

# Genocide in Rwanda – The Origins and the Perpetrators

Shin'ichi Takeuchi

## Preconceptions concerning the Rwandan genocide

The Rwandan genocide in 1994 was a mass slaughter which we, living in the modern (or post-modern) world, experienced in real time. In the space of little more than 100 days nearly one million people were slaughtered, and some of this slaughter was witnessed worldwide through television images. The scenes of innumerable bodies lying on roadsides, left in schools and churches, and floating to the shores of lakes in neighbouring countries could not fail to affect all of us who saw them. This mass slaughter suddenly brought Rwanda, previously anonymous in the international community, to light as the centre of world attention, with vast numbers of people, including journalists and members of aid agencies, flocking to its borders.

Certain images have become attached to the Rwandan genocide in the public consciousness. This fact is not unrelated to the high level of international attention it received. The concepts of “conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu” and “neighbours slaughtering neighbours” gained currency partly as a means of responding to the public need for a simple explanation of the events in Rwanda. However, the questions of whether the genocide was really triggered by the conflict between the Tutsi and the Hutu, and whether it was actually a case of neighbours slaughtering neighbours, do not in fact have straightforward answers. The issues of the circumstances in which the genocide took place, and who its perpetrators were, are even today under examination, and remain unsolved.

Considering the seriousness of the mass slaughter in Rwanda – in terms of its scale and speed– the fact that the full details of the massacre remain unclear today, only twelve years later, should hardly be surprising. In order to answer the questions posed above, enormous efforts must be made by practitioners such as lawyers and politicians, as well as scholars. The purpose of this paper is, while calling into question the prevalent images associated with the genocide in Rwanda, to examine previous researches into this field and some testimonies that the author collected during his fieldwork<sup>1)</sup>, in order to answer the questions of what happened there in 1994, and why.

---

1) The author has carried out fieldwork in Rwandan rural area since 1999 in collaboration with Jean Marara of the Institut de Recherche Scientifique et Technologique. In this paper, interviews with prisoners that we held in 2003 will be especially examined. The author takes full responsibility of this paper and possible errors.

## How the genocide took place

The catalyst for the Rwandan genocide was the shooting down of the presidential aeroplane on the night of April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1994. Rwandan President J. Habyarimana, having just attended a meeting on regional security in Tanzania, was returning to Rwanda in his presidential plane. Just before it touched down at an airport in the suburbs of the capital Kigali, the plane was hit by two missiles, and crashed. All on board were killed.<sup>2)</sup> No sooner was the news of the assassination of the president made public, than mass slaughter began throughout Rwanda. The victims of this carnage were for the most part people of the Tutsi ethnic group. The Tutsi were a minority group making up just over one tenth of the total national population, and with the Hutu (over 80%) and the Twa (around 1%), constitute the Rwandan ethnic distribution. The Twa are said to be the indigenous people of this region (so-called Pygmies), and originally existed as hunter-gatherers. Especially before independence, the Hutu tended to concentrate their economic activity on crop farming, while cattle raising tended to be the centre of the Tutsi's economic activity. However, today such distinctions in way of life are non-existent. All groups speak the same languages (Kinyarwanda); neither are there any religious differences. All groups live interspersed within shared territories, and intermarriage between ethnicities is not uncommon. Yet in these circumstances, it was the Tutsi who were predominantly victimized by this slaughter.

While the vast majority of deaths were among the Tutsi in terms of sheer number, the Hutu and Twa victims were not insignificant either. For example, shortly after the killing began, several highly-placed Hutu officials of anti-government factions were killed in the capital. In this case, regardless of ethnicity, the issue of whether a given person constituted an opposing political force to the government became the deciding factor in the undertaking of the massacres. The genocide in Rwanda can be conceived of as consisting of an urban element in which key figures in anti-government forces were killed regardless of their ethnicity, and a rural element in which ethnic Tutsi were the victims of slaughter.<sup>3)</sup> (D. Newbury [1998])

The massacre, which began in earnest the day after the president's assassination, advanced at an astonishing speed, and on an astonishing scale. It is thought that the number of victims totaled approximately 800,000, but the exact statistics are unknown. The total population of Rwanda at the time is estimated at just under eight million, which yields a figure of

---

2) The perpetrators of this assassination remain unknown. The theory that the perpetrators were extremists within the Habyarimana government has been widely accepted (see Prunier [1995]); but recently there have been moves in France to prosecute high officials of the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) for these actions.

3) If one were to remain faithful to the definitions of the "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" adopted at the United Nations in 1948, and maintain the position that genocide refers to the mass killing of a specific ethnic group, then it is possible to view the massacre of the Tutsi as the *only* instance of genocide in Rwanda. However, it is this author's opinion that such a restricted view would be inappropriate. The massacres committed after the assassination of President Habyarimana, whether their victims were the Tutsi or anti-government Hutu groups, were all conducted by the extremist groups within the government for the same reasons. To remove certain instances from the category of genocide simply because of the ethnicity of the victims, when the philosophy behind them is unchanged, would simply lead to an unfortunate narrowing of the concept of genocide.

approximately 10% who were slaughtered. At least 80% of the Tutsi population of the time in Rwanda was lost. The massacres continued from immediately after the president's assassination, throughout the civil war which was recurred by this event, and until the military victory for the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) on the 18 of July, some 100 days later. The killings were particularly concentrated in a period extending from the second week of April to the third week of May.<sup>4)</sup> The methods used in this massacre will be discussed later, but during this period ordinary citizens were being killed throughout the country.

### The origins of the conflict

In order to answer the question of why an ethnic group that has no clear linguistic, religious or occupational differences should become the target of slaughter, we must turn to Rwandan history. Rwanda is a rare example of an African state which had existed prior to European colonization, and which managed to maintain for the most part its original territory through the process of colonization, before becoming an independent sovereign state in 1962. The country's history stretches back at least as far as the seventeenth century, and the establishment of the Tutsi and Hutu ethnic groups was closely related with the process of the state formation of the Rwandan kingdom. The word "Tutsi" was used from the seventeenth century in the royal court as a term by which the political elite referred to themselves, but in the mid-eighteenth century it underwent a semantic change to refer to those involved in military activity, as an antonym of "Hutu", which referred to non-military people. At the time in Rwanda, warriors were recruited from the cattle raisers, while the crop farmers were not required to fight. This fact led to the words Tutsi and Hutu differentiating between the economic activities of each group.

Later, with the developing hegemony of the royal court in the nineteenth century, a hierarchical relationship between the cattle raisers and crop farmers began to develop, as the former deprived the latter of land rights and imposed forced labour. In this sense, there existed a relationship of domination and subservience between the Tutsi and the Hutu prior to colonization.<sup>5)</sup> However, it must be noted that this pre-colonial hierarchical relationship between the Tutsi and the Hutu only existed in one part of the country. The Rwanda of the time was of a very different nature to the modern sovereign states which cover the globe today. It had no defined borders, and the area over which the court exerted its controlling influence was in constant flux. It should be thought of as containing a nucleus, where the royal court had established a stable political domination, and its surrounding area that was ever-changing frontier lands. While the hierarchical relationship between the Tutsi and the Hutu was firmly

---

4) Prunier calculates that 80% of the victims were killed in this period, and claims that the speed of the massacre was over five times that of the Nazi persecution of the Jews. (Prunier [1995:261])

5) Vansina (2001) discusses the pre-colonial history of Rwanda in detail, including the relationship between the Tutsi and the Hutu. In this field, Vansina's research seems to be unrivalled at the present time. Traditionally, under influence from the "Hamitic Hypothesis" which will be examined later in this paper, the historical understanding that the Twa were the indigenous people of Rwanda, and that the Hutu migrated later, only for both groups to be subjugated by the Tutsi in the later formation of the Rwandan kingdom, has enjoyed widespread recognition. However, the contention that the Tutsi and Hutu arrived in different eras is questioned today. Vansina rejects the scientific appropriateness of this theory.

established in the nucleus of the kingdom, in the surrounding areas it varied between the fragile and the non-existent. Indeed, the very concepts of Tutsi and Hutu held little importance in the surrounding areas. In these areas, the native lineage retained their land rights without losing any land to the central cattle raisers (Tutsi), which meant that lineage belonging held a far greater importance than any concepts of Hutu or Tutsi.<sup>6)</sup>

This inter-group dynamic underwent a dramatic transformation in the colonial period. There were two major factors leading to this. Firstly, the colonial forces supported the king by suppressing any uprisings in the territory, and contributed, at least in a short run, to a strengthening of the power of the court. A protection treaty signed between the Rwandan king and Germany at the end of the nineteenth century signaled the start of the colonial era. However, Germany feared a clash with Rwanda, which possessed the strongest military in central Africa at the time, and so refrained from interfering in its internal politics, instead working to support the king and to stabilize his domination. In the land declared as Rwandan territory by the colonial borders, there were areas which had not been loyal to the king, but Germany controlled these areas through the threat of its modern military machine. By the early 1910s, major uprisings had been stamped out, and for the first time in its history, the authority of the king extended over almost all Kinyarwanda speakers. As a result, previously autonomous areas declared their allegiance to the king, and forced labour and taxation became universal. This led to the hierarchical relationship between the Tutsi and the Hutu which had previously been confined to the centre of the country, spreading throughout the territory.

Secondly, the administrative overhaul initiated by the colonial forces from the 1920s onwards brought about radical changes in the governmental system, and significantly altered the relationship between the ethnic groups. After the First World War, Belgium replaced Germany as administrator of the territory of Rwanda, and began colonial management of the country. Seeking to streamline the management of their colonies, Belgium simplified the complex administrative structure of Rwanda, as part of which they appointed only the Tutsi as heads of local administrations, and ousted the Hutu. While a vertical relationship was being developed between the Tutsi and the Hutu in the centre of the country, the regional administration up until this point had ensured a certain maintenance of hierarchical position for the Hutu, such as by appointing some Hutu chiefs to gather tax from the peasants. However, as well as dramatically reducing the number of “chiefs” (and “sub-chiefs” beneath them) in the regional administrative structures, the Belgians thought that all such posts should be filled by the Tutsi.

Theories of racialism, widespread in Europe at the time, undoubtedly played a part in this Belgian policy, and we must recognize that the understanding of Rwandan society at the time

---

6) The term “lineage” refers to a genetically related group extending back five or six generations. Each of the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa formed their own lineages. Originally, the lineage of the individuals who cultivated any given area of land held the rights to that land. With the establishment of the kingdom of Rwanda, the royal court deprived the lineages of their land rights, and imposed hierarchical relationships. In C. Newbury’s research in the south-west of Rwanda, near the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, it was confirmed that even as late as the end of the nineteenth century, all those who came to the area from the centre of the country were referred to as Tutsi, and all original inhabitants were known as Hutu. (Newbury, C. [1988:253,fn.34])

was profoundly informed by these theories. In Europe from the nineteenth century, the so-called “Hamitic Hypothesis”, which suggested that it was the Caucasoid Hamitic peoples who brought civilization to Black Africa, was widely believed (Sanders [1969]). According to the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, Ham was one of Noah’s sons. He was cursed for peeking at Noah’s naked body and banished, but as he remained a son of Noah, his descendents shared the same lines of descent as the Europeans (Caucasians). The Hamitic people were thought to live in north-east African countries such as Ethiopia and Somalia, but explorers who had been to the Great Lakes Region<sup>7)</sup> in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century determined that the ruling classes of the various kingdoms in the region were Hamitic, due to the fact that they were similar in body type to the people of north-east Africa. In other words, it was believed that these Hamitic people had come from Ethiopia, conquered the indigenous peoples and established kingdoms in the Great Lakes Region.<sup>8)</sup>

With respect to the situation in Rwanda, the Tutsi were seen as the Caucasoid Hamitic race, and the Hutu as the native African Bantu race. Based on this racialistic theory, the Europeans saw the Tutsi as the ruling race, and the Hutu and Twa as the subservient race. This perception prevailed not only among the Belgian colonial administrative officials, but throughout the European community stationed in Rwanda. The policy of the removal of the Hutu from key administrative posts was seen as a matter-of-course. Further, the version of history in which Rwanda was established by the Tutsi who arrived from Ethiopia, was adopted as the official national history, and as such spread in the collective consciousness through its teaching in schools and churches.

### The “Sociale Revolution” and continuity after independence

The conflict which occurred in November 1959, three years before independence was achieved, was a direct result of colonial policy. With the opening of party activity as a preparatory stage for independence, clashes intensified between parties supporting the Tutsi-centred status quo and parties calling for the expansion of the rights of the Hutu, leading to violent confrontations throughout the country between the parties’ supporters. These confrontations took the form of peasant revolts against the chiefs and sub-chiefs, but as the former were Hutu and the later Tutsi, these were also ethnic conflicts. The Hutu elite, angered at being ousted from power, called for an end to the “dual colonialism” of the Tutsi and the colonial forces. Faced with this situation, the colonial authorities changed policy and supported the political parties led by the

---

7) The Great Lakes Region refers to an area of land stretching across modern day Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the north-west of Tanzania, which receives its name from the fact that several lakes of various sizes, including Lake Victoria and Lake Tanganyika are scattered throughout the region. In this region existed the traditional kingdoms of Nyoro, Nkole (both part of present-day Uganda), Rwanda, Burundi, and Haya (part of present-day Tanzania), all of which featured minority groups whose way of life was based upon cattle raising in the upper echelons of society. Among these, Rwanda is considered to have featured the clearest hierarchical relationship between ethnic groups. See Maquet [1973] for further information concerning these kingdoms.

8) This perception appeared as early as the mid-nineteenth century in the works of the British explorer J. H. Speke, who visited the Great Lakes Region in search of the source of the Nile (Speke [1864]).

Hutu elite, and stopped the chiefs and sub-chiefs from suppressing the peasant rebellion.<sup>9)</sup> As a result, the conflict began to move in a direction favourable to the Hutu elite, and while they took control of the independence movement, many of the Tutsi, particularly the chiefs, sub-chiefs and their families, fled to neighbouring countries as refugees. The number of such refugees reached approximately 200,000 by the early 1960s.

After independence, Rwanda was ruled by the Hutu elite, in a reversal of the situation in the colonial era. The late colonial-era conflict was viewed by the Hutu as an extremely important turning point in Rwandan history from the “feudalistic” rule of the minority Tutsi to the majority Hutu “democracy”, and was labeled the “Sociale Revolution”. The perception of this “Sociale Revolution” as the incident which justified the government’s rule was maintained by both the first post-independence government, led by G. Kaybanda, and by Habyarimana who overthrew the Kaybanda government in a coup d’état in 1973. Further, both administrations continued the diffusion of the view of Rwandan history established in the colonial era, although now it was used to justify the post-Social Revolution Hutu elite government as the oppressed majority which had fought for its freedom from the Ethiopian-originated Tutsi oppressors.

In October 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front attacked Rwanda from the northern border with Uganda, leading to the outbreak of civil war. The core members of the RPF were the Tutsi refugees who had been driven out of their country during the “Social Revolution” and their children. For example, the supreme commander of the RPF, and current president of Rwanda, P. Kagame, was born in 1957, and sought asylum with his family at the age of just three. However, the RPF was a guerrilla movement united in criticism of the Habyarimana government’s monopoly of power by minority elite under a one-party system, and also featured a significant number of Hutu members.

During the civil war, the extremists professing Hutu supremacism within the Habyarimana government presented the conflict as ethnic in nature, and stirred up anti-Tutsi sentiment. They frightened the people with tales of the retribution: the RPF, who were presented as a Tutsi group desiring a return to the previous political structure, would wreak if they were to ever claim power. Behind these moves from the extremists to reframe the political confrontation between the Habyarimana government and the RPF as an ethnic antagonism between the Tutsi and the Hutu, was the fact that the political structure of the time was undergoing a period of destabilization. Stuck in a long period of economic stagnation, Rwanda was forced into a series of widespread fiscal cutbacks under the guidance of the international financial organizations from the latter half of the 1980s. Further, pressured by developed countries following the end of the Cold War the one-party system of the MRND (Mouvement révolutionnaire national pour le développement) was abolished,<sup>10)</sup> and the introduction of a multi-party system was approved.

9) After World War II, Rwanda was made a United Nations Trust Territory, and Belgium was requested to prepare it for independence and to manage the country democratically. The fact that the minority Tutsi were monopolizing power was seen as undesirable, and Belgium was pressured into instigating political reform. Moreover, the colonial authority distrusted the Tutsi party that was calling for the immediate independence and the departure of Belgians. The international pressure and the distrust against the Tutsi party lie behind Belgium’s change in policy in the late colonial period.

10) After seizing power in the 1973 coup d’état, Habyarimana founded the MRND, and maintained a system whereby it was the only legal party.



In other words, the Habyarimana government was forced into a delicate balancing act involving fighting a civil war on the one hand while instigating unpopular economic reforms and removing the ban on competitive party political activity on the other. It is a common political trick to distract the population from internal trouble by directing attention toward an external enemy. The extremists in the Habyarimana government sought to justify their own rule by placing the Tutsi, originally part of the same country, on the outside, and encouraging a sense of crisis among the majority Hutu.

This ethnic-oriented philosophy was an extension of the racialism introduced in the colonial era. The radicals made use of the freedom of media which accompanied political liberty, and used newspapers and radio, as well as political meetings, to repeatedly incite hatred towards the Tutsi. The rhetoric used in this process frequently reveals the influence of the historical view established by the colonial authorities. On November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1992, the Hutu supremacist ideologue L. Mugesera delivered a speech containing the following rhetoric:

...The fatal mistake we made in 1959 was to let them [the Tutsi] get out. [...] They belong in Ethiopia and we are going to find them a shortcut to get there by throwing them into the Nyabarongo river [which flows northwards]. (cited from Prunier [1995: 172])

Indeed, during the massacres of 1994, innumerable bodies were thrown into the Nyabarongo, and ended up floating to the shores of lakes in neighbouring countries.

## State-led violence

When the genocide in Rwanda first came to the attention of the international community, it was explained by the then Rwandan government as a result of “long-standing tribal conflict”. J. Bicamumpaka, Foreign Minister of the interim government installed following the assassination of President Habyarimana, explained the situation to the United Nations in the following terms.

The Rwandese tragedy derives from the age-old history of the nation of Rwanda. The hatred that is erupting now was forged over four centuries of cruel and ruthless domination of the Hutu majority by the haughty and domineering Tutsi minority. [...] All of that events, one after the other [this refers to the shooting down of the presidential plane and the reopening of the civil war] unleashed the animal instinct of a people afraid of being enslaved once again. (Speech delivered to the United Nations Security Council, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1994. Cited from Morris & Scharf (vol.2)[1997: 251-252])

In this way, the Foreign Minister explained that the violence of the populace was a spontaneous reaction of “animal instinct”, driven by fear of a return to the pre-Social Revolution “tyrannical and cruel rule” of the Tutsi which the RPF might bring. The reality of the genocide contradicts this explanation in its entirety. It would be fair to suggest that the governmental authorities of the time, exemplified by the foreign minister, explained away the

genocide as a spontaneous act of the people in order to cover up their own responsibility in the matter. There is no doubt that the mass killings which took place in Rwanda were conducted with the significant involvement of the political elite.

With the beginning of the civil war, newspaper and radio stations calling for the expulsion of the Tutsi were established, and it was a group known in Rwandan language as “*Akazu*” (meaning small house) from the core of the Habyarimana government which supplied them with fiscal and personnel aid. The members of *Akazu*, being mainly composed of the brothers of Habyarimana’s wife Agathe and other members of his extended family, were deeply involved in the establishment of all of the major radical media outlets such as the tabloid newspaper *Kangura* and the *Radio Télévision - Libre des Mille Collines* (Chrétien (dir.)(1995)).

An interim government was established after the president’s assassination, but it was the chief of cabinet in the Ministry of Defense T. Bagosora who controlled the government from behind the scenes. A former aide of Habyarimana’s, he stepped into the political vacuum left by the assassination and formed a cabinet predominantly filled with extremists, and on April 9<sup>th</sup>, three days after the assassination, appointed the former speaker of the house of parliament T. Sindikubwabo as the new President. This newly formed extremist government proceeded to take a leading role in conducting genocide. Focusing on retribution for the assassination of President Habyarimana and viewing the RPF and the Tutsi as one and the same, the new government effectively ordered the massacre of thousands of Tutsi all over the territory<sup>11)</sup>. This order was also carried to rural areas by branches of the extremist parties and militia groups such as the *Interahamwe*.<sup>12)</sup>

The massacres in Rwanda are often described as “the killing of neighbours by neighbours”. While it is an undisputed fact that the slaughter in Rwanda in 1994 extended across the entire country, and vast numbers of civilians were involved in one way or another, the widely prevailing image of “ordinary people” conducting the massacres requires careful reexamination.

It was argued above in explaining the process of the genocide in Rwanda that the victims differed between urban and rural areas. Differences can also be detected between the perpetrators in the two areas. In the cities, it was the elite corps of the military such as the presidential guards and para-commandos who slaughtered key anti-government figures (Melvern [2003:143-144]). After compiling a list of all of the anti-establishment leaders, these groups forced their way into the houses of those on the list, killing them and their families. Additionally, after declaring the shooting down of the presidential plane to be a conspiracy between the RPF and Belgium, they slaughtered Prime Minister A. Uwilingiyimana, a Hutu

11) In this process, relationship between the military and the interim government was complex. The international community such as the United Nations warned Bagosora, who had been known as a hardliner, against possible military coup in the confusion, and recommended him to make efforts to form civil government. Bagosora did not wield complete control over the entire military, and the moderate General Gatsinzi was selected as the successor to the Chief of Staff who was also onboard the president’s plane. At the same time, civilian government posts were predominantly filled by Hutu supremacists. This was due to Bagosora’s strong influence, as well as the fact that anti-government officials were almost all assassinated after the president’s death. Under pressure from the civilian government, Gatsinzi was relieved of his duties after just ten days in the post, and the extremists seized control of the military as well.

12) The *Interahamwe* was a militia group belonging to President Habyarimana’s MRND party.



woman originally of the opposition party, and ten Belgian peacekeepers of the UNAMIR (United Nations Assistance Mission For Rwanda) assigned to guard her.<sup>13)</sup> These killings were carried out in the next morning of the assassination of the president.

While the full details of the rural massacres have still not come to light, it is clear that they were carried out by a different group to the urban massacres. How the killings took place may differed from region to region, but I would like at this point to detail the situation in Rukara in the eastern province of Umutara and in Gishanvu in the southern province of Butare, in which the author has carried out research since 1999.

Rukara, in the east of Rwanda, lay on the RPF's advance route after the reopening of the civil war, and by the end of April had been taken over by the RPF, after a series of vicious massacres. The killings were undertaken via group attacks known as "*ibitero*".<sup>14)</sup> These attacks varied in scale, from small-scale killings of Tutsi inhabitants in and around residential areas to the mass slaughter of large numbers of citizens who had fled to churches and the like. In Rukara, the "*ibitero*" were mainly led by the leaders of local administrative authorities. Even after the introduction of a multi-party system, support for the MRND remained strong in this region, and the heads of the local administrative authorities were in most cases unchanged from the one-party era.<sup>15)</sup> It was these officials who led the attacks, which were carried out by sometimes as many as dozens of local militias or local residents. Firearms were not generally used; rather, agricultural tools such as machetes, axes, or handmade weapons such as "*amahiri*"<sup>16)</sup> were the weapons of choice.

Before the "*ibitero*" could be carried out, many Tutsi citizens, hearing the news of President Habyarimana's assassination, fled from their houses and sought refuge in churches and schools in fear of possible persecution. The attacks launched against these refugees often featured the involvement of armed military or police. The following testimony is an account of an attack on a church in the centre of the Rukara region.

The Tutsi fled to the church on the night of April the 7<sup>th</sup>. The first to attack the church were the *Interahamwe* from Murambi.<sup>17)</sup> While they threatened those who had fled into

---

13) The extremists within the Habyarimana government, which resisted the completion of a peace accord with the RPF, had an uneasy relationship with the UNAMIR which had been sent to oversee the signing of the accord, and the radical mass media launched frequent attacks upon it. Further, former colonial ruler Belgium endured criticism from the extremists for suspending all military aid upon the outbreak of civil war in 1990, and forming the core of the UNAMIR peacekeepers, as opposed to France, which enjoyed a hospitable relationship with the Habyarimana government, continuing aid even in the period of civil war. It was in this political situation that news of the president's assassination emerged, and rumours spread that Belgium and the RPF were responsible. Following the massacre of ten of its soldiers, Belgium announced its withdrawal from the peace keeping operation, and UNAMIR, having lost the core of its forces, was essentially forced to withdraw.

14) "*Ibitero*" (singular form "*igitero*") is a derivative of the verb "*guteru*" (to attack).

15) During the one-party era, party organization and state administrative structure were completely integrated, meaning that only active supporters of the MRND could become heads of local administrative authorities.

16) "*Amahiri*" refers to a weapon made by attaching a lot of nails to the end of a pole.

17) Murambi was the neighbouring region to Rukara. At the time, the powerful politician Gatete Jean-Baptiste, an ardent loyalist of President Habyarimana, exerted a powerful influence over this region, and the organization of the *Interahamwe* proceeded under his direction. As for Gatete, see African Rights [2000].

the church, they were unable to inflict any serious damage.

Rumours began to surface that M, the Bourgmestre<sup>18)</sup> of Rukara, was coward, as he did not attack the Tutsi who had fled to the church. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, he brought with him a troop of military police...

R, the brigadier of the military police squad, drew his finger across his throat, indicating that all within were to be killed. The Bourgmestre had known and approved the direction. From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup>, the soldiers killed everyone in the church.<sup>19)</sup>

As is clear from this testimony, the massacre of the Tutsi who had fled to such asylums as church and school, was only made possible through the involvement of forces armed with modern weapons such as guns and hand grenades (army, military police, police). As militias did not usually have firearms, they alone were unable to penetrate the defenses of the refugees in the church, and so the leaders of the administrative authorities requested military forces to assist the siege.

Next I would like to consider the case of Gishanvu, in the south. The massacres did not begin in earnest in this region until April 20<sup>th</sup>. At the time, the governor of Butare prefecture, in which Gishanvu lay, was the only Tutsi in this position in all of Rwanda, and he was able to prevent the spread of genocide. However, the governor was removed from his post on April 17<sup>th</sup>, and later killed. After his removal, the killings spread rapidly in the area. As Butare had the largest Tutsi population in Rwanda at the time, once the massacres began, they produced victims at a devastating rate (Takeuchi [2003]).

In both Gishanvu and Rukara, there were two distinct types of “*ibitero*”: those carried out in or near residential areas using agricultural implements or handmade weapons, and those targeting churches or schools where large numbers of refugees had gathered, in which modern small firearms were the prime means of killing. What was distinctive about the killings in Gishanvu was that the leaders of the “*ibitero*” were political party activists as well as the heads of administrative authorities.

In April 1994, a rumour circulated that people wore on banana leaves<sup>20)</sup> were coming towards us from Gikongoro<sup>21)</sup>, and the “Responsible”<sup>22)</sup> commend us to defend the cell against them and maintain order. When they eventually arrived, we found that they were MDR supporters. I recognized some of their faces, such as Alfred, who was born in 1967, and who I knew from school. He was also known as an MDR activist. About fifty of them

18) Bourgmestre refers to the head of a “commune”, the local administrative unit directly beneath the prefecture. In the context of this paper, both Rukara and Gishanvu were “communes” at the time in 1994. However, it should be noted that Umutara prefecture was only established as an administrative unit after the civil war, and during the war Rukara was a part of Byumba prefecture.

19) This is the testimony of N.L., taken at Nsinda Prison on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003. N.L. himself admitted his complicity in the crime of genocide.

20) Banana leaves were important items of warriors’ costume in Rwanda’s traditional context.

21) Gikongoro is the neighbouring prefecture to Butare. In this prefecture, the massacres began earlier than in Butare, in early April.

22) The “responsible” is the head of a “cell”; the smallest local administrative unit. A “cell” typically contains a population of several hundred.

came, blowing their whistles and yelling...Contrary to the rumours, however, they did not come from Gikongoro, but in fact from the neighbouring S sector<sup>23)</sup>. When they arrived, they began burning the houses of the Tutsi. They knew exactly where the Tutsi lived.<sup>24)</sup>

The MDR (Mouvement démocratique républicain) was a political party created after the introduction of the multi-party system in 1991, and inherited the legacy of the party which called for Hutu liberation during the “Sociale Revolution”. During the Habyarimana government, the MDR was the opposition party, but in 1993 they effectively split into two groups – the Hutu supremacist block which categorically refused to negotiate with the RPF, and the moderate block which believed in the negotiation. The term “MDR supporters”, as used in the context of the above testimony, refers to supporters of the Hutu supremacist block. Unlike the east of the country, in which support for the MRND was strong, in prefectures such as Butare in the south, the MDR was very popular. In these regions, these party activists, being clearly influenced by national level politicians who joined the Hutu supremacist block, led acts of “*ibitero*”.

As has been made clear from the examples of Rukara and Gishanvu, it was generally individuals with links to national level politics, such as the heads of local administrative authorities and local party activists, who led the genocide in rural areas. While it is true that ordinary civilians participated in the attacks, it was these political figures who incited and organized them. Furthermore, the massacres carried out in places such as churches and schools would have been impossible without the participation of the military or military police with their modern weaponry. In this respect, the phrase “the massacre of neighbours by neighbours” does not accurately represent the genocide in Rwanda.

The differences in the leaders of the “*ibitero*” observed in Rukara and Gishavu, reflect the political situation at the national level at the time of the genocide. As mentioned above, with the introduction of the multi-party system in 1991, the MRND, previously the only political party in Rwanda, saw its power wane, and opposition parties such as the MDR expanded their power base to fill this void. As the “*Akazu*”, which controlled the nucleus of the state power during the one-party era, gradually lost its footing in the government and in the military, the newly rising opposition powers strengthened their influence over national politics. However, at the same time as this movement, from midway through 1993 the opposition party effectively split in two, with the Hutu supremacist group gaining power rapidly within each of the opposition parties, eventually merging with the conventional extremist parties such as CDR (Coalition pour la Défense de la République) and MRND to form an enormous Hutu supremacist block known as “Hutu Power”.

The aforementioned media strategy of the “*Akazu*” certainly played a large role in the

---

23) A “sector” is also a local administrative unit, which is composed of several cells and contains thousands of population.

24) Testimony of N.S., taken at Butare Prison on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003. N.S. also admitted his involvement in the crime of genocide.

establishment of this enormous extremist block, but another factor which significantly contributed to this state of affairs was the fact that the opposition party, by virtue of the fact that it was able to force its way into positions of importance in the government, was able to counter the RPF in peace negotiations. This encouraged the emergence of forces opposing the RPF from within the opposition parties, and brought them closer to the MRND and the “*Akazu*”<sup>25</sup>). The “*Akazu*” and a part of the opposition party, which originally had very different ideals, found their interests conflating with the discovery of a common enemy in the RPF, under the conditions of civil war, leading to the creation of an immense extremist political force. Ironically, the weakening of the political power base of the “*Akazu*” led to the birth of the “Hutu power”.

It was those connected to this extremist block in the centre who led the genocide in rural areas. In Rukara, this was the leaders of the local administrative authorities appointed during the one-party era, while in Gishanvu, it was those relating to the Hutu supremacist political party which emerged after the introduction of the multi-party electoral system. In both cases, they enjoyed direct or indirect relationships with political elite in the national level, and carried out “*ibitero*” in rural areas with the background of this “patron-client” relationship supporting them. Unlike during the one-party era, when the “*Akazu*” wielded tremendous influence, the state-central government at this time was made up of a number of different political forces with differing political ideals. Under the feeling of uncertainty and threat among political elite caused and amplified by the collapse of the power systems that the Habyarimana regime had established, and of the situation of civil war, the extremist group of strange bedfellows expanded rapidly, and it was this political climate which made the sudden and dramatic spread of genocide possible.

### In conclusion: Implications for practical issues

Focusing on case studies of genocide in Rwanda, this paper has put forth a thesis which has made it clear that the Rwandan genocide was largely the result of the process of the history of the colonial and post-colonial eras, and of state-level political machinations. While the ethnic divisions of Tutsi and Hutu predate colonization, the nature of all relationships between these groups was definitely altered during the colonial era. The genocide in Rwanda must be considered within the post-colonial political context. The reason that the Tutsi, as a specific ethnic group, were the victims of this slaughter, was not due to any “inherent” feature of their ethnicity *per se*, but a result of the political situation encompassing the ethnic issue.

So, under what political circumstances did ethnicity become politicized, and lead to the carrying out of genocide? The “Sociale Revolution” had its beginnings in the power struggle between rival political parties on the eve of independence. The genocide of 1994 occurred

---

25) The RPF’s breach of the ceasefire agreement in February 1993 seemed to be an important trigger for the growth of extremist faction in the opposition parties. It is said that the RPF canceled temporarily the ceasefire agreement to show their military supremacy (Jones [2001: 82-83]). The act was a great menace not only to the Habyarimana faction, but also oppositional leaders who participated in the government.

under the influence of the civil war which broke out four years earlier from the conflict over the rule of the Habyarimana government. It would therefore be accurate to conclude that the politicization of ethnicity in Rwanda took place in the context of power struggle over the state rule. As the outbreak of such conflicts (or power struggle) has been always related with the international aspects such as process of colonization, de-colonization and the end of the Cold War, it is clear that the politicization of ethnicity, and hence the genocide, in Rwanda must be considered in a global context.

Finally, the contributions of this paper to the practical issue of how future genocide can be prevented should be considered. The case of Rwanda demonstrates how genocide can emerge as a result of armed conflict. These massacres did not suddenly take place in peace time, but in a civil war situation, as a destabilized government made use of ethnic symbolism to make hatred and plan slaughter. Therefore, one vital requirement for preventing genocide is to avoid an eruption of radical violence, such as armed conflict. This paper has made the link between Rwandan armed conflict and problems concerning state rule clear. A state rule monopolized by a minority group, and its perpetuation especially by the silent support of the international community for it, lay behind the outbreak of civil war.

The current RPF-led Rwandan government has, in an effort to learn from the mistakes which led to genocide, removed all ethnic rhetoric from the public domain. Not only has ethnicity been removed from all identification documents, but the mention of ethnicity have become taboo in Rwanda. Despite this, however, this paper has demonstrated how the current government's policies have not always been effective in suppressing ethnic conflict.

As has been stressed repeatedly in this paper, even when ethnicity holds central importance in armed conflict, the root of the problem lies in the political context in which the concept of ethnicity has been manipulated. Therefore, the key to overcoming these issues is not in ethnicity itself, but in the governmental and political sphere. For all that ethnic rhetoric has been expunged from the public domain, if monopolization of power and despotic governmental rule continue, then conflict will easily break out, and with conflict will necessarily come the politicization of ethnicity. What is vital is to institutionalize the state power struggle in order to avoid eruption of violence<sup>26)</sup> Furthermore, the fact that this paper has stressed the influence exerted by international relations on the genocide in Rwanda, is evidence that the international community has a vital role to play in the proper establishment of such political systems. Unfortunately, research on post-civil war Rwanda tends to suggest that the political rule remains highly autocratic (Dorsey [2000]; Pottier [2002]). It is vital that research be continued into what steps the international community can put into place to ensure the development and institutionalization of democracy in Rwanda.

---

26) State power struggles take place in all countries. What is important is whether these power struggles take place within the rules laid out for them, and whether the institutions are in place to ensure that these conflicts do not degenerate into physical violence.

## References

- African Rights (2000), *Jean-Baptiste Gatete: En liberté en Tanzanie?*, London.
- Chrétien, Jean-Pierre (dir.) (1995), *Rwanda: Les médias du génocide*, Paris: Karthala.
- Dorsey, Michael (2000), “Violence and Power-Building in Post-Genocide Rwanda”, in Doom, Ruddy & Jan Gorus (eds.), *Politics of Identity and Economics of Conflict in the Great Lakes Region*, Brussels: VUB University Press, pp. 311-348.
- ICTR (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda) (1999), *Case No. ICTR-96-12-1, The Prosecutor Against Anatole Nsengiumva, Amended Indictment*, August 12, 1999.
- Jones, Bruce D. (2001), *Peacekeeping in Rwanda: The Dynamics of Failure*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Maquet, Jacques (1971), *Power and Society in Africa*, London : Weidenfeld & Nicolson. (translated into Japanese by Hideo Oda) *Africa – sono kenryoku to shakai*, Heibonsha, 1973.
- Melvorn, Linda (2004), *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*, London: Verso.
- Morris, Virginia & Michael P. Scharf (1998), *The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda* (Volume 1, 2), New York: Transnational Publishers.
- Newbury, Catharine (1988), *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda, 1860-1960*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Newbury, David (1998), “Understanding Genocide”, *African Studies Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 73-97.
- Pottier, Johan (2002), *Re-Imagining Rwanda: Conflict, Survival and Disinformation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prunier, Gérard (1995), *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide, 1959-1994*, London: Hurst.
- Sanders, Edith R. (1969), “The Hamitic Hypothesis; Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective,” in *Journal of African History*, X, 4, pp.521-532
- Speke, John Hanning (1864), *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, (vol. 1), Edinburgh: Blackwood.
- Takeuchi, Shin’ichi (2003), “Butare no gyakusatsu – Rwanda no genocide to ‘futsuu no hitobito’” in Takeuchi, Shin’ichi (ed.) *Kokka-Bouryoku-Seiji – Asia-Africa no funsou o megutte*, Institute of Developing Economies. (“Massacres in Butare: Rwandan Genocide and Ordinary People”, in S. Takeuchi ed. *State, Violence, and Politics: Conflicts in Asia and Africa*)
- Vansina, Jan (2001), *Le Rwanda ancien: Le royaume nyiginya*, Paris: Karthala.