

Ethnicity a major hurdle for nation development in africa essay example

[Parts of the World](#), [Africa](#)



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The issue of race and ethnicity has been a sensitive matter in many governments for many decades. Socio-political aspects combined with economic interest have generated a totally different form of leadership other than the one intended to serve the state and pursue nation building. This new kind of leadership is skewed towards fostering efforts that benefit only a particular ethnic groups or race. The result of such differentiated form of leadership is rampant corruption, violence and in some cases genocide. Several states such as Somalia are now failed states due to political ideologies defined by ethnicity. Africa seems to suffer this problem more than any other continent. This research examines the ethnic composition in one African State, that is, Rwanda. The research will also illustrate how ethnicity may have affected the socio-political arena of the country and its consequences.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity, unlike race is a definition of a people based on the culture and others aspects different from biological classification. According to Muhoza

an ethnic society is one that embodies similar values, religion, traditions, heritage and language that identifies a group (14). A common aspect that generally accompanies an ethnic grouping is the demarcation of territorial land. Conflict normally arises in cases of territorial disputes. A country could be of one race but composed of several ethnic groups and enjoy peacefully co-existed in the past for several centuries. However, with the introduction of democracy and new political designation in Africa combined with a rapid population growth, ethnic divisions have since abounded.

Rwanda

Rwanda is one of the nations that have faced ethnicity as a problem to the point of near collapse. The 1994 genocide that occurred in Rwanda has been blamed on ethnic identities in the country. Lessons from the Rwandan case have since provided insights to the manner in which ethnic politics hinders a nation state and its development.

Rwanda is a landlocked state in Central Africa and just like most African countries it relies on traditional agriculture for economic sustainability. Originally, the region now referred to as Rwanda was composed on three ethnic groups, which are the Hutus, Tutsis and Twa. The Hutus, who were mainly farmers, were the majority making about 85% of the entire Rwandan population. Tutsis on the other hand were the elite minority of pastoralists making up just about 14% of the population. The remainder 1% was the Twa community that lived in forests as hunter and gatherers (Straus and Waldorf, 12).

Pre-colonial Rwanda was a safe country with a delicate balance between the

wealthy elite Tutsi minority and the socially deprived Hutu majority. Muhoza illustrates that this coexistence was based on some myths (18). Some of these myths held that Tutsis were of celestial origin and that the kind civilization that they brought to Rwanda was of superior value than any other. Additionally, these myths held that Tutsi were divine people who would always provide leaderships in terms of kings. This was a social stratification of the Rwandan society but still remained a cohesive nation. However, the European invasion and eventual colonization of Africa only did more to divide the Rwandan society. Both Germans and Belgians exploited the existing social demarcation in order to assert control over the people. In doing so, Belgians associated the Tutsi elites with a more supreme race as compared to Hutus. In this respect, Belgians would view Tutsis as a more civilized ethnic group and thus gave most powerful leadership positions to the Tutsis. To worsen the situation, Belgians exerted Tutsi control over land owned by the Hutus who relied on these lands for their agriculture (Straus and Waldorf, 23).

Post Colonial Rwanda

As the Belgian era came to a close, socio-political stratification of the Rwandan community was now so deep and completely institutionalized. Government policy and leaders further sought to further define Tutsis as the ruling elites in Rwanda. Tutsi leaders were more concerned about developing their own lands and increase wealth of their kinsmen. These ethnic differences became apparent after the government entrenched some leadership positions only for Tutsis in law.

Ethnic tension soared as a few elite Hutus started to question the status quo. Additionally, the 1973 Tutsi massacre in neighboring Burundi was the first incident in which ruling elite had been challenged. Tensions in Rwanda continued to increase as popular Hutu resentment toward Tutsis began to grip the nation. An election was held in 1987 leading to the first ever Hutu president and leadership in Rwanda. President Juvénal Habyarimana's regime of early 1990s exploited the Hutu population in an attempt to stem Tutsi control of the nation. Suddenly tables were turned and the Hutu majority now led an effort to eliminate all Tutsis from Rwanda (Muhoza, 32). The explosion of the plane that carried President Habyarimana was the single trigger that was needed to start off one of the worst genocide experienced in Africa. The 1994 genocide still reverberates among the Rwandan population.

Today, Rwanda is an economically stable nation that has successfully emerged from the horrors of the genocide. Ethnicity has been stamped out the country with government policy and leadership geared towards national interest and development.

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