A.M.I.R. had been completely ignored and it's force was reduced to 270 soldiers (Rwandan Stories, 2011). The West was able to utilise the bureaucratic system to stifle any progress towards providing aid to Rwanda due to fears of what it would cost them to provide the necessary means to solve the unfolding crisis.

The United States have also been criticised for failing to halt the broadcasting of Radio Libre Milles Collines. This radio station acted as the main government institution and provided information on the names and whereabouts of Tutsis and Hutu moderates that needed to be exterminated.

Dallaire pleaded with the U.N. to shut down the Radio station in order to significantly slow down the process of genocide. The U.S. refused on the grounds that it would breach the right of Rwanda to control the media in its own country and that it would be too expensive. This clearly breaches Article 3 of the genocide convention on complicity in genocide. The U.S. government steadfastly refused to accept that a genocide was occurring and in press conferences regularly refused to directly answer questions relating to the genocide taking place. At a State Department briefing, spokesperson Christine Shelley is asked, "How many acts of genocide does it take to make genocide?". To which she replied: "That's just not a question that I'm in a position to answer" (Christine Shelly, 2011).

This lack of action highlights a foreign policy motivated entirely by self-interest. Romeo Dallaire has said that with 5,000 troops he would have been able to prevent the genocide from happening yet it was only after 100 days that an intervention occurred following the arrival of the worlds media. The world's leaders allowed the racist state of Rwanda to carry out its genocide unabated. It will be interesting to see how the world reacts to the unfolding crisis in South Sudan. The U.N. responded to the massacre at Benitu saying victims were targeted based on 'ethnicity and nationality' but is yet to use the word genocide despite the words of Article II of the Genocide Convention which if applied to these events would suggest that is what is occurring.

France has also faced criticism for its support of the Hutu dictatorship. One of the questions asked is why they provided the Hutu government with troops to stop the Tutsi Rwandans returning to their homeland (Prunier, 1995). As well as providing the regime with weapons, there were also French Generals within the Rwandan Army helping to train the Interahamwe that would ultimately lead the killing of Tutsis. President Mitterrand was openly obsessed with Rwanda to the point that it led to the interruption of government meetings concerning other issues. He feared that the RPF in Uganda were receiving backing from Anglophone forces who wanted to create an English speaking Tutsi state. Was French competition with the Anglophone international community so intense that Mitterrand was willing to support a dictatorship that was planning the systematic extermination of 20% of its own people?

It is easy for the West to highlight the progress Rwanda has made in the last twenty years. The country is no longer on the brink of genocide and total economic collapse but - has the country managed to leave its murky past behind? In my opinion, no. Much work is still to be done in Rwanda before the over-hanging threat of racism dragging the country back into the darkness can be dispelled. The constitution has only recently been amended so Hutu and Tutsi are now seen as a united Rwandan nationality. This change is a political milestone that can be part of the recovery rhetoric employed by 'Pro-Kagame' journalism but in reality it will have no affect on the way people think at a grassroots level in the short term. Issues which affect those outside the ruling elite must be addressed. This includes the education system which, if properly managed, has the capability to positively influence racial attitudes of young Rwandans. However, the current situation is that the West is continuing to fund a government which is using education to reinforce its own views. The truth is that Rwanda is still a country that has a minority group ruling over a majority. Until this is addressed, the issues that have plagued the country for the last century will continue to hold it back as it seeks to assert itself as a member of the global economic community.

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