

New Humanitarianism with Old Problems: the Forgotten Lesson of Rwanda Madalina Elena Ann
The Journal
of Humanitarian Assistance, Feinstein International Centre

4 October 2010

In early April 1994, following the assassination of the Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana, the deep and long-lasting animosities between the two main ethnic groups in Rwanda, the Hutus and the Tutsis, degenerated into genocide. The military, Hutu militia groups and ordinary people engaged in targeted, systematic killings of large numbers of Tutsis and political moderates irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. In the course of only a hundred days, “several hundred thousand people ... were gunned down, beaten to death, or literally hacked to pieces by machete, often after being raped, tortured, and forced to watch or participate in the execution of family members” (...)

(...) The present article attempts to outline some of the predicaments humanitarianism is facing in a changing world; as well as encourage a re-conceptualisation of humanitarianism, and of some of the indeterminate rules and ‘slippery’ concepts it is working with. To this end it will take Rwanda as a case study and will examine the possible reasons for non-intervention in the Rwandan events of 1994, by the international community. Rwanda was chosen as a case study, not only because of the author’s own interest in the region and the events of 1994, but also because much has been written on Rwanda and the deliberations engaged in by the relevant actors are more readily available for critical assessment (...)

(...) With humanitarianism facing near moral bankruptcy, the international community realised that reconceptualising humanitarianism, its principles and tools was imperative. The ‘re-branding’ of humanitarianism came in 2005 in the form of the concept of ‘new humanitarianism’; a new humanitarian order which was intended to be one more politically active, which would assign responsibility for the protection of vulnerable populations to ‘the international community’. The ‘new humanitarian’ paradigm authorises intervention, recognising the limits of sovereignty, especially in the case of weak and failing states and promoting the international norm of the ‘

responsibility to protect’

(R2P). The R2P framework is based on the idea that sovereignty is not a privilege, but an international responsibility. Accordingly, if a state fails to fulfill its responsibilities to protect its people from harm, the international community has the responsibility to intervene, at first diplomatically, then more coercively, and as a last resort, with military force. Lacking however is a new enforcement mechanism which would ensure that these principles are acted upon (...)

Read
[full](#)
article

