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Maggie Penkert

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## Their Genocide and Ours: International Influence in 1994 Rwanda

Maggie Penkert

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In 1994 Rwanda suffered a genocide of unprecedented speed. Western press coverage at the time attributed the genocide to ancient ethnic hatreds between Hutus and Tutsis, but the genocide was, in fact, a political act involving the Rwandan government that planned it and the international community that stood back and observed it. This international community included Western states, international organizations, and neighboring African states. The world community seems to tread a fine line between violating national autonomy and working together across borders to maintain a standard for human rights. Moreover, genocide places the effects of national self-interest on international relations in stark relief, often to the detriment of less developed countries. Though Rwandans organized and carried out the genocide, no actor on the world stage ever performs in isolation. The international community, collectively in the form of various organizations and states, influenced the genocide both by abandoning Rwanda in its time of need, as well as contributing to factors leading to the genocide.

Africa has long grabbed the attention of the world with its civil wars and massacres, but the Rwandan genocide is an extreme case. Within only a few months, ethnic Hutu extremists planned the genocide and then murdered approximately 800,000 Tutsi men, women and children. Two million Rwandans fleeing the killings became refugees within Rwanda and in

neighboring countries.<sup>1</sup> As a brutal genocide, the events in Rwanda could not escape comparison to the Holocaust. It was after the Holocaust that the United Nations organized a Genocide Convention in 1948 as part of the international community's commitment that the genocidal horrors "never again" be repeated. The Convention's immediate goals were to clarify genocide in legal terms as a criminal act, thereby making it legally imperative for nations ratifying the Convention to attempt to halt any genocidal acts. The Convention defined genocide as the intention to destroy wholly or partially a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Genocide became an unacceptable tool of political or military authority, with the international community organized through the United Nations to act as watchdog for prevention.<sup>2</sup>

Much of the scholarly writing on the genocide in Rwanda has focused on the causes of the genocide, explained in terms of Rwandan history. Scholars agree that ethnic tensions existed between Hutus and Tutsis, but disagree about the depth of traditional divisions between these two groups.<sup>3</sup> This debate is

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<sup>1</sup>Guy Arnold, *Historical Dictionary of Civil Wars in Africa* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1999), 229.

<sup>2</sup>Robert F. Gorman, "Genocide," *Great Debates at the United Nations: An Encyclopedia of 50 Key Issues, 1945-2000* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 96-99; Alexander Laban Hinton, ed., *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 1-6.

<sup>3</sup>Mahmood Mamdani is part of the group of scholars that believes that the colonial experience exacerbated any political, ethnic, and economic divisions that may have existed before colonialism. On the other side of the debate, Philip Gourevitch, Catharine Newbury, and David Newbury believe that ethnicity was created as a political construct within Rwanda during

significant considering that ethnic differences, to some extent, influenced the genocide. Some scholars have also discussed economic causes for the genocide.<sup>4</sup> Rwanda, already a poor country by international standards, experienced economic hardship in the 1980s, and these economic difficulties often reinforced views of Hutu and Tutsi class differences.<sup>5</sup> Focusing on the international impact of economics as opposed to the national, some scholars have discussed the influence of Western states' and organizations' economic aid in Rwanda in the years leading up to the genocide. In continuing to provide aid to Rwanda despite governing Hutus' racist policies against Tutsis, the donor countries were unofficially supporting the government's human rights abuses. Rwanda's increasing debts to donor countries also contributed to the negative economic situation despite benevolent aid intentions.<sup>6</sup> These economic factors placed the Rwandan government in a desperate situation, which prompted some officials to extreme measures. While many scholars have explored international political actors' responses to the genocide, there has been very

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colonial times, and post-colonial governments perpetuated it as a political agenda.

<sup>4</sup>Scholars supporting the economic causes of the genocide include Helen Hintjens and David Newbury.

<sup>5</sup>Helen Hintjens, "Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 37 (1999): 256-258; David Newbury, "Understanding Genocide," *African Studies Review* 40 (1998): 89-90.

<sup>6</sup>Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, Inc., 1998), 1-4; Regine Andersen, "How Multilateral Development Assistance Triggered the Conflict in Rwanda," *Third World Quarterly* 21 (2000): 441.

little work on the responses of non-governmental organizations like the Red Cross or Christian missionary groups. This study will comprehensively explore the role of the international community in the forms of the UN, the United States, Belgium, France, Western Christian missionary groups, the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and neighboring African states.

The history of ethnic relations in Rwanda is often mistakenly described as one in which primordial “tribal” conflict eventually resulted in genocide. Ethnicity, however, is a social construction that is contextually relative. Ethnic identity often varies by situation, and indeed, the identities of Hutu and Tutsi had fluid ethnic boundaries. Even after colonialism hardened the distinction between them, social and political forces continued to construct and manipulate Hutu and Tutsi ethnicity for various reasons.<sup>7</sup> At one point in the distant past the Hutus and Tutsis belonged to different ethnic groups that migrated to the region of Rwanda, but after centuries of living together and intermarrying, they came to share a language, religion, and other cultural traditions. Their differences largely centered on economic status, as the Tutsi predominately raised cattle for their livelihood and the Hutu farmed.<sup>8</sup> There were some differences in social status as well. A kingdom state developed in Rwanda, and while official position appointments were controlled by a Tutsi monarchy and chiefs were usually Tutsi, Hutus could also be chiefs, especially in posi-

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<sup>7</sup>Newbury and Newbury, 294.

<sup>8</sup>Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 5.

tions of agricultural authority.<sup>9</sup> While people's identity as belonging to a particular group remained generally intact over time, Hutu or Tutsi group membership was not their sole identity. Kinship, clan (which often was inclusively Hutu and Tutsi), and class were often more important markings of social identity during pre-colonial history.<sup>10</sup>

The Germans were the first colonialists to arrive in the Rwanda region in 1897, and they remained until they lost the territory to the Belgians after World War I. When the Germans set about structuring their administrative rule, they saw the Tutsi-led kingdom as an instrument of control over the people. The Germans' racist attitudes also influenced how they perceived the kingdom. The colonialists viewed the fairer and taller Tutsis as a superior race to the Hutu; this notion seemed to be validated by the fact that the Tutsi dominated political leadership. The Germans theorized that the Tutsi had migrated from the north, possibly even from west Asia, and then set themselves up to rule over the inferior (and smaller, darker) Hutu.<sup>11</sup> This imaginary scenario, based in nineteenth-century Social Darwinian ideology, worked well for the colonialists, because the colonial administrators could simply perpetuate the "natural" social structures by giving Tutsis positions of leadership. When the Belgians became the new colonial lords, they continued using the system that the Germans had set up. The Belgians reified ethnic distinctions by instituting identity cards in 1933 naming the bearers as Tutsi or

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<sup>9</sup>Prunier, 9-12.

<sup>10</sup>Newbury and Newbury, 293.

<sup>11</sup>Prunier, 5-9.

Hutu. However, their system of distributing the cards confused and artificially strengthened pre-colonial “ethnic” identities of Rwandans, and in many cases ignored the self- and ancestral identity of the individuals. Colonial rulers favored Tutsis in political and religious leadership, employment opportunities, and education (using the identity cards to help them distinguish between Hutus and Tutsis).<sup>12</sup> Through the years of Rwandan colonial experience, ethnicity became a self-fulfilling prophecy, and its function as a fixed identity marker disadvantaged Hutus and benefited Tutsis.

As independence movements gained momentum in Africa, Hutu populations in Rwanda sought independence for themselves. However, in their revolutionary struggles to restructure Rwandan society, Hutu activists targeted the downfall of the Tutsi monarchy as the key to their freedom rather than the complete removal of the Belgian colonialists. The Hutus were aided in their efforts to grab power because prior to granting independence in 1962, the Belgian trusteeship (working with the UN) replaced many Tutsi authorities with Hutus. The Church and European governments were influenced by post-World War II era ideologies that connected colonialism to favored, and thus, suspect leadership groups. When independence was granted to Rwanda in 1962, the new government was mostly Hutu. Many Hutus internalized the European colonialists’ view of Rwandan history to the degree that they came to see themselves as the indigenous Rwandan population, suffering for years under

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<sup>12</sup>Hintjens, 249-250.

the “foreign” rule of the conquering Tutsis.<sup>13</sup> During the struggle to gain power at independence, 20,000 Tutsis were killed and thousands sought refuge in neighboring states, which increased perceived divisions between Hutus and Tutsis.<sup>14</sup>

The first independent leader of Rwanda was Gregoire Kayibanda, and during his presidency, ethnic divisions between Hutus and Tutsis established by the colonialists intensified. With Hutus now the elite ruling class, it was they who reaped the benefits of an ethnically prejudiced system, and the Tutsis who suffered.<sup>15</sup> The second independent presidency, of Juvenal Habyarimana, starting in 1973, generally continued anti-Tutsi policies.<sup>16</sup> Economic problems, political problems of declining legitimacy, external situations of Hutu and Tutsi conflict in Burundi and Uganda, and an influx of refugees led to increasing disapproval of Habyarimana’s leadership, especially among extremist Hutus who disliked his attempts, in the face of international pressure, to negotiate an end to the war with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a largely Tutsi army based in Uganda that demanded the return of Tutsi refugees and Tutsi representation in government. Habyarimana’s political favor also plummeted among the rural Hutu population that feared an invasion by RPF Tutsis. Returning Tutsis might reclaim land and property taken over in their absence, a prospect that was especially alarming to the

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<sup>13</sup>Hintjens, 254-255.

<sup>14</sup>Rene Lemarchand, “Disconnecting the Threads: Rwanda and the Holocaust Reconsidered,” *Journal of Genocidal Research* 4 (2002): 503.

<sup>15</sup>Newbury and Newbury, 298-299, Uvin, 35.

<sup>16</sup>Lemarchand, 504.

coffee farmers who had largely turned to subsistence farming on former Tutsi lands when the price of coffee dropped on the world market.<sup>17</sup>

With all of these problems faced by the Habyarimana regime, violence against Tutsis was a tool of the government to maintain power while “punishing” a cultural scapegoat. During the early 1990s, Tutsis were blacklisted, arrested, and killed in raids that were encouraged, if not planned, by extremist Hutu members of the president’s circle.<sup>18</sup> Peace accords, reached during negotiations in Arusha, Tanzania, in the early 1990s, between the RPF and Habyarimana’s government declared that current political leaders would share the future Rwandan government with RPF leadership and that some extremist Hutu parties would be excluded. It was the potential implementation of the Arusha Accords that prompted the extremists, fearing loss of power, to use genocide as a political tool.<sup>19</sup> The genocide’s first victim would not be any Tutsi but the man viewed by the extremists as most responsible for allowing the Arusha Accords, the president himself.

On April 6, 1994, a plane carrying Habyarimana and the Burundian president, Cyprien Ntaryamira, was shot down, killing both presidents. Although it is still not certain who was responsible, this event seemed to mark the planned start of the genocide. Within hours roadblocks throughout the capital of Kigali were set up, Tutsi and opposition Hutu names were spread, and groups of government soldiers,

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<sup>17</sup>Hintjens, 256-259.

<sup>18</sup>Lemarchand, 505.

<sup>19</sup>Lemarchand, 510-511.

police, and youth group militias searched out the victims, whom they began to massacre.<sup>20</sup> Although the majority of victims were Tutsis of all social and political groups, Hutus opposing Habyarimana's regime were also targeted. The massacres spread out from the capital into surrounding areas of Rwanda and drew in masses of low-class Hutus to join the "professionals" in wielding mostly machetes to murder men, women, and children. Orders and encouragement to join the killers permeated the country through official political chains of command, starting at the top of the government leadership. People at any political level or social class who were reluctant to kill were cajoled, enticed by the property of potential victims, or threatened with death themselves.<sup>21</sup> Propaganda to join in the killing was also spread by the extremist Hutu radio station Radio des Mille Collines (RTLM), which aided the killers by directing them to locations where victims were hiding. The RTLM broadcasts, like the extremist Hutus in the government, ignored the distinction between Tutsi civilians and the Tutsi-led RPF guerilla army invading Rwanda from Uganda. Many Hutus were encouraged to feel that their lives were in danger from their well-known Tutsi neighbors.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile the RPF was attempting to halt the genocide, but not by slaughtering Hutu civilians. The RPF aim was to reach the capital of Kigali as soon as possible to take over the government. In the face of the international community's lack of action, it was indeed the RPF's

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<sup>20</sup>Newbury and Newbury, 294.

<sup>21</sup>Prunier, 242-247.

<sup>22</sup>Christine L. Kellow and H. Leslie Steeves, "The Role of Radio in the Rwandan Genocide," *Journal of Communication* 48 (1998): 120-122.

capture of Kigali on July 2 that heralded the end of the genocide.<sup>23</sup>

If the international community had intervened, this tragedy could have been halted early on, if not prevented altogether. Instead, the Rwandans were left to themselves, to kill or be killed. The international players that virtually abandoned Rwanda during the genocide, both states and organizations, had various reasons for their inadequate response and had various relationships with pre-genocidal Rwanda. The UN was no stranger to Rwanda as it participated in the Arusha Accords' negotiations between the RPF and the Rwandan government. The deployment of UN peacekeeping troops to the country in 1993 was part of the implementation of the Accords' peace plan. The operation, called the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR), sent 2,500 troops to the country on a Chapter Six peacekeeping mandate. The Chapter Six mandate restricts operations to light weapons for self-defense only.<sup>24</sup> Thus, mandates can restrict UN troops on the ground from carrying out actions that they may deem necessary, as in Rwanda in 1994.

The UN was first made aware of genocidal plans in Rwanda in January 1994 through a cable sent by the UNAMIR commander in Rwanda, General Romeo Dallaire, to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York. A government politician warned Dallaire of government plans to kill the Tutsi

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<sup>23</sup>Prunier, 293-294.

<sup>24</sup>Michael Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002), 191; Scott Peterson, *Me Against My Brother: At War in Somalia, Sudan and Rwanda* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 290.

population as well as Belgian troops, if necessary to prompt the Belgians to pull out. Dallaire, justifiably alarmed, suggested that the UN troops raid the massive arms stores in the capital city, to which Dallaire's informant could direct them.<sup>25</sup> The responding cable from Kofi Annan, then Deputy Director of Peacekeeping Operations, did not seem to take the threat of potential massacres seriously. He advised Dallaire to assume that Habyarimana was not aware of the genocidal plans and inform him of them. Dallaire was also told to inform the ambassadors of Belgium, the United States and France of the potential violence. However, Annan did not pass the informant's message along to the UN Security Council.<sup>26</sup> At this point, three months before the beginning of the genocide, a UN department and three western governments were apparently aware of the potential violence being planned by extremists in the Rwandan government, but nothing was done.

There are several reasons why the UN avoided intervention in Rwanda once the genocide began, including the recent UN mission failure in Somalia widely covered by the international media, the disinclination of member states to support action in Rwanda, and the lack of accurate information about the severity

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<sup>25</sup>Romeo Dallaire, "Request for Protection of Informant," (Outgoing Code Cable to Baril at DPKO in UN) *The Triumph of Evil 1999* <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/warning/cable.html>> (29 October 2003).

<sup>26</sup>Kofi Annan, "Contacts with Informant," (The UN's response to Roger Booh-Booh and General Dallaire) *The Triumph of Evil 1999* <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/warning/unresponsive.html>> (29 October 2003).

of the genocide.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the UN leadership's wariness of becoming embroiled in another African disaster, member states of the UN were equally worried about the financial costs and potential loss of lives. Moreover, most countries could not rationalize action in Rwanda with their own national security or national interests. With the exception of a few states such as the Czech Republic and New Zealand, member nations did not volunteer troops.<sup>28</sup> The United States and Belgium, in fact, even encouraged the complete withdrawal of UNAMIR. On April 21, weeks after the genocide began and as the death toll was mounting, the UN passed a resolution to reduce the UNAMIR force by ninety percent.<sup>29</sup> The UNAMIR commander General Dallaire later blamed the member nations for failing to intervene, saying, "The true culprits are the sovereign states that influence the Security Council, that influence other nations into participating or not."<sup>30</sup> This is an indication of a critical inadequacy of the UN as an international organization. That is, problems are inevitable if member states are faced with a choice between their own good and the common good. Shortcomings within the leadership of the UN compounded the effects of the unwillingness of member states to intervene. Jacques-Roger Booh-Booh of

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<sup>27</sup>"Interview with Iqbal Riza," (website). In the failed UN mission to Somalia in 1993, Somalis killed 18 U.S. soldiers, and the UN was afraid of another Somalia, that is, of losing control and losing lives in Rwanda.

<sup>28</sup>Gourevitch, 151.

<sup>29</sup>Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide*, 191.

<sup>30</sup>"Eyewitness: UN in Rwanda 1994," (interview with Dallaire) *BBC News* 6 September 2000 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/911232.stm>. (27 October 2003).

Cameroon was the UN special representative who supplied UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali with information on the situation in Rwanda. However, Booh-Booh had a conflict of interest because he actually supported Habyarimana's regime. Booh-Booh's reports to Boutros-Ghali toned down the speed and scale of the killings and made it seem as if both sides were murdering each other in similar numbers. When Boutros-Ghali received reports from Dallaire that contradicted some of Booh-Booh's reports, the Secretary General took his advice from the latter.<sup>31</sup>

The United States' role in the genocide largely paralleled the UN role. Because of the death of eighteen U.S. soldiers in the Somali capital the previous year, Congress resisted joining potentially dangerous UN operations. National interest also played a role, as the U.S. appeared to have nothing at stake in the Rwandan crisis other than a moral obligation to prevent genocide. The U.S. ambassador to the UN at the time, Madeleine Albright, pressured other states to join the U.S. in opposing further involvement in Rwanda. This coincided with Presidential Decision Directive 25, which set up guidelines for acceptable U.S. involvement in UN peacekeeping operations.<sup>32</sup> Rwanda did not fit the guidelines.

The UN and the United States both faced a dilemma by not intervening in the Rwandan genocide. According to the Genocide Convention, they both were morally and legally responsible for acting to prevent genocide if they knew it was occurring. The solution for the UN and the U.S. initially was to deny the events

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<sup>31</sup>Peterson, 294.

<sup>32</sup>Gourevitch, 150-151.

as genocide. UN and U.S. leaders publicly avoided using the term and encouraged their staffs to follow suit. The U.S. took this word avoidance a step further by actually forbidding unqualified official use of it. State Department spokeswoman Christine Shelley openly admitted that qualifying phrases for the term “genocide” were necessary because, “there are obligations which arise in connection with the use of the term.”<sup>33</sup> James Woods, former Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs in the Department of Defense, also noted that the U.S., “didn’t want to know the full dimensions of this thing and, thereby, assume the responsibility of having to deal with it.”<sup>34</sup>

Belgium and France also played significant roles in the Rwandan genocide. Belgium’s involvement dated, of course, from the colonial period. When the UNAMIR force was first deployed, the largest contingent of troops was Belgian. The extremist Hutu government was betting that if European peacekeeping troops were killed, it would influence them to withdraw. On April 7, the day after Habyarimana’s plane crash, ten Belgian soldiers, protecting the moderate Hutu Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyamana, were killed by *genocidaires*. The Hutu extremists had planned correctly. After the peacekeepers’ deaths, the Belgian government withdrew their soldiers from UNAMIR. Similar to the U.S. administration, Belgium, placing national interest above international responsibility,

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<sup>33</sup>Gourevitch, 152-153.

<sup>34</sup>“Interview with James Woods,” *The Triumph of Evil*, 1999  
<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/interviews/woods.html>> (29 October 2003).

decided that intervening in Rwanda was not worth the risk for Belgian soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

France, another influential actor in the international community's inaction in Rwanda, was unique among western states because of its close connection with the Rwandan government before the genocide. The ties between the two countries were largely personal and cultural. The personal relationship was based on the friendship of French President François Mitterand and Rwandan President Habyarimana. The cultural relationship was grounded in France's desire to maintain political, linguistic, and cultural ties with Francophone African countries. French motives stemmed partly from the desire to spread French culture but also from a phobia of losing ground to Anglo-Saxon influence on the African continent.<sup>36</sup> The two countries also had a military cooperation agreement since 1975. Beginning in 1990, French troops joined the government military Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR) in fighting the RPF invasions. France saw the Tutsi-led RPF as promoting Anglophone interests in Rwanda because the RPF had emerged from the Anglophone country of Uganda. While French involvement in actual fighting was not large-scale, French arms shipments to Rwanda were huge throughout the early 1990s and even during 1994, when the genocide was obvious.<sup>37</sup> Even if French officials and military leaders had no idea of the extremity of the Hutus' genocidal plans, the institu-

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<sup>35</sup>Peterson, 292.

<sup>36</sup>Gourevitch, 90.

<sup>37</sup>Gourevitch, 89; Alain Destexhe, "The Third Genocide," *Foreign Policy* (Winter 94-95): 3-18; Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide*, 56.

tionalized racism and policies of anti-Tutsi discrimination should have been apparent, as the French worked closely with the Rwandan military, many of whose generals were extremist Hutus. Whether or not France had any advance information of the genocide, the French government's reaction to news of the genocide, once it became common knowledge within the international community, was as inadequate as the responses of the UN and the United States. The French government made no official declarations about or against the genocide. Indeed, Rwandan government leaders were welcomed in a trip to France weeks into the genocide, further evidence of French avoidance of the genocide and French support of Habyarimana's government.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, during this period, Belgium refused to issue visas for Rwandan government ministers. As the genocide continued, the French shipment of arms to Rwanda continued as well, in spite of a UN sanctioned arms embargo on Rwanda.<sup>39</sup> France seemingly ignored not only the evidence of genocide in Rwanda, but they also ignored the international community's admittedly weak efforts in censuring the Rwandan government.

France finally took the initiative and responded to the genocide, but even that response was inappropriate. In choosing to respond to the genocide, French Prime Minister Balladur spoke to the UN Security Council of a "moral duty" to protect the threatened

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<sup>38</sup>Rwandan Foreign Minister Bicamumpaka and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza (the leader of the most extreme Rwandan Hutu political party) were officially received by President Mitterand, French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, and French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe in Paris on April 27, 1994.

<sup>39</sup>Prunier, 277-279.

populations and to end the genocide.<sup>40</sup> This rhetoric contradicts the previous French stance that the killing was not genocide but was just massive casualties on both sides of a civil war between the RPF and the government. The reversal of French policy towards Rwanda prompted international leaders to question French motives in mounting an armed operation in Rwanda. South African President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and of course the RPF, were all concerned that the proposed French military action was really a cover to aid the FAR.<sup>41</sup> However, the UN approved of the French mission, called Operation Turquoise, which also consisted of Senegalese troops to keep up appearances of multilateral action.<sup>42</sup>

Operation Turquoise received a UN Chapter Seven mandate, which authorized troops on the ground to use aggressive military action in self-defense and to protect civilians. Operation Turquoise officially started on June 22, and succeeded in setting up a “safe zone” in the country. The beneficiaries of the “safe zone,” however, were not those who had been most victimized. The French mission probably saved more extremist Hutus fleeing from the advancing RPF than Tutsis fleeing the *genocidaires*. To be sure, the Operation saved the lives of some Tutsis and innocent Hutus, but it did nothing to aid the deteriorating political situation. In fact, by the time the Operation began, not only was the genocide winding down (as most of the Tutsis to be killed had already been

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<sup>40</sup>“Genocidal Slaughter Claims as Many as One Million,” *United Nations Chronicle* 31 (December 94): 3.

<sup>41</sup>Gourevitch, 154-156.

<sup>42</sup>Italian and Tunisian troops were also part of the initial Operation Turquoise plans, but it did not work out.

murdered), but the RPF was nearing victory in gaining control of the capital.<sup>43</sup> The French response was essentially too little, too late.

In looking at the involvement of the international community in Rwanda it is also important to examine the role of development aid, including aid from foreign states and international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the 1970s Rwanda was seen as a model developing country, and international aid poured in from Western states, especially Switzerland and Belgium.<sup>44</sup> Even after the economic crisis began, Rwanda signed an agreement with the World Bank for a ninety million-dollar structural adjustment program (SAP) in 1991.<sup>45</sup> Rwanda's political stability made it an ideal recipient country. Although it was clearly a dictatorship, the government was in undisputed control of the country, there was an effective administration, and there was a concern for investment in rural areas. This dictatorship had the problems that aid and adjustment programs were meant to address – poverty, high population growth, and environmental pressures. Other problems, such as human rights abuses and racism, were not easily solved with donor money and adjustment programs, so they were ignored. The aid agencies failed to investigate the political history of Rwanda in their project reports.<sup>46</sup> These were grave mistakes. Rwanda was given the

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<sup>43</sup>Prunier, 281-299; Destexhe, 3-18.

<sup>44</sup>Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, Inc., 1998), 42.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 43-46; DesForges (website).

impression that what they were doing internally would be ignored externally.

Following the end of the Cold War, however, the West added a new condition for aid, democratization, which, ironically, adversely affected the Rwandan situation. President Habyarimana was forced to accept democratization as a goal of structural adjustment, to avoid economic disaster. However, the extremist leaders of the government were fearful of potential power loss, and they became more extreme and anti-Tutsi in their attempts to retain authority.<sup>47</sup> The effects of aid programs on pre-genocide Rwanda were twofold. First, as model recipients for aid and development, Rwandan economics and not Rwandan politics were the focus. Rwanda's pattern of prejudice and human rights abuses was initially ignored. Second, the conditions of receiving aid and adjustment programs were forced moves towards democratization, which merely pushed Hutu officials towards extremism as they feared losing power. While foreign aid and structural adjustment programs cannot be blamed for the genocide, they were undoubtedly in part responsible for setting the political and economic scene in Rwanda that eventually led to genocide.

Another large group who had the opportunity to work for positive change in Rwanda, but did not, were the Christian Churches and their various missionary orders. Christian missionaries not only made up a significant portion of the international community living in Rwanda, but they had also been intimately involved in the development of ethnic politics in Rwanda since the colonial period. The White Fathers

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<sup>47</sup>Andersen, 441-450.

order of the Catholic Church established their missionary movement in Rwanda in the 1880s. This group of missionaries attempted initially to convert the traditional leaders of Rwandan society, in the hopes that once the leaders converted the rest of the population would follow. By the 1930s the majority of Rwandans had converted to Christianity, and the devotion lasted. In post-colonial times, Rwanda was one of the most “Christian” states in Africa. The missionary attention to leadership extended to the colonial powers as well as to the African elite. Religious leaders worked closely with the colonial administrations and contributed to the legitimacy of colonial authority. Church officials and priests preached obedience to the state as a core Christian value. Protestant missionaries came to Rwanda after the Catholics, and while Protestant churches often appealed to the more marginalized populations, Protestants followed the Catholic example of preaching obedience to the state.<sup>48</sup>

The relationship between the Church (Catholic and to a lesser extent Protestant) and the state extended further than respect for state authority. The churches played a key role in establishing visions of ethnic superiority, as they were the original sponsors of the Hamitic hypothesis, which stated that the superior

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<sup>48</sup>Timothy Longman, “Christian Churches and Genocide in Rwanda,” *The Holocaust Revealed* 1997 <[http://www.logon.org/-domain/holocaust.revealed.org/Africa/Rwanda/Christian\\_Church\\_Genocide.htm](http://www.logon.org/-domain/holocaust.revealed.org/Africa/Rwanda/Christian_Church_Genocide.htm)> (15 November, 2003); Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Waal, “The Ungodly Missionary Legacy,” from *U.S. Complicity by Silence: Genocide in Rwanda* <<http://mediafilter.org/CAQ/CAQ52Rw2t.html>> (4 November, 2003).

foreigner Tutsis conquered the native inferior Hutus.<sup>49</sup> The Catholic Church was also instrumental in constructing ethnic relations in the post-colonial state of Rwanda. Priests played a crucial role in changing Belgian colonial support from Tutsis to Hutus as independence neared. In the 1950s, the typical Belgian missionary priest coming to Rwanda was a Flemish “progressive” motivated by theories of social justice. These priests regarded minority rule as outdated, and they identified with the oppressed Hutu majority. The Church attitude influenced the Belgian colonial authorities. Following the Hutu struggle to gain power, when Belgium was granting independence to Rwanda, colonial and Church leadership supported the switch from Tutsi to Hutu leaders.<sup>50</sup> After independence, the ties between Church and state were knotted even tighter. Many of the early Hutu leaders had Church patrons who not only supervised their advanced education but also helped them gain positions within the government. Church leaders were also members of the government. The Archbishop of Rwanda was a member of the Central Committee of Habyarimana’s party, the only party until the 1990s.<sup>51</sup> Not all religious officials participated in discriminatory practices against the Tutsis before the genocide, but neither did the Church stand against the institutionalized racism – cooperation with the state was too deeply ingrained at this point.

The Church also played a role during the genocide. Due to the Church’s significant status in Rwandan

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<sup>49</sup>Mamdani, 232.

<sup>50</sup>Longman (website); Omaar (website).

<sup>51</sup>Mamdani, 232.

society and the nonexistence of other social organizations, churches and priests often had very close relationships with community members, especially in rural areas. Populations went to their churches for education, economic assistance, healthcare, charity and employment. These resources furthered the Church's status among the people and provided an image of refuge in tumultuous times. The people remembered this image during the genocide. Tutsis often fled to their local churches for safety. The *genocidaires* often told Tutsis to gather in churches, ostensibly for their protection, but in reality to gather them together to make the killing easier. The range of nuns' and priests' actions during the genocide varies widely. Some religious leaders attempted to protect their Tutsi congregations seeking refuge, some did nothing, and some were actively involved in helping the killers or even carrying out killing themselves.<sup>52</sup> The Church can be held accountable for its complicity with the extremist Hutus in government and its failure to take a stand against ethnic discrimination and violence in Rwanda.<sup>53</sup>

There are other international organizations that should be examined, not because they were directly complicit with the violence in Rwanda, but because of their lack of appropriate response to the genocide. Two groups were the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, also known as Doctors without Borders), the only two

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<sup>52</sup>Longman (website); Omaar (website).

<sup>53</sup>Rasmus Hylleborg, Lone Moller-Hansen and Allan Poulsen, "The Rwanda Genocide in 1994 and Danish Baptist Involvement in the Country," trans. Allan Poulsen (Report for the Baptist Union, 1998), 1-7.

large-scale humanitarian organizations that continued to operate in Rwanda during the genocide. The Red Cross and MSF are independent non-governmental groups that go to areas facing humanitarian crises to provide medical relief as well as to address underlying health-related issues, such as providing clean drinking water and better sanitation facilities. The MSF is often the first NGO to arrive at a crisis, but their services are only meant to be temporary, whereas the Red Cross carries out long-term projects in many countries after the immediate crisis has ended but while humanitarian relief is still needed.<sup>54</sup>

MSF and Red Cross workers provided medical care to survivors of *genocidaire* attacks in Rwanda. Treating near-fatal machete wounds was a common purpose of medical teams. Wounded and hiding Tutsis also sought refuge in the MSF and Red Cross compounds, and both organizations cared for orphans of the genocide. The MSF and Red Cross were doing their jobs to the best of their abilities, considering the number of volunteers and the amount of available supplies.<sup>55</sup> It is in the area of politics that MSF and Red Cross were constrained. Publicly choosing sides in a conflict would limit their effectiveness in future endeavors. They have to stay neutral to continue working in areas of conflict. In addition, aid from the

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<sup>54</sup>Elliot Leyton, *Touched by Fire: Doctors Without Borders in a Third World Crisis* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1998), 29, 45; "The ICRC in Rwanda," *International Committee of the Red Cross* (17 August 2003) <<http://www.icrc.org/Web/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/rwanda?OpenDocument>> (23 November 2003)

<sup>55</sup>Leyton, 63, 92; John Sundin, "Kigali's Wounds, Through a Doctor's Eyes," *Harper's Magazine* 289 (August 1994): 13-18.

developed world is often viewed as a cover for political manipulations in the Third World, and, therefore, MSF and the Red Cross have to scrupulously and publicly avoid politics to assure the countries that the aid and relief comes with no strings attached to Western governments. These factors limit the ability and willingness of such organizations to take a stand on issues about which they have unique access to information. Only after crises, such as the genocide, can MSF and Red Cross workers speak out politically about what they witnessed.<sup>56</sup>

The final group of international actors to examine regarding the 1994 genocide are three of the states surrounding Rwanda: Burundi, Uganda, and Congo. Burundi had the most influence on Rwanda among the neighbor states in the years from independence until the genocide, partly due to shared histories and partly due to the ease of populations crossing borders. Rwanda and Burundi had been governed by the colonial powers jointly as one territory. The colonial powers favored Tutsi minorities in both territories, and policies of ethnic discrimination were put in place. Rwanda and Burundi attained independence in 1962, but unlike the case in Rwanda, Tutsis remained in control of political and military power in Burundi. Burundian minority Tutsi officials discriminated against majority Hutus. The discrimination by both governments evolved into ethnic violence.<sup>57</sup>

The violence in each country influenced ethnic violence in the other. Ethnic violence towards Hutus in Burundi was the justification Rwandan officials

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<sup>56</sup>Leyton, 136, 159-160.

<sup>57</sup>Hintjens, 276; Arnold, 3.

used in persecuting Rwandan Tutsis, and violence against Tutsis in Rwanda was justification for Burundian officials' persecution of Burundian Hutus. The movement of refugees fleeing from such persecution across borders also influenced inter-ethnic relations. In 1972, Tutsis killed between 100,000 and 200,000 Hutus in Burundi after Hutus attempted to organize an uprising. This event, referred to by scholars as the first genocide after the Holocaust, sent Hutus fleeing across borders to Rwanda, and also played a pivotal role in aiding future President Habyarimana's regime of anti-Tutsi policies. In 1993, Burundi's first popularly elected Hutu president, Melchior Ndadaye, was assassinated by the Tutsi-controlled military. The assassination prompted Burundian Hutus to murder about 20,000 Tutsis, which the army responded to by killing about 300,000 Hutus.<sup>58</sup> These events led to Hutu refugees fleeing into Rwanda, many of whom later participated in the 1994 genocide.<sup>59</sup>

The killings of Hutus in Burundi in 1972 and 1993 were used as examples by the Habyarimana regime of the threat that Tutsis posed to Hutus and as justification for ethnic violence within Rwanda. In addition, as journalist Philip Gourevitch stated, "Lack of international response to the 1993 massacres in Burundi permitted Rwandan extremists to expect that they too could slaughter people in large numbers without consequences."<sup>60</sup> The ethnic violence used as political tools by Rwanda and Burundi were inextricably linked

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<sup>58</sup>Hintjens, 277-279; Lemarchand (article), 5-7; Newbury and Newbury, 298.

<sup>59</sup>Mamdani, 205.

<sup>60</sup>DesForges, (website).

– when the two states had problems with the policies of their neighbor, they never engaged in government dialogue, but simply channeled their anger with their neighbor to their own populations of their neighbor’s politically powerful ethnic group.

Uganda was also involved in Rwandan affairs because many Tutsis fleeing from Hutu extremist violence throughout the decades after independence sought refuge in Uganda. There they joined with Ugandans to create the post-colonial state. However, under Ugandan President Milton Obote’s two periods of rule, Rwandan refugees were viewed with hostility, prompting many to join with Ugandan Yoweri Museveni’s revolutionary guerilla forces to overthrow Obote. One Rwandan involved in this guerilla movement was Paul Kagame, future leader of the RPF. After Museveni’s victorious ascent to power in Uganda, he changed rules of citizenship so that anyone who had lived within the country for ten years was a citizen, partly to acknowledge Rwandan refugees’ aid to his revolution. However, facing criticism from native Ugandans, and needing to maintain his legitimacy, Museveni revoked the changes so that citizenship was once again dependent on ancestry. Refugee Rwandan Tutsis, unable to return to Rwanda, were faced with losing their welcome in Uganda.<sup>61</sup> These events played a significant role in the establishment of the RPF as a group fighting for the right of Tutsis to return to Rwanda. Thus, events in Uganda had an influence on pre-genocide Rwanda, although direct relations at the state level had not been a factor.

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<sup>61</sup>Prunier, 67-74; Mamdani, 17.

Congo (Zaire at the time of the genocide) was also involved in pre-genocidal Rwanda, but unlike Burundi and Uganda, Congo maintained positive relations because of the friendship between President Mobutu Sese Seko and President Habyarimana. Mobutu aided the Rwandan government's struggle against the RPF by assisting the shipments of arms to the Rwandan army during the genocide. Mobutu also provided bases for the French Operation Turquoise within Congo, as a cultivator and recipient of French government support for his own country.<sup>62</sup> While Mobutu did nothing to halt the genocidal culture developing among extremist Rwandan Hutus, and, in fact, probably encouraged it through his support of Habyarimana's regime, Congo's most direct involvement in the affairs of Rwanda occurred towards the end of the genocide and after it. Partially through the French Operation Turquoise safe-zone, Hutu extremists fled the RPF into the protective custody of refugee camps located in Congo. These refugee camps, run by numerous international humanitarian organizations, provided a base for the extremist Hutus in exile to reorganize their violent anti-Tutsi efforts and to regain support among the camps' populations. The extremist Hutus directed armed battles against the new RPF-controlled government of Rwanda in an attempt to regain power. The extremists also, tragically, encouraged ethnic violence against Tutsis living in Congo, even if they were native Congolese.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Gourevitch, 253-254, 279-280.

<sup>63</sup>Kevin C. Dunn, *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 140, 143-144.

Were there warning signs of the violence or potential actions that the international community could have taken? The major warning sign of impending genocide was supplied by the UNAMIR commander Dallaire's informant, but other evidence for a potential genocide was also ignored by the international community. In 1993, a mission undertaken by International Federation of Human Rights and Africa Watch found evidence of human rights abuses carried out by Habyarimana's regime in the mass graves of Tutsis killed in 1991 and 1992. Their report was corroborated by a UN human rights official, and the report was sent to Western governments. The report was largely ignored or viewed as an exaggeration.<sup>64</sup> However, some foreign officials heeded the signs of impending violence. The Foreign Minister of Belgium, Willy Klaes, warned the UN Secretary General in March 1994 that the current situation in Rwanda, "could result in an irrepressible explosion of violence."<sup>65</sup> Another ignored warning sign was the hate propaganda pouring out of the Rwandan radio station RTLM and the newspaper *Kangura* beginning in the early 1990s. The messages of ethnic hate encouraged violence against Tutsis and portrayed all Tutsis as direct threats to Hutu safety.<sup>66</sup>

Some scholars note that the international community could have undertaken various military actions to halt the genocide once it began. For example, bombing the RTLM radio headquarters would have presented

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<sup>64</sup>William A. Schabas, "When There's No Forgetting," *Irish Red Cross Journal*, March 2000 <<http://www.redcross.ie/news/review/2000/0300b.html>> (15 November 2003)

<sup>65</sup>Gourevitch, 108.

<sup>66</sup>Kellow and Steeves, 116.

little risk to the military volunteers heading the operation, and by cutting out the main voice that encouraged and aided killers, lives might have been spared.<sup>67</sup> More direct action to halt the genocide would have involved military presence on the ground in Rwanda, but this could have occurred in various degrees of intensity. The UN could have changed the UNAMIR mandate from Chapter Six to Chapter Seven, authorizing more aggressive force. The UNAMIR forces could have been enlarged. The Belgian and French paratroopers who were sent in only long enough to evacuate their citizens, could have remained to protect their citizens and provide an armed presence in Rwanda.<sup>68</sup> The UN or the U.S. could have led an intervention force designed to end the killings. Political scientist Alan Kuperman theorized that a minimal intervention consisting of solely air force from outside Rwanda that either evacuated Tutsis to neighboring countries or bombed Rwandan government troops, could have saved up to 75,000 Tutsis from execution.<sup>69</sup>

Historical events are, to be sure, contingent on a variety of factors, so it is impossible to know the outcome of any of these scenarios. Yet, it is clear that contemporaries did make predictions based on their assumptions about outcomes. The organizers of the genocide were betting on international withdrawal from Rwanda once the genocide exploded. International presence, even without international military action, might have been enough to dramatically reduce the killings by genocidal killers armed only with

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>68</sup> Des Forges, (website).

<sup>69</sup> Kuperman, 106-119.

machetes. It was only after the international journalists, diplomats, clergy, aid agencies, and businessmen left Rwanda that the killing became massive and widespread.<sup>70</sup> The international community's obvious decision to leave the Rwandans to themselves was a clear signal to the extremists in power that they could continue with the genocide as planned without anyone trying to stop them. Tragically, the same signal that told the genocide's organizers they could continue with their plans also signaled to the populations in Rwanda that participating in the killing would not incur punishment. Realizing the relative ease with which the international community could have intervened leads to questions of why it did not. To prevent genocide from occurring again, which in all probability it will somewhere, these questions need to be asked and the answers explored.

Rwanda had a very troubled history that led to a culture capable of committing genocide. Many factors played a role in not only setting Rwanda on the path to ethnic violence as a state policy, but also in causing the genocide. Although the genocide had obvious ethnic expressions, it was a form of political violence and did not result from ancient ethnic differences. Because the genocide was a political outcome, it could have been dealt with in the international community through political avenues. It should not be denied that Rwandans were responsible for committing the genocide, but neither should it be ignored that the international community and historical conditions were influential in setting the stage for assisting the extremist Rwandans to attain power in Rwanda and to

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<sup>70</sup>Hintjens, 272.

pursue genocide in a state which was in economic and political crisis. In addition, the international community, in its various forms, is limited by the necessity of respecting state sovereignty. States' national interests are usually prioritized above those of individual citizens. Recognizing these aspects of the international system and acknowledging the historical role of international governmental and non-governmental actors in events leading to genocide will help explain the failures in Rwanda. Furthermore, it may help to avert future genocide under different circumstances.