

A Discourse on the Developmental Path of Rwanda

By **Govindi Dyal**

The overarching issue this essay will be analyzing is surrounding the topic of politics of identity. Generally speaking, the term politics of identity was coined as a result of the colonial imposition of identity on the local community. This led the local community to question their background and existence. Politics of identity is the result of a settler-native binary which was initiated by colonial powers and forced onto the local community, causing an identity crisis. As scholar Mahmood Mamdani detailed in his academic article entitled “Indirect Rule, Civil Society, and Ethnicity: The African Dilemma”, a creation and imagination of the so-

called “native” is then formed as a direct result of the settler-native binary. This paper will look at the specific example of Rwanda by analyzing the historical, cultural and social background that, inevitably, led to the Rwandan Civil War and, more specifically, the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. This paper will demonstrate the crucial role post-colonial nationalism, media, and fictions of ethnicity played in the development of Rwanda as a country, and how these factors led to the horrific genocide of the Tutsi population. In order to fully comprehend these micro factors, a detailed account of the pre-colonial context of Rwanda will be provided,

followed by an outline of the Belgian colonial era in Rwanda, demonstrating the disruption this caused to the course of Rwandan development. Ultimately, this paper will display how the colonial disruption was the leading factor to the modern-day fragmented political, social and cultural state of Rwanda.

One of the smallest countries situated on mainland Africa, Rwanda is packed with a rich history that has shaped the course of its growth and development. This complex history can be framed in terms of the concept politics of identity. The term politics of identity was coined as a result of the colonial imposition of identity on a local community. As a result, this led the local community to question

their background and existence. This paper will look at the factors that have been used to politicize identity by, either the colonial power or the government in place. These include, but are not limited to, post-colonial nationalism, media, and fictions of ethnicity. This paper will look at how these concepts shaped the cultural and developmental growth of Rwanda, which culminated in the Rwandan Civil War and the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. This paper will take the reader through Rwanda's history dating back to pre-colonial times all the way to the twentieth century, in an attempt to demonstrate the impact politicizing one's identity has on the state of a nation. Ultimately, this paper will display how

colonial disruption was a contributing factor to the internal strife that led to the Rwandan Civil War, Rwandan Genocide, and in turn, a fragmented political and cultural nation, making this a case of developmental concern.

Post-Colonial Nationalist State of Rwanda

This paper begins by analyzing the relationship between post-colonial nationalism and politics of identity. Post-colonial nationalism was discussed in detail by scholar Mahmood Mamdani in his article “Indirect Rule, Civil Society, and Ethnicity: The African Dilemma”. Mamdani outlined two forms of governance that were present during colonial times: direct rule and

indirect rule (Mamdani 1996, 145). He stated that direct rule was achieved by forming a centralized foreign authoritative presence in the colonized lands, which were headed by colonial officials in order to establish a single, legal order (Mamdani 1996, 145). This was accomplished by means of domination and reintegration of the “native” according to colonial, or “modern”, law (Mamdani 1996, 146).

While direct rule did exist in colonial nations, it was indirect rule that Mamdani claimed was most commonly experienced in colonial nations. This a type of governance was conducted through mediated rule. Therefore, the vast majority of those living in colonized lands were controlled by their own

people (Mamdani 1996, 146). With the blessing of the colonial power, pre-established local elites and native institutions were integrated into society, thus solidifying their position as leaders. As a result of the colonial power maintaining their control over local leaders, a Janus-type affair was created (Takamura, Sept. 18). The settler-native binary created two sets of laws: one surrounding equal right for the settler, and another that allows for ease of control over the “native” (Takamura, Sept. 18). Consequently, this led to legal dualism, which ensured the settler’s position over the “native’s” (Takamura, Sept. 18). This was accomplished by the native institutions ruling the country under customary laws. This

binary resulted in the construction of the “native” because of the two rules of law that were developed under indirect rule. The idea of the “native” was used to establish cultural supremacy of the settlers over the natives.

The outcomes of the settler-native binary and legal dualism were drastic because it characterized the post-colonial period in terms of the re-imagination of the “native” (Takamura, Sept. 18). Tensions began intensifying as the question of who is “native” became a common discussion because every group wanted to be recognized as the “real native”, as it was associated with the moral superiority (Takamura, Sept. 18th). As a result of these combination of

factors, it can be concluded that the overall outcomes of post-colonial nationalism were exclusionism, violence, and conflict (Takamura, Sept. 18).

This concept can be applied to Rwanda. Traditionally, Hutus were farmers while Tutsis were those who tended to livestock (Beauchamp 2014). Due to the fact that livestock was worth more, the Tutsis became the local elites and established a monarchy to solidify their position of power prior to colonial times (Beauchamp 2014). However, it was not until the Belgian occupation that commenced in 1916 (BBC 2018) did these class divisions soon turn into ethnic divisions that were contested and manipulated for political gain. The Belgians openly

favoured the Tutsis which can be seen with colonial authorities choosing Tutsis alone to obtain training to become future administrators in order to gain better jobs (Jefremovas 1997, 97). It was admitted by the Belgian administration that they selected candidates that they believed would be best suited to carry out the agenda of Belgium (Jefremovas 1997, 97). This was accomplished under legal dualism because native institutions were governing the entire nation under customary laws (Takamura, Sept. 18). With the support of the colonial power behind them, the Tutsi monarchy solidified their status as the local elites and excluded the Hutus as a result (BBC 2018). It can be concluded that the Tutsis

had the moral high ground as they had already established a monarchy and were then supported by the Europeans over the Hutus. Tensions began brewing amongst the Hutu community as they wanted to be acknowledged as the “real native” intensified (Takamura, Sept. 18).

In response to the exclusion that the Hutus were experiencing, they established a rival political party called Parmehutu in opposition to the Tutsi monarchy (Commonwealth). The goal for Parmehutu was to unite all Hutus by reinforcing the fear of exclusion and suppression felt under colonialism (Commonwealth). Led by Gregoire Kayibanda, Parmehutu was responsible for provoking the Hutu Revolution which occu-

red in 1959 until 1960 (Commonwealth). During this time, Parmehutu was accountable for the deaths of approximately 20,000 Tutsis and was the reason why many Tutsis fled to neighbouring countries, like Burundi and Uganda (BBC 2011). Eventually, Kayibanda took office on the cusp of Rwanda’s independence (Commonwealth). Systematic violence and strife targeted towards Tutsis were a daily occurrence under this regime (Commonwealth). It was only until Kayibanda was overthrown in 1973 by Juvenal Habyarimana that systematic violence briefly ceased (Commonwealth).

Meanwhile, Tutsi refugees in Uganda had formed an organization, first called the Rwandese

Alliance for National Unity, now known as the Rwandese Patriotic Front and commonly abbreviated to RPF (Commonwealth). The sole mission of the RPF was to mobilize exiled Tutsis to combat against the divisive policies targeted towards them during post-independent Rwanda, demonstrating the want to regain their status as the superior group and the “real native” (Takamura, Sept. 18).

The politicization of identity is evident in the nationalist state of post-colonial Rwanda. This is demonstrated through the example of the Belgian implementation of the Tutsis into positions of power and providing the Tutsi communities with the opportunity to receive a well-rounded education. Formally instituti-

onizing the Tutsis as the local elites was a way to demonstrate who were worthy enough to follow in the footsteps of the European powers. This social hierarchy stemmed from the system of legal dualism and settler-native binary and therefore, indirect rule. Placing Europeans at the top of the hierarchy, the Tutsis were directly below, excluding the Hutu community based on the simple fact that the Belgians had a preference for the Tutsis. The construction of the “native” was then used as a political tool to assert the dominance of one ethnic group over another. Thus, dividing a nation based off of the identity of who’s the “real native” became an engrained problem for the state of Rwanda and shaped the course of its

development, as this was the start of governing the nation through means of discrimination, exclusion, and eventually violence. All of which are the results of a post-colonial nationalist state.

The Rwandan Media

Another key tool closely tied to politics of identity is the use of media. Media is important for regime change, either to destabilize an authoritarian regime or to strengthen it. Media is manipulated in authoritarian regimes to convince the public that their government is a trustworthy representative of its citizens. Believing that the media is trustworthy leads to an increased consumption of altered and targeted news, giving the regime a

clear path to persuade the public. This power allows the regime to perpetuate ideas that have been institutionalized throughout the history of the nation in order to shape the public opinion into believing a limited and specific idea (Takamura, Sept. 20). Daniela Stockmann described these ideas in her article “Media Commercialization and Authoritarian Rule in China”. Stockmann stated that there was a lack of attention placed on the role and influence of media until the 1960s when political scientists began to analyze the effects media had on destabilizing authoritarian regimes and the potential role media could play to strengthen these same regimes (Stockmann 1997, 2). She continued to support the claim of the media’s

growing influence in a nation's political landscape by discussing studies that have been conducted to show that there are a variety of ways the media can be manipulated to restrict the press, freedom, and access to information (Stockmann 1997, 3).

The media played a crucial role in the tensions between the Hutus and the Tutsis, specifically during the Rwandan Civil War that took place in 1990 and terminated with the start of the genocide. President Habyarimana, the Hutu leader at the time of the civil war, led propaganda campaigns across the nation to exaggerate and emphasize the ethnic divide and tensions between the Tutsis and Hutus (Lower and Hauschildt 2014, 2).

The underlying goal of these propaganda campaigns was to instill one important feeling into the Hutu community, the sense of fear. Thus, the aim of the media outlets is to remind them of the suppression and exclusion that they were victim of during those years of the Belgian occupation to create a sense of panic and uneasiness amongst the Hutu community. The messages that were produced were circulated around the nation to mislead the public into succumbing to this feeling of fear. To make it believable, the government orchestrated a staged, public attack on the capital city of Kigali in October of 1990 that they claimed was conducted by Tutsis, when in fact it was not (Lower and Hauschildt

2014, 2). This was the attack sparked the Rwandan Civil War (BBC 2018).

Rwandan news outlets such as the Kangura, Radio Rwanda, Radio Mille Collines were the key tools used by President Habyarimana to propagate the idea that the invading RPF had the intention to eradicate the entirety of the Hutu ethnicity (Lower and Hauschildt 2014, 2). These media platforms used their power, with the support of the government and the fact that there were no alternate news sources to spread this message (Lower and Hauschildt 2014, 3). An example of this can be seen from the newspaper Kangura, as they published an article entitled the “Hutu Ten Commandments”, one of

the most widely circulated propaganda documents based on anti-Tutsi rhetoric (Lower and Hauschildt 2014, 3). This document can be paralleled to the Nazi’s portrayal of European Jews during the Second World War (Lower and Hauschildt 2014, 3). It was documents like the Ten Commandments that brain-washed the Hutus into believing the Tutsis were the enemy. It was the power of the media that helped to produce this mentality that led Rwanda to the horrific genocide of 1994.

An easy way to perpetuate colonial ideas is by manipulating the media. As a result of there being a lack of a variety of news outlets and a government who controlled the news and had a specific message that

they wanted to circulate creates a perfect environment to propagate colonial ideas that concern the politicization of one's identity. The media is an excellent platform to perpetuate ideas about a community in order to benefit the one's own agenda. Doing this is a form of discrimination used to treat people of a distinct identity differently. Again, this demonstrates that those in power are using identity as a political tool. This is evident during the Habyarimana regime, as he staged fake attacks in order to solidify the idea that this group of people are a harm to the majority of the society, simply based on their identity. Discrimination against an individual or a group is easily perpetuated in a society such as Rwanda

because there are no alternative news outlets. Thus, the politicization of identity is an easy tool that can be manipulated because of the colonial past and the discrimination that occurred and was targeted to the Hutu peoples. This inherently weaves inequality into the foundation of the nation's ideology, resulting in an unsafe environment for many to be themselves. As a result, the use of media has the ability to shape the future of the country and if news outlets solely report false reports, the media has the ability to be detrimental to the development of the nation as a united and safe place for all.

The Reality of Ethnicity in Rwanda

Fictions of ethnicity is a concept used to institutionalize ethnicity (Takamura, Sept. 20). This was accomplished through the practice of three key tools: state apparatus, history, and media, which created what is called, politics of exclusion, an idea that is closely related to fictions of ethnicity (Takamura, Sept. 20). Politics of exclusion is a discourse that is constructed around the binary of “us” – the good – and “them” – the bad (Takamura, Nov. 15th). In other words, it is the development and construction of the fear and undesirability of the other (Takamura, Nov. 15). By creating this binary, systematic violence along with other physical forms of power ensue. Scholar Villia Jefremovas comprehensively detailed the use of

ethnicity and politics of exclusion in her article “Contested Identities: Power and the Fictions of Ethnicity, Ethnography and History in Rwanda”. She claimed that ethnicity served as a political ideology to normalize the ideas of politics of exclusion which have helped powerful actors control their nation (Jefremovas 1997, 96). This sentiment was echoed by Mahmood Mamdani, who stated that ethnicity is not real because it has been socially constructed by the colonial power as an attempt to control the “native” while simultaneously conquering and dividing the land (Mamdani 1996, 147). Ultimately, the goal of crystallizing ethnicity into the government was to dominate, subjugate, and eliminate a specific

group of people (Takamura, Sept. 20).

Arguably, ethnicity is one of the most significant concepts used throughout the development of many colonized countries, and the same can be said for Rwanda. Since ethnic divisions are engrained in the history of Rwanda, a trend among all, if not most, of their political leaders have used ethnicity as a weapon to rally a group of people to manipulate and convince them that the other group is inferior to them. However, this did present a problem for the leaders, as the ethnic differences between the Hutus and the Tutsis were not dramatically different. Both of these groups of people share the same language, culture, religion and history. Nevertheless,

there is evidence that proves that the Belgians thought the Tutsis were “natural rulers”. As a result, they hand selected Tutsis to work in the government to further the agenda of the colonizer while simultaneously removing hundreds of Hutus from their governmental positions, showing a preference for Tutsis (Jefremovas 1997, 96). The only reason for this, and all other preferential treatments that the Tutsis received over the Hutus, were based on the fact that the Belgians believed that the Tutsis were “natural rulers” (Jefremovas 1997, 96). This institutionalized the notion that those from a Tutsi ethnic background were entitled to superior treatment, education, and jobs. It was not until the Belgian occupation was the

concept of ethnicity, a racial ideology, imposed on the communities (Jefremovas 1997, 103).

Following the precedent set by the Belgians to use ethnicity as a political tool, Hutu political leaders began using the “Hamitic Hypothesis” as the basis for advancing their personal goals. The “Hamitic Hypothesis” was present in both colonial and post-colonial times. This belief was formulated around the idea that the Tutsis originated from Ethiopia and had invaded Rwanda, thus, not making them Rwandan. However, in actuality, Tutsi genealogy is rooted in eastern Rwanda (Jefremovas 1997, 93). This demonstrates the perpetual cycle of using ethnicity as grounds for political advancement.

Inevitably, this form of racial ideology simply continues to divide the nation according to this socially constructed concept. This proves problematic for the development of the nation, as the country cannot advance. Rather, it strengthens divides that are detrimental to the progression of the country in terms of unity, peace, and development.

Ethnicity was used as a tool throughout the course of Rwandan history. Institutionalizing the Tutsis as the local elites created an unhealthy environment from the start and produced a precedent that made it seem as though it was acceptable to use one’s ethnicity to determine the kind of job, education and way of life one can have. Invariably,

ethnicity was manipulated to the extent that it created a fragmented society that would become the foundation for later problems. Politicizing one's ethnic background creates a toxic environment where people begin to question their own background, who they are, and their worth based off of identity, which leads to discontent with their way of life. Mobilizing a group of people by using one's ethnicity is a form of politics of identity because the perpetrator is using identity as a way to determine who is worthy enough to be a part of society. One's ethnicity may never have been something that was of importance to the growth and development of a society, however after colonial times, and in the case of Rwanda and its

occupation under Belgium, one's ethnicity became an important role because it was the one thing that they could not change. Thus, it created doubt, a question of self-worth that became the main tool for political gain. As Mamdani stated, the social construction of ethnicity may be a fiction, however its impact on society, politics, and culture is reality and affects the development of the nation. Therefore, leading an entire community to question their identity.

Conclusion

Some may say that the course of Rwandan development was doomed from the inception. The Tutsis had already established a kingdom in pre-colonial

times, thus displaying their dominance over the Hutus. It could also be said that had it not been for the Belgians, the Hutus might never have realized their worth as a community that had the right to fight for a leadership role. Nevertheless, as the evidence shown above proves, one's identity was never looked upon as a weapon to use against another individual. It was the institutionalization of ethnicity and social divides that led to a state that ended up basing their entire governmental platform around this socially constructed idea. Had it not been for the manipulation of social divides, the controlling of media or the institutionalization of ethnicity, the history of Rwanda may not have been plagued with bloodshed and ma-

ssacre. Rather, if the country was given a fair chance to develop on its own, it could be in a state of peace and unity today.

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