

Rwandan Genocide: Chosen Literature Review

There are two subjects that require attention at first. The tragic event that took place in 1994 in Rwanda happened when both the press, the television and the radio were highly developed. Unfortunately, back then, Africa was still being presented worldwide as backwards and underdeveloped, connected to previous colonies, and the information about the conflicts, including the brutal ones, did not reach a wider public. At this point, the reporters could be blamed, as they did not escalate the importance of such a serious conflict, its causes and terrible results. The second potential fault could be assigned to the politicians, predominantly American, who prioritised highlighting the crime in the USA rather than paying attention to other African conflicts. It is, of course, not true, as the Swedish press took measures to present the situation in Rwanda appropriately. Assessing the situation from the perspective of the now completely free Europe, as well as the USA, it can be safely said that the the problem and its severity could be brought to light in a better way. It has to be said that even though in the beginning, the Swedish television took an interest in the genocide, after the 18th of May 1994, that is during the bloodiest fights on the streets of Rwanda, only a few mentions were made of the ongoing fights.¹ Does it mean that the public was uninterested in such subject?

Is it possible to discuss any military conflict without precisely highlighting its cause? The story of Rwanda is not just one month or even just a few years. We can talk about the plane crash that killed the President, but did everything truly start then? Even though there are many publications about the genocide itself, horrifying photographs, analytical works on the subject of peace and stability, there is very little on the subject of the real causes of this terrible event. At this point, a look back at the colonial times, Belgian and even American interests, because, after all, the German interests lay elsewhere. But someone led to the conflict, and it can be said and pointed out that the blame rests even with the Rwandese Patriotic Army, but where did this come from? Conflict in Rwanda lasted a long time, there were military conflicts, political pressures from European countries and even their financial support. Why did no one ever investigate President Bill Clinton, who, as the reports say, was clearly aware of the situation? Even if originally it was Germany that held initial colonial authority in Rwanda, they mostly focused on supporting the existing traditions. The problem came in 1931, when the Belgians began to divide the locals into classes, issuing them special identification documents.² Did such a cruelly divided society truly have a chance to survive such an internal conflict?

In the evening of the 6th of April, the plane with the presidents: Habyarimana and Burundi's Cyprien Ntaryamira was shot down by unidentified assailants. This, formally, started the genocide in Rwanda. Even though the official data states that the victims reached around 800,000 people, Rwanda's data denies that, stating that over a million people died in this terror. At this point, it is important to pay attention to the preparations that took place before, those connected to the propaganda as well as the distribution of the machetes, which were meant to supposedly be used

1 Tommy Gustafsson, „Swedish Television News in 1994”, *Historical Media Memories of the Rwandan Genocide: Documentaries, Films, and Television News* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024), <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/jj.9941225>> [Accessed 14th of July 2025].

2 David Rawson, *Prelude to Genocide: Arusha, Rwanda, and the Failure of Diplomacy* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018) <https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/51076/external_content.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [Accessed 14th of July 2025].

in agriculture. It was exactly this way, by dismembering people with those weapons, that countless people died. This was not the only weapon in the Hutu's possession, as in a short period of time, this group was armed with machine weaponry imported from Congo, which at that point was still under Belgian control. Furthermore, the radio broadcasts were a force to be reckoned with as they announced where Tutsi might be hiding. Horrifying stories of those who managed to escape the genocide, hiding in bushes, churches and any other place they could remain unnoticed, exceed human comprehension, and there's little point to bringing up their exact quotations for this very reason. The question that is worth asking is how such advanced weaponry easily reached Rwanda? Who gained the most from this conflict? The genocide, finally, stopped by the French forces that used force to achieve that, could potentially have been stopped earlier if not for those military supplies delivered to Rwanda by other countries.³

Therefore, the question remains: who was it that gained the most from this?

Understanding the process behind the genocide will never be simple. A recurring pattern can be noticed. During World War II, being part of the SS gave people the feeling of working together, where nearly every member of the group followed the same set of rules. Even if they did not truly believe in them, officially, they would always say they did. To relate this example to Rwanda, it is important to remember that members of Interahamwe committed mass murders. Many groups belonged to them, and it made them feel that everyone was doing exactly the same thing. The pack mentality in genocide is extremely important. A single person committing a murder is simply a murderer, but when hundreds or even thousands do that, it creates a pattern, a sense of a rule, a rule that gives strength. Various causes of genocide can be found, with even more publications attempting to discuss the subject. It is extremely important to pay attention to the subject of hierarchical order. A mass-issued orders addressed to many groups stating that certain immoral actions are accepted and even required give a misguided feeling of impunity. After all, it was not that specific person who gave the order to kill those people, therefore, why should that person be punished for that? A lack of an identifiable chain of criminal command led to an increase in a lack of feeling of self-responsibility for crimes committed.⁴

Is it possible to ultimately explain why a genocide of such a scale took place in a country as small as Rwanda? Of course, both the plane crash with the president on board, being part of Interahamwe, premeditated preparations through the distribution of the machete, and post-colonial Belgian rules are in one way or another responsible for the genocide. Ultimately, equipping the militia with firearms, as well as a delayed reaction from the United Nations, utter trivialisation of the gravity of the problem by the U.S. President, as well as the public opinion which during the 90s was dissatisfied to African conflict, all of these were participating factors in the severity of the genocide that occurred in Rwanda.

3 Stephanie Wolfe, Matthew C. Kane and Tawia B. Ansah, *In the Shadow of Genocide: Justice and Memory within Rwanda*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), <<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/reader/read-online/3762b1a8-a021-4cb2-98bf-b1ab044804e7/book/epub?context=ubx>> [Accessed 14th of July 2025].

4 Timothy Williams, *The Complexity of Evil: Perpetration and Genocide*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020), <https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/52460/external_content.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [Accessed 14th of July 2025].

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