

Navigating the Dark Waters of Evil: the Roles of Colonial Interference, Propaganda, and Obedience in the 1994 Rwandan Genocide

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Abstract: In April 1994, the Rwandan Genocide erupted. The Hutu people, an ethnic group in Rwanda, endeavored to annihilate the Tutsi, an ethnic group that had coexisted with the Hutu for hundreds of years in the Rwandan region. Neighbors killed neighbors, friends killed friends, preachers killed church members, and family killed family; the question is “why”? How could churches open their doors to the innocents only to hold them for the coming slaughter? How could adults lead children to water to drown? This research shows that because of the European colonial interference after World War I, the propaganda of the Hutu-controlled government, the Rwandan’s idea of obedience, and the feeling of ethnic pride that surged through the Hutu and Tutsi people, the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 had been in the making for over thirty years.

In 1957, Hutu intellectuals of Rwanda drafted the “Bahutu Manifesto,” a political document that called for the ethnic and political unification of the Hutu people and the disenfranchisement of the Tutsis.¹

Many Hutu felt that as the overwhelming majority of the colony’s residents (84%) that they should politically dominate the country. As a result, much anti-Tutsi sentiment and talk of retribution began to sweep across the Hutu intellectual class...The result was the Bahutu Manifesto.²

It was this document that was the basis for the April 1994 genocide in Rwanda. It was then that the Hutu extremist regime began to kill thousands and thousands of Tutsi civilians. Both Hutu and Tutsi have lived together in virtual peace for years, intermarrying with one another, sharing friendships and language, as well as religious beliefs. Yet one day, they began slaughtering the ones they once held dear.

First, the setup of the Rwandan government, both pre-colonial and postcolonial, had a major effect on the minds of the Hutu murderers. Secondly, the use of propaganda and obedience manipulated the Hutu population, as is evident in the testimonies of both killers and victims. Finally, the analysis of the aftermath of the genocide based on the International Tribunals shed more light on the causes of the Rwandan genocide question. There is no one concrete answer, yet the evidence shows that because of the interference of the Belgians, the previous anti-Hutu movements by the Tutsis, the emotions of obedience, fear, and loyalty that flow through the veins of Rwandan culture, the Hutu extremists believed that it was their right and duty to slaughter the Tutsi population.

Transition to Colonial Rwanda: the Seeds of Genocide are Planted

Pre-colonial Rwanda was divided into kingdoms of Hutus and Tutsi. Rwanda was made up of three “ethnic” groups: Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. However, during the late 19th century a fourth ethnic group migrated to Rwanda from Western Europe called the Bazungu.³ Bazungu is a deviation of the word “mzungu” which means “white person.”⁴ The Bazungu peoples eventually took over the Rwandans by both force and diplomacy.⁵ With their help, the Tutsi aristocracy’s control over the land and the Rwandans expanded profoundly and the Hutus were forced under their centralized command.⁶

¹ “Bahutu Manifesto (1957)” <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=gah/bahutu-manifesto-1957> accessed on 27 March, 2011.

² Ibid.

³ Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford: Kumorian Press, Inc., 1998), 16.

⁴ “Mzungu,” <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mzungu>. Accessed on 27 March, 2011

⁵ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 16.

⁶ Ibid, 16.

The Bazungu, made up of Germans and Belgians, put the Tutsi in power because of their belief in the ethnic superiority of the Tutsi due to their more European physical features.⁷ However, the Tutsi made up only about fifteen percent of the population, while the Hutus comprised about eighty-five percent. It was under this indirect rule that “social relationships in Rwanda became more uniform, rigid, unequal, and exploitative than ever, with a clear hierarchy from Bazungu to Tutsi to Hutu to Twa, with each higher level having privileges denied to the lower level and with an ideology of racial superiority underlying this system of inequality.”⁸ This example speaks to the theory of social Darwinism which served as a justification for the colonizing Europeans. Because of the social structure set up by the Bazungu, the staunch caste system caused deep resentments between the Hutu and Tutsi.

In 1919, after World War I, the League of Nations declared that Rwanda was a mandate territory⁹ under the control of the Belgians. The Belgians broke the ethnic groups into three separate sections: the aboriginal Pygmies (Twa), Bantu peasants (Hutu), and the Nilo Hamitic aristocrats (Tutsi).¹⁰ The Belgians made the citizens obtain ID cards identifying each individual race, thus fortifying the racial tensions. For the forty-three years that Rwanda was under Belgian control, the Belgians instituted the Tutsi minority as the rulers, because the Belgians believed that due to their lighter skin complexion, the Tutsi were somehow racially and ethnically superior to the Hutu and the Twa.¹¹

In July 1962, Rwanda was given its independence from the Belgians after years of colonial rule. Because the Hutus made up approximately eighty-four percent of the population, while the Tutsi and the Twa together make up the other sixteen percent,¹² the Belgians set up the Hutu as the new leaders of the country, not the Tutsi. After the Hutu rise to political power, the Hutu people began to feel a surge of ethnic pride which caused extreme resentment towards the Tutsi people causing much anti-Tutsi violence throughout the 1960s. The radical switch from Tutsi leadership to Hutu leadership laid the foundation for the Rwandan Genocide of 1994.

Propaganda of the Hutu Extremist Regime

The first president of Rwanda, Gregoire Kayibanda, was in office from 1962 until 1973. Kayibanda was very discriminatory towards the Tutsi population; in the early 1960s and in 1973, there was a series of anti-Tutsi massacres.¹³ The second president of Rwanda was Juvenal Habyarimana, who was president from 1973 until 1994.¹⁴ As a Hutu moderate, Habyarimana was more lenient to the Tutsi population. On April 6, 1994, Habyarimana was assassinated, but by whom, no one is exactly sure. Some historians argue it was the Hutu hardliners, while others claim it was the Rwandan Patriotic Front. After the president’s assassination, the Hutu extremists grabbed power and began to put the plans of the genocide into action.

The Rwandan government’s use of propaganda, in all forms, was one of the main factors in the Hutu population’s involvement in the slaughter of the Tutsis. In countries where television sets are scarce and illiteracy runs rampant, radio is the public’s main access to news and information. Many of these radio stations are government owned and limited on what can be said. According to a United States’ congressional transcript in 1994, the encouragement of ethnic hatred, along with the arming of militias, was one of the strongest signs of genocides.¹⁵ It was the job of the “hate radio,” known as Mille Collines,¹⁶ to convince the Hutu population that their lives were menaced by the Tutsi and the moderate Hutu.¹⁷ One quote from this radio transcript is especially telling, “...the majority of Kigali is safe again, from some part of the outskirts which must be seriously cleaned by our soldiers with

⁷ Ibid, 16.

⁸ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 17.

⁹ After World War I, Rwanda was a Class B territory that was not considered politically or socially advanced enough to be declared independent, thus they were placed under the mandate of a League of Nations member state.

¹⁰ Alex de Waal, “Genocide in Rwanda,” *Anthropology Today* 10 (1994):1.

¹¹ *The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed*, “Bahutu Manifesto,” <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=gah/bahutu-manifesto-1957>. Accessed on 27 March, 2011

¹² “The World Factbook” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rw.html>. Accessed on 30 March 2011.

¹³ Scott Strauss, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 23.

¹⁴ Ibid, 23.

¹⁵ “Crisis in Central Africa,” http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23291756M/Crisis_in_Central_Africa. Accessed on 27 March, 2011

¹⁶ *Mille Collines* translates to “of a thousand hills” in English.

¹⁷ Frank Chalk, “Hate Radio in Rwanda” in *The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire*, ed. Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 94.

the help of the population.”¹⁸ The station specifically mentioned the “help” of the population with the “cleaning” of the Tutsis. This is just one example of how the radio recruited civilians and persuaded them to kill.

Other than the Bahutu Manifesto, another document used by the Hutu to persuade the masses was known as the “Hutu Ten Commandments.” This document was released in the Hutu extremist magazine designed to spread ethnic pride of the Hutu. It also preached the need of the decimation of the Tutsi, much like Mille Collines, but in print media. The “Hutu Ten Commandments” read as follows:

1. Every Hutu must know that the Tutsi woman, wherever she may be, is working for the Tutsi ethnic cause. In consequence, any Hutu is a traitor who:
 - Acquires a Tutsi wife;
 - Acquires a Tutsi concubine;
 - Acquires a Tutsi secretary or protégée.
2. Every Hutu must know that our Hutu daughters are more worthy and more conscientious as women, as wives and as mothers. Aren’t they lovely, excellent secretaries, and more honest!
3. Hutu women, be vigilant and make sure that your husbands, brothers and sons see reason.
4. All Hutus must know that all Tutsis are dishonest in business. Their only goal is ethnic superiority. We have learned this by experience from experience. In consequence, any Hutu is a traitor who:
 - Forms a business alliance with a Tutsi
 - Invests his own funds or public funds in a Tutsi enterprise
 - Borrows money from or loans money to a Tutsi
 - Grants favors to Tutsis (import licenses, bank loans, land for construction, public markets...)
5. Strategic positions such as politics, administration, economics, the military and security must be restricted to the Hutu.
6. A Hutu majority must prevail throughout the educational system (pupils, scholars, teachers).
7. The Rwandan Army must be exclusively Hutu. The war of October 1990 has taught us that. No soldier may marry a Tutsi woman.
8. Hutu must stop taking pity on the Tutsi.
9. Hutu wherever they be must stand united, in solidarity, and concerned with the fate of their Hutu brothers. Hutu within and without Rwanda must constantly search for friends and allies to the Hutu Cause, beginning with their Bantu brothers. Hutu must constantly counter Tutsi propaganda. Hutu must stand firm and vigilant against their common enemy: the Tutsi.
10. The Social Revolution of 1959, the Referendum of 1961 and the Hutu Ideology must be taught to Hutu of every age. Every Hutu must spread the word wherever he goes. Any Hutu who persecutes his brother Hutu for spreading and teaching this ideology is a traitor.¹⁹

As the Commandments illustrate, the Hutu wanted to make it explicitly clear that the Tutsi were the enemy. The Hutu put these ideals into place approximately four years before the genocide began. These two documents, the Bahutu Manifesto and the Hutu Ten Commandments, were designed to manipulate the Hutu population to the point where the masses felt it was their right and their duty as Hutu to exterminate the Tutsi. Moreover, the constitution of Rwanda revised in 1991 shows the corruption of the times. It speaks of a government that is “of the people, for the people, and by the people.”²⁰ Article 12 of their constitution is very chilling. “The human being shall be sacred.”²¹ However, the Tutsi was not considered human. They were called *inyenzi*, or “cockroaches,” by the *interahamwe*²².

¹⁸ “Digital Repository: Translations of Mille Collines”

http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/7166/browse?order=ASC&rpp=20&sort_by=1&etal=-1&offset=0&type=title accessed on 30 March, 2011

¹⁹ Genocide in Rwanda, “The Hutu Ten Commandments as published in Kangura No. 6”

<http://www.trumanwebdesign.com/~catalina/commandments.htm>. Accessed on 17 April, 2011.

²⁰ Rwandan Constitution of 1991, http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/rw0000_.html. Accessed on 18 April, 2011/

²¹ Ibid.

²² The *interahamwe* was the name of the militant Hutu population who traveled in search of Tutsi citizens to slaughter. The word translates into “those who attack together” in Kinyarwanda, the native language of the Rwandans.

Before the killings, we usually called them cockroaches. But during, it was more suitable to call them snakes, because of their attitude, or zeros, or dogs, because in our country we don't like dogs; in any case, they were less-than-nothings. For some of us those taunts were just minor diversions. The important thing was not to let them get away. For others, the insults were invigorating, made the job easier. The perpetrators felt more comfortable insulting and hitting crawlers in rags rather than properly upright people. Because they seemed less like us in that position.²³

Obedience and Fear: Essential Tools of Genocide Orchestration

At the end of the genocide, seventy-five percent of the Tutsi population was wiped out, yet some survived and lived to tell their stories. Adele, a young Tutsi woman, told a story of how the killers would take children and march them to "the lake."²⁴ In this lake, the children would step into the water going deeper and deeper until they went under. Some swam miles and miles to safety, like Adele. Others drowned. How could men and women lead children to their deaths? It is because of the Rwandan cultural belief of obedience and respect to those in power. Marie Beatrice Umutesi tells of an experience she had while fleeing Rwanda. Umutesi was a woman who lived through the genocide with her family and crossed the border, fleeing the interahamwe.

...we began to pass bodies of the dead and the dying...My eye fell on a teenager hardly sixteen years old. Like the others she was lying at the side of the road, her large eyes open...A cloud of flies swarmed around her. Ants and other forest insects crawled around her mouth, nose, eyes, and ears. They began to devour her before she had taken her last breath. The death rattle that from time to time escaped her lips showed that she was not yet dead.²⁵

This is an example of the amount of death these people encountered every day for the hundred days during the genocide. The killers were immune to the cries for mercy and screams of children. They had one mission: to kill. Another Tutsi woman who escaped the clutches of the Hutus, retells something she will never forget:

Distant kneeling²⁶, and the thwack thwack thwack of small arms goes on for a couple of endless minutes. Then there's an enveloping silence. Where silhouetted forms had been running, there is now no movement, Bodies, like puddles after a shower, lie everywhere.²⁷

When the Rwandans were given their independence, the newly formed Hutu extremist government had "requirements" of the male citizens. First, both Hutu and Tutsi peasants were forced to provide free labor "for the state and towards the good of development."²⁸ Furthermore, Rwandan citizens were required to attend meetings called "animations." These "animations" were large gatherings of small communities to pay tribute to the state, nation, and MRND²⁹ using song and dance. According to Baines, "...enthusiastic Rwandans were rewarded for their vigor in repeating nationalist slogans, often identified for specific community tasks and resultant political rewards. A more pernicious fate awaited those who were less enthusiastic, in particular for those who opposed the ideology of the national party."³⁰

Some Hutus killed because of political reward and enthusiasm for the "Hutu cause," however, not all participants in the genocide were "willing" participants. According to Ravi Bhavani, ten percent of Hutus helped during the genocide, thirty percent were forced to kill, twenty percent killed reluctantly, and forty percent killed enthusiastically.³¹ Some Hutus and their families were threatened with death if they did not comply. They were to kill or be killed themselves. Therefore, obedience was used by the Hutu regime to manipulate some of the Hutu population into participating in their killing missions.³² As one of the killers put it, "Rule number one was to kill.

²³ Jean Hatzfield, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* (New York: Picador Press, 2003), 132.

²⁴ Voices of Rwanda, <http://voicesofrwanda.org/testimonies/>. Accessed 20 March, 2011. Accessed 30 March, 2011.

²⁵ Marie Beatrice Umutesi, "Surviving the Slaughter." 104.

²⁶ This is in reference to the actually physical positions of the Tutsi when the Hutu were killing. In most cases the Hutus would make groups of Tutsis kneel and then hack them to death with machetes, or shoot them.

²⁷ Louise Mushikiwabo and Jack Kramer, *Rwanda Means the Universe: A Native's Memoir of Blood and Bloodlines* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 44.

²⁸ Erin Baines, "Body Politics and the Rwandan Crisis," *Third World Quarterly* 24 (2003): 482.

²⁹ MRND stood for "Mouvement Revolutionnaire National pour le Développement" or National Revolutionary Movement for Development in English.

³⁰ Baines, *Body Politics*, 482.

³¹ Ravi Bhavani, "Ethnic Norms and Interethnic Violence: Accounting for Mass Participation in the Rwandan Genocide," *Journal of Peace Research* 43 (2006): 651.

³² *Ibid*, 651.

There was no rule number two.”³³ Another said, “...the judge announced that the reason for the meeting was the killing of every Tutsi without exception. It was simply said, and it was simple to understand.”³⁴ The civilians were given their orders and they obeyed. No questions. If they had questions, they were subject to death themselves. As one killer put it, “Some began the hunts with nerve and finished them with nerve, while others never showed nerve and killed from obligation. For others, in time, nerve replaced fear.”³⁵ It was obedience that drove most of the killers. However, the sheer fear of death of themselves or their families drove many Hutu to slaughter their Tutsi neighbors. They would become numb to it, no longer feeling the guilt or shame. Eventually it was just their job as a Hutu.

One famous man accused of genocide was a preacher in the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Elizaphan Ntakirutimana. He was accused of promising safety in his church to Tutsi and then turning them over to the interahamwe to be slaughtered.³⁶ He was found innocent and released. The case of Paul Bisengimana sheds a little more light on his motives in the genocide. From the case file we are told the following:

Paul Bisengimana was appointed bourgmestre of Gikoro commune by the President of the Republic of Rwanda upon the recommendation of the Minister of the Interior. He acknowledges that as bourgmestre, he represented executive power at the communal level. Further, he had administrative authority over the entire commune and was responsible for ensuring peace, public order and the safety of persons and property, and for the implementation of local laws and regulations, as well as government policy. The Accused admits that he had a duty to protect the population, prevent or punish the illegal acts of the perpetrators of attacks against persons or property. Further, he was responsible for informing the central government of any situation worthy of interest in Gikoro commune...Paul Bisengimana acknowledges that he had a duty to protect the population, prevent or punish the illegal acts of the perpetrators of the attacks at Musha Church and Ruhanga Complex but that he failed to do so. He admits that he had the means to oppose the killings of Tutsi civilians in Gikoro commune, but that he remained indifferent to the attacks. With respect to the Musha Church massacres, Paul Bisengimana acknowledges that his presence during the attack would have had an encouraging effect on the perpetrators and given them the impression that he endorsed the killing.³⁷

He admits that he remained indifferent and even condoned the killings. It was his duty as a Hutu to make sure the Tutsis were exterminated, not kept safe. In reality, his job was to keep the Hutu and make sure their mission was accomplished.

Conclusion

One hundred days after the genocide started, it was over. This research was designed to answer the question “why?” The first reason was because of the colonial set up of Rwanda. The German and Belgian colonizers who created such rigid classes between the Hutu and the Tutsi planted a seed that eventually grew into fruition: the genocide. Secondly, many Hutu participated because of the widespread propaganda. “Hate radio” was used to convince the Hutu population that the Tutsis were a threat to their life and that the Tutsis were planning on taking over again, subjecting the Hutu to the persecution they faced under the Tutsi monarchy. Respect, fear, and obedience were also used to manipulate the Hutu masses into participating. Embedded in the social fabrics of Rwandan society is the respect and obedience of power. When the people were commanded they did as they were told. Some Hutu only participated out of fear for themselves or their families, because not only were Tutsis killed in the genocide, but Hutu who stood up for the Tutsi cause were slaughtered as well. With every kill, it got easier. With every life taken, it was not as hard to take the next. The Hutu masses became a mob of killing machines, no longer seeing themselves as individuals, but as a Hutu nation. We may never fully understand the reasons why the killers killed, but the sources presented in this article hoped to shed some light on the darker parts of the minds of the killers.

³³ Hatzfield, *Machete Season*, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁶ “International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda: the Case of Elizaphan Ntakirutimana”

<http://www.unictr.org/Cases/tabid/127/PID/46/default.aspx?id=4&mnid=4>. Accessed 30 March, 2011.

³⁷ “The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda: The Case of Paul Bisengimana”

<http://www.unictr.org/Cases/tabid/127/PID/20/default.aspx?id=4&mnid=4>. Accessed 29 March, 2011.

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