

Crises and the International System: A Case Study of Genocide in Rwanda and Ethiopia and the Significance of Early Warning Signals

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Abstract

As the international system encounters armed conflict ongoing in several parts of the globe, concerns have shifted from resolving these conflicts to premeditating and preventing them in the initial stages. However, different continents and societies have inherent peculiarities that shape their conflicts, of which the African continent is not excluded. This paper examines the incidences of genocide in Rwanda and Ethiopia to shed light on the significance of early warning signals in preventing and mitigating such catastrophic events. The research interrogates the complex dynamics of the African continent, exploring how political, social, and economic factors contribute to the emergence and escalation of crises. Through an examination of Rwanda and Ethiopia, the study highlights the importance of recognizing early warning signs as important indicators of potential crises. In essence, policymakers and stakeholders can potentially aver or minimize the devastating consequences of crises by identifying this signal and implementing swift and timely intervention measures. Additionally, the findings emphasize the need for enhanced international cooperation and proactive measures to address and manage crises within the global context effectively.

Keywords: Early warning; Genocide; International crisis; Prevention

1. Introduction

The international system is constantly put to the test by various forms of crises, be it man-made or natural. Among the most devastating human-induced crises of the 20th century, stands the genocide in Rwanda and Ethiopia which took many lives and nearly brought the two states to total anarchy and destruction (Matfess, 2015). This essay aims to delve into the intricate details of the events that led to the genocide, the international community's response, and the long-lasting ramifications on the affected regions. The case study of Rwanda and Ethiopia serves as a crucial lens through which we can critically evaluate the adequacy of the international system in preventing and managing mass atrocities of this nature.

Furthermore, it highlights the need for persistent efforts in addressing the underlying causes of such crises and enhancing the international community's capacity to respond effectively and expediently.

The Concept of Genocide

Genocide is a term that refers to the intentional and systematic destruction of a racial, ethnic, religious, or national group (Gellately & Kiernan, 2003). The concept of genocide was first coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944, in his book 'Axis Rule in Occupied Europe', in which Lemkin defined genocide as "the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group" (Moses, 2008). According to him, genocide has two distinct stages: the first being the destruction of the cultural identity and heritage of the targeted group, and the second being the imposition of the culture and values of the perpetrator group. This imposition can be done through either allowing the targeted group to remain or forcing them to adopt the perpetrator's culture, or by completely removing the targeted group and replacing them with the perpetrator's nationals. Docker (2008). Novic (2016) and several other scholars tried to differentiate between two types of genocide, highlighting a difference between cultural genocide and the popularly known physical genocide which incorporates the physical destruction of a people. Cultural genocide is construed as a method of carrying out genocide, which includes the destruction of tangible or intangible elements of a group's culture, particularly the intentional destruction of cultural heritage assets (Docker, 2008). Later, it has been defined as a separate process leading to the extinction of certain ethnic group's culture, either through targeted destruction or forced assimilation into the dominant culture. It has been defined as suppression of a group by eliminating their specific characteristics or the total elimination of a culture causing the identity of a people to disappear, and in the periods of colonialism, this has been conceived as the idea behind those epochs (Gellately & Kiernan, 2003).

The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted in 1948, defines genocide as "a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part. It does not include political groups or so called "cultural genocide" (The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide [CPPCG], 2019). Here, it clearly outlines that it doesn't take into consideration cultural genocide as a crime or type of genocide. Genocide is not only a crime against humanity, but it is also a violation of international law. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide has been ratified by over 130 countries and is considered to be part of customary international law (CPPCG, 2019). This means that even countries that have not ratified the Convention are still bound by its provisions.

Jones (2011) undertakes an historical analysis of the cases of genocide, drawing first from biblical texts and the actions of Israelites in the bible in near extinction of some races, before moving to more recent times. Between 1810 and 1828, the Zulu kingdom under its dictatorial leader, Shaka Zulu, waged an ambitious campaign of expansion and annihilation where huge areas of present-day South Africa and Zimbabwe were laid waste by Zulu armies, resulting in depopulation and refugees fleeing to other parts of Africa, with a possibility of a gender-selective extermination strategy being implemented. Jones (2011) further highlights other instances of genocide, including the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923) where 1.5 million Armenians were killed by the Ottoman Empire, the Holocaust (1933-1945) in which 6 million Jews were killed by the Nazi regime, the Cambodian Genocide (1975-1979) where 1.5 to 3 million Cambodians were killed by the Khmer Rouge, and the Bengali Holocaust (1971) where 3 million East Pakistanis were killed by the Pakistan army.

Genocide has severe and long-lasting consequences for the affected groups, as well as for the international community. The physical destruction of a group can lead to the loss of cultural heritage, language, and traditional practices. The trauma of genocide can also have a lasting impact on the mental health of survivors and future generations (Schabas, 2009). Genocide not only happens during times of war, but it can also occur during times of peace, as seen in the Cambodian Genocide under the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s (Novic, 2016). Preventing genocide is a complex and difficult task, as it requires addressing the root causes of discrimination and hate, and the international community has been striving so hard to prevent and respond to reoccurrences of genocide through diplomatic, economic, and military means. This includes early warning systems to detect potential genocide, the deployment of peacekeeping forces, and the prosecution of those responsible for genocide in international criminal tribunals (Jones, 2011).

History of Rwanda and the Incidence of Genocide

Rwanda, is a small landlocked country in East Africa, has a long and complex history that shaped its political, social, and economic landscape. The country's history can be divided into several distinct periods, the pre-colonial, colonial, and post colonial periods, each of which played a critical role in shaping Rwanda's current state (Sellstrom et al., 1996). The pre-colonial period, which lasted until the arrival of the Germans in 1894, was characterized by a strong centralized state under the rule of the Tutsi monarchy. The Tutsi, who made up about 15% of the population, were the dominant ethnic group, while the majority Hutu was mainly farmers. The Tutsi monarchy, known as the Mwami, controlled the land, the army, and the administration, and the Hutu were largely excluded from political power (Clark, 2011).

The arrival of the Germans in 1894 marked the beginning of a new era in Rwanda's history. The Germans, who were looking to establish a colony in East Africa, found a country that was already highly centralized and organized. They quickly established a system of indirect rule, in which the Mwami retained his political power, but the Germans controlled the economy and the administration (Forges, 1999). The Germans also introduced a new system of ethnic classification, in which all Rwandans were classified as Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa. This system was based on physical characteristics and was used to justify the exclusion of the Hutu from political power, placing the Tutsi as superior above the others (Thompson, 2007). After the Germany Lost the World War I, Rwanda was assigned to Belgium by the League of Nations, and they continued the system of indirect rule and reinforced the ethnic classification system (Schoenbrun, 1993). They also introduced new policies aimed at increasing agricultural production, which further marginalized the Hutu, and conversely, Christianity and Western education, which led to the emergence of new Hutu elite (Byanafashe & Rutayisire, 2016).

The postcolonial period, which began in 1962 when Rwanda gained its independence from Belgium, was marked by political and social upheaval. The Hutu elite, who had taken control of the government, began a policy of discrimination and persecution against the Tutsi. This led to a series of Tutsi uprisings, which were brutally suppressed by the Hutu-dominated government (Clark, 2011). In 1973, Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, seized power in a military coup and established a one-party state (Forges, 1999). He ruled the country with an iron fist, suppressing all political opposition and continuing the policy of discrimination against the Tutsi. The years leading up to the 1994 genocide were marked by increasing tensions between the Hutu and the Tutsi. In 1990, a Tutsi-led rebel group invaded Rwanda, and the Hutu government responded with a campaign of violence against the Tutsi (Sellstrom, et al., 1996).

On April 6, 1994, the plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was shot down, killing him and the president of Burundi, who was also a Hutu (Byanafashe & Rutayisire, 2016). The Hutu government immediately blamed the Tutsi-led RPF and used the incident as a pretext to launch a campaign of genocide against the Tutsi. The Hutu-dominated government and military, as well as Hutu militias, set out to kill all Tutsi and moderate Hutu. In just 100 days, an estimated 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed (Clark, 2011). The genocide ended when the RPF, led by Paul Kagame, captured the capital city of Kigali and took control of the government in July 1994.

History of Ethiopia and the Incidence of Genocide

The genocide of the Tigrayans in Ethiopia is a complex issue with deep historical roots. The Tigray region, located in the northern part of the country, has a distinct culture and identity that has long been at odds with the central government in Addis Ababa (Tiba, 2007). The Tigrayans have a long history of resistance to Ethiopian rule, dating back to the 19th century when the Tigrayan kingdom was conquered by Emperor Menelik II and incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire (Adejumobi, 2007). In the 20th century, the Tigrayans were further marginalized by the Ethiopian government, which saw them as a potential threat to its rule (Dugo, 2017). The Derg, a communist military government that came to power in 1974, targeted the Tigrayans for repression and discrimination. It was widely assumed that Derg's policies led to widespread famine and suffering in the Tigray region, and so many Tigrayans joined rebel groups in an effort to overthrow the government (Ibreck & Waal, 2022).

In 1991, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) succeeded in toppling the Derg and establishing a new government in Ethiopia. The TPLF, which was dominated by Tigrayans, played a key role in the coalition government and many Tigrayans held high-ranking positions in the government and military (Marzagora, 2017). However, the relationship between the TPLF and the government in Addis Ababa began to deteriorate in the following years. The TPLF accused the government of neglecting the Tigray region and failing to address the needs of the Tigrayan people. In 2020, the TPLF withdrew from the EPRDF and formed a new coalition which sought greater autonomy for the Amhara region and a more equitable distribution of power and resources (Tiba, 2007).

The Ethiopian government, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, responded to the TPLF's withdrawal by launching a military offensive against the Tigray region in November 2020 (Canetti, 2021). The offensive was accompanied by widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, rape, and forced displacement. The Ethiopian government has been accused of committing genocide against the Tigrayans, with many organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, calling for an independent investigation into the atrocities (Amnesty International, 2021). The situation in Tigray continues to be dire, with reports of ongoing violence and human rights abuses, as well as a humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict. Over 2 million people in the region are in need of assistance, and many have been forced to flee their homes (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Comparison of the Rwandan and Ethiopian Genocide

The genocides in Rwanda and Ethiopia have some similarities but also significant differences. Both genocides were marked by horrific violence and atrocities committed against ethnic groups, and both had deep historical roots. However, the specific causes, dynamics, and outcomes of the two genocides were quite different. While the two genocides occurred in different countries and at different times, there are several similarities and differences between them that are worth examining (Matfess, 2015).

One of the main similarities between the two genocides is the ethnic divisions that played a major role in their causes. The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 was primarily directed against the Tutsi ethnic group by the Hutu-led government and Hutu extremist groups (Jones, 2011). The Tutsi minority had long been marginalized by the Hutu-dominated government and Hutu extremists had been propagating hate speech and incitement to violence against the Tutsi for years. The trigger for the genocide was the death of the Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana in a plane crash on April 6, 1994. The Hutu extremist government and military quickly orchestrated a genocidal campaign against the Tutsi and moderate Hutu, which led to the deaths of an estimated 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu in just 100 days (Docker, 2008).

The genocide in Ethiopia, on the other hand, is ongoing and primarily directed against the Tigrayan ethnic group by the Ethiopian government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. The Tigrayan people have a distinct culture and identity and have long been at odds with the central government in Addis Ababa (Tiba, 2007). The Tigrayans have a history of resistance to Ethiopian rule and have been marginalized by the Ethiopian government, which saw them as a potential threat to its rule. The Ethiopian government launched a military offensive against the Tigray region in November 2020, which was accompanied by widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, rape, and forced displacement (Dugo, 2017).

Another key factor to note between the two genocides is the response of the international community. In the case of Rwanda, the international community failed to intervene and stopped the genocide, despite clear warning signs and calls for action (Adelman, 1996). In contrast, the Ethiopian government's actions have been widely condemned by the international community and calls for an independent investigation have been made. The genocide in Rwanda was a well-planned, orchestrated campaign of mass killings that took place over a hundred days, while the genocide in Ethiopia is an ongoing conflict with a complex set of causes and dynamics (Matfess, 2015).

The Response of the International Community to the Rwandan and Ethiopian Genocides

The response of the international community to the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the ongoing genocide in Ethiopia has been a topic of much debate and criticism. In the case of Rwanda, the international community failed to intervene and stop the genocide, despite clear warning signs and calls for action. In contrast, the Ethiopian government's actions have been widely condemned by the international community, and calls for an independent investigation have been made (Thompson, 2007; Dugo & Eisen, 2018).

The UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda, UNAMIR, was under-funded and under-equipped, and was unable to intervene to stop the violence. Despite pledges of "Never Again" following the Holocaust. Well-armed foreign forces were only deployed to evacuate white individuals, and the UN Security Council ultimately voted to withdraw the majority of the peacekeeping force (Davis, 2014). This "act of total cowardice" resulted in the deaths of a million defenseless victims. A few peacekeepers led by Canadian Major-General Roméo Dallaire and Brigadier General Henry Kwami Anyidoho disobeyed the Council's order and

remained, ultimately saving thousands of lives (Jones, 2011). The UN Security Council also failed to take action, with many countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, opposing the deployment of additional peacekeeping troops to Rwanda (Schabas, 2009). Furthermore, the international community failed to respond adequately to the humanitarian crisis that resulted from the genocide.

The failure of the international community to intervene in Rwanda has been widely criticized, with many arguing that the international community's inaction allowed the genocide to continue unchecked. Critics have pointed to the lack of political will among world powers to intervene and the lack of understanding of the complex dynamics of the conflict as key factors in the international community's failure to act (Schabas, 2009).

In contrast, the international community's response to the ongoing genocide in Ethiopia has been more robust. The Ethiopian government's actions have been widely condemned by the international community, with many organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, calling for an independent investigation into the atrocities (Amnesty International, 2021). The United Nations and major world powers have also called for an end to the violence and for the protection of civilians. Furthermore, the international community has been providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2022).

However, it is important to note that while the international community's response to the genocide in Ethiopia has been stronger than in Rwanda, it has not been without its criticisms. Some have argued that the response has not been strong enough and that the international community has not done enough to hold those responsible accountable for their actions. Others have also criticized the lack of a coherent international response and the lack of decisive action to stop the violence (Amnesty International, 2021).

In conclusion, the response of the international community to the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the ongoing genocide in Ethiopia has been a topic of much debate and criticism. While the international community failed to intervene and stop the genocide in Rwanda, its response to the ongoing genocide in Ethiopia has been more robust. However, it is clear that the international community's response to both genocides has been inadequate and that more needs to be done to prevent and respond to such atrocities in the future. Giving its recommendations, Amnesty International (2021) alongside several other bodies urge the United Nations Organisation, the Human Rights Council (HRC), and all other international bodies to convene a special session to address the escalating conflict in Ethiopia and respond to a joint report on the situation. During this session, Amnesty International recommends that the HRC establish an investigative mechanism to collect and preserve evidence and contribute to accountability, as outlined in the joint report. The organization also suggests that the HRC adopt a resolution which calls for all parties in the conflict to respect international human rights and humanitarian law, protect civilians, provide humanitarian access, and hold those responsible for violations accountable. The International Crisis Group (2022) also recommends that International actors should take stronger action to address the humanitarian crisis in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the leaders of these countries should be held accountable for any attacks on civilians. The U.S. President should personally communicate this message to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, emphasizing the potential consequences if their forces continue to engage in such actions and other organizations of great import such as the African Union should be actively involved in seeing these atrocities come to an end.

Implications for the Future: The Early Warning Signs of Genocide

The implications for the future of genocide are significant and far-reaching, as it can lead to deaths, displacements, and atrocities against humanity (The International Crisis Group, 2022). The early warning signs of genocide in Rwanda and Ethiopia are important to identify in order to prevent future atrocities. Although many scholars and observers believe that warnings signs are hard to predict and understand, there still exist similarities across history that can help to warn against advent of such mass atrocities in the future (Wisniew, 2012). Some of the key early warning signs include:

a. Past History:

Jones (2011) asserts that Genocide is often linked to prior state conduct and the relationship between the state and society, quoting psychologist, Ervin Staub, who identified the presence of "ideologies of antagonism" among different communities, which arise from a prolonged history of hostility and mutual violence.

Rwanda is a country that has a history of ethnic conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi groups, same with Ethiopia which had also had a history of ethnic conflict, particularly between the Oromo and Amhara groups (Matfess, 2015). These historical conflicts have continued for several decades, leading to conflicts and smaller skirmishes between people from these differing ethnic groups. This goes to show that the degeneration of the country to a widespread advent of conflict and atrocities have been simmering for a while before its explosion.

b. Lack of institutional peaceful conflict-resolution structures:

An absence of structures to aid peaceful resolution of conflict between ethnic affiliations in the state can be a foretelling of problems to come. Especially if one group feels increasingly marginalized and treated unfairly, sparking tension and discord within the state (Wisniew, 2012).

c. Hate Speech/Incitement

Incitement to violence and hate speech against a particular group, often based on ethnicity, religion, or national origin can be a telltale sign of future conflict. This can be in the form of speeches, statements or slogans by political or religious leaders, or through media outlets that promote discrimination and violence against a specific group (Sellstrom et al., 1996). Thompson (2011) brings to light how in 1992, Radio Rwanda broadcasted messages inciting the killing of Tutsi in Bugesera, using a fake warning from a human rights group to convince Hutu to attack first, resulting in the death of hundreds of Tutsi.

d. The 'superior group'

The dehumanization of a targeted group through propaganda and the media is a telltale sign of looming problems. This can involve the portrayal of a group as subhuman, inferior, or a threat to society. It can also include the use of stereotypes and negative images to create a sense of fear and hatred towards a certain group (Thompson, 2007).

e. Extremism/ Military groups The rise of extremist or militant groups that promote violence and discrimination against a specific group and the increasing number of hate crimes and acts of violence against a specific group, including physical attacks, vandalism, and intimidation can foretell the breaking down of a heterogeneous society (Wisniew, 2012). This is so if it is compounded with the breakdown of law and order, the presence of arms and weapons in the hands of some groups, and if the state or government fails to protect the targeted group from violence and discrimination.

2. Conclusion

To prevent future genocides, it is essential to address the root causes of ethnic conflict and to address the early warning signs before they escalate (Wisniew, 2012). This may include measures such as promoting inclusive and democratic governance, increasing access to education and economic opportunities, and fostering dialogue and reconciliation between different ethnic groups (Thompson, 2007). Additionally, the international community has a responsibility to intervene in situations where genocide may be imminent. This may include imposing economic sanctions, supporting human rights organizations, and deploying peacekeeping forces. The implications of genocide for the future are significant and far-reaching. Identifying the early warning signs of genocide in countries with similar configurations like Rwanda and Ethiopia is crucial in order to prevent future atrocities. To do so, it is essential to address the root causes of ethnic conflict and to intervene when genocide is imminent. The international community has a responsibility to take action to prevent genocide and to hold those responsible accountable for their actions.

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