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## **Rwandan Genocide in 1994**

It is without a doubt that the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 is one of the most tragic and darkest events that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century post World War 2. The amount of victims killed and the speed in which it happened within a short span of time makes it a shame that mar history, especially when the genocide could have been prevented altogether. In this essay I will give a brief narrative on the history of Rwanda and its ethnic groups. I will discuss the crucial events that lay as a background to the genocide. I will then write extensively about the role of the West in Rwanda's genocide, what they did that facilitated the genocide as well as what they did not do to prevent it from happening. The latter part of this essay will examine a couple of scenarios that could have helped avoid the genocide.

Originally, there were three ethnic groups in Rwanda. The Twa who were hunter gatherers took residence in the area since 1000 A.D. Later on, the Hutu arrived bringing farming, clan based monarchy into Rwanda and they dominated the Twa. Sometime in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Tutsi came to Rwanda from the Horn of Africa and set up their own monarchy which involved the mwami or the king ruling at the top. Since the Twa comprised a fraction of the population, more emphasis is put on between the Hutu and the Tutsi. The two ethnic groups were able to live in harmony, they had more or less the same customs and traditions, they spoke the same language, practised the same religion, shared the same ancestral stories and intermarriage was common (Shah 2006).

According to Mamdani (2001), it is the consequences of colonialism that created a rift between the two ethnic groups. The early German colonizers in Rwanda decided to represent Tutsis as superior to Hutus as between the two ethnic groups, Tutsis resembled the Caucasian

phenotype closer than Hutus. Generally, Tutsis were taller, had lighter skin and sharper nose than Hutus. This distinction was furthered by the Belgian administration in 1933 when they carried out a population census and gave identity cards to people to determine which ethnic group they belonged to. For many decades the Tutsi enjoyed privileges in politics, education, employment and certain aspects in daily life (Mamdani 2001, p.87-90). This, in return, alienated the Hutu who comprised majority of the population.

After World War 2, the Tutsi started their campaign to break the chains of colonialism and wanted to get rid of the Belgian's control over Rwanda. Due to this, the Belgian administration began to favour the Hutu as they thought they were easier to manipulate and proceeded to toy with the two ethnic groups. Tutsi chiefs were replaced by Hutu chiefs and this turn of events became known as the Social Revolution of 1959. Many Tutsis, including King Kigeli V, were forced to leave Rwanda and flee into the neighbouring countries (Melvern 2000, p.14). Some of these displaced Tutsis would later on become soldiers in the RPF.

The Habyarimana regime was clever at inciting hatred against the Tutsi. As majority of Rwanda's population at the time was illiterate, the Hutu extremist government decided to broadcast propaganda through RTLMC or otherwise known as the hate radio. Another reason why this strategy turned out to be effective is that during this time transistor radios became cheap so almost every household could tune in to the radio broadcast. A weekly newspaper which was read out loud in public was also used to demonize the Tutsi community (Melvern 2000, p.70-72). Around this time, the Habyarimana regime was also busy training militias around Rwanda and stocking up on weapons. The weapons were imported from other countries primarily Egypt, France and China (Melvern 2000, p.65-68).

The Rwandan genocide was ignited on the night of April 6 1994 when the pro Hutu Power president's private plane got shot down by ground-to-air missiles when it was trying to land in Kigali airport. Almost instantaneously roadblocks were set up everywhere in Kigali (Melvern 2000, p.115-116). In the following days and weeks, the systematic slaughter of Tutsi spread throughout the country which would last for 100 days leaving devastating scenes in its wake.

While massacres ran rampant throughout Rwanda, the West on the other hand decided to stay passive. Instead, they put their efforts in avoiding the term 'genocide' in public statements because they did not want to be legally bound to the UN Convention of Genocide 1948 which states that participants should do everything in their power to prevent genocide from occurring (Melvern 2000, p.177-178). The fiasco in Somalia was also a factor in their decision to stay passive and the fact that Rwanda holds little geopolitical interests for the West (Melvern 2000, p.79). The insufficient UN peacekeepers stationed in Rwanda during those fateful 3 months were overrun by the Interahamwe and when the UN realised that Rwanda was a lost case, they sent reinforcements to help evacuate the expats and issued a mandate to pull out after the rescue operation was executed (Melvern 2000, p.2-3). By doing this, Tutsi civilians were left defenceless and this action also encouraged Hutu extremists to continue the ethnic cleansing without fearing international intervention. France in particular played a shady role in the genocide. Allegations have been made that the French government was trying to establish a relationship with the Hutu extremist government and that during the evacuation of French expats, they also evacuated pro Hutu power characters (Caplan 2013, p.456). An evidence found by the arms division of Human Rights Watch shows that France delivered weapons to the Hutu extremist government during the three months of genocide. But France adamantly denies these allegations (Melvern 2000, p.183).

There are three scenarios that could have played out to prevent the genocide. First and foremost, The West should have taken an action and intervened instead of remaining indifferent despite a plethora of irrefutable evidence that a genocide was taking place in Rwanda. It is understandable to an extent that the UN did not wish to repeat the fiasco in Somalia and wanted to avoid casualties of their troops, however, increasing military presence in Rwanda with sufficient preparedness to defend Tutsi civilians without engaging in warfare with the extremists would have been enough to deter the carnage from occurring. Second, if the Arusha Peace Agreement had been successfully implemented then Rwanda would have avoided its genocide. Unfortunately, the Habyarimana regime was not serious when it came to the negotiations and local slaughter of Tutsis happened around Rwanda even at the height of the negotiations (Melvern 2000, p.54-55). Third, in 1993 the RPF decided to cease the peace agreement when they realised that it would not work and invaded Rwanda to try and save the Tutsi in the hands of extremists. During this invasion, the RPF showed that they were tactically stronger than the Rwandan army and were able to advance in great speed into Rwanda. However, the French military helped the Hutu extremist government in fighting against the RPF and with the French military's much more advanced array of weaponry, the RPF could not help but lose (Melvern 2000, p.57-58). Hypothetically, if the RPF succeeded to overthrow the Habyarimana regime then, the genocide would never have happened.

In conclusion, even today Rwanda's scar from the genocide is still fresh. In my opinion, the present Rwandan government should put their effort in undoing the racialization and political identification between the Tutsi and the Hutu established by the legacy of colonialism. However, the post genocide Rwandan government refuses or is slow at improving its justice system when it comes to putting genocidaires on trial (Prunier 2009, p.12). If hatred of each other due to ethnicity is left unsolved and left to simmer then it will always play as a challenge to peace for Rwanda.

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