The Role of Ethnicity in Post-Conflict Peace Building: A Case Study of Rwanda, Bosnia and Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of ethnicity in post-conflict peacebuilding, focusing on Rwanda as a primary case study and drawing comparisons with Bosnia and Sri Lanka. It explores how ethnic divisions, often rooted in colonial legacies, have shaped conflict dynamics and influenced recovery processes. The study delves into Rwanda's post-genocide strategies, including institutional reforms, justice mechanisms, economic reconstruction, and reconciliation programs, highlighting both successes and challenges. The research contrasts Rwanda's approach to the institutionalized ethnic divisions in Bosnia and the majoritarian policies in Sri Lanka, offering insights into the complexities of balancing ethnic identities in peacebuilding. Key lessons emphasize the importance of inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, grassroots reconciliation, and the integration of justice and economic development in fostering long-term peace. The findings contribute to understanding how ethnic dynamics can either hinder or promote stability in divided societies.

Introduction

The process of peacebuilding is crucial for civilizations to successfully recover from the effects of conflict-induced violence. Ethnic tensions often trigger violence, making the aforementioned statement particularly relevant (Alaverdov et al., 2023). Those who cling to ethnic identities typically experience a sense of pride and belonging. This is typically due to the historical and cultural foundations of the identities. On the other hand, the politicization or exploitation of these identities can make social inequities that currently exist much more severe and encourage violent cycles to persist (Smith et al., 2020). The success of peacebuilding efforts depends on understanding the role ethnicity plays in conflict dynamics, reconciliation, and long-term peace

maintenance. Rwanda's post-genocide rehabilitation, aimed at fostering national and ethnic unity, illustrates the challenge of bringing together populations separated for decades. This case highlights the importance of understanding ethnicity in conflict resolution and peace preservation (Zupancic et al., 2021).

The purpose of this research is to analyze how the ethnic composition of Rwanda impacts the process of peacebuilding after a conflict. The purpose of this study is to investigate the technique that the Rwandan government uses in an effort to strike a balance between emotions of national identification and those of ethnic sorrow (Komatsu, 2024). This research presents an analysis of Rwanda's economic performance, legislative framework, and institutional reforms. The purpose of this analysis is to emphasize both the positive and negative aspects connected to Rwanda (Hasley, 2024). Research contrasts the experiences of Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sri Lanka to draw significant conclusions about the significance of ethnicity in the peacebuilding process. This research concludes that the ethnic dynamics within divided communities can present both opportunities and challenges for the maintenance of long-term cooperative partnerships.

Theoretical Framework: Ethnicity in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

In the aftermath of the conflict, ethnicity seems to be at odds with itself. Sharing a common identity and culture can unite individuals, but when politicized or controlled, it can lead to violence and alienation (Glucksam, 2024). Having an understanding of this contradiction can make it easier to establish peacebuilding approaches that focus on regulating ties between different ethnic groups. Despite the inevitable disagreements within a society, ethnicity can offer a sense of historical continuity and identity. Consider the ways that elite manipulation and systemic inequality exacerbate these issues (Deane, 2024). Ethnic communities' identities are influenced by various social, political, and historical contexts. Colonial legacies, such as segregation and prejudice, persist as ethnic imbalances. Addressing racial hierarchy fluidity can help policymakers solve divisions. Developing community identities emphasizing shared experiences is crucial for harmony (Merhej and Rahme, 2024). Ethnic politics hinder post-conflict rehabilitation, with elites exploiting racial differences to maintain supremacy. Institutional changes and policies prioritizing equality, inclusivity, and power sharing are needed for peace.

The resolution of basic inequalities and strains between different ethnic groups is essential to the prevention of violence. The primary causes of disruption are feelings of alienation and hostility, which stem from discrimination in the workplace, educational environments, and resource distribution (Kumari, 2023). Researcher must resolve these inconsistencies and include excluded individuals in the nation's growth, as they play a crucial role in maintaining peace. Researcher should discuss integrating the adoption of policies that promote ethnic equality into the strategy for economic recovery (Beyene, 2024). It would be necessary to ensure the fair distribution of rehabilitation's advantages. Neglecting efforts to maintain peace runs the risk of rendering them ineffective and preventing them from addressing the fundamental factors that contribute to conflict.

Case Study: Rwanda

About 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus perished in the 1994 Rwandan genocide over the course of less than 100 days. In the annals of contemporary history, no genocide of this nature has ever occurred (Selter, 2024). The principal elements that precipitated this calamity were colonial practices, weak post-independence governance, and the political elite's manipulation of ethnic

identities. Years of ethnic manipulation have led to this situation. The Belgian colonial authorities established social and political frameworks based on ethnicity to discriminate against Hutus and preferentially support Tutsis (Peter and Osazuwa, 2024). They carried this out to achieve their discriminatory goal. The Hutu rulers of Rwanda, seeking independence, exploited this animosity to pursue their objective. As a result, intolerance, widespread violence, and genocide manifested themselves. Following the calamity, Rwanda endeavoured to mend a nation torn apart by morality (Kočan and Zupančič, 2024). The crimes forced millions of people to leave their homes, leading to significant psychological distress as a result of their displacement. Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) employed a variety of approaches to address the issue of ethnicity within the framework of peacebuilding.

The eradication of racial and ethnic identities was a primary objective of the initiative, which aimed to cultivate a singular Rwandan identity (Senehi et a., 2023). The government restricted ethnic language and identification card designations to foster national unity and diminish acts of violence. Researcher cannot overstate the importance of accountability and equity (Malunda and Musana, 2012). The community-oriented Gacaca courts adjudicate genocide cases, prioritizing the pursuit of justice and the establishment of peace to achieve their objectives. Concurrently, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) began imposing sanctions on notable offenders. Despite their substantial nature, these procedures faced criticism for their unjustness and bias, especially in relation to RPF infractions. Rwanda's measures to attain peace significantly prioritized the nation's economic development (Brass, 2023). To eliminate structural injustices and create a shared future, the administration prioritized addressing issues related to healthcare, education, and poverty reduction. Some individuals think that refraining from discussing past transgressions hinders the possibility of reconciliation, as it induces greater self-consciousness than would often occur. The insights that Rwanda offers on ethnicity and post-conflict reconstruction are profoundly significant.

Historical Roots of Ethnic Divisions

Despite the perception of intrinsic and immutable racial differences in Rwanda, colonial initiatives that entrenched and redefined ethnic divisions for administrative purposes initiated most of these distinctions. Rwandan society before colonial domination was flexible (Brass, 2023). The identities of the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa were defined by social status rather than ethnic features. Belgian colonial authorities, on the other hand, formalized and politicized these identities in the early 20th century, resulting in decades of ethnic conflict.

By endorsing the Tutsi minority, whom they deemed racially superior based on pseudoscientific beliefs, the Belgians established a history of ethnic manipulation that they inherited from the colonial regime (Nunn, 2020). As intermediaries between the colonists and the general populace, the Tutsi enjoyed preferential access to political power, land ownership, and educational opportunities. The Hutu, particularly in agricultural labour, found themselves compelled to occupy subordinate economic and social positions during this period (Brass, 2024). Identity cards in the 1930s led to erratic ethnic classifications and institutional inequity, causing unhappiness among the Hutu population. After independence in 1962, Hutu-led governments imposed discriminatory practices against the Tutsi, causing hostility and brutality. The Hutu Revolution of 1959 resulted in thousands of Tutsis' extermination and forced hundreds to relocate to neighbouring nations, contributing to the cessation of the genocide (Alibašić, 2020).

In the decades preceding 1994, Hutu-dominated administrations utilized ethnic violence, discriminatory legislation, and propaganda to sustain their authority, exacerbating tensions within

the nation. The state-controlled media fostered anti-Tutsi sentiments and attributed the nation's political and economic problems to them (Villaverde, 2023). These tensions culminated in 1994, resulting in an unprecedented outbreak of protracted ethnic violence that ultimately led to genocide. This slaughter, stemming from tensions that emerged post-independence and the racial hierarchy established during colonial authority, exemplifies the devastating consequences of prior ethnic manipulation.

Post-Genocide Strategies and Their Implications

Rwanda launched a peacebuilding, rehabilitation, and recovery program after the 1994 massacre. The Rwandan administration addressed ethnic tensions, economic development, national unity, and justice after the genocide (Alibašić, 2020). These programs have transformed the nation, but they have raised questions about their efficacy, inclusivity, and long-term effects.

Institutional Reforms

An early Rwandan goal was to eradicate ethnic categorization. The government's ambitious national unity drive banned "Hutu" and "Tutsi" from public discourse and identity cards. The goal was to unify "Rwandans" against ethnic discrimination. While this program was successful in reducing public ethnic discrimination, it was not without its drawbacks (Purdeková and Mwambari, 2022). Critics say the government suppresses ethnic identity to avoid tackling the historical grievances and injustices that triggered the conflict. The silence around ethnic concerns made it hard for disenfranchised populations to acknowledge their previous pain and suffering during post-genocide rebuilding. This affected genocide victims especially. To promote local government accountability and inclusivity, the administration decentralized governance (Ouafaa, 2021). This reform strengthened local leaders and encouraged community participation in decision-making. Critics say the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) handles politics and economics. Others disagree, arguing that decentralization should enhance inclusivity and responsiveness. Power centralization hinders decentralization and political plurality.

Justice and Accountability

Traditional and international procedures underpin Rwanda's justice and accountability system. One of the greatest achievements was the creation of Gacaca courts, community-based tribunals. These tribunals hastened genocide justice (Ataci, 2023). These courts used restorative and retributive justice to punish offenders and promote communal healing. Gacaca courts greatly decreased case backlog. These tribunals made justice more accessible than courts. These tribunals grappled with justice anomalies, procedural biases, and issues related to fair trials (Baker, 2024). The Gacaca system's strictness hindered reconciliation, leading to criticism of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Despite its efforts, the tribunal faced accusations of indifference, alienating local communities and fostering hatred towards the international judicial system.

Economic Reconstruction

Rwanda needed its economy to recover from genocide. The government's Vision 2020 prioritized infrastructure, healthcare, education, and poverty reduction. Researcher wanted to build a solid economic basis to promote social cohesion and reduce economic inequities that caused strife (Lajul, 2024). Rwanda is a model African nation with strong economic growth. Remember that economic recovery has several challenges. Despite its rapid rise, ethnic discrimination in resources and opportunities continued. Rural Hutu feel excluded from national development projects. The administration appears to Favor Tutsis (Senis et al., 2024). Government restrictions on political

discourse jeopardized the country's long-term stability. Though hidden, these grievances exacerbated tensions.

Reconciliation Programs

Genocide relief efforts included the Unity and Reconciliation Commission. The NURC encouraged communication, trauma rehabilitation, and national solidarity. Additionally, it sought to restore confidence in violently divided neighbourhoods (Choubey and Sharma, 2024). The group has faced criticism for prioritizing national unity over Hutu and Tutsi concerns, despite its attempts at reconciliation. Some say these initiatives failed because they didn't address the root reasons of the genocide, namely Hutu persecution. Rwanda contains national and municipal genocide memorials. These monuments honour the dead. These memorials commemorate genocide victims and teach future generations (Byrne et al., 2020). Despite criticism for prioritizing Tutsi pain, this policy has honored the victims. Most Hutus would feel alone or bad about the massacre. Selective memory can hinder progress and generate conflict.

Security and Stability

In the aftermath of the violent collapse of the genocidal dictatorship, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) implemented severe measures in order to establish and maintain peace and serenity. Consolidation of power occurred concurrently with greater monitoring, crackdowns on opposition, and the strengthening of the party that was in power at the time (Hartoyo et al., 2020). Even though these tactics were successful in preventing a significant number of lives, they were criticized for undermining democratic rights and instilling fear. Politicians who speak out against the current administration face threats of incarceration or intimidation. Despite the praise for Rwanda's stability, the country's administration has taken drastic measures to restrict political variety and free speech (Johnson et al., 2021).

Ethnicity and Political Dynamics

Rwanda's ethnically complicated and intricate political terrain remains unchanged, despite the administration's best efforts to alleviate tensions. The ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has launched an ethnic cleansing campaign to unite the country. This approach renders ethnic categorization and ethnic-based discussion meaningless (Nesterova and Kim, 2023). While this strategy has helped individuals connect across ethnic boundaries and strengthen national identity, it has also had unexpected consequences. Minority groups have found it more difficult to struggle for equality and justice since the government prohibits ethnic expression. Healing will not occur unless people address the economic and political divide that exists between Hutu and Tutsi. Conversations on justice and equality may come to a halt as a result (Kendhammer and Chandler, 2021).

The dictatorial RPF regime, which has been in power since the massacre, supports the goal of ethnic cleansing. The RPF may have suppressed opposition and political diversity, but Rwanda has flourished and achieved peace. Those who express dissatisfaction with the government's narrative or disagree with it, as Hutus, have their political voices silenced (Demiryontar and İçduygu, 2023). Those opposed to the plan claim that it jeopardizes the peace by stifling dissenting voices and banning particular communities from political participation. Unresolved issues can arise in the absence of political conversation and opposition. If this happens, Rwanda's unity and peacebuilding initiatives will suffer greatly (Elcheroth and De Mel, 2022).

Community-Level Peacebuilding

Community-driven initiatives were crucial for grassroots healing and reconciliation, whereas state-directed measures were vital for Rwanda's post-genocide recovery. Both initiatives were essential. The efficacy of these programs was largely contingent upon the involvement of individuals at the grassroots level (Rayen, 2023). Community dialogues, predominantly facilitated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith-based entities, enabled survivors and perpetrators of genocide to express their suffering and share their stories. By addressing suffering, seeking forgiveness, and confessing sorrow, these meetings fostered reconciliation among diverse groups. These projects promoted reconciliation by emphasizing the significance of empathy and interpersonal relationships in addressing longstanding issues (Raja, 2023).

An additional strategy to promote peace and collaboration among individuals was the establishment of firm cooperatives. Programs facilitating cooperative farming, trading, and commercial ventures centred on shared economic interests led to a diminution of ethnic hostility between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes. By collaborating for mutual gain, communities established bonds based on cooperation rather than conflict (Villaverde, 2023). This extensive data corroborated the disregard for racial and ethnic differences. Economic initiatives that emphasized the collective wealth and interdependence of Rwandans were crucial for restoring relations and establishing a foundation for enduring peace. The community-based initiatives aligned with the government objectives fostered the development of a more tolerant and peaceful society.

Comparative Analysis: Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sri Lanka

Rwanda's recovery after the genocide provides a compelling lens through which to examine the role of ethnicity in healing. Following their calamities, Bosnia and Sri Lanka—two countries entangled in morally complicated conflicts—have taken opposing methods to reconciliation. This diversity demonstrates the challenges of fostering harmony across states and ethnic groups in widely fractured civilizations.

Bosnia: Institutionalizing Ethnic Divisions

The 1995 Dayton Accords divided control among Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, thereby ending the Bosnian War. This system institutionalized ethnicity. The agreement divided Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska and the Bosniak-Croatian Federation (Villaverde, 2023). While the violence subsided, this policy intensified racial tensions within the political framework and raised questions about the government's stability and national unity. The institutionalization of ethnic identities inside political, social, and educational systems resulted in segregation rather than union. In Bosnian politics, ethnic interests often trump national unity, and the system itself exacerbates ethnic conflict. Rwanda outlawed racial and ethnic discourse in public (Purdeková and Mwambari, 2022).

Role of External Actors in Bosnia

Outside help played an important role in Bosnia's recovery. The United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and European Union helped the Office of the High Representative (OHR) monitor the peace treaties and reforms. Unlike Rwanda's domestic policy, the Patriotic Front (RPF) administration maintained strict control over the narrative and post-genocide rehabilitation programs (Ouafaa, 2021). Despite external groups giving technical and financial aid to Bosnia, this circumstance resulted in individuals abdicating their responsibilities and relying on international troops for peacekeeping.

Sri Lanka: Majoritarianism and Marginalization

In 2009, during the massacre, Sri Lanka's Sinhalese-majority government drove the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) underground. Rwanda promoted government-led national identity after the war, while Sri Lanka promoted ethnic majoritarianism (Ataci, 2023). The regime ignored Tamils' demands for political independence, resource equity, and cultural recognition. The Sinhalese-led military militarized Tamil districts after the fight, fueling animosity and distrust. These actions exacerbated ethnic tensions and disenfranchised Tamils, hindering peace attempts (Baker, 2024).

Rwanda's Distinct Approach

Rwanda prioritized national unity and progress. Governments and power-sharing arrangements excluded ethnic groups. To end ethnic prejudice, the Rwandan People's Front (RPF) promoted a "Rwandan" identity while removing ethnic features. Rwanda's peacebuilding efforts, which support Vision 2020's inclusive growth and shared prosperity, focus on poverty reduction and economic development (Baker, 2024). This approach prioritizes the future in order to foster unity. Opponents say ethnic identity repression and political expression censorship undermine legitimate grievances, especially among Hutu people. Rwanda used Gacaca courts to deliver justice and accountability, unlike Sri Lanka and Bosnia (Senis et al., 2024). These institutions were more culturally and locally meaningful than foreign tribunals' poor transitional justice procedures in Bosnia and Sri Lanka. Despite these shortcomings, it worked better.

Challenges in Balancing Ethnic Identities

Reconstruction in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sri Lanka presented challenges to ethnic identity balance. Bosnia and Sri Lanka codified ethnic divisions while rejecting minority claims, but Rwanda ignored history. In contrast to Rwanda's unity, Sri Lanka fostered animosity in its pursuit of stability, potentially overlooking underlying injustices (Kendhammer and Chandler, 2021). Sri Lanka endeavored to achieve stability at the expense of escalating animosity, Rwanda took the risk of hiding underlying inequalities, and Bosnia achieved peace but remained divided. According to these reports, ethnic-based remedies in post-violence communities are problematic. To eliminate ethnic animosity and foster national unity, fairness, and inclusion, researcher need scenario-specific solutions (Elcheroth and De Mel, 2022). Rwanda has struggled to maintain long-term peace among varied people, but its focus on national identity and prosperity offers lessons.

Lessons and Recommendations for Peacebuilding in Ethnically Divided Societies

Rwanda's post-conflict recovery offers valuable insights for designing effective peacebuilding strategies:

1) Gaining an understanding and finding a solution to previous complaints is a key step in the process of putting an end to violent behaviors (Kendhammer and Chandler, 2021).
2) Implementing comprehensive educational programming and governmental initiatives can achieve the goal of eliminating ethnic stratification from the colonial era.
3) The establishment of a single national identity has the potential to reduce inequities and improve the recognition of ethnic groups within the context of a shared framework (Villaverde, 2023).

4) One ought to abstain from participating in activities that disguise ethnic identity in order to prevent feelings of alienation and the development of disagreements.
5) For the purpose of fostering legitimacy and confidence, it is vital to implement equitable representation for all ethnic groups within the institutions of government (Glucksam, 2024).
6) In order to safeguard against prejudice or exclusion, it is of utmost importance to advocate for decision-making processes that are both transparent and inclusive.
7) To address past injustices that have occurred, it is vital to have both restorative and retributive justice systems (Glucksam, 2024).
8) In order to foster trust among various communities, it is necessary to have a legal system that is not only accessible but also transparent, equitable, and accessible (Elcheroth and De Mel, 2022).
9) It is important to ensure that all ethnic groups have equal access to resources, opportunities, and development in order to reduce the discrimination and marginalization that already exist.
10) Engaging in economic activities is the only way to strengthen ties between different ethnic groups (Komatsu, 2024).
11) It is important to encourage grassroots reconciliation efforts because they frequently handle local issues more effectively than measures that come from the top down.
12) Researcher should invite local leaders and civil society representatives to assume leadership roles to foster and stimulate discussions.
13) The promotion of political liberty and plurality is absolutely necessary in order to guarantee an ongoing state of stability (Villaverde, 2023).
14) This mistake affects trust, healing, and harmony, and it should serve as a lesson to learn that repressing disagreement is problematic.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of a battle, ethnicity can either encourage togetherness or divide individuals. Rwanda's circumstances demonstrate both the difficulty and potential benefits of controlling ethnic identities throughout rehabilitation. Policies that promote economic development, decentralization of authority, and a united national identity all have an impact on a country's stability and success. Each of these undertakings is subject to specific limits. Restricting ethnic discourse may help address overt injustices, but it can also downplay unresolved issues, especially in underprivileged areas. While centralization fosters order, it also raises questions about political freedom and inclusivity. Its capacity to uphold harmony remains uncertain. Rwanda's experience has shown that the restoration of ethnically split societies necessitates the purposeful integration of political pluralism and stability, justice and reconciliation, variety, and cohesion. Examining Rwanda's successes and shortcomings can better prepare policymakers to handle worldwide ethnic conflicts. The discovery of such findings can help us construct ecologically sensitive, sustainable, inclusive, and context-specific peacebuilding programs.

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