

The Rwandan Genocide: Combating Stereotypes and
Understanding the Origins

Nicola Skakel

Senior Honors Thesis
Department of History
April 9th 2018

Defense Committee:

Dr. Susan K. Kent, Department of History, Primary Advisor
Dr. Matthew Gerber, Department of History, Honors Council Representative
Dr. Paul Shankman, Department of Anthropology, Advisor

Introduction

On the 7th of April 1994, the small east African country of Rwanda erupted into one of the most deadly and intimate genocides the modern world had ever witnessed. Whilst the western world stood by and watched in just 100 days over 800,000 Rwandans out of a total population of 7 million, were systematically murdered in the most brutal and violent of ways. Those who were targeted made up the country's minority ethnic group the Tutsis, and moderates from the majority group, the Hutus. For many, the legacy of Rwanda is a monstrous example of extreme pent up ethnic tensions that has its roots in European colonialism. In contrast, I will argue that the events not just of 1994 but also the unrest that proceeded it, arose from a highly complex culmination of long-standing historical tensions between ethnic groups that long pre-dated colonialism. In conjunction, a set of short-term triggers including foreign intervention, civil war, famine, state terrorism and ultimately the assassination of President Habyarimana also contributed to the outburst of genocide in 1994.

Whilst it would be easy to place sole responsibility on European colonists for implementing a policy of divide and rule and therefore exacerbating ethnic tensions, it seems to me that genocide is never that cut and dried: it can never be explained by one factor. There is no doubt that colonial policies played into certain dynamics of Rwandan culture, but distinctions between the Hutus and Tutsis were already in place long before the first Europeans arrived.

A Tutsi survivor of the genocide, Reverien Rurangwa observed, "there is a sort of unfathomable mystery of evil in such an inhumanity committed by humans; a hatred which comes from elsewhere, a secret inspiration which goes beyond our mental capacities and

our powers of analysis”.¹ Rurangwa’s explanation suggests that the genocide of 1994 was unpredictable and is incomprehensible. However, I argue that when both the long and short term histories of Rwanda are analysed in light of the genocide, the genocide becomes comprehensible. Rwanda is a country that for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did not know peace. Tensions between what were once economic groups and then defined racial groups always existed. Whilst genocide had not previously occurred, mass murder had. The constant portrayal of Tutsis as arrogant foreign invaders, and the subsequent installation of hatred against them in generations of Hutus, makes the events of 1994 not that surprising at all.

The twentieth century alone saw 27 genocides. Whilst little is known about prior genocides, this number allows us to infer that as we as human beings evolve our ability to withstand from committing atrocities and genocide does not. It seems the unprecedented became a precedent for future genocides. Applying Hannah Arendt’s idea of the banality of evil to the Rwandan genocide, scholar Josias Semujanga explained, “once an exceptional occasion, which stood out because of its infrequency, genocide has by now become so frequent that it risks losing the capacity to shock and sadden, or the ability to provoke extreme emotional reactions to extreme occasions.”² The continuing presence of genocide makes it all the more important to study the causes and origins of such events, as we attempt to understand the human psychology behind genocide and thus strive to prevent it from happening again.

Perhaps what is most chilling about the Rwandan genocide is the short time frame in which it occurred. It is precisely this element that makes this genocide different from

¹ Reverien Rurangwa. *Genocide: My Stolen Rwanda*. (London: Reportage Press, 2009) 31

² Josias Semujanga. *Origins of the Rwandan Genocide*. (Montreal: Humanity Books, 2003) 9

previous genocides. According to Phillip Gourevitch, Rwanda saw “a rate of killing four times greater than at the height of the Nazi Holocaust.”³ For this to have happened, most of the Hutu population must have been involved; the perpetrators were everywhere. In Nazi Europe the situation made Jews suspicious of their neighbours, but rarely did these suspicions equate to murder. However, in Rwanda more often than not these suspicions turned into a reality: they were massacred in the hundreds of thousands, often by the people who lived literally next door. As pointed out by anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani, the main difference between the Rwandan genocide and the Holocaust, is the distance between perpetrators and victims. He states that whilst the Nazis made a conscious effort to separate the two, the Rwandan genocide was a far more intimate affair.⁴ Similarly, Rurangwa explains, “in effect, its architects masterminded it in such a way as to prevent any legal proceedings. This involved implicating as many people, because, as they say, ‘you can’t try an entire population’ ”.⁵

Additionally, as highlighted by Gourevitch, the differing development and economic situations of 1940’s Germany and 1990’s Rwanda, had no impact on the efficiency of the killings in Rwanda. Whilst one would think that technological advances in Europe in the mid-twentieth century helped the Nazis implement Hitler’s plan to exterminate the Jews, Rwanda shows that indoctrinating a population can be just as powerful: “If you could swing the people who would swing the machetes, technological underdevelopment was no obstacle to genocide. The people were the weapon and that meant everyone, the entire

³ Phillip Gourevitch. *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*. (London, New York: Picador, 1999) 8

⁴ Mahmood Mamdani. *When Victims Becomes Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 2001) 14

⁵ Rurangwa 2009, 15

population had to kill the entire Tutsi population.”⁶ By studying the perpetrators and leaders of the genocide, one question looms greater than all: How could a small, militant group successfully convince the majority of the population to massacre their Tutsi neighbours, who made up the minority?

Rwanda has a highly complex history that is largely overlooked in popular discussions surrounding the genocide. In the west, most knowledge of the genocide is journalistic or comes from blockbuster hits such as *Hotel Rwanda*. Whilst elements of such films hold some truth, they provide no context and have a tendency to depict the genocide as separate from events that came beforehand, and of Rwanda’s turbulent history in general. Perhaps this is done through naivety or because in some disturbing way it makes the topic more enthralling and perplexing. However, despite these stereotypes, when analysed within the framework of Rwanda’s greater history, the genocide is not that out of place. It is within this framework that I want to present the genocide, as I attempt to provide a greater understanding of what caused and prompted the violence.

The tendency to reduce the genocide down to a legacy of European colonialism, in conjunction with popular journalistic accounts of the genocide, creates a highly Eurocentric stereotype of Africa more generally. The journalistic accounts’ ignorance of previous events perpetuates the representation of the genocidal violence as “irrational” as they present it as an anomaly, thus resurrecting century-old western stereotypes of Africans as savages. Moreover, the “blame it on the colonisers” argument is also Eurocentric as it denies Africans agency within their own history. This view of Africans as “primitive savages” not only ignores the fact that they are human beings capable of their own agency, whose actions and

⁶ Gourevitch, 1999. 96

beliefs are profoundly shaped by the past, but also played a part in why the west was so reluctant to intervene in Rwanda when violence broke out in 1994.

Oral Traditions and Histories

Before unpacking Rwanda's rich and turbulent history as it pertains to 1994, we first must understand the nature of African history more generally. Rwanda has a proud history that up until recently was sustained exclusively through oral traditions. As explained by historian Erin Jessee, "in the pre-colonial period, Rwandan history was primarily maintained through a combination of rituals, dynastic lists, dynastic poetry and historical narratives."⁷ These oral traditions and stories of the past are of great significance as pre-colonial Rwanda had no alphabet and thus written accounts were not an option for archiving historical data. However, the problem with oral accounts of history is that they are malleable and therefore often unreliable. In the case of Rwanda, those histories told by Tutsis differ monumentally from those told by Hutus. Similarly, because of the strict hierarchal structure of Rwandan society, historical stories are often told by those in charge or on the other hand, by those who oppose the state.⁸

Consequently, for those of us who study African history the practice of reading between the lines is fundamental. However, this also means that there are no reliable written records of what the pre-colonial state looked like. At the heart of today's debates surrounding Rwandan history is that over the roots of the Hutu-Tutsi ethnic tensions.

⁷ Erin Jessee. *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*. (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) 4

⁸ Gourevitch, 1999. 48

Nonetheless, because of the lack of reliable sources this history remains unclear. As observed by Mamdani, “that much of what passed as historical fact in academic circles has to be considered as tentative- if not outright fictional- is becoming clear as post genocidal sobriety compels a growing number of historians to take seriously the political uses to which their writings have been put, and their readers to question the certainty with which many a claim has been advanced.”⁹

Background:

Pre-colonial Rwanda- Who are the Hutus and the Tutsis?

The question of when and why Hutu- Tutsi tensions arose is the most difficult to address. The lack of reliable sources means scholars disagree on where the different ethnic groups came from and the nature of their relations in pre-colonial Rwanda. In the nineteenth century, Rwanda’s geography made it a particularly desirable place to settle as it was underpopulated and did not pose many of the barriers and hardships that other African nations did and still do. Unlike much of Sub-Saharan Africa which does not have predictable rains and therefore struggles with agriculture, Rwanda is blessed with rains most of the year which makes it an easier place to successfully farm. Similarly, the highlands of Rwanda act as a natural defence against the tse-tse fly that kills off livestock in much of Africa, again hindering agricultural processes, as well as the mosquito, so malaria and other vector-borne diseases are less prevalent than elsewhere. The natural environment was so plentiful that

⁹ Mamdani 2001, 32

“the first explorers who reached the Rwandese highlands after crossing the vast malarial and war-torn expanses of the Tanganyika bush felt they were reaching a beehive of human activity and prosperity.”¹⁰

According to Alison Des Forges, the environment attracted migrants from “several physical stocks and different cultural backgrounds. From such ecological variety and such a diversity of immigrants, significant cultural and occupational differences had emerged in the region.”¹¹ As to how these different immigrant groups were categorised, she argues that the three groups we see today in Rwanda, the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, were said to have entered the region in succeeding waves, with Twa followed by Hutu, followed by Tutsi, resulting in a clear hierarchy as each new group dominated its predecessor group.

Due to Rwanda’s ecologically diverse environment, each of the three groups were able to have differently defined economic specialisations within society. The Twa were hunter-gatherers who lived in the forested areas; the Hutu were agriculturalists who cultivated the land; and the Tutsis were cattle herders. Due to the nature of these three different specialisations, the terms Tutsi, Hutu and Twa came to define different economic and political classes as “the regime was essentially feudal: Tutsis were aristocrats, Hutus were vassals and the Twa were regarded as irrelevant by both.”¹² Due to the fact that the Twa have never constituted more than one percent of Rwanda’s population, and that the Hutus and Tutsis have seemingly always alienated them from society, the Twa are largely irrelevant to the question of Rwandan ethnic tensions.

¹⁰ Gerard Prunier. *The Rwandan Crisis: History of Genocide*. (London: Hurst, 2010) 2

¹¹ Alison Des Forges. *Defeat Is The Only Bad News: Rwanda under Musinga, 1896-1931*. (Madison, London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011) 4

¹² Gourevitch, 1999. 49

Despite their different economic specialisations, most scholars point to intermarriage between the two main groups to argue that in pre-colonial Rwanda the Hutus and the Tutsis lived generally harmoniously alongside each other. The idea of the three groups being different classes is largely accepted due to the fact that one could move from one group to another. If a Hutu became wealthy or influential they could be absorbed into the Tutsi aristocracy, and if a Tutsi lost their wealth (which was counted in cattle) they would become a Hutu. These porous boundaries between the three groups contests the common image of Hutus and Tutsis as racially different humans who are natural enemies, that arose in the twentieth century and contributed to the 1994 genocide. Meg Guillebaud, a third-generation British missionary in Rwanda explains that, “the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa should not be defined as tribes because they are not and never were. All three groups spoke the same language, had the same culture despite their different occupations, lived amongst each other throughout the country and commonly intermarried, so technically speaking they are not tribes.”¹³ So if this is the case and the two groups lived peacefully alongside each other supposedly for centuries, where did the tensions really begin?

The majority of popular culture suggests and a large number of scholars argue that before Rwanda was colonised, first by the Germans and then the Belgians, the Hutus and the Tutsis lived alongside each one another for centuries. They argue European colonisation fundamentally changed Rwandan society, making it a breeding ground for ethnic and later genocidal violence. Josias Semujanga, a professor of African history and literature, who has written a substantial amount about the Rwandan Genocide, argues that it was the “tutsification” (meaning the consolidation of power by the Tutsis) of administration by the

¹³ Interview with Meg Guillebaud. December 22nd 2017.

Belgians, that created the fatal division and resentment between the Hutus and Tutsis: “the system of three political chiefs made the traditional political regime flexible. Hutu and Tutsi, depending on the local government, shared the chieftaincies. The tension between Hutu and Tutsi began when this triple chieftaincy was suppressed and the sub-chieftaincies governed by the Hutu were eliminated to the benefit of the Tutsi; this happened under the Belgian Governor Mortehan in 1926.”^{14, 15} Shortly thereafter, anthropologist Paul Magnarella points to the introduction of identity cards in 1933 as the turning point for violence in Rwanda. This view of colonialism as the root of Rwanda’s ethnic tensions has unsurprisingly arisen in the post colonial world. Writing in 1972 historian Catharine Newbury explains, “most of the earlier studies assumed that social stratification, ethnic cleavage, and clientship institutions were rigid, unchanging ‘givens’ of precolonial Rwandan society were little changed by colonialism.”¹⁶

These scholars as well as the general popular view that colonialism should be blamed for the 1994 genocide, is part of a wider problem of studying imperial history and in particular, as it pertains to Africa. It allows for the creation of a Eurocentric approach to understanding Rwandan history as it takes away all agency from Rwandans themselves. By simply blaming it on the colonisers, the perpetrators of the genocide are given somewhat of an excuse for the atrocities they committed and are simultaneously relegated to the status of “primitive” objects of an ahistorical anthropological gaze rather than presenting them as responsible players within their own history.

¹⁴ Semujanga, 2003. 15

¹⁵ The system of three political chiefs refers to the system through which three chiefs ruled a specific area together. The three chiefs could be either Hutu or Tutsi.

¹⁶ Catharine Newbury. *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda 1860-1960*. (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1972) 3

There is no doubt that colonisation, through policies of divide and conquer, the undeniable preference for the Tutsis and the introduction of identity cards and their subsequent racialisation of what were once malleable social groups, exacerbated ethnic tensions, yet that alone cannot be held solely responsible for the violence of the mid to late twentieth century and the genocide of 1994. Whilst it seems that originally the Hutus and the Tutsis were primarily economic classes, I argue that this changed decades before the first Europeans stepped foot in Rwanda. The autocratic nature of the Tutsi monarchy and their aggressive expansion of power in the nineteenth century seems to be the root of the rigid divisions between the two groups. The creation of a divided society within a country that has a long-standing history of unwavering obedience to authority, was the start of what proved to be a fatal and disastrous recipe that would climax in 1994.

Nineteenth Century State Expansion and Clientship Institutions

According to Alison Des Forges, Jan Vansina and Philip Gourevitch, it was the Tutsi monarch Kigeli IV Rwabugiri (1853- 1895) who defined the boundaries between the three groups. All three scholars argue that during his expansion of power across Rwanda in the nineteenth century, the three separate groups were formalised as a means of making administration more efficient, whilst simultaneously solidifying Tutsi wealth and power. Gourevitch writes “the stratification was accelerated after 1860 when the Mwami King Kigeli Rwabugiri, a Tutsi, ascended to the Rwandan throne and initiated a series of military

and political campaigns that expanded and consolidated his dominion over a territory nearly the size of the present republic.”¹⁷

Included in his expansion of power, in around 1870, King Kigeli implemented a new system of exploitation called *uburetwa*. This was a highly controversial system which involved Hutu farmers providing unpaid labour in exchange for access to land owned by Tutsi pastoralists.¹⁸ For Hutu farmers this meant that half of the working four day Rwandan week had to be set aside for services to their Tutsi chief.¹⁹ This loss of time and economic servitude had severe consequences for Hutu farmers but greatly benefitted the Tutsi land owners, thus the division between the two groups expanded as cattle clientship became the norm. This is the system from which Macquet’s famous notion of “the premise of inequality” arose. In 1916 Leon-Paul Classe, a French Catholic priest in Rwanda described the following: “The Chief and his wife take what they want; cooking bananas, yams etc that are ripe and the Muhutu (farmer) does as he is asked so as to not lose his field.”²⁰

The system of *uburetwa* was successfully implemented due to the proportion of Tutsis in relation to the total population. At the beginning of the twentieth century the Tutsi constituted about ten percent of the Rwandan population and the Hutu around eighty-eight percent. As explained by anthropologist Jacques Maquet in 1952, “if the Tutsi had, for example, constituted fifty percent of the population, the Hutu would never have been able to supply them the labour force and products of the soil necessary to assure them a

¹⁷ Gourvitch, 1999. 48

¹⁸ Jessee, 2017. 4

¹⁹ Jan Vansina. *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2001) 134

²⁰ Cited in Vansina, 2001. 134

comfortable existence.”²¹ Maquet wrote this years before the systematic violence between the Tutsis and Hutus began yet his observations about Rwandan hierarchies and their correlation to population are important in showing the nature of clientship in Rwanda, in that the minority were very much in control of the majority. It seems that if the Tutsi had represented a larger proportion of society they perhaps would not have been able to expand and consolidate their power as successfully as they did throughout the nineteenth century.

Moreover, *uburetwa* allowed for the maintenance of Tutsi superiority, thus enabling them to keep their privileges. Per Macquet, “in Rwanda social power and prestige rests on the effective disposition of the cattle that the Tutsi invaders brought with them in the past. The distribution of the livestock was made almost exclusively through *uburetwa*, an institution of clientship by which an individual inferior in prestige and wealth offered his services to another, who in return gave him the usufruct of one or several cows. This institution incorporated all Rwandans within a dense network of reciprocal, if unequal ties.”²² Ultimately this placed all the power in the hands of the minority Tutsi elites as they were directly in control of Hutu livelihoods. In effect, they “profitably monopolized social, political and economic power” under the last few kings of the Tutsi monarchy.²³

The imposition of tax on famers, but not on herders, further helped solidify the Tutsis and Hutus as separate social groups and “very soon it provoked a rift that was to divide society from top to bottom into two hierarchies and opposed social categories.”²⁴ As

²¹ Maquet, Jacquet cited in Simon Ottenburg . *Cultures and Societies of Africa*. (New York: Random House, 1960) 312

²² Maquet cited in Ottenberg, 1960. 314

²³ Macquet cited in Ottenberg, 1960. 317

²⁴ Vansina, 2001. 134

the capital grew and the King's influence expanded, these distinctions spread throughout the country. Vansina writes that by 1890 the exploited were rebelling across the country, by drawing upon specific examples in the southern region of Bwanamsikari which erupted into revolts in 1890, 1897 and 1899, "led by farmers driven to distraction by too much oppression."²⁵ However, whilst the distinction between the groups was hardening, at this point they were still social groups, not racialized groups. That definition would follow in subsequent decades with the expanding power of first the German colonisers at the end of the nineteenth century, and then the Belgians in the twentieth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Hutus and Tutsis were distinguishable and separate. Additionally, it is important to remember that this expansion of state power created conflict between differing Tutsis as well as between Tutsis and Hutus, as it shook up the entire administrative system.²⁶ At this point in Rwandan history the ways in which the state was organised administratively allowed for, and encouraged competition between local authorities who jockeyed for royal favour, which is why the expansion of centralised power also pitted some Tutsis against one another.

European Colonisation

Throughout imperial history, policies of 'divide and conquer' were commonly executed as a means of dividing conquered populations thus making it easier for colonisers to maintain control, due to a lack of unity between their opposition. There is no doubt that

²⁵ Vansina, 2001. 136

²⁶ Rene Lemarchand. "Rwanda: the Rationality of Genocide." *A Journal of Opinion* 23. No 2. 1995. 3

such policies have had disastrous and fatal consequences for those involved, so it is understandable that such policies may be held responsible for the genocide. However, this argument must be presented as just part of the picture.

The colonisation of Rwanda occurred as a result of the “Scramble for Africa,” in which European powers divided and occupied the African continent amongst themselves at the end of the nineteenth century. In a meeting held in Berlin in 1884, the European powers took out their rulers and drew arbitrary lines across a map and divided up the continent, paying little attention to existing kingdoms and chieftaincies that operated as political entities.²⁷ Whilst many areas were carved up, “the cartographers at Berlin left Rwanda, and its southern neighbour Burundi, intact and designated the two countries as provinces of German East Africa” which Germany held for eighteen years.²⁸ The speed at which Africa was colonised cannot be underestimated: “In 1876 Europeans controlled perhaps one tenth of African landmass. By 1900 nine tenths of Africa had been colonised,” leaving just Liberia and Abyssinia as independent nations.²⁹ This conquest was enabled due to advancements in technology, communications, medicine and firearms. Discoveries surrounding Malaria, such as how it was transmitted and how to prevent it, opened up the interior of Africa to Europeans who had previously been decimated at a rate of 50% by the disease.

Europeans’ prior inability to explore the interior meant that at the time of the Berlin conference very little was known about Rwanda as no white man had ever stepped foot inside the country. Despite this, what became known as the Hamitic hypothesis became gospel to those who first entered Rwanda and also Hutu extremists later. The hypothesis

²⁷ Gourevitch, 1999. 53

²⁸ Gourevitch, 1999. 53

²⁹ Susan Kingsley Kent. *A New History of Britain Since 1688: Four Nations and an Empire.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) 291

was set forth by John Hanning Speke, an English explorer in 1863 after an expedition to modern day Tanzania. The basis of his hypothesis was that, “all culture and civilisation in central Africa had been introduced by the taller, sharper-featured people, whom he considered to be a Caucasoid tribe of Ethiopian origin, descended from the biblical King David, and therefore a superior race to the native Negroids.”³⁰ The second half of the nineteenth century was a time in which “race science” dominated much of the thinking in Europe, and ideas of pseudoscientific social Darwinism meant that human beings were ranked hierarchically, with Africans deemed to be biologically inferior to white Europeans. Speke highlights this idea in the first chapter of his findings *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*: “How the negro has lived so many ages without advancing seems marvellous, when all the countries surrounding Africa are so forward in comparison; and, judging from the progressive state of the world, one is led to suppose that the African must soon either step out from his darkness, or be superseded by a being superior to himself.”³¹

The first Europeans who entered Rwanda documented that Hutus and Tutsis looked physically different and thus the stereotypes were born: “Hutus are stocky and round faced, dark skinned, flat nosed, thick lipped and square jawed; for Tutsis, lanky and long-faced, not so dark skinned, narrow nosed, thin lipped and narrow-chinned.”³² Therefore, to the first Europeans the Tutsis were the most “European” of the three groups, and were therefore the ones fit to be in charge. The differing occupations and status of the Hutus and Tutsis was seen by early Europeans as something that had always existed in Rwanda.

³⁰ Gourevitch, 1999. 51

³¹ Speke cited in Gourevitch, 1999. 53

³² Gourevitch, 1999. 50

By the time Germany was given Rwanda as a colony, King Kigeli IV had already expanded Tutsi power. This, in addition to the idea that Tutsis looked more European than the Hutus and Twa, meant that right away the Tutsis were seen as a superior race. “When the Europeans arrived in Rwanda at the end of the nineteenth century, they formed a picture of a stately race of warrior kings, surrounded by herds of long-horned cattle and a subordinate race of short, dark peasants, hoeing tubers and picking bananas. The white men assumed that this was the tradition of the place and they thought it a natural arrangement.”³³ The Hamitic hypothesis and the clear favouritism of Tutsis by the Europeans strongly impacted Rwandans themselves as Tutsis began to see themselves as “born to rule.”³⁴ When King Kigeli IV died in 1895 with no clear heir, a system described as “dual colonialism” appeared through which competing Tutsi leaders collaborated with their German colonisers in exchange for sponsorship. The result of this system was that the Tutsis were given protection from the Germans and consequently their superiority over the Hutus was further exacerbated. By the time Rwanda was given to Belgium as a spoil of Germany’s loss in World War I, the Hutus and the Tutsis were no longer seen as separate classes, but distinct separate ethnic groups.

Both the Germans and the Belgians ruled indirectly through the Tutsi court and notables. Eventually Hutu chiefs were replaced with Tutsi equivalents, effectively alienating the Hutu majority from direct political representation and expression.³⁵ The division between the two groups became even clearer under the Belgian administration, culminating with the introduction of identity cards in 1933. The cards were based on a census that was

³³ Gourevitch, 1999. 50

³⁴ Meg Guilllebaud. *Rwanda: The Land God Forgot?* (London: Monarch Books, 2002) 34

³⁵ Jessee, 2017. 6

carried out in the previous year. Those who owned more than 10 cows were considered to be Tutsi and everyone else was now a Hutu or Twa. From then on one's ethnicity was identified patrilineally; all persons were designated as having the "ethnicity" of their fathers, regardless of the "ethnicity" of their mothers. "This practice which was carried on until its abolition by the 1994 post-genocide government, had the unfortunate consequence of firmly attaching a sub-national identity to all Rwandans and thereby rigidly dividing them into categories, which, for many people carried a negative history of dominance-subordination superiority- inferiority and exploitation suffering."³⁶

Therefore, whilst the distinction between the Tutsis and Hutus was greatly exaggerated by Colonial polices, the distinction already existed and was further exploited by the Germans and Belgians. As explained by Vansina, "hostility between these groups was not a product of colonialism; Europeans, merely adopted practices they found on arriving, applying court terms to the organisation of society."³⁷

The Hutu Revolution

One of the biggest misconceptions in regards to the 1994 genocide is that it was unexpected and occurred spontaneously in a previously harmonious country. However, beginning with the Hutu Revolution in 1959, violence between Hutus and Tutsis became increasingly common and continuous whereas in the past it was episodic and sporadic. On November 1st 1959 in the central province of Gitarama, there was a rumour that a Hutu activist and administrative sub-chief named Dominique Mbonyumutwa was beaten to death

³⁶ Magnarella, 2002. 25

³⁷ Vansina, 2001. 64

by a group of young Tutsi men. Despite the fact that there was no truth to the rumour, the idea of a politically active Hutu being murdered by a group of Tutsis was enough to spark a full scale social revolution, which was later coined the 'Hutu Revolution' or the 'Wind of Destruction'.³⁸ Within hours bands of Hutus began attacking Tutsi authorities, destroying Tutsi homes and by the end of the week violence had erupted throughout the country. Never before had such systematic political violence been recorded between the two groups but it inspired attacks that occurred frequently across the breadth of the country, ultimately climaxing in 1994. A Tutsi survivor Erin Jessee interviewed "characterised this period as the start of the war between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda- a war that would last until 1994. Jean de Dieu, another survivor framed it similarly, noting that from the start of the Hutu Revolution in 1959, the Tutsis knew no peace in Rwanda."³⁹

When the revolution occurred in 1959, Rwanda was still very much under the control of their Belgian colonisers. So where were they when Tutsi homes were being burnt to the ground and hundreds were being murdered in the streets? According to Gourevitch, the Belgians, under the leadership of a colonel named Guy Logiest, incited and promoted attacks on Tutsis. "Rwandans who wondered what Logiest's attitude towards the violence might be had only to observe his Belgian troops standing by idly as Hutus torched Tutsi homes."⁴⁰ By the late 1950's, the Belgian administration had successfully racialized Rwanda's ethnic groups and increased the economic gap between the Hutus and Tutsis. As a result, many Belgian administrators began to be concerned about the inequalities that their policies produced, and started to view the Tutsis as arrogant and worried they would

³⁸ Gourevitch, 1999. 59

³⁹ Jessee, 2017. 125

⁴⁰ Gourevitch, 1999. 59

attempt to oust their colonial oppressors. “Logiest, who was virtually running the revolution, saw himself as a champion of democratization, whose task was to rectify the gross wrong of the colonial order he served. ‘I ask myself what was it that made me act with such resolution. It was without doubt the will to give the people back their dignity. And it was probably just as much the desire to put down the arrogance and expose the duplicity of a basically oppressive and unjust aristocracy’ he later recalled.”⁴¹

In the following year, 1960, Logiest continued his mission to “undo the wrong doings of colonialism” by staging a coup d’etat which replaced Tutsi chiefs with Hutu chiefs. Additionally, he called for midterm elections and placed Hutus outside of all polling stations to intimidate and coerce voters to vote Hutu. “Hutus won ninety percent of top posts and by then more than twenty thousand Tutsis had been displaced from their homes, and that number kept growing as new Hutu leaders organized violence against Tutsis or simply arrested them arbitrarily, to assert their authority and to snatch Tutsi property. Among the stream of Tutsi refugees who began fleeing into exile was the Mwami.”⁴² Shortly thereafter, the Tutsi monarchy was declared overthrown and thus the Hutu revolution had succeeded. In October of 1960 the Belgians installed a provisional government led by Gregoire Kayibanda. Under his leadership, the Belgians granted Rwanda independence in 1962 by formally declaring it a republic, and Kayibanda was inaugurated as President. Erin Jessee argues that Kayibanda’s rise to presidency was the “death of democracy in Rwanda” as it hallmarked the start of great uncertainty and misery for the Tutsis.⁴³ The exodus of the

⁴¹ Gourevitch, 1999. 60

⁴² Gourevitch, 1999. 60

⁴³ Jessee, 2017. 125

Belgians, ushered in a period of great violence and disorder that ultimately resulted in the Rwandan genocide.

Desire for changes in power and the success of the revolution were further incited by the Catholic church. As highlighted by anthropologist Rene Lemarchand, the revolution “would have quickly fizzled out had it not been for the sustained political, moral, and logistical assistance which the Catholic Church and the colonial authorities provided insurgents.”⁴⁴ Missionaries had entered Rwanda in the 1920s and early on many expressed doubts about the repressed position of Hutus within a society where the Tutsis seemed to be becoming more arrogant as a result of their access to better education. Prunier writes, “the control of the Rwandese church was slowly slipping from the hands of the whites. By 1951 there were as many black Rwandese priests as white ones and there were almost exclusively Tutsi. The Tutsis had been the first to pick up on the new ideas of racial equality, colonial political devolution and possible self-government. They fully realised that their social position was not impregnable and that they could not wait too long for the Belgians to transfer power to them if they did not want to see the transfer challenged.”⁴⁵ The Belgian Catholic fear of losing control of the Catholic churches in Rwanda, pushed many missionaries to reverse their backing of the Tutsi elites to the Hutu underclass who were on the whole less educated and therefore posed less of a threat to the Belgian colonial power.

Whilst Europeans like Colonel Logiest and some Catholic missionaries encouraged attacks on Tutsis and are very much partly responsible for the success of the Hutu revolution, the hostility and tension between the Hutus and Tutsis had been mounting for decades; at this moment in time, the perpetrators of the attacks did not attack because

⁴⁴ Lemarchand, 1995. 4

⁴⁵ Prunier, 2010. 43

Europeans told them to. Instead, 1959 proved to be the first time in Rwanda's recent history when a viable opportunity presented itself to overthrow the Tutsi monarchy that had been continually expanding its power and oppressing Hutus since the early nineteenth century. Therefore, it is not hard to comprehend why the revolution appealed to so many Hutus.

Besides the obvious shift in power from the minority to the majority, the Hutu Revolution is of great importance in terms of the massive refugee problem it created. The systematic violence towards Tutsis encouraged thousands of them to flee to neighbouring countries. "Since 1959 the diaspora of exiled Rwandans Tutsis and their children had grown to include about one million people, it was the largest and oldest unresolved African refugee problem."⁴⁶ As explained later, it was from this group of refugees that the Rwandan Patriotic Front would form, who in the 1990s would invade Rwanda and successfully fight its way into Kigali and defeat a Hutu army more than three times its size. This invasion would spark a civil war in Rwanda that directly lead to the outbreak of the genocide in 1994.

Independence

The Kayibanda Regime:

Upon independence in 1962 some aspects of life in Rwanda changed dramatically whilst others stayed much the same. The ways in which society functioned remained the same but instead of the Tutsis being in charge, the Hutus now were. "Nobody in Rwanda offered an alternative to a tribal construction of politics... Rwanda's revolutionaries had

⁴⁶ Gourevitch, 1999. 73

become what the writer V.S Naipaul calls ‘postcolonial mimic men,’ who reproduce the abuses against which they rebelled.”⁴⁷ As explained by Prunier “in many ways the President was in fact the mwami of the Hutu. The same style of leadership applied, and his deliberate remoteness, authoritarianism and secretiveness unavoidably mimicked the old kings.”⁴⁸ In some aspects, Kayibanda was more oppressive and paranoid than any Tutsi monarch that came before.⁴⁹

The violence of 1959 created a diaspora of exiled Tutsis that continued to grow throughout the 1960’s. Over 100,000 Tutsis were living as refugees in the neighbouring countries of Uganda, Burundi, and the Congo, many of whom remained politically active and attacked Hutus on the borders of Rwanda regularly. Additionally, a newly independent African nation was seen as highly attractive to both of the Cold War’s great superpowers as they raced to snatch up as many allies as possible. With this knowledge, Kayibanda was anxious about a full-scale invasion and thus a period of repression ensued. As written by Christine Vidal, a French sociologist living in Rwanda at the time: “Slowly the country turned into an island. The government feared its whole environment: it was horrified by the Congolese rebellions, reserved towards Tanzania, hostile to the Tutsi regime in Burundi and dependent on Ugandan roads for its imports. The inhabitants were inward looking and bore the country’s slow shrinkage in silence. There were several forms of censorship: from a triumphant Catholic church and from the government which was afraid both of possible communist inspired social movements and of the traditional manifestations which could be

⁴⁷ Gourvevitch, 1999. 61

⁴⁸ Prunier, 2010. 57

⁴⁹ Stephen Childress. *From Revolution to Ruin: A Preliminary Look At Rwanda’s First Two Presidents, Gregoire Kayibanda and Juvenal Habyarimana and Their Administrations.* (Kansas City: University of Missouri Kansas City. PhD Dissertation. 2015) 24

a reminder of the Tutsi imprint which it considered with something like phobia. To the generalised lack of trust, rumour, secrecy, lack of breathing space: on top of material deprivation- the country was one of the poorest in the world and lacked almost everything- was added something like mental paralysis.”⁵⁰

Part of this oppressive society came in the form of a quota system. In 1963 Kayibanda installed a quota system which meant only 9 percent of Tutsis were allowed access to education and employment. Many Tutsis were thrown out of their jobs and some Hutu students even started to check the bloodlines of students to see whether someone was Hutu or Tutsi.⁵¹ The introduction of the quota system enraged Tutsis both left in Rwanda and those in exile. In December 1963 those in exile launched a desperate yet poorly planned attack from neighbouring Burundi. Although they came close to Kigali they were quickly defeated by Kayibanda’s government forces. The President used this attack to justify reprisals he unleashed on the remaining Tutsis in which an estimated 10,000 Tutsis were murdered and 300,000 became refugees between December of 1963 and January of 1964.⁵² In an ominous speech in 1964, Kayibanda stated that “if the Tutsis ever seek to obtain political power again they will find that the whole Tutsi race will be wiped out.”⁵³ From here until his deposition in 1973, Kayibanda’s rhetoric became ever more exclusive as he began to speak of Rwanda as “two nations in one state.”⁵⁴

Moreover, just as the Tutsis monarchs pitted lineages against each other as a means of balancing power, President Kayibanda also played different groups against one another.

⁵⁰ Claudine Vidal “Situations Ethniques au Rwanda” cited in Prunier, 2010. 60

⁵¹ Fred Grunfeld and Anke Huijboom *The failure to prevent genocide in Rwanda: The role of bystanders*. (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014) 5

⁵² Prunier, 2010. 56

⁵³ Grunfeld and Huijboom, 2014. 31

⁵⁴ Gourevitch, 1999. 62

By the early 1970's, the oppressive and claustrophobic atmosphere Kayibanda created soon became too much for even the Hutu elites. The situation enabled and encouraged the senior army commander Major-General Habyarimana to seize this opportunity and carry out a coup. "When he took power in a bloodless coup on 5th July 1973, there was widespread popular relief, even among the Tutsi whose security the new regime immediately guaranteed."⁵⁵

The Habyarimana Regime and State Terrorism:

When Habyarimana came to power in 1973 he was initially welcomed by the Tutsi population who believed he would unify the country and get rid of the oppressive systems his predecessor had installed, like the quota system. However, this optimism would be short lived, "Tutsis weren't alone in their disappointment as the Second Republic calcified into a mature totalitarian order, in which Habyarimana, running unopposed, claimed a comical ninety-nine percent of the vote in the presidential elections. While the country as a whole had grown a bit less poor during Habyarimana's tenure, the great majority of Rwandans remained in circumstances of extreme poverty, and it did not go unnoticed that the omnipotent President and his cronies had grown very rich."⁵⁶ Not that corruption and inequality were anything new to Rwanda, but the lack of change and continuation of past problems became an ever-increasing cause for concern primarily amongst the exiled Tutsis.

Under Habyarimana's rule, violence against the Tutsis within Rwanda lessened and some level of stability returned. However, these improvements came with the price of living

⁵⁵ Prunier, 2010. 61

⁵⁶ Gourevitch, 1999. 75

in a totalitarian regime: “Rwanda became a strict one party country. Habyarimana’s party, the National Republic Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND), was the only party allowed, and everyone, including babies, had to be a member.”⁵⁷ The one party system meant that Tutsi were still marginalised politically and the continuation of Kayibanda’s quota system ensured that the Hutu majority remained content. Nonetheless, compared to the Kayibanda regime things had improved for the Tutsis as they weren’t systematically being targeted in violent attacks and some even profited from the new regime and became successful businessmen. “The unspoken understanding was ‘do not mess around with politics, this is a Hutu preserve.’ As long as Tutsis stuck to that principle, they were generally left in peace.”⁵⁸ Regardless, the continuation of politics that repressed Tutsis, angered those living in exile.

At this time, Cold War influences, the end of European empires worldwide, and the obsession with democratization troubled Habyarimana’s, just as it had done to Kayibanda. He began to crack down on any opposition, “between 1973-1976 more than 700 political figures from the first republic, among them former President Gregoire Kayibanda were imprisoned without any trial and killed in atrocious conditions. As soon as he assumed power in 1973 Habyarimana was already an unscrupulous dictator. Every time he found himself facing opposition, real or assumed he repressed it in a bloody manner.”⁵⁹ Whilst violence towards Tutsis initially decreased under Habyarimana, during his regime the inner circle of the political elite became increasingly exclusive and more powerful. This inner circle, known as the *akazu* or “Little House,” represented the informal organisation of Hutu

⁵⁷ Grunfeld and Huijboom, 2014. 32

⁵⁸ Prunier, 2010. 76

⁵⁹ Semujanga, 2003. 31

extremists whose members would later contribute greatly to the genocide. They were mainly relatives and very close friends of the President and his influential wife Agathe. As concern over the growing support for exiled Tutsis grew, the *akazu* became known as the “zero network” for their goal in Rwanda was “zero” Tutsi.

In June 1990 “under pressure from France- Rwanda’s principle international backer- the Habyarimana government ended one party rule in the country, and Rwanda’s monopolized political system splintered into several competing parties.”⁶⁰ The forced introduction of multipartyism in a state where the government lived in fear of foreign invaders and a return to Tutsi power, increased political repression and has led some scholars to believe that the 1994 genocide was in fact an act of extreme state terrorism. The expansion of power of such a tight knit inner circle under the Habyarimana regime made the small group of ruling elites far more powerful than they had ever been. According to historian Timothy Longman the power of this group, who consisted mainly of Hutu extremists, is essential to understanding why the genocide could be perpetrated as efficiently as it was. The 1994 attacks were “organised and supported by an elite who feared that political and social reforms were undermining their power and compromising their capacity to enrich themselves at the expense of the general population. By focusing the attacks on the Tutsi minority, the elite sought to divert public attention from the privileges of the Hutu ruling class and to mask a general assault on their political opponents.”⁶¹ It must be remembered that while most of the 800,000 - 1 million Rwandans who were murdered in 1994 were Tutsis, moderate Hutus were also targeted. Therefore, the dictatorial nature of

⁶⁰ Robert Lyons and Scott Straus. *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*. (London: Zone Books, 2006) 28

⁶¹ Timothy Longman. “Genocide and Socio-political Change: Massacres in two Rwandan Villages.” *A Journal of Opinion* 23. No 2. 1995. 4

Rwandan politics post 1959, in a system that aimed to reverse the wrongs done to Hutus, all those who posed a threat to the current President were equally vulnerable regardless of whether one was Hutu or Tutsi. In summary “the disaster in Rwanda indicated the extreme tenacity of authoritarian rulers and the great lengths to which their supporters will go to protect their privilege.”⁶²

Culture of Obedience

How did a small, militant group successfully convince the majority of the population to massacre the Tutsis who made up the minority? Although the psychology behind this genocide is hard to comprehend, there are elements of Rwandan culture that make it easier to understand why so much of the population was easily indoctrinated into killing their neighbours. In conjunction with a history of oral tradition, embedded deeply in Rwandan society is a culture of obedience to authority. The strict hierarchal structure of Rwandan society meant that except for the King, and later the President, there was always an authoritative figure whose word was to be taken as gospel. Before he was deposed in 1961, the Tutsi monarch was effectively seen by Rwandans as God incarnate. “The Mwami himself was revered as a divinity, absolute and infallible. He was regarded as the personal embodiment of Rwanda” and therefore every command or demand he made, was immediately responded to, regardless of the consequence. Mwami Yuhi Musinga V who reigned from 1896-1931, was particularly good at taking advantage of his unquestioned and

⁶² Longman, 1995. 5

unprecedented power. Margaret Edwards, one of the first British Protestant missionaries in Rwanda wrote in her journal in 1924 the following about the King: “Musinga’s power was every bit as absolute as that of the old kings of Uganda. Many are the hundreds of unfortunate people who have been put to death at his orders, often to gratify some trifling whim or merely to show his kingly power. Indeed, one of the Ruanda proverbs runs this: “He who goes to court need not make provision for his cattle,” the idea being that his heirs will see to all that he is not likely to return...One of the King’s great grievances against European rule is that they have deprived him of this power of life and death, for what is a King worth who cannot do as he will with his subjects.”⁶³

Her reference to “Ruanda proverbs” highlights another key aspect of how Rwandan society functioned. For the same reasons that oral traditions are how Rwandan history was sustained and retold, proverbs are of great importance to Rwandans; they provided a means of uniting people and spreading common word which often became creed in a society where forms of mass communication and media were limited. In 1994 proverbs were used as a means of indoctrinating and inspiring neighbours and members of the same family, to start massacring each other with weapons they had used to farm with just hours before. In an interview with journalist Scott Straus, a Hutu perpetrator stated that calls to kill Tutsis “were not given in a direct fashion, it was through proverbs. In a meeting run by the *conseiller*, he told us “one must look for the *inyenzi* (enemy) among us and put them to one side.”⁶⁴ Proverbs like this one were not specific and therefore could be interpreted differently, which helps explain why it was not just Tutsis who were murdered but also moderate Hutus, as anyone could choose who their “enemy” was. Alison Des Forges

⁶³ Quoted in Guillebaud, 2002. 36

⁶⁴ Lyons and Straus, 2006. 43

comments, “a message is given to many, but those who are meant to understand, understand. There’s always a subtext in Rwanda. You don’t have to resort to brutal language. People understand.”⁶⁵

However, some of the proverbs and orders that circulated in 1994 were very specific and had catastrophic results. Violence between Hutus and Tutsis continued after independence in 1962 but usually the violence was confined to men. One of the most surprising aspects of the violence of 1994 was that women and children were targeted before men. Another perpetrator explained to Straus that “in Kinyarwanda there is an expression, “If you kill a rat, you have must also kill the rat in gestation. It will grow up to be a rat like the others,” which helped encourage people to kill those who had previously not been harmed.⁶⁶ Similarly, other proverbs reinforced Rwandans’ allegiance and obedience to those in charge. In Kigali such authorities included the Interahamwe militia and the elite group, the *akuzu*, but in rural Rwanda the authoritative figures came in the form of village elders. Therefore, proverbs like “no one can discard an elder’s saying. Elders tell the future,” and “from the word of an elder is derived a bone” made sure that even the most disconnected Rwandans living in the countryside obeyed their elders.⁶⁷

In a country where obedience to authority often seems more important than acting upon free will, these proverbs when spoken by authoritative figures, became very effective killing commands. As summarised by Gourevitch, “in Rwandan history everyone obeys authority. You take a poor, ignorant population and give them arms and says ‘it’s yours, kill,’ they’ll obey. The peasants who were paid or forced to kill, were looking up to people of

⁶⁵ Des Forges, 2001. 45

⁶⁶ Lyons and Straus, 2006. 47

⁶⁷ Prunier, 2010. 67

higher socio-economic standing to see how to behave. So the people of influence or the big financiers are often the big men in genocide. They may think that they didn't kill because they didn't take life with their own hands but the people were looking to them for their orders. And, in Rwanda, an order can be given very quietly."⁶⁸ In another interview conducted by Straus, a perpetrator stated "Rwandans, we are like cows. When authorities say move to the left, we move to the left. The authorities made the population believe that the Tutsis would kill us."⁶⁹

Whilst it would be easy to argue that the perpetrators were making these comments simply as a means denying responsibility for their actions, the concurrent accounts by early Europeans in the country also reference the importance of hierarchal power structures within society, thus making their claims more reliable. Historian Gerard Prunier explains that the first European to enter Rwanda, "Von Gotzen and all the other whites who followed him were immediately struck by the importance of the kinship institution," and the Rwandans' obsession with arbitrary structures of power.⁷⁰ French anthropologist Jean-Jacques Maquet noted that: "The role of the ruler was a mixture of protection and paternalistic profit. The subject was expected to fit within this form of leadership. He was supposed to adopt a dependent attitude. Inferiority is the relative situation of a person who has to submit to another in a defined field. But dependence is inferiority extended to all spheres of life. When the ruler gives an order, he must be obeyed, not because his order falls into the sphere over which he has authority, but simply because he is the ruler."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Gourevitch, 1999. 23

⁶⁹ Lyons and Straus, 2006. 39

⁷⁰ Prunier, 2010. 9

⁷¹ J.J Maquet "Le System Des Relations Sociales Dans le Rwanda Ancien" 186 cited in Prunier, 2010. 56

In rural Rwanda, intertwined with a culture of obedience existed a system of communal obligation. Due to the prevalence of attacks made by Hutus against Tutsis after independence, a system of “I cry, you cry. You cry, I cry” arose as conventional distress signal which carried an obligation as a means of protecting one another. This communal obligation was a necessity in the isolated rolling hills of Rwanda, where there was no reliable police force to deter attacks. It was a means by which the country’s vulnerable minority group banded together in an attempt to protect one another. However, “what if this system of communal obligation is turned on its head so that murder and rape became the rule? What if innocence becomes a crime and the person who protects his neighbour is counted as an ‘accomplice’?”⁷² Within this system not obeying made you subject to questioning which often resulted in individuals being branded as criminals for not looking out for the good of the community. One can imagine how easily such a system could be exploited in circumstances like those of 1994 and turned into highly effective death traps.

Throughout the last few centuries of Rwanda history, from the pre-colonial state through colonisation into independence much has changed. However, “the tight pyramids of patron-client relationship is the one thing that no change of regime has ever altered. Every hill has its chief, every chief has his deputies and his sub-bosses. The pecking order runs from the smallest social cell to the highest central authority.”⁷³ Such a tight and widely respected system of order and hierarchy, made it easier to turn a nation of farmers and pastoralists into cold blooded murderers.

When Rwanda became independent in 1962, the world had high expectations for its success as a prosperous and peaceful republic. Semujanga explains “many observers

⁷² Gourevitch, 1999. 34

⁷³ Gourevitch, 1999. 76

thought Rwanda was the best bet for democratic development among countries south of the Sahara. A small land locked country, whose population was 70% Roman Catholic, 20% Protestant, 9% traditional worship and 1% Muslim, seemed poised for development.”⁷⁴ However, in terms of democracy little changed upon independence. An autocratic monarchy and its European puppeteers was replaced with one dictatorial President, Gregoire Kayibanda, after another, Juvenal Habyarimana, both of whom had the international backing of the French. As a result, the regime of obedience to the head of the state continuing after independence.

Therefore, centuries of being ruled by authoritarian monarchies and dictatorial presidencies created a population that was inclined to do as they were instructed to by those in power. What historian Gerard Prunier describes as a “monstrous degree of social control” had the effect of creating a society who never even thought to question authority.⁷⁵ Whilst it seems like an excuse made up by those who orchestrated the genocide, the continuing presence of such an obedience to authority in post-genocidal Rwanda proves how deep rooted it is in the hearts and minds of the Rwandan population. Although highlighting this culture of obedience could play into the hands of the Eurocentric theories that dilute Rwandans’ agency, at the end of the day each individual Rwandan who contributed to the genocide had their own free will and chose to act how they did. The culture of obedience undoubtedly swayed people’s minds, but they are still responsible for their own actions.

⁷⁴ Semujanga, 2003. 12

⁷⁵ Prunier, 2010. 3

A Malthusian Catastrophe

Political control went hand- in- hand with control over land. Rwanda's plentiful ecology, including consistent rains and limited mosquitoes, allowed the population to flourish. In 1934 the population stood at around 1,595,000; by 1989 it had risen to 7,128,000, with a population density of 668 people per square km.⁷⁶ Prunier argues that "this obsession with control is not due to any special character trait but simply to the fact that the land is small, the population density is and always has been high."⁷⁷ In a country where everyone's livelihood is tied to the land, whether through the soil or through cattle, this level of population density was bound to cause problems at some point. It created a situation where individuals were vying for land in a time when the population was increasing by 50% every decade. Deforestation was taking place and there simply wasn't enough food being produced to feed the ever-growing population. Although other countries have experienced the same situation and have not erupted into a full-scale genocide, there is no doubt this pressure on the land added to the tense situation Rwanda found itself in by the early 1990's.

Although decisions over who to target and murder during the genocidal violence of 1994 came from politicians and other authoritative figures, "at least part of the reason why it was carried out so thoroughly by the ordinary rank-and-file peasants was the feeling that there were too many people on too little land, and that with a reduction in their numbers, there would be more for the survivors."⁷⁸ This idea was supported by another one of Scott

⁷⁶ Prunier, 2010. 4

⁷⁷ Prunier, 2010. 3

⁷⁸ Prunier, 2010. 4

Straus' Hutu interviewees who explained, "what you must know is that there was a famine and one had a need for things, when I heard that there were people who went to kill somewhere, I went with the group to get things, whether cows or house items."⁷⁹ This highlights the importance of the physical landscape and the hardships it exerted on Rwandans. Tensions surrounding over-population climaxed in 1994 with a famine that not only deprived people of basic nutrition but also highlighted the lack of agricultural diversity, as most farmers (Hutus) at this time only grew a limited selection of yams, bananas and corn. In this sense the famine effected the Hutus more severely than the Tutsis, not simply because they possessed less economic value, but because they were the ones who directly worked the land. Thus, with an understanding of the environmental hardships experienced in 1994, it is easier to comprehend why proverbs like "eat their cows" and the opportunity to steal from their Tutsi neighbours became so attractive.⁸⁰

To make matters worse, population pressures coincided with a severe decrease in soil fertility. Therefore, as families were growing, not only did they have more mouths to feed on less land, the little land they have often not fertile enough to produce sufficient amounts of food. As a result, many youth began migrating to Kigali in search of employment. "By the early 1990s a number of young men could be found everyday hanging about the commercial centre of Shyembe, seeking to earn cash loading trucks to merchants or delivering messages. Area residents attributed to the growing local incidence of robbery and vandalism to these unemployed youths."⁸¹ Therefore, the worsening situation in the

⁷⁹ Gourevitch, 1999. 112

⁸⁰ Prunier, 2010. 6

⁸¹ Longman, 1995. 5

countryside pushed many towards the city creating homelessness and unemployment which resulted in an angry young population who were increasingly desperate.

Short Term Triggers

Multipartyism:

The introduction of a multiparty state by the French in June 1990 not only intensified the *akuzus'* paranoid and therefore repression, but also had the effect of turning groups of Rwandans against each other. Violence between Hutus and Tutsis had been common since the revolution of 1959 but the introduction of new political parties in a state where authoritarian rule was all anybody had known for centuries, had the effect of splintering Rwandan society. When asked if he thought the introduction of multipartyism caused any changes in his village, a Hutu perpetrator replied "many, even between people who lived together. If they were not in the same party, they became estranged. My older brother belonged to the PSD and I was in the MRND. We didn't speak."⁸² The introduction of multiple political parties effected most Rwandans as it made them suspicious of one another. No longer were the tensions in the country felt just between Hutus and Tutsis, but also between extreme and moderate Hutus. Due to the fact that the moderate Hutus wanted change they were seen as just as much of a threat as Tutsis. It was within this context that a group of Tutsis, known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front invaded Rwanda and sparked the civil war which would ultimately climax with the genocide in 1994.

⁸² Lyons and Straus, 2006. 47

The Rwandan Patriotic Front Invasion and Civil War:

The Hutu Revolution of 1959 and the subsequent years of violence against Rwandan Tutsis, resulted in thousands fleeing to neighbouring Uganda as refugees. These refugees continued to call for change in Rwanda and thus the Rwandan Patriotic Front was formed in 1987. As the name would suggest, those involved in the organisation were Rwandans who had been forced to flee but who desperately hoped to return home. “Born out of the exodus of thousands of Tutsi families to neighbouring territories, few would have imagined that 30 years later the sons of the refugee diaspora would form the nucleus of the Tutsi-dominated politico-military organisation, the RPF.”⁸³

On October 1st 1990 the Rwandan Patriotic Front invaded Rwanda from Uganda “declaring war on the Habyarimana regime, and propounding a political program that called for an end to tyranny, corruption, and the ideology of exclusion ‘which generates refugees’,” and thus the civil war began.⁸⁴ By this time, the RPF was made up of some 4,000 members who were desperate to return home. Initially, the invasion went disastrously for the RPF but ultimately they would end up as they are today’s ruling party in Rwanda led by Paul Kagame. “No one within the RPF had the slightest idea of the scale of the cataclysm they were about to unleash. The assumption, fed through rumour and self-induced optimism, was that the Habyarimana regime was a push over and would quickly collapse in the wake of the invasion. While grossly overestimating the strength of the internal opposition, the RPF did not anticipate the massive military support that President Habyrimana was about to receive from the French, nor did they foresee the catalytic effect

⁸³ Lemarchand, 1995. 5

⁸⁴ Gourvitch, 1999. 82

of the invasion on Hutu solidarities and the growing determination of hard liners within the government to manipulate ethnic hatreds for political advantage.”⁸⁵

The “catalytic effect of the invasion” cannot be exaggerated. The suppression of Hutus for centuries under the Tutsi monarchy made generations of Hutus believe that the Tutsis were their natural enemies. So, when an armed militia of Tutsis invaded from another country, it reinstated and confirmed the fears that many Hutus had that the Tutsis were evil. After interviewing a Hutu perpetrator named Philippe, historian Erin Jessee came to the following conclusion: “stories of oppression and slavery relayed to Philippe by his parents and grandparents offered lessons that were difficult for him to forget. On October 1st 1990, the RPF invaded Rwanda, triggering a civil war. Philippe for the first time in his life was overwhelmed with an intense fear of the Tutsi. He joined a local youth militia, the *Interahamwe*, with the intention of defending Rwanda from the Tutsi invaders who he believed were determined to re-establish the Tutsi monarchy and re-enslave the Hutu masses.”⁸⁶ Philippe presents himself as victim of fear, forced to commit atrocities to protect his country from “foreign Tutsis” who sought to destroy their way of life. The invasion of the RPF in 1990 is also another way in which the Rwandan genocide differs from the Holocaust. Whilst the Jews and other targets of the Holocaust never posed a military threat, the Tutsis in the form of the RPF did. Although genocidaries massacred innocent civilians, they were initially provoked by heavily armed rebels.

This idea that the Tutsis were perceived as being dangerous foreigners by the Hutus is further explained by Mamdani who argues that this genocide needs to be understood as a “natives’ genocide”. He states that: “It was a genocide by those who saw themselves as sons

⁸⁵ Lemarchand, 1995. 8

⁸⁶ Jessee, 2017. 3

and daughters of the soil, their mission as one of clearing the soil of a threatening alien presence. It was not an ethnic, but a “racial” cleansing. For the Hutu who killed, the Tutsis were a colonial settler, not a neighbour”.⁸⁷ This adds a new perspective to the genocide as the commonly posed question is how neighbours could suddenly turn as massacre one another. He adds that the genocide cannot simply be viewed in the framework of ethnic differences as he points out that most modern nation states’ populations are made up of people from different cultures who don’t suddenly start killing each other. The Rwandan genocide was initiated and fuelled by a deep-rooted Hutu fear that the progress made in Rwanda by the Hutus would be reversed.

The Arusha Accords and Hutu Propaganda

The continuation of the Rwandan Civil War throughout 1991 and 1992 led to the signing of a United Nations-sponsored peace agreement between the RPF, the Rwandan government and other political factions on August 4 1993 in Arusha, Tanzania. By 1993 the war was “rapidly devouring the country’s resources. At the same time the government carried out the Structural Adjustment Programme it had agreed upon with the World Bank in 1990, which had resulted in a 40% devaluation of the national currency just before the outbreak of hostilities. A second devaluation was carried out in 1992 to adjust for the pressure of inflation since the start of the war.”⁸⁸ Thus, the situation in Rwanda was dire as

⁸⁷ Mamdani, 2001. 58

⁸⁸ Prunier, 2010. 160

rampant inflation and unemployment took over. In the end the Arusha Accords “ensured a right of return for Rwanda’s refugee diaspora, promised the integration of the two warring armies into a single national defence force, and established a blueprint for a broad- based Transnational Government, composed of representatives of all the national political parties, including the RPF. Habyarimana would remain President, pending elections, but his powers would be basically ceremonial. And, crucially, throughout the peace implementation period a United Nations peacekeeping force would be deployed in Rwanda.”⁸⁹ The negotiations were extremely difficult for a multitude of reasons. How much power would each group get? How would the militaries be integrated? What proportion of the RPF and former government forces would make up the new Rwandan Armed Forces? These questions meant that not everyone would be satisfied with the outcome.

For Habyarimana and the *akuzu*, whose power by this point was autocratic in nature, signing the Arusha Accords amounted to a “political suicide note.”⁹⁰ According to Tito Rutermara, one of the RPF leaders who negotiated the accords “the struggle wasn’t ethnic, it was political, and Habyarimana feared us because we were strong. He had never wanted peace, because he saw that we could be politically successful.”⁹¹ For Habyarimana, a tyrant, the prospect of being forced to share power with the enemy was all the encouragement he needed to further incite and exploit Hutu fears of Tutsis.

This fear held by the Hutus can be most easily seen in the mass production of propaganda that began to circulate within weeks of the RPF invasion. Perhaps the most infamous piece is the “Hutu Ten Commandments” that was published in December 1990.

⁸⁹ Gourevitch, 1999. 99

⁹⁰ Gourevitch, 1999. 99

⁹¹ Gourevitch, 1999. 99

The commandments were written by Hassan Ngeze, a popular Hutu supremacist who was hand-picked by Habyarimana's wife Agathe to plan attacks and propaganda against the Tutsi. As explained by Gourevitch, "it would be foolish to dispute his brilliance as a salesman of fear. As a racist theorist, Ngeze made John Hanning Speke look like an amateur. He was the original high-profile archetype of the Rwandan Hutu genocide and his imitators and disciples were soon legion."⁹² His ten commandments became the guidelines for the genocidal perpetrators as he "revised and reconciled the Hamitic Myth and the rhetoric of the Hutu Revolution to articulate a doctrine of militant Hutu Purity."⁹³ In the context of France trying to "democratise" Rwanda, President Habyarimana praised the publication of the commandments in the magazine *Kangura* (Wake Up!), as proof of Rwanda's freedom of press.

The Hutu Ten Commandments were as follows:

1. "Every Hutu should know that a Tutsi woman, whoever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result, we shall consider a traitor any Hutu who marries a Tutsi woman, befriends a Tutsi woman or employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or concubine.
2. Every Hutu should know that our Hutu daughters are more suitable and conscientious in their role as woman. Wife and mother of the family. Are they not beautiful, good secretaries and more honest?
3. Hutu women, be vigilant and try to bring your husbands, brothers and sons back to reason.
4. Every Hutu should know that every Tutsi is dishonest in business. His only aim is the supremacy of his ethnic group. As a result, any Hutu who does the following is a traitor: makes a partnership with Tutsi in business, invests his money or the government's money in a Tutsi enterprise, lends or borrows money from a Tutsi, gives favours to Tutsi in business.

⁹² Gourevitch, 1999. 87

⁹³ Gourevitch, 1999. 87

5. All strategic positions, political, administrative, economic, military and security should be entrusted only to Hutu.
6. The education sector must be majority Hutu.
7. The Rwandan Armed Forces should be exclusively Hutu. The experience of the October 1990 war has taught us a lesson. No member of the military shall marry a Tutsi.
8. The Hutu should stop having mercy on the Tutsi.
9. The Hutu, wherever they are, must have unity and solidarity and be concerned with the fate of their Hutu brothers.
10. The Social Revolution of 1959, the Referendum of 1961 and the Hutu ideology, must be taught to every Hutu at every level. Every Hutu must spread this ideology widely. Any Hutu who persecutes his brother Hutu for having read, spread, and taught this ideology is a traitor.”⁹⁴

The simple layout and language of the commandments as opposed to proverbs, meant that they could be understood, and not misinterpreted, by all. “Community leaders across Rwanda regarded them as tantamount to law, and read them aloud at public meetings. The message was hardly unfamiliar, but with its whiff of holy war and its unforgiving warnings to lapsed Hutus, even Rwanda’s most unsophisticated peasantry could not fail to grasp that it had hit an altogether new pitch of alarm.”⁹⁵ The specific reference to “the experience of 1990,” meaning the RPF invasion, suggests that the commandments, as well as other Hutu supremacist propaganda that began to circulate at this time arose as a direct consequence of the fear the RPF invasion installed in the Hutus.

⁹⁴ The Hutu Revolution, as cited in Samantha, Power. *A Problem from hell: American and the age of genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002.)

⁹⁵ Gourevitch, 1999. 88

Another infamous piece of propaganda is Leon Mugesera's 1992 speech which has come to be considered as the rallying call for genocide. Mugesera, a respected doctor, Vice President of the ruling MRND party and close friend of the President, delivered the thirty minute speech on November 22, 1992 at a MRND conference and is the first evidence of genocidal discourse by a member of the political elite: "Why don't we seize those parents who sent their children and exterminate them? Why don't we seize all those who bring them and exterminate them all? Are we really waiting now for them to come and exterminate us? What are we waiting for to decimate these families? Destroy them, no matter what you do, do not let them get away...Let me tell you that your home is in Ethiopia and that we will send you back along the Nyabarongo River so you can get their quickly...Drive them out. Long live President Habyarimana."⁹⁶

Leon Mugesera's call to send the Tutsis back to Ethiopia along the Nyabarongo River is a reference to the colonial Hamitic hypothesis that claimed that Ethiopia is where the first Tutsis in Rwanda allegedly came from. Mugesera's manipulation of this nineteenth century hypothesis is further evidence of how the political elite used ethnic hatreds for their own political advantage. By presenting the Tutsis as being from Ethiopia, Mugesera reinforced the image of Tutsis as foreign invaders. Even though this speech was made two years after the RPF invasion, the civil war that arose as a consequence was still in play. One could suggest that the two years of civil war between the invasion and his speech heightened Hutu fears that they were failing to defeat the Tutsi forces. The impact this speech, made by a very well respected Hutu, had on the Hutu masses cannot be underestimated. As explained by Gourevitch, "his voice was the voice of power, and most Rwandans can still

⁹⁶ Leon Mugesera 1992 speech, cited in Longman, 1995. 7

quote from his famous speech quite accurately; members of the *interahamwe* often recited favourite phrases as they went forth to kill.”⁹⁷

At around the same time that Mugesera made his speech, radio broadcasts also began transmitting hate propaganda to the illiterate masses. Radio Television des Mises Collines (RTL) was founded in October 1993 by President Habyarimana, his wife Agathe, and other members of the *akazu* as a private radio station. This is significant because the government-owned radio station, Radio Rwanda, was broadcasted to an international audience, including the French, so incitements of hate could not be broadcast on this public station. Beginning in October 1993, the private RTL was used by Hutu extremists leaders to propagate anti-Tutsi sentiments. Their key motive was to convince the Hutu masses that the Tutsi were threatening a genocide against the Hutu and therefore the Hutu needed to act swiftly to protect themselves. When the genocide began on April 7th 1994, radio stations were key in broadcasting the names and addresses of Tutsis and encouraging Hutus to defend themselves from Tutsi “cockroaches.” Per Lemarchand, “what emerges from the urgings of a Leon Mugesera, and the incitements to violence distilled by Radio des Mises Collines’, the extremist outlet, is an image of the Tutsi as both alien and clever, not unlike the image of the Jew in Nazi propaganda. His alienness disqualifies him as a member of the national community; his cleverness turns him into a permanent threat to the unsuspecting Hutu. Nothing short of physical liquidation can properly deal with such danger.”⁹⁸ Therefore, the 1990 invasion and the signing of the Arusha Accords in 1993 provided Hutu extremists with supposed concrete evidence that the Tutsis were in fact foreign invaders who should be feared.

⁹⁷ Gourevitch, 1999. 89

⁹⁸ Lemarchand, 1995. 5

Plane Crash

On the evening of April 6th 1994, Radio des Mises Collines announced President Habyarimana's plane, returning from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, had been shot down as it prepared to land in Kigali. The new President of Burundi, Cyprien Ntaryamira and several of Habyarimana's top advisors were also on board; there were no survivors. Those responsible for the assassination of Habyarimana are still in dispute, but the event undoubtedly acted as the catalyst for the Rwandan genocide. Immediately Radio des Mises Collines began blaming the RPF and called for Hutus to start exterminating evil Tutsis who were responsible for the assassination of their beloved President: "You cockroaches must know you are made from flesh. We won't let you kill. We will kill you," is one of the many broadcasts made by Radio des Mises Collines along with specific names and addresses of Tutsis, as well as moderate Hutus.⁹⁹ Beginning on April 7th, the government sponsored radio Radio Rwanda would also start broadcasting hate propaganda and orders to kill.

Due to the fact that the assassination of Habyarimana sparked the genocide, knowing who was responsible for the shooting down of the Presidential plane would provide information in terms of where blame should be placed. Twenty- four years later, no one has been found guilty of the assassination and conspiracy theories still circulate. Despite the government's immediate announcement that the RPF was to blame is somewhat hard to believe for a number of reasons. Less than a year earlier the Arusha Accords had been signed promising the RPF a place in government. So they did not have a pressing need to assassinate the President. Similarly, it is known that that the missiles were shot

⁹⁹ Gourevitch, 1999. 115

from an area of Kigali known as Masaka which is almost 100 miles from where the main RPF forces were located. Thus, it is hard to comprehend how the RPF could have got all the way to Masaka whilst transporting missiles without being seen. The missiles used were identified as Soviet made SAM-7s which gave rise to the theory that foreigners were involved. The Rwandan government itself had never purchased surface- to- air missiles and Rwandan soldiers had not received training in how to use them. For this reason, it is possible to believe that foreign intervention could have played a part but it seems to me that most of the evidence points to the government itself as the culprit responsible for the assassination of those on board the plane.

Within hours of the crash, barracks and road blocks around Kigali were set up and manned by members of the Rwandan army and Hutu extremists. The speed at which this happened suggests some sort of forward planning. On one hand, the assassination took place during a civil war so it is not surprising that forces could be assembled so quickly but the men who manned the barricades were not just soldiers, they were ordinary Hutu civilians as well. This, in conjunction with the broadcasting of names and addresses of Tutsis but also Hutu moderates who opposed President Habyarimana and the *akuzu's* extremist views, suggests that it was the extremists themselves who shot the plane down. Although assassinating the President, head of the extremist group, seems extremely drastic the government would have known that such a monumental event, followed by blaming it on the Tutsis, would unleash the kind of violence that allow for the ethnic cleansing they so deeply desired.

The atrocities committed in the 100 days that that became known as the Rwandan genocide continue to shock the world and make us question the morality of mankind. Encouragement from leaders at every level of society, allowed for the slaughter of

Tutsis and moderate Hutus in all regions. "Following the militias' example, Hutus young and old rose to the task. Neighbours hacked neighbours to death in their homes, and colleagues hacked colleagues to death in their workplace. Doctors killed their patients, and schoolteachers killed their pupils. Within days the Tutsi populations of many villages were all but eliminated, and in Kigali prisoners were released in work gangs to collect the corpses that lined the roadsides. Throughout Rwanda, mass rape and looting accompanied the slaughter. Drunken militia bands, fortified with assorted drugs from ransacked pharmacies, were bused from massacre to massacre."¹⁰⁰ Before long some 800,000 Rwandans lay dead; no region was spared. After images of churches full of corpses, live pregnant women having their unborn babies cut out of their bodies and children killing the elderly began to circulate on international news programs, one question loomed greater than all: How do we prevent this from ever happening again?

Epilogue:

Beginning on the first day of the genocide, April 7th 1994, the events in Rwanda were broadcasted around the world. On the ground the UN peacekeeping force the UNAMIR (The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda) that had been in place since the Arusha Accords of 1993, were left alone to face the brunt of the responsibility of attempting to stop the genocide. The Commander of the mission, a French Canadian Major General Romeo Dallaire, has since spoken out about his experiences in Rwanda and the

¹⁰⁰ Gourevitch, 1999. 115

failures of the UN to have any positive impact at all. In his book *Shake Hands with the Devil*, he highlights how profoundly the events he witnessed affected and changed him, “I know there is a God because in Rwanda I shook hands with the devil. I have seen him, I have smelled him and I have touched him. I know the devil exists and therefore I know there is a God.”¹⁰¹ The UNAMIR mandate stated that peacekeeping troops were only allowed to use force in their own self defence and thus little could be done from their side to prevent killings. Additionally, on the first day of the genocide 10 Belgian peacekeepers were brutally murdered which further inspired the UN not to pump in more resources and manpower to combat the violence. In doing so, on April 22nd 1994, the UN Security Council voted unanimously to reduce the size of the peacekeeping force from 1,700 to 270.¹⁰² These failures soon came to define the UN and the mistakes made in Rwanda have been a constant topic within debates over the last twenty years.

The age old popular western view of Africans as savages further motivated the international community to not get involved. In particular events that took place in Somalia just a year earlier, culminating in the Battle of Mogadishu, changed Westerners views on foreign intervention for peacekeeping purposes. In 1993, 1,800 American marines sponsored by the UN, entered Somalia in an attempt to disarm militias and end the civil war which has left 2 million of the country’s 6 million starving.¹⁰³ However, very quickly it became apparent that the politics of intervention were very going terribly wrong. Instead of receiving the peaceful reaction that they hoped for, the arrival of US forces sparked severe hatred from all sides of the Somalia conflict and thus violence actually increased. After a

¹⁰¹ Romeo Dallaire. *Shake Hands with the Devil*. 2004. 5

¹⁰² Dallaire, 2004. 28

¹⁰³ Matt Eversmann. *The Battle of Mogadishu: First-hand Accounts From The Men Of Task Force Ranger*. (Novato: Presidio Press, 2005) 3

mere few months 18 US troops were left dead and over 80 injured. The events left US troops running for their lives in a hasty retreat that was condemned by much of the watching world. The deaths of 18 US troops in a peacekeeping mission sparked great debate in Washington which resulted in President Clinton promising to reduce US involvement in overseas peacekeeping missions. Experiences in Somalia played into the hands of those who believed that violence in Africa could never be tamed by western intervention. A revival of these beliefs and the fear of repeating the loss of life in a peacekeeping intervention, dramatically affected how the US and UN intervened, or refused to intervene, in Rwanda.

The lack of intervention from the UN, the US, Belgian, France, Great Britain and most other nations was not done so through ignorance. Within hours of President Habyarimana's plane being shot down the UN phones both in Kigali and New York rang at an estimated 100 times an hour- it became clear very quickly that the situation in Rwanda was nothing short of genocide. Yet, a whole debate ensued over whether to use the word genocide or not. In the post-World War II world, the term genocide conjures up images of Nazi gas chambers and the horrors of the Holocaust, and therefore if it really was genocide the international community would have to act. This is reinforced by the Genocide Convention of 1948, signed by 149 states, which advises all participating countries to prevent and punish acts of genocide.¹⁰⁴ For that reason, it is not surprising that the term is not willing used and it took a whole six weeks for the Clinton Administration to publically denounce the events as a genocide. Even initially in Rwanda people avoided using the word genocide. General Romeo Dallaire recalls: "I was self-conscious about saying the killings were 'genocidal' because, to us in the West, 'genocide' was the equivalent of the Holocaust

¹⁰⁴ Power, 2002. 362.

or the killing fields of Cambodia. I mean millions of people. 'Genocide' was the highest scale of crimes against humanity imaginable. It was so far up there, so far off the charts, that it was not easy to recognise that we could be in that situation. I also knew that if I used the term too early, I'd have been accused of crying wolf and I'd have lost my credibility."¹⁰⁵

This reluctance to label the events as genocide did not mean that the international community was not aware of how bad things were. Within an hour of the plane crash US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Prudence Bushnell wrote the following memo to Secretary of State Warren Christopher, "If, as it appears both Presidents have been killed, there is a strong likelihood that widespread violence could break out in either or both countries, particularly if it is confirmed that the plane was shot down. Our strategy is to appeal for calm in both countries, both through public statements and in other ways."¹⁰⁶ The memo suggests that full-fledged US intervention was not considered to be a viable option and that public statements would be the best way to intervene. For not just the US, but also most the greater international community, intervening in Rwanda put them in the position where they had lots to lose and little to gain. Rwanda did not provide desirable resources such as oil or minerals which is usually what inspires foreign intervention in times of conflict. Even before the genocide, "Rwanda had never been of more than marginal concern to Washington's most influential planners."¹⁰⁷ Reduced down, it a tragic case of geopolitical realism in which nations only look out for themselves.

The question of where the responsibility for the genocide should lie is an impossible one to answer. The complexities of the events of 1994 but also centuries of

¹⁰⁵ Dallarie, 2015. 45

¹⁰⁶ Prudence Bushnell quoted in Power, 2002. 330

¹⁰⁷ Power, 2002. 331

turbulent history that came beforehand cannot be underestimated. In a country that has for the last few centuries been ravaged by dictators, colonial administrations, population pressures, civil war and foreign intervention, violence was inevitable. It would be hard or even impossible to argue that genocide- as distinct from violence- is an inevitability, but in the case of Rwanda it cannot be seen as surprising or unthinkable. Change through the introduction of multipartyism, desperation through the unavailability of land and food, and fear in the context of the civil war when propaganda of the RPF as foreign invaders circulated, all in a society where obedience to authority trumps all, the level of violence in 1994 is not beyond human imagination.

Given that Rwanda's culture of obedience sped up the process and efficiency of the genocide, the question remains could this happen again? This culture of obedience still exists today and for that reason alone it seems possible that if the government wanted to orchestrate systematic violence they could very well do so again. Meg Guillebaud still works with the Protestant church in Rwanda and on a trip back last autumn she found one encounter with a group of priests particularly unsettling. She remembered "I was hosting a bible study with ten of the local priests when I brought up the question of who we should obey first, God or the government. To my surprise nine out of the ten priests said the government without even a moment's hesitation."¹⁰⁸ One might expect this response from a group of ordinary Rwandans, but not from some of the most religious people in the country who experienced the horror of the genocide first hand. When asked if she thought another genocide was possible Meg responded, "I have no doubt that is possible. Until the

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Meg Guillebaud

peoples' obsession with doing everything their government tells them to do disappears, unfortunately anything is possible."¹⁰⁹

Additionally, whilst Meg explained that the majority of Rwandans, both Hutus and Tutsis, like the current President Paul Kagame who has been in office since 2000, the length of his Presidency has some Rwandans questioning just how democratic the political system really is. Moreover, the discourse in Rwanda about the genocide is changing. Meg described that in the years following the genocide the official name was "The Genocide of Tutsis and Moderate Hutus," which she said was extremely important for the Hutu population who too had lost loved ones. However, in recent years it has been changed to the "The Genocide of Tutsis," thus silencing the grief of the Hutus. She explained that this change in the name of the genocide has angered many Hutus who now feel they are not allowed to grieve their losses as it paints them all as murders. She expressed concerns that if a trigger were to happen again, like the assassination of the President, that the country could erupt into violence not dissimilar from 1994.

Since 1994, a number of countries have committed genocidal acts including Syria, North Korea and Myanmar, yet the international community has taken few actions to halt them. The more monstrous an act like genocide seems, the harder is it to face, and even with the memories of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, we are still reluctant to act. Whilst overall we as humans like to think of ourselves as rational, peaceful beings who condemn such actions as genocide, recent and past histories have shown that this is not always the case.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Meg Guillebaud

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