

POLITICS OF VICTIMHOOD:
THE RWANDAN PATRIOTIC FRONT AND
POST-GENOCIDE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION



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For William O. McCoy,
the greatest Tar Heel I will ever know.

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Introduction

Some of the best views in Kigali are from the balconies of the Rwandan parliamentary building, which is perched atop one of the highest hills in a city full of slopes and summits. Elevated above the motorcycles, street vendors, and bustling crowds, it is a rare pocket of stillness in Kigali's ubiquitous commotion. On a hot, November afternoon, I stand on a balcony here and watch the city vibrate beneath me. Construction cranes dot the landscape, policemen keep hordes of vehicles moving along well-kempt roads, and billboards advertise a national talent competition held in Amahoro stadium. "Amahoro" is the Kinyarwanda word for peace.

Yet, when I look directly over the edge of the balcony I see that my fingers have been resting on a wall pock-marked by shrapnel explosions from the 1994 genocide. In the distance Amahoro stadium is painted vibrantly in the colors of the Rwandan flag, but fresh paint does not trick people into forgetting its former life as the UN's meager genocide-response headquarters. The airport's runway, perhaps the flattest terrain in view, will always be known as the site above which a president's plane was shot down and a genocide was subsequently unleashed. The horrors of that period are inextricably etched in Rwanda's landscape. They are also etched into the essence of every Rwandan.

In April of 1994, about 800,000 Tutsis and their loyal allies were slaughtered by 200,000 of their Hutu neighbors, relatives, and friends in the swiftest genocide of the century.¹ Seventy-five percent of the population lost a close relative. After one-hundred days of terror, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a well-organized rebel force of Tutsi refugees, ended the slaughter and took control. With the victory of the RPF, two million

¹ "Genocide in Rwanda." United Human Rights Council.
http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/genocide/genocide_in_rwanda.html.

Hutus fled in fear of ethnic revenge on the part of the new government.² This fear has slowly begun to dissipate, but interethnic mistrust lingers. Between 250,000 and 500,000 women had been raped during the genocide, 67% of whom had been infected with HIV, and 75,000 children were orphaned.³ Twenty-two years later, the largest armed group in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a band of stalwart genocide perpetrators still seeking revenge against the RPF and stoking ethnic tensions. This is a snapshot of the population that the Rwandan government, still controlled by the RPF, has been attempting to weave into a nation with a single identity for the past twenty-two years.

The parliamentarian I met with that day on the balcony, Edouard, laid out the complexity of creating a unified, non-ethnic identity in post-genocide Rwanda as he discussed the challenges that will come with raising his future children. He is a Hutu married to a Tutsi, an atypical union he says has only happened about ten-thousand times since the genocide.

“My children are going to be half-Rwandan and half-confused because their parents are mixed. I hope their children are three-quarters Rwandan and one-quarter confused, and maybe in three generations we will only be Rwandans.”

Like the Rwandan landscape, fresh Rwandan faces cannot mask the haunting effects of the genocide. Even in three generations, the genocide will likely still be engrained in the people.

The RPF government is publicly engaging in the politics of identity as it simultaneously tries to expunge old, ethnic identities and construct a new, national one. At its crux, identity politics happen when actors define an in-group and use that cohesion to gain power or benefits over another group or groups. In the case of ethnic identity

² "Rwanda, Genocide, Hutu, Tutsi, Mass Execution, Ethnic Cleansing, Massacre, Human Rights, Victim Remembrance, Education, Africa." UN News Center. <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/education/rwandagenocide.shtml>.

³ "Statistics: Rwandan Genocide." Survivors Fund. <http://survivors-fund.org.uk/resources/rwandan-history/statistics/>

politics, it is an attempt to gain power at the expense of an out-group of a different ethnicity.⁴ Though the RPF publicizes itself as a government for all Rwandans and strongly denies that it is engaging in ethnic politics, its party's interests frequently align with Tutsi interests. It's genesis as a Tutsi rebel force and its policies that seem to favor this group lead many to see it as an arm of Tutsi power first and foremost, and then secondly as the Rwandan government. Under the RPF, national unification and inclusive identity formation will only happen if they feel that the Tutsi and the party itself are one-hundred percent protected.

Edouard heads the youth branch of the RPF's national identity initiative, epitomized by its motto, "*Ndi umunyarwanda*," "I am Rwandan." Like other leaders of the government, he concurs that most people directly affected by the genocide cannot completely disengage from ethnic identification or animosity, but he invests idealism and optimism for the country in younger generations. The government aims to prevent as much genocidal trickle-down as possible from seeping into younger generations in order to protect the population from future ethnic violence. Edouard, and others like him, hope that if they are proactive in re-educating the children, maybe in three generations, with his great-grandchildren, the phrase "I am Rwandan" will replace "I am Hutu" or "I am Tutsi." The RPF hopes they can stifle ethnicity and opposition until this education is complete.

The origins, evolution, and politics of Rwandan identities have been manipulated over centuries in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. In Rwanda, Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa groups are not clearly defined ethnicities, they better resemble cultural groups, but because the literature widely describes them as ethnic, this paper will do so as well.

⁴ Mary Bernstein and Verta Taylor. "Identity Politics." *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, September 14, 2013. doi:10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm104.

Historically, Tutsis have made up approximately 14% of the population, Hutus about 85%, and Twas comprise the remaining 1%.⁵ Since independence, Rwanda has developed a cyclical pattern of power reversals as Hutus and Tutsis have alternately enjoyed authority, typically at the expense of the other. Part of this cycle has been using periods of ethnic victimhood to justify seizing political rule and enacting vengeful policies against the other group. While intragroup unity has remained a strong component of individuals' identities, an intergroup sense of unified "Rwandaness" has never taken root, largely due to feelings of victimization at the hands of the other. These interethnic roots are what the government is publicly trying to implant in future generations.

Unfortunately, the RPF's quest to create this new identity is fraught with contradictions and paradoxes that perpetuate issues of ethnic divisionism. To create a unified identity, the government completely dominates the way Rwanda's history is told, all public discourse around ethnicity, and the language people can use to discuss their identities. Its critics are violently suppressed and fear is one of the main tools that the RPF uses to induce cooperation from the population. The ethnic implications of the RPF's political strategy have not yet had time to completely unfurl, but inklings of its ramifications are coming to light as the first generation born after the genocide emerges into adulthood. It appears that fear is a more pervasive consequence than a total Rwandan identity transformation.

While identity is an ever-evolving concept, this moment in the story of Rwandan identity is unique. It is dynamic. The government's strict interpretation of Rwandan history and national identity frequently run counter to family histories and messages about ethnicity that Rwandans receive at home. The RPF is not widely seen as the inclusive party working to unify people that it tries to portray domestically, there is substantial

⁵ "Rwanda, Genocide, Hutu, Tutsi..."

political suppression and fear that Rwandans associate with it. Without a safe space to explore the vital disparities surrounding their Rwandan identities and cultural backgrounds, a generation is being brought up mired in dissonance. The government's biggest shortcoming is the belief that if they wait long enough, stick to their black and white interpretation of the genocide, and force people to adopt their agenda, violent antagonisms of the past can be buried in the ground with the older generations. They fail to realize the intergenerational effects of the genocide, the reminders of ethnicity that cannot be silenced, and the contradictions they are actively creating by continuing a political discourse of victimhood. It is unclear whether they will be successful in redefining Rwandaness, but it will take more than time, a new history curriculum, and a strong arm.



Chapter 1: Cycles of Victimhood



Since Rwandan independence in 1962, identifying as the victim of ethnic aggression has been a prevailing political strategy amongst Hutu and Tutsi leaders. The Hutu revolutionaries, who first used the strategy in 1959, discovered that it was an easy way to mobilize oppressed masses, quiet foreign critics, and get away with policies that were blatantly discriminatory or hostile. Through the genocide Hutu leaders preached that unless a hard stance was adopted against the Tutsi, Hutus would all be forced back into the subservience they had historically suffered at the hands of Tutsis and colonizers alike. Subsequently, a growing body of Tutsi refugees from Rwanda was accumulating outside of the country and compiling their own chronicle of victimization at the hands of these radical Hutu politicians. After Hutu fear-mongering escalated to the genocide, Tutsis were clearly the new victims of ethnic aggression and the RPF leaders took their turn capitalizing on the political benefits of victimhood.

Today the RPF claims to be eradicating ethnic divisions in the population, which have always existed within of an unequal power paradigm, but still plays the victim card when it is politically beneficial. In a May 2011 speech, Paul Kagame took this approach,

"I don't think anybody out there in the media, UN, human rights organizations, has any moral right whatsoever to level any accusations against me or against Rwanda. Because, when it came to the problems facing Rwanda, and the Congo, they were all useless."⁶

The contradictory stance of posing as a victimized group, while in the midst of trying to erase the divisions that created this reality, has created a confusing narrative of identity. Rwandans do not feel that they are able to acknowledge obvious ethnic tensions, but they live under a government legitimizing itself with the possibility for potential future ethnic

⁶William Wallis. "Lunch with Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda." Slate. May 15, 2011. http://www.slate.com/articles/life/ft/2011/05/lunch_with_paul_kagame.html.

conflicts. The RPF uses Tutsi victimhood to keep itself in power as it dictates a new agenda for Rwanda's history and struggles with identity. To understand the Rwandan Patriotic Front and the country today, it is important to understand how Rwanda developed a political culture of using the identity of "victim" as capital.



Empowered Victims

World War Two indirectly transformed the course of Rwandan history by flipping the balance of power in favor of the Hutu majority for the first time. Much of the change was spurred by a new European sensitivity toward oppressed populations, at this time the Hutu. This sensitivity rose simultaneously with a new, global cash economy, also spurred by the war. Established cultural and economic norms in Rwanda, such as patronage systems favoring the Tutsi, unraveled and much more individualistic systems took root. These changes afforded Hutus fresh social and financial opportunities that had never existed. While Belgian disruption of pre-colonial Rwandan society had initially been crushing for Hutus, after World War Two they saw various ways around subjugation and embraced them, with the eventual result being a revolution.⁷ Frustrated with colonial oppression, Hutus readily capitalized on anything that changed their conditions.

The Hutu population took to new economic endeavors and opportunities much more quickly than many of their Tutsi counterparts who floated on Belgian salaries or favor. Tens of thousands of Hutus left Rwanda for the neighboring states of Zaire and Uganda to work for cash.⁸ Hutu emigrations started in 1924 after the Belgians' loathed introduction of compulsory labor and they escalated rapidly as gainful employment

⁷ Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 42.

⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 108.

opportunities began to spring up.⁹ The Hutu who left Rwanda were employed by European contractors on plantations or mining operations. At home Hutus had been stuck in rigid economic systems that indefinitely bound them in unfair contracts with Tutsi chiefs who exploited their labor for the benefit of the colonial state. *Ubugake*, the historical Rwandan patronage system between Tutsi patrons and Hutu clients, was one of the key institutions undermined by the cash economy as many Hutus began to seek means of employment elsewhere. These newly empowered men would form a counter élite during the first decade after World War Two.

The Hutu counter élite of rose to the surface during the 1950s, speaking out against their Belgian colonizers and Tutsi countrymen's discrimination and prejudice. Some Rwandan Hutus who had emigrated received degrees at foreign universities, where they read manifestos by contemporary revolutionaries and were exposed to democracy and socialism. These men were joined in openly dissenting from the status quo by the handful of Hutus that had been able to squeak out of Rwandan universities.¹⁰ The other important segment of this new counter élite was made up of Hutu graduates from Catholic seminary schools. Adding fuel to their fires was the severe underemployment and discrimination in the job market that this small group of Hutu men faced upon their graduations.

During the Second World War the composition of Rwanda's Catholic, European missionaries underwent a sizeable transformation with consequences that decidedly favored the Hutu. The Belgian priests coming in were no longer wealthy or traditional. They began to come from lower class backgrounds and many were Flemish, a Dutch-speaking minority group in Belgium that had felt persecuted against by the French-

⁹ Mamdani, 110.

¹⁰ Ibid., 112.

speaking Walloons for centuries.¹¹ These Flemish missionaries were sympathetic to the plight of the Hutu and, especially after the Second World War, sensitive to widespread language of the Tutsi being a “superior race.”¹² These priests empowered educated Hutus in their midst to begin the publication of *Kinyamateka*, a Church periodical that spread egalitarian ideas and spoke out for illiterate Hutus who could not.¹³

A pivotal moment was the March 1957 publication in *Kinyamateka* of the “Bahutu Manifesto” by nine leaders of the Hutu counter élite, including one who would become the first president of independent Rwanda, Grégoire Kayibanda. This set the stage for the next four decades of Rwandan identity politics. It called for a double liberation of the “Hutu from both the ‘Hamites’ and the ‘Bazungu’ colonization.”¹⁴ This referred to the Tutsis and the whites. The core of this document is rooted in perceived racial differences between Rwandans, showing how ingrained the colonizers’ messages of irreconcilable dissimilarities between the groups had become in the population. “The problem is basically that of the political monopoly of one race, the Mututsi. In the present circumstances, this political monopoly is turned into an economic and social monopoly,” the manifesto reads.¹⁵ The document expressly played into the politics of victimhood as Hutus sought to leverage their plight to rally members of their in-group against the Tutsi.

Political parties soon formed along ethnic lines within the colonial state as the tide of African independence movements reached Rwanda, much to the rising alarm of the Belgians who sensed their power slipping. Tutsis, especially their elite accustomed to power, refused to watch the Hutu rise up quietly. In June of 1957, Tutsi politicians

¹¹ Robert Mnookin and Alain Verbeke, “Persistent nonviolent conflict with no reconciliation: The Flemish and Walloons in Belgium”. *Law and Contemporary Problems* 72 (2009): 151. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40647745>.

¹² Mamdani, 113.

¹³ Prunier, 45.

¹⁴ Mamdani, 116.

¹⁵ Prunier, 45.

produced a document stating that it was “the custom of the country” for the Tutsi to be in power, going further to cite the pre-colonial conquest of the Hutu by their Tutsi ancestors as justification for the status quo. Two Tutsi political parties formed in response to the increasingly ethnically-charged environment of 1957, one militant and one more moderate. The lifespans of these parties would be cut short in the future because they were overpowered by the politically mobilizing Hutus majority who also organized into a number of their own parties.¹⁶ These groups were crude political parties in the sense that they did not work toward diplomatic change, but poised themselves to fight one another.

What has been called the Social Revolution took place in Rwanda in 1959 when the balance of power was unequivocally shifted in favor of Hutus for the first time by the Belgian state itself. That fall, tensions between the various political parties and the ethnic groups they represented were physically embodied by the attack of a Hutu political leader by Tutsis.¹⁷ Around the country Hutus took swift revenge, killing at least 200 Tutsi chiefs and sub-chiefs who were working for the colonial state. Belgian administrators rapidly made the political decision to support a new Hutu government under their colonial authority. Their other option seemed to be assuming the risk of losing total control in a long-term conflict against eighty-five percent of the population. Over three hundred Tutsi chiefs and sub-chiefs were replaced by the Belgians with Hutus and the old military was scrapped, replaced with a representative force of 85% Hutu soldiers and 15% Tutsi soldiers.¹⁸ A Hutu political party, PARMEHUTU, emerged victoriously in the first national elections and enjoyed the support of the Belgians.

The late 1950s and early 1960s were a terrible time to be a Tutsi in Rwanda, especially in the northwest where the Hutus most drastically outnumbered them. Periods

¹⁶ Mamdani, 121.

¹⁷ Ibid., 123.

¹⁸ Ibid., 124.

of violence, economic discrimination, and even pogroms plagued the Tutsi population, while Hutu perpetrators enjoyed virtual impunity from the new Hutu chiefs. Seeing that their days in Rwanda were numbered, the Belgians declined to intervene on behalf of the suffering Tutsis because they felt that a Hutu alliance could prolong their relationship with Rwanda more than a Tutsi alliance could. From a population of 2.7 million Rwandan Tutsis, about 130,000 were exiled refugees by 1963.¹⁹ The political benefits of perceived victimhood had become clear to Hutus, and future leaders in Rwanda would also take note.



Hutu Power

On July 1, 1962 Rwanda became independent of the Belgians, who had voluntarily left after realizing they could no longer afford to maintain the colony. Grégoire Kayibanda, an author of the “Bahutu Manifesto” and member of PARMEHUTU, became president. The number of Tutsis in exile was swelling and in December of 1963 they launched a large, but poorly organized, attack from Burundi that almost reached Kigali.²⁰ Kayibanda’s young government and their supporters swiftly retaliated, murdering over 10,000 Tutsis and executing all Tutsis that still held government positions in a matter of weeks. This firmly consolidated Hutu control of Rwanda and made it clear that there was not going to be ethnic inclusion in government. While the Tutsi were cleaning their wounds, the Kayibanda government, later referred to as the First Republic, was recreating an archetypically Rwandan, centralized hierarchy. The only difference was that for the first time it was not being run by the Tutsi.

The Kayibanda regime and the Belgians continued a mutually beneficial relationship after independence. As opposed to most other parts of Africa, many Hutus

¹⁹ Prunier, 52.

²⁰ Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 64.

viewed their former colonizers as their liberators. In this case it was liberation from oppression by the Tutsi.²¹ This shows the depth of the Belgian's racialization of Hutu and Tutsi identities in Rwanda; Hutus believed the Belgians had freed them from centuries of subjugation by a foreign, Tutsi invader. The cruel genius of Belgian colonization was that Tutsis were the faces Hutus saw carrying out racist policies, the Belgians could brush their culpability off. Because the Tutsi were considered a racially distinct group with a foreign origin, as the Belgians had taught Rwandans, they were given no place in Rwandan politics or legitimate claim to reside in the country.²²

Unrest continued to escalate within the country throughout the 1960s and early 1970s as ethnic tensions were catalyzed by a conflict in neighboring Burundi, which has the same ethnic makeup. In Burundi, 200,000 Hutus were massacred by a Tutsi-dominated army.²³ In reaction, Rwandan Tutsis were legally barred by Kayibanda's government from essentially all public institutions and a growing number of private ones. Broadcasts over state-sponsored Radio Rwanda began to call for a larger, more vengeful "solution" to the Tutsi problem. The violence in Burundi was portrayed as the inevitable consequence of Tutsi power and Rwandan Hutus were made to feel that they would be massacred like their Burundian neighbors had been if it was allowed.

Meanwhile, most Hutus felt that not enough economic progress had been made under Kayibanda's government- the majority of them were still destitute and uneducated despite the political climate being in their favor. As frustration grew, a major in the army, Juvenal Habyarimana, attracted a following of disappointed Hutus with his promises of national development. Habyarimana easily overthrew Kayibanda in 1973 with a bloodless coup, establishing his presidency and what would be known as the Second Republic.²⁴

²¹ Gourevitch, 59.

²² Mamdani, 134.

²³ Ibid., 137.

²⁴ Prunier, 61.

After the unmitigated discrimination of Kayibanda's regime, the Second Republic seemed a bit less harsh to the Tutsi. They were brought back into the realm of being "Rwandan," no longer referred to as a race of foreign invaders, but as an ethnic minority that had once possessed too much unfair privilege and needed to be regulated. Racial discrimination was turned into ethnic discrimination as they were re-included as legitimate members of the nation, but subjected to severe restrictions. Rigid quota systems were put in place in every public sphere, Tutsis could constitute no more than 15% of any sector, but often made up far less than this proportion.²⁵ These quotas also applied to public universities, the only universities in the country. By recognizing the Tutsi as a legitimate minority, the Second Republic was able to keep critics outside the country from protesting and create seemingly legitimate parameters for their minimal inclusion.

While Habyarimana's policies seemed somewhat moderate to outsiders, they infuriated many Hutus who did not believe that they went far enough in protecting them. On the other hand, his policies simultaneously enraged Tutsis who thought they were egregious. There were a slew of coup attempts by Hutus who thought Habyarimana was "pro-Tutsi" for his policies and, at the same time, a host of Tutsi voices making the reverse argument from outside of the country.²⁶ Political pressure mounted against the president to allow formal organization of opposing political parties, banned after his coup, and in 1991 he felt forced to allow their introduction. The parties that emerged within the country represented diverse Hutu opinions on the issue of ethnic inclusion of Tutsis, but the only formal Tutsi organizations rested outside of Rwanda.²⁷

Habyarimana was paralyzed between the loud demands of the Tutsi diaspora to be readmitted into Rwanda under satisfactory conditions and the absolute refusal of the Hutu

²⁵ Prunier, 75.

²⁶ Mamdani, 149.

²⁷ Ibid., 154.

majority within the country to allow this. Since 1959 Tutsis had been emigrating in trickles and bursts, and by 1990 there were between 400,000 and 600,000 in exile all over the world.²⁸ Most of them were in refugee camps in Uganda, Tanzania, and Zaire, where they loudly demanded access to and more rights within Rwanda. Facing additional pressure from the refugees' host nations, Habyarimana knew he could not refuse the Tutsis' readmittance forever, but he also knew that if he allowed the Tutsi to return to Rwanda it would further infuriate his flagging base of Hutu support. This inescapable issue of Tutsi repatriation would lead to a civil war and its escalation to the genocide.

In reaction to whispers about the growing threat of Tutsi Power from the refugee camps of Uganda, Hutu Power movements accelerated and radicalized within Rwanda. The leading Hutu Power movement was birthed from the most extreme wing of Habyarimana's own party.²⁹ They were known as the *akazu*, "little house," and were interestingly led by Habyarimana's wife and her brothers outside of the president's control. Habyarimana was too afraid of his party's radicals and his wife to rein them in; he soon became the subject of national derision for his weakness. The Radio Libre des Milles Collines (RTML) became one of the most important tools of the Hutu Power movement, incessantly broadcasting hate speech to the largely illiterate population of Hutus. They told them that they must either join their brothers in the fight against the Tutsi or would once again be subjugated and exploited if Tutsis returned from exile to Rwanda. Many Hutu fell under the belief that they only had one choice: "to kill or be killed."³⁰



²⁸ Mamdani, 161.

²⁹ Ibid., 191.

³⁰ Ibid., 191.

Abatabazi

Across the border in Uganda, the current government began its life as a Rwandan Tutsi rebel force with the mission of bringing their people back to their homeland. The government's reputation as a Tutsi rebel-force-turned-political-party is perhaps one of its greatest burdens today. No one in Rwanda forgets that Paul Kagame's political legitimacy and widespread support was originally staked in his position as the leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, or in other words as the savior of the Tutsi. During the genocide the RPF referred to itself with the Kinyarwanda word, *abatabazi*, literally translating to "savior."³¹ This is something that Kagame and his party have simultaneously fought against and embraced since 1994, playing the victim and the unifier at different times. Kagame is a political entrepreneur with a streak of belligerence, he is decidedly finished with watching other people and, especially, other nations make severe blunders with Rwanda's soul.

The RPF was born in Ugandan refugee camps where scores of Tutsi youths were growing restless, unable to assimilate into local populations and legally barred from returning to their homeland by Habyarimana's government. Kagame was one of the restless Tutsi youths who spent the vast majority of his young life in limbo as a refugee in Uganda. Uganda was going through great political turmoil during the 1970s and 1980s and many young Tutsi men found an outlet for their anger in Ugandan political guerilla groups. Kagame joined one headed by Yoweri Museveni and quickly proved himself as an invaluable asset. After about fifteen years of fighting, Museveni won power and sent Kagame, now a key advisor, to the American military college at Fort Leavenworth.³² With his experience in guerilla battle and his American military training, Kagame was finally poised to do what he had dreamed of since he was a child- lead tens of thousands of Tutsi

³¹ Rwanda: Institute for Research and Dialogue of Peace. *A Time for Peace*. Kigali, 2010.

³² Stephen Kinzer, *A Thousand Hills: Rwanda's Rebirth and the Man Who Dreamed It*. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 64.

fighters back into Rwanda and reclaim their place. So he formed the RPF with other refugees and they became a remarkably well-oiled army training in the Ugandan bush.

In 1990 the Rwandan Patriotic Front began a civil war with Habyarimana's government because they saw him stalling on the issue of Tutsi repatriation and were under intense pressure to leave their refugee camps, but offered no other place to go. The RPF additionally feared that escalating Hutu antagonism toward Tutsis within Rwanda, emanating from the *akazu* and RTLM broadcasts, was becoming alarming. After three years of guerilla fighting between the RPF and the government, the Arusha Peace Accords were introduced by the United Nations in 1993 as an attempt to bring about a ceasefire and the safe reintegration of Tutsi refugees, politically and socially.³³ Both sides had the political incentive to show up to Arusha because they feared being labeled as an aggressor while the international community was watching. However, neither the RPF nor Habyarimana's government believed in the process's efficacy. They remained ready for conflict, entering a wary stand-off as they went through the motions of negotiating.

On April 6, 1994 unknown forces shot down the plane of President Habyarimana, who was returning from Arusha after another round of peace talks. The most likely culprits were the *akazu* who were unwilling to accept the direction the peace accords were headed, toward a power sharing agreement with the RPF.³⁴ The genocide commenced within hours of the plane crash, showing that it had been planned long before the actual violence began. The rapidly erected roadblocks, systematic Tutsi home invasions, and dispersal of weapons were in no way spontaneous. The world was startled by the violence's bureaucratic nature and horrific efficiency, which sustained a kill rate of about 8,000 people per day for 100 days. The end of the Tutsi massacres and the civil war, which had been ongoing in spurts since 1990, was brought about by the military victory of the RPF

³³ Mamdani, 192.

³⁴ Kinzer, 139.

who realized the outside world was not going to intervene to aid their Tutsi brothers and sisters. Here begins the RPF's transformation into a political party and their quest to redefine Rwandan identity.

Tackling the reality of serving a primarily Hutu population has been Kagame's government's largest test, and the reason they chose to call themselves "the Government of National Unity and Reconciliation." Intentionally or not, they sent mixed signals on the issue of ethnic inclusion from the outset. Upon the victory of the RPF in 1994, two million Hutus fled into neighboring countries out of fear that Kagame and his still-growing rebel force would carry out a revenge genocide. Ninety percent of those who fled were innocent, but so many innocent Tutsis had been murdered during the genocide that a lack of culpability did not secure confidence in anyone.

A crisis quickly arose that forced the RPF to publicly address an issue infused with ethnic implications. Refugee camps in Uganda, Tanzania, and Zaire were absolutely unequipped to handle the influx of needy Hutu refugees after the genocide. In Western Rwanda and the Goma province of Eastern Zaire a massive cholera epidemic broke out in internally displaced persons' settlements and refugee camps on July 20, 1994 because of the toxic conditions. It spread like wildfire and in a span of two weeks it was taking the lives of 3,000 Hutus per day.³⁵ Some in the international media construed this cholera outbreak as a "genocide of the Hutus," which the displaced Hutu Power leaders quickly embraced to gain international sympathy. These former genocidaires tried to portray the RPF as intentionally neglecting to help Hutus. The secretary-general of Médecins Sans Frontières, Alain Destexhe, who had been working in Rwanda throughout the genocide thoroughly rebuked this double-genocide claim saying,

"This comparison, which one can see widely used in the press, puts on the same plane things which have nothing to do with each other. Through this confusion the

³⁵ Prunier, 302.

original, singular and exemplary nature of the genocide is denied and the guilt of the perpetrators becomes diluted in the general misery.”³⁶

In a brutal twist of irony, the misinformed media did a better job of covering the crisis in the Zairean refugee camps than they did in the previous one-hundred days of Tutsi massacres. Since the day the genocide began, not a single American troop set foot in Rwanda, but after a week or two of media coverage on the refugee crisis in Zaire there were 4,000 American troops distributing aid.³⁷ The RPF and Rwandan Tutsis were incensed by this. The world had neglected them during the genocide, but scrambled to help the fleeing Hutus and the genocidaires in their midst. As the RPF actively fought against the growing perception of a double-genocide, their anger was interpreted by Hutus as asking the world to let them rot in the camps. Kagame’s overwhelmed new government missed an opportunity to publicly show that it was a government for all Rwandans during this crisis, but with the genocide still so fresh there was little he could practically have done.

Kagame understood that making himself the new president right away would be too controversial, as he had been the most public figure in the Tutsi rebel army and was deeply identified with one side of the ethnic conflict. With this rationale, he made himself the Vice President and named a sympathetic Hutu, Pasteur Bizimungu, to the presidency of the Government of National Unity and Reconciliation.³⁸ Many Hutus had opposed the genocide, like Bizimungu, and wanting to soothe ethnic tensions, Kagame recruited a handful to the new Rwandan government. However, despite these official titles there was no doubt that Kagame was running the show and the country.

Nevertheless, outward ethnic inclusiveness and political savvy would be the trends that Kagame tried to set for his new government. They were intended to instill faith in Hutus and Tutsis alike that a government could work for both of them, and to turn a new

³⁶ Prunier, 303.

³⁷ Kinzer, 185.

³⁸ Prunier, 90.

leaf in Rwanda's history that promoted unification. Even though a Hutu was technically at the helm, the new government was considered to be a force of Tutsi Power by most.³⁹ Because the origins of the RPF are so deeply entrenched in a history of ethnic conflict, it actively still struggles to convince Hutus that they being represented and protected.

The issue of ethnicity rapidly sprang to the surface in a more malicious way as the RPF was forced to address the growing problem of revenge killings by its own members. This was not an issue that Kagame could reasonably claim was out of his hands, as the cholera outbreak had been. The RPF's ranks had quickly swelled with disenfranchised, angry genocide survivors who were swift to lethally retaliate against their Hutu neighbors. Up to 6,000 Hutus were murdered in Rwanda during the fall of 1994 by traumatized genocide survivors and furious RPF combatants.⁴⁰ Kagame was adamant that the perpetrators of these crimes were being punished in private military tribunals, but it is not clear that anything was done. There remain questions about whether the killings were a part of the RPF's agenda or were intentionally ignored by its officials.

The fear of the RPF organizing massacres against Hutus escalated further in 1995 when the Rwandan Defense Force (RDF), the new name for the national army, forcibly attempted to evacuate an internally displaced persons' (IDP) camp at Kibeho. The camp had been a temporary home for 100,000 IDPs since the genocide, but the government designated it as a security risk because it was harboring Hutu perpetrators of the genocide and the former government's combatants.⁴¹ In April it was raided by the RDF and thousands of Hutu IDPs were murdered in indiscriminate violence; the UN's initial body count was between 6,000 and 8,000.⁴² The government's response was only to contest the

³⁹ Prunier, 331.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 323.

⁴¹ Sam Kiley, "8,000 Rwanda refugees die in army massacre," *Times* (London), April 24, 1995.

⁴² Ibid., 12.

number of deaths, which they valued at around 300, not to correct their own soldiers' behaviors. A member of the RPF leadership interviewed later on said that these revenge killings were "never RPF policy, but there was a certain tolerance."⁴³ Between the revenge killings and the incident at Kibeho, the RPF was creating its own bloody trail.

Hutus still feared that they might become the victims of a new genocide and, understandably, did not take these incidents lightly. They felt that there was not enough being done to protect them by a government that was hypothetically working for everyone. Two Hutu ministers in the new government became vocal and critical about the scope of the ethnic revenge killings and began to collect testimonies about war crimes committed by the RPF during and after the civil war.⁴⁴ They were both quickly removed from their posts; one was later assassinated and the other still lives in exile under Rwandan threats. Kagame's evasive attitude when asked about ethnicity and his suppression of critics does not instill confidence in Hutus within Rwanda or the refugee camps that they will be safe under the administration unless they are one-hundred percent deferential.



These initial conflicts were a true test of how Kagame and his government would handle the issue of ethnicity and they had confusing implications, but seemed to consistently favor protecting the Tutsi above all else. The true consequence was that the RPF ended up defining itself as a fearsome, dominant party with its own vague agenda. The policies that the government would soon enact keep ethnic tensions in the country palpable, unspoken, and unresolved, The RPF still legitimizes itself through its actions as the protectors of its Tutsi brothers and sisters, a nod to the politics of victimhood.

⁴³ Kinzer, 190.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 191.

Chapter 2: The Evolution of Rwandan Identities



The nature of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa identities is perhaps the most significant and simultaneously taboo issue in present-day Rwanda. It is analogous to “stepping on a land mine.”⁴⁵ There is no general agreement about where these identities came from or what they initially meant, but all Rwandans recognize their eruption into the 1994 genocide. Today, the words “Hutu” and “Tutsi” pack such loaded memories and personal sentiments into their staccato syllables that many Rwandans question whether their origins even matter anymore. However, the RPF government has insisted the origins of these groups prove that Rwandans are historically one people who were wickedly manipulated by colonialism. They consider this point to be crucial for post-genocide recovery and security. To understand exactly how the RPF is revising the concept of being Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, it is critical to look at the most accurate, historical understanding of how these identities have evolved over time in comparison to the government’s version.



Pre-Colonial Rwandan Identities

Rwandan history was passed down orally until Europeans began to record it in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the significant problems with oral histories in an extremely hierarchical society, like pre-colonial Rwanda’s, is that the person in power could unilaterally dictate how the past was recalled.⁴⁶ The story of Rwanda may have been retold and changed any number of times without leaving traces. Any reliable pre-colonial history, however, mentions the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa groups living together, sharing a common culture and speaking a single, unique language, Kinyarwanda. The stability of

⁴⁵ “Antoine,” interview with Sara Skutch, November 6, 2014.

⁴⁶ Gourevitch, 48.

these groups leaves vagueness about where the distinctions between them lay or originated. Over the past century, this vagueness has become the subject of highly politicized debates within Rwanda and arguments within academia. Scholars must rely on scant evidence from linguistic patterns, inferences using neighboring historical accounts, and collective Rwandan memories to try and piece together a substantiated, yet still imperfect, history of these identities.

Pre-colonial history in Rwanda is very important politically because the RPF puts it on a pedestal as a golden time of unity and peace. Examination of how Rwandan identity is portrayed officially shows that there are key deviations in its interpretation from the findings of researchers. The Rwandan government uses an altered version of pre-colonial history with the goal of supporting its assertions that Rwandans are inherently one nation with a long tradition of unity. Meanwhile, academic analyses suggest that intergroup divisions likely began as geographic and were then translated into unequal economic and political identities during the precolonial period. The government plainly argues against theories that would give fuel to separations within the population and clearly selects a history that aids its unified identity construction.

The question 'Can you tell the difference just from looking at a Rwandan?' seems to consistently arise with regard to the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. Outsiders in Rwanda have claimed that the Tutsi are taller, more lightly pigmented, and have elongated features. Hutus have been described as shorter and darker-skinned, resembling other East African peoples. In comparison the Twa have historically been classified as 'pygmies,' shorter and darker than the others. While these observations likely have some truth in a general sense, studies of physical differences have been inconclusive and contradictory. A semi-recent anthropological study in 1974 found that, on average, Tutsis were about ten centimeters

taller than Hutus.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, there are countless exceptions to these stereotypes that one can find on the streets of Kigali, so many that they hold no weight in the real world. The appropriate answer to the aforementioned question is that it is impossible to tell from looking at a Rwandan if they are Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, even for Rwandans themselves. And it is completely inappropriate to ask.

The most common academic belief about the origin of the Hutu and Tutsi identities is that the ancestors of the Tutsi were pastoral people who migrated to Rwanda, which was already inhabited by the Bantu-speaking predecessors of the Hutu and the Twa.⁴⁸ The Tutsi supposedly came from Nilotic regions of Northern Africa and introduced their herds of cattle to Rwanda. There is strong linguistic and archaeological evidence that pastoral peoples from northern Africa were migrating to regions near Rwanda before the fifteenth century, but these patterns are not able to specifically verify the path of the Tutsi.⁴⁹ Supporting this migratory theory are pre-colonial myths that consistently speak of the Tutsi coming to Rwanda from elsewhere.

Perhaps some of the most convincing evidence for the migration hypothesis is found in a few genetic differences between the groups. A study done in the early 1960s found two noteworthy differences between Tutsis and Hutus from a sample of about 600 people, not a large enough group to draw conclusions from, but large enough to be of note. Firstly, the sickle-cell trait was found to be almost absent amongst Tutsis, while the trait was present amongst Hutus at an above average frequency when compared to other ethnic groups from sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁰ Another genetic study showed that lactose digestion, a purely heritable trait, is remarkably frequent in samples of Tutsis when compared to other

⁴⁷ Mamdani, 44.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁰ Laurent Excoffier, Beatrice Pellegrini, Alicia Sanchez-Mazas, Christian Simon & Andre Langaney, "Genetics and history of sub-Saharan Africa," *Yearbook of Physical Anthropology*, 30 (1987): 182.

African groups, and much less common in Hutus.⁵¹ This supports the theory that the Tutsi were cattle herders, drinking milk for thousands of years, while the Hutu were not doing so. It also indicates that intermarriage was not common enough through the centuries to eliminate all genetic differences between the groups.

Rwandan government publications, meanwhile, claim that there is “no scientific basis” for the most academically accepted theories about multiple migrations bringing the Tutsi to Rwanda.⁵² Theories about the Tutsi traveling from Northern Africa or Ethiopia are written off in government-issued school textbooks as mere “speculations.”⁵³ The government’s favored theory of migration involves many smaller migrations by many groups who converged on the region now known as Rwanda. An alternative theory as to why these three, distinct groups have existed within Rwanda for as long as people can account for is conspicuously absent. It is understandable to address the weaknesses of the migration hypothesis, considering there are no consensus or definitive answers, but official publications and school texts present the information as unequivocally debunked when this is not the case.

Looking at the research done in the region, it is very likely that the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa have distant, but distinct, geographic origins, though scholars disagree about specific region and rate of Tutsi migration to Rwanda. While they question the specifics, the evidence leads the majority to believe it is likely that there was a Tutsi migration to Rwanda around the fifteenth century. Nevertheless, once they were on the same Rwandan hills, the Hutu and Tutsi cohabitated for centuries. Intermarriage between the groups, though not unheard of, was not common.⁵⁴ While hereditary differences are insignificant

⁵¹ Mamdani, 287

⁵² *History and Conflict*. Rwanda: Institute for Research and Dialogue of Peace. Kigali, 2013: 75.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵⁴ Mamdani, 50.

today, strong societal delineations remained throughout Rwanda's history, though their nature fluctuated over time.

In a day-to-day functional sense, Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa identities were most closely associated with economic classes in early pre-colonial Rwanda. The Twa were associated with hunter-gatherers, the Hutu with agriculturalists, and the Tutsi with cattle-raisers.⁵⁵ As Tutsi pastoralists trickled into Rwanda from other regions, the trade of cattle and sharing of agricultural skills by Hutus helped create one cultural group. Because of the high value of cattle, the Tutsi controlled the most wealth and were therefore at the top of the Rwandan economic pyramid. The value of cattle motivated various forms of clientage that developed in the later pre-colonial period. People with cows, predominantly Tutsis, would give patrons, typically Hutus, access or ownership over cattle in return for labor and political loyalty.

There were ways for people to move within the groups, however, and this has been something the RPF government has focused on to emphasize the unified nature of pre-colonial Rwanda. Recent studies have disputed black and white depictions of the groups' occupational distinctions, showing that some Hutu raised cattle and a number of Tutsi farmed the land.⁵⁶ Obtaining cattle would "Tutsify" a Hutu, and a Tutsi without cattle would be "de-Tutsified".⁵⁷ There was synonymy at this point between group membership and one's social class, not someone's ethnicity or race. When the cases of intergroup marriage in pre-colonial Rwanda did arise, brides would adopt the group identity of their grooms and then pass that on to their children in a purely patrilineal fashion.⁵⁸ The families still considered themselves homogenously Hutu or Tutsi. No combined

⁵⁵ Prunier, 14.

⁵⁶ Mamdani, 51.

⁵⁷ Prunier, 12.

⁵⁸ Mamdani, 53.

Hutu/Tutsi identity ever emerged amongst Rwandans, making the RPF quest for a single, national identity based on pre-colonial unity all the more interesting.

It appears that once a single Rwandan state began to form around the end of the fifteenth century, the Hutu and Tutsi identities became more political than economic, and more rigid. The new state was most likely a conglomeration of several smaller kingdoms into one large kingdom for the sake of regional economic and military security.⁵⁹ An absolute Tutsi king, *mwami*, became the center of every sphere and was believed to be the divine embodiment of Rwanda.⁶⁰ The *mwami* would appoint three prestigious chiefs to oversee the minutiae of running the kingdom-- the chief of landholding distributed farmland and collected taxes, the chief of men organized military affairs, and the chief of the pastures oversaw cattle administration.⁶¹ The *mwami* would appoint fellow Tutsis to the key chiefdoms, with one exception. At certain points, there were Hutu chiefs of landholding because of their association with agriculture. While Tutsis were clearly in control at the higher echelons, the low-level administrators were commonly Hutus with allegiances to a Tutsi higher up in the state hierarchy.

As Rwanda became more politically consolidated in the seventeenth century a ban was placed by Tutsi royalty on Hutus or Twas owning cattle and the occupational distinctions between the groups became more clear-cut than before.⁶² This ended the slight economic fluidity that had existed and concentrated wealth, therefore power, in the hands of the existing Tutsi class. This ban was a calculated method of control, a way for the Tutsi to keep the Hutu and Twa subservient and financially dependent. It is unclear how many Tutsi were agriculturalists at different points or how many Hutu were herders,

⁵⁹ Mamdani, 62.

⁶⁰ Prunier, 11.

⁶¹ Ibid., 12.

⁶² Ibid., 15.

but the flexibility with which one could move between groups was greatly reduced during this period.

Increasingly powerful Tutsi rulers had to keep their Hutu and Twa subjects dedicated to the state's wellbeing and invested in its growth. There were various ways that Hutus were incorporated into the political and cultural spheres. High-ranking Hutus were appointed as "royal ritualists," *abiiru*, vital for the Rwanda's spiritual welfare.⁶³ Their rituals cleansed and protected the kingdom, considered integral for Rwanda's survival. Perhaps the key element of Rwandan society that brought the three groups together, however, was war. The state faced threats from neighbors on all sides and also engaged in offensive maneuvers, at times expanding far into what is now the Congo, Uganda, or Burundi. In order to be successful, the Rwandan military evolved from an elite force of Tutsi warriors to a powerful army enlisting every male, Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa.⁶⁴ The battlefield became the most egalitarian aspect of the pre-colonial Rwandan state.

Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa peoples lived within these hierarchies for centuries. The unique culture that formed in the Rwandan kingdom produced other important forms of identity amongst the population in conjunction with being Hutu, Tutsi or Twa. These included a person's lineage and clan identity, which each had a special function. The most intimate identity was a person's lineage, the relatives they could trace to an actual, common ancestor four or five generations back.⁶⁵ Lineages were exclusively Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa and were the most powerful bonds within the population. As stated before, if intermarriage occurred, the woman was assimilated into her husband's family and they considered the homogeneity of a family's Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa identity to be retained.

⁶³ Mamdani, 63.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 55.

The societal construct of the clan emerged as one major way in which pre-colonial Rwandans identified themselves, and interestingly, all eighteen Rwandan clans had assortments of Hutus, Tutsis, and Twas within them.⁶⁶ Yet heterogeneous clanship did not signify fraternity amongst the members, unlike other clans in Africa that were based on kinship. Clan members were linked to a symbolic mythical or historical figure that was not intended to be factual. One of the primary mechanisms that united the different groups into these clans was a patronage system, called *ubuhake*, in which a client would establish loyalty to his patron by adopting the same clan identity. The client's offspring would continue to be loyal to the offspring of that patron for an indefinite period.⁶⁷ Historical research leads scholars to believe that clan members "did not exhibit any solidarity at all and behaved toward each other as complete strangers."⁶⁸ These identities were mostly political and economic, intended to secure loyalty for a patron and protection for a client.

The difference between official Rwandan descriptions of clanship and academic ones is that the government focuses on the ancient meaning of the clan, which was more communal and ritualistic.⁶⁹ School textbooks explain clanship more fraternally saying it is, "defined by actual or perceived descent from a common ancestor" amongst neighbors.⁷⁰ The Rwandan government focuses on the early, more egalitarian embodiment of clanship, while historians focus predominantly upon the later embodiment of clanship. The earlier significance of Rwanda's eighteen clans is useful for the government today because the interethnic clans are pointed to as evidence that there was no division or animosity until colonization. An official from the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission

⁶⁶ David S. Newbury, *The Land beyond the Mists: Essays on Identity and Authority in Precolonial Congo and Rwanda*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 190.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 191.

⁶⁸ Mamdani, 55.

⁶⁹ Emmanuel Bamusananire and Dorothy Ntege, *New Junior Secondary History Book 1* (Kampala, Uganda: Netmedia Publishers Ltd, 2011), 16.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 16.

reiterated this, saying the clans' "existence disproves that the groups could have come from different regions. That would be like saying even though we have the same father, you are from Ethiopia and I am from Cameroon."⁷¹ However, interviews with Rwandans unaffiliated the government reveal that this construct has little to no meaning to them or their present-day identities.

The Rwandan practice of *ubuhake* is a hotly debated topic among scholars, who disagree on whether or not it was used as a form of slavery or exploitation of Hutus and Twa by the Tutsi. In the most basic form of *ubuhake* a client sought out a patron and pledged the servitude of his family and its future generations. In exchange, the client and his family were granted one or more cows for their use and the economic and physical protection of the patron. However, only the patron could dissolve this relationship once it was established and, if he did, the client would have to return every single cow he had acquired, even ones he may have purchased on his own.⁷² Because the Tutsi controlled the vast majority of the cattle, the instances of a powerful Hutu patron are few and far between. As the state expanded and became more centralized, it became a necessity for Hutus to seek the protection of a Tutsi patron with ample resources.⁷³ *Ubughake* dominated the economy of Rwanda for centuries. The hereditary nature of the servitude amplified its lasting exploitative nature; there was scarce room for upward mobility in current or future generations.

Those who argue that *ubuhake* was not exploitative point to the fact that it was voluntary on the part of the client, that there were cases of Tutsi clients and that there was reciprocity in the relationship. However, many clients were born into hereditary servitude and *ubuhake* had become a backbone of the economy, creating intense pressure for people

⁷¹ Sarah Bawaya, interview with Sara Skutch, July 22, 2015.

⁷² Jan Vansina, *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 47.

⁷³ Prunier, 13.

to seek out patronage if they were unaffiliated. There was little ability to support oneself in Rwanda outside of this institution. So while a client may have voluntarily walked to a patron and asked to strike a deal, his only real alternative was to have chosen another patron. The Tutsi clients of *ubuhake* likely had administrative duties tying them to Tutsi patrons and probably had their own Hutu clients. Any Tutsi clients who worked the land in exchange for a cow were a lower caste within the Tutsi group. Lastly the reciprocity of *ubuhake*, the exchange of a cow for labor, was weak because the cow could always be revoked and the client could not legally break his relationship with the patron.

Ubughake and other forms of Hutu labor are explicitly attacked in official histories because they work against the RPF's goals. Research endorsed by the Kagame's office claims that the use of *ubuhake* as a "political instrument of exploitation, domination and oppression tailored by the Tutsis to easily enslave the Hutus... [is] not based on any scientific fact."⁷⁴ The research then cites statistics that show a minority of Rwandans were involved in the system and that it did not primarily target Hutu clients.⁷⁵ Yet the statistics they reference were collected from 1910-1920 in the most heavily concentrated area of Tutsis in Rwanda, with no mention of sample size, sampling technique, or methods. Evidence from this area misrepresents the practice as less prevalent because there were fewer Hutus to form client relationships with than in the rest of the country. There were also more instances than usual of Tutsi-Tutsi *ubuhake* relationships in this area. It is a misleading statistic for the government to use.

Other social developments that would play a role in defining intergroup identity came during one of the last breaths of the Rwandan state before colonization. These were

⁷⁴ *History and Conflict*, 80.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

ibikingi and *ubureetwa*.⁷⁶ When war chiefs or generals, predominantly Tutsis, performed particularly well, they were gifted large swaths of land by the *mwami* or another upper level official through *ibikingi*. Farmers, typically Hutus, may have already inhabited this land, and if so they became the tenants of this war chief and suddenly owed him rent. To pay their new “landlord” the Hutu tenants were required to perform *ubureetwa*, which was working for free for this war chief or general. This was considered “the most hated and humiliating... it symbolized the servitude of the Hutu vis-à-vis the dominant minority.”⁷⁷ Tutsi tenants of *ibikingi* were either given supervisory roles in *ubureetwa* or exempted, unlike Hutus. This was one example of how segregated pre-colonial Rwanda was on the eve of colonization. In contrast to *ubuhake*, in which there was at least the physical exchange of a cow, *ubureetwa* and *ibikingi* were explicitly exploitative. The Rwandan kingdom was not totally centralized, so these practices were more prevalent in certain areas, but nonetheless there was a trend of increasing subordination of Hutus by Tutsis.

This was the status of the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa identities in Rwanda until colonization when radical changes in identity took place. As academic research shows, a lot is unknown about the origins of these identities, but fluctuating levels of division between the groups always kept them separate. Most likely, the Tutsi migrated to Rwanda from northern regions and settled amongst the Hutu and Twa with their cattle. A common culture was born between the groups as they lived together for millennia, though ethnic intermarriage was never normative enough to neutralize the categories or meld them into a single, Rwandan people. Yet the current government attributes blame for the genocide only on the changes that would take place during colonization and looks back on the pre-colonial period through rose-colored glasses as a time of bucolic harmony.

⁷⁶ Catharine M. Newbury, "Ubureetwa and Thangata: Catalysts to Peasant Political Consciousness in Rwanda and Malawi." *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 14, no. 1 (1980): 97. doi:10.2307/484280, 100.

⁷⁷ Newbury, C.M., 100.



Colonial Rwandan Identities

Colonization deepened inter-group divisions and amplified existing antagonisms as Europeans coopted pre-colonial power structures to rule Rwanda. For colonial administrators, Rwanda was something of a dream to be tasked with. On the lush, green hills existed a highly developed state structure with efficient administrative channels and relatively centralized power. Explorers documented an elite governing class, the Tutsi, effectively controlling the rest of the population, the Hutu and Twa. When Europeans managed to secure the loyalty of the *mwami* and the top Tutsi echelon of the society, they had an effective way to control the whole country with minimal manpower or cost.

In general, the Rwandan histories tend to overstate the importance of colonial policies and changes on dividing the Rwandan people, downplaying divisions that had previously existed. Rwandan publications describe Belgian colonization transforming “the values of the indigenous people, creating a new mind/identity that still remain problematic.”⁷⁸ A secondary-school history book recounts the removal of Hutu chiefs by the Belgians as “the basis for the future political crisis that destroyed the nation.”⁷⁹ The central issue with the Rwandan interpretation of colonization is its overemphasis on the divisive nature of colonization and its tendency to underemphasize other cultural divisions outside of it.

As Africa was colonized in the 1700s and 1800s, there was a classification obsession sweeping the anthropological and scientific communities. Blood types, insects, viruses, and humans were being divided and labeled according to ascribed distinctions, some correct and some contrived. Race was one major category that humans were being divided into and Caucasians were believed to be the ideal. This discriminatory philosophy

⁷⁸ *History and Conflict*, 156.

⁷⁹ Bamusananire and Ntege, 85.

led many Europeans to adopt the conviction that any civilization in Africa was due to the influence of a Caucasoid invader in the past. Europeans considered black Africans incapable of creating a high level of social complexity. The combination of these two beliefs, combined with the Europeans' desire to explain developed African states, like Rwanda's, fed into the "Hamitic hypothesis."

In Genesis 9 of the Biblical Old Testament, Noah (of Noah's ark) is passed out drunk one night and his three sons stumble upon his naked, sleeping body. Two of them shield their eyes out of respect for their father and go fetch a blanket, but the third son, Ham, does not avert his gaze. When Noah finds out that Ham intentionally looked at his drunken, naked body he is irate. Noah curses Ham's son, Canaan, to punish the transgression and says, "A slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers."⁸⁰ Early translations from the Hebrew version of this story mistranslated the name Ham as also meaning 'black' or 'dark.' From this misinterpretation sprung the common belief that Noah had cursed Ham with dark skin and his son with slavery.⁸¹ However, skin color is never mentioned in the ancient Jewish or early Christian versions of the story and there is never a connection between skin color and slavery.⁸² Nonetheless, since the seventh century C.E. accounts of Noah's curse on Ham connect slavery and dark complexions. This distorted myth had devastating consequences for Africa beginning in the late-1700s.

The Hamitic hypothesis was applied to African peoples for the first time with the Egyptians in the 1790s. Europeans decided that "Negroids" from Africa could not have produced the oldest civilization in the world and were determined to find an alternate explanation for Egypt's remarkable history.⁸³ It was convenient that the average

⁸⁰ Gourevitch, 51.

⁸¹ Nigel Eltringham, "Invaders Who Have Stolen the Country': The Hamitic Hypothesis, Race and the Rwandan Genocide." *Social Identities* 12, no. 4 (2006): 426.

⁸² Ibid., 426.

⁸³ Eltringham, 427.

phenotype for an Egyptian was lighter pigmented than the tones typically found in the rest of Africa. Turning to the Bible for reference, they traced the Egyptians back to being descendants of one of Ham's uncursed sons, Miziram.⁸⁴ It was concluded that the Egyptians were not the cursed Negroid sons of Canaan, but uncursed Caucasoid sons of Miziram, who they called "Hamites." This supported their racist theory that Negroid Africans were too incompetent for state building and offered a more agreeable explanation for the undeniable advancement that existed in many African cultures.⁸⁵ The term "Hamite" was expanded to apply to numerous groups in Africa with lighter skin and taller frames that existed within established state structures. The Tutsi of Rwanda were among the new group of "Hamitic" peoples.

When Germany, Rwanda's first colonizer, arrived in 1897 it quickly enlisted the Tutsis' support. The Germans were largely absent as colonizers due to World War One, which they were fighting across Europe. In 1914 only ninety-six Germans were in the country, and a handful of those were missionaries unaffiliated with state duties.⁸⁶ The Tutsi chiefs remained completely in charge for all intents and purposes. With the material support of Germany, however, the *mwami* and his chiefs saw that they could be more forceful and demanding of their Hutu and Twa subjects. They increased the number of crops that had to be produced and the hours of communal labor that the Hutu and Twa were required to do. At the end of World War One, with Germany's loss, Rwanda was re-allocated to Belgium and the nature of their colonization changed.

In 1916, Belgium quietly slipped into its role as a colonizer, but would eventually alter the fabric of Rwandan society in fundamental ways. The first few years of their colonization did not create many ripples, the Belgians observed and assessed the status

⁸⁴ Eltringham, 427.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 428.

⁸⁶ Prunier, 25.

quo. It was not until the mid-1920s that observers and historians were able to identify notable changes resulting from their presence in Rwanda. The Belgians conspicuously made the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa identities racial for the first time, using the Hamitic hypothesis, as opposed to economic or political.

The Belgians might have subscribed to the Hamitic hypothesis as either a psychological method of control or because they truly believed in it, but regardless they introduced and instilled it in Rwandans. Identity took on a new, polarizing dimension as Belgian officials discussed it in racially-charged terms.

“The Bahima [Tutsis] differ absolutely by the beauty of their features and their light colour from the Bantu agriculturalists of an inferior type” (Mgr. Le Roy).⁸⁷

“We can see Caucasian skulls and beautiful Greek profiles side-by-side with Semitic and even Jewish features, elegant golden-red beauties” (J. van den Burgt).⁸⁸

“The Batutsi were designed to reign...over the inferior races that surround them” (Pierre Ryckmans, Belgian Governor General).⁸⁹

It was convenient that Rwandan origin stories already presented the Tutsi as outsiders who immigrated from the North. The Belgians used this as evidence that the Hamitic hypothesis and its racial ramifications were undeniable facts.⁹⁰ Belgian legislation mirrored these beliefs and continued to revere Tutsis as superior while further exploiting Hutus. The seeds of the Hamitic hypothesis would catapult Rwandan inter-group antagonisms to genocidal levels at the end of the century.

One of the first major changes the Belgians made was completely overhauling the Rwandan government system, redefining Rwandan identity in the process. Low-level Hutu chiefs were eliminated and replaced by Tutsis, who Belgians believed to be natural leaders. The three major chiefdoms that had operated beneath the *mwami* were abolished

⁸⁷ Prunier, 8.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁹ Eltringham, 432.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 432.

and their power was concentrated in his hands; he only had to report to the Belgians.⁹¹ To the dismay of the *mwami*, however, reporting to the Belgians was no small task. He no longer had judicial autonomy and was not allowed to appoint chiefs without explicit consent.⁹² The abolition of local Hutu chiefs silenced the last voice that the group had exercised in any official arena and Hutus would become more and more subjugated as time passed under the Belgians.

Belgian taxation and compulsory crop production transformed the role of Tutsi chiefs and resulted in the clearest polarization between the groups. Tutsis were both emboldened and threatened by their relationship with the colonizers. They were personally responsible for meeting economic quotas and keeping order amongst the Hutu in their jurisdictions, but if they did this adequately the Belgians would not interfere in any of their affairs.⁹³ A Tutsi who had been a chief under the Belgians recalled the sentiment being, “You whip the Hutu or we will whip you.”⁹⁴ If a Tutsi chief was confident that he had met the Belgians’ administrative expectations, it became common practice for him to levy additional taxes, unsanctioned by the Belgians, on Hutus or to require them to perform additional, unpaid labor for his personal benefit.⁹⁵ The further exploitation of Hutus by Tutsis, outside of the colonial structure, resulted in great resentment.

To meet Belgian economic goals, the detested pre-colonial practice of *ubureetwa* labor was revamped in 1924 and landed squarely on the shoulders of Hutus with crushing weight. This highlighted the distinction between the groups starkly. Before colonization “*petit-* Tutsis,” poorer Tutsis, would have participated in *ubureetwa* and wealthy Hutus would not have.⁹⁶ Now all Tutsis were exempt and all Hutus were obligated to participate.

⁹¹ Prunier, 25.

⁹² Mamdani, 90.

⁹³ Ibid., 97.

⁹⁴ Gourevitch, 57.

⁹⁵ Mamdani, 97.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 98.

Some petit-Tutsis reveled in their new status and walked onto the fields of their toiling Hutu neighbors, taking yams or bananas; the Hutu could not protest.⁹⁷ The Belgians were fond of distorting pre-colonial practices like *ubureetwa* and then referring to them as “customary” laws of the Rwandan people, when in reality there was only a meager lasting resemblance.

Catholicism was ushered into Rwanda by the Belgians and eventually became one of the most powerful influences on identity and government, lasting long past colonization itself. The Belgians endorsed Catholicism and tied it to the political sphere, leading to a “massive enrollment in the Catholic army,” one priest in Rwandan recalled in 1930.⁹⁸ Christian missionaries had operated in Rwanda for many decades prior, and while they had not converted a large number of the population they knew Rwanda much better than any Belgian did. These missionaries were a very valuable resource for the new colonizers. Catholicism was the main tool used to “civilize” Rwandans according to European standards, denouncing polygamy and paganism, encouraging hard work and piety.⁹⁹ The religious aspects of the church did not become accepted as rapidly as the political benefits of joining it did. This remained a struggle for the Belgians who wished to do away with the overtly African aspects of the culture.

In 1931 the Belgians deposed King Musinga, the last Rwandan king to be selected by the sacred *abiiru* ritualists. One of his sons, King Mutara III Rudahigwa was selected by the Belgians to replace him without any consultation with the traditional power structures. This caused many Rwandans to deny Mutara’s legitimacy.¹⁰⁰ Unlike his father, he adopted Christianity, wore European clothes, and was not polygamous. Rwandans referred to him as *mwami w’abazungu*, or the “King of the Whites”. Mutara publicly

⁹⁷ Mamdani, 97.

⁹⁸ Prunier, 32.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 31.

discarded the divine status of the *mwami*, which had been a key aspect of Rwandan culture since the beginning of the pre-colonial state.¹⁰¹ The insertion of Mutara onto the throne by the Belgians was a major blow for the people and Rwandan culture.

One of the Catholic Church's biggest areas of influence was formalized education, which they had a monopoly over. The Church gave the Tutsi sons of chiefs and wealthy families a lot of attention because it saw them as the impressionable, future leaders of Rwanda.¹⁰² The Church and Belgian state hoped to gain their loyalty early on and indoctrinate them with Christian and Western principles. Church education explicitly perpetuated the Hamitic hypothesis and enforced the racialization of the groups. The Tutsi sons sent to the Church's schools were taught that they were entitled to rule Rwanda by virtue of their superior racial origins.¹⁰³ Illiteracy rates remained extremely high outside of elite circles because education was not easily accessible to Tutsis from less influential families, virtually any Hutus, and no females. When a Hutu did graduate from school, he usually faced an even larger challenge finding employment outside of manual labor.¹⁰⁴ The blatant educational discrimination that existed bred much intergroup antagonism and was one of the biggest points of strife upon independence.

In 1933 the Belgians conducted a national census and issued identity cards that identified the "race" of each Rwandan.¹⁰⁵ These Belgian racial distinctions lasted through the 1994 genocide, when an identification card marked "Tutsi" was a death sentence for hundreds of thousands of people. What little fluidity or class mobility had survived the late pre-colonial and early colonial stages was crushed, and national unity disappeared with each generation born into these conditions. Though the basis for Belgian

¹⁰¹ Gourevitch, 56.

¹⁰² Prunier, 33.

¹⁰³ Mamdani, 91.

¹⁰⁴ Gourevitch, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 57.

identification as Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa remains murky, there is a persistent claim by the RPF government that a “ten-cow rule” existed, anyone with ten cows or more was deemed a Tutsi. This seems unlikely to be the only measure because it is possible to surmise the approximate number of cows in Rwanda from 1933 to 1934 and there would be far fewer Tutsis if this had been the only criterion.¹⁰⁶ It is very likely that existing church records denoting one’s ethnic group, like marriage licenses or birth certificates, were the predominant source used in identification.¹⁰⁷ The current government’s endorsement of the “ten-cow rule” is likely because it allows them to argue for the arbitrary nature of ethnic divisions more easily.

The colonial period transformed identity in Rwanda and made it racial, proclaiming the inherent superiority of the Tutsi “race.” Though impossible to determine the causal effects of colonization on the 1994 genocide, a substantial amount of blame can be placed on the Belgian authorities and Catholic Church.



Academic research offers scant concrete evidence about the origins of the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, but it does show that for as far back as history can be traced there were three distinct groups living together in the country. At each stage certain things prevented the three from coalescing into a singular group, economic, political, and then racially charged power imbalances never organically dissipated. Pre-colonial Rwanda was not classified by intermarriage and intergroup mobility, as the government would like people to believe, but it was not until colonization that the groups became racial and immutable. The seeds of genocide were sown during Belgium’s reign over Rwanda, but the soil was growing fertile for those seeds of intergroup discord to be sown before European contact was made.

¹⁰⁶ Mamdani, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 99.

Chapter 3: The Complexity of the RPF



The laws and official policies of Rwanda have clearly stated objectives with regard to creating a new identity, but the reality of the government's behaviors is quite perplexing because they seem to draw upon ethnic divisions to justify many of their actions. When the new Rwandan constitution was written in 1996, then revised in 2003, it had a clear purpose of creating a new identity, preventing another genocide, and repatriating the millions of Rwandan refugees who remained in camps outside of the country. The very preamble of the Rwandan constitution is dedicated to national identity construction and ending genocidal divisionism. But the way the RPF has conducted itself runs counter to its proclamations that everyone in Rwanda is an equal in the eyes of the law and it seems that its primary agenda is actually eliminating political opposition.

The Rwandan Patriotic Front, when interpreted based on its actions, not its words, is a party that is intent on self-preservation first and foremost. It has shown that it will go to any lengths necessary, political assassinations or foreign coups, to keep its grip on Rwanda unchallenged so it can carry out its agenda. The RPF relies on force and fear to protect itself as it works towards the goal of creating a new national identity.



Laws of Intimidation

The keys to building identity in Rwanda come right from its constitution, which gives the government the muscle it needs to forcibly impose a new identity on the people until it is fully adopted. Article 13 of this document declares that the vague crimes of “revisionism, negationism, and trivialization of genocide are punishable by law.” This article is meant to prevent people from challenging the Tutsi death toll, the issue of RPF revenge against the Hutu, and anyone who claims the government's policies are not in the

nation's best interests. This article has been used by the RPF repeatedly, brandished to prosecute or intimidate scores of Rwandans, from subsistence farmers up to a former president, Pasteur Bizimungu. The lack of clarity in the article gives the government leeway in tagging people as "genocide revisionists" or spreaders of "divisionism" and then taking legal action to silence them. Another important section, Article 24, states that "every Rwandan has the right to his or her country and no Rwandan shall be banished from the country." Accordingly, Rwandan refugees are intensely pressured by the international community to return because of the welcoming government, which many of them feel is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Two of the most salient crimes that the RPF accuses people of committing are spreading "divisionism" and spreading "genocide ideology." Divisionism, formerly known as sectarianism, is outlined in a 2001 law that reads, "The practice of sectarianism is a crime committed by any oral or written expression or any act of divisionism that could generate conflicts among the population or cause disputes."¹⁰⁸ Anyone convicted of this crime can serve up to five years and lose their civil rights permanently. The law against spreading genocide ideology is more serious, guilty parties serve between ten and fifteen years for "revisionism, negationism, and trivialization of genocide," as mentioned in the constitution's thirteenth article. The specific criteria one must meet in order to qualify as guilty are not outlined by the constitution or the laws themselves.¹⁰⁹ The fuzziness of the description and criteria for these crimes, and the readiness with which the government makes these allegations, leads to fear among Rwandans of breaking them rather than principled adherence to them.

¹⁰⁸ Rwanda Law no.47/2001, article 3.

¹⁰⁹ "Law and Reality." Human Rights Watch. July 25, 2008. 35.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/07/25/law-and-reality/progress-judicial-reform-rwanda>.

Dissenting political opinions, by Hutus and Tutsis, are rarely voiced because Kagame and his government have reacted so harshly over the past two decades toward this candid minority. Most ominously, a handful of public figures who have spoken out about the government's strict policies have been assassinated at home and abroad.¹¹⁰ The first high profile assassination was of Seth Sendashonga, a former minister in the government, in 1998. After speaking out about egregious actions by RPF soldiers in the year following the genocide, he was assassinated while exiled in Kenya.¹¹¹ It is believed to have been the work of an operative contracted by the Rwandan government; Sendashonga had survived an earlier assassination attempt and publicly reported numerous threats by Rwandan officials during his time in Kenya.

This pattern of threats, suspicious deaths, and then odd failures to investigate or prosecute the killings has become a well-known fate for the RPF's critics.¹¹² As recently as 2010 and 2014 there have been foreign assassinations and attempts that are likely the work of the Rwandan government. After Patrick Karegeya, Rwanda's former Head of External Intelligence, was murdered in South Africa in January of 2014, Rwandan Prime Minister Pierre Damien Habumuremyi tweeted: "Betraying citizens and their country that made you a man shall always bear consequences to you."¹¹³ Paul Kagame himself had a much more ominous speech after one of these suspicious deaths:

"Whoever betrays the country will pay the price. I assure you. Letting down a country, wishing harm on people, you end up suffering the negative consequences. Any person still alive who may be plotting against Rwanda, whoever they are, will pay the price...Whoever it is, it is a matter of time...I hear some of our people saying: we are not the ones who did it. It's true they were not the ones who did it, but that is not my concern, because you should be doing it... What is surprising is that you are not doing it. People who dare to betray, betray the country!"¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ "Rwanda: Repression Across Borders." Human Rights Watch. January 28, 2014.

¹¹¹ "Human Rights Watch and the FIDH Condemn Assassination of Seth Sendashonga." Human Rights Watch, 18 May 1998. Web.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ "Rwanda: Repression Across Borders"

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

These words and his actions clearly show that no one is safe and no one can criticize the government because Kagame and the RPF have no fear of taking revenge. It instills terror and then they take advantage of the ensuing obedience.

One prime example of the nebulous, self-serving application of laws by the RPF was their destruction and deterrence of competing political parties during the 2003 presidential elections. The Mouvement Démocratique Républicain (MDR) entered Faustin Twagiramungu as Kagame's competitor in the election. Twagiramungu had been appointed Prime Minister in 1994 by Kagame, but was disgracefully removed in 1995 after being one of the open critics of RPF aggression toward Hutu civilians.¹¹⁵ In May of 2003 the MDR was disbanded by parliament for promoting "divisionism," with no concrete evidence, and forty-six people were publicly identified as its leaders. Seven of those people went missing and two are presumed to be dead at the hands of the Rwandan Intelligence Service.¹¹⁶ Twagiramungu fled to Belgium with his family, where he remains to this day. In another incident, after attempting to form their own political party in 2002 the former president, Pasteur Bizimungu, and a government minister were indefinitely put on house arrest and denied the ability to speak with any outside sources for five years.

The Rwandan people have witnessed the government brandishing these damaging accusations with such looseness that it has created a paralyzing fear in the population of drawing the government's wrath, stunting even personal conversations. From 2007 to 2008, 1,304 people were tried for crimes of divisionism or promoting genocide ideology, and only 102 people were acquitted.¹¹⁷ An allegation is almost synonymous with guilt. A

¹¹⁵ "Rwanda: Treatment by Government Authorities of Faustin Twagiramungu and Supporters of His Candidacy during the Presidential Election Campaign in August 2003." Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. May 5, 2006.

¹¹⁶ The Wire, *Amnesty International*, 31 July 2003, Index number: NWS 21/007/2003.

¹¹⁷ "Law and Reality," 40.

prominent Kigali preacher, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said that discussions in families about ethnicity were “taboo...secretive and whispered about only when necessary because people think that they can get in serious trouble.”¹¹⁸

Yet, when the Unity and National Identity Regional Coordinator for Kigali was asked about the government’s vague laws potentially creating paralyzing fears and silence, she wrote it off saying, “It’s impossible for anyone to have a misunderstanding about clearly printed laws.”¹¹⁹ She has “never, never, never, never, never” heard of a problem with people being wrongly accused or denied a speedy trial when suspected of violating one of the constitutional articles on genocidal ideology. Her effusive statements flew in the face of numerous people who refused to be interviewed on topics like the history curricula or *Ndi Umunyarwanda*, all of which are government-sponsored and should fall under the category of “impossible” to misunderstand. This very Unity and National Identity Coordinator refused to speak personally on laws related to the topics in her job title, but referred all inquiries back to the text of the constitution.



Patriotism vs. Indoctrination

While the constitution sought to tackle the issue of national identity formation in a number of ways, one of the most direct and explicit was through the organization of patriotism camps, mandated in Article 8. The inspiration for these camps was drawn from pre-colonial Rwanda where young boys would participate in cultural schools, *itorero*, which helped them serve the state when they grew up and indoctrinated them with Rwandan values.¹²⁰ The reincarnation of these camps in 1996 was intended to “endorse patriotic values, national unity and reconciliation and eradicate genocide ideology through

¹¹⁸ “Alain,” interview with Sara Skutch, November 6, 2014.

¹¹⁹ Sarah Bawaya, interview.

¹²⁰ National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. Kigali Center. *National Itorero Commission Strategy*. Government of the Republic of Rwanda, Nov. 2011. 5.

shared experiences.”¹²¹ Pre-colonial *itorero* camps were traditionally reserved for Tutsis, so despite the fact that they inspired the modern camps, the government chose to refer to the new programs as *ingando* instead.¹²²

These programs began in an effort to repatriate the millions of Tutsis living abroad and the more recent Hutu refugees, but in 2007 *ingando* expanded to include members of Rwandan civil society, secondary students, and university students. The expanded branch of the program was given the precolonial name, *itorero*. The commission hopes to make participation in *itorero* camps mandatory for all youth between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five by 2017. In the government’s ideal world, the entire population would graduate from these programs and accept the tenets of unification they are teaching.

Ingando primarily serves returnees, repatriating refugees, and former prisoners, aiming to “make them good Rwandans,” in the words of a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission official.¹²³ The first graduates of the camps were Tutsis who had been in exile for decades and out of touch with their Rwandan backgrounds.¹²⁴ The government used the camps to reeducate them on traditional culture and the RPF’s national history curriculum promoting unity. After the first waves of Tutsi returnees graduated, the RPF repurposed the camps to mainly serve repatriating Hutu refugees and released prisoners. The classes taught today in *ingando* include civic education, national history, methods of reconciliation, and courses on Rwandan customs that bind people through their shared culture.

Kagame and the RPF government believe that repatriating all the former genocidaires and Hutu combatants is vital for the eradication of genocidal divisionism.

¹²¹ National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, 11.

¹²² Chi Mgbako, “Ingando Solidarity Camps: Reconciliation and Political Indoctrination in Post-Genocide Rwanda.” *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 18 (2010): Web, 202.

¹²³ Sarah Bawaya, interview.

¹²⁴ Mgbako, 209.

This is the reason for the constitutional provision encouraging all Rwandans to return from abroad and live within the country, where they can be supervised. This policy undermines refugees' ability to argue that they still are in need of political asylum. In the RPF's opinion it is safer to have contentious groups within Rwanda where they can be monitored, as opposed to shrouded in secrecy in the DRC or elsewhere. A mandatory, two-month stay at *ingando* is one of the most important ways that the government demilitarizes former aggressors and attempts to shape them into Rwandan citizens that no longer pose a threat.¹²⁵ Some of the former Rwandan combatants from the Congo have been incorporated into the Rwandan Defense Force based on their previous military experience. The RDF is alleged to have an aggressive recruiting campaign to bring the highest ranking and most talented soldiers from opposition groups in with the promise of money and amnesty for their former crimes.¹²⁶ Those who they cannot convert are jailed and brought before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. This is one way that Kagame and the RPF can weaken and monitor the opposition, while simultaneously bolstering their own ranks.

Very controversially, upon graduation from *ingando* some former Hutu combatants receive economic assistance from the government to encourage their loyalty.¹²⁷ It appears that Kagame is willing to go to great lengths to diffuse threats of further ethnic violence, even at the cost of public opinion. Giving money to genocide perpetrators is quite contentious within Rwanda and outside of it.¹²⁸ Actions like these, conducted along poorly disguised ethnic lines, arguably prolong divisions in the population and impede the government's goal of creating a single identity.

¹²⁵ Mgbako, 210.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 211.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 211.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 216.

Itorero, on the other hand, is a tool intended to cultivate the future leaders of Rwanda, but often accused of being a tool used by the government to create the next generation of RPF purists. Since it grew out of *ingando* in 2007 there have been 284,209 graduates from the program.¹²⁹ There are three phases to *itorero*: mobilization and training, placement and serving, and then graduation.¹³⁰ The modules included in the mobilization and training curriculum are nation building, character building, national service, and physical development, which includes basic military training.¹³¹ This typically takes place at a camp for two weeks and then students go back to their homes to carry out the placement and service portion of *itorero*. This phase includes community works projects across the country, which are intended to demonstrate national cohesion and ethnic cooperation. One participant interviewed went door to door asking if people had registered for national identity cards, and if they had not he provided them with the necessary forms.¹³² If all of these phases are completed successfully the participant receives a certificate of graduation and is expected to continue spreading messages of reconciliation and unity through their actions and service to Rwanda.

Itorero's intensity seems to perpetuate fear of authority in many instead of producing the quintessential "Rwandan" leaders it proclaims to mold. The days start at four in the morning with aggressive army drills, there is limited food, the civic and history lessons carry on for many hours, and sleep is scarce.¹³³ There have been beatings and inappropriate sexual relationships between male instructors and students reportedly used to punish participants for minor infractions during their time in the camps. One interviewee, a college freshman who had completed the program the summer before,

¹²⁹ National Itorero Commission Strategy, 7.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 13.

¹³¹ Sarah Bawaya, interview.

¹³² Itorero participant, interview with Sara Skutch, December 2, 2014.

¹³³ Ibid.

showed the interviewer scars running across his back that he says came from camp instructors.¹³⁴ Multiple graduates repeated answers to questions that were seemingly regurgitated verbatim, for instance effusive statements like “the Government of National Unity works for all Rwandans teaching forgiveness and opens their arms every single person.”¹³⁵ Despite the intentions of the program, the main takeaway seems to be not to question the RPF or their policies above all else.

A pervasive culture of obedience was one of the things that allowed the 1994 genocide to be perpetrated so rapidly as people followed Hutu leaders telling them to massacre their neighbors, and it seems as if the RPF is playing on the same culture to coerce behavior today and construct a new identity. While their efforts are more innocuous than genocide, it is unsustainable to play on fear and indoctrination as a method of maintaining order. An official from the National *Itorero* Commission described Rwanda’s history of hierarchical deference as an inalienable characteristic of its people, “We have respect for authority because of having a monarchy for almost a millennium.”¹³⁶ This type of hierarchy does not seem to be able to break out of an ethnic mold and if the RPF relies on it, it will perpetuate cycles of fear, obedience, and violence. Instead of supporting tolerance, Kagame and his government are attempting to force, not necessarily foster, the eradication of ethnic differences that have been around for as long as Rwandans can remember.



The Menace across the Border

Embedded in the hordes of innocent, fleeing Hutus after the genocide were most of the perpetrators and leaders of the genocide. The most radical of them carried their

¹³⁴ Itorero participant, interview.

¹³⁵ Sarah Bawaya, interview.

¹³⁶ Itorero participant 2, interview with Sara Skutch, November 30, 2014.

genocidal wrath into the mountains of Eastern Zaire and regrouped there, forming the Hutu terrorist group that would become the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). The FDLR's key objective has always been to overthrow the RPF government, that "Tutsi Empire." The RPF claims that the FDLR's sinister goals also include completing the genocide of the Tutsi.¹³⁷ As of 2015, they were classified as the largest and most dangerous armed group in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire.¹³⁸ They are the largest physical warning of the possible continuation of the Rwandan genocide and keep the population on edge.

In the eyes of the current Rwandan government, the FDLR is an intolerable and perilous national security threat that cannot be understated because it is the embodiment of the genocide. The conflict between the FDLR and the RPF government rooted in the fact that both sides view the other as the embodiment of all Rwandan ills. It is a key objective of the RPF to destroy this group, and it has demonstrated that it will go to astounding lengths to accomplish these aims. The FDLR is one of the major factors that keeps ethnicity alive in Rwanda as the RPF repeatedly denounces and attacks the group, who is actively attempting to project Hutu Power into Rwanda from across the border.

Demonstrating its brazen commitment to destroying the FDLR and all forms of Hutu extremism in the region, Rwanda has unabashedly interfered in Congolese politics numerous times. When leaders in Kinshasa will not fully endorse aggressive agendas to eradicate the FDLR, Rwanda's government reliably takes matters into its own hands. Since 1996 it has surreptitiously and blatantly supported two coup d'états in the DRC with the goal of eliminating Hutu extremism from its neighbor's Eastern provinces. The first coup

¹³⁷ "Army for the Liberation of Rwanda (ALIR) - Terrorist Organization Profile," *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism*..

¹³⁸ Nick Long, "UN: Over 700 Rwandan FDLR Rebels Surrendered in 2015." *Voice of America*. December 30, 2015.

was successful, driving out the long-standing despot, Mobutu Sese Seko.¹³⁹ Claiming Mobutu's successor was still not taking enough action against the FDLR, Rwanda militarily and financially supported yet another coup in 1998, which was unsuccessful.¹⁴⁰ A proxy war ensued with the DRC compensating the FDLR to actively fight against Rwandan aggression until about 2004.¹⁴¹ Then the Congolese government changed course, deciding it would rather end any Rwandan pretext for meddling than continue to fight unproductive battles. The two eventually entered into a joint-offensive mission against the FDLR in 2009.¹⁴² This Congolese policy pivot has been a great blow to the group and changed their behavior to focus on survival rather than offense.

The FDLR grew out of a dreadfully successful genocidal regime that had already demonstrated organizational complexity and garnered mass allegiance. Consequently, post-genocide refugee camps were bursting with panicked Hutus who had been coerced into committing crimes during the violence and a radical faction that wanted to continue the genocide. Most believed that returning to Rwanda meant certain death at the hands of a new "Tutsi regime." It was easy for the early FDLR to convince men to join their group from this pool of despairing refugees. They promised to improve the men's immediate quality of life, fight to overthrow the RPF government, and bring Hutus back to Rwanda victoriously. The terrorist organization sowed its roots in an intact force of 35,000 Hutu militiamen that had operated during the genocide and attracted enough support to swell to 100,000 members by 1996.¹⁴³

At its genesis, collective action problems were overcome by manipulating historical fears and taking advantage of Rwanda's culture of obedience. In the period of relative

¹³⁹ Kinzer, 199.

¹⁴⁰ Sasha Lezhnev and John Prendergast, "Rwanda's Stake in the Congo," *Enough* (2013).

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² "Rwanda." *UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia*, Uppsala Universitet.

¹⁴³ Lezhnev & Prendergast.

peace since the genocide these tensions have become harder to manipulate, but fear and obedience are still entwined in the FDLR's rhetoric. The group circulates stories that an aggressive campaign is being carried out by the RPF government against Hutus, which many find believable based on Rwanda's history of ethnic conflict.¹⁴⁴ Prevented from assimilating into the DRC, the FDLR still leads refugees to believe that they must fight to return to Rwanda or resign to a miserable life in the camps. With a top-down command structure and an ethnically-charged rallying cry, the FDLR has managed to survive in the forests of the DRC for twenty-two years.

One of the biggest reasons the FDLR has survived is that it is active in the black market sale of minerals and natural resources from lucrative mines in the DRC and the group has a level of financial autonomy that allows them to offer selective benefits to their members and bribes to DRC officials.¹⁴⁵ Their economic assets grant FDLR fighters and their families significantly more material comfort and security than refugee camps can. The survival of the FDLR is contingent in part upon its leaders continuing to be able to offer a higher quality of life to Hutus in exile than the refugee camps can.

At present, the ultimate strength of the FDLR stems from its ethnic homogeneity and its members' hardline views. In the twenty-two years since the FDLR has been in existence, its moderate and less committed members have all been pulled away as the Rwandan government has worked to allay their worries about repatriation. The most radical rebels have even resorted to physically preventing masses of defectors from returning to Rwanda at times.¹⁴⁶ Today, the FDLR is down from about 6,000 fighters in 2007 to around 2,000.¹⁴⁷ The present-day FDLR is comprised mainly of fanatics who have chosen to stay and battle rather than to set aside ethnic antagonisms. Recent recruits have

¹⁴⁴ "FDLR Commander Defects, Runs with Escorts." KT PRESS. December 19, 2015.

¹⁴⁵ "Rwanda," *UCDP*.

¹⁴⁶ Lezhnev & Prendergast, "Rwanda's Stake in the Congo."

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

mostly been Hutus from the Congo, Tanzania, and Burundi who believe in fighting against any form of “Tutsi oppression,” including the Rwandan government.¹⁴⁸ These new recruits are cause for worry because they indicate that a larger group of sympathizers exists outside of the radical Hutu remnants of the genocide. A greater ethnic conflict could be sparked if the FDLR engages with the Rwandan army directly or if Hutus in the region feel threatened by Tutsi aggressions.

The FDLR attempts to use violence to provoke the RPF into chasing them across the Congolese border, knowing this cross-border invasion would likely result in another state conflict between the DRC and Rwanda. With Rwanda’s history of supporting rebel groups and coups in the DRC, the Kinshasa government is highly wary of any infringements and the tenuous goodwill between the two nations could collapse with FDLR provocation.¹⁴⁹ If a larger conflict happens, the group hopes to infiltrate Rwanda and undermine RPF control. Over the past two decades, the FDLR has repeatedly attempted to do instigate a situation like this, crossing into Rwanda and killing numerous civilians or attempting sabotage. So far, the Rwandan army has not taken its bait.¹⁵⁰ The FDLR believes that if it can spark a regional conflict by drawing the RPF into the DRC, there will be room for them to lead a movement into Rwanda and potentially topple the “Tutsi” regime. The FDLR’s lack of success is likely because of its reduced numbers and power, but if it grows stronger this is not an unforeseeable occurrence.

The methods of violence characteristic of the FDLR include small arms, grenades, and machetes reminiscent of the 1994 genocide. Since 2004 about sixty-seven deaths are annually attributed to the FDLR, with the exception being the year of the joint Rwandan-

¹⁴⁸ Villia Jefremovas, *Brickyards to Graveyards: From Production to Genocide in Rwanda*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 102.

¹⁴⁹ Lezhnev & Prendergast, "Rwanda's Stake in the Congo."

¹⁵⁰ "DR Congo: Arrest Rebel Leader Wanted by ICC." Human Rights Watch. July 13, 2015.

Congolese offensive, 2009, during which the FDLR's death toll was 1,590.¹⁵¹ After 2004, when they stopped receiving Congolese government support, the most typical activity of the group has been raiding villages and government outposts, as well as kidnapping for ransom.¹⁵² These raids intimidate civilians in the area, deterring opposition, and provide the FDLR with basic material necessities. Raids also have the effect of driving civilians from key mining areas, allowing the group to secure access to crucial resources and sustain its fighters.¹⁵³ There are allegations that local Congolese officials collude with the FDLR to sell minerals on the black market, and in return they give the group space. These low-level politicians have an incentive to keep the FDLR safe and it is hypothesized that this is a major reason the group has not been eradicated.¹⁵⁴

Since inception, the FDLR has posed more of an existential threat to the Rwandan government and people than a tangible one. The group represents the continuation of genocidal ideology at a time when many Rwandans feel the fragile nation could still erupt with ethnic violence. Yet most of the violence carried out by the FDLR is perpetrated in the DRC and against Congolese citizens during its local raids, making the threat to Rwanda less physical than conceptual. The Rwandan government's public and concerted effort to demonstrate benevolence toward repatriated FDLR defectors has steadily eroded many rebels' fears of returning and been very effective in weakening its numbers. Telling fighters and recruits that the RPF government will punish, or even murder, them is now known to be a false statement. Increased efforts by the Congolese government and the United Nations to return Rwandan refugees have also helped to drive FDLR fighters from the group.

¹⁵¹ "Rwanda," *UCDP*.

¹⁵² "DR Congo: Arrest Rebel Leader Wanted by ICC."

¹⁵³ "Rwanda," *UCDP*.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

The Rwandan government has relatively good information about the group's current structure, but is not receiving cooperation from the Congolese government allowing them to act swiftly or aggressively. A push from the UN, Rwanda, and the DRC has been made over the past year to reassess the cases of all Rwandan refugees with the hopes of repatriating most of them, potentially ousting members of the FDLR who have been blending in as refugees.¹⁵⁵ Positive sanctions on the part of the Rwandan government also seem to have been highly successful over the years in drawing rebels away from the group with the promises of amnesty and repatriation. The UN reported that 700 fighters surrendered in 2015 and that many of them were wounded or in poor health, a sign that the group is being effected by pressures in place.¹⁵⁶ This is a time when the FDLR is at its lowest numbers yet, but it also means that many of the remaining rebels are hardline Hutu extremists, unwilling to be enticed by the RPF. The vast majority of the moderate and less committed members have already left the group. Those left have a penchant for violence and a fanatical, anti-Tutsi worldview.



Rwandans still live under the umbrella of ethnicity every day and the government body that has made it a mission to eradicate divisionism is one of the worst culprits keeping it alive. It is hard to say if the RPF is intentionally creating a “pro-Tutsi” agenda and structure within the government, or if it is reacting to its own fears about the specter of Hutu control being restored. The consequences, either way, are that the old identities are not going to be eliminated from the population if the government continues to suppress its opposition, restrict discussions on the topic of history, and create new facades that poorly mask continued ethnic divisionism. The survival of genocide ideology,

¹⁵⁵ “Africa set to conclude one of its longest-standing refugee situations,” UNHCR (October 2, 2015).

¹⁵⁶ Long.

embodied by groups like the FDLR, is evidence that Rwanda will need to confront its demons with more than intimidation and violence. It seems that the RPF's actions are primarily about self-preservation, and then secondarily about unifying Rwanda.

Chapter 4: Growing Up Rwandan



The paradoxes accompanying the rise of Paul Kagame and the RPF political party induce confusion in young Rwandans who are grappling with their “Rwandaness” and identity. In attempting to conspicuously eradicate it, the divisions visibly exist directly beneath the surface of conversations without being addressed. As previously discussed, the key to constructing a new Rwandan identity lies in the government’s re-interpretation of Rwanda’s history, which they insist on, despite the fact that many families intimately know different realities of the past. “This history they teach is the official history, the official memory. It is intended to lead to reconciliation,” said a Rwandan historian, Dr. Shyaka Aggeé, who was commissioned to help write a new Peace Education Curriculum for all public schools.¹⁵⁷ Rwandan youths must sort through conflicting narratives of history in an environment of fear and whispers, creating great challenges as they try to understand who they are in the context of their nation.

The result of the domineering political environment created by the RPF is that a generational gap has come to exist between children who did not directly experience the genocide and their parents who are afraid of contradicting the government’s story. This has psychological and practical ramifications that threaten to carry the genocide into future generations as the complicated aspects of trauma and divisionism remain unaddressed. There is a lack of communication at home on topics surrounding the genocide, high levels of trauma still present in the population, and confusing messages received from multiple sources that create snarls in the search for identity.



¹⁵⁷ Dr. Shyaka Aggeé, interview with Sara Skutch, July, 23, 2015.

New Names, Old Meanings

Language is important in defining what it means to be Rwandan, as is clear based on the unspoken RPF directive to stop using the words “Hutu,” “Tutsi,” or “Twa,” but the government is still referring to these groups using different names. There are five new terms that have been introduced as the only appropriate political terms for referring to members of these groups today: returnees, refugees, victims, survivors, and perpetrators.¹⁵⁸ *Returnees* are the Tutsi who repatriated to Rwanda with the RPF after the genocide and had been exiled during the First and Second Republics. The *refugees* are divided into two groups, the “old caseload” and the “new caseload.”¹⁵⁹ The old caseload refugees are Tutsis who came back to Rwanda once the RPF had established itself and the new caseload refugees are Hutus who repatriated or are still repatriating after fleeing in 1994. *Victims* can be Hutus or Tutsis that suffered due to political violence in Rwanda, but the RPF does not count anyone as a victim of political violence after it assumed control of the country in 1994. The *survivors* are all Tutsis who lived through the genocide. Finally, the *perpetrators* are all Hutus who committed crimes during the genocide. Everyone in Rwanda knows which ethnicity the government is referring to when they use these terms.

The most controversial part of this five-part categorization is that the government offers selective benefits to people based on what category they fit into, and the Tutsi (survivors, victims, old caseload refugees, and returnees) receive much more support. Because the RPF does not allow anyone who suffered political instability within Rwanda after 1994 to be classified as victims, Hutus who had family members killed by the RPF as it consolidated control or because of Tutsi revenge killings are not entitled to government aid. The government disproportionately aids Tutsis, allocating about 5% of the national budget for survivors, neglecting many Hutus who were not guilty of any crimes with no

¹⁵⁸ Mamdani, 266.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 266.

official support channels.¹⁶⁰ Survivors far and away receive the most government support financially and politically. The Fund for the Neediest Survivors of Genocide in Rwanda (FARG) is viewed by many as a “Tutsi Fund,” and the government has done little to address the widespread belief that Tutsis are prioritized even when they are not the neediest in the entire population.

The Hutu are either uncategorized members of the population who do not feel represented or are negatively typed as perpetrators. This creates issues because Rwandans feel that they are still living under the reality of the ethnic categorization of the past, but cannot address it. Shame and frustration are common sentiments among younger Hutus, especially, who want to break out of the undesirable mold the RPF has stuck them in. They resent the undertones of government language used to refer to Hutus as being tied to group guilt. They “want to distance themselves from the genocide as much as possible.”¹⁶¹ Edouard explains it like this, “every Tutsi is a survivor because it was a genocide against them, but even though every Hutu was not a perpetrator they still feel like that is how they are seen.”



Silence at Home

For a nation rebuilding from a genocide, writing and disseminating a new national history may have seemed like a strange priority, but it was something the RPF quickly commissioned to educate “the youth who were less contaminated than their parents,” as one government official put it.¹⁶² It was deemed necessary to reverse the messages many parents were sending, messages of age-old fear and anger. Kagame and his government believed that putting the conflicts in Rwanda’s past to rest was absolutely critical for its

¹⁶⁰ Sarah Bawaya, interview.

¹⁶¹ “Alain,” interview with Sara Skutch, November 6, 2014.

¹⁶² Itorerero participant, interview.

future. According to a Kigali-based secondary school teacher, the material is intended to emphasize the political nature of identity conflicts in Rwanda and undermine the less malleable attitudes about ethnicity.¹⁶³ Politics can be overcome and forgiven, but ethnic antagonisms tend to last much longer.

When asking Rwandan youth about how they first learned about the genocide, many of them credited history lessons in primary school or government speeches on the radio as their initial introductions to the facts. Further questions revealed that while this was their first direct presentation to it, all of them had pieced together their own history of the genocide using remarks they had overheard and tidbits of conversations with their families. It was something they inherently understood they were not supposed to talk about at home. A twenty-year old named Paul explained one typical experience of learning about the genocide saying,

“The government would come to our school and talk about reconciliation, so it was probably in primary school that I first really learned. But I didn’t want to show my mom and dad that I understood what had happened so I tried not to ask about it.”

Other young Rwandans reported an even later timeline of understanding the true realities of the genocide and its political context, reportedly finding out the details as late as age fifteen or sixteen. A young woman named Anna reported that until she was a teenager, she only understood the genocide as a “time of killing.”

There are a number of reasons that parents do not disclose much of their personal experiences with the genocide to their children, reasons related to fear, trauma, or even the belief that the stories are now irrelevant. Fear arises because parents worry about inadvertently causing their child to develop a dislike for Hutus or Tutsis if they talk too much about personal sentiments revolving around genocide. René, a twenty-two-year-old Rwandan, spoke of children in her primary school being expelled for saying the words

¹⁶³ Itorero participant, interview.

“Hutu” or “Tutsi” in class. When parents hear stories like this, it leads them to avoid conversations about ethnicity for fear that their family would suffer the consequences if the wrong person overheard their child say something potentially controversial. It is safer and easier to let the schools teach the official version of history than to risk being labeled as a parent who passes on “genocide ideology.”

Fear of saying the wrong thing and drawing the wrath or scorn of the government is heightened by the vague laws and incidents of intimidation or revenge against RPF opponents that have been discussed. While talking about identity and the genocide is not explicitly prohibited by law, the looseness with which the government has applied the terms “genocide revisionist” or “genocide denier,” and the negative repercussions that ensue, makes people feel that these topics are taboo. If a student is expelled from school for discussing ethnicity, a blanket of suspicion falls on the parents for indoctrinating their child with questionable ideals. “It is serious, but subconscious, how much fear people are living with and reacting to on a daily basis,” a Rwandan educator explained when talking about why there is such reservation about addressing the issue of the genocide.¹⁶⁴

Psychological trauma is another major factor that prevents parents from discussing the genocide with their children, regardless of if the parent was a survivor, perpetrator, or witness to the violence. The psychological toll on the population was only just beginning to rear its ugly head in the months following the end of the violence, it still is a pervasive social issue. One of the symptoms of parental trauma is the evasion of all mentions about experiences with the genocide when speaking to their children.¹⁶⁵ This avoidance is even more pronounced in Rwanda because the government attempts to quiet distressing conversations about ethnicity. Many children in research studies have reported

¹⁶⁴ Celine Mukamurenzi, interview with Sara Skutch, July 14, 2015.

¹⁶⁵ R. Dekel & H. Goldblatt (2008). Intergenerational transmission of trauma? The case of combat veterans' children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 78(3), 285.

picking up on persistent clues about their parents' traumas, but not being able to discuss them, leading the children to make up their own theories about and develop fearful worldviews about an unspeakable past.¹⁶⁶ In Rwanda, 43.2% of mothers who struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder from the genocide reported symptoms related to withdrawal from their children, making trauma an important psychological reason that conversations about the genocide do not happen at home.¹⁶⁷

A third common reason that discussions about the genocide are not common in Rwanda between parents and children is expressed by a fifty-one year old mother of six like this, "I do not want my children to know about the genocide, now we are reconciled and the pain has no reason to be brought into the next generation."¹⁶⁸ Some parents say that they do not believe there is an appropriate reason to talk about the genocide with their children because it's over. But the reality is that the children experience its ramifications, regardless. This type of parenting approach, whether a true reflection of the parents' sentiments or one they have adopted to avoid their own feelings, is not helpful because children still report having questions they do not feel comfortable asking their parents. Silence does not keep questions or the genocide's reality at bay.

While parents avoid talking about their own experiences, they do not keep their neighbors' secrets as hidden. This is especially an issue in the Rwandan countryside where the communities are more intimately linked and everyone has heard about what their neighbors were doing during the genocide.¹⁶⁹ It is not uncommon for Rwandan children to learn the details about their family's role during the genocide from neighboring children

¹⁶⁶J.P. Siegel (2013). Breaking the links in intergenerational violence: An emotional regulation perspective. *Family Process*, 52, 168.

¹⁶⁷ P.N. Pham, H.M. Weinstein & T. Longman (2004). Trauma and PTSD symptoms in Rwanda: Implications for attitudes toward justice and reconciliation. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 292(5), 606.

¹⁶⁸ "Imogene," interview with Sara Skutch, November 25, 2014.

¹⁶⁹ Edouard Bamporiki, interview with Sara Skutch, November 25, 2014.

while playing on the street. That is how Edouard, the parliamentarian, learned that his father had been one of the Hutu killers and would soon be arrested by the RPF. A twenty-two year old Rwandan reported that in primary school some Hutu children would stop coming to class because the Tutsi children derided them saying things like “your parents killed ours.”¹⁷⁰ It is something that eventually comes out and controlling the shock by preparing children through conversations in the home would be beneficial.



A Poisoned Reality

As much as the government would like to control the introduction that children have to the genocide, they cannot monitor the messages transmitted within homes. Many children’s understanding of the genocide is derived from psychological processes as they grow up amongst genocide survivors, perpetrators, and witnesses. Today, the children are not immune to the psychological symptoms of trauma from the events that happened in 1994, despite the fact that they do not have personal memories of the violence. Young Rwandans must navigate living in a post-genocide society that forces them to repeatedly confront the violence while simultaneously restricting their ability to explore it. The government acknowledges this problem saying,

“Future generations will have only a partial vision of the past, distorted by the emotional tales of their parents and friends, vulnerable to media propaganda, and susceptible to the kind of rumor and gossip that played such a devastating role before and during the killings of 1994.”¹⁷¹

Intergenerational trauma transmission is an unfortunate and threatens to spread the deep-rooted suffering of the genocide and ethnic divisionism.

In April of 1994 Patrick was a six-month old infant tightly swaddled against his mother’s back as she crouched in the bushes outside of a Catholic church in Kigali,

¹⁷⁰ “Paul,” interview with Sara Skutch, November 19, 2014.

¹⁷¹ *A Time for Peace*, 49.

Rwanda.¹⁷² His mother's chest heaved against the *ibitenge* cloth that bound her young son to her back and she tried to focus on the warmth of his little body for strength. A week earlier, Patrick's parents had fled with their twin sons for the safe haven of this church, believing that the murderous bands of *genocidaires* would never violate such a sacred space. Cramped in the nave of the church with seven-hundred other Tutsis, they waited, attempting to stave off hunger and thirst and ignore the growing stench. Then one morning grenades whistled through the windows and exploded between their jam-packed bodies, soon followed by a stampede of drunken Hutu *genocidaires* with guns and machetes. In the ensuing chaos Patrick's mother fled, losing track of his twin and his father. So there she crouched outside the church, not knowing what would happen and mourning her husband and second son, while Patrick drifted off to sleep.

The levels of trauma exposure in the Rwandan population due to the genocide are remarkably high, leading to a great risk for younger generations. From a representative sample of 2,047 Rwandans who were in the country in 1994, 24-26% meet criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹⁷³ Today about 10% of the Rwandan population lives with untreated or undertreated PTSD, and, as a country with a high fertility rate, it is probable that most of them are raising children at risk of intergenerational trauma transmission. A key incentive for Rwanda to address post-traumatic stress disorder is that 77% of people suffering from PTSD view reconciliation attempts by the RPF government unfavorably and refuse participate in nation-building initiatives.¹⁷⁴ Even if direct trauma symptoms are not passed down, this negative attitude toward reunifying the country may be adopted by children and continue to threaten political upheaval.

¹⁷² "Paul," interview with Sara Skutch, November 19, 2014.

¹⁷³ Pham et al., 606.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 608.

While Patrick and the first generation at risk of inheriting trauma is still young and a comprehensive picture of the psychological consequences for them is not yet clear, there are indications that trauma transmission is occurring and influencing how Rwanda moves forward and how its people understand identity. Studies in Rwanda found that children from both groups experience deep anxiety about the recurrence of violence and a lack of trust in members of the opposite group.¹⁷⁵ While it seems unthinkable when looking at the developed, clean streets of Kigali to imagine the country sliding back into genocide, the large majority of youths interviewed in Rwanda reportedly fear that there will be more violence in the future. Edouard, the parliamentarian in charge of *Ndi Umunyarwanda*, speaks from personal experience working with youths when he says “only now are shame, trauma, hatred, and distrust emerging in the next generation of Rwandan who are teenagers and twenty-year olds.”

One of the complications that can result from parental trauma is over-identification by children with a parent’s suffering. Parents who over-confide in their children or frame the world in the context of a horrific past typically cause significant distress and warp their children’s views of the world.¹⁷⁶ These children experience trouble forming a separate sense of self. When a child’s understanding of their place in the world is so entangled with his or her parent’s trauma, it will be hard for them to disengage from the Hutu or Tutsi identity of their family members who lived through the genocide. In schools that serve children born after 1994, graffiti is still written with messages like “We’ll finish you all off next time” or “We will take revenge on the Hutus.”¹⁷⁷ As Patrick grew up

¹⁷⁵ M. Roth, F. Neuner, T. Elbert (2014). Intergenerational consequences of PTSD: risk factors for the mental health of children whose mothers have been exposed to the Rwandan genocide. *International Journal of Mental Health Symptoms*, 8(12).

¹⁷⁶ Dekel and Goldblatt, 282.

¹⁷⁷ “Alain,” interview.

he grew angry, talking with his young Tutsi friends on the streets saying “we would fight back this time, we would kill the Hutus, and we weren’t afraid because we were so angry.”

Despite efforts of the Rwandan government to eradicate Hutu and Tutsi identities after the genocide, children and young adults today are having trouble letting go of intergroup antagonisms due to the experiences of their parents. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5th edition criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder includes people who were indirectly traumatized after “learning that a close relative or close friend was exposed to trauma.” This means that many Rwandan children and young adults, like Patrick, could likely be diagnosed with PTSD and therefore be susceptible to negative attitudes toward reconciliation. Some children and young adults in Rwanda even report feeling like direct victims of the genocide.¹⁷⁸

In some instances, a traumatized Rwandan parent relies on his or her children for emotional support, especially when widowed, which distorts family roles and burdens children with age-inappropriate responsibility.¹⁷⁹ In Rwanda, UNICEF and US government estimates put the number of child-headed households resulting from the genocide between 65,000 and 85,000.¹⁸⁰ These statistics from Rwanda reveal an incredibly high number of children who do not receive adequate support from an adult figure and are at risk for psychopathology and maladaptation in their lives. Patrick became one of these children; he had to provide for all his mother’s emotional and material needs from age eleven. He learned to hide the calendars and turn off the radio so that his mother would not know when the month of April hit, the time when she had the worst nightmares and flashbacks.

¹⁷⁸ S.M. MacDermid Wadsworth (2010). Family risk and resilience in the context of war and terrorism. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73(3), 537-557.

¹⁷⁹ Siegel, 169.

¹⁸⁰ “Lasting wounds: Consequences of genocide and war on Rwanda’s children” (2003), Human Rights Watch, Vol. 15, No.6(A).

Ethnic animosity is most commonly transmitted to children indirectly as they observe negative behaviors or attitudes toward Hutus or Tutsis on the parts of their parents.¹⁸¹ Multiple youth in Rwanda report being instructed by their parents not to play with certain children without explanation, whispers about why a neighbor is in jail, hypotheses about why a child is an orphan, or what houses to avoid on the walk to school. It creates a “poisoned reality” in the opinion of one parent.¹⁸² Edouard talks about the challenges that accompany these vague directives and murmurs,

“I think if children don’t get answers from their parents, that is an answer they understand. But the parents who are able to calmly talk to their children have much happier children, I can tell you that right now.”

Psychological implications of the genocide and maladjustment in Rwandan children is important for the RPF to address because it is one of the primary methods through which younger generations begin to understand the genocide. Government visits to schools and radio broadcasts they control are not the primary method through which children learn things about the genocide. The attitudes of Rwandan parents are not well-hidden, but the message that children must not ask about the events seems clear. It can be very confusing to grow up with these ill-defined boundaries and evidently is not preventing ethnic animosity from being passed between generations, as the government would wish.



Alice survived the genocide, but lost an arm and was left with a machete scar across her face. She told her story sitting in a circle of reconciled survivors and perpetrators who meet monthly to discuss the challenges they face. When Alice emerged from her hiding place at a neighbor’s house in July of 1994, she returned as a widow to the home she had lived in with her infant daughter before the violence. One year later, her former neighbor Emmanuel moved back to their village with the first wave of returning Hutu refugees.

¹⁸¹ Siegel, 168.

¹⁸² “Alain,” interview.

Emmanuel is the man who amputated her arm and slashed her face and, in the reconciliation circle, he was sitting two chairs down from her as she retold her story. Alice and her young daughter, Sarah, intensely feared Emmanuel for years, but one day the government came and led a workshop where the two families were forced to speak with a mediator. It was a rocky few hours, but they slowly reestablished trust with one another. Now Alice has become like a godmother to Emmanuel's small children and Sarah counts on Emmanuel to fill the missing role of her father when she needs it. It is one of the sincere success stories of reconciliation and shows the benefits of open communication about the genocide.

Interestingly, it was a government sponsored initiative that brought the two of them together to talk out their differences and truly reconcile. Alice and Emmanuel's story shows the true value of speaking individual truths, airing grievances, and finally putting conflicts truly to rest. If the government could expand this type of program and allow people to express themselves, as it did with Alice and Emmanuel, these types of reconciliations would be more plentiful and the country could experience real growth. Stories like Alice and Emmanuel's are few and far between, but they show that true reconciliation is possible. Unfortunately, the government is afraid of expanding these initiatives too far into the population where they cannot be monitored or regulated as closely as they could in Alice and Emmanuel's situation.

In Conclusion...

Rwanda's cycle of victimhood is going to continue to turn if the Government of National Unity and Reconciliation, led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front, continues to endorse policies that perpetuate ethnic division and prevent cohesive identity formation. The RPF is not making it clear that they are a party for all Rwandans and they are preserving frustrations in a Hutu population that feels underrepresented. This will continue threatening their proclaimed goal of perpetuating "Rwandaness." To properly work toward this objective, the thinly-veiled language they use to differentiate between the ethnic groups must be applied more sparingly and only in appropriate, direct reference to people who were present during the genocide, so as not to be a continual reminder that people's identities were frozen by their status during in 1994. The younger generations cannot be referred to as "the children of survivors or perpetrators of genocide" if they are expected to be Rwandans who will coexist and work together toward the prosperity of the nation.

Across Rwanda's borders with the DRC, Uganda, and Burundi, there still exist many people who identify as ethnically Hutu and Tutsi and make it hard for Rwandans to forget the historical ramifications of these groups. The FDLR is one of a handful of Hutu extremist groups that operate in East Africa. As of May 2015, there is an ethnically charged battle happening in Burundi between a Hutu government and an increasingly disempowered Tutsi population.¹⁸³ As hundreds of thousands of Burundians have fled to Rwanda in recent months as refugees, it is impossible to ignore that Hutu and Tutsi conflicts still exist and will continue to exist despite the efforts of the RPF. A sustainable solution needs to be developed that incorporates addressing and overcoming ethnic struggles in the population, not quashing them.

¹⁸³ Jeffrey Gettleman, "Burundi Crackdown Puts Hutus and Tutsis, and the West, on Edge." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 28 Dec. 2015. Web.

The government's national identity project distorts the reality of ethnic identity in Rwanda to serve political purposes and uses obedience and fear to pressure the population into adopting it. One of their key strategies has been to create as much of a barrier as possible between older generations infected with genocide ideology and younger generations who are less contaminated. They believe that if these barriers stay in place, a rigid history curriculum is maintained, and they can suppress all opposition, they will not only have a unified Rwanda, but a continuation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front itself. It is like the biological concept of survival of the fittest, Kagame and his loyalists will go to extreme lengths politically to ensure that the RPF's legacy will be carried on after they are gone, even if they suffer negative repercussions in the present.

In an odd twist of reality, the RPF's ultimate vision is indeed to end ethnic antagonisms, but they have deemed it necessary to strategically play off of them as they attempt to bring about this new reality in Rwanda. By posing as the victims of ethnic aggression, the RPF legitimizes itself as the unchallenged leaders of the nation and uses its victimhood as justification to assassinate opponents and intimidate critics. They create allegiance to their vision and their government through manipulating fear in the population. It is an interesting parallel with the manipulation of fear that the former Hutu governments used before the genocide to induce people to cooperate in a much different agenda. The Rwandan Patriotic Front and Paul Kagame make it clear that they want to unify Rwanda under one identity, but only tolerate those who unconditionally and deferentially accept all of their terms and conditions.



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