The Rwandan Genocide
Introduction

“The most horrible and systematic human massacre we have had occasion to witness since the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis” — Bertrand Russell, 1964, as quoted in A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide, in response to bloodshed following the Rwandan revolution

A heavily populated territory that is comprised of 10.9 million people, the Republic of Rwanda gained its independence from the Belgians in 1962 after a long struggle of first being ruled under the Germans until the end of the World War I and later under the Belgians from 1916-1962. Under the Belgian colonial rule, Rwanda became one of the members of Belgian League of Nations, which basically meant that the Belgians possessed an indirect power to control and change the system of Rwanda’s government, including its social and political system. One of the political practices that the Belgians implemented, which would later become one of the main causes of the bloodbath during the genocide, was the system of dividing the Rwandans into different ethnic groups — Tutsis, Hutu and Twa. With the adaptation of this systemic ethnic division, Rwanda faced constant and impending ethnic conflicts between the Tutsis and the Hutu because the Tutsis were favored over the Hutus in terms of their education and class opportunities. The conflicts between the two groups were often violent and dangerous, and it eventually led to the most horrifying genocide in Central Africa — the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. The Rwandan Genocide of 1994, which lasted for approximately 100 days, saw 800,000 casualties, an astounding 20% of the country’s total population.

Rwanda and Central Africa

Rwanda’s geographic location has been a major factor in both its internal struggles and the stability of the region as a whole. It shares borders with Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Uganda, a group of countries that have experienced great conflict and upheaval:

“This region matters. It matters because it is the great core of Africa, its breadth nearly the distance between London and Moscow. It matters because its nine neighbors are all affected by its upheavals and because parts of it are stuffed with valuable minerals. And it matters because the war that engulfs it is brutal, unending and often overlooked.” — from "Bloody history, unhappy future," The Economist

Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo Conflict

After Rwanda’s genocidal Hutu regime was overthrown, more than two million Hutus fled into the Democratic Republic of Congo. It has been noted that hundreds of thousands of people fled to other neighboring countries as well, such as Tanzania, Burundi and Uganda. When the Tutsi-led government regained power in July 1994 after genocide, the refugee camps in the DR Congo caught the Rwandan leaders’ attentions. Most refugees refused to return home. Many were guilty of genocide including former soldiers and officers of the Rwanda armed forces and members of militias. Many of the refugees in the camps however were women and children who were neither major perpetrators of the genocide nor a military threat.

In regards to the militiamen who were responsible for the genocide, they allied themselves with Mobutu’s government, the government of the DR Congo at the time, and began to attack the ethnic Tutsis who had lived in the DR Congo for generations.

As a response, Rwanda’s Tutsi government fought back eventually overthrowing the Mobutu’s government. In his place, the Rwandans installed a guerrilla leader, Laurent Kabila. They hoped he would follow the Rwandan’s government’s orders. However, Kabila did not satisfy the Rwandan’s government. As a result, Rwanda decided to ask for help from Uganda and Burundi to overthrow Kabila’s position. The conflicts involving other five nations, including Zimbabwe and Angola, decided to get involved to save Kabila from getting toppled by the Rwandan’s government. The question of why all the countries got involved lies in the fact that they all had legitimate interests in Congo.

The failure of the Kabila government to curb these revels prompted Rwanda, Uganda and Angola to enter the war.

Kabila’s Assassination

In 2001, Kabila was shot to death by one of his bodyguards. Kabila left behind a negative legacy. For example, he is known as a dictatorial figure who jailed foreign businessmen and insulted foreign diplomats. Kabila was succeeded by his son, Joseph. Ever since his son took over the office, it has been reported by the United Nations that he is improving the conditions of the DR Congo.

In regards to the conflict between the DR Congo and Rwanda, Rwanda’s government still insists on getting rid of all the possibilities of genocide. To prevent the Hutus from regrouping and invading Rwanda, the United Nations has proposed setting up a Congo-based border force.

The ethnic violence between Hutu and Tutsi forces has been the main force driving the conflict between the DR Congo and Rwanda. Although there have been many attempts to end the violence and come to a peaceful agreement, it has been difficult for unstable Central Africa to stay out of war.

Overview — Ethnic Groups
There are three main ethnic groups in Rwanda: Tutsi, Hutu and Twa. When Rwanda emerged as a state in the 18th century, the pastoralists known as Begogwe and the cultivators dominated both the country’s work force and power structure. Rwanda has one national language known as Kinyarwanda, spoken by all three ethnic groups. Most people, both the Tutsis and Hutu are Christians. Rwandan institutions were also shaped by pastoralists and cultivators, in which wealth and the status of power were measured by the number of cattle or lands that people in Rwanda owned or controlled. By the 19th century, Rwanda’s power structure became more clearly defined. By this time, the word “Tutsi” described the status of a person rich in cattle (referring to the elite group) whereas the word “Hutu” meant an individual under the power of the elite group. The general grouping system developed as a norm as most people married within their occupational group, creating an exclusive gene pool. Intermarriage was not common, though it was practiced. However, the practice declined in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the ethnic difference between Tutsi elite and Hutu cultivators became increasingly defined.

The Hutu

Hutus constitute the vast majority of the population in Rwanda. Majority of Hutus were cultivators, working under the control of the Tutsis before and during the colonial period. They are generally characterized as having a darker complexion of skin, shorter, stronger and broader features. In spite of being the majority group in Rwanda, they were oppressed and lacked political and social power. This structure only worsened under German and Belgian rule. The Belgians, for example, who believed that the Hutu were not born to be leaders, but laborers, oppressed the Hutus through the labor force and through social aspects like education and employment. The restricted policies towards Hutus getting access to education and fair employment became thinner to the point that the Hutu's anger and frustration towards both the Belgians and the Hutis piled up. Later on, the Hutus called for a fundamental change in the peasantry uprising, eventually overthrowing the Hutus' elites as well as achieving independence from the Belgians.

The Tutsi

Tutsi is the second largest ethnic group in Rwanda. Historically speaking, Tutsis, characterized as tall and cattle herding warriors, migrated to Central Africa about 600 years ago from South Ethiopia. Although the gap between the Tutsi and the other two ethnic groups was not as fixed before the colonial period in Rwanda, Tutsis were generally considered to be more superior and powerful than the two mainly because they constituted the elite groups amongst the class system. Although intermarriage was not prohibited, it was not commonly practiced. It has been said by many historians that even during the pre-colonial period, Rwanda faced a serious social inequality, and some powerful political actors used their power abusively. The majority of Tutsis owned cattles, reinforcing the concept that they were superior and more powerful than the two other ethnic groups. Although intermarriage was not forbidden, it was not commonly practiced. Most people married within their occupational group. This as a result created more of an exclusive ethnic group, which meant that over generations, Tutsis' came to look more like the Tutsis group with lighter skin, tall and lean body types.

Under the European colonist rule, the Tutsis were much favored. To them, the Tutsis were a group of people who owned land or other forms of wealth, such as ten or more cows. They were favored in terms of education and employment over the Hutus, who were simply neglected. This administration created a rift between the two groups which indeed led to the civil war.

The Twa

The Twa formed the smallest component of the Rwandan population. They were hunters and gatherers who tend to live exclusively out in the woods. The divide between the Twa and the two other groups, Tutsi and Hutu, was also deep, and Twas also fell victim to the atrocities of the genocide.

Ethnic Conflicts

Rwanda became Germany's colonial state at the turn of the 20th century, and at the end of the First World War, Belgians replaced the Germans. The ultimate goal for the European states was to maximize their economic profit. For example, in order to make sure that the Belgians were the ones controlling the resources and profits in Rwanda, they positioned Tutsis in power. The Belgians indeed believed that Tutsi, Hutu and Twa were three distinct ethnic groups, in which the Tutsi were superior to both the Hutu and the Twa, with the Twa at the bottom of the racial pyramid. There is a myth that Europeans favored the Tutsis more than the other two groups because they thought that the Tutsi looked more like themselves. They also believed that the Tutsi were more reasonable, logical and fit for ruling the country.

In the 1930s, the Belgians even created a system known as the "identity cards" that indicated a person's ethnic category. This system became a tool for the Europeans to easily identify the groups so that one would be favored than the others in terms of access to economic, political and social privileges. As a result, the Hutu had fewer opportunities to attend school and go on to higher education.

On a broad scale, the colonial period contributed to the widespread discontent in rural areas. Hutus began to pressure for democratization, calling for an end to the monopoly of political rule by a small group of elites. A group of activists even issued a "Hutu Manifesto" in 1957, calling for equality of opportunity, and improved access to education, employment and social services.

By the late 1950s, two political parties emerged. At the same time, rumors emerged that a Hutu subchief was killed by a gang of Tutsi youths. This led to more rural uprisings, where the activists started going after Tutsi inhabitants and burning houses. The two emerging political parties, Association Pour La Promotion Soiale de le Masse (APROSOMA) and Rassmbelment Democratic Rwandais (RADAR) were both quite moderate.
as they emphasized helping those in need and reducing social inequality.

Causes of the Conflict between the Tutsis and the Hutus

“...there was considerable land shortage in some provinces by the 1950s. The kingdom was only about 100,000 square miles and had to support a leisured class of some 2,000 chiefs and about 50,000 Tutsi who never tilled the soil. The high productivity of the land well manured by cattle, with bananas and a wide range of grains and leguminous crops, made land valuable, especially when large tracts served as pasture for the Tutsi herds.” (Linden, 1. & Linden J.)
Natural Resources

Rwanda is a small country as it covers an area of 26,338 square kilometers. In spite of the limited space, Rwanda is known to possess a great variety of bioclimatic regions that mass produce tea and coffee. Central Rwanda was occupied mainly by the Hutus and with its vast forest environment, the inhabitants living amongst Central Rwanda's valued pastoral and agricultural resources. Pastoralism was a much larger section in Central Rwanda than in the East.

Eastern Rwanda, on the other hand, surrounded itself with more extensive natural resources led by pastoralist groups that carried out their pastoralist activities. It is important to note that with cattle overpopulation over time, some pastoralists living in the East migrated to the Western part of Rwanda in order to find more space for their herds. The migrating pattern created two different groups of people shooting for the same land resources in the same ecological environment. Many scholars argue that this ecological background set the foundation of the ethnic relationship and its conflict in the last centuries.

The Tutsis used a system called ubukake—a clientage system in which a patron grants a cow and the rights to a client who in turn provides some form of labor for the patron. Instead of following the fair arrangement over time, some pastoralists living in the East migrated to the Western part of Rwanda in order to find more space for their herds. The migrating pattern created two different groups of people shooting for the same land resources in the same ecological environment. Many scholars argue that this ecological background set the foundation of the ethnic relationship and its conflict in the last centuries.

Racial Stereotypes

When the Europeans occupied Rwanda, they oversimplified and formed stereotypes about the Hutu and Tutsi people. The Tutsi were known to be taller and have lighter skin complexions. They were also described as quiet, reserved, and relaxed. They believed that the Tutsis were natural leaders and superior to the Hutu in all respects. On the other hand, the Hutus were characterized as shorter and darker than the Tutsis. They were also known to be the laborers not the leaders. The stereotypes were accentuated by the Europeans as they wanted to find a way to simplify the people in Rwanda for their economic interests. In order to highlight the division between the two groups, the Belgians created a system through “identity cards” that stated whether one was a Hutu or a Tutsi. In addition, the Tutsis’ general attitude of viewing themselves as superior to the Hutus contributed to the ethnic division.

Imbalance of Power and Wealth

By the 1920s, the Tutsi nobility won over the cause of Western education. By 1925, the Belgians were restricting enrollment at the main government school in Nyanza to Tutsis only. The Belgians’ intention was to train the Tutsi elite who would later form legitimate leadership to support and continue the system that the Belgians had established. People in Rwanda were constantly reminded that Tutsi were “born chiefs, who had the sense of how to command” (Des Foreges 1965, 195) and that “a Hutu does not want to be welcomed the sea change in Tutsi attitudes towards Western education, and hoped to capitalize on this softening towards European ways by converting the Tutsi nobles to Catholicism as well.” (C. Newbury 1988, 115). The Westerns believed that teaching the Tutsis the Western beliefs and philosophy and leading missionary schools was a way to separate the Tutsis from the Hutus as it created an “ethnically defined Christian aristocracy.”

It is important to note that education was a significant way of getting access to political power in Rwanda. Conversely, education policies became one of the most effective means by the Belgians and white fathers to suppress and push the Hutus to the bottom class.

The Tutsi supremacy system empowered the power of Tutsis chiefs not just in terms of their wealth, but in terms of their prestige, reputation and education. The Tutsi chiefs by the late 1920s were part of the governing process in Rwanda where they were in charge of the collection of head taxes, providing work and completing public work projects: “The chiefs, their kinsmen and their clients would use their power to extract surplus from the common people, or forcibly create a surplus where there was none” (C. Newbury 1988, 128).
The Rwandan Revolution of 1959

"The two post-independence changes of regime in Africa that can plausibly be called revolutionary—Rwanda in 1959 and Zanzibar in 1964—were both the outgrowth of systems of ranked ethnic subordination."

--Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict

Causes
The turmoil in the 1950s and 60s surrounded the 1959 Revolution, largely a function of reactions to failed reforms in Belgian rule. During Belgian rule, the UN pressured Belgium to reform the administrative system in Rwanda. The reforms, which forced Belgians to educate Hutu, were ineffective because Belgians did not want to forfeit political and economic power. As such, even the educated Hutus were excluded from power. The educated group became increasingly frustrated with Belgian rule and broke into various political parties. The Hutu extremist party, the Parmehutu, was one of these new groups. Violence broke out from 1959-61 when Belgians supported what they called the “natural” rulers of Rwanda, the Hutu. In 1959, Tutsis fled to Uganda to seek refuge from the violence as Hutu parties harassed and then killed powerful Tutsis.

President Grégoire Kayibanda and the Parmehutu Party

In 1962, in an end to colonial rule, Grégoire Kayibanda, a Hutu from the extremist Parmehutu party was elected president. Soon after, anti-Tutsi, racist ideology intensified, and the government took control of resources and power to safeguard Hutu dominance. Under the Kayibanda administration, Rwanda shifted its political focus to economic elevation and integrated development of Rwanda based on policies supporting Hutu causes. Kayibanda implemented a quota system that attempted to marginalize Tutsis, excluding them from education and jobs. The regime faced opposition to its power-hoarding in 1973 and Kayibanda responded with ethnic violence in schools. Still, the party fell to a popular coup d’État by the north. The revolution resulted in the end of a long history of colonial rule, leaving Rwanda both independent and deeply divided. Juvenal Habyarimana took over the presidential seat following the disbandment of the former Parmehutu party.

"Instead of the promised first act in a revolutionary drama that would close the curtain on the colonia era, 1959 turned into a final act desperately trying to breathe life into racialized identities born of the colonial state. Indeed, 1959 ushered in a pursuit of justice so focused that it turned into revenge."

— Mahmood Mamdani, When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda

The Refugee Problem

In the wake of the 1959 revolution in Rwanda, Tutsis sought refuge in Uganda. In 1979, the educated refugee population created the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity (RANU). Uganda’s strict refugee policies attempted to force refugees into camps the following year, a result of the country’s laws that offered citizenship only based on “indigeneity.” In 1980, the Ugandan government attempted to force the Tutsis back into refugee camp, even though refugee families had been there since the start of the revolution. Tutsi refugees responded by fleeing the country, which only complicated their refugee status. Both the Rwandan and Ugandan governments refused to take back the fleeing refugees, and many Tutsis were stuck without a place to stay. In 1987, the Tutsi refugee population in Uganda formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

President Juvenal Habyarimana and the Rwandan Civil War

The MRND Regime and Hutu-Tutsi Conflict

President Juvenal Habyarimana took over Rwanda by executing a coup d’État against President Kayibanda, stripping the Parmehutu party of power. Habyarimana created the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND), which ruled Rwanda from 1975-1994. Habyarimana further institutionalized the split between Hutus and Tutsis by favoring Hutus and leaving Tutsis largely out of positions of power. Kayibanda had implemented a quota system to divide power, and Gérard Prunier argues that Tutsis were continuously excluded from jobs and education under Habyarimana's regime:

"Throughout the Habyarimana years there would not be a single Tutsi bourgmestre or préfet, there was only one Tutsi officer in the whole army, there were two Tutsi members of parliament out of seven and there was only one Tutsi minister out of a cabinet of between twenty-five and thirty members." — Gérard Punier, The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide

Habyarimana brought the MRND into power and created a single-party, totalitarian state. Habyarimana told a journalist from Le Monde in 1982, “I know some people favor multipartyism, but as far as I am concerned, I have had no hesitation in choosing the single party system.” Throughout his rule, Habyarimana implemented programs to develop arable land and boost Rwanda’s economy. Under Habyarimana, Rwanda joined the French-backed Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries, and the World Bank-backed Kagera River Basin Organization. Given its growing economy, Punier argues that Rwanda was in a much better state compared to its unstructured and underdeveloped neighbors. But Habyarimana essentially used forced labor, and widespread discrimination and oppression was a reality of his regime. Habyarimana even split Rwanda regionally to create “regional militias” to look out for him, and to prioritize the development of certain regions over others. The country was becoming increasingly divided, leading to unrest in the country and in refugee populations elsewhere.

The 1990 War — The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) Invades Rwanda

The Push Towards War

For the RPF, the timing was right for several reasons. Firstly, in 1990, Pasteur Bizimungu and businessman Valens Kajeguhakwa told Tutsis in Uganda that the political system in Rwanda would collapse with any outside force. Then the Rwandan government called for delegates to visit Uganda so that some refugees would be repatriated. Members of the RPF didn’t want to return home without a fight, so they saw this as another
reason for war. Finally, the political movement within Rwanda made the RPF think that the time was right. Frustrated Rwandans planned to create opposition parties. According to Punier, the RPF knew its legitimacy was based on a fight against a single-party state; if a multi-party state emerged, the RPF would have less popular support.

The Invasion

“These conflicts are extremely tenacious because they
revolve around the fundamentals of human life: land, safety, security, identity, recognition,
esteeem and unhindered opportunities for human development as a whole” — Ami R. Mpungwe, Chief Facilitator of the Arusha Accords

Led by Major-General Rwigyema, October 1, 1990, the RPF opened fire on guards at the Rwandan border in the name of “democracy, good governance and the right of refugees.” The civil war in Rwanda was in full swing. The RPF expected major gains because of the surprise attack, but government forces responded and the RPF suffered casualties and desertions. It had turned into conventional warfare because the Rwandan government was soon backed by the French. The problem for the RPF is that they carried limited supplies and weapons, expecting a quick win. RPF forces were decreasing rapidly, and the government declared that the war was over on October 30, 1990. But Major Paul Kagame, who took over RPF leadership, carried out the war into a four-year struggle with the intention of defeating President Habyarimana's regime. The war officially ended in 1994 with the signing of the Arusha Accords.

The Arusha Accords

While the Rwandan people were happy to see the end of fighting, Hutu extremists strongly opposed the peace process. The negotiations between the Rwandan government and the RPF took place in Arusha, Tanzania in August, 1994, facilitated by the United States, France and the Organization of African Unity. The Accords established a power sharing agreement. The official peace process was the result of discussion from July 1992 to July 1993, and it marked the end of the Rwandan civil war. The official agreement includes statements about the war and the refugee crisis:

"Considering that the two parties accepted the principle of power-sharing within the framework of a Broad-Based Transitional Government; Noting the Protocols of Agreement on Power-Sharing signed at Arusha respectively on 30th October, 1992, and on 9th January, 1993; Recognizing that the unity of the Rwandese people cannot be achieved until a definitive solution to the problem of Rwandese refugees is found and that the return of Rwandese refugees to their country is an inalienable right and constitutes a factor for peace and national unity and reconciliation; Resolved to eradicate and put a definite end to all the root causes which gave rise to war." – Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front

The Assassination of Habyarimana
It was April 6, 1994, just before the mass killing began, President Juvénal Habyarimana’s plane was shot down, killing everyone on board including the president. To this day, responsibility of the killing remains unknown, though many suspect that the crime was done by the extreme Hutus who were desperate to take over the government and carry out the Rwandan Genocide. For the Hutus, the death of President Habyarimana was a call to action.

The Genocide

The genocide in Rwanda began on April 6, 1994 in the capital city of Kigali. Followed by Habyarimana’s death, members of the Rwandan armed forces (FAR) and Hutu militia groups known as the “interahamwe” and “Impuzamugambi” began killing Tutsis as well as moderate Hutus. Prime Minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, as well as her ten belgian bodyguards, were the first ones to die. Over the next three months, the mass killings in Rwanda spread from the capital to the rest of the country, killing around 800,000 people. In the midst of this horrific war, more than 2 million people, mostly Hutus, fled Rwanda to its neighbor, Congo. One of the highlighted killing events is the Gikondo Massacre, the mass murder of the Tutsis, including children and women in a Polish Pallottine Mission Church in Gikondo, Kigali:

“Infants were picked up by their feet and thrown against walls, others were thrown alive into latrines, pregnant women had the fetuses cut out of their stomachs, and mutilations were common with breasts and penises often being chopped off. The torture methods used to kill victims were so widely known amongst the population that individuals, if they had the money, often paid their killers to be finished off quickly with a bullet rather than being slowly hacked to death with a machete” (One Hundred Days of Silence: America and the Rwanda Genocide 2).

The Rwandan Genocide is still widely recognized today as one of the worst in history. Accounts of gruesome and heartless murder characterize the mass killings. Many point to how quickly the genocide occurred to describe the atrocities: 800,000 dead in about 100 days, or about 8,000 casualties per day.

International Community’s Reactions

International organizations as well as the NGOs have been harshly criticized for not responding at all to the genocide of Rwanda. The fact is that the genocide that was preceded by four years of civil war was widely known amongst the United Nation community as it even launched the Arusha Peace Progress with the support of the United States. When the violence began on April 6, 1994, however, Rwanda received almost no support. For example, the United States government made sure that there was no active response to Rwanda as the Congress lobbied the security council to withdraw all of UNAMIR troops. The United States as well as other international organizations acknowledge their failure to intervene during the Rwandan genocide as they claim that their knowledge of what was going on in Rwanda was too limited back then to do anything.

Divisionism and Ethnic Labeling

A Mechanism of Conflict Reduction

In Donald L. Horowitz’s Ethnic Groups in Conflict, he describes five mechanisms of conflict reduction. The one that most closely relates to the Rwandan government’s response to the genocide is focusing attention away from ethnic divisions and toward more uniting factors. As Horowitz wrote, “Interethic conflict may be reduced by policies that encourage alignments based on interests other than ethnicity” (Horowitz 599).

A Ban on Ethnic Labels and Divisionism

The Rwandan government steered attention away from ethnicity by instituting a ban on labeling groups as Hutu or Tutsi, opting instead for a policy that recognizes all Rwandans as Banyarwanda, or as having a national Rwandan identity. Article 9, Section 2 of the Rwandan constitution calls for the “eradication of ethnic, regional and other divisions and promotion of national unity.” It was an attempt, in a deeply divided society, to create a kind of nationalism that transcended divisive features. The government also created Ingando camps to “re-educate” Rwandans about the government and on the issue of ethnicity.

The government also takes the anti-divisionism laws banning “the use of any speech, written statement, or action that divides people, that is likely to spark conflicts among people, or that causes an uprising which might degenerate into strife among people based on discrimination (IDRC).

Criticism

Rene Lemarchand suggests that the Rwandan government glazed over the deep root of the conflict, which could result in either ethnic group rewriting history: “Reconciliation, assuming it can ever be achieved, requires that the past be confronted, not obliterated. Recognition that guilt and victimization transcend ethnic boundaries is not enough.” Lemarchand argues that powerful figures can manipulate the national memory for
political purposes, which does nothing to actually solve tensions between ethnic groups; rather, he says, the ban on ethnic labeling is a tool to reduce political opposition towards the ruling party. This is largely directed towards the policy of outlawing divisionism. Specifically, journalists and political opposition have been imprisoned because of the divisionism law, or allegedly trying to incite genocide or genocidal sentiments.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRmNNE2rOUm

Attempts at Justice

After experiencing the genocide, Rwanda promulgated a new constitution, on June 10, 1991. During this time, Rwanda had gone through a state of war since October 1991 followed by the military successes of the rebel movement Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and the installation of a coalition government.

The Court System

In Tanzania, the UN set up the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda to try perpetrators of the genocide. The Rwandan government, however, realized that the process was moving too slowly, deciding that it would take approximately 200 years to try all alleged perpetrators. As a result, the traditional Gacaca courts were put in place to quicken the process. Gacaca derives from the word Kinyarwanda, meaning grass. It is a traditional form of justice that historically saw elders in the community settling disputes by providing compensation for wrongdoings. The courts were repurposed to handle genocide through Organic Law N° 40/2000. The courts are governed by the National Service of Gacaca Jurisdiction (NSGJ). The Gacaca justice systems divides cases into three categories:

- Category 1: Planners of the genocide and those who had powerful roles during the genocide - these cases are reserved for the national courts and the UN Tribunal (ICTR)
- Category 2: Crimes including murder and bodily harm - handled by the secteur level
- Category 3: Property crimes - presided over by the cell level

Approximately 9,000 courts were set up around Rwanda, and judges were elected to deal with crimes local to the region in which they were elected. Gacaca courts are community-oriented, so people usually handle litigation themselves, instead of handing over the work to legal professionals. The courts adhere to a conciliatory approach, in which the accused are encouraged to confess both before and after their hearing. Judges can write sentences accordingly, adjusting the degree of penalty based on whether the accused confessed.

Criticism

“The tribunal was created essentially to appease the conscience of the international community, which has failed to live up to its conventions on genocide. It was to look as if it is doing something, which is often worse than doing nothing at all” — Colin M. Waugh, Pau Kagame and Rwanda: Power, Genocide, and the Rwandan Patriotic Front

While the courts greatly quickened the judicial process following the genocide, critics noted that the all-inclusive approach failed to consider defendants’ rights or the rights of victims of rape and sexual assault. Additionally, compensation was not provided to victims. The courts were shut down in 2012.

Rwanda Since the Genocide


The year of 2012 marks the eighteenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, and unlike how the country was politically and socially during the late 90s, Rwanda is characterized as one of the most stable nations in Africa. The world acknowledges and praises the fact that Rwanda is at a better position politically, economically and socially than it was during the 1990s. CNN journalist, Fareed Zakaria, during the interview, described Rwanda as “the biggest success story out of the continent” and “a poster child of success.” A New Yorker reporter, Philip Gourevitch, who has spent many years of his career examining and analyzing the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath, has also pointed out the positive light that Rwanda brings to its people and to the international community. In Gourevitch's report on Rwanda, "The Life After," he describes many developments and improvements that Rwanda has gone through since the genocide of 1994. Characterizing Rwanda as "one of the safest and the most orderly countries in Africa," Gourevitch points out the economic development as well as increase of the population as signs of the country moving forward: "Since 1994, per-capita gross domestic product has nearly tripled, even as the population has increased by nearly twenty-five percent, I more than ten million. There is a national health insurance, and a steadily improving education system." (The New Yorker, 36). He also carefully examines the political system in Rwanda, and points out a sense of diligence and dedications amongst the leaders. For example, government officials are required to be at their desks by seven in the morning. Also, the gender inequality has been eased in Rwanda, as it is the only government in the world that has women as the majority of parliamentarians. In addition, Rwanda’s President, Paul Kagame, proudly talks about the the policies towards the prisoners of the Rwandan Genocide, stating that the death penalty has not only been abolished, but Rwanda is capable of bringing people together, in spite of sharing the most tragic history of the twentieth century.

But is this all true? The genocide of Rwanda has indeed cast its shadow over many internal and international conflicts in the African region. The international community as well as the media, however, have failed to take further actions to help the nation run itself more smoothly without corruption and violence. The Rwandan genocide and the victory of RPF has led to two subsequent wars in the Congo after many former government officials and soldiers that belong to the Hutu group fled to the Congo. The ones that fled the country carried their hatred sentiments...
against the RPF hoping to take away the RPF's power. Rwanda justified waging war by claiming the need to eliminate war criminals who were responsible for the genocide. The RPF, indeed, uses the excuse of preventing a recurrence of genocide to suppress political oppositions, dissidents and refuse to allow other party members to organize new political parties. They even jail dissidents as they adopted a new constitution that prohibits ethnic divisionism and limiting liberties of speech and press.

As the international community reduced its support of the RPF, some international leaders have also started questioning Rwanda's violation of human rights issues as well as the transparency of the government. The country that survived the worst massacres of the twentieth century may, on the surface, have many successful and hopeful stories. However, the truth is that the country is still struggling economically, politically and socially, not to mention the dictatorial political system that current President Paul Kegame has been maintaining ever since the genocide.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front Victory

The Rwandan Patriotic Front members, led by Paul Kagame, ended the 1994 genocide by defeating the military authorities responsible for the killing more than 500,000 people in Rwanda. RPF soldiers advanced south down the Eastern side of the country and stopped the killings, rescuing the Tutsis from the violence. The members of RPF are known to have saved millions of lives and for proceeding the justice system by confronting those responsible for the killings. What has not been noted in the mainstream media enough is the fact that the RPF members are responsible for slaughtering many civilians during the months when the RPF was taking control of Rwanda. Within Rwanda, the RPF, after its official victory in July 1994, used the pretext of preventing a recurrence of genocide to suppress the political opposition refusing to allow dissidents to organize new political parties and eliminating an existing party that could potentially have challenged the RPF in national elections.

Many international leaders supported and praised the RPF for stopping the genocide and saving millions of people, also compensating for their failure to protect Rwanda.

Pasteur Bizimungu

Pasteur Bizimungu, an ethnic Hutu, was appointed the fifth President for a five-year term of the Republic of Rwanda in 1994 until he resigned in March 2000 after facing a conflict with the RPF over the appointment of a new cabinet and accusing Parliament of discriminating against Hutu politicians in its campaign against government corruption. Before being appointed as the president, Bizimungu held several important positions in the Hutu regime that ruled Rwanda until 1994. He was the post of director general of the national electricity company, Electrogaz in the early years of career. In fact, during the 1980s, he and President Habyarimana kept a close relationship as he generally supported his policies. He also joined Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) after his brother was assassinated by the orders of the Rwandan government. As a member, Bizimungu served as an information officer, and was also involved in negotiations in regards to the Arusha Peace Accords between 1992 and 1994. Bizimungu, though served the country from 1994-2000, often clashed with the RPF. Bizimungu, despite of his political position, played a minor role in politics as most Rwandans believed that the real power resides with Vice President Paul Kagame, who would take over the presidency seat after Bizimungu resigns.

Having born and raised in a stronghold of Hutu extremists region, Gisenyi Province, Bizimungu was often criticized by the members of his opponents to have widened the ethnic divisions in Rwanda. In addition, he has been accused of playing the "ethnic card" in defending a Hutu official, accusing him of being a corrupt leader. In fact, after his resignation, Bizimungu was sentenced to 15 years in prison, who was found guilty of embezzlement, inciting violence and associating with criminals that threatened the national security. The RPF claims that Rwanda moving forward towards stability, transparency and multi party system. However, the critics have often characterized the RPF and the current leader, Paul Kagame as a authoritarian leader, who not only represses the dissents on a political and ordinary level, but also has committed violent acts towards the people since the genocide in order to preserve his power.

Paul Kagame
Paul Kagame is the sixth and current President of the Republic of Rwanda. Following Pasteur Bizimungu's resignation in 2000, Kagame became the president and was re-elected with a landslide, winning 95.1 percent of the vote in the 2003 election. Kagame was the leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and was the leader of ending the Rwandan genocide in July 1994. Under the Bizimungu's administration, Kagame assumed the dual roles of Vice President and Minister of Defense. In spite of being the Vice not the actual president, Kagame was known to be a extremely powerful figure, who controlled the army as well as the Cabinet of the Rwandan government.

In 2009, President Kagame made the "Time 100" list of the world's most influential people. It is clear that Kagame is portrayed as agressive figure with brilliant African leadership as he has tried to build a non-ethnic Rwanda while pushing for more developments in the national economy. In fact, Philip Gourevitch, a journalist who has spent many years of his life studying and examining Rwanda, states that although President Kagame is openly authoritarive figure in terms of his established policies towards his dissents in particular, he is calm, intelligent, thoughtful and questioning: "Kagame ... led the rebel force... that stopped the genocide. He has presided over Rwanda's destiny ever since, and he has come to be recognized, by his adversaries and his admires alike, as one of the most formidable political figures of our age" (Philip Gourevitch).

Economic and Social Policies

The Rwandan government under Kagame has tried to expand its national economy for international investment, reducing corporate taxes and eliminating taxes on exports. The economic policies have been dependent upon a well-educated, middle class, urban workforce to attract investors seeking to develop a cheap labor service industry. In spite of the government's effort, social and economic conditions in haven't drastically improved the quality of life for people in Rwanda. The CIA World Factbook reports that life expectancy in Rwanda is only 40 years, mainly because of a high rate of HIV/AIDS. As the most densely populated country in Africa, 85 percent of Rwanda's population are farmers; coffee and tea exports provide 80 percent of Rwanda's export revenue. As a result, the Rwandan government is still financially dependent on the international community. For example, International financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the African Bank for Development, have extended its credit. In addition, after taking over Rwanda, the RPF benefited from counterinsurgency and combat training from U.S. Special Forces.

President Kagame also depends on United Nations protection from investigations of violences and crimes committed by the RPF during the genocide. It is common for the RPF to halt an investigation or suppress dissidents from speaking out against the government, and the United States as well as the UN have been supportive of the Kagame regime in spite of his alleged human rights violations.

Socially speaking, under the Kagame administration, the Rwandan government set about implementing its goals of ending ethnic division by outlawing the classification system, basically eliminating the national dialogue on ethnicity. Kagame has tried to build a non-ethnic Rwanda, in the hopes of creating one national identity.

In spite of the bad conditions in Rwanda, it is true that Rwanda's Per Capita GDP has multiplied, not to mention the national health insurance, and free primary education that are available to all. Tourism is also growing with an emerging development of modern technologies in the cities of Rwanda. These achievements have been attributed to President's Kagame's political and social policies.

http://www.indexmundi.com/rwanda/gdp_per_capita_(ppp).html
Life in Rwanda

As of 2011, Rwanda scored 0.429 out of 1.00 scale on the Human Development Index. It is classified 166th among 187 countries in the global human development index ranking in 2011, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and is in the category of countries with a low human development index (HDI).

It is worth noting that Rwanda is one of the countries which have scored the highest increase in their HDI over the period between 1980-2011. For example, between the years of 2000-2011, Rwanda achieved the second highest growth in the human development index, with an average annual increase of about 2.92%. Progresses made in education, health and economy account for this increase in the recent years.

In spite of the improvements, Rwanda still struggles as a third world nation. The report also indicates that with regards to poverty, 50.6% of the Rwandans live in extreme poverty. With regards to income, 76.8% live with an income that is below $1.25 a day. According to the national poverty line, the Rwandan population living below the poverty line is 58.5%.

Education

The literacy rate among adults in Rwanda is 70.7%, one of the best performances among the countries with low human development. There is a constant rise of development of technology and information. There was a 5900% growth of users between 2000 and 2008. This however does not get rid of the fact that the country still faces many difficulties as only 3.1% of the people use the Internet and less than 0.5% of the people have a personal computer.

Life Satisfaction

With regards to the index of life satisfaction, Rwanda has a score of 4 out of 10. This means that Rwanda has a very high level of dissatisfaction amongst the Rwandans. In spite of the developments in the economy, education and health in recent years, Rwanda is still largely impoverished.

Obstacles to Growth

Without a doubt, economic and social progress continues in Rwanda in the fields of public service, health and the economy. Amendments and revisions of the laws regarding the ethnic division, however, still contain loopholes in that freedom of expression; political opposition is largely restricted. Members of opposition parties, journalists and other critics of the government have been arrested, tried and reprimanded for speaking out against the government.

Political Opponents

Bernard Ntaganda, leader of the PS-Imberakuri Opposition party, was sentenced to four years imprisonment in February 2011. He was accused and found guilty of endangering national security, divisionism and attempting to organize demonstrations without authorization.
Victoire ingabire, leader of the FDU-Inkingi Opposition party, also faced six charges — “creating an armed group, complicity in terrorists acts, complicity in endangering the state through terrorism and armed violence, inviting the public to rise up against the state, genocide ideology and divisionism.” (Rwanda 2012 UN Human Rights Council) She was being tried with four other members of the Democratic Forces of the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

The law on genocide ideology has been used to target critics. The regulations however have been criticized for containing vague offenses such as approving of the genocide by “mocking” a person or group.

Media

The Rwandan government revised its media laws, lifting some restrictions on journalists and introducing self-regulation by media. However, there are almost no independent Rwandan journalists operating in Rwanda; most remain in exile. Agnes Nkusi Uwimana and Saidati Mukakibibi, two Rwandan journalists for the Umurabyo newspaper, for example were sentenced to jail for speaking against the government and President Kagame. They were found guilty of endangering public order.

In addition, Rwanda scored 0.385 out of 1.00 scale on the Human Development Index. It is ranked as 152 in the world. The Human Development Index is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living for countries worldwide. In short, is a standard means of measuring well-being. It is used to distinguish whether the country is a developed, developing, or underdeveloped country, and also to measure the impact of economic policies on quality of life. Countries (almost all UN member states and a couple of special territories) fall into three broad categories based on their HDI: high, medium, and low human development. Rwanda is considered to have low human development.

Commentaries

The signs of growing repression in Rwanda itself have grown more clearly amongst the international community. The landslide election victory in August 2010 was manipulated, dominated by opposition parties banned from running, and attempted assassinations of a dissident in exile. It is true that Kegame has successfully developed the country economically, especially in the context of Central Africa. However, his rule has been criticized as being oppressive and insensitive to human rights like free of speech.

Useful Links

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc3y7ol_2rA

• Philip Gourevitch on Genocide in Rwanda

www.youtube.com/watch?v=wc5a6P6VDGc

• “Rwanda Today” — Fareed Zakaria’s Interview with President Paul Kagame

www.history.com/topics/rwandan-genocide/videos#rwanda-background-to-genocide

• Background to the Rwandan Genocide

www.youtube.com/watch?v=q10h-EASsSU

• Allan Stam, "U-M Professor of Political Science and Faculty Associate the the Center for Political Studies," discusses the genocide, civil war that took place in Rwanda. It is a presentation that has a different interpretation of the genocide.

References


International Human Development Indicators — UNDP. http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/67106.html


Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front. 1993. [http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/1ype,BILATERALTREATY,RWA,3ae6b4f0c,0.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/1ype,BILATERALTREATY,RWA,3ae6b4f0c,0.html)


