

At Issue: Ethnicity, Violence, and the Narrative of Genocide: The Dangers of a Third-Term in Rwanda

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Abstract: Rwanda's upcoming August 2017 presidential election provides a unique opportunity for the international community to reflect upon the past and contemplate the future of a nation that has struggled with intense ethnic factionalism for much of its history. In particular, incumbent President Paul Kagame's bid for a third-term is cause to consider the merits and dangers of his continued rule. While Kagame is often hailed for his role in ending the 1994 civil war and ushering in an era of stability and economic growth, in recent years his regime has faced widespread criticism for rampant human rights abuses, repression of civil liberties, growing income inequality, clandestine involvement in regional conflicts, and suppression of political opposition. Despite strong evidence for many of these allegations, to date Kagame and his ideologues have escaped any major international censure by virtue of his brash indignation toward any indictments and his willingness to utilize the memory of genocide to deflect criticism. However, closer analysis of the Kagame government reveals that in many ways it is recreating the economic, social, and political conditions that have in the past led to the proliferation of ethnic tensions and heralded outbreaks of violence. Therefore, it is a critical juncture for the international community to consider intervention prior to the 2017 elections to compel more substantive democratization characterized by ethnic power-sharing in order to forestall any potential resurgences of violence and ensure that Rwanda continues on its path towards reconciliation and stability.

Introduction

Modern Rwanda is a land of contradictions, a country with two pasts and two presents. One Rwanda is an unabashed African success story, lauded by the international community for a GDP growth rate that averages 8 percent, its impressive halving of infant and maternal mortality ratios, and for exceeding parity in women's representation in parliament. This Rwanda not only returned from the brink of self-destruction in 1994, but went on to achieve stability and prosperity. The man at the forefront of this Rwanda and the recipient of praise for its successes is Paul Kagame. The hero of Rwanda, who upon seeing his country destroying

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<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v17/v17i1a5.pdf>

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itself marched on the capital to put an end to genocide, restore order, build a lasting peace, and usher in an era of prosperity. In this Rwanda there are no Hutus or Tutsis, ethnicity has been erased, and hostilities forgiven. In the other Rwanda, both the past and present are much more complex. Ethnic hatred in and of itself never loomed as a monolithic terror waiting to strike. The civil war was neither a one-sided slaughter nor a manifestation of intrinsic racial tension. Rather it was an outpouring of anger, frustration, and resentment built up for decades along social, economic, political, and ethnic fissures both real and imagined. There was no hero of this war, no savior to be found. Rather, one man who had been raising an army for years took advantage of the chaos to fight his way into power, killing hundreds of thousands of the opposition in the process to violently secure his position. The victor of this Rwanda built a post-conflict government based upon the exclusion and marginalization of his enemies. He consolidated power through fear and repression of civil liberties all the while deflecting criticism against his authoritarianism by manipulating the memory of genocide to perpetuate shame and guilt. The face of this Rwanda is also Paul Kagame.

Which narrative we believe is of crucial importance for the future of Rwanda and its people. If the international community continues to praise Kagame as the hero and savior of Rwanda, with the license to maintain stability at all costs and of his own accord, there is a very real risk that the fragile democracy will continue to be degraded and the despotism of Rwanda only further increased. Under these conditions a majority of the population will continue to be politically excluded, economically disadvantaged, socially devalued, and increasingly marginalized. Under these conditions there is ample reason and motivation for unrest, discord, resentment, and eventually even renewed violence. In fact, it is those very conditions that led to the outbreak of one of the worst civil wars of recent memory and all of its corresponding humanitarian atrocities. If, however, the international community chooses to censure Kagame for his increasingly dictatorial tendencies and endeavors to hold him accountable for the ever more brazen breaches in good governance, perhaps there is a chance for Rwanda to complete its democratic transition and achieve a truly peaceful and stable civil society. Though the scars of Rwanda's civil war may take many more decades to heal completely, a just and inclusive society with democratic institutions and governance is the best way to ensure that the wounds of the past do not fester and reopen.

In this regard, the upcoming August 2017 presidential election will be a critical moment in Rwandan history, one that could be an affirmation of the country's progress or an indictment of its failure to move beyond exclusionary ethnic politics. President Paul Kagame has already announced his intentions to run for re-election as a third term president in defiance of the 2003 post-genocide constitution drawn up by his very own government. While this announcement officially came after a referendum in December of 2015, which resulted in a majority vote in favor of altering the constitution to accommodate a third term for Kagame, the improbable 98 percent approval was accompanied by widespread reports of voter intimidation and coercion by the state.¹ In addition to the questionable nature of the process by which Kagame's bid for a third term was legalized, the decision is all the more concerning after the recent events in neighboring Burundi. The controversial election of President Pierre Nkurunziza to a third term of office in July of 2015 led to public protests and an attempted military coup by the opposition

followed by severe repression and violent retaliation by Nkurunziza's government and supporters, resulting in hundreds of deaths and driving nearly 280,000 Burundians to flee their country.² This conflict in Burundi is nothing new. Though not as infamous as the 1994 genocide, Burundi shares a similar history of ethnic conflict and violence between Hutu and Tutsi populations. Indeed, ethnically rooted conflict between these two ethnic groups in one country has often been a catalyst for reactionary violence in the other.³ The recent outbreak of violence in the Burundi under such similar circumstances, therefore, should be an obvious warning as to the risks of renewed conflict in Rwanda should Kagame seek a third term, and one that the international community must seriously consider as the 2017 election approaches.

History of Ethnicity and Conflict

In order to understand the potential danger to Rwandan society posed by the continued rule of Paul Kagame and his ideologues, it is important to understand the past, in particular, the complex interplay between ethnic identities and Rwanda's political, social, and economic history. Additionally, it is necessary to understand Kagame's rise to political power within the context of the 1994 civil war when ethnic tensions and socio-political divisions were at their worst. Going beyond the narrative of genocide perpetuated by President Kagame, to examine the more complex dynamics of ethnicity and the outbreak of conflict is the only way to see the concerning parallels to modern Rwanda. The history of ethnicity in Rwanda and the political events leading up to the 1994 war have been exhaustively covered by several other scholars.⁴ A few aspects of this history, however, merit explicit emphasis here, especially those which challenge the dominant narrative of genocide perpetuated by the Kagame government.

First, The Rwandan civil war was not the inevitable outcome of deep tribal divides, intrinsic or imagined, rather the outbreak of violence was the culmination of increasing social, economic, and political tensions, which were radicalized along ethnic lines drawn from a complex tribal and colonial history. The narrative presented by ideologues of the Kagame regime insists that pre-colonial Rwanda was a society of perfect harmony, absent of ethnicity and its corresponding social stratifications. In reality, the socioeconomic and political system that exploited the Hutu majority was not a colonial invention; rather, it was an extrapolation or pre-existing dynamics based upon divergent modes of production.⁵ However, it is true that the permeable social class boundaries of pre-colonial times were institutionalized and racialized first by colonial authorities and then under the government of Juvenal Habyarimana.⁶

Second, the Hutu revolution of 1959-1961, which secured governmental authority for the Hutu, was not merely the product of intrinsic ethnic hatred, but sprang from a list of grievances with the social, political, and economic conditions of the time, which privileged the Tutsi minority at the expense of the Hutu majority. Importantly, however, this revolution was fought explicitly along ethnic lines, demonstrating the extent to which the racial hierarchy had been internalized and radicalized by this point. For both groups it established the relationship between ethnicity and power as a foundation of independent Rwanda, and cemented the antagonistic notion that one group in a position of authority almost necessarily excluded the other.

Finally, it is imperative to understand that throughout the majority of Habyarimana's regime ethnic violence and anti-Tutsi rhetoric were minimized, and at least superficially the sense of a united Rwanda was promoted even if the ethnic disparities in power were well-known. It was not until the 1990 invasion of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) that the Habyarimana regime (1973-94), capitalized on the ethnic make up of the RPF to cast Tutsis as enemies of the state.⁷ The politicization of ethnicity at this time was what Oluwa Olusanya in his study of mass participation in genocide calls a "cumulative radicalization process."⁸ The emergence of anti-Tutsi rhetoric was thus a political decision motivated by what a perceived threat to state power represented.⁹ Habyarimana subsequently exaggerated the severity of the RPF threat in order to broadly condemn his opposition and create the specter of an imminent threat to Rwandans.¹⁰ The threat of ethnic violence allowed Habyarimana to take draconian liberties in suppressing his political opposition in the name of restoring stability and stamping out ethnic hatred.¹¹ It was thus a combination of economic insecurity and political instability coupled with the social and political stigmatization of Tutsi as a threat to a unified Rwanda that created the kindling for ethnically based violence. It only required the spark of President Habyarimana's assassination to burst into the flames of violence that consumed Rwanda for three months in 1994, resulting in the death of nearly 20 percent of the population.

Kagame's Government and the Narrative of Genocide

Genocide, that is the label most commonly applied to this violence and it is the narrative of events aggressively promoted and nationally enforced by Paul Kagame. And indeed a staggering number of Tutsi were targeted and killed as an enraged populace, whipped into a frenzy by the assassinated president's party and military, sought vengeance on those they viewed as responsible. Indeed, the anti-Tutsi rhetoric promoted by Habyarimana's regime prior to his death seemed to justify the violent response against Tutsis, a group demonized as synonymous with political and economic oppression and threats to national security. Neither the atrocities against the Tutsi people nor this ethnic component of the violence should be diminished. However, the genocide terminology insisted upon by Kagame ideologues limits the narrative of violence to a rigid binary of perpetrators and victims, which are in turn ascribed to dichotomous ethnic classes of Hutu and Tutsi respectively. Indeed, the dominant narrative, as told by the Rwandan government today, is that Hutu perpetrators senselessly slaughtered Tutsi victims until the Rwandan Patriotic Forces (RPF) led by Kagame marched on the capital to put an end to the violence and restore order.

What this account, however, neglects is the hundreds of thousands of Hutu who were also killed in this process, not simply as a means of restoring order but in a campaign of targeted violence to purge the country of Hutu extremists. Even after securing power by taking Kigali, the RPF government continued until 1997 to widely engage in assassinations, torture, large-scale imprisonment, and even mass killings in an effort to eliminate opposition, primarily in the form of Hutu people.¹² In fact, the former chief of the intelligence service, Sixbert Musangamfura, alleged that by July 1995 the RPF had deliberately targeted and intentionally killed over 300,000 people.¹³ In some cases, civilians were blatantly murdered alongside potential guerrillas, such as the 1995 Kibeho Camp massacres, in which as many as 8,000

predominantly Hutu refugees were killed.¹⁴ After eliminating Hutu enemies at home, the RPF continued its campaign to hunt down those who had fled across neighboring borders. In 1996, for instance, the RPF invaded the Democratic Republic of the Congo, targeting refugee camps and pursuing a months long campaign of vengeance, killing as many as 200,000 Hutu in the process.¹⁵ These so-called counter-insurgency operations continued in border regions through 1997 when between January and August alone at least 6,000 people, most of whom were unarmed civilians, were killed by RPF forces.¹⁶

The point here is not to deny or undermine the experience and severity of the hundreds of thousands of Tutsi who were killed in the violence of 1994. Rather it is to emphasize the atrocities that occurred against all Rwandans, regardless of ethnicity or class or political affiliations. The *Forces Armées Rwandaises* (FAR), the state military of the Habyarimana regime, and the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), the military wing of the RPF, carried out most of the violence during and after 1994, though a great number of civilians also engaged in opportunistic and reprisal killings on both sides. Therefore, FAR and RPA soldiers as well as civilians both perpetrated violence and fell victim to it in great numbers regardless of ethnicity. Some scholars, such as René Lemarchand, have long argued that rather than a one-sided slaughter, we might more accurately understand Rwanda as a double genocide in which both Hutu and Tutsi groups targeted each other in succession to a genocidal degree.¹⁷ However, the narrative aggressively promoted and in fact nationally enforced by the RPF government under the leadership of Kagame denies the victimhood of any Hutus killed in the 1994 violence.

Indeed, according to Rwandan Laws of Genocide Ideology passed by the Kagame government in 2008 and amended in 2014, only Tutsi are recognized as legitimate victims of the 1994 Civil War, leaving the category of perpetrators to be filled only by Hutu people.¹⁸ The implications of this are severe both psychologically and socially. For instance, in 1998 the Survivors of Genocide Fund (FARG) was established to pay the school fees and grant assistance to orphans of the civil war. However, the fund lends support only to Tutsi children even in areas where violence did not occur, while children who are Hutu, including orphans whose parents were killed by other Hutu during the genocide for being Tutsi sympathizers, are denied assistance because they are not considered legitimate victims.¹⁹ The very recognition of Hutu as legitimate victims of violence is in fact criminalized by Rwandan law, as is the suggestion that a double genocide occurred, which is considered synonymous with “genocide denialism” by the law.²⁰

In addition, the vague language of these laws, which the 2014 amendments did little to change, allows for the prosecution of those accused of “promoting genocide ideology.” The RPF government has aggressively applied these laws to silence political opposition, journalists, and foreign scholars. For instance, when opposition candidate Victorie Ingabire Umuhoza returned to Rwanda in January of 2010 to participate in the elections after sixteen years of exile, she gave a speech emphasizing that many moderate Hutu were killed in the violence of 1994 and pointed out the atrocities of the RPA, for which she was immediately arrested, jailed, and charged under the genocide ideology law.²¹ During the same 2010 presidential election cycle, the RPF regime used the genocide ideology law to force the only two remaining independent newspapers in

Rwanda to suspend publication for six months.²² The Kagame government has even targeted a number of foreign national academics under the genocide ideology law, including Peter Erlinder, who was jailed in 2010 after serving as a defense counsel for Hutus accused of genocide, as well as Alan Stam and Christian Davenport, who have been banned for life from Rwanda after mapping FAR and RPA activities and casualties from 1994 only to find that many more Hutu and far fewer Tutsi than previously thought were killed in the violence.²³

The result of such laws is an effective silencing of opposition to the dominant narrative of 1994. Not only is the discussion and examination of the civil war itself considered off limits by the Kagame government unless it is to reaffirm the accepted version of events, but also the very mention of ethnicity is outlawed. Enshrined in the 2003 constitution, is a clause against ethnic divisionism, which includes banning all mention of ethnicity, a policy that is enforced through monitoring and suppression of public speech.²⁴ The criminalization of discussing ethnicity in a country with a history of politically, socially, and economically polarized ethnic groups has profound ramifications. This law removes any civil recourse for ethnic Hutu to oppose the very means of their exclusion from social and political positions, and it prevents them from discussing the system of structural violence that ensures their continued oppression.

Though the RPF Government claims to share power and be ethnically neutral, political and therefore social and economic power rests firmly in the hands of the victors of the 1994 civil war, who are predominantly ethnic Tutsi. An internal 2008 U.S. embassy analysis found that despite some ethnic Hutu achieving senior positions in the government, they are typically figureheads to placate international pressure for power sharing and in practice are often “twinned” with senior Tutsi who exert actual control.²⁵ Beyond even superficial efforts at power sharing, ethnic Tutsi held between 60-70 percent of the most important political offices in the RPF government over the past two decades, despite accounting for only 10-15 percent of the overall population.²⁶ The same aforementioned US Embassy report stated the following:

While the Rwandan government (GOR) presents itself as a champion of national unity and equal opportunity, de-emphasizing ethnic identity and ostensibly opening positions throughout society to those of skill and merit, political authority in the country does not yet reflect this ideal. Ethnic identity is still keenly felt and lived, and ordinary Rwandans are well aware of who holds the levers of power. The long-term stability of Rwanda depends upon a government and ruling party that eventually shares real authority with the majority population.²⁷

As this report makes clear, the Kagame government does not in principle or in practice seek to truly share power with ethnic Hutu. In its current form, the RPF government fits one of the primary markers of systemic racism, which as Kenneth White describes is when “institutional arrangements are designed not only to award preferential treatment to the dominant group but also to maintain one group’s supremacy over the other group.”²⁸

This consolidation of power goes beyond ethnicity as well, disproportionately favoring RPF ideologues made up of former Tutsi refugees from Uganda or the Democratic Republic of the Congo.²⁹ Many in this new class of Tutsi elite brought to power by the 1994 civil war, including President Kagame himself, grew up outside of Rwanda as refugees.³⁰ It is easy to see why the

children of refugees driven out of their own country due to the Hutu revolution of 1959-1961, might grow up bearing a grudge against those they view as responsible. However, enshrining those grudges in the very power structure of a purportedly democratic government is extremely problematic. In fact, the stranglehold of the RPF on Rwanda's government is highly reminiscent of the Habyarimana regime's monopoly on state power. Just as the Habyarimana government excluded and marginalized ethnic Tutsi, so too now is the Kagame government denying Hutu the opportunity to engage in politics or even voice opposition to the status quo. By removing the oppressed group's ability to articulate their grievances along ethnic lines, the RPF has stripped them of recourse after being obviously excluded based upon ethnicity. Indeed, the denial of ethnicity is a tactic to simultaneously consolidate power along ethnic lines, while also discrediting arguments of ethnic favoritism.³¹

This is not the only example of Kagame's government using the narrative of genocide to their advantage. Indeed, this has been a theme throughout the RPF's regime, both to bolster their claims to legitimacy and to deflect domestic and international criticism of the regime and its repressive tactics. Following the RPF victory in the 1994, which put an end at least to the slaughter of Tutsi, Kagame was uniquely well positioned in the eyes of the international community to cast himself in the light of both victim and savior of the genocide.³² This dual role is one that Kagame has expertly exploited to escape international censure for his increasingly dictatorial practices, and egregious abuses of human rights. For instance, in 2005 the Rwandan government responded to a World Bank study focusing on basic rights and the strength of democratic institutions by seizing and destroying the research data, claiming that the study perpetuated genocide ideology.³³ Similarly, after the World Food Programme issued a statement in 2006 proclaiming a regional famine and requesting urgent humanitarian assistance for 300,000 rural Rwandans, the RPF government dismissed the claims as not only false but also subversive.³⁴ Dated as this example may be, the willingness of the RPF to deny the existence of a famine and reject offers for humanitarian assistance that would have benefited hundreds of thousands of citizens and possibly saved many lives is indicative of the extent to which the Kagame regime is willing to sacrifice the well-being of its own people to maintain control over the image of a stable and effective government.

Many researchers and human rights observers assert that Kagame's regime is granted generous leniency due to guilty consciences for failing to intervene in 1994 to stop the violence.³⁵ Indeed, the extent to which Paul Kagame and the RPF government have escaped censure even in the face of strong evidence of human rights abuses and repression is rather remarkable. After the UNDP published a 2007 report entitled "Turning Vision 2020 into Reality," which critically assessed the Rwandan government's assertions of progress, emphasized the problem of growing inequality, and called for increased democratization and improved quality of governance, Kagame publicly criticized the review methodology and rejected the findings as unfounded.³⁶ In fact, he responded so violently to the report, accusing its authors of destabilizing the country, that he successfully pressured the UNDP into blacklisting their own researcher and withdrawing their findings.³⁷ Needless to say subsequent UNDP reports in 2008 and 2009 were full of positive comments about Rwanda's progress and

do not mention the issues of inequality, despite two studies in 2007 and 2008 that confirmed the ongoing trend of rising inequality in Rwandan society.³⁸

The exploitation of the memory and narrative of genocide for political ends does not stop there. While the repression of political dissent has become less overtly violent and indiscriminate, since 2000 the Rwandan government has moved to targeting journalists and political opponents of the regime.³⁹ The 2010 presidential elections saw the arrest of two opposition candidates on charges of crimes against the state, and stirring up genocide ideology by criticizing the Kagame government and the dominant narrative of genocide.⁴⁰ Additionally, numerous journalists, domestic and foreign alike have been subject to death threats, intimidation, and exile.⁴¹ The assassinations of journalists and political opponents even occur across borders. For instance, in 2011, Charles Ingabire, a Rwandan journalist critical of the RPF regime was shot and killed in Kampala, Uganda. Similarly, Patrick Karegeya, the former head of External Intelligence for the RPF was murdered in 2014 after seeking refuge in Johannesburg. Another refugee in South Africa, former Army Chief of Staff, General Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, has survived two separate assassination attempts in 2010 and 2014. Kagame and his ideologues have dodged accusations of involvement in these assassinations through outright indignation and aggressively insinuating that only supporters of genocide perpetuate such claims. Even more boldly, in a 2014 speech shortly after Karegeya's murder Kagame claimed that "Whoever betrays the country will pay the price. I assure you... Any person still alive who may be plotting against Rwanda, whoever they are, will pay the price," and then went on to deny involvement in the assassination after essentially condoning it.⁴²

International Response to Kagame's Regime

Incredibly, these tactics of outright denial followed by accusations that any detractors are in effect trying to destabilize the country and must support genocide have allowed the Kagame government to escape blame for these assassinations and clear violations of human rights and civil liberties with little to no censure from the international community. Despite mounting evidence of Kagame's abuses, between 2004 and 2014 foreign direct investment increased over thirty-five fold, from \$7.7 million US to more than \$291 million.⁴³ More troubling still, net official development assistance and official aid received more than doubled during the same period from some \$490 million to more than \$1.03 billion in 2014.⁴⁴ While this is an overall decrease from the high of 1.2 billion foreign aid dollars in 2011, following the controversy stirred by a 2012 UN report, which alleged that the RPF government was supporting the M23 rebel movement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, like so many other accusations they did not manage to stick to Kagame for long.⁴⁵ In fact foreign aid levels quickly rebounded from the temporary drop in 2012 and by 2014 once again made up nearly half (over 47 percent) of Rwanda's \$2.17 billion US budget, as reported by the Rwandan Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.⁴⁶ This means that foreign governments are in effect funding and maintaining Kagame's government, which arguably confers some degree of responsibility upon foreign donors when it comes to the outcomes and behaviors of this regime.

While some foreign donors, such as the United States, have made efforts to redirect aid to politically neutral areas like the health sector, donors have limited control over how the money

freed up by foreign aid is used. Indeed, the fungibility of aid dollars means that governments receiving such substantial sums of aid are enabled to engage in behaviors that might not otherwise be possible. For instance, a study of ninety-seven countries between 1975-2004 revealed that unearned foreign aid actually enabled autocratic governments to remain in power longer, by placing the burden of welfare goods on foreign donors, which in turns allowed autocrats to spend money on the patronage networks that helped keep them in power.⁴⁷ Foreign aid levels are so substantial in Rwanda that the Kagame government is able to effectively suppress free media, a luxury often reserved for dictators of oil-rich nations, since poorer dictators facing resource constraints are often forced to allow free press.⁴⁸ In fact, press freedoms in Rwanda are some of the most restricted worldwide.⁴⁹ Given the fact that such substantial development assistance, therefore, helps sustain the repressive behaviors of the RPF government, the burden of this responsibility is shared by the donor agencies and foreign governments that continue to provide aid despite volumes of evidence indicating Kagame's increasingly dictatorial tendencies and disregard for civil liberties and human rights.

Ironically, the international guilt felt due to inaction during the 1994 civil war has allowed Kagame to evade accountability for his regime's misconduct, thus prompting further inaction from an international community that is supporting his regime, a regime which is actively recreating the social, economic, and political divisions that contributed to the atrocities of 1994. Much as the Habyarimana government was run by a small enclave of elites, the RPF government is dominated by a homogenous group of former Tutsi refugees, far removed from the experiences or struggles of the rural majority, and based upon their policy prescriptions largely disinterested in improving their condition.⁵⁰ In fact, numerous rural policies directly conflict with the interests of subsistence farmers, placing severe burdens upon the predominantly Hutu rural masses and further disenfranchising them, while their persistent poverty is seen as an indicator of the same general corruptness of character that allowed them to commit genocide.⁵¹ Similarly, just as Habyarimana's mandate that all Rwandans belong to the *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement* (MRND) party by birth to give the outward impression of national unity, Kagame strictly enforces the erasure of ethnicity, restricting any discussion of the very real societal divides that persist along ethnic lines.⁵² Finally, the RPF government systematically excludes the ethnically Hutu majority from meaningful positions of political power while it simultaneously denies ethnic favoritism. The Habyarimana regime did exactly the same thing at the expense of the Tutsi minority.⁵³ Though these are not necessarily sufficient conditions for renewed violence in Rwanda, the socio-economic dynamics and ethnic monopolization of political power are strikingly similar to those that preceded the outbreak of the 1994 civil war.

Scholars of genocide identify several common factors that place a society at risk of such violence, including the existence of historic, pervasive and institutionalized prejudice, and the "moral exclusion" of a category of people, causing social and political marginalization.⁵⁴ This is exactly what we see in Paul Kagame's Rwanda, particularly in the aggressively promoted narrative of Hutu as categorical perpetrators of genocide. This narrow version of events as it is enshrined in the RPF government morally excludes Hutu from society and the political sphere.

In addition to being captured in the Rwandan constitution, the very foundation of its modern government, the rhetoric of Hutu as sole perpetrators was further institutionalized by the *gacaca* courts, which failed to try any RPF members and instead focused almost entirely on prosecuting Hutus.⁵⁵ Moreover, the *gacaca* system became a mechanism of political repression, as it could be used to try cases against those accused of the vague crime of “ethnic divisionism.”⁵⁶ Indeed, this unilateral reconciliation process by the RPF victors has failed to create trust in the peace imposed upon the country and has in fact increased frustration among Hutu people, only widening the chasm of ethnic divides.⁵⁷ Rwandans themselves have reported government coercion, fear, and pragmatism as the primary drivers of their participation in the fiction of reconciliation vehemently maintained by the Kagame government.⁵⁸

Yet the narrative of a fully reconciled, stable, and ethnicity-blind Rwanda persists. But this is decidedly the image perpetuated by Kagame’s government, the same government with a vested interest in maintaining the perception of peace and stability in order to maintain power and repress the opposition. Tony Waters points out that stories of ethnicity are often kept within their groups as “explicitly hidden or clandestine” narratives that form the basis of ethnic identity often defined in opposition to another antagonistic group.⁵⁹ Similarly, Max Weber notes, that stories often times not only define, but also re-enforce ethnic stratifications by reproducing their particular understanding of the world, and in the case of dominant groups by glorifying the past to justify their continued power.⁶⁰ This is not dissimilar to the annual genocide memorials, held each year at the behest of Kagame, which in practice serve to publicly shame Hutu perpetrators while aggrandizing the Tutsi victors in public ceremonies and spectacles that reinforce the narrative of genocide thereby reaffirming the RPF government’s righteousness for Rwandans and the international community alike. Interpreted along the lines of constructivist theories of ethnic violence, this is a dangerous example of political elites capitalizing upon ethnic divides, even if the label of ethnicity is obscured, to consolidate power at the expense of an ethnic other.⁶¹

While it is true that thus far the Kagame regime has not adopted an outward rhetoric of Tutsi dominance, the message is clear in terms of repressing the political opposition along thinly veiled ethnic lines and morally excluding Hutu through the ritualistic reinforcement of their guilt for committing genocide. Moreover, as the legitimacy of the RPF government continues to erode, due to enforced one-partyism, censures on civil liberties and free press, rampant human rights abuses, and uneven distribution of economic gains, its reliance upon repressive tactics and ethnic factionalism as a means of maintaining power will only increase.⁶² None of this is to say that renewed violence in Rwanda is inevitable. In fact, the 2017 election poses an incredible opportunity to ensure that Rwanda continues on its path towards political stability and lasting peace. But in order for such progress, genuine healing and reconciliation must occur. Ethnicity is not something that can simply be erased by changing the nomenclature, least of all when the RPF government continues to capitalize upon ethnic divides and demonize all Hutu as perpetrators of genocide. The habits and practices of ethnic divisionism by both groups must be addressed in order to build a secure society.⁶³

This means altering the stories of ethnicity, by acknowledging the past injustices of both ethnic groups, rejecting the justice of the victors that places sole blame on Hutu and exonerates

the RPF, and committing to building an inclusive government in which power is shared and the interests of all ethnic groups are represented. It means addressing the horrors of the past in order to heal its wounds, and confronting the issue of ethnic antagonism to begin repairing those divisions.⁶⁴ As Sebastian Silvia-Leander notes:

a proper treatment of historical traumas can be a vital element of a national reconciliation strategy, as was the case in Germany, where the universal and unequivocal rejection of the Nazi regime and its divisive ideology served as a common platform to forge a new national identity after 1945.⁶⁵

Currently this type of inclusive national reconciliation effort is absent in Rwanda. Instead of a unified national identity, its government perpetuates the narrative of ethnic genocide at the hands of the Hutu. While the crimes of Hutu *genocidaires* need to be acknowledged and justice served, the same is true for retributive killings of Tutsi and the RPF. Atrocities committed by both groups must be addressed if the country is ever to move forward as a unified nation.

On the political level, Rwanda must also strive for inclusion and true democratization. The current political system enforced by the Kagame government reinforces the political oppositionalism of Tutsi and Hutu, perpetuating the notion that hegemony of one group necessarily excludes power for the other. If Rwanda is ever to move forward as a unified nation, ethnic inclusion must become a foundation of its democracy rather than a professed ideology in principle rather than practice. To this end, Rwanda must avoid the third-term syndrome that has gripped so many other African nations, which have quickly turned promising democracies into repressive authoritarian regimes.⁶⁶ The international community has immense leverage in terms of its foreign aid dollars to pressure the government into respecting its own democratic constitution and committing to the thus far empty promise of ethnic power-sharing. Rather than preparing troops for potential deployment after renewed ethnic violence already manifests, as was the UN's response to the recent crisis in Burundi, the international community has the opportunity to take a proactive approach to protecting the integrity of Rwandan democracy.

Potential Foreign Policy Responses

The most common response of the international community, which here refers to foreign governments and their bilateral aid agencies, INGOs, and multilateral organizations, in such cases of human rights abuses, civil liberties repression, and erosion of democracy as those occurring in Rwanda under the Kagame regime are economic sanctions, conditional aid, or formal denouncements. Despite the prevalence of economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool to pressure reform, there is little evidence that this is an effective method. Multiple cross-national studies have found that not only do generalized sanctions fail to achieve their stated objectives in up to 95 percent of cases, but also that they often increase political repression and human rights abuses by the state as a means of quelling political dissent in the face of declining economic conditions.⁶⁷ Broad economic sanctions tend to be particularly ineffective when triggered by concerns over human rights abuses, as they are often motivated by the vague goal of improving overall human rights conditions without a clear plan for reform.⁶⁸ The historical evidence therefore suggests that this tact would be not only ineffective in creating the desired

changes, but also harmful for Rwandan citizens, as the Kagame regime would likely only increase human rights abuses and political repression.

While there is moderate evidence that more targeted sanctions, such as partial foreign aid cutoffs, result in fewer negative consequences for the population, they are only marginally more effective in achieving their desired outcomes than broad sanctions.⁶⁹ In Libya, for instance, targeted sanctions succeeded in convincing the Khaddafi government to stop state sponsorship of terrorist groups and later to reduce weapons development programs without a concomitant increase in human rights violations; however, these targeted sanctions were combined with other diplomacy and policy tools, and may not have been effective on their own.⁷⁰ In contrast, targeted sanctions against the Mugabe government in Zimbabwe initiated by the US and EU in 2002 due to the clear erosion of democracy and fraudulent elections are widely considered to have failed.⁷¹ The effectiveness of targeted sanctions in inducing democratization is highly dependent upon the nature of the regime and the state's recent economic conditions.⁷² Though some critics argue that sustained foreign aid helped support brutal dictatorships in the former Zaire, similarly high levels of aid did not have the same impact in Benin, which despite receiving substantial foreign aid for over three decades underwent multiple regime changes.⁷³ In fact, out of the thirty-one African countries, including Rwanda, which received more than 10 percent of their GNP from foreign aid between 1990-1997, those that experienced substantial decreases in foreign aid were no more likely to democratize than those that did not.⁷⁴ Therefore, while targeted sanctions might not lead to the same decline in human rights conditions as broad sanctions, they are also unlikely to effectively induce democratization.

Conditional aid, which typically mandates economic or democratic reform as a condition for continued assistance, though often more effective in initiating democratic changes has a similarly worrisome record in regard to increasing political repression and ethnic violence. For example, in 1991, a consortium of international donors responded to Daniel Arap Moi's widespread repression of the political opposition in Kenya by suspending one billion annual foreign aid dollars stipulating aid would only be resumed under the condition of political and economic reforms. As a country heavily reliant upon foreign aid, the Moi government was forced to adopt such changes, though the result was a period of state-sponsored violence aimed at intimidating and eliminating political opposition disguised as ethnic violence, which killed over 1,500 people and displaced 300,000.⁷⁵ During the same time period in Rwanda, the IMF and World Bank with the ardent backing of the United States attempted to ease ethnic tensions and conflict by threatening to cease foreign aid unless the Habyarimana regime allowed for a multi-party government.⁷⁶ In practice, however, this period of rapid, forced democratization reinforced ethnic and regional identities creating greater factionalism and institutionalizing anti-Tutsi sentiment.⁷⁷ Though foreign donor-led democratization pressure through conditional aid suspension succeeded in Malawi during the same time period without similar levels of violence, it was unique in so far as the army tacitly supported the opposition and therefore limited Hastings Banda's capacity for state violence.⁷⁸ Based on this record, using conditional aid to impose immediate democratic reform in Rwanda would be unwise. Though the Kagame government is so reliant on foreign aid that it would likely be effective in forcing political

reform, it is probable that ethnic tensions would sharply increase creating an even greater likelihood of renewed violence.

If widespread economic sanctions and forced democratization both risk exacerbating human rights conditions and increasing political repression in Rwanda, then formal denouncements are the most viable remaining foreign policy tool. Though evidence on the efficacy of formal denouncements is mixed, there is potential for this approach to be utilized effectively in the case of Rwanda. While it may be argued that formal denouncements are purely symbolic and lack any real impact, they are often the push necessary to induce individual donor organizations to advocate for change, to embolden political opposition organizing within the denounced state, and to shame image-conscious leaders into reform. Additionally, formal public denouncements by respected organizations such as the UN, IMF, and World Bank, as well as renowned INGOs effectively challenge the image of Paul Kagame and his RPF government as the “benevolent leadership” that it so ardently strives to maintain.⁷⁹ Kagame’s care in crafting his image as the savior of Rwanda and of his regime as the enlightened rulers ushering the nation into a new future, is evidence that his image matters both domestically and internationally. His outrage and indignation at criticism from home and abroad further indicate how important this image is to maintaining his power. In this regard, the more foreign governments, INGOs, and multilateral agencies that formally and publicly denounce the practices of the Kagame government, in particular his decision to run for a third term, the greater the impact will be on weakening his stranglehold of Rwanda.

In addition, such formal public denouncements actually create leverage for individual foreign donors, INGOs, and governments to respond to the Kagame government’s abuses of power by reducing their levels of support, advocating for changes in governance, or asserting the need for greater autonomy over the implementation of their aid programs on a case by case basis. A study of public resolutions issued by the UNCHR criticizing certain states based on their human rights records found that such denouncements significantly reduced subsequent multilateral aid commitments.⁸⁰ This shows, that public denouncements serve as signals to other donors, which may inspire them to alter their aid relationships with the Rwandan government. In particular, foreign aid agencies can advocate for less state control over how donor dollars are spent, they can utilize aid dollars for direct services to the Rwandan people, especially disenfranchised Hutu groups, rather than giving discretionary spending privileges to the Kagame government, and they can funnel aid money toward democracy assistance. A study of 1,500 organizations receiving democracy assistance between 2008-2010 found that these programs can be highly effective in creating a viable political opposition, but that “donors—especially bilateral aid agencies—need to be willing to take more risks to support challenging groups in civil society rather than caving in to pressure from the host state.”⁸¹ In Rwanda, any efforts to support democratization and empower political opposition groups must be combined with peace-building and reconciliation efforts with an eye toward minimizing ethnic factionalization and fostering genuine post-genocide healing. However, formal public denouncements are an important first step to create the kind of leverage necessary for foreign

donors and aid agencies to regain autonomy over aid programs and implement the kind of efforts needed to create a viable democratic environment.

Regardless of the approach of individual aid agencies or foreign governments decide to adopt, the time for action in Rwanda is now. As Matthew Winters points out, donors hold a huge amount of leverage over recipient countries and need to be more willing to utilize this leverage to hold countries accountable to democratic principles and international human rights standards.⁸² The painful lessons of Rwanda's past, and the recent events in Burundi, should serve as a reminder that intervention is a poor substitute for prevention. Both France and Belgium continued supporting the Habyarimana regime even in the face of mounting ethnic tensions and a prolonged erosion of democracy. Their support of Habyarimana despite such warning signs contributed to the tragic events of 1994. In fact, Belgium offered a formal apology to the Rwandan government in 1997 for its role in contributing to the genocide.⁸³ Even the UN was censured for not doing more to prevent the outbreak of violence. As an official independent inquiry concluded, the UN "should support efforts to rebuild Rwandan society after the genocide, paying particular attention to the need for reconstruction, reconciliation and respect for human rights."⁸⁴ By blindly continuing to support Kagame and his regime, the UN is currently failing in this effort, and if it truly strives to help heal Rwandan society, must publicly denounce Paul Kagame's decision to run for a third term and his regime's practices of ethnic exclusion and political repression. If the international community fails to act, fails to censure the Kagame government and reconsider the nature of current aid programs, the political, social, and economic disparities growing along ethnic lines will only continue to deepen, and like Burundi the risk of renewed ethnic violence will continue to approach its breaking point.

Conclusion

Rwanda's past is inescapable. The brutality of 1994 left an indelible mark on the collective conscience of the international community, and even twenty years after the conflict it remains a subject of pivotal importance. No one can or should deny the violence and devastation that swept through this land of a thousand hills, or the anger, pain, and resentment felt by those who lost loved ones in the chaos that nearly tore this nation asunder. While this past may hang like a dark shadow over an otherwise vibrant and beautiful country, it need not define Rwanda in perpetuity. However, when fear of the past is cultivated instead of hope for the future, and the narrative of genocide is exploited by those who seek to consolidate power and silence opposition through ethnic shaming, the past continues to cast its long shadow. When this tragic history is used as an excuse for further injustices within the country or for further inaction on the part of the international community, rather than as an opportunity to confront the painful but necessary work of true reconciliation and healing, the horrors of the past are allowed to rule. Proper respect must be given to the conflict and its resultant tragedies, proper justice and healing sought for those guilty and those who suffered, but the people of Rwanda and the international community should not be held hostage by the memories of the past, or we risk blindly following the same path that led to such disastrous consequences for humanity in the first place.

If the international community is willing to take a hard look at a difficult past, and acknowledge its own failures in 1994 and the years preceding the outbreak of ethnic violence, there is potential to change the future course of Rwanda. Rather than allowing the past to keep the world in fear, or letting Paul Kagame and his government bully the international community into accepting his account of history, there is an opportunity to learn from it. In this regard, caution must be taken when deciding how to place pressure upon the Rwandan government. As history has shown, forcing an abrupt and artificial democratization may not be the answer, and may in fact cause more harm than good. However, letting an increasingly authoritarian leader sustain himself off of donor dollars used to maintain his own position of power at the expense of a repressed majority is also clearly not the answer. As the recent outbreak of violence and the resultant refugee crisis in Burundi demonstrates, the dangers of allowing Kagame to proceed in seeking a third term completely unchecked have potentially disastrous consequences.

Therefore, the 2017 presidential election marks an exceptional opportunity for the international community to assert its democratic values and define the limits of acceptable aid. Each donor organization and country may have to decide for themselves how best to approach the issue of continued support to Paul Kagame's government, but the responsibility for the outcomes of his regime is certainly shared by those that continue to enable him despite the mounting warning signs. While the past may be inescapable, the future need not be so. This is a chance for intervention, to ensure the continued stability and true lasting peace in Rwanda through reconciliation and democratic power-sharing, but the opportunity for this future must be taken, lest a fear of history compels its repetition.

Notes

1 *The Guardian* 2016.

2 Human Rights Watch 2016.

3 Lemarchand 1998, p. 6-7.

4 See for instance, Lemarchand 1998; Jefremovas; Uvin 2001; Kamola 2007; Reyntjens 2011.

5 Umutesi 2006, p. 165.

6 Ansoms 2009, p. 293.

7 Jefremovas 1997, p. 97.

8 Olusanya 2013, pp. 850-51.

9 Kirsche 2000, p. 239.

10 Uvin 1999, p. 260.

11 Des Forges 1999, p. 54.

12 Davenport 2007, p. 181.

13 Reyntjens 2013, p. 101.

14 Silvia-Leander 2008, p. 1607.

15 Umutesi 2006, p. 158.

- 16 Amnesty International 1997.
- 17 Lemarchand 1998, p. 8.
- 18 Uwizeyimana 2014, p. 2374.
- 19 Umutesi 2006, p. 169.
- 20 Uwizeyimana 2014, p. 2374.
- 21 Marijnen and van der Lijn 2012, p. 16.
- 22 Pflanz 2010, p. 30.
- 23 Uwizeyimana 2014, p. 2373.
- 24 Thomson 2011, p. 442.
- 25 US Embassy Kigali 2008.
- 26 Reyntjens 2013, p. 20.
- 27 US Embassy Kigali 2008.
- 28 White 2009, p. 471.
- 29 Naftalin 2011, p. 23.
- 30 Ansoms 2009, pp. 294-95.
- 31 Silvia-Leander 2008, p. 1609.
- 32 Glover 2010, p. 98.
- 33 Ingelaere 2010, p. 50.
- 34 Marijnen and van der Lijn 2012, p. 15.
- 35 Umutesi 2006, p. 163.
- 36 Marijnen and van der Lijn 2012, p. 18.
- 37 Ingelaere 2010, p. 48.
- 38 Marijnen and van der Lijn 2012, p. 18.
- 39 Silvia-Leander 2008, p. 1608.
- 40 Pflanz 2010, p. 30.
- 41 Santoro 2015.
- 42 Human Rights Watch 2014.
- 43 World Bank 2015.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 McDoom, 2013.
- 46 Republic of Rwanda 2015, p. 13.
- 47 Ahmed 2012.
- 48 Egoroy, et al. 2009.
- 49 Green 2011, p. 428.
- 50 Ansoms 2009, p. 296.
- 51 See for instance, Somers and Uvin 2011; Ansoms 2008; Desrosiers & Thomson 2011.
- 52 Naftalin 2011, p. 23.
- 53 White 2009, p. 475-6.
- 54 Uvin 1999, pp. 253-71.
- 55 Nyseth Brehm 2014, p. 338.

- 56 Davenport 2007, p. 183.
- 57 Umutesi 2006, p. 158.
- 58 Buckley-Zistel 2006, p. 142.
- 59 Waters 2003, p. 68.
- 60 Weber 1946, pp. 187-90.
- 61 Fearon and Laitin 2000, p. 853.
- 62 Silvia-Leander 2008, p. 1616.
- 63 Kay 2013, pp. 21-2.
- 64 Buckley-Zistel 2006, p. 147.
- 65 Silvia-Leander 2008, p. 1610.
- 66 Lumumba-Kasongo 2007, p. 132.
- 67 Wood 2008; Peksen 2009.
- 68 Kim 2009, p. 40.
- 69 Drezner 2011.
- 70 Ibid., p. 103.
- 71 Grebe 2010.
- 72 Wright 2009.
- 73 Ibid., p. 568.
- 74 Goldsmith 2001.
- 75 Roessler 2005, pp. 213-14.
- 76 Anderson 2000, p. 448.
- 77 Silvia-Leander 2008, p. 1605.
- 78 Roessler 2005, p. 220-22.
- 79 Desrosiers and Thomson 2011.
- 80 Lebovic and Voeten 2009.
- 81 Diamond 2015, pp. 440-41.
- 82 Winters 2010, p. 224.
- 83 Kerstens 2008, p. 194.
- 84 Feyter 2005, p. 327.

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