African Affairs, 1–28 doi: 10.1093/afraf/ady032

RWANDA'S POST-GENOCIDE FOREIGN AID RELATIONS: REVISITING NOTIONS OF EXCEPTIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

This article studies donor–government relations in Rwanda since the end of the 1994 genocide. The notion that Rwanda enjoyed or enjoys exceptional relations with donors because of guilt regarding their inaction during the genocide is widespread in the literature and in policy circles. To assess this myth, the article first looks at aid trends for Rwanda and comparable countries, and then takes an in-depth look at aid relations with two average-size donors: Canada and the Netherlands. It demonstrates that Rwanda is not as exceptional as claimed, but instead should be considered one amongst a group of exceptional cooperation partners. The article further highlights that donors operated informally immediately following the genocide, but soon renormalized aid relations, and that there has always been a complex set of rationales determining donor behaviour regarding Rwanda.

THERE IS AN ENDURING MYTH THAT Rwanda benefited and may still benefit from exceptional relations with its foreign aid donors on account of the 1994 genocide.[1] It is often assumed that guilt over the international community's inaction during the genocide translated into significant generosity, especially from bilateral donors, and a 'free pass' on the part of aid practitioners regarding questionable governance practices by the current government, led by President Paul Kagame and the Rwandan

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1. The Rwandan genocide began on 6 April 1994. The RPF took control of the country in July 1994. It had been intermittently at war with the Rwandan government since October 1990.

Patriotic Front (RPF).[2] This premise has been encouraged by statements of regret by key foreign personalities regarding inaction during the genocide and features regularly in media coverage. For their part, academics often suggest that Rwanda is given leeway as a result of what authors have called a 'genocide credit'.[3] Academic work on this purported genocide credit has focused on how the RPF feeds the myth by playing on the international community's failures in 1994.[4] The other part of the genocide credit story, the extent to which donors have actually been influenced by guilt and driven by emotional motives when giving aid, has been ignored. We seek to fill this gap.

Following the genocide, Rwanda received large amounts of aid, but how exceptional are donors' relations with Rwanda? According to research, donors have aid 'darlings' and frequently fail to enforce political conditionalities when lending aid.[5] Could Rwanda instead be part of a larger group of countries that enjoy advantageous aid relations with foreign aid donors? In addition, few scholars have studied donor rationales in Rwanda. If Rwanda is indeed exceptional, are guilt, sympathy or moral imperatives the predominant factors driving donor relations? The motives behind foreign aid giving are, after all, rarely simple.[6]

Contrary to notions of Rwanda as an absolute aid outlier, standing out with regards to standard aid patterns, we argue that aid relations in Rwanda follow a trajectory seen in a group of privileged aid recipients. Rwanda is not exceptional among a group of non-standard, more favoured recipients. Through a series of quantitative comparisons we show that, although Rwanda has on average received a greater amount of aid than most developing countries, it is part of a *group* of donor darlings that have attracted special interest from donors and receive an above average amount of aid. This was also true *prior* to the genocide. We also stress

2. Questionable governance practices include political assassinations, tight control of the political realm, violations of political and social rights, and Rwanda's violent involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo. See Filip Reyntjens, *Political governance in post-genocide Rwanda* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013) and Susan Thomson, *Rwanda: From genocide to precarious peace* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2018).

3. Filip Reyntjens, 'Constructing the truth, dealing with dissent, domesticating the world: Governance in post-genocide Rwanda', *African Affairs* 110, 438 (2011), pp. 1–34; Luc Reydams, 'NGO justice: African Rights as pseudo-prosecutor of the Rwandan genocide', *Human Rights Quarterly* 38, 3 (2016), pp. 546–588.

4. We use the term 'myth' to signal a notion that is not validated but circulates widely. For RPF discourse aimed and the international community, see Johan Pottier, *Re-imagining Rwanda: Conflict, survival and disinformation in the late twentieth century* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002) and Reyntjens, 'Constructing the truth'.

5. Stephen Brown, '"Well, what can you expect?" Donor officials' apologetics for hybrid regimes in Africa', *Democratization* 18, 2 (2011), pp. 512–534; Haley J. Swedlund, 'Can foreign aid donors credibly threaten to suspend aid? Evidence from a cross-national survey of donor officials', *Review of International Political Economy* 24, 3 (2017), pp. 454–496.

6. Carol Lancaster, *Foreign aid: Diplomacy, development, domestic politics* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2007).

the complex and changing nature of drivers behind aid giving to Rwanda. To get insights into the drivers of aid to Rwanda, we focus on two under-studied, yet typical donors, which we take to be a missing test of the myth of exceptionalism: Canada and the Netherlands. Drawing on original interviews with Canadian and Dutch officials, we reveal that both donors operated informally, that is in a highly reactive and at times non-standard manner, immediately following the genocide. However, in both cases, aid relations renormalized relatively quickly. We also find that rationales for aid giving have never been one-dimensional. Throughout the post-genocide period, Canada and the Netherlands have adopted a complex set of motives when providing aid to Rwanda.

Our contribution is two-fold. First, we question an enduring myth at a pivotal time. More than twenty years after the genocide, the effects of the genocide credit—if it ever existed—should be dissipating. In particular, there is reason to believe that Rwanda's relations with donors may have been tarnished in recent years by its continued involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo and by growing concerns over human rights abuses and authoritarianism.[7] Second, the article contributes to literature on foreign aid and donor–government relations.[8] Somewhat paradoxically, our findings suggest that both macro forms of patterned behaviour on the part of donors and idiosyncratic 'donor stories', that is factors and trends specific to individual donors, matter when making sense of development cooperation.

Myths, darlings and exceptionalism

Myths are generally defined as widely believed but unproblematized or untested assumptions or narratives that build on elements of truth, but simplify matters and blur the lines between real and presumed. A myth is a common belief or notion that may not be accurate, although many people share it. When pervasive, myths form the base through which people and objects and their roles and places are understood. The notion that Rwanda benefitted or is benefitting from exceptional aid relations operates in a similar manner. Although not thoroughly assessed by scholars, exceptionalism has become one of, if not the predominant, filter through which post-genocide Rwandan aid relations are understood. As a myth, the notion of exceptionalism has three key components: (a) that Rwanda is an absolute outlier in terms of the type of relation it has enjoyed/continues to

7. From 1971 to 1997, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was named Zaïre. For consistency, we refer to it as Congo.
8. Lindsay Whitfield (ed.), *The politics of aid: African strategies for dealing with donors* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009); Haley J. Swedlund, *The development dance: How donors and recipients negotiate foreign aid* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2017).

enjoy with donors; (b) that donors have proved significantly more generous in terms of aid volumes and significantly more indulgent in terms of Rwanda's governance practices compared to other aid recipients; and (c) that guilt and moral/humanitarian concerns were/are the key drivers of Rwanda's exceptionalism.

The simplest expression of the 'exceptionalism myth' is found in journalistic accounts that reduce donors' engagement with Rwanda to guilt. They speak of 'residual Western guilt and sympathy over the genocide',[9] 'huge international feelings of guilt and sympathy for Rwanda',[10] and donors 'burdened by guilt over their inaction during the genocide'.[11] Donor guilt supposedly translates into 'guilt money'[12] and even 'total support'.[13] Journalists also discuss how the RPF government and President Paul Kagame play on this guilt, inherently assuming these sentiments exist and drive donor behaviour.[14] A key element of this story is also how influential individuals like Tony Blair, Clare Short, Bill Gates, and Bill Clinton became committed friends and supporters of Rwanda and its president. It is often implicitly assumed that these friends have influenced or continue to influence how Rwanda is perceived internationally.[15]

Over the last decade, journalists have also identified Rwanda's progress since the genocide as a factor in Rwanda's aid relations. Contemporary Rwanda is presented as a model for donors hungry for change in Africa: 'something new to Africa: a capable, technocratic state',[16] and a 'rare symbol of progress on the continent'.[17] Such accounts often assume that

9. Oxford Analytica Daily, 'Rwanda: Fading 'genocide credit' strains foreign ties', 7 April 2014.
10. EIU ViewsWire, 'Rwanda politics: Donors cut aid to Rwanda', 27 July 2012.
11. Human Rights Watch, quoted in Yaroslav Trofimov, 'Muffled dissent: As horror recedes in time, Rwanda still restrains press', *Wall Street Journal*, 30 April 2004, A-1.
12. The Economist, 'Rwanda: Keep looking ahead', 11 January 2007, <http://www.economist.com/node/8533675> (1 May 2018).
13. Anjan Sundaram, 'Our man in Kigali', *Foreign Policy*, 3 August 2012, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/08/03/our_man_in_kigali> (1 May 2018).
14. Jeffrey Gettleman, 'The global elite's favorite strongman', *New York Times Magazine*, 4 September 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/08/magazine/paul-kagame-rwanda.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0> (1 May 2018); William Wallis, 'Lunch with the FT: Paul Kagame', *Financial Times*, 13 May 2011, <https://www.ft.com/content/6888f8ea-7ce5-11e0-a7c7-00144feabdc0> (1 May 2018).
15. Though this claim would need to be tested, journalists often implicitly make this link. E.g. Chris McGreal 'Tony Blair defends support for Rwandan leader Paul Kagame', *The Guardian*, 31 December 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/31/tony-blair-rwanda-paul-kagame> (1 May 2018); David Smith, 'The end of the West's humiliating affair with Paul Kagame', *The Guardian*, 25 July 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/25/paul-kagame-rwanda-us-britain> (11 October 2017).
16. Howard W. French, 'How Rwanda's Paul Kagame exploits U.S. guilt', *Wall Street Journal*, 19 April 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303603904579493440845328418> (1 May 2018).
17. Gettleman, 'The global elite's'.

donors make 'allowances'[18] and/or turn a blind eye on questionable governance policies or practices because of Rwanda's successes.[19]

Academic work typically proposes a more nuanced account of Rwanda's aid relations, but nonetheless promotes exceptionalism. Depictions range from preferential treatment and darling status to outright exceptional relations. A few authors explicitly point to the central role of guilt in shaping Rwanda's aid relations.[20] Most, however, focus on a combination of moral and humanitarian factors. Implicit references to emotive, moral, or humanitarian drivers are particularly visible in literature on how Kagame and the RPF instrumentalize the genocide as leverage with the international community. This argument has been essential to deconstructing Rwandan mythmaking, but rests on presumptions regarding a gullible or emotive international community played upon by Kigali.

Some academics suggest alternate motives. According to several authors, strong technocratic leadership by the Rwandan government cements donor relations with Rwanda.[21] Some scholars present the Rwandan government as very apt at adopting international aid language and current 'best practices'.[22] Others focus on an international community keen to identify good performers on which new approaches can be tested.[23]

18. Clinton explained that: 'I do make more allowances for a government that produces as much progress as this one'. *BBC News*, 'Bill Clinton speaks about his tour of Africa, and global conflicts', 13 August 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23687644> (11 October 2017).

19. EIU ViewsWire, 'Rwanda politics'; Chris McGreal, 'Rwanda's genocide and the bloody legacy of Anglo-American guilt', *The Guardian*, 12 December 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/12/rwanda-genocide-bloody-legacy-angloamerican-guilt> (1 May 2018); Samantha Power, 'Our man in Kigali', *The New Republic*, 218, 14 (6 April 1998), pp. 16–18; and Sundaram, 'Our man in Kigali'.

20. Eugenia Zorbas, 'Aid dependence and policy independence: Explaining the Rwandan paradox', in Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf (eds), *Remaking Rwanda: State building and human rights after mass violence* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2011), pp. 103–117; Nina Wilén, 'A hybrid peace through locally owned and externally financed SSR-DDR in Rwanda?', *Third World Quarterly* 33, 7 (2012), pp. 1323–1336; Zoë Marriage, 'Aid to Rwanda: Unstoppable rock, immovable post', in Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens (eds), *Aid and authoritarianism in Africa: Development without democracy* (Zed Books, London, 2016), pp. 44–66.

21. Rachel Hayman, 'Abandoned orphan, wayward child: The United Kingdom and Belgium in Rwanda since 1994', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 4, 2 (2010), pp. 341–360; Stefaan Marysse, An Ansoms and Danny Cassimon, 'The aid "darlings" and "orphans" of the Great Lakes region in Africa', *European Journal of Development Research* 19, 3 (2007), pp. 433–458; Filip Reyntjens, *Political governance in post-genocide Rwanda* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013), pp. 257–258; Zorbas, 'Aid dependence'.

22. David Booth and Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, 'Developmental patrimonialism: The case of Rwanda', *African Affairs* 111, 444 (2012), pp. 379–403.

23. Danielle Beswick, 'Aiding state building and sacrificing peace building? The Rwanda-UK relationship 1994–2011', *Third World Quarterly* 32, 12 (2011), p. 1918; Rachel Hayman, 'Abandoned orphan', p. 349.

Finally, a few note the strategic role Rwanda plays with regards to regional security, particularly as a contributor to peace operations.[24]

Academics speak of exceptionalism as generosity in terms of aid amounts, but also focus on donors' apparent reluctance to criticize the RPF government publicly. A number of authors insist on the leeway granted to Rwanda, pointing to a failure to apply conditionalities and to a 'good enough' attitude.[25] Contrary to journalists, academics usually differentiate across donors regarding this indulgence.[26] Academic literature has also kept pace with recent events in the region, pointing to a shift in donor behaviour, as exemplified by international condemnations of Rwanda's involvement in Congo, its treatment of political opponents, or opposition to a third mandate for Kagame.[27]

Nonetheless, comparisons between prior and current patterns of donor behaviour and discussions of a shift in donors' attitudes remain vague. Few acknowledge the criticism—and sometimes aid suspensions—levelled at Rwanda in the 1990s and early 2000s. In addition, no author has studied if and why this purported shift occurred. The only lead in the literature centres on a waning of the genocide credit, which remains an untested proposition.

When analysed comparatively, there are several reasons to be sceptical about claims regarding Rwanda's exceptionalism, and whether donors are driven exclusively—or even primarily—by guilt or moral imperatives. Donors often have aid darlings, countries that receive more foreign aid than their policies and institutional indicators would predict.[28] Rwanda may thus be part of a larger group of countries that stand out in comparison to the average recipient, rather than truly exceptional.

In fact, the patterns purportedly observed in Rwanda may actually reflect a broader tendency on the part of donors to focus on technical

24. Danielle Beswick, 'The risk of African military capacity building: Lessons from Rwanda', *African Affairs* 113, 451 (2014), p. 220; Danielle Beswick, 'Peacekeeping, regime security and "African solutions to African problems": Exploring motivations for Rwanda's involvement in Darfur', *Third World Quarterly* 31, 5 (2010), pp. 739–754. See also Nina Wilén, 'A hybrid peace'.

25. Beswick, 'Aiding state building'; Rachel Hayman, 'Funding fraud: Donors and democracy in Rwanda', in Scott Straus and Lars Waldorf (eds), *Remaking Rwanda: State building and human rights after mass violence* (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2011), pp. 118–131; Reyntjens, 'Constructing the truth'.

26. Beswick, 'Aiding state building'; Peter Uvin, 'Difficult choices in the new post-conflict agenda: The international community in Rwanda after the genocide', *Third World Quarterly* 22, 1 (2001), pp. 177–189.

27. Until recently, academics were more likely to highlight donor critiques. Hayman, 'Abandoned orphan'; Wilén, 'A hybrid peace'.

28. David Dollar and Victoria Levine, 'The increasing selectivity of foreign aid, 1984–2003', *World Development* 34, 12 (2006), pp. 2034–2046; Emmanuel Frot and Javier Santiso, 'Herding in aid allocation', *Kyklos* 64, 1 (2011), pp. 54–74; Raechelle Mascarenhas and Todd Sandler, 'Do donors cooperatively fund foreign aid?' *Review of International Organizations* 1, 4 (2006), pp. 337–357.

governance and ignore political governance failures.[29] Tobias Hagmann and Filip Reyntjens, for example, go as far as to suggest that aid has entrenched authoritarianism in Africa.[30] Such entrenchment has purportedly taken place in several countries commonly identified as donor darlings.[31] Rwanda is clearly not the only country where, despite claims of authoritarianism, aid continues to be disbursed.

Finally, single factor explanations for aid giving, particularly those focused on moral drivers, ignore a large body of research that suggests that the drivers of aid giving are complex, multiple, and vary over time and across donors.[32] Perhaps the only generalizable finding in the aid allocation literature is that aid always has a political and/or strategic component.[33] There is little reason to believe that Rwanda would be any different.

For the purpose of the research, we define exceptional aid relations as standing out from conventional or expected relations. The notion of exceptionalism is thus necessarily comparative. It cannot be gauged without reference to the standard or norm. Exceptionalism entails a significant variance, whether in terms of the amount of aid received (either more or less) or the type of practices adopted towards the recipient.

Broad comparisons

To assess Rwandan exceptionalism, we first compare rates of aid received by Rwanda to global averages for general comparison groups. Such comparisons are messy, but a useful first step in understanding aid giving to

29. Brown, 'Well, what can you expect?'; Wil Hout, 'Political regimes and development assistance: The political economy of selectivity', *Critical Asian Studies* 36, 4 (2004), pp. 591–613; Swedlund, 'Can foreign aid donors'; Matthew S. Winters and Gina Martinez, 'The role of governance in determining foreign aid flow composition', *World Development* 66 (2015), pp. 516–531.
30. Hagmann and Reyntjens (eds), *Aid and authoritarianism*.
31. Isaline Bergamaschi, 'The fall of a donor darling: The role of aid in Mali's crisis', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 52, 3 (2014), pp. 347–378; Luis Flores, 'Development aid to Ethiopia: Overlooking violence, marginalization and political Repression', Oakland Institute, 2013, <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/OI_Brief_Development_Aid_Ethiopia.pdf> (6 June 2018).
32. Stijn Claessens, Danny Cassimon and Bjorn Van Campenhout, 'Evidence on changes in aid allocation criteria', *The World Bank Economic Review* 23, 2 (2009), pp. 185–208; Thad Dunning, 'Conditioning the effects of aid: Cold war politics, donor credibility, and democracy in Africa', *International Organization* 58, 2 (2004), pp. 409–423; Bernhard Reinsberg, 'Foreign aid responses to political liberalization', *World Development* 75 (2015), pp. 46–61.
33. Alberto Alesina and David Dollar, 'Who gives foreign aid to whom and why?', *Journal of Economic Growth* 5, 1 (2000), pp. 33–63; Thomas Carothers and Diane de Gramont, *Development aid confronts politics: The almost revolution* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 2013); Steven W. Hook, 'Building democracy through foreign aid: The limitations of United States political conditionalities, 1992–96', *Democratization* 5, 3 (1998), pp. 156–180; Javed Younas 'Motivation for bilateral aid allocation: Altruism or trade benefits', *European Journal of Political Economy* 24, 3 (2008), pp. 661–674.

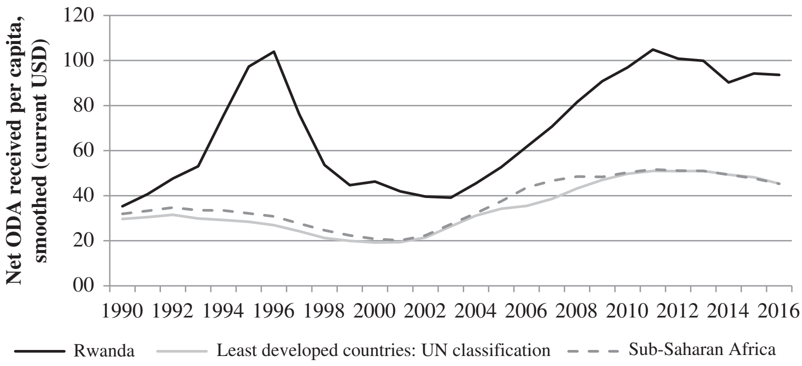

Figure 1 Net ODA received per capita, 1990–2016.
Source: The World Bank's World Development Indicators (databank.worldbank.org/wdi). Smoothed values equal the three-year moving average of ODA per capita (the average of the current and past two years).

Rwanda. We also examine rates of foreign aid in the pre-genocide period. Rwanda was, after all, described as a donor darling prior to 1994.[34] Finally, we compare Rwanda to specific groups of aid recipients, which we argue are more useful tests of the exceptionalism claim.

Since 1990, Rwanda has indeed received, on average, higher amounts of aid as compared to other least developed countries and other sub-Saharan African states.[35] Figure 1 suggests two spikes in net official development assistance (ODA) per capita: a large spike that peaked in 1996, and another that peaked in 2011. Consistent with the exceptionalism literature, we also see that Rwanda's largest donors changed. Before 1994, Belgium was the largest donor. More recently, it has been the US and the UK (see Table 1).

However, a closer look suggests important challenges to the myth. First, if we look at aid to Rwanda since the 1970s (Figure 2), we see that Rwanda has always received higher amounts of aid as compared to other least developed countries and sub-Saharan African countries. Aid to Rwanda spiked dramatically after the genocide in 1994 and 1995. Contemporary differences, however, are similar to the 1970s.[36] This is

34. Peter Uvin, *Aiding violence: The development enterprise in Rwanda* (Kumarian Press, West Hartford, 1998).
35. A least developed country is defined as a low-income country 'confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development.' 47 countries are currently classified as least developed. See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category.html> (6 June 2018).
36. Data on ODA as percentage of gross national income is not available for least developed countries prior to 1985. However, if we compare ODA per capita for this group to ODA per capita in Rwanda, we see comparable gaps in the 1970s and 1980s, and the 2000s.

Table 1 Top five bilateral donors to Rwanda pre- and post-genocide

Top bilateral donors pre-genocide		*Top bilateral donors post-genocide*	
Donor Country	*Total Net ODA (1970–1989) US$ millions Current Prices*	*Donor Country*	*Total Net ODA (1995–2016) US$ millions Current Prices*
Belgium	490.54	United States	2040.61
Germany	287.18	United Kingdom	1590.95
France	234.15	Belgium	803.95
United States	150.00	Netherlands	768.85
Canada	120.78	Germany	629.24

Source: OECD-DAC (http://stats.oecd.org/), Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a]. Calculated by summing total net ODA received by all bilateral DAC donors for the period. All figures are in current prices.

consistent with Peter Uvin's insight that prior to the genocide Rwanda was already a 'darling', indeed 'one of the most aided countries in the world', due to its performance on development indicators and the relative ease of implementing aid projects.[37]

Second, if we breakdown post-genocide foreign aid, we see that the spike around the genocide is driven by humanitarian rather than development aid (Figure 3).[38] In 1995, 38 percent of the total net ODA received by Rwanda was humanitarian aid. This is important but rarely noted. It is not surprising that humanitarian aid would increase dramatically following an event like genocide; in fact, it is to be *expected*. The displacement of millions of people following the civil war and genocide necessitated a large inflow of resources.

Third, if we look at ODA volumes as a percentage of gross national income (GNI), rather than as per capita, the spike in aid in the 2000s disappears (Figure 2). As an average to below average size sub-Saharan Africa country in terms of population, aid per capita is likely to be higher in Rwanda than in more populous states, simply because ODA volumes are disbursed amongst fewer people.[39] However, when measured as a percentage of Rwanda's wealth, we do not see a spike in aid in the 2000s. As Rwanda's economy grew, so did the amount of aid received.

37. Peter Uvin, *Aiding violence*, p. 40.
38. Data on humanitarian aid is available from the OECD for 1995 onwards.
39. With approximately 11 million people, Rwanda is an average to below average size county. For an explanation of this bias, see Paul Isenman, 'Biases in aid allocations against poorer and larger countries', *World Development* 4, 8 (1976), pp. 631–641.

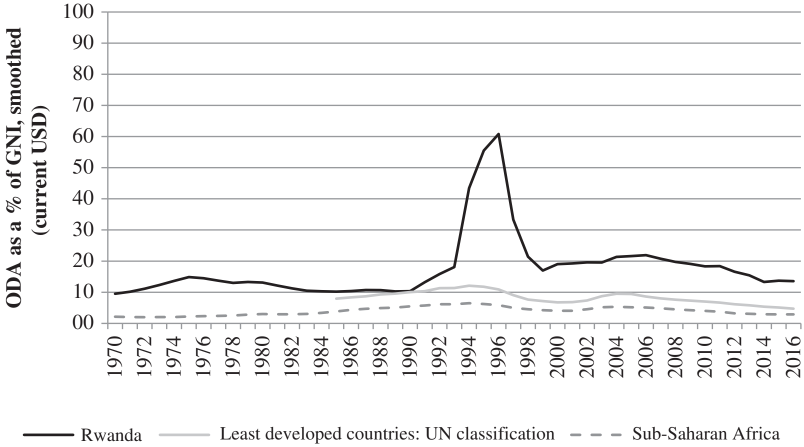

Figure 2 ODA received as percentage of GNI, 1970–2016.
Source: The World Bank's World Development Indicators (databank.worldbank.org/wdi). Smoothed values equal the three-year moving average of ODA per capita (the average of the current and past two years).

Finally, when we compare the average ODA per capita received by Rwanda to the average ODA per capita received by countries in more relevant comparison groups, differences between the amounts of aid received decrease substantially. Two groups make for better comparisons: countries that participated in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and countries classified as fragile and conflict affected. Rwanda signed on to the HIPC programme in 2000, and has consistently been considered fragile and conflict affected by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) since it started tracking aid to this group of countries in 2008.[40] These groups make for more apt comparisons because they reflect special global aid priorities.[41] Launched in 1996, the HIPC programme provides debt relief and low-interest loans to countries abiding by certain procedures, including the adoption of a Poverty Reduction Strategy. Similarly, around the same time, donors also began earmarking aid for fragile and conflict affected states.

40. The OECD began reporting on ODA to fragile countries in 2005. In 2008, the label was expanded to fragile and conflict affected states. Our calculations use the 2008 list. See <http://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/listofstateoffragilityreports.htm> (6 June 2018).

41. Tony Killick, 'Politics, evidence and the new aid agenda', *Development Policy Review* 22, 1 (2004), pp. 5–29; Stephen Baranyi and Marie-Eve Desrosiers, 'Development cooperation in fragile states: Filling or perpetuating gaps', *Conflict, Security & Development* 12, 5 (2012), pp. 443–459.

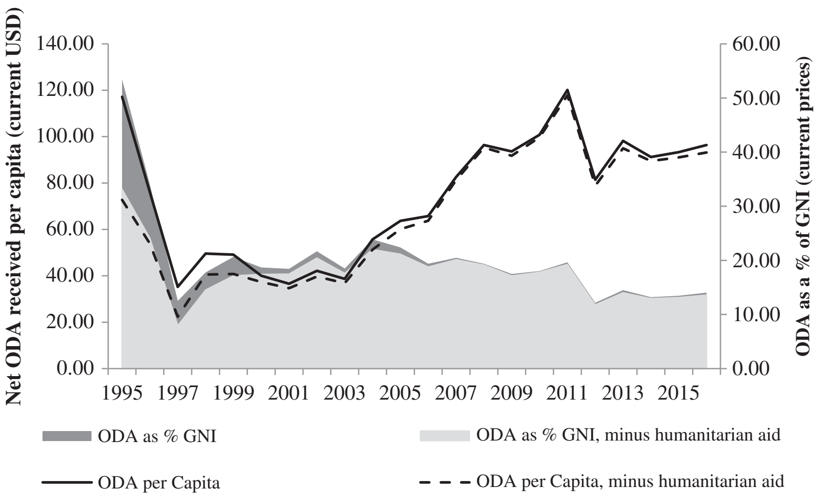

Figure 3 Development and Humanitarian Aid to Rwanda, 1995–2016.
Source: OECD-DAC (http://stats.oecd.org/), Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a]. ODA as percentage of GNI and ODA per capita minus humanitarian aid was calculated by first calculating the percentage of total net ODA (gross disbursements) given as humanitarian aid. Using these percentages, ODI as a percentage of GNI and per capita were adjusted accordingly.

Figure 4 suggests that the increases in ODA per capita in Rwanda in the 2000s mirror global trends in aid giving. Between 2000 and 2016, ODA per capita is roughly similar in Rwanda as in the average HIPC country and is consistently *less* than in the average fragile and conflict affected country.[42] As Tables A1 and A2 in the **online appendix** further illustrate, Rwanda is not particularly exceptional amongst either group. Several other countries, including Zambia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Bolivia and Congo, received a similar average annual ODA per capita between 2000 and 2016. Other countries and territories, including the West Bank and Gaza, Timor-Leste, Iraq, Liberia, and Afghanistan, received substantially more average annual ODA per capita over this period.

These broad comparisons suggest that notions of donors' exceptional generosity to Rwanda need nuance. Rwanda may be exceptional compared to least developed countries and other sub-Saharan African countries. However, to some degree, that exceptionalism has always existed. And, compared to other countries attracting a special interest on the part of donors, Rwanda is not particularly exceptional.

42. We use ODA per capita because there is more complete data for the period.

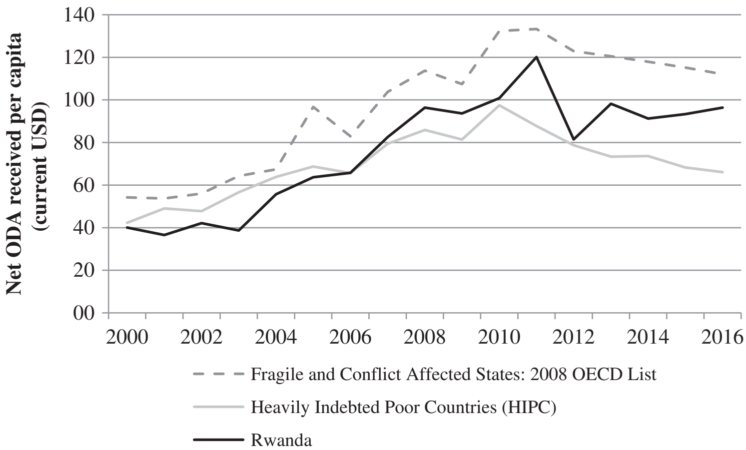

Figure 4 Annual ODA per capita, 2000–2016
Source: OECD-DAC (http://stats.oecd.org/), Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a]. For fragile and conflict affected states and HIPC countries, we show how much ODA per capita a country in this category received on average. For fragile and conflict affected states we relied on the list of countries used by the OECD in the 2008 report, 'Resource Flows to Fragile and Conflict-Affected States'.

Donor case studies

Assessing the myth of exceptionalism also requires donors' perspective on whether or not they were operating in an exceptional manner regarding Rwanda, and if so why.[43] For this reason, we examine the aid relations of two bilateral donors: Canada and the Netherlands. These case studies are designed to qualitatively assess the salience of the moral component of the myth, as well as to provide insights into other salient drivers.

Canada and the Netherlands have been understudied by the literature, which focuses predominantly on the US and the UK. The US and the UK, however, are outliers amongst donors—both in Rwanda and globally. Not only are they currently the largest bilateral providers to Rwanda, they are among the top bilateral donors globally. In contrast, Canada and the Netherlands are more representative of a typical donor both to Rwanda and globally. Widening the scope beyond the largest donors is also important, because academics and journalist alike often claim that the donor community as a whole is affected by guilt, rather than specific types of countries, like larger donors such as the US or UK. Canada and the Netherlands thus provide an important, yet missing test for the myth.

43. We opted to compare donor giving over time and across donors, because it allows for a more detailed analysis of donor rationales over time and across donors.

Empirically, they also make interesting contrasting cases. Both are perceived—and perceive themselves—to be donors that were forerunners in terms of their involvement when the genocide ended.[44] However, their involvement in Rwanda prior to and after the genocide differs. While Canada had an office in Kigali before the genocide, the Dutch did not have formal representation in Rwanda before 1994.[45] And, while both were active in the post-genocide years, Canada closed its bilateral cooperation programme in 2012, while the Netherlands remains an active donor.[46]

For our interviews, we selected a range of participants to cover the entire period since the genocide (1994–2016) and offer a variety of viewpoints (i.e. worked at the mission or headquarters level, technical versus political staff).[47] This allowed us to track shifts in motives and gain a more nuanced—if sometimes factional—sense of drivers behind aid relations. Interviewees were asked to comment specifically on the period they worked in or on Rwanda. When interviewees offered more impressionistic takes about other periods, we refrained from using the material. In the Canadian case, 13 interviews were conducted, including one with David Kilgour, Secretary of State for Latin America and Africa from 1997 to 2002, who waived anonymity. Ten Dutch interviews were conducted, including one with Jan Pronk, Minister for International Development in 1989–1998, who also waived anonymity.[48] We used open source documents and access to information requests to complement interview data. We split the discussion into two periods representing specific sets of patterns that we identified inductively.

The emergency period (1994–2000): lots of aid, quickly, informally and politically

For Canada and the Netherlands, 1994–2000 was dominated by humanitarian and reconstruction efforts. A key trend for this period is how reactive and, particularly in the Dutch case, how informal aid processes were. The reactivity of decision-making appears to have allowed for a larger footprint on the part of certain political actors who took a marked interest in Rwanda. Importantly, however, reactivity and informality in the wake of mass violence is not necessarily exceptional, nor did it prevent the

44. Based on Canadian and Dutch interviews.
45. The Canadian office reported to the Embassy in Kinshasa and as of 1993 the High Commission in Nairobi.
46. A Canadian diplomatic office remains open.
47. Swedlund conducted most Dutch interviews. Desrosiers conducted all Canadian interviews and two Dutch interviews.
48. Given the sensitivity of the material, all other interviews were conducted under guarantee of anonymity.

Canadians or the Dutch from criticizing the new government. Evidence from this period also underscores that engagement in Rwanda was determined by a complex set of drivers, even immediately following the genocide.

Prior to 1994, Canada maintained a vibrant bilateral aid programme in Rwanda, with relations and programming dating back to the 1960s. It had a longstanding presence in Rwanda, in part as a result of the Dominican fathers' interest in the country. The order founded Rwanda's first university, the National University of Rwanda, where many Canadians would go on to teach, fostering what many saw as a strong cooperation bond between the two countries. Importantly, Canada kept its programme active amidst security concerns in the early 1990s. According to an official working on Rwanda at the time, this illustrated how much Canada appreciated doing development work in Rwanda.[49]

During the genocide, Canadians jumped into humanitarian efforts. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided support to refugee camps, and in late May/early June the Deputy Minister of National Defence, his Executive Assistant, and the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff travelled to Rwanda. This visit was a response to the presence of Canadian Major-General Roméo Dallaire, head of the UN mission, and his Canadian staff in Rwanda, and was meant to assess the viability of a Canada-run 'Armed Forces Hercules logistics air Support to Kigali from Nairobi', one of the only continued aerial link with Rwanda during the genocide.[50] Given Canadian presence in the field, both the air support and the visit were standard procedure, according to a former senior military officer.[51]

In contrast, the Dutch were part of a 'new generation' of donors—and perceived as such by long timers like the Canadians. Prior to the genocide, the Netherlands had provided limited bilateral aid to Rwanda, mainly via the Dutch organization SNV.[52] This meant that the Minister for International Development at the time, Jan Pronk, knew relatively little about what was taking place in Rwanda and was caught off guard when civil war and eventually the genocide broke out. To assess the situation, Pronk decided to visit the region at the height of the genocide in May 1994.[53] As he explains: 'I had been in Mozambique, I had been in

49. Canadian Interview 4, 16 November 2016.
50. Exchange with former high-level National Defence official, 6 July 2017 and follow-up exchange with Canadian interviewee 12, 21 June 2017.
51. Canadian Interview 12, 5 June 2017.
52. Pyt Douma, 'The Netherlands and Rwanda: A case study on Dutch foreign policies and interventions in the contemporary conflict history of Rwanda' (Clingenbael, The Hague, 2000).
53. Tweede Kamer, 'Brief van de Minister voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking', Tweede Kamer Archives, 23, 727, no. 1, 1993–1994, 24 May 1994.

Cambodia, I had been in Liberia, I had been in Somalia, and also in Sudan. […] So I thought I had to go there.'[54] During his visit, Pronk met with leaders of the RPF, including Kagame, in Mulindi and visited Kigali to witness the genocide first hand.[55] He would go on to visit Rwanda eleven times over the next three years.[56]

In these early days, both countries disbursed significant amounts of aid, often in a relatively informal way. By autumn 1994, André Ouellet, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, had approved a 'Canadian Strategy in Rwanda'. The strategy included an early project to rehabilitate electricity structures in Kigali. This was an unconventional choice for Canada, according to a CIDA employee,[57] implemented at the request of Rwandan authorities.[58] An initial Canadian programme in the amount of 21 million Canadian dollars (roughly US$15 million in 1994 prices) was developed in 1995. This programme was in large part a follow-up to the 40 million CAD (roughly 30 million US$ in 1994 prices) Canada had pledged in conjunction with a Donors Round Table on Rwanda in Geneva in January 1995.[59] Given the immense needs, the programme called for an 'exceptional approach'.[60] Standard development programming only restarted in 1999, and was initially developed with less overall consultation than standard.[61] Canadian interviewees emphasized, however, that this informality was not necessarily out of the ordinary, at least for post-conflict states.[62]

On the Dutch side, following his first visit to Rwanda, Pronk quickly increased aid from two to fifteen million guilders (roughly $7.7 million in 1994 prices). Shortly thereafter, he provided an additional 20 million NLG (roughly $10.3 million in 1994 prices) to support refugees.[63] More

54. Interview with Jan Pronk. Pronk recently published a book on Rwanda: *Strijd rond de grote meren: Onderhandelen over vrede en recht in het hart van Afrika* (LM Publishers, Volendam, 2018).
55. Fred Grünfeld and Anke Huijboom, *The failure to prevent genocide in Rwanda: The role of bystanders* (Brill, Leiden, 2007), p. 227.
56. Douma, 'The Netherlands and Rwanda', p. 42.
57. Canadian Interview 5, 5 January 2017.
58. Huguette Labelle, President, 'Sélection d'une société d'ingénieurs-conseils', Canadian International Development Agency, C-94-0462, 3 October 1994.
59. IMF, 'Rwanda: Social and economic background paper, and statistical Appendix', August 1995, p. 40 and Ministry of Planning-Rwanda and United Nations Development Programme, 'Fifth report on Rwanda's round table activities', February 1997, p. 10.
60. CIDA, 'Mémoire au ministre: Programme bilateral Rwanda – Sélection d'organisations à titre de partenaires pour le développement et la mise en oeuvre du programme bilatéral d'une envergure de 21 millions $ sur trois ans au Rwanda', C-95-9271, 17 May 1995.
61. The programme covered 2000–2003. CIDA, 'Cadre pour le Programme d'aide au développement du Canada au Rwanda', 1999. An interviewee explained that: '[…] we did not conduct broad consultations either within CIDA or with any public groups because we had learned that open discussions about Rwanda became polarized and unconstructive.' Canadian Interview 5 follow-up email, 11 May 2017.
62. Canadian Interview 11, 17 May 2017.
63. Grünfeld and Huijboom, *The failure to prevent*, pp. 223–224.

significantly, as part of the Geneva Donor Round Table Series, Pronk pledged approximately $130 million between 1995 and 1997. This was an exceptionally large amount for a small country like the Netherlands and put the Dutch only second to the Americans in terms of pledges.[64] In order to move money quickly, Pronk used the humanitarian aid budget rather than going through the sub-Saharan Africa Department, bypassing standard development processes.[65] In these early years, the number of Dutch staff working on Rwanda was limited and their relationship with Pronk highly personalized. In July 1994, Pronk requested that a junior diplomat, Bengt van Loosdrecht, set up an office in Kigali.[66] van Loosdrecht had a direct line to Pronk, allowing him to bypass conventional modes of operating.[67] The Dutch embassy in Kigali opened in 1996. However, the Netherlands did not develop an official country aid strategy until the 2005–2008 cycle. Before then, programming was planned annually.[68]

For both Canada and the Netherlands, the short-circuiting of standard development cooperation during this period appears to have allowed for more influx from the political realm into the management of aid relations and for more active involvement on the part of committed political actors. This is especially clear with the Dutch. In these early years, Dutch engagement was dictated by the personal involvement of Pronk and his close relation to Kagame and other personalities in the regime. As one interviewee explained: '[w]e were Pronk's troops. [...I]t was really Pronk, Pronk, Pronk.'[69]

Though not quite at Pronk's level and with less direct influence on aid decisions, Canada's David Kilgour, Secretary of State for Latin America and Africa from 1997 to 2002, also adopted an activist profile. This was fed in part by his connections with political actors in Rwanda and the Rwandan diaspora. Kilgour's keen interest in Rwanda made him critical of the pace at which CIDA deployed aid to Rwanda.[70] Part of the tension between Kilgour and CIDA officers came from what they saw as his eagerness to act and his ability to weigh in on the administrative process, and CIDA officers' wariness to jump in without a proper assessment of the context, needs, and Canadian impact. According to one former high-

64. There was a subsequent Round Table of donors in 1996. The Dutch pledged around 30 millions, but followed up with a 100 million pledge. Ministry of Planning-Rwanda and United Nations Development Programme, 'Fifth report', p. 10.
65. Dutch Interview 7.
66. Interview with Jan Pronk; Dutch Interview 4.
67. Dutch Interview 4.
68. Follow-up exchange with Dutch interviewee 10, 11 July 2017.
69. Dutch Interview 7.
70. Canadian Interview 5; Canadian Interview 6, 18 January 2017; Canadian Interview 11; David Kilgour Interview 1, 5 May 2017; David Kilgour Interview 2, 9 May 2017.

level CIDA employee, Kilgour never said 'no', but his interest in Rwanda remained something to contend with.[71]

As political actors, Pronk and Kilgour clearly promoted the 'guilt' register. According to Pronk, '[w]e were responsible, co-responsible. We had forgotten the country […]'.[72] Similarly, Kilgour candidly expressed that

> [e]verybody was convinced that Canada had really, really […] let the people of Rwanda down and Canadians down on the whole thing […] I don't think people wanted to talk about the guilt so much… but I, I… maybe I am just speaking personally… I sensed that Canada had really botched the thing, botched it completely.[73]

Nevertheless, the Canadian development officials we spoke with for the period were sceptical of the notions of exceptionalism and a genocide credit. Most, when asked if they considered Rwanda to be an exceptional partner, indicated that by the late 1990s the programme was small to average. No interviewee seemed to suggest that they operated in a non-standard manner during this emergency phase. One Canadian ventured that, if there was a credit, it was a 'Canadian sized credit' (i.e. small) and mostly expressed by political actors.[74] In contrast to Kilgour, those in more administrative roles seemed much less drawn to an emotive register, with few exceptions.[75]

The notion of Rwanda being given a blank cheque by donors was also strongly rejected by Canadian participants. All were adamant that CIDA closely monitored governance and rights in Rwanda. Many pointed to Canada's strong reaction when Rwandans invaded Congo, and Canada's early preference for working at the community-level, outside of official Rwandan institutions.[76] Nevertheless, a number of interviewees did note that, despite this awareness, cooperation actors were first and foremost looking to respond to the pressing needs. This meant helping the RPF government. In the words of one interviewee: 'to influence, you need to be there'.[77]

In contrast, though they often expressed a strong dislike of the term, Dutch interviewees were more likely than their Canadian counterparts to say that some sort of genocide credit operated.[78] As two explained:

71. Canadian Interview 11.
72. Interview with Jan Pronk.
73. David Kilgour Interview 2.
74. Canadian Interview 5.
75. Three Canadians, including two with ties to Rwanda prior to 1994, mentioned a sense of personal responsibility.
76. Claiming the need to defend Rwandans and Rwandophones in Congo, the RPF sent forces over the border in 1996. Rwanda was involved in subsequent conflicts in Congo and has been accused of supporting rebel groups in Congo even after the official end of these conflicts.
77. Canadian Interview 6.
78. Many found it distasteful, like assuming Jews benefitted from the Holocaust.

> […] we were there because of the genocide. […] We did give Kagame [a credit], because of the fact that we were afraid there might be another genocide.[79]

> In our case, it is evident. Our minister, Jan Pronk was the first to arrive after the genocide, first minister of a donor country. And, he then and there promised that we're going to help you […] I think that in general donors accepted more from the RPF and Kagame, because they realized that the alternative would have an enormous risk of the repetition of the genocide, so if you include that in the genocide credit, then I think that is the main part. [80]

According to our Dutch respondents, however, this credit did not exist solely because of guilt. As an interviewee explained, although there was guilt 'from [a] human point of view', guilt was never made into an operative element in the relationship. As he explained, 'I think that's not the thing you do'.[81] Our respondents also emphasized that guilt did not mean that the Netherlands—or Pronk—was blind to criticism levelled at the RPF. Pronk himself insisted that human rights violations by the RPF were discussed in the Netherlands and in international forums.[82] As Pronk explains, he continued to work 'very intensely' with the government and to trust Kagame, because he felt that the confidence gained from this support would allow him to 'put pressure' on the Rwandan government.[83] Several interviewees noted that once political commitment to the new government was pronounced, they saw it as their responsibility to support the Rwandan government despite any personal criticisms they may have had.[84] After Pronk shifted to another portfolio, high-level support waned somewhat. His replacement, Eveline Herfkens honoured Pronk's aid pledges, but proved more critical of the RPF. In contrast to Pronk, Herfkens was 'less interested and less personally attached to what happened in Rwanda'.[85] Many administrative actors nonetheless continued to see it as their job to support the government despite any misgivings they had.

Finally, our conversations with Canadian and Dutch officials hint at a number of factors influencing aid relations with Rwanda between 1994 and 2000 that go well beyond guilt. Rwanda's leadership appears to be particularly important, although not in the straightforward manner suggested by the myth. To start, donors' perception of a strong technocratic leadership on the part their Rwandan counterparts already existed quite early following the genocide,[86] while post-genocide references to Rwanda

79. Dutch Interview 6, 12 May 2017.
80. Dutch Interview 2, 20 April 2017. Pronk first visited Rwanda in May 1994. Douma, 'The Netherlands and Rwanda', p. 42.
81. Dutch Interview 4.
82. Interview with Jan Pronk.
83. *Ibid.*
84. Interview with Jan Pronk; Dutch Interview 4; Dutch Interview 6.
85. Dutch Interview 1, 30 March 2017. This is consistent with Uvin, *Aiding violence*.
86. Canadian Interview 4.

as an effective development partner in the media and to a large extent in academic literature only became common in the mid to late 2000s.[87] Most interviewees expressed amazement at how quickly the Rwandan administration organized itself following the genocide, especially at higher echelons.[88] As one Dutch participant explained: '[T]hey have their act together. They have their vision […] They know how to engage in a very mature way with Western leaders'.[89] The notion of an RPF 'vision for the future' came up regularly.

But political leadership in these early years also acted as a negative driver, especially in terms of human rights issues, dampening relations, at least in the Canadian case. One interviewee spoke of a Canadian 'discomfort' with the RPF government, another of Canada's 'caution'.[90] This tied into fears concerning security and especially the fear of renewed instability and violence, which loomed large in upper echelons at CIDA. Speaking about the need to keep an eye on what was going on a daily basis, a Canadian participant explained that '[he] had to spend more time on Rwanda than a typical country'.[91] The Dutch shared this concern about the return of violence. One interviewee even argued that Dutch interest in prisons-reform in Rwanda was partly driven by an interest in stability.[92]

Interviewees also pointed to other drivers, some very idiosyncratic, which influenced Canadian and Dutch aid relations to Rwanda during this time. On the Canadian side, a number of interviewees brought up the role of Major-General Dallaire. Dallaire's presence in Rwanda during the genocide led to Canada's military contributions. But, for many, it also translated in an obligation to contribute to reconstruction efforts. In the words of interviewee, 'there was a sense that we kind of owned Rwanda, unwillingly'.[93]

All Canadian interviewees working on Rwanda during this period also brought up Canada's engagement in Rwanda prior to the genocide as a justification for its continued interest in the country. Several Canadians occupying high-level posts in the mid- to late-1990s had worked in Rwanda early on in their careers, including CIDA Vice-President for Africa and the Middle East, from 1997 to 2001, Émile Gauvreau. This fostered a 'personal' interest in Rwanda, according to a former official.[94] These

87. Following 1994, the literature focused predominantly on the genocide as an explanatory factor. Discussion of Rwanda's success as a development partner became a regular feature towards the mid to late 2000s.
88. At lower echelons, a number of interviewees indicated that capacity was quite low.
89. Dutch Interview 4.
90. Canadian Interview 6; Canadian Interview 7.
91. Canadian Interview 11.
92. Dutch Interview 1.
93. Canadian Interview 5.
94. Canadian Interview 7.

pre-existing ties proved influential in keeping Canada engaged, but were also an irritant for policy development towards Rwanda. Passions were often high, leading to strong debate on how to engage with the Rwandan government. An ad hoc mechanism was even created to allow CIDA development officials to express their views without affecting policy-making.[95]

For Canadians, Congo also loomed large during the late 1990s. Rwanda's involvement in Congo proved to be a particularly tense episode with some CIDA officials situating the start of a shift in donor relations at this point. For them, this is when Canadian interest in Congo eclipsed interest in its neighbour.[96]

On the Dutch side, Pronk loomed so large in those years, that he was the single most important driver for the Netherlands—not unlike the involvement and interest often ascribed to Clare Short at the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) at the time. This is tied to his personal trajectory: his larger interest in Africa,[97] and the sense that he had made a mistake being caught off guard by violence in Rwanda in the early 1990s.[98] But, it is also tied to the relationships he built in Rwanda during and immediately after the genocide. Pronk injected a tremendous amount of political will into Dutch aid towards Rwanda, which was a blank slate in terms of Dutch intervention prior to 1994. According to an official at the time, 'the Minister of Foreign Affairs […] left it to Pronk, so it was very personalized decision-making'.[99] In this sense, Pronk's involvement in Dutch aid to Rwanda is the dominant, but also most idiosyncratic driver of the period. The impact this had on Dutch-Rwandan aid relations should not be downplayed.[100] This was far from a conventional relation between a development cooperation minister and a recipient country. Nonetheless, his actions need to be looked at in broader context. Pronk's engagement in Rwanda was part of his larger interest in humanitarian and conflict-affective states, as well as his advocacy for engaging in development cooperation, not just short-term humanitarian aid, in conflict-affected countries.[101]

95. Canadian Interview 5; Canadian Interview 6.
96. Canadian Interview 6.
97. Dutch Interview 1.
98. He explained that 'I thought I made a mistake. Yeah. So now I have to correct it by intensifying the relationships.' Interview with Jan Pronk.
99. Dutch Interview 7.
100. We thank Filip Reyntjens for this insight.
101. Pronk is well known for criticizing what he sees as a false dichotomy between war and peace. At the time, this was a radical take on development cooperation. Jan Pronk, *Development in conflict*. Speech for the Conference 'Healing the Wounds: Refugees, Reconstruction and Reconciliation' (UNHCR, Princeton, NJ, 1996), <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae68f3e0.html> (1 May 2018).

From 2001 onwards: a return to normalcy[102]

If there were non-standard elements in donor–Rwanda relations in the years following the genocide, this changed by the early 2000s for both the Netherlands and Canada. As a respondent explained, bilateral aid relations 'became more mainstream', more conventional.[103] Although Rwanda's involvement in Congo regularly rocked or perturbed development cooperation over this period, from 2001 onwards there was a marked (re)normalizing of aid giving.

All Canadian interviewees insisted on how standard development cooperation was in these later years, even calling it 'boring' or 'banal'.[104] The only source of exceptionalism in aid relations raised by Canadian participants during this period is the little room donors and development actors were given to manoeuvre and the surveillance they felt subjected to.[105] The major trend of the period was a marked decrease in Canadian interest in Rwanda. Some participants indicated that they felt little pressure from above in terms of aid matters with Rwanda because political interest had shifted elsewhere. Rwanda was added as one of CIDA's 25 countries of concentration under the Liberal government in power in 2005, but removed in 2009 from the list of countries of concentration under the subsequent Conservative government. By the 2010s, Canada's bilateral cooperation programme was so small that, according to an interviewee, 'it was more just a group of projects'.[106] The bilateral programme was abandoned altogether in 2012.[107]

In contrast, during these years, the Dutch Embassy in Kigali grew significantly in terms of staff and development funding.[108] Despite regular controversy, Rwanda has remained a partner country for the Netherlands since 1998.[109] In recent years, it has even become a top recipient of

102. Interviews were conducted in 2016–2017. The period covered by this section can therefore be presumed to be 2001–2016/early 2017.
103. Dutch Interview 4.
104. Canadian Interview 5; Canadian Interview 3, 20 October 2016.
105. Canadian Interview; Canadian Interview 8, 14 February 2017; Canadian Interview 10, 24 February 2017.
106. Canadian Interview 1. A notable exception is 2010 when aid increased following an important disbursement linked to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program. Email exchange with aid official, 24 November 2017.
107. Motives behind this termination are discussed below.
108. Dutch interview 5; Dutch interview 6.
109. Tweede Kamer, 'Brief Minister over Beleidsvoornemens voor Toepassing van Criteria Inzake Structurele Bilaterale Ontwikkelingshulp', Tweede Kamer Archives, 26, 200 V, no, 8, 1998–1999, 5 November 1998. See also Lau Schulpen, 'In the name of quality: Dutch development cooperation in the 1990s', in Paul Hoebink and Olav Stokke (eds), *Perspectives on European development cooperation: Policy and performance of individual donor countries and the EU* (Routledge, London, 2005), pp. 423–425 and Dutch Interview 6. On controversy, see below and IOB, 'The Netherlands' Africa policy 1998–2006: Evaluation of bilateral cooperation' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, no. 308, The Hague, 2008).

Dutch ODA. When asked specifically about whether they saw Rwanda as an exceptional recipient, Dutch officials were more likely than Canadians to believe in the exceptional nature of the country. However, when discussed by Dutch interviewees, exceptionalism was linked not only to Rwandan effectiveness, but also to the prominence of Rwanda in public debates in the Netherlands and political factors not directly tied to aid relations. An example of the latter is the arrest of Victoire Ingabire in 2010, a Rwandan political opponent and head of the political movement United Democratic Forces (FDU), who lived in the Netherlands for decades prior to returning to Rwanda the year of her arrest. Many used this as an illustration of exceptionalism in Rwanda's relation with the Netherlands, not in terms of aid but in terms of some of the difficult and pressing political realities to navigate with Rwanda.

For this period, notions of guilt were almost non-existent in Canadian interviews. One Canadian referred to it as the 'virtual reality' they operated in, a notion that circulated but had in reality no impact on actions taken regarding Rwanda.[110] The Canadians we spoke with also did not support the notion of a genocide credit during this period, though most saw the aid relation with Rwanda as complex, requiring a careful 'balanced approach'.[111] This translated into a selective and strategic engagement with the Rwandan government, as not to give the appearance of being in their pocket, while working behind the scene on governance issues in creative ways. Different domestic and international venues were used to bring up governance in a non-frontal or indirect way.[112] As an official explained: 'this is the way we tried [...] to keep it moving, but keep it real and keep it meaningful, so that it wasn't just whitewashing and co-opting the donor community from the government of Rwanda's side'.[113] In other words, while continuing to work with the Rwandan government, Canadian officials brought up governance concerns, but in less confrontational ways in the hopes of making progress on these matters. Given governance concerns, Canada was reluctant in the mid-2000s to provide budget support, but eventually gave some to targeted sectors.[114]

110. Canadian Interview 3.
111. Canadian Interview 9, 16 February 2017. Also Canadian Interview 8. Respondent 5 felt issues were sometimes overlooked.
112. Canadian Interview 1.
113. *Ibid.*
114. Budget support is a type of programme aid in which aid is transferred directly into the recipient country's treasury, with recipient countries' own allocation, procurement, and accounting structures managing the aid. While sector budget support is targeted toward specific sectors, general budget support gives the freedom to use the aid however the recipient country would like. See Stefan Koeberle, Zoran Stavreski, and JanWalliser (eds), *Budget support as more effective aid? Recent experiences and emerging lessons* (World Bank, Washington, DC, 2006).

Echoing a concern expressed by other donors, a Canadian interviewee noted that, because budget support goes directly into the coffers of the recipient, '[w]e were quite aware that money is fungible and could go to something else'.[115]

For the Dutch, the tendency was also not towards emotive responses, though Dutch participants were less likely to dismiss the notion of a genocide credit.[116] Most referred back to Pronk's time, however, illustrating how important Pronk's impact had been for Dutch engagement in Rwanda.[117] For Dutch participants, this guilt did not translate into a blank cheque. In fact, at the time there was significant domestic pressure to take a critical stance towards the RPF government. This pressure came from opposition parliamentarians and a strong advocacy group supported by prominent NGOs critical of what they saw as a relatively timid response by the Dutch government to human rights issues in Rwanda.[118] In 2000, the Dutch parliament reluctantly approved a structural bilateral aid partnership with Rwanda, but conditioned the programme on signing a memorandum of understanding that set out progress indicators for democratization and peace building.[119]

Rwanda only ever received sector budget support from the Netherlands, something that is often stressed in official communications.[120] The most recent aid strategy, for example, emphasizes that all modalities are deployed 'with a sufficient level of control and targeting'.[121] The Netherlands also suspended sector budget support on a number of occasions, including in 2012 in reaction to Rwanda's support to the M23 rebel group in Congo. Similar to Canada, respondents stressed that there was always an awareness of governance issues in Rwanda and internal discussions centred on how to 'balance things' in light of Rwanda's perceived economic performance.[122] Several Dutch participants suggested that a policy of continued support, despite governance issues, gave them leverage with the government. They also often expressed the sentiment that, despite real concerns, there currently is no alternative to Kagame. As an official explained: '[…] as long as there is no alternative for Kagame we continue supporting him […] we feel he is still the guy who is capable of leading the country to something more positive in the future.'[123]

115. Canadian Interview 8; Canadian Interview 10.
116. Dutch Interview 7.
117. e.g. Dutch Interview 2; Dutch Interview 10.
118. Dutch Interview 6; Dutch Interview 8, 12 May 2017.
119. MoUs were signed on 14 February 2002 and on 11 March 2005.
120. Dutch Interview 5; Dutch Interview 6.
121. Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 'Multi-annual strategic plan 2014–2017' (Kigali, 2014).
122. Dutch Interview 10, Dutch Interview 5.
123. Dutch Interview 4.

For both donors, Rwandan technocratic leadership continued to feature prominently as a driver. Most Canadian participants insisted that the Rwandan government's capacity to 'get things done' was key.[124] Rwanda was described as 'a development darling', 'serious' about aid.[125] But many warned that issues surrounding political leadership in Rwanda also dampened their country's aid relationship with Rwanda. Some mentioned forms of pressure deployed by the RPF government, such as the division of labour imposed by Kigali on donors.[126] Some felt limited space for debate in public settings but that there was more space for discussion in one-on-one meetings—a lobbying practice Dutch participants also judged relatively successful.

Dutch respondents also emphasized Rwanda's technocratic leadership. As one respondent put it: 'I'm sure that if development money wasn't spent the way it was spent under Kagame's leadership, there would have been less development aid available'.[127] Others spoke of Rwanda's track record, especially in the justice sector and on development indicators. One claimed that Rwanda is seen as the 'best pupil', operating along the lines set out by the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness.[128] Several interviewees were nonetheless careful to place these accomplishments in a larger context, noting parallels with other countries such as Singapore or Ethiopia, emphasizing that all three have seen economic growth at the hands of a strong state.[129]

As for Rwanda's role in terms of security in the region, for Canadians, this was predominantly understood in a negative light. The 2009 Country strategy spoke of Rwanda 'having been a central factor in the destabilization and conflict in the broader Great Lakes region'. It also, however, stressed Rwanda's ability to work with neighbours to address security issues.[130] Many Dutch participants saw, for their part, working with Rwanda as a potentially stabilizing element in the region. By 2012, however, the Netherlands had become increasingly concerned with Rwanda's involvement in Congo.

Other factors, many once again idiosyncratic, mattered for this period. Reinforced by the election of a Conservative government in 2006, by the mid-2000s, Canada embarked on a rationalizing exercise to make aid

124. Canadian Interview 1; Canadian Interview 3; Canadian Interview 5; Canadian Interview 7; Canadian Interview 8; Canadian Interview 9.
125. Canadian Interview 1; Canadian Interview 3.
126. Republic of Rwanda, 'Division of labour in Rwanda', Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Kigali, October 2013. <http://www.devpartners.gov.rw/fileadmin/templates/documents/DOL_Oct_2013.pdf> (12 June 2018).
127. Dutch Interview 2, 20 April 2017.
128. Dutch Interview 10.
129. Dutch Interview 2; Dutch Interview 5.
130. CIDA, '*Rwanda country strategy 2.0*' (Canadian International Development Agency, Ottawa, 2009).

more efficient. Many respondents insisted that the decision to close Rwanda's bilateral programme had nothing to do with Rwanda, but followed a political decision to narrow down Canada's countries of concentration based on political interest, economic proximity, etc.[131] This rationalizing exercise was not strictly Canadian. Globally, there was a trend towards greater geographic concentration. According to several respondents, however, the push towards concentration also reflected the Canadian government's own interest in rationalization and cost cutting: Canada was proposing a much narrower understanding of aid effectiveness than the Paris Agenda, one focused on making efficient use of their aid dollars rather than embracing a new, more equitable international paradigm for aid.[132] Rwanda may have been the victim of this trend.

Many also insisted on the banal bureaucratic realities of the period: Canada remained in Rwanda in part to see programmes through. This may have even been, according to one participant, at the heart of the decision to have Rwanda on the initial list of countries of concentration: a simple grandfathering rather than a show of interest.[133] Many also noted CIDA specific dynamics, including a new Vice-President for Africa in the mid-2000s who did not know the region well and thematic reorientations based on Canadian interests of the day. The latter included a switch from a focus on local governance to food security, which impacted Canadian programing in Rwanda.

Domestic determinants also mattered in the Dutch case. With approval of cooperation programmes resting in part with the Parliament, political opposition and civil society regularly used criticism of the RPF government to critique a particular minister or the Dutch government. One interviewee explained that '[i]n the Netherlands, they used Rwanda as a stick to hit the minister'.[134] Indeed, all Dutch participants for this period brought up the influence of Dutch politics on development cooperation with Rwanda. Not unlike the Canadian case, many also explained changes in policy in light of changing Dutch preferences. One pointed to the recent shift towards economic development as a reflection of the Netherlands' new interests;[135] another gave an example where a programme in Rwanda 'became the victim' of changes at headquarters that refocused Dutch aid towards other priorities.[136] The same official pointed

131. Canadian Interview 3; Canadian Interview 10; Canadian Interview 5; Canadian Interview 8.
132. Stephen Brown, 'Aid effectiveness and the framing of new Canadian aid initiatives', in Duane Bratt and Christopher J. Kukucha (eds), *Readings in Canadian foreign policy: Classic debates and new ideas*, 3rd Edition (Oxford University Press, Toronto, 2015), p. 469.
133. Canadian Interview 8; Canadian Interview 5.
134. Dutch Interview 6. Also Dutch Interview 4.
135. Dutch Interview 1; Dutch Interview 2.
136. Dutch Interview 9.

to the change in government in 2013 in the Netherlands, which he linked to the decision to produce a new strategic plan regarding Rwanda before the official end of the previous one.

Much like in the Canadian case, Dutch participants also pointed to global drivers. The most obvious were international shifts in aid practices, with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness playing a key role in the Dutch's stance on supporting the government.[137] Others tied recent scepticism regarding budget support not simply to the RPF government's questionable governance practices, but also to the changing international tide regarding this modality and the volatility it entails when used to sanction recipients for failing to implement promised reforms or for problematic practices like corruption.

Overall, mirroring our quantitative comparisons, the Dutch and Canadian cases suggest that the story of aid to Rwanda has always been more complicated then blanket exceptionalism, open wallets, little oversight, and guilt as a driver. The nature of bilateral engagement in Rwanda clearly changed over time. There are patterns tied to a first period, from 1994 to 2000, and a second period beginning around 2001: the informality of an emergency phase, followed by a renormalization, indeed a rebureaucratization, of the relationship starting in 2001. These patterns are shared by both donors. At the same time, dynamics during these periods do not straightforwardly reflect key assumptions behind the exceptionalism myth, with a key role played by other drivers, including idiosyncratic factors, suggesting a complex set of motives behind donor-Rwanda relations.

Conclusion

The idea that Rwanda has benefited or benefits from an exceptional relationship with its foreign aid donors in the form of a genocide credit is a widely held assumption. It is an assumption, however, that has long remained untested. We have sought to evaluate the nature of donor–Rwanda relations and the salience of emotive drivers in aid giving to Rwanda.

Our findings call into question the myth of exceptionalism. In terms of actual aid dollars received, Rwanda does receive more than the average least developed or sub-Saharan country. But this was already the case *before* the genocide. And, when compared to other countries that participated in the HIPC initiative or to countries classified as fragile and conflict affected, Rwanda fares quite typically. Our case studies of aid relations with two average size donors, Canada and the Netherlands, also

137. Dutch Interview 2.

provide little support for the exceptionalism story. Instead, they suggest that donors often operate informally in the face of major crises. This can temporarily open up space for political interests. However, over time, relations appear to (re-)normalize. This helps to contextualize roles ascribed to individuals such as Bill Clinton and Clare Short, or in our cases Jan Pronk and to some extent David Kilgour. But more broadly, it shows that donors in Rwanda have always operated according to a complex set of motives, many of them rather idiosyncratic. Guilt or emotional drivers were never the only factors behind aid giving, even immediately after the genocide. And, although they did not necessarily act on them, donors were always aware of political governance issues, preferring instead to work with the government in order to maintain access.

In this way, Rwanda is actually quite a 'typical' aid recipient. Rwanda has a unique historical trajectory, which has influenced aid giving in the country. But, this is true of all aid recipients. Aid relations are messy, complicated, and influenced by a number of variables at both the recipient and donor-level. Aid relations are always a reflection of donor specific dynamics and a diplomatic-development 'dance' between donors and partners.[138]

More than a story about Rwanda, the myth of exceptionalism may therefore be more telling of an academic–practitioner gap and to a lesser extent a journalist–practitioner gap regarding aid relations. Journalists and academics are the main producers and promoters of aid mythology with regards to Rwanda, but how aptly do they understand and reflect the realities of the agents behind aid relations? By focusing solely on Rwandan aid relations, academics assume that certain features of the Rwandan case are unique, neglecting broader aid patterns across priority groups and basic aid patterns acknowledged in the aid literature. By starting with the assumption of a genocide credit and the leeway it entails, the myth reflects a misunderstanding of practitioners' constraints in terms of managing security issues and political transgressions, while maintaining access. This is a challenge not just in Rwanda, but also in many other developing countries. Practitioners cannot afford to be the critical voice academics are, lest they be cut off from the countries and partner populations they mean to support. Diplomacy and development are always, in the words of our respondents, a 'balancing act'. Notions such as a blank cheque or turning a blind eye fail to account for all the non-frontal balancing that often goes on between donors and recipients.

This does not mean we ought to condone donor actions on account of the difficult relations they must navigate. It is academics' role to assess and evaluate the impact of donor behaviour, particularly when their

138. Swedlund, *The development dance*.

practices may embolden authoritarian trajectories. There is a risk that over the long run continued 'balancing' may be seen as an accommodating stance towards the enshrinement of authoritarianism, further limiting donors' ability to engage their partner constructively on political governance matters. That said, labels such as exceptionalism and the genocide credit tell only part of the story. To better understand how aid practices contribute—often unwillingly—to authoritarian trajectories we need to understand the complex, sometimes idiosyncratic and contradictory strategies and motives practitioners deploy in the face of challenging partnerships. We need to look at what dynamics and realities lurk behind the myth in order to identify realistic and effective points of contact and pressure in challenging aid contexts such as Rwanda. We see the latter as a key agenda for future research, both in Rwanda and in studies of development cooperation more broadly.