Conflict Mapping of Rwandan Civil War (1990-1994)

Background
This paper proposes a conflict map of the Rwandan Civil War of 1990–1994, inclusive of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. The conflict is assessed using a modification of the model proposed by Bright (2004), which is useful in that it synthesizes the issues-based conflict mapping approach proposed by Wehr (1979) with the ‘Three Pillar’ approach by Sandole (1998) which places additional emphasis on levels of conflict. However, we make one key deviation from this model in that we make no evaluation or analysis of conflict interventions. Instead, we choose to focus solely on mapping the conflict with the view to evaluate intervention and peacebuilding at a later date.

1. Parties to the Conflict

1.1 Primary Parties
When looking at the Rwandan conflict, it is tempting to divide the primary parties purely on basis of ethnicity between ‘Tutsi’ and ‘Hutu’, which encourages viewing the conflict primarily through the lens of “ethnic fears” or “ethnic hatreds” (Fujii 2011: 4). However, while most of the parties to the conflict were broadly organised on the basis of ethnicity, many scholars now agree that a purely ethnic or racial reading ignores the highly politicised nature of the conflict and the intra-ethnic struggles for power that occurred between elites of the same ethnicity (Berry and Berry 1999: 3; Fujii 2011; Prunier 1997: 140-142).

For the purposes of this paper we define the primary parties to the conflict with the broad labels of: “government”, “opposition” and “rebels”. Differentiating the parties along these lines draws the focus away from a purely ethnic reading to a more nuanced understanding of the complex political situation in Rwanda and the various ways that actors and parties responded to and acted during the
conflict. Following Bright’s model, we examine the goals and interactions of these parties, and who they represented.

1.1.1 Government

The government during the genocide was a one-party state controlled by dictator Juvénal Habyarimana and his party, the Mouvement révolutionnaire national pour le développement or MRND. Habyarimana and the MRND élite were northern Hutus who had taken power after defeating the previous southern Hutu government of Gregoire Kayibanda (Fujii 2011: 72-73). Thus, Habyarimana’s goals were primarily to establish tight political control over Rwanda and to advantage his northern Hutu élite, and to retain this power at all costs.

Power within the MRND was particularly restricted to a small group, known as the akazu, made up primarily of close friends and family of President’s wife, who was a member of an extremely influential northern clan (Prunier 1997: 85). Thus, while it may have claimed to represent all Rwandans (or at least all Hutus), the MRND generally represented the interests of this small northern Hutu élite at the expense of southern Hutu opponents and Tutsis.

The government of Rwanda had direct interaction with other parties in the conflict in two distinct ways. Firstly, it interacted with the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) forces militarily, by sending the army (Forces armées rwandaises or FAR) to directly combat the RPF invasion of the country via conventional symmetrical warfare. Secondly, it interacted with its political opponents and potential RPF Tutsi sympathisers within the country by forming militia groups.

The two main militia groups, the Interahamwe and the Impuzamugambi were initially formed as youth wings of political parties, the MRND and its radical extremist offshoot the Coalition pour la défense de la République (CDR) respectively. They recieved military training from the government armed forces (Totten and Ubaldo 2011: 200) and as such they represented the extreme anti-
Tutsi elements of these parties by proxy. The **goals** of both militia groups was ultimately to maintain MRND and Hutu control via the extermination of Tutsi civilians and Hutu moderate groups who were seen as being *ibitsyo* (“collaborators” accused of secretly supporting the RPF invasion) (Prunier 1997: 231). Militia engaged in asymmetrical violence, killing and torturing thousands of unarmed civilians with machetes, clubs and farming implements. They also pressed many ordinary Hutu civilians into killing gangs and ordered them to kill Tutsis or be killed themselves (Fujii 2011: 164).

### 1.1.2 Opposition

Despite being a one-party state for close to 30 years, by 1990 Habyarimana was facing internal and external political pressure for the legalisation of multiparty politics in Rwanda (Prunier 1997: 122). Although the various parties that formed had a variety of political positions, they were broadly united in their **goals** of attaining greater power and access to political representation for those outside Habyarimana’s northern elite. This brought them dangerously into conflict with the *akazu*, who were extremely jealous of giving up power. They *directly interacted* with the government through political action and mass protests (Fujii 2011: 51), pressuring the MRND régime for greater democratisation, including freedom of the press, reduction of corruption, and the end of MRND-controlled police and military oppression of opposition to the President (Prunier 1997: 134-135, 145-146). They also interacted with the RPF by attempting to bring them to the negotiating table, culminating in signing the Arusha Accords in which opposition members, the RPF and the government were to supposed to share power (Fujii 2011: 52), although generally they were more concerned with increasing political power available to the Hutus than defending championing the rights of the Tutsi minority within Rwanda (Kroslak 2007: 37).

### 1.1.3 Rebels

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) was formed from, and thus **represented**, mostly Tutsi refugees in Uganda who had fled the violence of the Rwandan
Revolution of 1960. Their primarily goals were for these refugees to be allowed to return to Rwanda, which they considered their homeland and birthright (Kroslak 2007: 34; Prunier 1997: 67, 73-74). These goals were incompatible with those of the MRND, especially with Hutu Power hardliners, who held extreme anti-Tutsi ideologies. In response to the obstinate refusal of repatriation by Habyarimana, and to persecution and attacks by government forces in Uganda, the RPF launched a guerilla war in 1990 from across the Ugandan border with the aim of capturing Kigali and overthrowing the régime (Prunier 1997: 73, 93). This brought them into direct interaction with the MRND-controlled army, the Forces armées rwandaises (FAR), with whom they conducted various skirmishes and battles in the north of the country before finally making their way to capture Kigali by the 4th of July, 1994 (Kroslak 2007: 53).

1.2 Secondary Parties

1.2.1 The Church

Although they were never directly involved in the conflict, the Catholic Church has been criticised (along with other church groups) for giving tacit support to the Rwandan government and the génocidaires by refusing to condemn the government’s killing of Tutsi civilians, and for contributing to the inequalities and polarisation between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwandan society, particularly the education system (Berry and Berry 1999: 43-39; Kroslak 2007: 20-24; Longman 2010). Although many apologists have argued that those members of the Church who participated in, or gave approval to the genocide were unrepresentative of the organisation as a whole (Longman 2010: 7-10) the fact still remains that clergy refused to condemn the persecution and violence against perpetrated against civilians, ostensibly in order to remain in good standing with the MRND government (Longman 2010: 162).

1.2.2 France

In the aftermath of the genocide the government of France faced particular criticism in its role in indirectly supporting Habyarimana and the MRND régime.
The French gave military advice, training and equipment to the government, the FAR and the Presidential Guard (who would later go on to participate in the genocide) and gave political and military support to the régime in fighting the RPF (Berry and Berry 1999: 6; Kroslak 2007: 125). Even more serious are allegations that suggest French soldiers fought alongside the FAR, directly involving themselves in the conflict (Kroslak 2007: 134-138).

France also staged two military operations during the conflict, Opération Amaryllis, which lasted 6 days and was focused on evacuating French and foreign nationals from Kigali (Kroslak 2007: 220) and Opération Turquoise, an ostensibly ‘humanitarian’ operation to establish ‘safe zones’ in the southwest of the country which was yet to be occupied by the RPF. Critics have argued that by preventing the RPF advancing into the safe zone, the French willingly let the killings continue and facilitated the mass exodus of thousands of Hutu militias and MRND officials involved in the genocide across the border into Zaïre (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) (Kroslak 2007: 230-233)

1.3 Intervening Parties

1.3.1 The United Nations

With the Arusha Accords and establishment of a ceasefire between the FAR and RPF on February 22, 1993, both sides appealed to the UN for an international force to help the implementation of the peace agreement and establishment of transitional government (Barnett 2002: 60-62). Despite emphasis on the need for a robust mandate to ensure security and disarmament, the budgetary constraints facing the DPKO and political sensitiy towards the use of force in peacekeeping after the disastrous operation in Somalia (Barnett 2002: 71) meant the Security Council instead decided to send a relatively small force with a limited mandate. After the security situation began to break down and signs of genocide began to emerge, the UNAMIR mission command repeatedly requested an increase in troop numbers and a wider mandate in order to protect civilians and disarm the genocidaires, however these ultimately fell on deaf ears (Barnett 2002: 77-80).
Thus, the UN mission was ultimately fated to pass most of its deployment as passive witnesses in the midst of the genocide, without the force or mandate necessary to intervene to stop the killing.

2. **Conflict History**

2.1 **Continuum of Relationships**

2.1.1. **Government and Opposition**

The past history between the MRND and opposition forces was generally one which fluctuated between competition, tension and conflict. Power in Rwanda was historically contested between the northern and southern regions, regardless of ethnic makeup (Fujii 2011: 48; Longman 2010: 37, 80). Significant events in the past include the rise to power of Rwanda’s first President, Grégoire Kayibanda from the southern region, and his subsequent overthrow in a coup by Habyarimana which established northern dominance (Fujii 2011: 72-73).

Both these events had important psychological impacts on both the government and opposition parties to the conflict. Fear of a return of southern power drove Habyarimana and the akazu to try and forestall any real attempts at multiparty governance and democratic reform, for fear of losing their grip over the country.

Upon Habyarimana rise to power, all citizens were declared members of the MRND at birth and required to register their identities and their movements with the state. Habyarimana also appointed and controlled officials at all levels of government, even down to the local responsables, and utilised quota systems to control participation in the government, military and education systems (Fujii 2011: 72; Prunier 1997: 75). Although such controls and quotas were ostensibly put in place to limit Tutsi control over the country to their proportion of the population (9%), they were also used to exclude Hutu political rivals from power (Fujii 2011: 73).
As if to confirm the MRND’s fears, when multiparty democracy finally was introduced to Rwanda, one of the first parties to emerge was the so-called *Mouvement démocratique républicain*, essentially a reincarnation of Kayibanda’s PARMEHUTU party composed of southern Hutu who had been biding their time since the humiliation of the coup to regain their former power and prestige (Fujii 2011: 48; Prunier 1997: 123).

### 2.2.2. Government and Rebels

The past history between the government and rebel forces was intertwined with the legacy of colonial rule and racial politics. German and Belgian colonisers, along with the Catholic Church (Longman 2010) applied racialised overtones to the preexisting social categorisations of “Tutsi” and “Hutu” to cement control over the population via the elevation of the Tutsi monarchy, who they saw as “racially superior” and “natural born dominators” of the Hutu (Fujii 2011: 58, 63; Prunier 1997: 33). Naturally, the Tutsi elite at the time did not object to this European view as it gave them privileged access to power, education and wealth at the expense of the Hutu majority (Prunier 1997: 33), creating a culture of hegemonic abuse of power and a culture of political violence that would shape the course of Rwandan governance for years to come (Prunier 1997: 141-142).

However, by the late 1950s, increasing pressure was mounting on Belgium to grant Rwanda independence (Fujii 2011: 65). Despite the Tutsi monarchists’ attempts to cling onto power, the Hutus, with the leadership of Kayibanda’s PARMEHUTU party successfully took control via a combination of numerical superiority and the widespread use of violence against their Tutsi “oppressors”, causing many Tutsi to flee to neighbouring Uganda, Burundi and Zaïre (Fujii 2011: 68-69).

Significant events here included massacres of Tutsis by PARMEHUTU supporters which lead them to flee the country (Fujii 2011: 68), as well as counterattacks by hardline pro-monarchist Tutsi élites which aimed to reclaim
their privileged position of domination over the Hutu masses (Fujii 2011: 70; Prunier 1997: 55).

These events had important psychological impacts which played heavily in the conflict. The MRND was able to use the spectre of “Tutsi supremacy” to create fear among the population of the RPF invasion and create justification of the genocide on the basis that the Tutsi were “aggressors” who wished to “rule over” the Hutu once again (Fujii 2011: 121). Similarly, they were able to justify limiting Tutsi participation in politics, education and the civil service along similar lines, pointing to the historical advantages Tutsis enjoyed in these areas during the colonial period (Fujii 2011: 73; Prunier 1997: 75).

3. Conflict Context

3.1. Multiple Levels of Conflict

The conflict can be situated as occurring both at the societal level (the genocide) and at the international level (the conventional war). (Fujii 2011: 68-69) argues that the genocide can be explained through processes of “social interaction”, in which those who joined in the killing did so because of local ties and group dynamics exerted pressure on genocidaires and served to create identities which enabled them to kill people who they considered neighbours or even friends or family.

The more conventional conflict between the government and rebels, however, clearly occurred at a higher, international level. As highlighted in Section 1 both the RPF and MRND had clear and specific political agendas of controlling Rwanda at a state level, and both sides involved external national actors (France, in the case of the MRND; Uganda in the case of the RPF) in order to achieve these.

Looking at the conflict via Dugan’s “nested paradigm model”, the issue here was fundamentally who would control political power in the state of Rwanda. The relationship was the history of conflict, tension and conflict between the various
parties as a result of historical and colonial forces. The subsystem was the larger Great Lakes Region, including Rwanda (and its north-south geographical divisions) and its neighbouring countries which played a role in the conflict (namely, Uganda, Zaïre and Burundi). Finally, the system can be described as the history of structural violence present in Rwanda where certain political policies had historically favoured specific groups (Tutsis, northern Hutus, southern Hutus) and deprived others.

4. Party Orientation

4.1 Issues and Objectives

The objectives of the parties to the conflict can most succinctly be classified as diametric opposites, in particular that of “status-quo maintaining” vs. “status-quo changing”. The government of Rwanda, and in particular the hardline members of the akazu, sought desperately to maintain the status quo in which they wielded ultimate power and influence over Rwandan society to the exclusion of all others (Fujii 2011: 52). Even the eventual genocide can be seen, in many ways, as a method of the MRND to maintain their northern Hutu hegemony over Rwanda by physically removing Hutu from other regions who might erode their share of power, under the guise of protecting the nation from the “Tutsi threat” (Prunier 1997: 169). In contrast, both the opposition and the RPF sought to change the status quo by removing the hegemonic grip which the MRND had held over the country for so long: via the use of military force in the case of the RPF, and via the use of democratic, diplomatic and popular pressure in the case of the opposition.

5. Conflict Dynamics

5.1 Behaviour Styles

Worldviews of parties present within the conflict can be described as fitting into two main types: realpolitik and idealpolitik. Realpolitik is described by Fujii (2011: 185) as having a competitive approach to conflict and a pessimistic view
of the possibility of collaboration or systemic or behavioural change. This worldview fits well in explaining the attitudes of both the government (MRND) and rebels (RPF) towards the conflict and breakdown of the short-lived Arusha Accords, where both parties had extreme difficulty in reaching compromises on key issues (Kroslak 2007: 118; Prunier 1997: 173). In contrast, the opposition’s worldview can be described as more *idealpolitik* in that it had overall optimistic view of the potential for collaboration and real change in the system of governance in Rwanda Sandole (1998), engaging with both the MRND and RPF in attempts to reach a genuine resolution of the conflict and the establishment of a broad-based transitional government (Prunier 1997: 150).

5.2 Conflict Events

5.2.1 Precipitating Events
The main events that precipitated each stage of the conflict were 1) the RPF invasion of northern Rwanda starting in 1990, which lead to the start of the conventional war (Prunier 1997: 93) and 2) the shooting down of Habyarimana’s which signalled the start of the genocide (Fujii 2011: 2, 15). In each case these events were used by the MRND government as justification for the retaining control of the country, limiting the sharing of political power and eliminating political rivals in the face of the “RPF threat”.

5.2.2 Issue Transformation
The most obvious instance of issue transformation was the move from conventional warfare with the RPF to the genocide perpetrated against Tutsi civilians. Although this move was gradual (massacres and violence against Tutsis had occurred periodically throughout recent Rwandan history, and frequently in the leadup to the genocide) (Fujii 2011: 74, 78, 93), as mentioned above, the assasination of Habyarimana signalled a turning point in which the imperative issue of the conflict as portrayed by the government moved from military defense of the invasion of the RPF to the extermination of all Tutsi and political moderates within the country.
5.3.3. Polarisation

The hard line the RPF took in negotiations, including refusing to join in coalition with more extreme Hutu groups like the CDR (Kroslak 2007: 118) gave the government the opportunity to derail peace negotiations on the grounds they were unfair, with the support of their anti-RPF French allies (Kroslak 2007: 119; Prunier 1997: 170). The use of popular media and radio propaganda contributed heavily to the polarisation of the conflict (Prunier 1997: 211), with moderate Hutu voices of opposition being sidelined as they became fearful to speak out against the government for fear of being seen as supporting the RPF invasion.

Bibliography


