

THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE AND THE NEMESIS OF MANIPULATED ETHNICITY

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ABSTRACT

In 1994, an unprecedented orgy of internecine violence erupted in Rwanda amidst lingering tension between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. The unmitigated cycle of mass murder of innocent and defenseless Tutsis by the rampaging Hutu killer squads culminated in the savagery of the Rwandan catastrophe. The resultant massive scale of atrocities and palpable animosity invariably engendered genocide in its darkest hue. Within three months, about 800,000 lives of Tutsi men, women, children and some moderate Hutus were consumed in the mindless carnage. It is against this backdrop that this paper is primed to interrogate and properly situate the underlying ethnic mistrust between the Hutu and Tutsi which is rooted in the colonial heritage and legacy. The paper is based on the historical/interpretive research method and adopted the theory of relative deprivation as a framework of analysis. To forestall future occurrences, the paper recommends a sustainable policy of intra-ethnic integration and the deepening of National consciousness and patriotism in African countries. This would definitely reduce attachment to primordial cleavages, ethnocentrism and unhealthy rivalries for socio-economic and political domination among the diverse ethnic groups within African countries.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Genocide, Colonialism, Hutu, Tutsi, Rwanda

INTRODUCTION

Rwanda is situated in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa with a population of about 8 million people. This population consists of three clans of the same people delineated by specific occupational attributes which defined and identified each within the pre-colonial Rwandan society. These clans include the Hutu (84%) which constitutes the majority with the Tutsi (14%), and the Twa (1%) of the population. The names- Hutu, Tutsi and Twa depict the occupations of the people who belong to such socio-economic stratifications during the pre-colonial era. The Hutu were mainly farmers or cultivators, with the Tutsi mostly associated with Cattle rearing, while the Twa- a type of pygmy stock were renowned for hunting.

Essentially these three occupationally distinct groups share common cultural values, language and identity in the pre-colonial Rwanda. As a result, the concept of multi-ethnicity was fundamentally alien to pre-colonial Rwanda. It was therefore obvious that the Hutu and Tutsi by virtue of the fact that they speak the same language, with shared cultural values and ethos, worship the same Deity and under the same political leadership called Mwami, belonged to one and the same ethnic group. This is corroborated by Nikuze (2014) when he noted that during the pre-colonial era, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa were commonly known as Rwandans. From time immemorial, they lived together in the same territory, had the same culture and used the same language- 'Ikinyarwanda' Those ties were important elements of social cohesion. Individuals recognized one another as being Rwandans and each recognized the other as having the right to be a Rwandan. At that time, the first Rwandan identity reference was the clan. This natural social bonding and collective affinity in Rwanda was shattered by the advent of colonialism. Germany was the first European Nation to colonize Rwanda in 1894 following the partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference between 1884-1885. Although the Germans had their own version of racist perception of the Rwandan ethnic profile, they were more concerned with the extraction of raw materials from the territory. To that extent, they favoured using the existing local leadership structure under the control of the Tutsi aristocracy to administer the colonial enclave. German colonialism did little to alter the existing stratified social system. Thus, the German affirmation of the stratified social structures was utilized by the Tutsi autocracy as justification for minority rule over the Hutu. Wikipedia (2020) With the defeat of Germany in the first world war, Rwanda was handed over to Belgium in 1916. Belgian colonial administration arrived with a rather fixed and outlandish perception of the ethnic configuration of Rwanda. The Belgian colonialists created 'races' out of Rwanda's lone ethnic identity. They concluded that the Tutsi and Hutu composed two ethno-racial groups. Thus, under Belgian rule, the difference in status between the Tutsi and the Hutu became socially fixed. A then popular pseudo-scientific method of taking skull and nose measurements was used to determine whether one was a Tutsi or a Hutu. Based on external characteristics, the ethnic origins of all citizens were recorded on their personal identity cards. (Haperen, 2014) This sharp division generated animosity and cold war between the Tutsi and the Hutu which continued throughout the colonial period. The skewed power equation relationship in favour of the Tutsis was challenged and reversed in 1959 after the Hutu led social revolution.

Thereafter, the Hutu began to dominate the political space in Rwanda and eventually secured the independence of the Country from Belgium in 1962. With the Hutu now at the helm of affairs and in control of the commanding heights of Rwandan economy, they promptly hounded the Tutsis out of their original privileged positions and mounted a string of hideous propaganda against them as foreigners and invaders who must be chased out of Rwanda. The seed of ethnicity sowed by colonialism now came to maturity as the centre could no longer hold. The Hutu-Tutsi crisis continued to escalate until it snowballed into the 1994 Genocide.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS:

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity encompasses a given people with distinct culture, language, religion, belief system, among other common features. It is a close-knit society with unifying factors and shared values. Gurr (2000) defined ethnicity as people who share a distinctive and enduring collective identity based on a belief of common descent and shared experiences and cultural traits (which include) language or dialect, social customs, religious beliefs, physical appearance and region of residence. Ethnicity is therefore more compact than nationality. In postcolonial African Countries like Nigeria, you hear and read about Citizens talk or write about their ethnic nationality- to which they attach more sentiments than the citizenship of the country. Ethnicity in Africa is essentially a sanctuary of group identity and solidarity and a weapon of political action and reaction.

According to Olaesobukan (2010), ethnic cleavages are already deep and political discrimination against minority is widely practiced in Africa. Ethnicity cannot but be a great potential for separatist activities. Ethnicity has bred the feelings of suspicion, hatred, and distrust among members of the various groups in Africa and has no doubt retarded political integration in Africa. The stage for the Rwandan genocide was set essentially by the rivalry and deep-rooted animosity between the Hutu and the Tutsi caused by the Belgian colonial authorities who deliberately introduced ethnicity into Rwanda for purposes of 'divide and conquer'

GENOCIDE

The crime of genocide is generally regarded as the ultimate crime- the mother of all crimes,

indeed the highest demonstration of atrocity. The word 'genocide' was introduced in the English language in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer who formed "Genocide" by combining 'geno' a Greek word for race and 'cide' a Latin word for killing. In proposing this new term, Lemkin had in mind "a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves" (New Jersey Darfur Coalition, 2009) On December 9th, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide (known more commonly as the Genocide Convention) (IPEP/OAU, 2000). Mchilum (1995) defined genocide as deliberate murder borne out of the myth that one ethnic group, race, or creed is superior to another and that it is thus legitimate 'that' other to gain power. In a more broad manner, Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide (1948) defines genocide as: Any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such (a) killing members of the group (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group (c) deliberately inflicting on the group 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 [and] (e) forcibly transferring Children of the group to another group. (UN Charter, 1948) The Rwandan genocide was about one of the most savage the world has ever witnessed. Tutsis and moderate Hutu victims were hunted down like common animals.

COLONIALISM

Colonialism means the practical subordination of weaker nations and their peoples by stronger ones usually through violence for purposes of economic exploitation, political domination and socio-cultural manipulation. According to Asiabaka et al, (2013 citing Sarraut, 1923), at the start, colonization was not an act of civilization, nor was it a desire to civilize. It was an act of force motivated by interest. An episode in the vital competition, which from man to man, from group to group, has gone on ever increasing; the people who set out to sieze colonies in distant lands were thinking primarily of themselves and were working for their own profits and conquering for their own power. By the time industrial revolution exploded in Europe, the need for African slaves was no longer acute. In fact, it began to decline

as machines replaced slave labour. European nations reasoned that it would be better to split the continent and share it among themselves to put an end to the conflicts that erupt as they compete for territories in Africa. The famous scramble for Africa had thus started. The Berlin treaty they signed in 1885 laid down principles whereby with minimum friction, these rival powers could conquer and divide up Africa. (Chinweizu, 1978). This was how Rwanda fell into the hands of the German colonialists and later was handed over to Belgium in 1916.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION:

This paper examines the Rwandan genocide imbroglio within the context of the theory of Relative Deprivation. It addresses the contradictions which arise from unfulfilled expectations, the gap between hope and reality at the levels of goals attainment relative to perceived justice in allocation of scarce resources amongst and between contending groups within a given society. According to Richardson (2011, citing Gurr, 1970,) relative deprivation is the term used to denote the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the 'ought' and the 'is' of collective value satisfaction that disposes men to violence. The primary source of the human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration-aggression mechanism- the anger induced by frustration as a motivating force that disposes men to aggression irrespective of instrumentalities. As a theory predicated on factors which triggers frustration and aggression, the psychological dimension is vital. It postulates that interference with goal directed behavior creates frustration which in turn leads to aggressive response usually directed against the frustrating agent. (Kaarbo and Ray 2011, citing Dollard, 1939) Onuoha (2008) noted that the basic theoretical proposition is that a psychological variable, relative deprivation is the basic precondition for political violence of any kind and that the more widely spread and intense deprivation is among members of a population, the greater is the magnitude of violence in one form or another. Also Dowse and Hughes (1972) observed that in social life, men come to value many things: wealth, status, power, security, equality, freedom, the Nation etc. When they cannot achieve these values, dissatisfaction, anger, and aggression occur. In essence if a group feels an intense sense of relative deprivation with respect to a class of values important to it, then it has considerable potential for collective violence. If a group feels that collective violence is a legitimate response to its anger, and that violence is the only means to alleviate their discontent, then the likelihood of violence is greater. The culmination of deprivation into

political violence is predicated on the intensity and scope of the deprivation. The deprivation must be sufficiently intense and experienced by a sufficiently broad sector or strategically located section of the society, in order to create potential for political violence. Nnoli (1989) established a relationship between ethnicity and political violence. He contended that Nigerian politics has presented an image of a struggle among the various ethnic groups for a division of national resources. As a result, most Nigerians have come to believe that unless their own men are in Government, they will not be able to secure those socioeconomic amenities that are disbursed by the government. Anigbogu, (1984), equally believes that the central premise of the frustration-aggression theory is that aggression is always the result of frustration. Given the requisite conditions, an individual whose basic desires are thwarted and who consequently experiences profound anger is likely to react to his condition by directing aggressive behavior at what is perceived as being responsible for thwarting those desires. The greater the perceived importance of those desires, the more vigorous and aggressive the response becomes. Relative Deprivation is interpreted to mean a state of mind where there is a discrepancy between what men seek and what seems attainable. This is intimately related to another version of the frustration-aggression model-“revolution of rising expectations” This has to do with want formation and want satisfaction or aspirational expectation and the gap developed. This gap generates social frustration and dissatisfaction. The extent of the gap provides a reasonable index for political violence. The theory of relative deprivation aptly explains the animosity, tension and incessant violence that eventually culminated in the tragedy of Rwandan genocide. After the German and later Belgian colonial administrators designed and implemented the concept of 'racial/ethnic' superiority of the minority Tutsi group over the majority Hutus, a sharp and deep-rooted anger enveloped the Hutu enclave. The Belgians dismantled Hutu kingdoms that had maintained local control in the North west. In 1926, the Belgians abolished the local posts of “land-chief” “cattle-chief” and “military-chief”, and in doing so they stripped the Hutu of their limited local power over land. Instead, they entrenched an authoritarian Tutsi aristocracy to rule over the Hutu majority as Tutsis took over as provincial governors, local chieftains, and civil bureaucrats. The establishment of Tutsi minority rule created much bitterness among the Hutu majority who felt disenfranchised and politically repressed. This political resentment fueled the development of an ethnic gulf between the Tutsis who wielded political power and the Hutu who were locked out of

power.(Wikipedia,2020)The prevailing scenario of subjugation and marginalization of the Hutus by the Tutsi at the behest of the colonial authorities exploded in a Hutu revolution in 1959 which resulted in a massive attack on the Tutsi ethnic group and set the stage for the overthrow of Tutsi power establishment by a rabid and tempestuous Hutu power elite class.

4. COLONIAL ROOTS OF RWANDAN ETHNIC CRISIS:

Although Rwanda has an unusual advantage as one Country in Africa where the entire indigenes speak one common language-*Ikinyarwanda*, yet the country witnessed one of the crudest intra-ethnic genocide of all time. The Belgian colonial power arrived Rwanda with a fixed mindset: to divide and rule the territory. In the absence of differences in language, and other cultural values among the natives, the Belgian colonists created and imposed an artificial ethno/racial diversity among the hitherto one people. The colonial authorities attempted to read complicated ethnic hierarchies they observed through the lens of western race categories. Armed with scales, rulers and calipers the dutifully measured the skull radius, nose length and bodily proportions of Rwandans and concluded that the minority Tutsi with their lean, sharp 'European' features were the country's natural rulers. Next, came the more bestial Hutu and finally the most primitive of all, the Twa. (www.brookings.edu, 2015). According to Batware (2012), Tutsi were favoured in terms of education and employment over the Hutu who were neglected. Also, the Belgian administration introduced identity cards to distinguish one's ethnic origin. These acts led to tensions between the Hutu and the Tutsi. Belgian colonists misinterpreted the existing socio-economic stratifications in Rwanda. They transformed the three existing socio-economic stratifications into ethnic groups. Referring to the Hamitic ideology, they divided Rwandans into a 'conquering' race (the Tutsi), a Bantu race (the Hutu) and the Pygmoids (the Twa) Colonial powers treated the Tutsi and the Hutu differently. They described the Tutsi as alien, the superior ethnic group, and as natural leaders while the inferior Hutu, the indigenous people should become a permanent underclass. Consequently, Hutu Chiefs were systematically demoted and Tutsi promoted. (Nikuze, 2014) This induced and false ethnic conspiracy theory based on the Euro-centric Hamitic foundation totally and completely polarized the Rwandan society not necessarily as two purportedly distinct ethnic groups but as two 'races' with superior and inferior complexes. Belgian colonialism created and foisted the most criminal form of dichotomy and hatred within Rwanda with the result that

a people who had for centuries lived together as one people now see one another as two different races without a common meeting point. This bizarre concept of the Hamitic race construct was drawn from the Biblical Noah who placed a curse on his son Ham for failing to cover his nakedness when he saw him in a state of drunkenness. Ham was alleged to have wandered about and later settled in the area that became known as Africa. According to the fable, the genealogy of Ham included people of Ethiopia from where the Belgians insisted the Tutsi migrated. To that extent and in view of their physical features the Tutsi were deemed to possess some significant level of European character. According to Jean (2016) a 1925 colonial report describes Hutu as “generally short and thick-set, with a big head, a wide nose and enormous lips, while the Tutsi has nothing of the Negro apart from his colour. The report further depicted the Tutsi as: very tall, 1.8m at least. His features are very fine: Highbrow, thin nose and fine lips framing beautiful shining teeth. Gifted with vicious intelligence, the Tutsi displays a refinement of feelings which is rare among primitive people. He is a natural born leader, capable of extreme self-control and calculated goodwill”. The irony of this development is that the Tutsi accepted their colonially contrived elevated status and basked in the euphoria of a dominant powerful minority without realizing that the day of judgment will certainly come. On their own part, the Hutu held on strongly to the colonial assertion that the Tutsi were alien to Rwanda, and therefore regarded them as invaders who must one day retrace their step back to where they came from. Another angle to the Tutsi superiority theory is built around a previously innocuous folklore and myth about the origins of Rwanda's clan groups of Tutsi, Hutu and Twa. Jean (2016) observed that one myth stated that 'Kigwa' who fell from Heaven had three sons: Gatwa, Gahutu and Gatutsi. When he decided to choose his successor, he entrusted each of the three sons with a pot of milk to watch over during the night. At day break, Gatwa had drunk the Milk, Gahutu had fallen asleep and in the process spilt the milk and only Gatutsi had kept watch throughout the night, and only his milk was safe. It was then clear to Kigwa that Gatutsi should be the successor and by that fact should be exempt from any menial tasks. Gahutu was to be his servant. The utterly unreliability of Gatwa was to make him only a clown in the society. The implication of this myth is that the Tutsi were born to rule despite their minority status and that the Hutu should naturally accept their fate designed subservient status as servants in spite of their majority status. These and other sentiments promoted by the colonial authorities engraved deeply rooted hostility of the Hutu against the

Tutsi.

5. THE HUTU SOCIAL REVOLUTION AND THE RAGE OF GENOCIDE.

By mid 1950s, the pressure for Independence began to mount in Rwanda. Apart from internal agitations, Belgium also came under pressure from the United Nations to accommodate the Hutu majority in the scheme of things in the country. The Belgian colonial authorities also observed with measured dismay that their closest partners- the Tutsi were equally anxious and eager to see them vacate power, and felt betrayed. It would be recalled that the Tutsi since the colonial era had occupied virtually all positions of importance in politics, economy, education, government, and the public service of Rwanda at the instance of the colonial administration. From all indications, the Tutsi were carried away by the hubris of their socio-economic and political dominance of the Rwandan society that they forgot to take their colonial benefactors into confidence. Through subtle and diplomatic processes, the colonial authorities started a policy of redistributing most of the powerful posts originally held by the Tutsi to the Hutu. This new rearrangement of power in Rwanda whittled down the more than six decades of minority rule of the Hutu by the Tutsi under the colonial dispensation. As corroborated by Haperen (2014) the pursuit of independence by many highly educated Tutsi led to a cooling of relations with the Belgians.... who unexpectedly dropped her policy of favouring the Tutsi. They now admit the Hutu to functions and organizations that had until recently been reserved for Tutsi. In 1957 with the permission of the Belgian government, the party of Hutu Emancipation Movement-MDR-*PARMEHUTU* was founded. This historical development marked a watershed in the intense resolve by the Hutu to initiate the process of liberation from the shackles of all round domination by the Tutsi. When the Tutsi Monarch died in 1959, the Hutu rose and mounted a violent social revolution that eventually overthrew the Tutsi leadership. The Hutu in exercise of 'Hutu Power' the mantra of the Hutu Manifesto viciously attacked the Tutsi who they described as foreigners and invaders and insisted that they must leave Rwanda. According to Goehrun (2017) the Hutu revolution of 1959-1961, which secured governmental authorities for the Hutu, was not merely the product of intrinsic ethnic hatred, but sprang from a list of grievances with the social, political, and economic conditions of the time, which privileged the Tutsi minority at the expense of the Hutu majority. Importantly however, the revolution was fought along ethnic lines, demonstrating the extent to

which the racial hierarchy had been internalized and radicalized. The new power equation in Rwanda in favour of the Hutu was tantamount to a recreation and reconfiguration of a people and their destiny. They rode this crest wave of rehabilitated identity to contest for the pre-independence elections. The Hutu party was victorious and took over the reins of Rwanda's government from the departing colonial administration at independence in 1962. For the Hutu, it was a long walk to freedom. After years of denigration and dehumanization, of contempt and scorn as ignoble and good for nothing mass of primitive humanity, the Hutu finally arrived the seat of Rwandan power as its very custodian. The leading light of that Hutu social revolution Gregoire Kayibanda became the first indigenous president of Rwanda. Kayibanda forgot to be a Rwandan nationalist. He personified the eccentricity of rabid Hutu ethnocentrism and instigated a sweeping wave of antagonism against the minority Tutsi as state policy. The coming of independence created a perfect opportunity to bridge the gap between the two in the name of larger Rwandan loyalty. But the chance was forfeited as the down trodden Hutu suddenly discovered the many convenient uses of the ethnic card. Rwanda's independence was more of a repudiation by the majority of their despotic local overlords than of their harsh but remote European colonial masters.(IPEP/OAU, 2000) The new Hutu run government decided to replicate the injustices and deprivations they suffered at the hands of the Tutsi(under Belgian colonialism) against the same Tutsi, who are now at the receiving end of socio-political and economic deprivations.

In 1963, barely one year after independence some elements of the Tutsi ethnic group who escaped from Rwanda in the wake of Hutu social revolution organized themselves into an armed group and attacked Rwanda. Kayibanba not only successfully repulsed the attack, he mounted a strident ethnically laced campaign against the Tutsi both within and outside Rwanda accusing them of plotting to destabilize the Country in order to continue their tyranny and domination of the majority Hutu. Magnarella (2001) observed that the Hutu used a failed 1963 invasion as the pretext to launch a massive wave of repression between 1963 and 1964 in which an estimated 10,000 Tutsi were slaughtered. All surviving Tutsi politicians still living in Rwanda were executed. The government of Kiyibanda was subsequently toppled in a military Coup d'etat in 1973 by Juvenal Habyarimana. The new Rwanda's helmsman initially avoided the loud rhetoric of Hutu jingoism but practically ensured through official government policy that the Tutsi were totally marginalized and disempowered. For instance, throughout the

Habyarimana years (1973-1994), there was only a single Tutsi officer in the whole Army, two Tutsi members of parliament out of seventy and there was only one Tutsi minister in a Cabinet of between 25 and 30 members. (Magnarella, 2014, citing Prunier, 1997) Meanwhile vestiges of Tutsi refugees with some moderate Hutu compatriots scattered in the various refugee camps in Uganda organized themselves into a formidable armed organization called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). This group began a serious war against the government of Rwanda in 1990. The government of Habyarimana responded by inciting reprisal attacks on Tutsi inside Rwanda and used the media of Radio and the Newspapers to demonize and incite the Hutu to rise and defend their newly found freedom from the invading and power-hungry Tutsi. According to Human Rights Watch (2006), among the false ideas drawn on by political leaders backing Habyarimana, were the following: Tutsi were foreign to Rwanda and had no right to live there. Despite the 1959 revolution, Tutsi continued to enjoy higher status and greater wealth than Hutu and were in some way responsible for continuing Hutu poverty. Tutsi posed a danger to Hutu who were always the victims...and so Hutu had a right and a duty to defend themselves. However, the RPF military incursions into Rwanda continued to gain momentum and Habyarimana had no other option than to seriously consider the peace initiative with the RPF generally referred to as the Arusha Accords because the meetings were being held in Arusha, Tanzania. As fate would have it, it was on a return trip from Arusha after signing the peace accord with the RPF that tragedy struck on April 6th 1994. The plane conveying the president and his high-profile entourage back was targeted by surface to air missile within the precincts of Kigali airport. Everybody on board the aircraft died in the mishap.

Thereafter, hell was let loose. The Hutu military high command took over the government and directed, coordinated, and supervised a ferocious mass murder of Tutsi and anyone who failed to actively participate in the killing spree. Over the following days, the killings and violence spread all over the country and, since the government had already marked the names and addresses of nearly all Tutsi living in Rwanda, the killers were able to go from door to door, slaughtering all the Tutsi men, women and children. Since bullets were expensive, most Tutsi were killed with other weapons such as machete and clubs...In addition, rape and other forms of sexual violence was used as a weapon of genocide and directed against the Tutsi women. In a space of 100 days, more than one million Tutsi were murdered solely because they were Tutsi (Nikuze, 2014)

CONCLUSION

The Rwandan genocide occupies one of the worst pages in the history of genocide in the world. Apart from the Holocaust, it ranks as the most virulent, vile and sadistically organized human carnage in living memory. Even with the atrocity of the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide is unprecedented in the savagery of its execution and venom of its ethnic hatred. It was genocide like no other.

This calls to mind the destructive nature and character of colonialism. This was a society that was at peace with itself without any iota of division or segregation on account of ethnicity or identity informed by their normal well accepted socio-economic and political stratifications. Colonialism arrived with ideas of superior and inferior races, pitching one group against the other and favouring one group and undermining another. The Rwandan tragedy which almost resulted in the extermination of an entire nationality for no just cause other than for being who they are is a classic legacy of colonial devastation of the African identity.

The Rwandan experience exposes the negative effects of ethnicity especially when fused with the disproportionate distribution of wealth and political powers within the colonial enclave. It captures the basic issues involved in the endemic politics of underdevelopment in most African postcolonial societies. It is the contention of this paper that until and unless the current power elite in Africa recognizes the ruinous impact of both created and contrived sense of ethnic superiority or born to rule syndrome, to that extent would the continent continue to experience crisis of ethnic identity.

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