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## **Domestic and Foreign Policy in Ethnic Conflict: The True Reasons for the Rwandan and Burundian Genocides**

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# Domestic and Foreign Policy in Ethnic Conflict

The True Reasons for the Rwandan and  
Burundian Genocides

**William A. Ladnier**



Ethnic conflict has been a major problem that has plagued contemporary Central Africa, spreading across the continent. Often various tribes and ethnic groups have long standing histories of conflict amongst themselves that may perhaps explain these outbreaks of violence; however, far too often ethnic conflict has spawned from politics and socio-economic biases, rather than simply cultural issues.

The colonization and seemingly nonsensical division of Africa by European powers in the late nineteenth century did nothing to prevent or stave ethnic conflict in the coming decades—indeed the politically motivated creation of new borders on the continent at least moderately contributed to later ethnic conflict. But did the festering wounds left by the European colonizers *directly* cause later ethnic violence? Rather than asking such a specific question, it is better to examine these conflicts as having both ultimate and more immediate causes. And this is how we must examine the case of Rwanda, and even its closely related sister, Burundi: indeed, their Belgian colonizers bred problems that ultimately led to the countries' ethnic problems, culminating in a number of genocides in the latter half of the twentieth century; but it was their own people and political make-up that was directly at the root of the problem. Moreover the ultimate and more immediate causes often comingle, as one may give rise to the other. Because of the shifts in political power brought on by the Belgians in their countries the various ethnic groups there became increasingly more violent. Soon violent incidents became the norm, directly ushering in the ethnic conflicts between the Hutu and Tutsi years later.

As with any major event, there are a multitude of complex issues that may act as probable causes. For our purposes we will focus mainly on how the political and

economic atmosphere in Rwanda gave rise to the violence of the genocide. Indeed, numerous other factors contributed to the tragedy, but none of them had as strange an influential impact as the dire political climate at the time. And in that are included underlying issues such as the social structure in the country at the time, as well as major economic problems that plagued Rwanda. Nevertheless we must, at the very least, treat with some examination other factors, such as colonialism and demographics in Rwandan history. However, the political make-up of Rwanda immediately prior to 1994 (namely that of the Habyarimana administration), as I will argue, was the greatest of these issues that contributed to the ethnic conflict and subsequent genocide.

Burundi is a case very similar to that of Rwanda: the two neighboring countries housed the same Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. Both grew from the same colonial background. However, independence left different groups in power. In Burundi, unlike Rwanda, the Tutsi remained the powerful ruling elites. Nevertheless, the political underpinnings in Burundi proved to be a major factor that culminated in the 1972 genocide of the Hutu people. Again, politics prevailed over ethnic and social reasons to explain the bloodshed.

But Burundi is a unique case in that even after the 1972 genocide bloodshed would continue—in 1993, after the Hutu gained political power in the country, many Tutsi were killed. Obviously, again, politics proved potent as the administration of President Ndadaye inevitably escalated the violence associated with the 1993 genocide. And while the circumstances in Burundi are fundamentally the same as those in the case of Rwanda, the fact that different ethnic groups supported genocide in the two separate countries proves that ethnicity was not the problem—politics and democratization was.

So what were the real causes of these ethnic tensions? Did the shared colonial histories of Rwanda and Burundi set the stage for their respective genocide events, or did those episodes arise from separate internal causes? In the region by this time genocide had seemingly become the norm—in many ways an end to the violence was unfathomable. The first Burundian genocide of 1972 offered a rallying cry for many Hutu that would later fuel their fire to massacre the Tutsi. And that indeed happened: first in 1993 in Burundi, and then in 1994 in Rwanda. A clear connection can be made between these latter two cases, and that connection centers on the political administrations in the two countries at the time. The domestic politics, as well as foreign affairs, conducted by both spelled clear doom for one ethnic group. Bloodshed ensued and was hardly staved without foreign intervention. With the overthrow of these governments the genocides were concluded, but the wounds remained—the memories were not forgotten, not in Rwanda, not in Burundi, and not in Central Africa.

Indeed, the genocides in both Burundi and Rwanda were caused by governmental policy, more so than by ethnic issues and biases. Internal factors in each country greatly affected the escalation of tensions to a violent level. However, external factors, such as foreign state and international institution involvement, played minor factors in causing the genocide. Colonialism and the wounds it left were never the problem—instead the new policies of violence and racial superiority preached by the Rwandan and Burundian governments were the true culprits. Understanding these factors, internal and external, political and ideological, best explains the historical progression of genocide in Central Africa.

To understand the true causes of these genocides helps us to learn from our mistakes. As we work alongside other states, as we attempt to harbor better relationships internationally, we all must work to stave violence and ethnic biases. Ethnic tension has long proven to be an incredibly dangerous phenomenon, most often ending in the deaths of thousands of innocent lives around the world—we need not look beyond Rwanda or Burundi to understand that. And that alone is reason enough to study the circumstances surrounding genocide. Armed with the knowledge of what causes genocide, we are armed with the knowledge of how to stop it.

Discussions on humanitarianism, humanitarian intervention, and ethnic conflict attempt to imbue humanity with a better understanding of how we can better our world, and how we can eliminate needless violence. And in these discussions, opinions differ about the best ways to tackle various situations. In a field of such varied views, numerous divisions can be made. In the field, macro divisions can be drawn, between those who support some sort of intervention, and those who believe that conflicts should be left to play out. Intervention and ethnic conflict are themselves hotly contested issues, as debate rages about the participation each merits from the international community, or rather anyone other than the nation state at the center. Regardless of these divisions, however, we must ask how these opinions are developed when thinking about the genocide in Rwanda.

When we consider the issues at hand in Rwanda, the macro divisions become more focused, as some argue over the construction of the genocide as “ethnic conflict,” rather than some recent government construction. While others still focus their critiques on the international community’s involvement in the genocide.

Yahya Sadowski, in her article entitled “Ethnic Conflict,” broadly discusses the place of ethnic conflict in the evolving post-Cold War international system. Sadowski posits that while ethnic conflict itself is a long-standing historical issue, it is ultimately an issue that continues to evolve and develop in modern times. Often “modern hate” inflames ethnic issues ultimately into conflict, but any modern conflict never reaches a fever pitch, so to speak, due to old wounds. As applied to Rwanda, these claims challenge the established ideas that the genocide ultimately developed from some of the ethnic tensions stemming from the Belgian occupation of the region. Sadowski shrugs such a point off—arguing instead that modern hatred, especially developed by the government, escalated tensions.

Zeric Smith, in his “The Impact of Political Liberalisation and Democratisation on Ethnic Conflict in Africa: An Empirical Test of Common Assumptions,” argues that other factors—such as liberalization and democratization—are more prevalent in explaining the changing trends of ethnic conflict. In a quantitative analysis of a number of theories concerning the relationship between conflict and civil liberties and democracy, Smith discovered that conflict and ultimately genocide are inextricably linked with other so-called political factors. Smith’s analysis informs us that democratization has little to no effect on ethnic conflict. Whereas a far-reaching democratic government might seem to produce decreased conflict, this simply was not quantitatively demonstrable. Instead, increased liberalization—that is, the increased allowance and support of civil liberties—clearly decreased ethnic conflicts for some time.

Given the governmental breakdown that occurred weeks before the genocide in Rwanda, Smith’s findings become particularly applicable. The quantitative assessment of

liberalization as a primary factor to changing the trends of ethnic conflict can be greatly applied to a more qualitative study of the conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi. And this lends credence and value to any study on the subject that is based wholly on mere subjective opinion. In that respect, Smith's study is an invaluable asset for our purposes. Indeed, this study should be viewed alongside other works on ethnic conflict as a supportive posit of theory. It is not, in and of itself, some sort of seminal work.

Others, like Helen Hintjens, more specifically comment on the rising and falling actions of the genocide itself. In her article, "Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda," Hintjens posits a number of factors that explain the occurrence of the genocide. Departing from some of the more common arguments, she claims that the Habyarimana administration played an unequalled role in escalating tensions and encouraging conflict. Hintjens, furthermore, argues that the international community along with major international institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, helped to influence conflict. Many do not speak sufficiently to the effect that the international community helped raise tensions; rather, authors more often speak about international involvement in intervention efforts. Overall, Hintjens develops somewhat new arguments that explain some of the multifaceted reasons behind the genocide by ultimately separating herself from the more common claims of other authors. And indeed, Hintjens is not alone, as Catharine Newbury, in her article "Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda," echoes many of the same findings, but focuses more primarily on the domestic political and historical issues. And others still, like Peter Langford in his "The Rwandan Path to Genocide: The Genesis of the Capacity of the Rwandan Post-Colonial State to Organize and Unleash a

Project of Extermination,” describe exclusively the inextricable link between government policies and genocide actions.

These articles offer a plethora of information that greatly focuses much of the research in their field. Often authors focus their discussions of Rwanda on how the genocide of 1994 illustrated the need for humanitarian intervention, or claims to the contrary. In regards to the inner working of Rwanda at the time, authors commonly also limited themselves to a discussion of the long-standing issues among the various ethnic groups as a way to demonstrate growing tension and conflict. Nevertheless, in so vast a field of often-repetitive information, new arguments must develop to possibly better explain the causes and effects of the genocide in Rwanda. Smith’s and Sadowski’s research, while it does not comment on Rwanda or Burundi in particular, does argue for much of the reasoning that Hintjens, Newbury, Verwimp, Langford, and others employ. It is their opposition to a simple understanding of ethnic conflict as arising solely from ethnic tensions that is the foundation of my own research in this paper.

Hintjens, Newbury, and Langford, furthermore, also provide solid foundation to my own research on the issues of genocide in Central Africa. Hintjens’ research focuses primarily on the Rwandan genocide’s profound relationship with domestic political policy and foreign economic and governmental involvement. This argues that there were indeed both external and internal factors that caused the 1994 genocide—factors that were more influential than simply ethnic biases. Newbury and Langford agree: the Rwandan domestic government policies of hatred and racial superiority more so caused the genocide than perhaps colonial memories. While their research focuses only on the

link between Rwandan history and its domestic policies, their conclusions match that of Hintjens, leaving little question that ethnicity was not the true problem.

Each author is equally valuable in his or her contribution to the field of research in discovering the real causes behind genocide in Central Africa. Each offers different, yet equally valid, reasoning for the causes of the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Sadowski and Smith discuss the more macrocosmic reasoning behind ethnic conflict as a whole, and how it may be applied to any given situation, while the others apply those principles on a smaller, more focused scale. However, none provide information on the link between the Burundian genocides and the later Rwandan genocide. Barren of any mention of so important an event, these authors do not fully cover the gamut of reasoning's explaining the long history of ethnic conflicts and genocides in Central Africa in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Indeed, little research can be unearthed that comments at all on the Burundian genocides of either 1972 or 1993. Burundi and Rwanda shared a long cultural, ethnic, colonial, and political history, leaving the two nations strongly linked. To leave research on the genocide of Rwanda barren of comment on Burundi, or vice versa, is truly unfair. The genocides of Central Africa cannot be fully explained without an understanding of both sides of the issue, with comment on both countries, and the relationship between the two. My research aims to do just that—to explain the relationship between the genocides of Burundi and the genocide in Rwanda. This relationship can best be explained through discussion of the two countries' shared histories, political dynamics, and developing ethnic make-ups, and how the two differ or perhaps affect one another. Indeed a link exists between the two, and the reasons behind the ethnic tensions and conflicts in

Central Africa cannot be fully understood without first gaining an understanding of all the constituent issues.

In order to better understand how escalating political tensions inevitably caused the Rwandan and Burundian genocides, we must first examine ethnic conflict as a term. Ethnic conflict is, in many ways, any sort of major conflict between two or more ethnic groups or between ethnic groups and the state, based primarily upon ethnically charged issues, disagreements, or issues. Indeed, these conflicts may arise as a result of ethnic nationalism, as is often the case; however, there need not be any single specific reasoning at its root. Furthermore, these conflicts, due to their intense nature, often can escalate, as with the case of Rwanda and Burundi, into genocide, which Hintjens<sup>1</sup> defines as “a form of one-sided mass killing in which the state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are identified by the perpetrator.” If we maintain this definition, we can more fully examine and understand how decades of Rwandan ethnic conflict ultimately culminated in the 1994 genocide. But it is necessary to note an important distinction—that ethnic conflict and other occurrences of intrastate organized violence, such as civil wars, are *not* one in the same. Civil war need not be confined to ethnic groups; rather only organized groups, such as political organizations or more commonly armies themselves, must combat one another. Furthermore, civil wars are, very often, confined to the borders of one nation or state, whereas the same is not necessarily true of ethnic conflicts. Perhaps the distinctions are small, but they are nonetheless important, because in Rwanda and Burundi ethnic conflict is most classically considered to have occurred—not necessarily civil war.

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<sup>1</sup> Hintjens, H. M. (1999, June). Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 246.

Ethnic conflict, contrary to popular belief, is not always the product of historically long-standing disputes. In fact, as Sadowski<sup>2</sup> claims, “the reality is that most ethnic conflicts are expressions of ‘modern hate’ and largely products of the twentieth century.” And this is especially true for Africa, as many major African ethnic conflicts are able to trace their origins to the immediate past. Furthermore, ethnic conflicts are not always caused by cultural differences. Although cultural or caste divisions may tend to spur on or intensify ethnic violence, nevertheless it is often only one of many contributing factors. Smith<sup>3</sup> proffers that ethnic conflict may find its roots in a number of things, such as “over access to material goods as well as over intangible goods such as power, respect, or social status.”

Prior to the twentieth century, ethnic conflict had never been a real problem in Africa proper, much less so in Central and Eastern Africa more specifically. Prior to the Berlin Conference of 1884, ethnic groups in the region had lived peacefully, commonly intermarrying and building other societal bonds. But during the 1880s many of the European powers decided, in the interest of expanded their own power, to begin colonizing the African continent to exploit it for territorial and economic gain. Politically motivated debate and disagreement soon followed, leaving randomly assigned borders on the map, commonly dividing historically close ethnic groups, and often enclosing together hostile groups. With these sudden changes what had been long-standing peaceful unions would soon, in many tragic cases, become ultimately violent conflicts. Fortunately

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<sup>2</sup> Sadowski, Y. (1998). Ethnic Conflict, *Foreign Policy*, No. 111, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, Z. K. (2000, March). The Impact of Political Liberalisation and Democratisation on Ethnic Conflict in Africa: An Empirical Test of Common Assumptions, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 24.

enough, however, this was not the case in either Rwanda or Burundi; nevertheless with the help of inner political pressure the divides between the Tutsi and Hutu would be highlighted and exploited, directly causing violent action.

Historically Rwanda was a unified country, sharing the same culture and political system (a central monarchy), but there were three major castes that divided the nation into the Hutu, Tutsi, and the Twa. Nonetheless these castes lived peacefully, commonly intermarrying; and social mobility between the castes was not uncommon. However, when the Germans colonized the nation after the Berlin Conference, things changed. By the end of World War I, the League of Nations mandated that Belgium govern the area of Ruanda-Urundi. Soon the Belgians changed the political system—they abolished the central monarchy and set up the minority Tutsi as the ruling local elite. Soon areas that had a long-standing history of Hutu leadership were put under the control of the Tutsi. As evidence, until 1929 about one third of the tribal leaders in Rwanda had been Hutu, but the Belgians quickly eliminated all non-Tutsi chiefs. By 1933 the colonial power issued mandatory identity cards, which fixed each person's identity as either Hutu or Tutsi, leaving generations with an inseparable label. As Belgian backing increased, so did the Tutsi's ability to more widely exploit the Hutu politically.

After World War II the United Nations and other global powers began pressuring Belgium to grant Ruanda-Urundi independence. But before they did so, the Belgians held open elections, in which the Hutu gained a majority of seats in the legislature. Now all the power lay in the hands of the formerly exploited majority. Extremist groups on both ends of the spectrum gradually tried to take over, leading to massive political instability. These seething problems overflowed when Tutsi extremists attacked Hutu leaders,

eventually leading to a Hutu massacre of 10,000 Tutsi and the expulsion of more than 130,000 others from the country. By the time that Belgium granted Rwanda full independence, its one-party Hutu government continued previous violence against the Tutsi refugees. The violence, however, would not end for some time; and when Tutsi rebel forces assassinated then-president Juvenal Habyarimana, many more Tutsi were to be killed in 1994.

But what caused this ethnic violence? Was it the cultural and historical differences between these two castes that eventually led to such a major genocide? No, not entirely; instead it was political instability and social cleavages that led to ethnic violence in Rwanda. For centuries the Hutu and Tutsi had lived in harmony. They both lived under a central monarchy, the Banyarwanda. That only changed when the Belgians took over the country.

Problems didn't manifest until the Belgians decided to change the political structure of the country, putting the Tutsi in power, subject only to the colonial government. This action ultimately undermined the politics of the country, which had been under the control of Hutu chiefs for years. However, before granting the country independence, Belgium gave all political power back to the Hutu. Furthermore, while occupying the region, the Belgians had inevitably caused changes to the philosophy of the social structure among the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa.

The Hutu and Twa were ethnically Bantu (a group from the Great Lakes region); however, the Tutsi were Hatitic, meaning that they were not native, like the other two groups. Prior to European intervention none of this mattered—the Tutsi, Twa, and Hutu all coexisted harmoniously in their society. But when the Hutu finally gained political

power in the newly independent Rwanda, they began to “purge” the society of these foreigners. In fact, only two years before the 1994 genocide, the major Hutu politician Leon Mugesera heralded the genocide when he said that all Tutsi should be sent “back home to Ethiopia,” from where they had supposedly come. It was obvious that by the time the Belgian colonialists left the region, they had instilled in the Hutu, at the very least, a strong zeal for their own ethnic superiority over the Tutsi. Nevertheless this zeal was nothing compared to what the Habyarimana and earlier Kayibanda administrations had done to instill great hatred between the two ethnic groups by 1994.

The post-independence democracy was, if anything, more of an authoritarian style government. The first president of Rwanda, Gregoire Kayibanda, was anything but sympathetic to the Tutsi, as his government continued to kill and expel them from the country. Many Tutsi fled to neighboring Burundi, where they would comprise a new government. But in light of this, Kayibanda’s regime dissolved political and economic ties with Burundi and began to kill some 14,000 more Tutsi. Kayibanda’s government would continue to stifle any and all Tutsi efforts for political and civil liberalization.

During a 1972 coup, Kayibanda was overthrown and killed, and Juvenal Habyarimana became president. But his administration was worse than that of his predecessor. Habyarimana refused to allow even basic human rights to the Tutsi, as he continued to expel many more from the country. All vestiges of democracy in Rwanda were disappearing as the PARMEHUTU party (the only political party allowed in Rwanda) still controlled the legislature. In the coming years of his twenty-two year reign, Habyarimana set himself up as an authoritarian leader in Rwanda, giving all to the Hutu, while taking everything from the Tutsi.

The question of whether Kayibanda's and Habyarimana's actions played a more significant role in inciting the Rwandan genocide still remains. The political implications of their administrations' actions were certainly a contributing factor to the genocide. Their choke-hold on the democratic institutions in Rwanda as well as their policies of non-liberalization for Tutsi were probably the greatest contributing factor politically for the genocide.

Many scholars have posited that democratization should bring about decreases in ethnic conflict, whereas political liberalization will result in increases in ethnic conflict in sub-Saharan Africa. Smith, however, found that this was not the case. In fact, the opposite was true—democratization has little effect on ethnic conflict, while political liberalization (greater access to civil liberties) decreases ethnic conflict. However, these findings do not preclude the possibility that a denial of civil liberties and basic rights would heighten ethnic violence. This seems to be the precise case in Rwanda during the Habyarimana administration—the Hutu government openly refused the Tutsi civil liberties and expelled them from the country (if they did not kill them), and as a result of this treatment, tensions would eventually reach a breaking point. However, numerous other political and economic factors played a role in ushering in the genocide.

Upon Juvenal Habyarimana's entrance into the presidency, Rwanda was a rather wealthy country, at least by African standards at the time. By the 1980s, Habyarimana had ushered in a time of great prosperity for all Rwandans. Many considered Rwanda the African model for orderliness and service: it had a great infrastructural base, there was incredible access to health care, primary education was readily available, and clean drinking water was abundant, all things few African countries at the time could claim.

However, this economic prosperity didn't last. In 1986-1987, receipts from coffee sales fell from 14 billion to 5 billion Rwandan francs in less than a year's time. Because the coffee trade was so important to the Rwandan economy, external debt accumulated. As a result redistributive and welfare policies came under mounting pressure that ultimately affected many Hutu. But over time it became increasingly obvious that these problems were not being blamed on external, uncontrollable factors; instead, the regime's political rhetoric suggested that the Tutsi, who worked as traders and merchants, were being blamed for Rwanda's economic collapse. As Hintjens<sup>4</sup> states, "An uneasy coexistence had emerged between the political and administrative Bahutu elite and the economic Batutsi elite."

In the face of an invasion by the Tutsi-backed Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) in the early 1990s, the Habyarimana administration yielded to pressure from the World Bank and IMF to implement structural adjustment programs. Of course, that meant that Rwanda's national currency would immediately fall in value (by about two-thirds). With a range of other problems in Rwanda, the country could not maintain its numerous services, and eventually the infant and maternal mortality rates rose. Nevertheless the government did find the funds to bolster the Rwandan military forces. As a matter of fact, Habyarimana and his political allies diverted funds from domestic services in favor of military spending. Not only that, but citizens were encouraged by the government to form "death squads" to fight the RPF and their Tutsi allies. Through a regimen of lies and propaganda Habyarimana was turning the whole country against the Tutsi.

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<sup>4</sup> Hintjens, 257.

As the country slipped further and further into economic crisis, the government refused to make the right decisions. Whereas the Hutu political party (the only legally permitted party) could have shared power with opposition parties, so that the World Bank would release their funds to the desperate county, they refused flatly. As they denied to do the right thing for their people, extremist Hutu politicians and military leaders, instead, turned to genocide as the only solution—the Tutsi, as they claimed, had caused the problem, and killing them was the “final solution.”

While Rwanda’s socio-economic problems snowballed, the government was supposed to democratize the country. The terms from the IMF and World Bank were simple: end political stalemate to access the structural adjustment program’s 30 million dollar funds. But “the imposition of such rigid political conditionality on Rwanda’s government hastened moves towards a violent ‘final solution’ to the country’s socioeconomic and political problems.”<sup>5</sup>

Political liberalization, or even democratization, could have done wonders to help prevent the genocide in Rwanda. Allowing more civil liberties and political power to the Tutsi during the Habyarimana administration could have significantly altered the outcome for so many innocent Rwandan victims. But sadly, none of that occurred. Instead Juvenal Habyarimana and his political allies (the *akazu*) attempted to solidify their own power, fearing that a more democratic form of government would end to their political careers. But this only needlessly compounded the issue; and yet that may have just been the goal—to escalate ethnic tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi by denying the latter those essential rights. Evidence of this possible strategy may lie in the fact that the

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<sup>5</sup> Hintjens, 258.

regime feared the rising power of the RPF and the Tutsi so much that they fabricated rhetoric to turn the Hutu in Rwanda against the *inyenzi* (“cockroaches”). After a demonstration in Kigali calling for democratization, the regime openly stated that “democratization” was nothing more than a cover for restoration of the Tutsi to positions of political and socio-economic power—the Hutu now feared a sort of renewed Tutsi hegemony and feudalism. Even more damning evidence of the regime’s tactics is illustrated by their elaboration of what was then called the “Bahima conspiracy.”

According to the Habyarimana regime the Tutsi rebels had long been planning to take over the Rwandan government. But in order to take control of the democratically elected government, the minority Tutsi would somehow have to win a majority of the votes from the then-Hutu leadership. The conspiracy claimed that the Burundian Tutsi were willing to kill off enough of the Rwandan Hutu population to achieve their goals. For the Rwandan people, if these claims made by the government were in fact true, they would be at serious risk. The government continued to claim that the Tutsi were themselves planning a genocide against the Hutu; unless the Hutu took preventative measures, they would all be killed, or so claimed Juvenal Habyarimana.

Thanks to the Habyarimana administration’s tactics of fear-mongering the Hutu population were incredibly nervous, wondering when this possible genocide might occur. When Tutsi rebel forces shot down Juvenal Habyarimana’s plane, killing him, the Hutu seemed to take this as the first steps toward their destruction. So, in response, they took the regime’s suggestion and took preventative measures. Over the next hundred or so days, hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were slaughtered. And the only real reason was politics—Habyarimana’s fear of losing power directly caused so many deaths.

Some may argue that this ethnic conflict (and ultimately the genocide) was caused by the exit of the Belgian colonizers. Others may claim that it came as a result of growing tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi. However, I would argue that politics caused most of it. Indeed, the Belgians as well as both the Hutu and the Tutsi can and should, at least in some part, be blamed. Nevertheless, it is the administration of President Kayibanda and more so that of President Habyarimana that must shoulder much of the blame.

The actions of both regimes to stifle any hopes of liberalization for the Tutsi were tragic and disastrous. Their mass murders and expulsions of so many Tutsi instilled in both ethnic groups a hatred for the other. But the numerous lies and ill-made decisions of the Habyarimana regime must be held directly accountable for the quick escalation in ethnic violence. Juvenal Habyarimana knew that his country was in dire straits, and yet he did nothing to help his people, Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa alike. Rather than putting money into a desperate economy he used those funds to maintain his chokehold on political power.

Rwanda should be considered a prime example of how a government can directly influence the affairs of its people. Ethnic conflict had never been an issue prior to colonization, but it became a major issue when the Hutu came to power. A few in positions of power manipulated the people to their will, and as a result they left so many dead in their wake. Possibly democratization or liberalization could have prevented these tragedies. But ultimately it was the government that should have stopped this—yet it instead lauded it. Hopefully many can learn from the mistakes that Rwanda made and prevent ethnic conflict and genocide in the future.

But tragically the circumstances surrounding the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 were not limited only to that event; indeed, Burundi experienced genocide under the same circumstances in 1972 and again in 1993. Burundi, unlike Rwanda, however, found the Tutsi suppressing the Hutu.

Similar to the lead-up to Rwanda's genocide, the politicking of the Burundian governmental administration over the minority ethnic group greatly exacerbated and escalated tensions and ultimately violence. The Ndadaye administration, a Hutu controlled group in a Tutsi controlled country, originally had attempted to smooth the racial divide. These attempts constantly aimed to inject more and more Hutu into the populations and more specifically into the echelons of the entrenched Tutsi army. Ultimately this proved to be a fatal mistake for the then peaceful nation, as the Tutsi eventually became enraged at the prospect of Hutu control in even limited circumstances.

While Ndadaye's intentions were to improve the democracy of Burundi by equalizing political participation among the ethnic groups of the countries, in practice his policies oppressed a number of Tutsi and showed overt favoritism toward the Hutu. Opposite of political liberalization, the 1993 genocide began with the murder of prominent Hutu leaders, including Ndadaye himself, and with the eventual slaughter of many more Hutu citizens by Tutsi radicalists.

In the 1993 Burundian genocide, Smith's hypothesis of political liberalization assuaging tensions was turned on its head. While the presidential administration attempted to politically liberalize the nation, unfortunately the opposite was practiced. The government's good intentions were far from good practices—the intended outcome bred Tutsi violence.

Much more overt political participation was demonstrated in the 1972 Burundian genocide, however. In this case, the Tutsi president Michel Micombero declared martial law and demanded the slaughter of thousands of Hutu along with the expulsion of numerous others from the country. Orchestrating a massive genocide of the minority from within his own administration, Micombero exemplified the cause of the 1972 genocide. His administration's policy of political suppression and overt expulsion were the clear cause of the escalating violence of the two ethnic groups—nothing else can possibly explain the speed and the vigor with which such an extermination was executed. And this idea rings true also in 1993 and 1994 in both Burundi and Rwanda.

Indeed, with both ethnic groups committing genocide actions against the other—the Tutsi against the Hutu in Burundi, and the Hutu against the Tutsi in Rwanda—little evidence supports the claim that ethnicity and social problems contributed solely to the various genocides in the countries. Rather domestic and external foreign factors contributed immensely to the escalation of violence.

Foreign, or external, factors such as economic problems as well as foreign national involvement in the Central African region, and sometimes more specifically in Rwanda and Burundi, played at least some contributory role in growing ethnic tensions. But more so, domestic factors like democratization and political liberalization, or lack thereof, are inextricably linked to the amassing anger and tension by both sides in both places. The political administrations, for instance, of Micombero and Ndadaye in Burundi and of Kayibanda and Habyarimana in Rwanda are perhaps the best explanations for the escalated and calculated violence of the genocides.

As these administrations applied domestic political reform, be it in the form of silencing the minority, or amplifying its voice, the government morphed political liberalization into political suppression and oppression. With these the radicalized ethnic groups were given approval to battle, harm, and slaughter one another. Whether overtly or indirectly, the political systems in place in both Burundi and Rwanda at least tacitly approved genocide time and time again.

Each government instigated ultimate genocide, whether intentionally or incidentally. In Burundi, the Ndadaye administration clearly intended to provide meaningful and peaceful change, hopefully lessening the recent divide between the Tutsi and the Hutu. Nevertheless, good intentions were transformed into tragic violence, in the midst of government weakness and loss of control. Unfortunately, the other cases of the Micombero administration in Burundi and the Kayibanda and Habyarimana administrations in Rwanda tell an obviously different story: government complicity and support in ethnic violence. Each of these administrations, as the evidence suggests, intentionally supported one group over the other, suggesting and even funding organized violence. The Rwandan and Burundian governments fully understood the consequences of wholesale murder of entire societal groups, and the consequence was simple: ultimate economic and political power for the “better” group. As a result organized participation by the national army and other groups followed and bloodshed ensued—all to be exacerbated by the chaos that arose during the genocides. Nevertheless, regardless of whether control was maintained or lost, government approval directly moved mere ideology to action, preparation to genocide.

The issues of how governments interact with the governed has always been important, and in light of such events, they have become that much more important in Central Africa. In a review of history, it is noticeable that violence pervades Africa and the globe. But in a new era most violence is avoidable by simply supporting peaceful debate and ultimate reconciliation. The need for these new tactics is obvious when reviewing the genocides of Burundi and Rwanda. Nevertheless more research is required to determine the methods by which reconciliation can be achieved and the means by which non-violence is best advertised, especially in light of the potential consequences of ignoring such tactics.

Indeed, these genocides have proven to be the ultimate blemishes upon the histories of Rwanda and Burundi. Their tragedies still demand answer to the questions that linger—why did these ethnic tensions emerge and so quickly lead to genocide and then continue moving forward? Only when genocide was clearly decried by those in power did it end and was it wiped, in some ways, from the public conscience. Still the wounds remain; but now these wounds are viewed as markings of a new era—an era of cooperation, not violence. These wounds have taught people of the wrongs committed by their governments and politicians. These wounds, although they remain unhealed, have healed much deeper wounds: the rifts between ethnic groups caused by the violence of the nineteenth century.

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