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Post-Genocide Rwanda Peacebuilding Efforts: The Perspective of the People

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Introduction:

In 2015, there were forty active conflicts worldwide, with approximately 167,000 fatalities. These statistics are representative for the past decade. Many fatalities are associated with the inability to create lasting peace in the developing world, due to a lack of peace-building techniques, assistance from the transnational justice system, and support from local citizens. An example of such a conflict is the Rwandan genocide. Between April and June 1994, the Hutu majority perpetrated a genocide against the Tutsi minority of Rwanda. The estimated death toll was between 800,000 and 1 million, with the overwhelming majority of the victims being Tutsi. A unique characteristic separating the Rwandan genocide from other conflicts is that Rwanda has shown immense capability in its peace-building efforts. The purpose of this project was to study the successful peace-building efforts in Rwanda in order to better understand how they can be applied elsewhere.

Specifically, we designed this project with the objective of analyzing the root causes of the conflict within Rwanda and its applicability to other conflict rich areas. The focus was on the transnational justice system and its impact on peace-building efforts, as well as the perception of the peace building process by Rwandan citizens. We hypothesized that there would be a strong correlation between how citizens perceive the peace-building efforts of their government and the successfulness of peace-building projects. My null hypothesis was that there was no correlation between these variables.

Prior to our arrival in country, we spoke to several academics who had carried out similar studies in Rwanda. They informed us that we were required to gain approval from the Ministry of Justice before we began our research. We did so promptly. However, upon arrival in country, our team was informed that there was additional clearance required for us to carry out our intended research. We did everything in our ability to gain this clearance, but unfortunately, it was to no avail. Government officials were unwilling to cooperate with us, and it appeared that we would be unable to carry out our research project. We therefore decided to switch our focus and analyzed the programs and initiatives that were focused on rehabilitation and reconciliation in Rwanda. Specifically, we looked for parallels within these programs, in order to better understand their widespread success.

Methodology

The research began prior to our departure. We started by studying the root causes of the conflict within Rwanda through the literature available. This allowed us to create a comprehensive literature review and better understand the conflict itself.

The original plan was to carry out in person interviews with Rwandans from various walks of life. However, due to our shift in focus, we were unable to carry out the surveys and interviews that would have allowed us to use gather quantitative data and use statistical analysis to find pertinent results. Instead, we focused on a qualitative analysis, and started visiting prevalent programs and initiatives. These programs and initiatives were created both by the government and non-governmental organizations and were focused on rehabilitation and reconciliation in post genocide Rwanda. We were able to visit various institutions, such as the Institute for Legal Practice and Development, the Nyanza Peace Academy, the Protestant...
University of Rwanda Conflict Resolution program, various churches and community groups, the Never Again Rwanda Center, and the Conflict and Development Foundation. We also visited the Centre for Conflict management, Center for Legal Aid and Mediation, and the Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Rwanda. We had the opportunity to discuss the goals and objectives of these programs with several key members of the organizations, giving us insight into their success. Discussing the various features and techniques that made the organizations successful allowed me to better understand how each organization had individually promoted peace in Rwanda, and identify parallels within the various organizations.

Results:

In regards to the literary analysis, three root causes that were almost universally acknowledge as having played an important role as precursors for the Rwandan genocide. The first was colonialism, which is the root cause of the ethnic tension and the resentment between the Hutus and Tutsis. During the colonial period, the Belgians favored a small subgroup of the population, which they designated as the Tutsis. The majority of the population became identified as the Hutus, and were part of the lower class, even though both groups were ethnically homogeneous. This caused economic and political inequality between the Hutus and the Tutsis, which was the second precursor we identified. Finally, many scholars pointed to the Interahamwe, a Hutu military organization, as an explanation for the the Rwandan genocide. This militia was persuasive in its recruitment techniques and effective in its use of propaganda. This mobilized the Hutu majority against the Tutsi minority, resulting in the immense loss of life in 1994.

The interviews with our key informants and peacebuilding organizations revealed interesting qualitative information. Throughout this interview process, we were able to identify various parallels between the organizations, allowing us to identify specifics characteristics common among successful organization. For example, the first parallel identified was an emphasis on education. Many of the organizations we met with were educational institutions that focused on teaching the younger generation tolerance and acceptance. This educational emphasis focused on race and ethnicity, but also on gender and social status. This led to the second parallel, which was an emphasis on gender equality and the involvement of women in the peacebuilding process. This was spurred by the government’s effort to increase the proportion of women in the government, who now hold 61% of seats.1 Nearly every organization we visited noted the importance of utilizing the perspective of the women in the community to foster attitudes of peace and acceptance. Finally, the last parallel was the emphasis on community involvement. Each organization and individual emphasized the importance of grassroot peacebuilding. This was especially critical in Rwanda, because the events of 1994 led to neighbors turning on one another. After the genocide, these neighbors were forced to return to normal. For this reason, communal peacebuilding became critical.

Discussion

Robert Ricigliano, an export on international peacebuilding efforts, proposed a theory which focused on the systematic factors of international peace-building efforts. Ricigliano argued that there are three elements that are the core framework of change, which are Structural, Attitudinal, and Transactional.2 The elements deal with the institutions designed to meet people’s basic human needs (Structural), shared norms and beliefs (Attitudinal), and the processes and skills used by important people to peacefully manage conflict (transactional). Although our findings did not deal much with the transactional feature of this theory, the emphasis on communal peace, women’s involvement, and education, clearly tie into Ricigliano’s structural and attitudinal emphasis, and therefore provide further support for his theory.

Conclusion
Our analysis provided two conclusions. First, the three main causes of the Rwandan genocide were: colonialism, the oppression of a people, and the use and effectiveness of propaganda and intimidation. Second, the successfulness of peacebuilding organizations in post-genocide Rwanda are linked to their emphasis on education, female involvement, and communal and grassroot peacebuilding. Because of the complications we ran into in country, these conclusions are only backed by a qualitative analysis, not quantitative data. This makes our analysis speculative, rather than empirical. Therefore, these conclusions call for further research on peacebuilding in Rwanda, so that our findings can be supported by data.
