

Rwanda Society-Environment Project

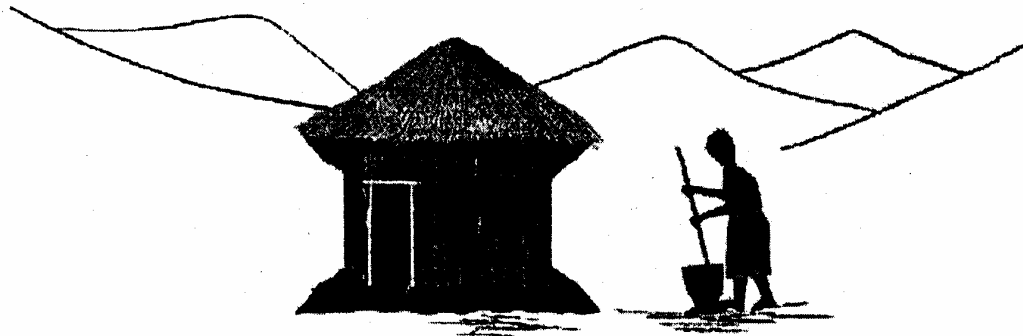
Factors Behind the Recent Tragedy in Rwanda

by

Jennifer M. Olson

based on excerpts from "Behind the Recent Tragedy of Rwanda" forthcoming in GeoJournal

Paper presented at
"The Contribution of Key Factors in the Recent Tragedy in Rwanda:
Poverty, Population, and Environment"
The World Bank
Washington, D.C.
November 2, 1994



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PREFACE

The Rwanda Society-Environment Project has its origins in the work of the MSU Center for Advanced Study of International Development (CASID) Environment and Development Project. This project was begun in 1989 and was funded initially by the MSU Foundation.

The Project has developed into a collaborative effort involving Michigan State University, the United Nations Environment Programme, Global Resources Information Database, and in Rwanda the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment and Tourism, and the National University. The objective of the Project is to assist in the improvement of analysis and policy making for natural resources management (NRM) in Africa through a pilot study in Rwanda to identify optimum and minimum data sets for NRM.

Funding for the research project at Michigan State University (MSU) is provided by MSU, and the Consortium for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), the SEDAC for NASA, under contract CSN #415-93. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa provided seed money for the Rwandan team. UNEP-GRID has donated the costs of its activities on the project. The support of these institutions is gratefully acknowledged.

The author's field research in Rwanda was assisted by a grant from the Joint Committee on African Studies of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies with funds provided by the Rockefeller Foundation. It was also supported by the National Science Foundation, the Association of American Geographers and Michigan State University. The author gratefully acknowledges their support.

The author remains responsible for the contents of this document which should not be interpreted as necessarily reflecting the views of any of the institutions named above.

This piece contains excerpts of a forthcoming article, "Behind the Recent Tragedy in Rwanda," in GeoJournal. It is based on an earlier version, "A Short Narrative of Rwanda by Way of Explanation of Current Events" submitted to the Office of the Geographer of the Department of State, and the Sub-Committee on Africa of the House of Representative's Foreign Relations Committee, July 1994.

The author would like to thank Rwandan friends and colleagues who have helped me to understand some of the complexities behind recent events in their country. To mention them by name would be inappropriate. She would also like to thank David J. Campbell for insightful comments which added much to the cogency of the argument, and for providing much encouragement in the preparation of this piece.

This study is dedicated to the people of Rwanda, with deepest sympathy.

I. Introduction

UNTIL THE MID-1980'S, RWANDA WAS CONSIDERED A RARE EXAMPLE OF AN AFRICAN COUNTRY successfully adapting to difficult circumstances. Food production had risen at the same rate as population growth. The government had developed an effective nation-wide system of services reflected in rising literacy rates, a high vaccination rate of children and perhaps the densest paved road network on the continent. The government was stable and considered not tainted by corruption. After the mid-1980's the portrayal changed. It was then seen to be a victim of extreme over-population suffering from declining per capita food production and soil degradation. Since the events following the death of President Habyarimana on April 6, Rwanda has been portrayed as the victim of suddenly-released brutal ethnic hatreds. But which of these portrayals is accurate and helps to explain the recent events? Was the violence entirely unexpected, was it a foreseeable consequence of population pressure or of ancient hatreds, or was it linked to the refusal of vested interests to relinquish their access to power?

This piece will briefly mention some of the historical elements that are influencing current events, and then focus on current linkages between poverty, population, the environment and the recent political upheaval.

II. Pre-Independence 1500 - 1959

RWANDA AND BURUNDI WERE UNUSUAL IN AFRICA DUE TO THEIR EXTREMELY ORGANIZED, hierarchical political system in which Tutsi kings, the Mwami, ruled through Tutsi and Hutu chiefs. The mythology of Tutsi rulership is that Tutsi pastoralists migrated from the north (Sudan or Ethiopia) with their cattle around 1500 A.D. and over a period of several hundred years established a patron/client relationship with the Hutu (Maquet 1954, Gotanègre et al 1974). More recently, historians have concluded that rather than a relatively recent wave of Tutsi in-migration, that both groups arrived in numerous small bands over a period of time. The classification of Tutsi was apparently relatively fluid and a farmer could earn the status of a Tutsi if he owned sufficient cattle. When the first Europeans arrived in 1880's. they found a highly anthropogenic landscape of grass-covered hills and a political system in which ownership of cattle was indicative of economic and political power (Everaerts 1939, Schoenburg 1993). The Tutsi monarchy maintained complete control over access to land and reserved most of the land throughout the country as pasture for their cattle. Farmers were confined to small areas in the foothills of the Western Highlands (Prioul and Sirven 1984).

The Tutsi king who ruled Rwanda when the colonialists arrived governed the area of present-day Rwanda except what is now the Northwest (Ruhengeri and Gisenyi). With assistance of the colonialists, he later gained control over this region but realistically allowed the ruling Hutu elite to continue to govern (Lemarchand 1970). This historical difference between the people of the Northwest, the Kiga, and the rest of the country continues to influence current events.

The Germans and then, following World War I, the Belgians were the colonial powers of Rwanda. The colonial administrators retained the Tutsi monarchy and governed through it in a system of

indirect rule. The political and cultural system which placed such importance on cattle and cattle ownership was thus reinforced. In order to strengthen their control, the Belgians ensured Tutsi support through military and other means (e.g., they deposed an older reticent Mwami) and in turn they helped the Tutsi monarchy extend and consolidate its power (Lemarchand 1970, Newbury 1988). The division of power between Tutsi and Hutu was codified and institutionalized by the colonial administrators by, for example, establishing identity cards indicating each person's "race." The Belgians confined colonial governmental benefits such as education and jobs to those considered Tutsi. This consolidation of power and wealth in the hands of a few, as well as anger over enforced communal labor, caused great resentment amongst the Hutu.

Colonial policies also had an impact on demographic processes. As health programs were implemented, new food crops adopted and traditional birth spacing methods abandoned, the population size increased substantially beginning in the 1940's (ONAPO 1990). The Tutsi rulers continued to reserve large tracts of land for pasture even in the face of this rapid population growth and land scarcity felt by farmers. Population densities mounted in the limited area allotted for farmers in the Western Highlands, creating politically-induced population pressure. Intensification of the farming system therefore began in western Rwanda at an earlier date than elsewhere in Africa (Gourou 1953). The agricultural system evolved to double and triple cropping, reduced land in fallow, increased on-farm trees and production of high-caloric crops such as tubers (Nzisabira 1989, Ford 1993, Bart 1993).

III. The Social Revolution 1959 - 1962

THE RESENTMENT TOWARDS THE CONCENTRATION OF OPPRESSIVE POWER AND WEALTH IN THE hands of the Tutsi developed into a violent revolution starting in 1959 against the Tutsi hegemony and monarchy. A few chosen Hutu had been educated by Catholic Missionaries and became the voice of the Hutu rebellion. They eventually became the leaders of new political parties and of the independent government. When it became clear which direction the revolution was heading, Belgium switched sides and attempted to remove itself from the fray (Lemarchand 1970). Meanwhile many Tutsi were killed and approximately 150,000 fled the country to become refugees in Uganda, Burundi, Zaire, Tanzania, and other countries (Watson 1991). The refugees periodically attempted to re-enter Rwanda militarily in the 1960's, initially to regain power but later to regain citizenship rights.¹ After each attack, the Tutsi within the country suffered reprisals with thousands killed.

The revolution culminated in 1962 when the United Nations oversaw an election and an elected Hutu government was put into place. The capital was moved from Butare, the site of the Tutsi court and the Belgian colonial capital, to Kigali in the center of the new country (Gotanègre et al 1974). This overturn of power was termed the *social* revolution since it arose from and overthrew the social inequities of the system (Lemarchand 1970).

¹ The attackers were called the *inyenzi*, the cockroaches, the term applied 25 years later to the RPF.

IV. Independence 1962 - 1990

THE ELECTED PRESIDENT, PRESIDENT GRÉGOIRE KAYIBANDA, WAS A HUTU FROM GITARAMA in the center of the country. He halted the most hated of the Tutsi and Belgian laws such as restrictions on where farmers could settle. One immediate effect was a wave of migration from the densely-populated Western Highlands to the savanna lands of the East (Kigali, Byumba and Kibungo) by farmers encouraged by governmental promises of free land in settlement schemes. Vast areas that had been pasture were converted to crops and the East became an area of relatively wealthy, large commercial farms (Prioul and Sirven 1984, Cambrezy 1984, Olson 1990). This process of extensification was a major contributor to rising food production paralleling increases in population (Uwizeyimana 1991). Most people who now live in the East, therefore, originate from various locations in the West and often maintain their identities from Butare, Ruhengeri etc.

The government installed a hierarchical administrative system very similar to that of the pre-independent administration, and slowly some of the same rules were re-introduced such as communal labor for building roads, digging erosion ditches, planting trees, etc.. Many of the same discriminatory practices from pre-independence were put into place, but against Tutsi (Lemarchand 1970, Africa Watch 1993). Placements in higher education and in the government, for example, were proportioned with ethnic quotas to decrease perceived Tutsi over-representation. To implement the quota policy, a system of identity cards imprinted with the person's ethnicity was re-instated from the colonial period.

Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, from the Northwest, took power in a military coup in 1973. Initially he promoted restoration of national and ethnic unity and re-establishment of order. The president took a very militaristic approach to ruling. Communal labor activities were insisted upon and farmers were quickly beaten and jailed if, for example, they neglected to join in digging erosion ditches.

Nevertheless, the country was stable and progressing economically. Ethnic violence became rare and there was little differentiation economically between Hutu and Tutsi farmers. Between the 1978 and the 1991 censuses, life expectancy rose and death rates declined. Rwanda became the recipient of much donor attention; by 1990, much of the government's budget was met by donor assistance.

In the mid 1980's President Habyarimana began to funnel government and donor investment to his home region, the Northwest. New roads, new schools, a university campus, agricultural research stations, agricultural projects, etc., were placed in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi Prefectures whereas the rest of the country received little (Newbury 1992). Even the educational system was skewed with children from the Northwest needing only a test score of 50 to be admitted into secondary school instead of the usual 80 or 90 for the children from the rest of the country. The result was a build up of resentment in the rest of the country towards President Habyarimana and his northern supporters.

During the 1980's, the economic situation worsened for most farmers, who make up 93 percent of the population, due to a combination of local, national and international factors. Farmers of the Southwest were particularly affected by the changes. These factors included:

1. *Population growth* since the 1940's has led to extremely high rural population densities, particularly in the West where the farming population had been confined before independence. Population growth has been rapid; at its peak in the late 1970's, the country experienced a growth rate of 3.7 percent or a doubling of the population every 19 years. With few non-farm options available, people remained in agriculture and sought additional farm land. They first conducted short-distance movements to convert nearby pasture, valley and forested land into cropping, and then long-distance migration to the East to settle on former pasture land. This extensification of the agricultural system contributed to the increases in agricultural production that paralleled the growth in population. By the mid-1980's these options were virtually exhausted with no remaining unsettled land within the country. Each generation has thus experienced a shrinking of farm sizes to a current average of around 0.7 ha.

The historical inequities in land distribution have been followed by relatively minor, but nevertheless disturbing, disparities at the local level with some farmers able to maintain woodlots and hire laborers whereas many others are near-landless. Several governmental or parastatal projects have also appropriated relatively large acreage for programs that have produced few benefits for local farmers or the state.

Population control programs had been successful in bringing awareness of and access to birth control to both urban and rural areas. The new access coincided with a decline in desired family size and a trend of delayed marriages especially in the poorest rural areas (the Southwest and Northwest). The demand for birth spacing techniques was reflected in increased usage of "modern" birth control techniques and in a recent decline in birth rates.

2. *Prices paid to farmers for agricultural products* stagnated at low levels due to unfavorable terms of trade and a limited national market for internally-traded produce, and low coffee prices on the international market. Regional differences in the impact of the prices were important with farmers in areas able to produce and sell higher-value produce, e.g., white potatoes in the Northwest and bananas and sorghum in the East, doing much better than those in the South. Meanwhile, the implementation of a structural adjustment program in 1991 included a 40 percent devaluation of the Rwandan franc, which effectively reduced the buying power of farmers for imported beans, the primary source of protein, and most other goods they bought.
3. *Agricultural intensification programs* introduced few new profitable techniques, improved varieties or agricultural inputs visible on farms. One success was the rapid adoption of climbing bean varieties. The benefits of most programs, however, such as distribution of fertilizers and lime, were confined to the few farmers directly associated with programs. The government and many projects concentrated their efforts on control of soil erosion through terracing and agroforestry, important for soil preservation but insufficient for what farmers needed— increases in production. Although the government's immense erosion control efforts were successful in terms of the kilometers of progressive terracing built throughout the country, the enforced nature of the communal labor to dig the terraces caused bitterness on the part of the

farmers. This resentment of enforced communal labor was a prime factor in the widespread opposition of farmers to the regime.

4. *Soil degradation* lowered productivity on many farms. Areas with highly acidic soils and steep slopes, as in the highland Southwest, were particularly suffering from severe soil degradation and low productivity. The degree of degradation also depended upon the availability of resources, such as manure, labor, land and trees, at the household level to maintain and improve the soil. The areas of the Northwest with volcanic soils were, however, able to maintain high productivity.

The result of these factors has been a decline in agricultural production and food availability. Agriculture alone was unable to support the rural population in much of the West. Indeed, Gikongoro, Butare and Kibuye in the Southwest were in a state of chronic food deficit and were highly susceptible to minor climatic or other perturbations. The deficiency in the agricultural sector increased the importance of non- and off-farm sources of income in rural areas. The availability of these opportunities differed, again, between regions and between people in regions.

5. *Non- and off-farm opportunities in rural areas* were very rare outside of the low-paying agricultural labor market. The East was somewhat better off since it was well linked to the external market and had larger farms with agricultural wage labor employment possibilities.
6. *Governmental and private investment* was extremely limited in almost all rural areas. An exception was the Northwest that had received much development investment since the early 1980's. Some rural northwesterners were presumably directly employed or otherwise benefited through economic multiplier effects from these activities.

Despite common acknowledgement that the future of Rwanda's rural areas could not depend solely upon agriculture, most governmental and donor projects in rural areas were confined to attempting to increase agricultural production or to control erosion. Very few non-agricultural programs existed to develop the non-farm sector and to create rural employment opportunities.

The Southwest, again, had fewer opportunities, a situation reflected in its low incomes and "symptoms" of stress such as poor child nutrition. Although the Northwest had a higher rate of population growth and higher population densities than the Southwest, the situation in the Northwest was less critical since other causes of poverty were less severe.

7. *Limited migration to urban areas.* The urban-based economy of Rwanda has grown very slowly with few new jobs available. The government also enforced restrictions on migration into cities to those who could prove they were formally employed. Between 1978 and 1991, the in-migration rate to Kigali-Ville, the capital city, was only 3.2 percent. Neither urban or rural areas, therefore, offered many opportunities for young people.

The net effect of these factors in rural areas has been a decline in income, an increase in the number and proportion of extremely poor households, and many young people being unable to afford marriage and foreseeing a bleak future for themselves.

V. The Political Revolution 1990 - 1994

OVER TIME, PRESIDENT HABYARIMANA WAS FORCED TO INSTITUTE POLITICAL REFORMS DUE TO pressure from within and support from without. A multitude of political parties were formed and by 1992 seemingly every village had a row of flags declaring the villagers' membership in various parties. Large and small meetings of political parties became weekly events throughout the country. The new political parties were universally opposed to the ruling party of the president, the MRND. For many farmers, "démocratie" meant they no longer had to obey administrators. Displays of violent and non-violent protest became common.² Nevertheless, the mail continued to be delivered, schools remained open and a mechanism to incorporate opposition parties into the government began to emerge through power-sharing negotiations.

The strongly-felt opposition, the appearance of increasing chaos and the weakening of President Habyarimana's position were all heightened by activities of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and President Habyarimana's response to those activities. In October 1990, the RPF invaded the country from Uganda. It was halted a few kilometers into Byumba but the invasion caused a severe reaction in Kigali. Habyarimana's presidential guard began a large-scale campaign to arrest thousands of people, anyone suspected of opposing the president and most top-level Tutsi (Africa Watch 1993). There was little evidence the arrested people had prior knowledge of the RPF invasion but the president and his supporters took the opportunity to detain "suspected collaborators." This action shattered the basic belief in the national unity intentions of the president and galvanized opposition party members. It also was the first major act of violence against local Rwandans by the Habyarimana regime. Future acts of violence in the country would thereafter be attributed to the regime by the population.

President Habyarimana apparently felt he was losing his strong grip on the country due to the increasingly vocal and widespread opposition movement and the intermittent war with the RPF. Indeed, the RPF invaded again in January 1993 following a massacre in the Northwest of Tutsi and opposition party members (Africa Watch 1993). By March 1993, 900,000 people were displaced by the war and living in refugee camps (Onyango-Obbo 1993). The President implemented a two-pronged response to these internal and external threats to his power (Hilsum 1994).

On the one hand, he instituted political reforms and spoke of power sharing. The government of Tanzania organized and resolutely maintained internationally-monitored peace talks between opposition party representatives, RPF political representatives and Habyarimana's government. The talks culminated in the signing of the August 1993 Arusha Accords detailing power sharing amongst

² In 1992, farmers began to refuse to participate in enforced communal labor until it was abandoned by the government. Some farmers destroyed the erosion ditches they had dug with communal labor. Woodlots, planted with communal labor on local governmental land and often considered the personal property of the burgomaster, were burned. A few of the most-hated burgomasters were physically threatened.

the parties: which party was to get what government post and how many parliamentary seats, when elections would be held, etc.

On the other hand, Habyarimana used violence and propaganda to incite fear and to arouse hatred of his enemies. In 1991, the radio station Mille Collines began its broadcasting of fear and hate messages against opposition party leaders, local Tutsi and the RPF.³ This turning against his former national unity discourse was an attempt to mobilize the population behind the original cause of the Hutu revolution, of fighting Tutsi domination, and therefore to reunite all Hutu around himself (Chrétien 1992). Habyarimana, and France, also strengthened the presidential guard, and the guard in turn organized, trained and armed a civilian militia, the *Interahamwe*. Between 1990 and 1994, the presidential guard, the CDR (the Comité pour la Défense de la République, the extremist wing of the ruling MRND party) and/or the militias periodically massacred opposition party members and Tutsi, plus planted land mines on rural roads and bombs in mini-buses, urban markets and taxi stations to generate a climate of fear (Smyth 1994, Africa Watch 1993). Despite documentation by human rights groups of direct governmental involvement with the massacres, the international community reacted indecisively and appeared to believe the president's explanations of random disobedience by subordinates. A climate of fear was certainly created throughout the country, but the population associated the acts of violence with the regime and, at least in the South, did not rally around the president.

The situation of March 1994, then, was one of strained optimism by opposition party members and the RPF who were hopeful the Arusha Accords would soon be implemented, of chaos in the countryside and sporadic violence in Kigali, and of apparent fear of losing power by the president and his supporters. Two possibilities for the future were widely discussed— either the Arusha Accords would be implemented, or the widely-rumored assault by extremist elements of the regime on opposition party members and on Tutsi would begin.

VI. The Coalescence of Factors Following the Death of President Habyarimana

THE VIOLENCE THAT FOLLOWED THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT HABYARIMANA IN THE PLANE crash of April 6, 1994 cannot be explained without recognizing the importance of the antecedent political and economic conditions. The murder of Hutu opponents of the government and of Tutsi by extremist Hutu elements has given rise to an explanation for the violence based on "long standing ethnic hatreds." Others have suggested that the violence stemmed from desperation due to the effects of overpopulation and poverty. To what extent are those ethnic, regional, demographic and economic explanations valid? Ethnicity, regional identity and political affiliation had coalesced in complex ways in the period of liberalization since 1990. The historical legacy of pre-colonial, colonial and independent regimes had left different regions viewing the impending Arusha Accords differently.

³ The Radio des Mille Collines broadcast slanderous statements against opposition party leaders and human rights workers, and Tutsi in general, that were recognized as propaganda by most people. However, it also broadcast emotional interviews of people whose families has supposedly been killed in horrible ways by RPF soldiers and interviews of wounded soldiers who had barely escaped from the advancing RPF army. These interviews brought an immediacy to the government's propaganda of the dreadfulness of the RPF and of the imminent threat of war.

REGIONALISM

The Northwest (Ruhengeri and Gisenyi), the home region of Habyarimana, is different from the rest of the country. It gained the most from Habyarimana's and his MRND party's rule and therefore had the most to lose from the Arusha power-sharing accord with the opposition and the RPF. It considers itself unlike the rest of the country, was not long under the Tutsi king's rule, and has been hostile to Tutsi and to Southerners (Newbury 1992). It is also very near to the site of the 1990-1994 RPF armed incursions and has been living in fear of the RPF.

The South and Center (Butare, Gikongoro, Kibuye, Gitarama and Cyangugu) were the main seats of opposition to President Habyarimana. Many of the administrators placed by President Habyarimana in the South and Center were from the Northwest and were considered as unwelcome outsiders by the locals. The Hutu's of the South and Center also historically had a different relationship with the Tutsi than the Hutu of the Northwest. There were many more Tutsi in this area, and mixed marriages were common. Some of the opposition parties had Tutsi members and many were willing to join with the political wing of the RPF to force President Habyarimana into making power-sharing concessions. Nevertheless people were fearful of the RPF army and of the possibility the RPF might reinstall a repressive Tutsi regime. Radio des Mille Collines and speeches of President Habyarimana reinforced and fueled this fear.

The refugees in the South, therefore, have a different attitude towards the old regime from their neighbors in the North. After President Habyarimana was killed, the South remained calm for several weeks until the Interahamwe and presidential guards came from Kigali and began their systematic killings. The moderate opposition party administrators who had so recently been put into positions were deposed, killed and replaced by extremists.

The regional differences were combined with ethnic and economic ones. Rwanda has one language, one religion, a common culture and years of inter-marriage have reduced physical differences between Hutu and Tutsi. However, beginning with the divide-and-rule Belgian colonial policy that set Tutsi apart from and superior to Hutu, distributions of economic wealth and ethnicity have become institutionalized and reinforced by access to and application of power. Ethnicity became a convenient short-hand to indicate the haves and the have-nots. It was a characteristic that could be used to inflame emotions and catalyze political opportunism.

ETHNICITY

The ethnic murders after April 6 were the result of a "created ethnicity." Habyarimana had cultivated ethnic tensions in the 1990 to 1994 period to mobilize the population behind the original cause of the Hutu revolution, of fighting Tutsi domination, and to thus reunite Hutu around himself (Chrétien 1992). In 1991, the radio station Mille Collines began its broadcasting of fear and hate messages against opposition party leaders, local Tutsi and the RPF. This creation of ethnic threats was entirely believed by his own extremists who felt that all Tutsi were their mortal enemies (the Interahamwe were formally trained in this belief). The creation was less successful, however, in rural areas between farmers and in towns among the middle class.

After April 6, ethnic tension was no longer a promoted concept but became reality, a matter of life and death. Local Tutsi were targeted and became victims of the mass extermination campaign by the former government. Their only hope for survival was an RPF military victory. On the other hand, Hutu were caught in the RPF/government war and looked to the army of the former government to protect them against what they believed was certain death at the hands of the RPF. The polarization

was acted out at the local level where Hutu were fearful their Tutsi neighbors would "collaborate" and point out to invading RPF soldiers which families were Hutu and would be killed, and, inversely, Tutsi were fearful that their Hutu neighbors would divulge to roaming Interahamwe that they were Tutsi and that they would then be killed. The result is a new polarization between Hutu and Tutsi that gives an acute reality to ethnicity. This polarization cannot be ignored in the rebuilding process.

On the other hand, what has often been overlooked in the horror of the post-April 6 events is what did *not* occur between Hutu and Tutsi. There was no immediate spate of killing between people after the president was killed. The mass killings were conducted by outsiders trucked or flown in for that purpose. Butare, for example, stayed quiet for a few weeks with the prefet and the prefectural head of the army jointly urging people to remain calm. The calm was broken one dawn when presidential guards flew in from Kigali and started their mass killings of Tutsi and opposition party members (UN 1994). The same pattern occurred elsewhere with the militias, governmental army or presidential guards coming to an area that had been calm and then systematically murdering people (sometimes with the aid of local administrators). Many Tutsi and opposition party members, who knew they were targeted because of lists that had been circulated, were hidden by friends and neighbors despite the extreme risk involved. Many Hutu and Tutsi hospital, church, orphanage and other service workers risked and often sacrificed their lives attempting to protect the Tutsi in their care.

POPULATION PRESSURE

Some observers have placed the recent chaos and war in Rwanda in a population pressure context. Are the war and ensuing famine and disease examples of Malthusian "positive checks" on a society ruined by rapid population growth? Are the war, famine and diseases restoring a balance to the population/environment relationship? The answer is no. The massacres, the war and the refugee movements were political in nature. A more fitting metaphor than restoration of balance would be the oft-quoted African proverb, "when elephants fight, the grass gets trampled."

Was poverty a factor in the political events? Yes. Increasing rural poverty, combined with resentments built up through years of repression, forced labor and inequitable distribution of governmental resources, was an important factor behind the wide-spread opposition to the former regime. In a country with a long history of highly-authoritative central government, people tended to expect solutions from, and place blame on, the central authority when economic problems arose. This condemnation, combined with new freedoms of expressions legislated in 1990, resulted in an out-pouring of peaceful anti-regime protests by Hutu and Tutsi alike. The protests were organized by elites, many of whom had previously been members of the ruling party, into opposition political parties.

The massacres and the war were planned, led and conducted not by poverty-stricken subsistence farmers, however, but by political and military elites anxious to gain political power. For elites, not land but government represented the ultimate resource. The government in Rwanda, almost to the exclusion of any other source, was the paramount source of jobs, wealth and power. Those in power could, and did, apportion the jobs and government largesse to themselves and their supporters while those not in power received few government resources. In Rwanda, this apportionment was primarily regional. The Northwest, home of the former President Habyarimana, had been the leading recipient of government investments since the 1980's and political opposition formed in the rest of the country around this inequity.

When the President's plane was shot down, the leaders of extremist elements of the old regime dominated and acted in a planned, organized manner to retain political power. The massacres were conducted by the militia and members of the armed forces, primarily from the Northwest, whose purpose was to wipe out political opposition. They first targeted political opponents and human rights workers, both Hutu and Tutsi, and then concentrated on all Tutsi as probable political enemies and potential collaborators with the RPF (des Forges 1994, Newbury and Newbury 1994). How much of the killing in rural areas was spontaneous between neighbors, and how much was done by or because of fear of the militia and the army, will probably never be known. What is known is that the vast majority of those killed were unresisting civilians. The invasion of the RPF was an effort to halt the massacres (but it was too late) and prevent the rump group from gaining power. The mass exodus into Goma, Zaire was by former regime members and by northwesterners fearful of potential focussed retribution following years of oppression and the massacres.

The massacres, war and refugee movements were, therefore, tied to political aspirations and fears. Poverty in combination with perceived injustices produced a volatile mix and undoubtedly contributed to the unhappiness with the old regime. It was the efforts of elements of that regime to stay in power, however, that led to the massacres and subsequent war.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

At this point, we can trace the multiple threads that led to the events behind April 6. The threads include the reasons behind the strongly-felt opposition to the Habyarimana regime (i.e., poverty, favoritism of the Northwest, bitterness over enforced communal labor and other oppressive measures) plus the RPF incursions. Habyarimana found the opposition movement and the RPF threatening and responded with calculated violence and anti-Tutsi rhetoric from 1990 to 1994. After his death, it was these responses that exploded and were transformed into a holocaust, and destroyed the country.

The post-April 6 events have altered Rwanda to such an extent that addressing only the original threads that led to April 6 will not be sufficient to rebuild the country. The intense, traumatic events and the tearing of the social fabric that has occurred since April 6 need to be acknowledged and addressed. Similarly, the current threats to peace need to be acknowledged. We may be experiencing only a lull between fighting.

FEEDBACK PROCESS TOWARDS POLITICAL UPHEAVAL

WITHIN RWANDA

MACRO STRUCTURE	OPPRESSION REGIONAL FAVORITISM
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LOCAL MANIFESTATION

LOW AGR. PRICES; LIMITED NON-AGR. OPPORTUNITIES	FORCED COMMUNAL LABOR; LIMITED GOVT INVEST.
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LOCAL REACTION

INCREASING POVERTY; POLITICAL OPPOSITION; VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT PROTEST

REGIME'S RESPONSE TO THREATS

POWER-SHARING NEGOTIATIONS; ARUSHA ACCORDS	VIOLENCE; ETHNIC AND POLIT. OPPONENT BAITING
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April 6, 1994

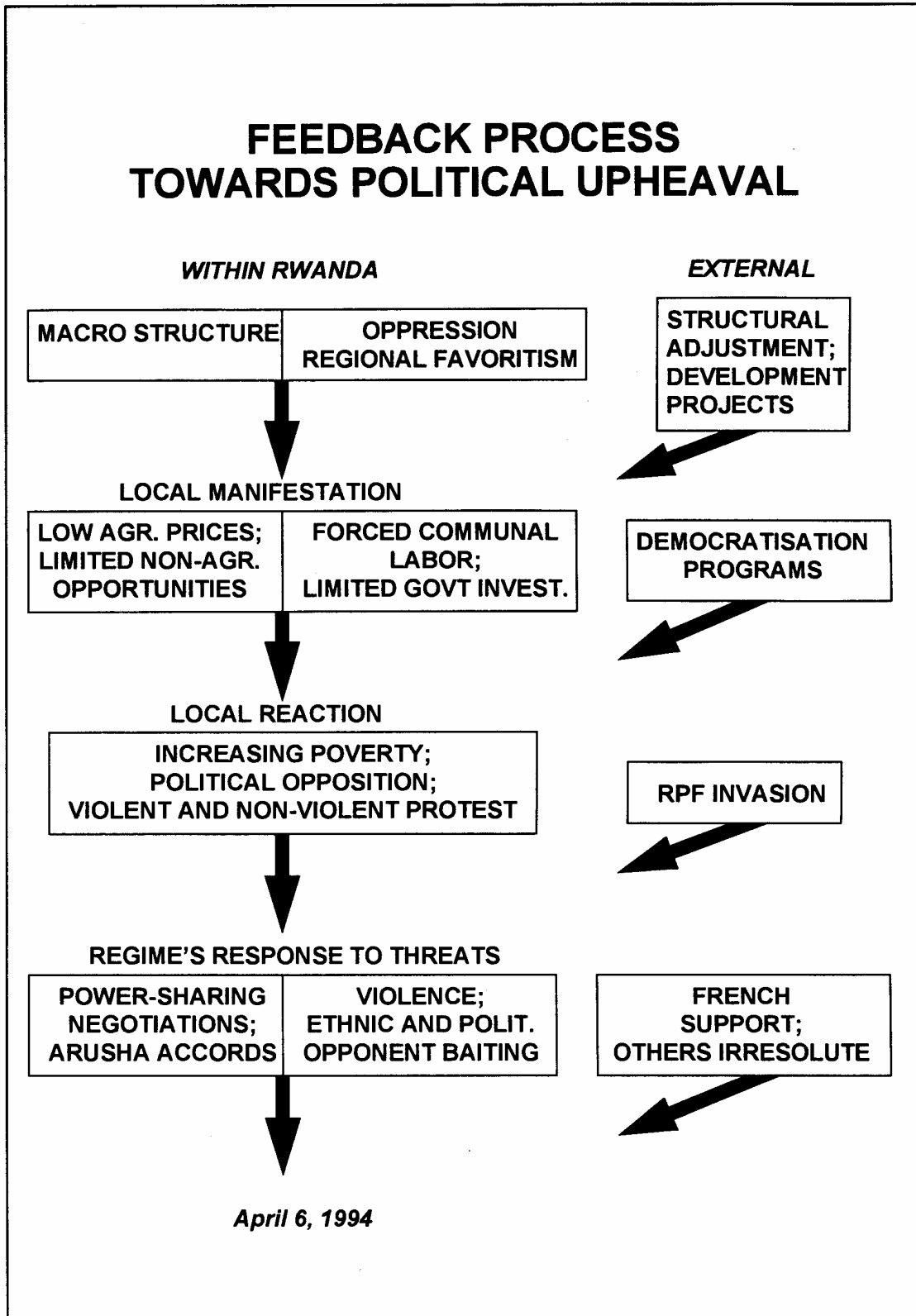
EXTERNAL

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT; DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS
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DEMOCRATISATION PROGRAMS

RPF INVASION

FRENCH SUPPORT; OTHERS IRRESOLUTE



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