

## Reflecting on Determinant Factors of Violence in Light of the Governments' Access to Resources, Vested Political Interests and Ethno-religious Identities in the Rwandan Genocide After 25 Years

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### ABSTRACT

*The research sought to know the primary determinant factors of violence in light of the governments' access to resources and vested political interests on the one hand and ethno-religious identities on the other in the context of the Rwandan Genocide. The Instrumentalism Theory of Ethnicity guided the research. The research used a qualitative research design within the phenomenological approach. A non-probability snowball sampling technique was used. The data collection method was interviews; hence, the data collection instruments were interview guides. A total of ten participants from the Republic of Rwanda participated in the interviews. Thematic data analysis was used to arrive at the research result. The research findings pointed to the determinant factors of violence linked to colonial powers, governments and ethnoreligious identities. The political interests and the resource issues of the governments are stronger determinants of violence than the ethnoreligious identities. This means that religion, ethnicity, and other cultural grievances remained secondary or instrumental factors that the external and internal governments utilised in the history of Rwanda. In addition, the research found that religion and ethnicity are important agents in exacerbating conflict and building peace and social transformation in the aftermath of conflicts. They bring the warring parties into reconciliation, healing, and enhancing peace. Therefore, the research findings concluded that the lack of natural resources, Rwanda being a land-locked country, and overpopulation of the geographical space exposed the people of Rwanda to virtual poverty. This socio-economic reality exacerbated the government's desperate search for access to meagre resources by external and internal political and ethnic authorities. Hence, the primary cause of the genocide was the desperate search for resources and political manoeuvres to secure them by holding on to power at any cost. The article recommends that all the stakeholders of Rwanda's peace and development must stand shoulder to shoulder to reduce poverty and create good governance.*

**Key Words:** Access to Resources, Ethnoreligious Identities, Rwanda, Sustainable Peace and Development, Triggers of Violence, Vested Political Interests

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, exploring the determinant factors of violence between governments' access to resources, vested political interests, and ethnoreligious identities, Stewart (2009) argues that most conflicts are neither religious nor ethnic but nationalistic and political. However, Silvestri and Mayall (2015) also observe that religion is fluid and a strong element in the socio-economic milieu. Hence, understanding the religious role in violence is paramount. Religious identities could exacerbate or ease the situation of conflict. Similarly, Moller (2006) argues that religion decreases or increases conflicts.

In this concept, Moller agrees with Stewart (2009) and Silvestri and Mayall (2015), who state that though religion may not be the primary cause of conflict, it is undoubtedly an influential factor in exacerbating and solving disputes. In addition to governments' historical utilisation of religion, Stewart's argument appears to be valid, particularly when he states that religious and ethnic identities are generally present during conflicts in unifying, motivating, and creating trust among people. The three authors agree that although religion might not be the primary factor in conflict, there is no doubt it significantly affects the process of violence and peace.

In the context of Africa, particularly in Sudan, Nigeria, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Chad and Mali, the position of Stewart, Silvestri and Mayallis is important in comprehending the degree to which religion and ethnicity influence peace and conflict. In the same regional context, John Mbiti (Mbiti, 1991) observed that people are notoriously religious, meaning that a majority of the religions of the continent, mainly Islam and Christianity, have been uniting peoples of the mainland (Agbiji & Swart, 2015). The writers explain that on this continent, religion is inextricably interwoven into the socio-political situation of the people and constitutes the fabric of society. Therefore, religious values have the potential to make sense of the past, the present, and the future of people's lives. It then becomes

indisputable that religion is instrumental in the life of Africans since it permeates all levels of society. Interaction with religion, therefore, has to be held with wisdom and utilised positively so that its values can be maximised while controlling the negative elements. In this trajectory, societal transformation is realised (Agbiji & Swart, 2015).

Another core component relevant to this study and in relation to Africa is that religion promotes dialogue, peace, and development (Little, 2018). It has an effect on social life and history, contributing towards social transformation (Ludovic, 2021). This same writer stresses that religion in Africa remains important despite the rapid processes of secularisation. On that note, religious diplomacy becomes effective when national and international state actors fail to bring peace between different warring parties. For instance, in the 1990s, religious leaders were chosen to preside over national political conferences, which had serious socio-political issues threatening the disintegration of nations. A case in mind is when the religious leaders carried out effective political facilitation in Benin, the Republic of Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Ludovic, 2021). As a result, those countries passed peacefully from one-party to multi-party systems. This led to peace and stability, thus realising a transformation that shed light towards a better future devoid of bloodshed or political stagnation.

Analysing the history of conflict concerning Rwanda's Genocide of 1994 (Sellstrom & Wohlgenuth, 1995) and the recent conflict in Ethiopia (2020-2023) (Girma, 2021). It appears that though religion was not the attributed trigger of the conflict, the concerned governments instrumentalised it. History reminds us of the sad events in the Rwandan conflict, which involved the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Rwandan Government Forces (RGF). More than 800,000 Tutsis, moderate Hutus and some Twas were killed by Hutu Ethnic groups in a genocidal manner (Shaw, 2012).

Two major ethnic groups were involved: the Hutus and the Tutsis. The government of Rwanda mainly consisted of the Hutu ethnic group and was supported by some European countries in the heavy presence of multi-national peacekeeping forces under the UN (Barnett, 1997). In this conflict, Tutsis were discriminated against, and the aim was to wipe them out. In the modern history of human conflicts, only the genocides of Cambodia in the 1970s and Bangladesh in 1971 exceeded the level of the Rwandan Genocide (Shaw, 2012).

Further, looking into the causes of conflicts in Africa points to their close link with the colonial past. Ali Mazrui, a Kenyan historian, in his article, *The Roots of Conflict Black Violence, White Roots* wrote that though most of the bloodiest wars in Africa have been those fought among the blacks, the roots of these wars, however, can be traced to the white legacy (Dimah, 2009). The cases of Rwanda and Ethiopia are no exceptions.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide, a visit by the researcher to the Genocide Memorial Museum in Kigali shed more light on the horror that took place. In the researcher's pursuit of social transformation from a peace and security perspective, an investigation into the root causes of conflict in Africa needed to be conducted, specifically focusing on Rwanda and Ethiopia.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

It is not uncommon that religion and ethnicity are seen as the root causes of conflict and violence; they are also instrumentalised both by the local and international agents of violence and peace. Based on this understanding, the research seeks to know the primary determinant factors of violence among the governments' access to resources and vested political interests on the one hand and ethno-religious identities, on the other, in the history of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994.

### **1.2 Research Objective**

To identify the determinant factors of violence among the governments' access to resources, vested political interests and ethnoreligious identities in Rwanda.

### **1.3 Research Question**

What are the determinant factors of violence among the governments' access to resources, vested political interests and ethnoreligious identities in Rwanda?

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introducing the Root Causes of the Rwandan Genocide**

In the global history of Genocide, there are different studies; among them (Kabeera & Sewpaul, 2008) (2008) and (Moodley et al., 2011) have informed literature on peculiar root causes. In Rwanda, the root causes appear to have been external colonial and internal economic and political interests (Moodley et al., 2011). During the Genocide in Rwanda, within 100 days, more than a million people had been drastically affected.

Though ethnic profiling was prominent, the root causes of the Rwandan genocide go deeper than simple matters of ethnicity. It points to the socio-political historical schemes of the external agents and internal grievances. This means that there was unprecedented manipulation of the history of Rwanda by colonial powers such as Belgium and Germany, as well as the post-colonial native political elites (Kabeera & Sewpaul, 2008).

## 2.2 Colonial Economic Interest - Ethnic Identity Card

The tension between the Hutus, who were the majority, and the Tutsis, who were the minority, existed long before the Germans and Belgian colonial powers arrived. However, with their arrival, the relationship between the two ethnic groups deteriorated. When the colonial powers, especially the Belgians, arrived in 1916, they could not rule the Rwandans easily, and gather the revenue they wanted. They started dividing them with the aim of gripping power. They initiated a system of ethnic identity cards, particularly dividing them into three categories: Hutu, Tutsi and Twa (Moodley et al., 2011). In the beginning, the Belgians supported the Tutsi Ethnic group, claiming they were better than the Hutus regarding intelligence and governance (Sellstrom & Wohlgemuth, 1995).

Ethnic Instrumentalism Theory argues that "ethnicity is a tool people use to achieve their goals because people who share inscriptive characteristics can be effectively organised and mobilised to influence public policies" (Yeghiazaryan, 2018, p. 49). Ethnic Instrumentalism Theory underlines how activist members of an ethnic group and political entrepreneurs are useful in mobilising their ethnic group to violence to gain and protect their group's access to economic and political powers. Applied to politics and ethnic relationships in Rwanda, the Instrumentalism Theory sheds light on this issue. In Rwanda, both the colonial powers and the native politicians instrumentalised the ethnic differences for their benefit.

At the beginning of the 19th century, European colonial power came to the region of the Great Lakes and adopted a sophisticated theory of the political organisation of an English explorer (John Speke), whose first African destination was Uganda. Speke hypothesised that everything of value in Africa had come from the Northern part of Africa, particularly from the Hamite Ethnic groups (Sellstrom & Wohlgemuth, 1995). In the context of Rwanda, the Tutsis were considered one of the Hamite ethnic groups coming from Ethiopia and its surroundings.

Hence, the Tutsis were perceived as noblemen, almost as noble as their European "cousins" (Sellstrom & Wohlgemuth, 1995). According to this theory, the Tutsis were considered born leaders and superior to the Hutus. This concept created an antagonising superiority and inferiority identity complex among the Hutu (majority) and the Tutsis (minority). This policy culminated in 1933 with the introduction of the instrument of segregation, the compulsory identity cards. The new system opened the way for the colonial power to divide and rule with the prefabricated ideology that appealed to the Tutsis and other European allies, both religious and non-religious agents interested in Africa (Magnarella, 2005).

However, the colonial power soon started changing sides from supporting the Tutsi to supporting the Hutus in the 1950s. Consequently, in 1959, with the help of the colonial power, the Hutus organised a first round of killing where more than 20,000 Tutsis were killed; the bulk of the surviving Tutsis ran away to the neighbouring countries. The Belgians supported the Hutus, encouraging them to expel Tutsis so that they could inherit political and economic privileges (Magnarella, 2002). About 130,000 Tutsis were expelled from their country then. As a result of this Belgian support, hungry agriculturalists quickly claimed the land and cattle that had given special privileges to the Tutsi.

When the country gained independence from Belgium in 1962, the Hutus controlled the power and continued until the Genocide of 1994. There is an accusation against France, which is known for being a significant player in the socio-economic matters of most of the French-speaking African countries, that it supported the Hutu Government before and even during the massacres. Germany was the first colonial power; then Belgium and France had direct economic, political and strategical interests in the process leading to the Rwandan Genocide (Cowell, 2019).

## 2.3 Internal Economic and Political Interest Factors

In 1994, when the political situation deteriorated, the extremist ethnic Hutu regime plotted to hang on to power by wiping out the ethnic Tutsi populations. During the turmoil, the Hutu president, Habyarimana, was killed when the plane that he was on board was shot down. He was accused of wrongly accepting the return of the refugees and a power-sharing deal with the RPF in the Arusha Accord. The killer of the president is not officially known to date (Shaw, 2012).

The government, angered by the situation, organised different groups of Hutu, led by the presidential guard and *Interhamwe*, illiterate militia groups, who attacked together. There were over 30,000 strong men with Machetes. Also, the civilians were forced to murder Tutsis in their neighbourhood. Within the space of 100 days, they killed more than 800,000 Tutsi civilians. The identity card became an effective negative instrument in the genocide. Also, some moderate Hutus who opposed the genocide were massacred together with the Tutsis (Cowell, 2019). It is worth revisiting the definition of genocide by the UN in Article 2:

*In the present Convention, Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (UN General Assembly, 1948)*

In the case of Rwanda, the intent was to destroy, in whole or in part, a racial group- Tutsi. Thus, it was Genocide according to the definition. The United Nations recognise the atrocious incident in Rwanda as a textbook example of genocide that remembered every year (United Nations, 2018). A scholar argues that the root causes of the Rwandan Genocide were economic, ethnic, cultural and political interests (Magnarella, 2005). Rwanda is a land-locked country and one of Africa's smallest and most populated countries. In 2008, it had a population of 9.6 million people. The land is 26338 square kilometres and has a density of a remarkably high population of 365 per square kilometre. It has no significant minerals that can back up the country's economy. This reality has pressured scarce land property (Moodley et al., 2011).

The immediate context was that the country was riddled with multiple economic and political deficits. There was war in the northern part of the country with the PLF and the subsequent refugee camps to feed, the failure of coffee products, famine in the south, and devaluation of the Rwandan Currency. There was a general understanding that the country was insufficient for the colonial powers, the Tutsis and the Hutus with Twa. So, the implication was to expel and keep some ethnic groups out of the country. In this case, the Tutsi were to be expelled.

Ethnoreligious identity in the Rwandan Genocide and the aftermath healing: Right from the beginning, with the colonial arrangements and the eventual arrivals, there is evidence to suggest that religion played convenient conditions for the Rwandan Genocide to take place (Banyanga & Björkqvist, 2017). Particularly, church leadership's identifying the characteristics of the ethnic groups and proposing how to deal with them concerning the collaboration with the colonial powers carried drastic consequences.

The point in 1927, when the colonial powers consulted the Catholic leadership for the best ways of ruling and through which to incorporate or side-line, the Vicar Apostolic of Rwanda, Monsignor Leon-Paul Classe, responded by recommending, for the sake of the country it is better to find leaders from Mututsi, who are "Born Chiefs" rather than from Bahutu (Sellstrom & Wohlgemuth, 1995).

When the Belgian government dragged its feet to make a decision, the same Vicar apostolic sent another message reiterating the greatest harm that one could commit against the country and the colonial power is to do away with the Tutsi; they are born capable of comprehension, more intelligent, more active, and more capable of understanding progress and more accepted by the population than Bahutu (Sellstrom & Wohlgemuth, 1995). Then, the colonial power acted immediately according to the recommendation of the Church leadership and replaced the Hutu Chiefs and deputy chiefs with the Tutsi leaders.

During the years that the genocide was being planned, the leading church representatives were close to the Habyarimana regime. During the massacres, these leaders did very little to discourage the killing (Sellstrom & Wohlgemuth, 1995). In the year of genocide (1994), the Anglican Archbishop refused to condemn the interim government that was slaughtering the people. The Catholic Archbishop moved with the interim government from Kigali to Gitarama (Sellstrom & Wohlgemuth, 1995). They are accused that significant numbers of Christian leaders were involved in the killing until they slaughtered their own church leaders. Much earlier than the genocide period, allegedly, the Catholic Church played an instrumental role in Rwandan politics and society, which exacerbated tensions between the Hutu and the Tutsi. When the time came, the members of the clergy also are accused of participating in the planning and execution of the Genocide.

At the same time, it should be admitted that there were pieces of evidence that some ordinary Christians and leaders, including the foreign missionaries, sacrificed their lives in opposing the genocide. Today, they are considered self-sacrificed heroes and have stood out as martyrs (Sellstrom & Wohlgemuth, 1995). The Church's complicity in the genocide lies in her inability to dissociate from ethnic-based mindsets and ways of collaborating. This is the cost of religion interfering in politics and allowing politics to interfere in religion. The result is shame and loss of moral authority in the Church and society.

However, the Churches' close collaboration probably was not intentionally done or premeditated that it could go as far as the genocide. Also, the government's need for support from the religious leadership was irresistible. Therefore, it could be summarised that although they officially apologised for it later, some Churches, particularly the Catholic Church, have been complicit in the Rwandan Genocide not only through the participation of its clergy but

also through its reinforcement of ethnic divisions in the society in the preceding years of the Genocide (Cureton, 2021).

When we observe closely in the aftermath of the religion, paradoxically, it was one of the most effective instruments of healing and reconciliation. Its alleged participation in the genocide has not prevented the Church from playing an active role in the reconciliation process after the event. According to a study by Cureton (2021) carried out in the field, despite the fact that more people died in the Church or in Church compounds than anywhere else, in the genocide period, religion was found to have been the most important coping mechanism used by the survivors and the actors of the trauma healing in the aftermath (Cureton, 2021).

It is historically accurate that the global north was initiated by enlightenment reasoning and exacerbated by Marxist socio-economic analysis. Consequently, many people have attempted to distance religion from socio-political and economic relevance. However, lately, the approach is changing. In spite of its undeniable ambivalence, the role of religion in enhancing peace, reconciliation, healing and cohesion is increasingly recognised (Agbiji & Swart, 2015). Similarly, other authors have argued that contrary to what the global north predicted, religion has not been diminished by secularisation (Campdepadrós-Cullell et al., 2021). On the contrary, it has increased. Today, most of the world's population is religious.

In Africa, the idea of religion being the worst cause of violence and the best means of healing and peace is evident. It has often been ambivalent, becoming the means of a positive compass to direct the nation to better unity and peace sometimes; other times; it is a misleading negative energy that the government often instrumentalised. Let's take the case of Ethiopia, as it is discussed broadly in the PhD research literature review by Weldu (2022). Religion has contributed to peace and development on the one hand and caused violence, instability, and socio-religious discrimination, on the other hand, being used by the governments. Religion, on the one hand, enhances healing, peace and social transformation that leads to positive peace and development; on the other hand, religion still contributes to explosive conflict when used and abused by governments (Banyanga & Björkqvist, 2017).

Similar to Ethiopia, in Rwanda, religious and ethnic identities were both at work. Ethnic identity was the ambivalent entity that the ruling authority utilised before and after the genocide. At that time, this identity was instrumental for the new government since it was a practical transforming factor in solving the Genocide issue. Without employing the traditional or ethnic methods of reconciliation, the new government would not have been able to come to a closure of the chapter because more than 800,000 alleged perpetrators were awaiting trial (Wielenga & Harris, 2011). (Wielenga & Harris, 2011, p. 16) The primary means of reconciliation and post-war conflict management was that transitional justice was employed through the Gacaca system, led by the traditional leaders of the communities. Gacaca in Kinyarwanda language means to sit on the grass; however, "Traditionally, *gacaca* was a community-based restorative model of justice that involved communities, literally sitting together on the grass, with both victim and perpetrator, to come up with possible solutions to the satisfaction of all parties" (Wielenga & Harris, 2011, p. 16). This process was utilised by wise leaders in the community.

The government and the community elders felt it was right to solve the community's problems through community leadership. The use of the *Gacaca* simplified the process of reconciliation by satisfying many victim families. This process also opened doors for all to be readmitted, with the minimum punishments, to the communities where they had perpetrated the heinous crimes. *Gacaca* was officially launched in June 2002.

It is worth mentioning that during the genocide and in the accompanying civil war, the judiciary system had been destroyed, and many of those with legal expertise had fled the country. According to Sosnov (2007), the newly power-controlling authority believed that it would take up to 200 years to prosecute such vast numbers of prisoners using the standard justice system. For this reason, the Government of National Unity began thinking creatively about alternative and effective ways. The religious leaders joined the nationally organised Gacaca reconciliation process organised by the government. This shows the possibility of the ethnic and religious identities working together to produce even richer fruit on the ground.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The research utilised a qualitative research method due to the need to reach out to individualised stories that shed light on the conflicts' intensities. The phenomenological approach was preferred due to its ability to underline the lived experience of the people concerned. It employed a non-probability snowball data collection technique to reach out to the participants who had first-hand experience of the violence during and aftermath of the genocide. The data collection method was interviews. Hence, the data collection instruments were interview guides.

Ten persons from different walks of life, genders, and ethnic groups were interviewed. There was one sister and one priest among the participants. The remaining eight persons were from different professions and ethnic

backgrounds. From a gender perspective, they were equally divided - four men and four women. The Instrumentalism Theory of Ethnicity guided the research.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Findings

#### 4.1.1 External Economic Search for Resources

External economic search for resources and vested political interests were prevalent. According to the participants, in the slow build-up to the event of the genocide, there was intense manipulation by the European countries. The prime purpose of the colonial powers was to get into the grips of the country so that they could collect enough revenue and raw materials for their countries back in Europe. This was one of the most consequential factors in the Rwandan Genocide

Over 80% of the participants stated that the internal and external governments' search for resources was crucial in manufacturing violence in Rwanda. Rwandans lived in peace before the German and Belgian colonial powers arrived. When the powers entered Rwanda, they did not find it easy to penetrate the society. So, they started systematically dividing the people's hearts and minds. A participant who worked for peace in an organisation said, "Basically, they focused on things that may have existed that people didn't pay much attention to. That led to the emergence of divisions" (Rwanda Genocide Museum high officer, April 28, 2019). Another participant (an officer in Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 20, 2019) argued that authority was traditionally distributed fairly and with some degree of consensus before the German colonial powers entered. For instance:

*In Rwanda, a king was assisted by three other rulers: the ruler of the soil, the ruler of the cattle and the ruler of the army. The ruler of the soil was normally from the Hutu, the ruler of the cattle was from the Tutsi, and the rulers of the army were majorly from either of the two. Due to this, everybody had their own governing.* (An officer of Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 20, 2019)

Before the arrival of the colonial powers, each of the ethnic communities had its own traditional system. However, they both had a sacred union where killing was forbidden. There was also a blood pact called *Harasinga*, where blood was drawn from each other (Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa) and shared so they could be united by blood. In this pact, all their families became partakers in the union. The research participants demonstrated how colonial powers undermined these unifying pacts so that they could divide the Rwandans (Government Officer, April 29, 2019). On this note, therefore, the strategy of divide and rule is to be taken as a root cause of the genocide. A former refugee in Uganda, now (a government agency employee, April 28, 2019), stated how the ethnicity that existed before the arrival of the Germans was neither black nor white division. All was orchestrated to fit the political interests of the foreigners. This ethnic antagonising was further brought out through the presence of the ethnic Identity Card (ID) to identify the three ethnic groups separately. Due to this, therefore, a participant (a government agency employee April 28, 2019) said that ethnic identities such as Tutsi and Hutu were social constructs before the arrival of the colonial powers. Then, it became a progressively political construct, and then it became everything. Eventually, it became a very powerful tool – similar to the ID card.

The reason is that ethnicity was emphasised by the colonial powers and given weight as a sign of division and, later, the root cause of the genocide. Slowly, things aggravated, and people would write ethnic groups everywhere, in the classroom, offices and other workplaces. Then, in 1994, everyone knew everyone. They knew where the Tutsi were. Then, it was easy to know who was targeted. And the person targeted knew that she or he was targeted. Eventually, the colonial powers succeeded in dividing the people, and after that, they could manipulate them to the extent of genocide against each other (Rwanda Genocide Museum High Officer, April 28, 2019).

In addition to the previous text, another participant argued that not only did the official colonial powers divide the people, but also the indirect colonial powers. This is in reference to France, who had been working with the Hutu-led government, "So I would say the root cause is the colonisation because they managed to split us, so everything that came after found a weak people" (Rwanda Genocide Museum high officer, April 28, 2019).

Similarly, another participant accused the colonial powers, especially the French, who came to work with the last president before the genocide, of dividing us (College Girl Student, April 30, 2019). Due to this, the colonial government did not want to give power to the Tutsi Ethnic group they were ruling because they had asked for independence, and that made them angry. So they would instead give [independence] to the Hutu Ethnic group (Rwandan Catholic Church leader, April 24, 2019).

Eventually, when independence approached, the colonial powers enticed the Hutus, saying: "There came the colonial masters. Oh, how come that you do not have land? Why do you not have cows, and why do you not have these and that? (An officer in the Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 21, 2019. In this scenario, France is accused of helping the government financially through its rule. France is again accused of training some personnel and even supporting them with weapons just before the event of the genocide (assistant leader in the Office of Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 20, 2019. Outside Rwanda and inside Africa, countries were involved because they had economic, ethnic, and political ties with the Hutu-led government. According to the participants, Burundi was one of them.

#### 4.1.2 Internal Economic Search for Resources

As the nationals perceive it, another of the most dangerous triggers of the Genocide in Rwanda was the government's and some Hutu's attempt to ensure that there were enough resources for the minimum number of the population. A participant gives the example of a small cake to be shared between two people. If one is eliminated before they share the cake, the one who is powerful enough to eliminate the other is guaranteed the whole cake (Rwandan Catholic Church leader, April 24, 2019).

The internal cause of the conflict and eventual genocide of the Tutsis by the Hutus was that the Hutus were convinced that if they expelled some and exterminated the rest of the Tutsis, Rwanda would provide enough resources for the Hutus. Various participants support this premise:

*The Tutsis were an aristocratic group. They were in control of land and cattle in the country because power was a key factor in economic matters and the power they had guaranteed their economic superiority. The Hutus were not as rich as the Tutsis; hence, they did not have control over Rwanda's resources, such as land and cattle. Therefore, the Hutus had a deep hatred for the Tutsis. (Assistant Director of Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 20, 2019)*

Hutus were poorer but bigger in number than the Tutsis; eventually, the Hutus wanted to take over the property of the Tutsis. In this way, it argued that the genocide was primarily based on economic reasoning. The Hutus said to the Tutsis, "You are who you are. I kill you because, first of all, I do not like you. I want to have what you have. I want to have it all. Not to share" (Rwandan Catholic Church leader, April 24, 2019).

It was a reality of the country that it had no petrol or other minerals as such. Therefore, the ethnic groups were fighting to share the few resources, such as land and cattle that they had in the country. Before and during the Genocide, Rwanda was a poor country with very few economic resources; it was an agricultural and pastoralist country with no oil or minerals.

#### 4.1.3 Bad Governance

The third most influential agent in the genocide was bad governance. The research found that bad governance played the second significant role in triggering the violence in Rwanda. In the words of the participants, bad governance had led the society to extreme poverty, where people were pushed to their limits and compelled to join those who killed their neighbours to inherit their possessions (Government officer, April 29, 2019).

The grievances and the vested interests were not only on the levels of the government, as the two main ethnic groups were polarised by the external and internal governments' mishandling of the economic and social differences; they carried deep hatred for each other. A participant added similar reasons, saying: "The other root cause was bad political power. Those government leaders were supporting the Hutu to kill those Tutsi. And when the government supports you, it is easy to kill people" (College girl student, April 30, 2019). Most of the time, people naturally embrace government policy. It appears one of the policies of the government was to sow political theory that the Tutsi ethnic group had come from the north of Ethiopia, and so they had to go back.

*They even said that you go back to where you came from to Abisinia. You come from Ethiopia. ... until you go back where you came from. They never consider as Tutsi as the citizens of Rwanda. You came from Ethiopia, Abisinia. You are Hamites; we are Bantu. So you go willingly, or we send you by the Nile [killed]. (Rwandan Catholic Church leader, April 24, 2019)*

The government was weak because it depended on external support in many aspects. The decisions and political system were manufactured outside the country (Dr and University Lecturer, April 27, 2019). Also, "The government not only used the system of dividing everything but also abandoned the cultural values of Rwandans from

the life of the society and the minds of the people. This caused hatred and division, which also led to the genocide" (Government officer, April 29, 2019).

According to the participants, the Second Republic, led by the Hutus of Rwanda government, was organising everything according to ethnic proportion; they were calculating how much to go to the Hutus, how much to the Tutsis, and to the Twas. How many public jobs each ethnic community could get was identified and counted according to the ethnic group. All these were put even in the identity card. Even educational opportunities given to them were recorded. By identifying the percentage that was given to each ethnic group, the government used education as an instrument to suppress the Tutsi. They knew that if the Tutsi studied, they would become richer and rule again. The Tutsis were given less share so they would not get rich and get into power again. A participant said the following:

*In order to organise education especially for the second republic they said that people because education is one of the factors of becoming rich removing from lower class to middle-class level. So, then they said we are going to organise education, and we know that formerly Tutsis were many to study so now we are going to reduce, and this is another factor of because of a shortage of resources.* (Government officer, April 29, 2019)

Hence, the percentage of Tutsis in schools was limited and certainly less than that of Hutus.

That notwithstanding, the government started dehumanising the other ethnic groups, calling them snakes, cockroaches and insects. "If you consider a person an insect or even a dangerous snake, it is not difficult to kill him or her" (College girl student, April 30, 2019). As a result, the government authorised Hutu members to hurt Tutsis directly and indirectly. On its part, the government used its authority to incite people to kill one another. It nurtured hatred among the people as it encouraged and trained on ethnic killings (Assistant Director of Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 20, 2019). When the Hutu-dominated government was established, it used an approach of reversing everything of the previous Tutsi-dominated rule in the manner of revenge. This policy was followed by most of the society members because it was the directive given by the government which carries weight (Ass. Director of Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 20, 2019).

In relation to the Tutsis that were out of Rwanda, the Hutu-led government feared that they might fight their way to power. As a result, they planned to eliminate those present in Rwanda, with the conviction that if those outside came back, they would have little trace of their families. It would then be easy to exterminate them on arrival. This became a deliberate attempt to stop the Tutsis from coming back from exile and getting to power again.

As discussed previously, all was pegged on politically vested interests and mismanagement or bad governance and not solely on ethnicity or religion. As stated by (an officer in the Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 21, 2019), "It was proven that the political sphere had more, more, more, more on the violence root causes."

#### **4.1.4 Religion and Ethnicity**

In Rwanda, for years, the grievances and the inequalities had taken the form of ethnicity. Hence, Hutus were unhappy when the Tutsi exercised power over them (Assistant Director of Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 20, 2019). Ethnicity became another powerful instrument of the Genocide. In the country's history, the Tutsi ethnic group had ruled Rwanda for longer than their Hutu counterparts, who had bred grievances. Some of those grievances were economic, political, and social.

"When you are in power, you exercise authority, but your power also goes in economic matters like the land; they are the owners of the land, and they were owners of the shepherd of the cows", said (Assistant Director of Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 20, 2019). This made the Hutus and the Tutsis take turns in becoming victims and victors; the "Hutu carried contempt for the Tutsis as they worked for hours with little payments and as a working class under the aristocratic class [of] the Tutsis" (Assistant Director of Peace and Rehabilitation Centre, April 20, 2019). This deep-seated hatred led them to violence, which was a true manifestation of the long-lasting hatred. Both the internal and external powers up to 1994 exacerbated and instrumentalised the existing ethnic and religious identities to obtain access to resources and a grip on power.

All this time, ethnicity-based economic injustice was in the form that led to hatred that exploded into genocide. In addition to ethnic instrumentalisation, the colonial powers used religion to manipulate the situation towards their interests. Religious leadership has not managed to distance themselves from the country's political system throughout history. Participants shared their experiences with pity, "Not only were the Church leaders enticed by the politicians, but the men of God themselves were also unable to rise above the bad politics" (Rwanda Genocide Museum high officer, April 28, 2019). According to this participant, some religious leaders were actively involved in planning and executing in their seminaries the segregation policies:



*The ones who participated a lot were the religious people because they could organise meetings in the seminaries, in major seminaries. Even those colonialists, in order to be safe if they had meetings, they had to come to the parish. So that promoted a lot about the division. Even after the Genocide in Rwanda, they had the Christian Democratic Party. (Religious Sister and directress of the school, April 29, 2019)*

In a similar incident, during the time before the genocide, when Rome elected a Tutsi priest to become a bishop, the existing leaders of the Church, in collaboration with the political leaders, refused the candidate to the point that Rome had to change the candidate. Thus, they left the Tutsi candidate and took a Hutu to become a bishop (Government Officer, April 29, 2019).

The worst part was when the Church personnel carried out colonial handling of the ethno-religious grounds after the departure of the colonisers. These local religious authorities became involved in segregation on tribal lines. "They continued to take sides contrary to the neutrality that the people expected from them" (Rwanda Genocide Museum high officer, April 28, 2019).

When the government became bad, everything, including religion, was bad. All this time, the transformative moral ground of the Church leaders lacked. Pastors and priests preached and taught people during the day and yet sat to plan executions in the night. A participant argued that these church leaders were not transformative (Rwanda Genocide Museum high officer, April 28, 2019).

Some participants observed a few positive contributions of the Churches, in enhancing Christianity, education, development and medical benefits; however, the participants insisted that due to the Church's involvement in politics and their silence during the Genocide, it had lost the prophetic role that it should have played. A former Refugee in Uganda, now (a government agency employee, April 28, 2019) added that saying: "They had the same philosophy as the colonialists. In order to maintain themselves, they had to be in synergy with the colonialists" (Religious Sister and Directress of the School, April 29, 2019).

The summary of the findings shows that according to the data, colonial powers, the lack of enough resources, and the respective governments' political dealings to grab and cling to power to safeguard their economic resources were among the primary factors that led to violence. This means that religion, ethnicity, and other cultural grievances remained secondary or instrumental factors that the external and internal governments utilised in the history of Rwanda. These findings are supported by Stewart (2009), who argued in his empirical study that most conflicts are neither religious nor ethnic but nationalistic, political, vested interests, and access to resources.

## 4.2 Discussions

### 4.2.1 External Economic Search for Resources

When people hear about the root causes of the Rwandan Genocide, the first idea which comes to their mind is that the aggravated ethnic differences were the triggers and actual causes of the violence. However, the data analysis from Rwanda proved otherwise. In addition to the failure of the UN to protect the minority, both the former external colonial powers' and internal Rwandan regimes' search for resources, as well as the power to secure access to the resources, played the main role in the Rwandan Genocide (Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2023). Ethnicity and religion were predominantly the effective instruments that the agents of violence utilised. However, in the post-genocide era, ethnic and religious factors played a transformational role in reconciling and rebuilding the country.

For instance, the findings argued that Rwandans were united before the Germans and the Belgians arrived and lived predominantly in peace. When the colonial powers arrived, they did not find it easy to penetrate the society. So, they started dividing the hearts and the minds of the people. They emphasised the simple ethnic and economic differences that existed until all became a bloody contest (Rwanda Genocide Museum high officer, April 28, 2019). The foreign forces thus tempered with the generally peaceful, well-accommodated, and united social positions of the ethno-religious Rwandan setting. They introduced the famous racial ID.

Also, foreigners came with theories and prefabricated inferiority and superiority labels. This was supported by the literature review section where the colonial powers of Africa introduced the idea that everything of value in Africa had come from the Northern part of Africa, particularly from the Hamite Ethnic groups (Sellstrom & Wohlgemuth, 1995). The Tutsis were considered part of those Hamite ethnic groups coming from Ethiopia and the surroundings. For the sake of political organisation in the Great Lake regions of Africa, this sophisticated theory of the British explorer John Speke was adopted into the Rwandan ethnic divides. It was applied to induce the superiority complex in the Tutsi ethnic group and the inferiority complex in the Hutus.

After many years of indirect colonial rule of Rwanda by Belgium, when the Tutsi-led government requested freedom, they instigated in the minds of the Hutu, who were the majority, to rise and claim power from the hands of the Tutsis. These deceptions gave the Hutus more time to rule over Rwanda, pretending that they were the saviours of the

people. They excused their colonial occupation under the pretext that they were saving the country's unity and security because, without them, the country would disintegrate.

There is a similar scenario in the context of Ethiopia; the conflicts between Christians and Muslims were anchored for centuries on nationalistic and political factors, as well as on access to resources by the elites (Ahmed, 2006). The Colonial powers tried to divide Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia but without complete success. When the Christian kings resisted colonial rule, the colonial power (the Italian government of the time) supported the Muslims by building Mosques and subsidising the pilgrimage to Mecca in order to weaken the nation by dividing it. The Ethiopian Muslims, seeking scarce financial resources and protection from Christian Kings, aligned with the Fascist Government of Italy (Abbink, 2011). Christians with a nationalistic and patriotic attitude hated the Muslims and took punitive measures against them, accusing them of treason.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the external powers looking for a stronger grip on Africa contributed tremendously to the conflicts in Africa, particularly Rwanda and Ethiopia. This reminds us of what once Ali Mazrui, a Kenyan historian, wrote in his article *The Roots of Conflict Black Violence, White Roots* that though most of the bloodiest wars in Africa have been those fought among the blacks, the roots of these wars, however, to be traced to the white legacy (Nhema & Zeleza, 2008).

#### 4.2.2 Internal Economic Search for Resources

According to the research, the primary factor in the conflict was economic deficiency in the country (Rwandan Catholic Church leader, April 24, 2019). Rwanda does not enjoy natural oil or minerals. It is a pastoralist country with limited spaces. The governments and the civilians had the weight of poverty in their minds. Everybody manoeuvred their way out of poverty, instrumentalising ethnic and political opportunities. In addition to lacking enough resources, Rwanda is not a vast country with extensive space and opportunities for all citizens.

According to the World Miter, as elaborated by the UN data, as of January 2023, 13,761,130 people live in 26,338 km<sup>2</sup> in Rwanda. This makes Rwanda the most densely populated mainland African country and the fifth most densely populated country globally (The UN, 2023). Hence, it is obvious that individual citizens and the government sectors need to look for financial resources and endeavour to secure them. The search was at times separately and other times in synergy.

During the event of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, the government and the activists from the Hutu ethnic group worked together. They utilised a powerful means of negative narratives and mass media to decrease the presence of the Tutsi ethnic group so that there could be no competition in sharing the cake. The attempt was to kill the Tutsis. The Hutu ethnic group members, who were privileged, stated to the Tutsis, "I kill you because first of all, I do not like you. I want to have what you have. I want to have it all, not to share" (Rwandan Catholic Church leader, April 24, 2019).

Governments and individual government members knew too well how to seek and secure resources through their political powers and vice versa. Hence, it could be said that most world conflicts arise from the fierce struggle by political powers to obtain or secure resources (Shah, 2023). When one tastes power, they find it sweet and provide countless privileges. Governments have waged wars against each other to have a bigger share of the cake. They killed and run the risk of being killed to have more. When it came to the history of Rwanda, it was no exception (Magnarella, 2005).

The government of Rwanda, leading to the genocide, instrumentalised the sacred as well as the secular aspects of the people's life. They used religion to achieve their targets. They also utilised the historically sensitive ethnic divide to minimise the population so that they maximise economic opportunities. Exceptionally, in Rwanda, they used education. They understood that education provides people with a higher opportunity for leadership. So, education was not for all but given to different ethnic groups proportionately according to the perception of the history of the country by those who were in power prior to and during the 1994 genocide.

In reference to the research question, whether the prime cause of violence in Rwanda was the ethnoreligious identity or vested search for resources, it is clear that the issue of Hutu and Tutsi brings forth relevant factors, among them religion. However, this does not stand out as the prime cause of the conflict, particularly the Genocide of 1994. The primary cause is seen as the desperate search for resources and, with these, the need to secure it with political power.

## V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The data gathered from the Rwandan research participants has shown that even in the countries with high sensitivity of ethnicity and religiosity, the determinant factors of violence in Africa, particularly in Rwanda, are access to resources and vested political interests rather than the ethnoreligious factors. The ethnoreligious identities are

effective instruments that the government and other agents of violence utilise to achieve and cling to economic and political powers.

In the case of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, the researcher's findings show that the lack of natural resources and overpopulation of the geographical space exposed the people to virtual poverty. This socio-economic reality exacerbated the government's desperate search for access to meagre resources by external and internal political and ethnic authorities. Hence, the primary cause of the genocide was the desperate search for resources and political manoeuvres to secure them by holding on to power at any cost. This was the main determinant factor of the violence in Rwanda. Bad governance, particularly the government's vested interests in the form of ethnicity and the religious leaders' inability to be neutral and prophetic, exacerbated the main factor – access to resources. The bureaucracy and dysfunctional presence of the UN was the last nail in the coffin of the Genocide in Rwanda. The UN Peacekeeping unit failed to maintain peace and protect the people (Berdal, 2005).

Another scientific finding guides us to the realisation that everything goes wrong when the government is weak and corrupt. A good government addresses the social and religious issues of its citizens. In the aftermath of the genocide and other conflicts, mere political authorities are not enough to bring inclusive, positive change. It was realised that when the government starts demonstrating the characteristics of good governance, ethno-religious values and leadership play a decisive role in the needed process of reconciliation, and healing becomes a crucial factor. Hence, religious and ethnic identities become strong instruments of social transformation that affect trauma healing, reconciliation, and rebuilding of sustainable peace and development.

The brief recommendation of the research is that all the stakeholders of peace and development in Rwanda and indeed in other countries of Africa need to stand shoulder to shoulder to reduce the level of poverty and create good governance in their respective countries.

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