**The Rwandan Genocide**

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April, 2009

Over the past fifty years, conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi in postcolonial Rwanda has resulted in over one million deaths and a series of horrific genocides. Between the years of 1959 and 1994, "the idea of genocide, although never officially recognized, became a part of life" (Melvern, 9). The early political violence escalated into the horrific massacre of 800,000 people in 1994. Present day Rwanda still struggles to come to terms with the aftermath of the conflict.

The terms "Hutu" and "Tutsi" were first given significance by the early white explorers. As both Hutu and Tutsi spoke the same language, practiced the same religion, and participated in the same government, ethnographers claim that the two groups "cannot be called distinct ethnic groups" (Gourevitch, 48). Rather, the two terms referred to a caste system in which the Hutu were primarily farmers and the Tutsi were primarily herdsmen. In the Kigali Genocide Memorial, historians even claim that this status was not always permanent; by owning ten or more cattle a Hutu could become a Tutsi and vice versa. However, British explorer John Hanning Speke interpreted these terms in a different way. In what is now known as the Hamitic Myth, Speke believed that the Hutu were a typical specimen of a "primitive race," "the true curly- headed, flab- nosed, pouched- mouthed Negro" while the Tutsi were "descended from the best blood of Abyssinia" and therefore far superior (Speke, Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile).

Soon after, Rwanda became a German colony. After the German defeat in World War I, Rwanda- Burundi was given to Belgium by the League of Nations. When Europeans first arrived in Rwanda, they found a complex and well organized semi- feudal society with a strong monarchy (Melvern, 5). In order to effectively control Rwanda, the Belgian colonialists issued out identity cards in 1933, "arbitrarily [classifying] the whole population as Hutu, Tutsi or Twa" by measuring qualities such as height, length of nose and eye shape. During Belgian rule, Tutsis were favored for all administrative positions and Hutus were actively discriminated against.

In 1957, the Hutu Manifesto was published, calling for majority rule and blaming Rwandan problems on Tutsi superiority. At this point, public opinion changed and many Belgians started to support the Hutu majority. In 1959, the Rwandan king died under mysterious circumstances while being treated by a Belgian doctor. Tutsi feared that this was part of Hutu plot to gain power and began trying to destroy emerging Hutu leaders. After a young Tutsi attacked a Hutu leader, widespread Tutsi murders began. Thousands of Tutsi were killed and thousands more families had to flee the country. Many petitions sent to the UN reported "burning and killing being done in the daylight sometimes in the presence of the so- called police" (excerpt from Melvern, 7), indicating that killings were planned and organized. When the UN sent forces to investigate the reports, officials reported seeing "racism that 'bordered on Nazism against Tutsi minorities'" (Melvern, 7). Under these circumstances, Rwanda became independent and Gregoire Kayibanda, a Hutu teacher, became president. Kayibanda encouraged violence against Tutsi and spread frequent rumors of Tutsi plots. During his reign, there were several genocides killing an estimated 10,000 to 14,000 Tutsi. A former Hutu military officer, Juvenal Habyarimana, ousted Kayibanda in 1973. Habyarimana was initially welcomed by both Tutsi and Hutu but quickly asserted total control over the country, enforcing a one party system, restricting movements, and encouraging divisions between Tutsi and Hutu. Violence, discrimination and corruption quickly became a government policy. When the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front), a small army comprised of Rwandan refugees, attacked the Rwandan border in 1990, Habyarimana reacted with panic. The government fired attacks on the capital to rouse Hutu citizens to action against Tutsi citizens. Relations between the Tutsi and Hutu deteriorated even more, leading to the massive genocide of 1994.

On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana's plane was shot down, killing the presidents from Rwanda and Burundi. Within hours of the plane crash, Tutsi massacres began. In Kigali, the international peacekeeping forces were badly organized and not united. Belgian soldiers guarding the house of the man set to become the next president were shot and killed. The Presidential Guard, loyal to Habyarimana, surrounded the future president's house and killed him and his family, claiming they were Tutsi supporters. After the former government had been disabled, the Hutu Power party took control of the city and country and began to urge people to "do their work," and kill the Tutsi men, women, and children. By this point, it was clear that the UN and international forces were powerless or unwilling to stop the current events unfolding. Over the next hundred days, between one million and 800,000 Rwandans would be killed by their neighbors, friends, families, teachers, and priests.

While at first glance, this conflict is often dismissed as an ethnic issue, involving only the Hutu and Tutsi, there are clearly many more parties involved. The primary parties involved in this conflict were the Hutu Power party and their supporters and Rwandan Tutsi and other Rwandan citizens of the time. Many secondary parties further fueled the conflict. To the South, Burundi was made up of both Hutu and Tutsi, both groups that would sympathize with groups in Rwanda. West of Rwanda, Zaire, the current Democratic Republic of Congo, was ruled by the dictator Mobutu, a close personal friend of Habyarimana, who blatantly sympathized with the Hutu. Mobutu, infamous for pocketing European and American aid, would encourage the conflict as a means of bringing in money for refuge camps and programs. Mobutu was also closely allied with France and, with French help, would support Hutu forces during the genocide and take a strong position against the RPF and Tutsi after the genocide. The Anglophone and Francophone conflict throughout Africa would play an important role in Rwanda, as Francophone countries and supporters would provide help and support for the Hutu. Currently, France's position against the current Rwandan president, Paul Kagame, has only served to further delay reconciliation. Tertiary parties, intended as international monitors and peacekeepers, had an important, and not always positive, role in the outcome of the conflict. The United Nations, despite admirable efforts by General Dallaire, did not have the necessary support, troops, and supplies to stop the genocide. In addition, NGOs and the UN funded refugee camps in Zaire, allowing thousands of genocidaires to escape justice and regroup for attacks. The belated intervention and peacekeeping attempts escalated the conflict and increased the death toll.

Despite some of the ulterior motives of the secondary and tertiary parties, the Rwandan conflict is mostly seen through identity frames. The conflict dismissed by the majority of the world as an ethnic issue and, as a tribal issue, one that outside parties did not have any responsibility to mediate. Secondary parties, such as France and Francophone colonies, viewed the conflict through identity frames and power frames. The close personal relationships between the presidents of France, Zaire, and Habyrimanara in Rwanda led to a close alliance between these French- speaking nations. These countries feared that any change of government in Rwanda would bring in a group of people that were not willing to maintain the cultural and financial ties with France. Although there was nothing to suggest that another government would have strengthened Anglophone ties, France and Francophone countries were more concerned with maintaining the status quo and limiting the potential for change in Rwanda. These countries framed the conflict in terms of power frames as well, deciding that the best way to maintain their own positions and power was to support the "old boy's network" in Africa. Finally, the primary groups involved also saw this as an identity conflict, using characterization and identity frames to view the conflict. In a perversion of the original Hamitic myth, Hutu Power and similar groups believed the Tutsi were immigrants to Rwanda and the Hutu were the original inhabitants. Tutsi were largely stereotyped, described as "cockroaches" and other vermin that required extermination. The Hutu Power movement strongly stereotyped the Tutsi and felt they threatened their own position.

These stereotypes were reinforced by the media portrayal of the groups and, after the President's plane was shot down, Hutu Power controlled media easily persuaded people to take up their weapons and kill Rwandan Tutsi. The massacre only lasted 100 days until the RPF army invaded but close to 1 million Tutsi were killed. Today, the government is headed by Paul Kagame, the leader of the RPF force which entered the country to abruptly stop the genocide. Still, the majority of the people in Rwanda during 1994 were at least indirectly either involved in genocide or knew victims of genocide. A UNICEF survey estimated that 5 out of 6 children in Rwanda at that time had witnessed bloodshed (Gourevitch, 224). People left in Rwanda were deeply scarred by their experiences. As one survivor described it, "people come to Rwanda and talk of reconciliation... imagine talking to the Jews of reconciliation in 1946" (Gourevitch, 240). Understandably, Rwanda remains in a stage of post conflict peace- building. Under normal circumstances, anyone who committed murder would be tried and punished. But, despite the large numbers of genocidaires in prison, the majority of the genocidaires are free. President Kagame has focused on trying and punishing mostly the masterminds of the genocide, instead of a huge percentage of the population. For the rest of the population involved, Rwanda has adopted the policy of trying to teach and redeem people who committed war crimes. Even today, villages have weekly trials or meetings to try to promote reconciliation and deal with past crimes of village members.

Although Rwandans face a daunting task, an amazing amount of progress has been made building back the country. There is a long history of violence and prejudice to overcome but Rwanda's future looks promising.

[1] Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*. New York: Picador, 1998

[2] Melvern, Lisa. *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*. Verso, London, UK. 2004

[3] Speke, John Hanning. *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*.

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