

AN APPRAISAL OF THIRTY YEARS AFTER THE RWANDA GENOCIDE (1994-2024): LESSONS FROM HISTORY

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Abstract

April 6, 2024 marked thirty years after the crisis in Rwanda always termed genocide. It was the climax of an existing conflict and civil war that had taken place in the country, since 1990. It was an ethnic based crisis that resulted in an unprecedented massacre in the last quarter of the 20th century. The country is in East Africa and also a member of the East African community (EAC). Between 1894 - 1918 Rwanda and Burundi were administered by the Germans. After the First World War the area was administered by Belgium under the mandate system of the League of Nations. Rwanda became independent in July 1962 following a revolution that took place between the two dominant and opposing ethnic groups, the Hutu and Tutsi. This study found out that ethnic minority and majority syndrome between dominant ethnic groups actually ignited the the genocide that devastated the entire country. This research uses historical narrative approach to bring to the fore the history of the crisis, thirty years after. The study proffered lessons that multiethnic societies can learn from the genocide.

Introduction

African societies are structured into different group of people known as ethnic groups. Multi ethnic societies exist in most African countries. Loyalty to ethnic groups runs deep than loyalty to the country. It is this loyalty to ethnic groups that usually leads to ethnicity which usually escalates into conflict between one ethnic group and another. One of the theaters of ethnicity is Rwanda, an east African country. The Tutsi and the Hutu are the two dominant ethnic groups in the country. Colonial policies of both Germany and Belgium resulted in one ethnic group becoming outstanding than the other. This

was the political culture in the country. The dominating prowess of the Tutsi ethnic group over the Hutu became more prominent in successive years after independence. The high point of the ethnic disparity was the genocide that took place in the country in April 1994. April 2024 marked 30 years after the genocide that took place in the country. The aim of this work is to examine the genocide in Rwanda 30 years after. The paper will look at peace building and reconstruction in post genocide Rwanda. Lessons for counties with multi ethnic groups will also be highlighted.

The Concept of Conflict and Genocide

Conflict is a generic term that is used in all part of the world by the young and old in the

society. It is a pervasive term because it erupts everyday in the society either within oneself, among or between communities or

between countries. It is an inevitable occurrence due to the nature and composition of the human internal components which hinges on the fact that human beings are never compatible in all ramifications. It is based on these phenomena that humans fight for anything anywhere and anytime. Conflict in this regard is endemic, contagious, pandemic and pervasive. The pervasive nature of conflict has resulted in destructive manifestation which abounds in all strata of the society. Many scholars have given their thought on the concept of conflict and concluded that conflict is an incompatible interaction between and among groups anywhere they cluster themselves. Scholars of conflict studies including OtoAbasi Akpan and Inwang Utin have look beyond the definition of conflict and decided to assess conflict in terms of its operation and manifestation. Otoabasi Akpan (2011:xx1)

Conflict and peace are not close neighbors but antagonizing neighbors. Even though individuals, group and societies yearn for peace, but conflict usually defies these peaceful yearnings and erupt because of differences in values, cultural practices and aspirations of individual, excessive needs of humans amid scarce resources and the genetic make up of human beings Utin (2018:58). Therefore, conflict is endemic, contagious, pandemic and pervasive. Its pervasive nature has resulted in destructive manifestations which abound in all strata of

The term genocide is not a very common in English language vocabulary. It is not a word that has been in the dictionary for centuries. The word was coined by Raphael Lemkin a Polish lawyer in the 1940s. Two prominent events prompted Lemkin to bring to the fore the term genocide. First was the attack by Adolf Hitler to the Jews, second was the attack by the Ottoman Turksto the Armenians. In his view Lemkin thought that these two occurrences were very outstanding crime worthy of being given a distinctive name

states that the differing values and moral preferences of human groups usually give rise to conflict. Inwang Utin (2022:49) in the same vein sees conflict as a norm in societies and when it prolong may escalate into crisis and sometimes result in eviction of defeated or weaker party from ancestral homeland. Johan Galtung sees conflict as a condition in the society where an action system engages in conflict if the system has two or more incompatible goals. Likewise, according to Lewis Coser, "conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aim of the opponents are the to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals" Akpan (2003:105). Conflict has been categorized into types such as community conflict, international conflict, boundary conflict, interstate conflict and intra-state conflict.

the society. When conflict defies all efforts at resolution it escalates to the stage of crisis. Crisis or war is the last stage in the linear progression of conflict. This is the stage that is characterized by hostilities Utin(2025:131). Hostilities in this regard are characterized by violence, loss of lives and properties Aja (2009:16). The intensity of killing may become so high that it can be described as blood bath. This intensity of crisis or war among ethnic groups is usually termed genocide.

which did not exist. The word genocide is coined from two Greek words which include people which stand for genos-and the Latin suffix cide-for murder. The mass killing of people is the vivid idea that Lemkin tried to bring out with the word genocide. The United Nations realized the effectiveness of the concept introduced by Lemkin. However, the U.N did not know how to make it precise as a basis for international law. In 1948 United Nations adopted the "convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of

genocide which incorporated the following definition of the act of genocide. Genocide means any of the following acts committed

- (a) Killing members of a group.
- (b) Causing serious bodily harm.
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the groups conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.

Rwanda in Colonial History

Rwanda is a land lock country which lies south to the equator in East Central Africa. The country is usually call the Land of a thousand hill by the indigenous people. The capital of Rwanda is Kigali. In terms of geography, the country is not very large in terms of land mass. The Hutu and the Tutsi are the major ethnic groups in the country. Apart from the two major ethnic groups, others like the Tiwa contribute less than one percent of the entire population of the country.

From 1894 to 1918, Rwanda and Burundi were administered by Germans who were in East Africa at that time. Base on the mandate system, the League of Nation mandated Belgium to administer the two territories with the name Rwanda – Burundi till the end of Belgian trusteeship in 1962. During the colonial era, the German colonial Government adopted the policy of indirect rule that consolidated and strengthened the dominance of the Tutsi ruling class and absolutism of the Tutsi monarchy, led by the Mwami. The system was also adopted by the Belgians during its administration.

Peasant revolution started in Rwanda in 1959, later it metamorphosed into an organized political movement with the aim to overthrow the monarchy and therefore vest full political power in the hands of the Hutu. It should also be noted that the end of World

with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such it include the following:

- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The efforts of Lemkin gave way to the adoption of the United Nations Genocide Convention (UNGC) in December 1948 and came into effect in January 1951.” Boghossian, (2024:2).

War II and the clamour for independence prompted civil servant and missionaries to agree that the Hutu’s had been subjected to unequal treatment. In the 1950’s, the colonialist shifted their support from the Tutsi to the Hutu. The assassination of a Hutu leader by the Tutsi resulted in a revolution which started as an uprising on November 1, 1959. Gregoire Kayibanda the leader of the “Party for Hutu Emancipation” led the revolution. He later became the first president of Rwanda in 1959. In 1960 Communal election was conducted which led to the transfer of power to the Hutus at the community levels. The monarchy was abolished following a coup that took place on January 28, 1961, it is alleged that the coup was supported by the Belgian authorities. Following the coup, Rwanda became a republic and also an all Hutu provisional government emerged.

Event Leading to the Crisis

Ethnic conflict started in Rwanda long before self rule in 1962. 1959 revolution resulted in the dead of hundreds of Tutsi, thousands also became refugees in neighbouring countries. By 1962 when Rwanda gained independence 120, 000 people mostly Tutsi’s were evicted, displaced and forced to take refuge in neighbouring countries to avoid violence which may erupt following the Hutu ascension to power. In response, the Tutsi refugees in Tanzania and Zaire (now Congo DRC) in an attempt to regain their prestigious

position in Rwanda started mobilized a **reprisal** attacks on Hutu government. Between 1962 - 1967 pockets of retaliatory attacks escalated in Rwanda resulting in mass killing of Tutsi civilians resulting in more refugees.

During 1980s about four hundred and eighty thousand people were evicted from their homeland, they became refugees in Burundi,

Event Leading to the Genocide

In 1988 a group of Rwanda political activist and refugees residing in Kampala, Uganda established a political and militia organization with the name the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RDF). The objective was to secure and enhance the repatriation of Rwandans in exile and also to reform the government of Rwanda, this will include political power sharing. The RDF comprises of many people of Tutsi origin exiled in Uganda. Many of them were part of Yoweri Museveni National Resistant Army in Uganda. It should be noted that the National Resistant Army was behind the over throw of the former Uganda Government in 1986.

The RPF which had been training in Uganda with 7000 militia launched a major attack on Rwanda on 1st October 1990 operating from Uganda. The attack resulted in propaganda from the government. The government media (radio and television) spread unverified information that all Tutsi's in the country were allies of the RPF. Hutu members of the opposition parties were also branded as traitors. This propaganda heightened the ethnic crisis. The RPF and its army The Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) launched an attack on the government in 1990. The conflict lasted up to 1994 (about 4 years).

In August 1993, the OAU approved a peacekeeping force which resulted in the signing of the Arusha Peace Accord. The peace accord restored peace especially between the Hutu dominated government and the opposition "Rwandan Patriotic Front"

Uganda and Tanzania. These refugees jointly fought for their right to return to Rwanda, their homeland. In the midst of all these, Juvenal Habyanimana became the president. His government was overwhelmed by the challenge of refugees mostly the Tutsis. This was occasioned by few economic opportunities or jobs to accommodate these large numbers of refugees Ibu, (2023:76).

(RPF). The United Nations Security Council setup the "United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwandan" (UNAMIR). The mandate given to UNAMIR was peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and support of the peace negotiation. The agreement reached by the parties was delayed in terms of implementation. This delay resulted in violation of human rights and similarly security situation deteriorated.

Genocide in Rwanda

On 6 April 1994, the plane carrying the Rwandan President Juvenal Habyanimana and his Burundi counterpart Cyprien Ntanyamira was shot down over Kigali the Rwandan capital. The aircraft crash killed all passengers on board including the two presidents. At first, it was alleged that the Hutu extremist were responsible, the RPF were also suspected. Immediately, organized killing and murder of Tutsi erupted that night led by Hutu extremists. Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, a moderate Hutu was assassinated including 10 Belgian soldiers who were part of UN peace keeping force in Rwanda. Some month later mass killing ensued. The army and Hutu insurgent groups known as Interahamwe (those who attack together) and Impuzamugarnbi (those who have the same goal) played a central role in the killings. It is estimated that about two hundred thousand Hutu's participated in the genocide. The fighters used crude instruments especially machetes to stabbed and killed victims. Rape was also used as a weapon of war. Those infected with HIV/AIDS carried out sexual assault and the results was

that many Tutsi women were deliberately contaminated with HIV/AIDS.

The genocide lasted for one hundred days from April 6 and ended in Mid-July 18. During the genocide more than eight hundred

Rwanda after the Genocide

After the 1994 genocide, the country has recorded unique achievement in the area of peace and development. Efforts have been made towards the rebuilding of the country through resolution and improved economic development. The President Paul Kagame and his Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) carried out a nationwide strategy for unity and reconciliation of the people of the country. The Government has equally developed a new constitution that focused on equity and equality of all citizens of Rwanda. The government discourages all forms of group identification on ethnic bases, instead the government emphasized social cohesion.

The UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) resolve most of the lawsuit against leaders of the genocide, similarly the 'National Court System' adjudicated cases of those involved in the planning of the genocide. Others were tried in the Gacaca court, Gacaca is a Kinyarwanda word for grass. It is an indigenous justice system for dispute settlement in which group of people gathered in public squares to settle local dispute. The focus of the Gacaca system was to redress issues that affected the people, the emphasis was that citizens should be informed of their mistakes and therefore request for forgiveness. More than 12, 000 grassroots Gracaca court resolve over 1.2 million cases.

President Kagame became president in 2000 and is still the president till date. He has been applauded for development, reconciliation and stability in Rwanda. He has built bridges and divides, control the political system and also enhanced economic growth of the country. Ferragamo (2024) stated that Kagame's economic transformation has been among the best in Africa with an average of

thousand civilians mainly Tutsi were murdered. Due to the genocide both Hutu and Tutsi fled, some fled into Eastern Zaire (DRC). Many Rwandans returned in the late 1996 and early 1997 Fleming, (2025:1).

eight percent per year over the last two decades. This achievement emerged from agricultural export from tea and coffee, mineral extraction, tourism and a large public sector. Healthcare has also improved, life expectancy has doubled in the two decades post genocide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the country had the best COVID-19 vaccination rates and also made outstanding deals in community health post.

On social issues, Rwanda is an exemplary in the reduction of gender inequality among lawmakers, its parliament has the highest percentage of women worldwide. The country's level of education is very unique, admission of student in school is the highest in Africa. The country is a model on climate goals, it is among the first country in Africa to propose updated programme to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 (www.britannica.com).

Lessons from History

7th April 2024 marks 30 years after Rwanda faced a historic crisis in the world. The genocide occur due to long years of ethnic differences between the majority Hutu, moderate Hutu and the minority Tutsi. This ethnic colouration started since colonial days and climax in 1994 when it resulted in one of the bloodiest hostilities that lasted for about 100 days and over 800, 000 death. Although the country has recovered from the genocide, it is a nightmare to most of the survivors when reflecting on its occurrence. Great lessons can be learnt from the Rwandan genocide. Countries with multi-ethnic groups should learn fast from the events that occurred in Rwanda. Nigeria is a country with multi ethnic groups, with over three hundred and eighty nine ethnic groups Otite (2000:37). Evenwith the integration of all the ethnic groups usually called amalgamation,

indigenous people still gives their loyalty to their ethnic groups instead of loyalty to Nigeria as a country. Loyalty to ethnic groups region from the republic of Nigeria and subsequently the civil war erupted Madiebo (1980:123). The civil war in Nigeria lasted for about 30 month resulting in displacement and eviction of people from their ancestral homeland. The civil war resulted in loss of lives and properties. Nigeria is a multi ethnic country with three major ethnic groups of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa standing out as major ethnic groups. Nigerian leaders should avoid ethnic divides and focus on provision of infrastructures and amenities to all part of the country. Flash point areas such as the Niger Delta region with history of insurgency and counter insurgency should be given more attention Utin (2018:62). More attention in the sense that the area is the power house of Nigeria, producing oil and natural gas, therefore the environment and people of the area should be given more attention. The neglect of the area over the years resulted in insurgent activities such as oil pipeline vandalization, illegal refinery, kidnapping and hostage taking of oil company workers. Provisions of infrastructures and jobs to people of the area would nib in the bud ethnic tension which has the propensity to escalate to the point of genocide.

The genocide which occurred in Rwanda did not happen spontaneously, there was early warning signs in which the government of Rwanda neglected. Early warning is a conflict preventive mechanism that Government of multi ethnic societies should take seriously. Centre or agency for early ethnic conflict detection should be setup to monitor and act

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was what prompted Col. Chukwuemeka Ojukwu to declare the secession of Eastern

on early warning signs of conflict Utin(2016:43). The agency will advise the government to take prompt action on any sign of conflict in any part of the country.

Conclusion

This work brings to the fore the genocide that occurred in the East African country of Rwanda, thirty years ago (1994-2024). The genocide erupted due to ethnicity and ethnic disparity between two ethnic groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi. The conflict between these ethnic areas heightened when the plane carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana and his Burundi counterpart Cyprian Ntaryamana was shot down over Kigali. All passengers on board including the two presidents were killed. President Habyarimana was from the Hutu ethnic group. The Tutsi ethnic group was suspected and therefore the attack and killings affected them the more.

The genocide in Rwanda shows the extent ethnicity and ethnic conflict can reach. Therefore, countries with multiethnic societies such as Nigeria should learn from this experience. Provision of infrastructures in all part of the country should be a priority. Flash point areas such as the Niger Delta area should be given more attention. Early warning mechanism should be adopted to discover potential sources of conflict and nib it in the bud before it escalate into crisis. Jobs should be made available especially to youth who are at the fore front of crisis whenever it erupts.

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