

# The coming of age of an African liberation ideology in Rwanda

Rwanda's quest for liberation can be conceived as a mirror for continental liberation. The country celebrated the 25th anniversary since the Rwanda Patriotic Front stopped – through military means – the genocide against the Tutsi, a feat that was also a defeat of ideas based on ethnic politics, thus cementing the truism that a military defeat always comes first as a defeat of ideas. This latter part demands Africa's attention given the recurrent struggles with ethnicity.

Despite this significance, Africans have not adequately engaged this ideological bedrock that explains the Rwanda Patriotic Front's (RPF) ability to defeat the genocidal forces and, subsequently. Which leads to the question: how has the RPF led the country out of genocide towards worldwide acknowledged progress and how can this inform liberation struggles on the African continent?

Was it leadership? Yes, but through which means? Critics argue that it was force, but development and reconciliation do not happen at gunpoint. In any case force is not a substitution of ideas but its manifestation, as we know since Clausewitz. In other words, even force is grounded on a certain representation of the world. Thus, searching for the ideological framework of the RPF never stops to be relevant.

Indeed, RPF historians, such as Dr. Jean-Paul Kimonyo, have demonstrated how the responsiveness of the RPF to the genocide against the Tutsi was linked to the ideological preparedness of the RPF. The continuity of RPF ideology has also been recently analyzed by Chemouni and Mugiraneza with sources from the early 1990s.

Critics of the RPF, however, do not see its developmental track record as the outcome of deliberate policy choices. Some blatantly refuse to acknowledge what has been observed by most multilateral development agencies, citing the allegedly legendary manipulative skills of the RPF. This revisionist line of thinking borrows heavily from the Anti-Tutsi hate propaganda by pretending that what you see is not what is real. The same scholars tend to deny the scale of the genocide against Tutsis against the rich body of jurisprudence, testimonies and academic knowledge.

Other critics acknowledge RPF's developmental track-record but look for an external explanation by pointing out at the role of development aid or even natural resources from neighboring countries. But both development aid and natural resources do exist in other countries without leading to similar socio-economic change. Beyond factual misrepresentations, what these two school of thought have trouble with is to explain how internationally reviewed social change can occur without the agency of the normal citizens.

There are other scholars who explain modern Rwanda through the prism of developmental patrimonialism or elite vulnerability. Again, these theories cannot account for RPF's ideology at a time the RPF was not in power. Yet that is when eight of the nine political choices in the RPF manifesto were drafted. In addition there is ample evidence of ideological production in seminars, publications and recorded speeches before 1994. In addition, there are other important seminars of political ideology such as the Urugwiro Debates, which took place at a time the RPF did not have yet any resource at hand. In fact, this experience holds a universal truth: whoever has been in leadership knows that it all starts with a vision, not with resources.

What remains difficult for some observers is the acknowledgement of homegrown agency. This problem is in fact linked to the absence of an international ideological

affiliation of the RPF. Indeed, one of the reasons some observers tend to deny RPF's ideological motivation is that RPF's ideology is uniquely home-grown. It does not benefit from the ambit of an international ideology, such as the Ethiopian EPRDF with Marxism. Thus, RPF committed the double sin of thinking differently and uniquely.

The fight for ideological ownership between Rwanda and the West has been there right since the RPF came to power. Policies such as Umudugudu Villages or unity and reconciliation were highly contested by Western scholars. In fact, they rivaled in predicting the end of the RPF in the near future right in 1994. Ironically, the acerbic contestation of RPF's policy choices had the reverse effect: it reinforced the view that external validation of ideas was not useful. This fight is likely to continue as long as Rwanda will still receive official development aid. Ironically, once policy choices are implemented successfully, development agencies are the first to refer to them.

Truth be told, the RPF was thus far reluctant to indulge into an ideological grand strategy, preferring a pragmatic approach driven by socio-economic indicators. Loyal to the famous dictum of Amilcal Cabral: "Struggle is daily action against ourselves and against the enemy."

Twenty five years after the Genocide against Tutsis, two factors have however changed the debate around the ideology of the RPF. On the one hand, there is a generational shift within the RPF whereby majority of its rank and file as well as a good number of its National Executive Committee are from a generation that has not participated in the struggle. On the other hand, a dozen of African countries frequently conduct Study Tours to Rwanda, thereby forcing the architects of modern Rwanda to constitute an internationally transferrable narrative.

There are today clear signs of the constitution of a body of

knowledge around the ideas of the RPF. Senior cadres such as Logan Ndahiro have published their diary and a film has just been produced about the Campaign against Genocide. Incidentally, the Chairman of the RPF is Africa's most communicative leader, the speeches and videos are instantly archived and digitized for the public. The coming out of age of the country also coincides with an increasing number of local publications written by Rwandans and Rwandans receiving international book prizes.

These works will have to be completed scientifically by epistemological research, such that the RPF ideology can be put in the wider context of African Liberation Struggle. This is not just an academic imperative but a matter of national security. As landlocked country with large Rwandophone communities outside her borders, Rwanda depends on African integration to thrive economically.