

The Globalization of Human Rights in Post-Genocide Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades, Rwanda has been through major changes, from a conflict-ridden society with deep divisions between the two main ethnic groups—Hutus and Tutsis—to a case of impressive economic growth. Despite the progress, deep divisions and human rights issues exist. To avoid the recurrence of any conflict, both state and non-state actors are playing varied roles in a post-genocide Rwanda. Based on both primary and secondary sources, this article argues that in an era of globalization and post-genocide in Rwanda, non-state actors like international non-governmental organizations have the most impact in the preservation of human rights. So, in spite of the multiplicity of actors working to protect human life and property in Rwanda, and recovery from the effects of genocide, the character and mode of operation of these non-state actors put them ahead of other actors in the achievement of this goal.

“What I have come to realize as the root of it all, however, is the fundamental indifference of the world community to the plight of seven to eight million black Africans in a tiny country that had no strategic or resource value to any world power.”
—Gen. Romeo Dallaire (2003), Commander of UN Forces in Rwanda

Introduction

In over three months in 1994, an estimated 800,000 people died as members of the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups in Rwanda clashed in a haunting genocide that shocked the international community. The causes of this genocide have been attributed to several external and domestic factors. During the genocide, the Rwandan people were reacting to such external effects as colonization and oppression, and an international community that was generally apathetic. Domestic factors that also propelled this genocide include, but are not limited to, population pressures and ethnic politics, which emphasize the fact that the genocide was a response by Rwandans to domestic issues and tensions that were created and exacerbated by external forces (Hintjens, 1999). Taking place during an era of globalization, the Rwandan genocide has challenged scholars to identify the role and failure of human rights given the increase in efforts on the issue by both state and non-state actors.

Globalization has enabled and facilitated the work of various actors in the international system. Throughout Rwanda's contemporary history, state and non-state actors have played a major role in Rwanda's political and economic missions and outcomes. Actors such as Belgium, France, and the United States as well as the United Nations, just to mention some, have influenced Rwanda. For example, since the United States and the United Nations poured aid into the once dependent Rwandan economy, it is now more stable. Other vital forces that continue to shape Rwanda's political development include its current leader, Paul Kagame, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that consist of human rights groups as well as aid agencies. Though each actor and organization has its own goals and objectives, they collectively impact the human rights environment of the country. In this article, I argue that though domestic and external actors have together shaped Rwanda's human rights sphere, in the post-colonial, particularly post-genocide, Rwanda, forces of globalization have enabled non-state actors to have great influence on this African state. Globalization has opened many doors for non-state actors to build positive initiatives impacting human rights. To effectively support this argument, I largely draw on fieldwork in Rwanda to show the relevance of globalization to both non-state and state actors engaged in human rights in Rwanda.

Recently, Rwanda has become a model for development and economic growth, and a welcoming environment for international investment as well as diverse international actors (From massacres to miracles, 2012). Firstly, the article sets the conceptual basis by examining human rights and globalization. The second section addresses the research methodology and challenges associated with human rights research in Rwanda. This evaluates the two main data acquisition methods (primary and secondary) used in this research. Thirdly, I draw on the concepts of human rights and globalization as well as information gathered during my fieldwork in Rwanda during the summer of 2013 to support my main arguments.

Conceptualization of Globalization and Human Rights

This section highlights the concepts of globalization and human rights, which are two well-known ideas. The relationship between globalization and human rights is shown by the importance of these two concepts to the case study. Globalization and human rights are interconnected, since human rights include some sense of universalism or the universal recognition of the rights of human beings, and globalization involves the integration of activities of all human kind. Human rights have become an integral part of the process of globalization in many ways. The Western countries and international organizations are increasingly using human rights norms as a yardstick to judge developing countries and to deal with economic and trade relations, and also to extend development assistance.

Scholte (2008) defines globalization as internationalization, which refers to “the growth of international exchange and interdependence and the cross-border relations between countries” (p. 18). As interconnections are developed across borders, globalization has its winners and losers. Globalization may intensify impoverishment by increasing the poverty, insecurity, and fragmentation of society, which contributes to the violation of human rights and dignity of millions of people (Chunakara, 2000). On the other hand, globalization also promotes attention to and needs of people, and, in most cases, highlights the suffering of populations in the international community. For example, with the expansion of trade, markets, and foreign investment, developing countries have experienced the inequalities that exist in the global economy. The imperative to liberalize has demanded the shrinking of state involvement in national life, producing a wave of privatization, job cuts, and slashed healthcare, education, and food subsidies, which often impact the poor in society (Chunakara, 2000).

Human rights are a set of principled ideas about the treatment to which individuals are entitled by virtue of being human. The human right discourse is universal in character and includes claims of equality and non-discrimination (Schmitz & Sikkink, 2002). Over time, these ideas have gained widespread acceptance as international norms defining what was necessary for humans to thrive, both in terms of being protected from abuses and provided with the elements to live a life in dignity. According to Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), domestic norms are deeply entwined with international norms. Hence, the human rights discourse, which is universal in character and includes claims of equality and non-discrimination, is internalized into domestic behavior. For human rights norms to evolve from a state of origin—what they refer to as norm entrepreneurship—to the state of internalization, both state and non-state actors play various roles in this process. Both state and non-state actors help the internalization of human rights norms by implementing positive platforms and ideas of human rights. They also promote equal rights in order to rebuild and reshape the idea of human rights within the state in question. As these actors work and interrelate in a modern and interconnected system, human rights norms govern these actors and their territories (Donnelly, 1998).

Though the value of these concepts to this study may vary, there are three main reasons why the concepts of globalization and human rights correlate and stand out in the case of Rwanda. First, the roles of state and non-state actors in the global governance of human rights are more visible in the era of globalization. The global community observes the role of actors within the global human rights sphere from different perspectives and levels (Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999). Whether actors are violating or adhering to

human rights norms, they do so as national, transnational, or non-governmental actors, and hence receive recognition at these levels. For example, in the 2007 report of Human Rights Watch (HRW), the international organization recognized the role of Gacaca courts meant to combine customary conflict resolution mechanisms with criminal justice for prosecuting culprits of the 1994 genocide (Human Rights Watch Report, 2007). Second, Rwanda remains a haunted case of gross human rights failure that took place while the global community stood by. In April 1994, the East African state descended into genocide with both domestic and external forces crossing paths in a conflict that had a lot to do with human rights violations as well as the inaction of an integrated global community. Third, in an era of globalization, the growth and spread of non-state actors is a distinguishing feature of the global political system. To accept human rights norms at the domestic level, non-state organizations and movements continue to play major roles in terms of socializing the norms and making them a part of the everyday lives of the people (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). In Rwanda, the growth and effectiveness of such non-state organizations as the Association of the Widows of Genocide (AVEGA), Inara Legal Aid Service (INALAS), and Community of Potters of Rwanda (COPORWA) are shaping the country's human rights practices and, most importantly, its political future.

Methodology

Primary sources used in this study consist of information gathered during my internship in Rwanda. I was involved with the non-profit organization Global Youth Connect (GYC). While involved with GYC, I was a part of a human rights delegation that studied the Rwandan Genocide with an emphasis on human rights. While in Rwanda, I conducted some interviews, participated in volunteer activities, and lived and worked with Rwandans who had been impacted by the genocide. I also used secondary sources, including information in scholarly journals, reports, and books. I encountered some challenges in conducting research in Rwanda, which I describe below.

In 1994 an estimated 800,000 people died during the Rwandan genocide. As the tension grew between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, both external and domestic factors fueled the already tense ethnic situation. In the days leading up to the genocide, a conflict became evident when the then president, President Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was assassinated on April 16, 1994. The shooting down of President Habyarimana's airplane worsened an increasingly tense situation. Many Hutu extremists, feeling neglected and oppressed, were angered and responded by ordering every Tutsi killed. The Hutu extremists made a conscious decision to instill fear in Tutsis by mass killings in order to remain in power. With an estimated 200,000 participants in the genocide, for weeks families were murdered together and women were systematically raped as well as numerous other human rights abuses were conducted (United Human Rights Council, 2014).

For primary data, I conducted nearly twenty interviews and did some observations. I interviewed different people, all selected based on access and willingness. These included members of parliament, women of the AVEGA, and some individual Rwandans who I came across during the internship period. While interning in Rwanda, I had the opportunity of meeting, interviewing, working, and living with Rwandans who had witnessed and lived during the genocide. I conducted informal interviews, during which I documented the key notes in my journal. The respondents mostly spoke about tangible experiences of walking through memorials, seeing skeletal remains, genocide weapons, and bloody clothing as well as intangible experiences. I could see vividly the hurt in the eyes of the victims. I observed and noted the emotional outpour of these respondents while they talked to me.

I tried to gain a balanced overview by talking to both Tutsis and Hutus; however, among the people who I met, Tutsis were more willing to talk to me, while most of the Hutus were unwilling to do the interviews. For instance, while visiting a memorial in the mountains of Bisesero during a visit, I was told the story of the Tutsi who fought to stay alive in those mountains. While I am not sure why Hutus were less willing to

conduct interviews, I have my own speculations. In my own personal opinion, I felt that many of the Hutu people I met did not want to offend or were unsure if I would understand their perspective. In spite of my inability to gain a deep knowledge of the Hutu perspective from interviews, one insight I gained was from a Hutu man who explained how hard it is to be a Hutu because people look at him with shame and disgust, even though he did not partake in the genocide. He told me that he was “just a child when these things were taking place, so why should I be blamed?”

For secondary sources, I found the majority of my information from scholarly journals and research banks. I took information on the history of Rwanda from both pre-colonial and post-colonial eras, research on the agendas of non-governmental organizations as well as previous research studies on Rwanda. These reports and diverse scholarly sources provided a wide range of perspectives.

Conducting research in Rwanda came with some unique research problems. The first problem is the lack of extensive resources on the genocide. Literature addressing a wide variety of perspectives about the genocide remains scarce. This problem might be due to the unwillingness on the part of the inhabitants to revisit the horrors of the genocide through interviews and other forms of research activities. There are other data problems, including historical memory, selective telling, and skewed participant demographics, that illuminate political structures, group relations, and societal cleavages. One study by King (2009) addressed issues with interviewing in post-genocide Rwanda. For example, with regards to historical memory, interviewees were asked to reflect upon experiences that occurred many years earlier, and their answers were filtered through memories of economic hardship, ethnic and regional politics, gender, exile, violence, and civil war as well as genocide. This was particularly the case in Rwanda, as the end of the genocide did not mark an end to the many social, economic, and political challenges that face the country. As I talked to native Rwandans, they could not help but refer to the daily hardships that affect them, even when that is not the topic of discussion.

Moreover, interview-based research has the tendency to allow individuals to mythologize the past. And with selective telling, many interviewees reported what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear and also withheld information from the researcher (King, 2009). The attention of the world was drawn to the genocide in Rwanda, and since then scholars and researchers have been asking questions about the genocide. This has led many Rwandans to have “prepared answers” for most of the often asked questions and hence may selectively provide these answers to respective researchers. While interviewing individuals, I realized that speaking about such a sensitive topic had the tendency to bring out emotions, as interviewees attempted to make me understand the hardships they went through. Those emotions could, in fact, have caused the storyteller to have a more biased approach. I also experienced what King (2009) in her research has described as selective telling. At times I had a feeling that the interviewee told me what s/he thought I would agree with. Sometimes I felt that I was being told what the respondents thought was appropriate to share. I believed that there was some underlying anger with the genocide among the delegation I participated in and with the local people I interviewed, which manifested itself in personal biases. These cases were more problematic when I had no means of verifying some of the stories.

Preserving Human Rights in Rwanda: Multiplicity of Actors

As stated previously in my thesis, domestic and external actors have generally shaped Rwanda’s human rights sphere in post-colonial and post-genocide Rwanda. In this era of globalization, however, non-state actors have had the most impact on this African state. Here I introduce of some of the external and domestic actors that have played and continue to play diverse roles in shaping human rights discourse in colonial and post-colonial Rwanda.

There were many external factors that have contributed to various conflicts in Rwanda. Upon arrival of the first European settlers in Rwanda during the twentieth century, it was discovered that the inhabitants

were largely divided into three groups: the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa (Prunier, 1995). However, little is known of the history of Rwanda prior to the occupation of European settlers. As a result tracing the history and origins of these groups is often difficult and highly contested (Eltringham, 2004). What is known, though, is that the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa groups shared a common language and philosophical and religious beliefs as well as similar cultural values (Uvin, 2001). There were no signs of problems among the people until colonization and the division of people through ethnic naming and divide-and-conquer tactics. Belgium used indirect rule to govern Rwanda and keep order. Through an indirect rule system, the Belgian government co-opted the Tutsi people and used them to help govern. Although the Tutsi ethnic groups were the minority, their positions in government led to them being perceived as the superior “race.” Largely, the Hutu people were denied positions in government and those who held positions were removed by the Belgian government (Uvin, 1999). The Tutsi population began to thrive. More Tutsi people became educated, earning better jobs opportunities, and ultimately, this bought them better standards of living. While the classification system used by the Belgians to determine the categorization of the groups is highly disputed, it was generally based on physical and economic features mainly determined by ethnicity (Grunfeld & Huijboom, 2007). With the colonization of Rwanda by Belgium deepening the divisions among ethnic groups, the Rwandan genocide became a possibility. Now, in modern day Rwanda, many Rwandans are making an effort to uphold human rights regardless of the country’s history and rebuild a torn society.

In post-colonial Rwanda, multiple actors are involved in ensuring human rights. Some of these major players include state actors like Belgium, France, United Kingdom, and the United States. For instance, France continues to play a major role in Rwanda, including subsequently taking some blame for the 1994 massacre. In 1998, a French parliamentary investigation made accusations that President Francois Mitterrand and the center-right government in France had been blinded by supposed French interest in the region into siding with radical Hutu groups. At first, France vehemently denied any responsibility for the genocide, saying that there was no way they could have predicted the massacre. Recently, erstwhile President Nicolas Sarkozy formally apologized and suggested that the entire international community and France, in particular, should accept that its response had been culpably weak. He stated, “What happened here obliges the international community, including France, to reflect on the errors which prevented us from foreseeing, or stopping this appalling crime” (Lichfield, 2010).

Non-state actors are the most potent in this era because of globalization forces, which allow organizations, groups, and movements to locate and relocate in Rwanda and around the world. Non-state actors have also been working in Rwanda since the era of colonization, but since the genocide, many human rights focused organizations have been promoting the principles and practices of human rights. These actors are able to acquire economic resources to achieve their goals. Many states in the global community started to send aid to make up for their non-response during the genocide. Unlike state actors, non-state actors have links with the global human rights system. Organizations such as the United Nations and its numerous affiliates, Amnesty International (AI), AVEGA, HRW, and GYC help with the preservation of human rights in Rwanda. With non-state actors in states, the international influence weighs heavily on the government, whether negatively or positively. As in the case of Rwanda, non-state actors have effectively shaped the human rights account during the post-genocide era.

First, non-state actors are able to avoid influences from the state. Most of the non-state actors have access to global resources and hence do not need resources from the Rwandan government, which would have come with strings attached. This ability to speak for the voiceless in Rwanda has been more effectively done by non-state actors than government institutions charged with the same task. GYC was one of the many NGOs that I worked with that had the opportunity to avoid influences from the state regarding their human rights work. The organization was able to receive financial backing from other outside sources other than the Rwandan government. Similar to many other non-governmental organizations, GYC was supported by Western countries, which gave them a platform and the safety to promote their cause

without interference from outside. Outsourced financial funding and secure operations allow non-state actors to achieve their sole objective and obtain access to global resources because of their shared platform (www.globalyouthconnect.org).

Second, non-governmental actors take advantage of globalization in post-genocide Rwanda. In an era where non-governmental institutions have increased in numbers, as well as mobility, most of these organizations are looking for causes that reflect their objectives. Human rights organizations see post-genocide Rwanda as an opportunity to call attention to the causes and effects of genocide in global affairs. With an increase in cross-border interactions, these actors have the required platform to further their causes. Health Development Initiative (HDI) was awarded the opportunity to expand their objective, benefitting from globalization through volunteer work and its connections with other international organizations like GYC and the United Nations (www.hdirwanda.org). These prominent global connections give HDI the opportunity and support to make other connections with other organizations that have objectives dedicated to human rights.

Third, Western non-state actors are in Rwanda to atone or appease for the neglect of the country during the genocide. During the 1994 genocide, Rwanda represented a neglected cause in the international community, and since then many states and non-state actors have come forward to apologize and appease for this costly neglect. To show a renewed commitment, most of these non-state organizations are dedicated to helping build a Rwanda where human rights are respected. Post-genocide Rwanda has seen tremendous strides within political leadership but the United States has taken major steps to help rebuild the country. The United States government and agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) are continuously aiming at creating programs in Rwanda that aim to achieve peace and prosperity by introducing the idea of having more political parties for diversity of opinions. Through some conversations with Rwandans, I learned that the people were comfortable with the current political party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and did not see the reason for opposition. Although the RPF has been the leading political party in Rwanda, a U.S. worker explained that this could lead to a dictatorship, and that the United States will help to prevent future negative outcomes by encouraging the development of other political parties.

Finally, non-state actors advocate for the inclusion of minority groups, which has increased and widened the base of interests in Rwanda. Most of the non-state organizations working in Rwanda continue to represent the voiceless found all over the country. This includes groups such as AVEGA (a women's group), INALAS, COPORWA, and HDI as well as groups that are trying to provide economic resources to other minority groups within Rwanda. The roles that these groups play are empowering and help with the socialization of human rights norms in the state. Working with HDI, I was able to experience the incredible work of the local doctors who were aiming to decrease HIV/AIDS in the country while battling the stigma against the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community in Rwanda. Regardless of minimum support and help from the government, HDI was able to hold training sessions and community awareness events aimed at promoting diversity of opinions on both accepted and sensitive issues within the Rwandan society.

Conclusion

My research aims to capture the role and importance of various actors in shaping the human rights in Rwanda, particularly in an era of globalization. Both state and non-state actors have played diverse roles in the development of Rwanda during its postcolonial era. Non-state actors have been very active in Rwanda and are building positive initiatives impacting human rights. As the global community continues to be interdependent, non-state actors have taken this opportunity to impact human rights and development activities in the state of Rwanda. Following the genocide, the country has been working with

the various actors to reclaim the health of its economy, strengthen democracy, open doors for partnership with other countries, and place human rights at the top of the agenda.

Non-states actors have been active and made major impacts in Rwanda's post-genocide human rights era with the benefit of globalization. First, these non-governmental organizations are able to avoid most of the influences from the state. With non-governmental organization being able to avoid outside influences, the easier their objectives are achieved. Second, with the opportunity to take advantage of globalization in the post-genocide era, organizations are using the opportunities they have available to build partnerships. Third, as Western states try to atone or appease for their neglect of Rwanda during the genocide, non-state actors are taking the advantage to provide economic and social benefits to the Rwandan population. Fourth, non-governmental organizations continue advancing equality by advocating for minority groups.

The experiences and conclusions in this research represent a useful foundation for further research into the role of particular actors in Rwanda, and the progress made by these actors in establishing and preserving human rights in Rwanda. First, the focus on non-state actors provides a useful case study for scholars and other stakeholders in Rwanda and Africa. Second, a look at the importance of the concepts of globalization and human rights in a post-conflict African state is also valuable. Finally, this case study highlights and provides some updates to a case that continues to intrigue the international community. Rwanda's recent history has been a mixture of challenges and opportunities and in the course of these; state and non-state actors have been and continue to be useful facilitators.

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