

Causes and consequences of the rwandan conflict politics essay



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Rwanda is a nation made up of two main ethnic groups, Hutu and Tutsi, whose struggles for power culminated with the genocide in 1994, the conflict's most critical paramount. This essay will argue that it was European colonialism that set the solid ethnic divide that was to act as the main cause of later struggles; the conflict resulted in most prominently long-term regional socio-economic damage. This essay will substantiate the thesis by first examining the causes of the Rwandan conflict including historical ethnic tensions, political struggles following Rwanda's independence, and economic roots; it will then analyze the results of the conflict including the political and social impacts on Rwanda and her neighboring countries, UN peacekeeping failures, and Rwandan political changes and international judicial limitations.

German and Belgian colonization of Rwanda left Tutsis as the ruling power, creating resentment between the two groups. Before colonization, relationships between the two tribes were mostly peaceful; sharing a similar culture and language, years of intermarriage pacified any heated disputes. However, Germans favored Tutsis, who had European features, ending the mutuality between two races (Shah). The discrimination quickly led to nepotism and the Tutsi aristocracy was made the local 'colonial puppet' ruling power, with better access to education and economic opportunities. As a result of the unfair divide, some Tutsi exploited their Hutu counterparts, and the distinctions "that later developed into jealousy transformed into rage by 1994", creating feelings of separatism (Jean). In addition, Belgian colonization after WWI established a practice that made all citizens carried 'tribal cards' which clearly stated their ethnicity, a system that made blending in impossible for Tutsis. As historian Michel Chossudovsky stated,

the “[colonial] socio-ethnic division have left a profound mark on contemporary Rwandan society” (Chossudovsky, 938). It is arguable that colonialism is the most important cause as the long-term animosity between the two races generated by the colonial system acted as the core of later short-term political and economic causes; without the introduction of such a gap, which had not existed before European establishment, the ethnic divide would never have had such a strong presence in Rwandan culture – and therefore the fundamentally ethnic-based genocide would not have happened.

Habyriamana’s political regime and pro-Hutu indoctrination exploited the Tutsis and increased ethnic tension. Rwanda gained independence with an all-Hutu government in 1962, and thus began decades of Tutsi inequity. General Habyarimana, established in 1973 a military dictatorship extremely partial against Tutsis – nepotistic and corrupted, it led to mass discrimination of Tutsi (World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh, 16). Habyarimana’s one-party state was backed by the Akazu, a Hutu elite group that leaned toward and contributed to the development of anti-Tutsi ideology as an effort to gain political power. Habyarimana also turned to military mobilization as a form of maintaining power, allowing the Akazu to freely execute all RPF opponents. As a result of the regime’s political struggles, the government further increased the tensions between the two races through propaganda and political warfare to secure its political hold on a to a nation of mostly illiterate civilians. The “ Hutu Ten Commandments” as well as other forms of indoctrination constantly reinforced of the difference between the Hutus and Tutsi “ cockroaches”, breaking any existing bond between the two races

(World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh, 18). As a result of the declining regime, Habyarimana was assassinated by Hutu extremists in 1994. Hutu extremists took this chance to blame RPF, and the short-term creation of radical antagonistic personalities gathered enough mass Hutu support against the Tutsis to pave the way for genocide (Jean). The political struggles were not the sole cause of the conflict; instead, they acted as a short-term catalyst that rekindled the ethnic animosity rooted in colonization.

Rwanda's economic collapse weakened the regime and thus encouraged the manipulation of the ethnic divide to regain majority support. Exporting coffee was the main source of income, and when coffee prices fell, the Rwandan elite had to depend on foreign aid. Such was the International Monetary Fund (IMF), whose strict financial reforms and Rwandan franc devaluation in 1990 led to further economic collapse, generating problems for an already weak government - and along with military threats from the RPF and dissent from Hutu extremists, support for the Habyarimana Regime weakened (Robbins, 271). As a result, Habyarimana turned to "exacerbating simmering ethnic tensions" to gain back the hearts and minds of the Hutu majority, further worsening the ethnic divide (Chossudovsky, 938). However, this cause can be partially attributed to Rwanda's Belgian colonizers, who transformed Rwanda's economy to exporting crops, precipitating the economic causes of the conflict (Jean). The economic collapse weakened Habyarimana's regime, pushing him to manipulate the historical ethnic enmities that sparked the conflict.

International peacekeeping failures, both a cause and a consequence of the Rwandan conflict, hastened the genocide and contributed to the decline of <https://assignbuster.com/causes-and-consequences-of-the-rwandan-conflict-politics-essay/>

UN credibility. As a consequence of the withdrawal of most UN troops from Rwanda amidst the crisis, many Tutsis and moderate Hutus were left to certain death. The most notable reason explaining the lack of peacekeeping in Rwanda was that many nations, although aware of the looming genocide, considered the tensions as just tribal warfare. Consequently, this flawed belief assured that military intervention was not necessary and that “ the core states could distance themselves from the conflict” (Robbins, 272). France, a permanent member on the Security Council supported Habyarimana’s regime, while the USA supported the opposition; the split in interests further led to the disorganized and ones-sided ‘ peacekeeping’ operations. The fear to directly intervene was also upheld by American demands to save money, and the unanimous Security Council vote to pull out of Rwanda, pressured by Belgian delegates, highlighted the core states’ selfish attitude towards a conflict hastened by their own foreign policies (Shah). It is probable that had the international community acted upon the urgency of the situation, the immediate violence could have been prevented. Although the UN later accepted full responsibility for its inability to prevent the genocide, this failure can be attributed to mainly the core states, whose collective decision to place self-interests over the genocide contributed to both the worsening of the genocide and the UN reputation plunge.

The Rwandan Genocide of 1994, the end of ethnic conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis resulted in regional socio-economic damage. The genocide was a direct consequence of the long-term racial discrimination harbored by colonialism and triggered by the immediate Habyarimana assassination; the intensity of the murders can be attributed to the short-term hatred rekindled

by Habyarimana's regime as a result of political and economic struggles. In addition to the psychological trauma and grief most of the population experienced as a direct result of the genocide, counterinsurgencies in both Rwanda and neighboring countries further heightened a climate of mutual distrust (Wesley). When the RPF drove Hutu extremists out of Rwanda in July 1994, Hutu radicals instead fled to neighboring countries (Tanzania, Burundi etc.), where constant power struggles increased political instability (Wesley). Particularly in Congo, the dictatorship fell to the Interhamwe disguised as refugees, and conflicts between Congolese Tutsi and the Hutu-sympathetic government accelerated the Rwanda-Ugandan conflict in 1998 and later a regional war over natural resources in Congo (Stanford Institute for International Studies, 62). The genocide also resulted in drastic economic consequences; as a result of war spending as well government corruption, Rwandan GDP declined more than 40% in 1994, the culmination of five years of civil war, with no sufficient export good to rebuild the economy (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 8). The socio-economic consequences of the conflict, although seemingly short-term repercussions, still scar the developing country today.

The Rwandan conflict resulted in both international and regional jurisdiction as well as political reform. Despite UN failure to prevent the genocide, international effort came together when the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) held trials for those found guilty. The establishment was successfully convicted prominent figures, including former Rwandan Prime Minister Jean Kambanda, an accomplishment which would not have surpassed domestic courts. However, the ICTR was criticized as a result of

the same reason; it did not have the capacity to convict all perpetrators (Stanford Institute for International Studies, 63). In comparison, the traditional system, the Gacaca, was a “ citizen-based approach” which, “ supported by the prisoners themselves as fair and appropriate”, restored relationships between criminals and victims at the local level (Shah). Although the ICTR trials were not without success, its inability to settle all crimes highlights the limitations of international jurisdiction as opposed to regional jurisdiction. After the genocide was understood as a result of Habyarimana’s autocratic government, domestic political reforms were also made. After RPF took over the government, the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the Transitional National Assembly (TNA), democratic institutions, were formed to combat the previously dictatorial regime, ensuring that political struggle for a single-party leadership would ignite another conflict. The Constitution formed in 2003 introduced the separation of powers between the three branches of federal government, further preventing abuses of executive privilege, a problem previously rampant in Habyarimana’s regime (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 8).

Struggles for power were not pacified but intensified after freedom from colonization, eventually leading to the genocide. However, although it ended over 15 years ago, danger from extremists is still imminent in many parts of the region. In conclusion, it was colonialism that established the Hutu-Tutsi differences, tensions that were to act as the determinant of later struggles; the conflict - and the concluding genocide, resulted in most notably regional social and economic damage, a long-term consequence that strongly impacted not just Rwandans but the international community.

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