

# Forced Migration From Rwanda: Myths and Realities

Edmund Abaka and J.B. Gashugi

The ongoing Rwandan crisis has been attributed to the war between the Tutsi-dominated Rwandans in the diaspora and the Hutu-dominated regime at home. More often than not, the conflict has been presented as that between the Hutu and the Tutsi. The media largely ignored the tens of thousands of Rwandans killed in massacres that antedate the 1990s. The explanation of the crisis in terms of the repression of the Tutsi by the regime in Kigali (whose power structure is mainly Hutu) is similarly flawed. The characterization of the French intervention in Rwanda as a "humanitarian" venture is yet another myth. Consistent support by Belgium and France strengthened the Habyarimana regime and made it inflexible at the Arusha peace talks, which aimed at restoring democracy in Rwanda. Even though the horrors of the Rwandan genocide have now clothed the French involvement with an aura of "do-gooder," the original French intervention was a case of the Imperial Twitch (Elliott 1994, 17).

## Realities

This paper will argue that the crisis in Rwanda is the culmination of a deep-seated antagonism arising out of local, national, and international conjuncture of factors. They include, among others, the colonial policies of Germany and Belgium, the lethargic response of the United Nations, the activities of France and Belgium in the post-colonial period, the regional policies of President Habyarimana, and the "Khaki Factor" in African politics. The assassination of Presidents

Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and Cyprian Ntaryamira of Burundi constituted the spark which set off this powder keg.

## Colonial Legacy

The colonial policies of Germany and Belgium contributed to the Rwandan crisis. Changes that occurred in the colonial period eroded the legitimacy of Tutsi rulers. Furthermore, the spread of new ideas has also been cited as the *raison d'être* of the 1959–61 "revolution" which impacted on the Rwandan political system and, by extension, on the current crises (Maquet and d'Hertefeldt, 1959). This functionalist paradigm was based on the premise of a static, traditional polity in which the Hutu had been dominated by state structures from the pre-19th century period (Newbury 1992, 5). Unfortunately, it does not take into consideration changes over time and falls short of a holistic explanation.

Rwanda was under two different colonial regimes. The Germans ruled Rwanda from 1898–1914 and the Belgians took over from 1916–61. Both colonial regimes identified with and ruled through the Tutsi nobility (Newbury 1988, 3; 1992, 194). Until the 1940s, the Belgians educated the Tutsi, but not the Hutu, and replaced Hutu chiefs with the Tutsi (Zolberg et al. 1989).

Under Belgium, the monarchy was abolished and the Hutu hegemony replaced that of the Tutsi (Newbury 1988). The Rwandan power nexus was significantly influenced by non-Rwandan institutions, such as the Catholic church and the Belgian administration, and this impacted on the post-colonial political situation. The altered political situation and the means by which it was brought about sowed the seeds for potential conflict.

The colonial state transformed a hierarchical, flexible system into a rigid,

bureaucratic one that exacerbated ethnic divisions (Zolberg et al. 1989). Thus, Belgian colonial policy enhanced the coercive and extractive powers of the state controlled by certain dominant lineages, and thereby widened the gap between the Tutsi office holders and the mostly, but not exclusively, Hutu non-office holders (Zolberg et al. 1989; C. Watson 1991). Aloysius Mugabo, a Tutsi refugee in Uganda, summed up Belgian policy:

The Belgian offered educational opportunities only to us ... They told the Hutu that priority was given to the Tutsi. Then in the end, they said to the Hutu: "You see what the Tutsi are doing? They are getting the best jobs." ... They did this to create conflict between us. (C. Watson 1991)

The colonial administration adopted the classic divide-and-rule policy of European imperialism in Africa (Duignan and Gann 1969). The colonial demands for labour and taxes and obligatory cultivation of the 1950s that were enforced by the chiefs and, to some extent, by the Tutsi (though not all Tutsi became rich and powerful), made a lasting and unforgettable impression on the Hutu (Pakenham 1991; Newbury 1992, 193).

The most hated aspect of Belgian rule was forced labour:

In 1932, an elderly missionary complained that the authorities had requisitioned his parishioners so often they scarcely had time to grow food, and famine threatened. There was, he complained, the coffee drive, the buckwheat drive, tree planting, construction work, road cleaning and more ... elderly Tutsi refugees in Uganda recall massive terracing schemes and road projects, and say Tutsi overseers were often required to force Hutu to work. "If you didn't meet your targets, the Belgians would whip you ... They said, 'You whip the Hutu or we will whip you.'" (C. Watson 1991, 4)

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Edmund Abaka is a Ph.D. candidate in the History Department, York University and a research associate at the Centre for Refugee Studies.

J.B. Gashugi is a political science student at the University of Toronto.

In effect, colonialism was an instrument which destroyed the social and political culture of Rwandese society by fundamentally transforming the political institutions. It also destroyed the traditional institution of divine kingship of the Mwami which, by giving cohesion to the diverse groups, served to minimize ethnic tension. In the final analysis, the contradictions of colonial rule laid the basis for the ensuing massacres, the refugee crises, and the present carnage in Rwanda.

The distrust sown between the two groups by colonial favouritism and exploitation, coupled with the machinations of the Catholic church, exploded in civil war after the abolition of the monarchy and the installation of a civilian republican government. The 1959 "revolution," led by the Hutu, overthrew the highly centralized monarchy that had ruled Rwanda up to the colonial period (Newbury 1992, 193). The formation of Le Parti du Mouvement de l'Emancipation Hutu (PARMEHUTU) in 1959, which adopted a pro-Hutu, anti-Tutsi platform, was one of the numerous methods aimed at addressing the contradictions which had existed in Rwanda (Newbury 1992, 196; Mazrui and Rotberg, 1970, 896). In November of the same year, the Association pour la Promotion Sociale de la Masse (APROSOMA) was launched by Joseph Gitara (Mazrui and Rotberg 1970, 898).

The latent antagonism, which had also been fostered by the Catholic church, culminated in violence near Gitarama in central Rwanda and other parts of the country in November 1959. Thousands of Tutsi huts were set aflame. According to the UN Visiting Mission, "the incendiaries set off in bands of ten. Armed with machetes and paraffin, which indigenous inhabitants use in large quantities for their lamps, they pillaged the Tutsi houses they passed on their way and set fire to them" (U.N. Visiting Mission, 78; Mazrui and Rotberg 1970, 904). These acts of violence had a millenarian character (Hobsbawm 1971). The Belgian administration changed sides and sup-

ported the Hutu and, from 1960 onwards, the Hutu began to gain prominent positions in Rwanda. Thus, "the events of Gitarama carried to its penultimate state the social and political revolution which had begun in late 1959" (Mazrui and Rotberg, 879). Its origins lay in the inequities of the social and political order and aimed at an irreversible shift in relations between the ruler and the ruled (Mazrui and Rotberg, 880; Maquet, 160). By the time of independence in 1962, Tutsi authority had been broken. The Tutsi fled the country by the thousand and, by 1962, 250,000 Tutsi left Rwanda (Newbury 1992, 197). Seven thousand were installed at the Nyambata camp for refugees, and 15,000 were distributed throughout the Bymba, Kisenyi, and

Bantu language of Kinyarwanda and share basically the same culture. In the words of Faustin Twagiramungu: "We are the luckiest people in Africa. We have the same language, the same religion—traditional religion, at least. No dance or song is particular to either Tutsis or Hutus" (*The Guardian Weekly* 1994). Anthropologists debate about whether these groups are castes or classes. The general consensus is, however, that a hierarchy existed between them. All the same, cognizance should be taken of the fact that social mobility and intermarriage blurred the "caste" distinction. A Hutu who was made a chief could become a Tutsi through "kwihutura" (shedding Hutuness). Conversely, a Tutsi family could lose its cattle, become farmers, and eventu-

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Astrida districts (Mazrui and Rotberg 1970, 909; C. Watson 1991, 2). Consequently, the Belgians appointed Hutu chiefs and subchiefs to occupy the posts which had been vacated (Mazrui and Rotberg 1970, 909). Thus, up to the end of their mandate, the Belgians accelerated the "revolutionary" forces which unleashed terror in Rwanda.

#### **Ethnic Conflict**

The conflict has also been portrayed as an ethnic civil war between the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Kigali regime. In the Kigali massacres, however, government troops and militias eliminated all moderate Hutu political opposition and attempted to erase the Tutsi population from the political map of Rwanda. The term "ethnic conflict," therefore, fails to capture what is now considered a genocide (Beresford 1994). A thorough understanding of the conflict must take into consideration Rwanda's past (Maquet 1961). The Banyarwanda (East Africa's largest ethnic group made up of 12 million, of whom 7.3 million live in Rwanda) all speak the

ally become Hutu (C. Watson 1991). The ethnicity argument is also unconvincing in view of the fact that some Hutu nobility saved their Tutsi friends and neighbours, and the first casualties of the pogrom turned out to be the Hutu (Beresford 1994). More importantly, confusion, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation characterize the treatment and group definitions of people by travellers, explorers, traders, European colonial administrators, geographers, and anthropologists. Ethnicity should be located clearly in time and space, and ethnic groups' tangled and often ludicrous histories should be traced (Southall 1985, 567; Amselle and M'Bokolo 1985).

The explanation of the crisis in terms of repression of the Tutsi by the regime in Kigali (whose power is mainly Hutu) does not capture the entire picture. In reality, both Hutu and Tutsi were at the mercy of a regional clique which repressed all of them. The genocide in Rwanda is rather the work of *escadron de la mort* who were armed and trained by Belgian and French mercenaries (*Rwandese Review* 1992).

## The Role of the Leadership

The leadership of Rwanda since independence shares part of the blame for the current crisis. Their failure to live above ethnic, regional, and group differences fed into an already existing atmosphere of hate and enmity. The regionalism and favouritism of the first Hutu president, Kayibanda (his government was dominated by people from central Rwanda), provoked regional tensions and culminated in the coup of 1973 (Newbury 1992, 198). Gregoire Kayibanda was overthrown in a bloodless coup d'état on July 5, 1973 by Major-General Juvenal Habyarimana. Habyarimana, a Hutu aristocrat and former army chief of staff, cited the failure to deal with tribal politics as one of the reasons for the coup d'état. In 1988, he was re-elected for a third five-year term as the unopposed presidential candidate.

However, Habyarimana and his clique proved no different from their predecessor (*Africa Confidential*, 1994 May). His politics of regionalism favoured the north, distorted development, and created a backlash of discontent. More importantly, his resistance to the repatriation of Rwandese exiles from Uganda, Tanzania, and Burundi culminated in the RPF drive to "come back home" (Adelman and Sorenson 1994, 143).

In addition, repression at home by the Habyarimana regime heightened tensions. According to Kayitare, security and safety for Tutsi students deteriorated from 1973 onwards. There was systematic harassment of Tutsi women who, in the absence of protection from University security personnel, called upon their male colleagues for support. Names of Tutsi students were posted at the entrances to buildings and they were enjoined to leave or face the consequences, i.e. physical violence (Murunganwa 1989, 10; *Africa Confidential* 1994 Aug). Unlike the repression of the 1960s, this one was aimed at specific groups—the educated, students, and those in skilled and semiskilled positions (Murunganwa 1989, 12).

In Uganda, the Banyarwanda fared badly between 1980 and 1985. The second Obote regime persecuted the Banyarwanda because they were "cousins" of Yoweri Museveni's ethnic group, the Banyankole, and expelled 40,000 of them in 1982 (C. Watson 1992, 53). Even though Tanzania offered citizenship to the 36,000 Banyarwandan refugees, less than 5,000 completed the costly paperwork and, in March 1990, Tanzania began to expel the 40,000 Rwandan migrants, mostly Hutu. In Zaire, Kinyarwanda speakers were classified as foreign and denied political rights (Watson 1992, 53). Thus, exile was harsh enough to drive some of them into RPF ranks.

In January 1991, the Rwandan Patriotic Front overran the northwestern Rwandan district of Ruhengeri and released all political prisoners. This daring attack forced French Marines (stationed in Rwanda since the October 1990 invasion) to evacuate French, Belgian, and German nationals from Ruhengeri and Gisenyi (*Africa Events* 1991). Despite the infusion of French paratroopers from Calvi, Corsica, the RPF offensive continued, prompting Habyarimana to call a ceasefire on February 16, 1991 and to agree to a regional summit. The summit brought together Ali Hasan Mwinyi of Tanzania, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Pierre Buyoya of Burundi, and Lunda Bululu (prime minister) of Zaire in Dar es Salaam. Here, Habyarimana, for once, expressed willingness to resettle refugees wishing to return home (C. Watson 1992, 53). He also offered general amnesty to all "rebels" who surrendered (*Africa Events* 1991). The RPF, however, rejected the ceasefire because they realized that the expansion of the fighting over the whole of northern Rwanda, rather than a spirit of compromise, occasioned the shift in Habyarimana's policies. Therefore, they wanted to take advantage of the momentum and bargain from a position of strength (*Sunday Standard*, 1989). The Habyarimana government responded to the invasion by giving carte blanche to troops and militia to massacre innocent civilians. Tutsi,

identified by their appearance and identity cards, were detained by soldiers and thrown into overcrowded police stations, jails, or football stadiums. Hundreds of children and the elderly perished in these conditions (*New African* 1990, 11; *Amnesty International Report* 1992, 223). Thousands of people fled the massacres and, within two weeks, 4,000 refugees had arrived at the border point in Kizinga. Refugees talked about government troops moving from village to village with lists of Tutsi to be executed. However, not only Tutsi were killed. Hutus suspected of collaborating with the rebels were likewise killed (*New African* 1990, 11).

Several summits, which aimed at finding solutions to the conflict between 1991 and 1994, produced few results due to the lack of commitment on the part of Habyarimana and the preoccupation of Mobutu Sese Seko with his own problems. On March 14, 1991, the Habyarimana government and the representatives of the Rwandese Patriotic Front met in Kinshasa, Zaire, to formalize the ceasefire. The position of the RPF at the talks was: an end to the discrimination against the Tutsi and the Twa minorities, a redress of regional imbalances, an improvement in human rights, and a clampdown on corruption and widespread abuse by the ruling Hutu clique (*Africa Events* 1991, 11). The RPF objective was the dismantling of the current institutions of dictatorship to enable the country to start on a new democratic path. However, talks on an all-party transitional government to end up the fighting ended nowhere.

The 1992 Amnesty International Report summed up the Rwandan situation thus:

Several thousand political detainees were held without trial until April when most were released. Dozens of members of the minority Tutsi ethnic group ... were arrested ... There were reports of torture, and "disappearances." Hundreds of extrajudicial executions by members of the security forces and vigilante groups were reported (*Amnesty International* 1992, 223).

According to the report, the Constitution was amended in June to introduce a multi-party (in place of the one-party) state and elections were scheduled for 1992. Unfortunately, several deadlines passed without any concrete attempt to implement the peace and constitutional plan.

In February 1994, President Habyarimana made a feeble effort to halt the Rwandan crisis by swearing in a transitional government. Four of the five parties involved refused to show up for the swearing-in ceremony because they were not satisfied with their promised share of power (P. Watson 1994; Beresford 1994, 23). Thus, for the fourth straight time, attempts to set up a multi-party government to rule till elections came to nought.

The shooting down of the plane carrying Presidents Habyarimana and Ntaryamira was the immediate cause of the massacres which were to reach genocidal proportions. In the second week of April 1994, extremist Hutus with machetes and guns murdered some 1,180 Tutsis at a church in Rwanda (*Toronto Star* 1994 April 16). Rampaging troops killed Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana who had sought refuge in the UN compound (*Toronto Star* 1994 April 8, A1; April 9, A12). As the slaughter got underway, the RPF began to drive the Hutu-dominated army and militia towards the south. In May, most of Rwanda's government fled south in the wake of the RPF onslaught. The self-declared government, set up after the death of Habyarimana, fled from Kigali to Gitarama a week later (*Toronto Star* 1994 May 30, A12).

Many refugees were driven by the RPF victory and the worsening conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu to Burundi in the south. Of those who survived the genocide, at least 2.2 million people are reported to have fled the country. In 5 days, a million Hutu refugees poured into Goma, Zaire. In camps across the eastern border with Tanzania and across the southern border in Burundi, hundreds of thousands of Hutu and Tutsi refugees languish (Gibbs 1994, 21). Hate radio broadcasts

by hardline Hutu spread hysteria among refugees, telling them that the new rulers would butcher them in reprisal and that they would thus be better off staying in the refugee camps (Brittain 1994; for an extended discussion of the French involvement in the Rwandan crisis, see Woldu and Abaka, *infra*).

The reasons behind the genocide in Rwanda and the forced migration of over two million people have often been couched in terms of ethnic clashes and the repression of the Tutsi by the Kigali regime. However, a careful analysis of the crisis shows that German and Belgian colonial policies, the activities of France and her allies, the failure to repatriate the Rwandese who had been forced out of the country, and the regionalism of Habyarimana and his ruling clique are the root causes. It is very important in the Rwandan question to recognize the fact that a person does not transmit refugee status to his child, grandchild, or great grandchild. ■

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