

# Ubunyarwanda and the Evolution of Transitional Justice in Post-Genocide Rwanda: “To Generalize is not Fresh”

Zoë Elizabeth Berman 

**Abstract:** Conversations around transitional justice often focus on concepts of victimhood and perpetration. Such has been the case in Rwanda in the decades following the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi. However, even as Rwandans continue to observe state-led transitional justice reforms which divide them into victims and perpetrators, they simultaneously draw on state discourses of unity to carefully critique and re-work the language and practices which produce such divisions. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, Berman illustrates how a new generation of Rwandan youth is transforming political ideology by creatively engaging the discourse of *ubunyarwanda* (Rwandanness) to forge inclusive post-genocide politics.

**Résumé :** Les conversations autour de la justice transitionnelle se concentrent souvent sur les concepts de victimisation et de perpétration. Tel a été le cas au Rwanda dans les décennies qui ont suivi le génocide de 1994 contre les Tutsis. Cependant, alors même que les Rwandais continuent d’observer les réformes de la justice transitionnelle menées par l’État qui les divisent en victimes et en coupables, ils s’appuient simultanément sur les discours d’unité de l’État pour critiquer et retravailler scrupuleusement le langage et les pratiques qui produisent de telles divisions. S’appuyant sur un

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travail ethnographique de terrain à long terme, Berman illustre comment une nouvelle génération de jeunes rwandais transforme l'idéologie politique du génocide en engageant de manière créative le discours de l'*ubunyarwanda* (rwandité) pour forger une politique post-génocide inclusive.

**Resumo :** Os debates acerca da justiça transicional centram-se muitas vezes em conceitos de vitimização e de perpetração. Foi o que aconteceu no Ruanda nas décadas que se seguiram ao Genocídio de 1994 contra os Tutsi. Contudo, mesmo se continuam a assistir à implementação pelo Estado de reformas na justiça transicional que os dividem entre vítimas e perpetradores, os ruandeses também recorrem aos discursos do Estado em prol da união para criticarem cuidadosamente e retrabalharem a linguagem e as práticas que geram essas divisões. Com base num trabalho de campo etnográfico de longa duração, Berman demonstra como uma nova geração de jovens ruandeses está a transformar a ideologia política genocida através de uma incorporação criativa do discurso da *ubunyarwanda* (*ruandalidade*) para criar uma política inclusiva pós-genocídio.

**Keywords:** anthropology; political science; Rwanda; East Africa; transitional justice; *ubunyarwanda*

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In August of 2018, I sat in a modest home in the embassy neighborhood of Kigali, Rwanda, surrounded by about fifteen members of a civic youth organization I had been working with since 2015.<sup>1</sup> We had gathered to unwind after a routine local election in which we had participated, campaigning for an elder candidate. Squeezed together on couches spaced throughout the cozy salon, we had stopped dancing and socializing to listen to speeches given by the group leaders. An air of disappointment hung in the room. The day prior, we had watched ballots pile suspiciously high for only two of the over twenty candidates, suggesting that the outcome of the election had been predetermined by local officials. Moreover, despite laws introduced after the 1994 genocide which now bar ethnic identification (along Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa lines), the two victors obviously represented each of the former ethnic majorities (Hutu and Tutsi). The candidate we had campaigned for lost, but that was not the problem. Members were more upset, they claimed, by how the officials who ran the election had disrespected the democratic process and that they had done so in a way which undermined ethnic censorship laws aimed at uniting Rwandans. Why promote ethnic tokenism, when the country is trying to move beyond ethnic identification? Gently trying to encourage optimism and avoid contention, the group's directors spoke about the group's recent positive achievements. However, when it was a member named Gatera's turn, he deliberately, albeit indirectly, called out the elephant in the room:

Now that we are older, we are not those people who follow the guidelines of maybe our mothers or fathers. For ourselves, we are people who have the

means to choose a path to go down... there are people who still love one another now, *right now*, we still love each other... now we build with that, we use it... it would hurt me a lot if you are following that which your mom tells you, or your dad... Every person sitting here came by themselves, you were not brought by your mother or your father... We are tasked with making progress. We do not wait for progress to be made by aunts or uncles...<sup>2</sup>

Although Gatera's words were careful—keeping with Rwanda's ethnic censorship laws—his message was clear to those of us in the room: ethnic partisanship and election rigging represented a politics of the past, which would not be a part of the politics of unity that the group endorsed for the future. Moreover, the group would not allow this incident to force them to accept the divisive views their older relatives might hold. While Gatera's parents' generation might be mired in the past, his is one capable of "making progress."

Scenes such as this represent important forms of political critique emerging from within Rwanda's post-genocide ideological regime. I explore Gatera's speech and other moments which transpired in the youth group as critical instantiations of *ubunyarwanda*, a post-genocide discourse intended to assist Rwanda's transitional justice process. Roughly translated as "Rwandanness," *ubunyarwanda* is a word that has long existed in Rwandan vernacular, but which the Rwandan government re-defined and popularized in the decades following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.<sup>3</sup> Although *ubunyarwanda* is part and parcel of a series of reforms enacted by the post-genocide regime—the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)—which were intended to encourage ethnic unity and a transition to peace (Kimonyo 2019), many scholars claim that such reforms have actually inhibited Rwandans from discussing the past in an open manner and that instead they encourage the covert perpetuation of ethnic tensions (c.f. Purdeková 2015; Straus & Waldorf 2011; Sundberg 2016). Responding to these assertions of the failings of transitional justice in Rwanda, I build upon over thirty months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted over a decade, as well as studies of ideology (Wedeen 2019) and post-colonial political aesthetics (Mudimbe 1994), to offer a long-term and generational perspective on political transformation after conflict.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, I illustrate how Rwandan youth grappling with contradictions embedded in post-genocide politics have begun to creatively use the traditionalist discourse of *ubunyarwanda* as a means of attending to and pushing back against political gestures which alienate or marginalize certain Rwandans. In doing so, I argue, they foster opportunity for political inclusion among their peers.

In the following pages, I turn away from the often-pursued question of whether or not transitional justice has been achieved in Rwanda, to instead interrogate how transitional justice and politics have intersected to inform ideological transformations across generations and over time. I focus my attention on what the Rwandan government refers to as the "post-genocide generation" of Rwandans born after 1994, the first group of Rwandans to have been raised with prohibitions on (Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa) ethnic identity

markers.<sup>5</sup> Drawing on interviews and participant observation conducted with the youth group featured in the opening vignette, Talented Youth United (TYU), I follow their evolution over seven years (2015 to 2022) to explore the ways in which members of the post-genocide generation formulate political critiques in the context of ethnic and historical censorship. TYU is a Kigali-based organization which uses intergenerational activities to teach young people about Rwandan history and encourage unity. Although TYU's programming and socioeconomic positioning are unique, the organization shares similarities with numerous other youth organizations that promote civic engagement and commemorate the genocide, all of whom are occupied with the question of what it means to be "Rwandan" in the post-genocide moment.

TYU offers an important case study of political innovation in Rwanda because the group highlights how sensitive political critiques may emerge from specific generational and socioeconomic positions within the post-genocide state. In past years, many foreign scholars have zeroed in on antagonisms between underserved "ordinary Rwandans" and the elite members of the RPF (e.g. Thomson 2013; Straus & Waldorf 2011; Reyntjens 2013). Although this research is vital, such studies tend to focus on either hegemonic "top-down" strategies employed by state actors or counter-hegemonic "bottom-up" responses leveled by those it represses. This study focuses on a case which fits neither of these camps—a group of upper-middle class Rwandan youth with precarious ties to the RPF, whose political and professional ambitions were both fueled and constrained by their efforts to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the ruling party. Additionally, rather than focusing on RPF doctrine or "hidden transcripts of the oppressed" (Scott 1990), this article centers on observations made in public and semi-public contexts to explore the ways in which the group engages politically acceptable speech.

I began working with TYU in 2015 when I met the organization's president, Andrew, by chance at a "youth entrepreneurship" mixer. Encouraged by our shared interest in intergenerational memory and trauma, he invited me to join TYU as a member and document their activities for my research. As a product of my close yet formal relationship to Andrew, most of my time at TYU was spent with the dozen or so core board members, and our interactions were conditioned by my status as a public-facing foreign researcher.<sup>6</sup> Building on this perspective, I illustrate how it is TYU's unique generational and political positioning which enables the group to critique post-genocide politics in support of what they believe to be the state's proclaimed aims of "unity," "reconciliation," and "development" (*ubumwe, ubwiyunge, n'amajyambere*). In doing so, this article contributes to a growing body of scholarship coming from within Rwanda which emphasizes how specific ethnic, gendered, classed, regional, and age-based dynamics shape contemporary engagements with the past, and highlights the nuances of transitional justice and transformation in the post-genocide state (Benda 2017, 2019; Kantengwa 2014; Kantengwa & Berman 2022; King 2019; Ndushabandi 2016; Nzahabwanyo & Horsthemke 2017; Rutayisire & Richters 2018).

## Beyond Transitional Justice: Creative Engagement with Ideology and Long-Term Political Transformation

Over the past two and a half decades, Rwanda has become a site of controversy in conversations about mass atrocity and transitional justice. In 1994, a decades-long series of revolts and pogroms perpetrated by both Hutu and Tutsi across east Africa climaxed in the Genocide Against the Tutsi, leaving over one million Rwandans dead and millions of others internally and externally displaced. In the years that followed, scholars and human rights agencies watched as Rwanda's new ruling party—the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)—began a series of reforms intended to eradicate ethnic antagonism. In 2001, 2003, and 2008, the government implemented a series of anti-discrimination laws which culminated in the prohibition of “genocide ideology” (*ingengabitekerezo ya jenoside*), barring citizens from identifying as “Hutu” or “Tutsi” in public. In addition, the regime stripped schools of history curricula and began using institutions geared toward transitional justice—such as annual commemorations and grassroots courts (*gacaca*)—to disseminate an official historical narrative which emphasizes the trans-historical unity of Rwandan people, or *ubunyarwanda* (Rwandaness), and identifies colonization as the root of ethnic “divisionism” (*amacakubili*) and genocide ideology.

Although the government claims that their approach to transitional justice has helped Rwandans reconcile and live alongside one another peacefully, over the past decades scholars and activists have argued that such reforms have only served to reproduce ethnic tensions and social inequality (e.g., Burnet 2008; Ingelaere 2016; Purdeková 2015; Reyntjens 2013; Straus & Waldorf 2011; Sundberg 2016). Critics not only assert that some formerly-identified Tutsi citizens—the “survivors” of the genocide—retain greater access to material and symbolic resources, but they also claim that through the guise of “the fight against genocide ideology” the state persecutes and punishes citizens who seek to challenge the government’s historical narrative and/or claims to reconciliation (Geraghty 2020).

Critiques of post-genocide Rwanda mirror a large body of literature on transitional justice which highlights how post-conflict states often reproduce longstanding social antagonisms and even create new ones through their efforts to rework national narratives on history and identity in the name of reconciliation (Fletcher & Weinstein 2002; Ross 2003; Hackett & Rolston 2009; Shaw 2007; Shaw et al. 2010; Theidon 2000, 2003). In fact, as these scholars highlight, the myth that transitional justice serves as a bridge between a prior time of “violence” and a contemporary time of “peace” (c.f. Arthur 2009) regularly enables states to claim that violence is a thing of the past without attending to issues of ongoing material and symbolic inequality that marginalize various groups in the present. As such, in many cases transitional justice institutions simply mark the installment of a new politico-legal regime and the creation of new victims of political violence (Mamdani 2020; Meister 2010). As anthropologist and *gacaca* scholar Mark

Geraghty underscores, this foundational politico-legal violence is not limited to post-conflict spaces at the “peripheries of Western liberal democracies,” but rather “constitutes the very grounds of a shared global history... where the ‘(post)-genocide’ statuses of states such as Australia, Canada, or the United States continue to be subject to erasure by the victors’ self-legitimizing narratives” (Geraghty 2020:592).

Reflecting on this trend, some scholars of transitional justice have begun to critique their own past observations, noting that, much like transitional justice mechanisms themselves, their analyses run the risk of reifying the naming of “victims” and “perpetrators” of political violence as central to solving problems of reparations and reconciliation (see Shaw et al. 2010:8–10). That is, critiques of transitional justice often simply result in a shift of perspective on who is really harming whom; in Rwanda, for example, many scholars have flipped the notion that the enemies of Rwandan reconciliation are (Hutu) genocidaires to instead seek justice against the (Tutsi) Rwandan state for oppressing the Rwandan masses (e.g. Thomson 2013). Although attending to oppression is of course a crucial aspect of post-conflict research, a serious risk of this phenomenon is that it de-politicizes members of communities that have experienced mass violence (rendering them as passive “victims” or pathological “perpetrators”) while ignoring the work of local activists and politicians leading processes of sociopolitical change happening outside of the drama of perpetration (Shaw et al. 2010; Dwyer 2010; Colvin 2004; Hackett & Rolston 2009). Or, as David Scott (2004) might put it, the scholarly focus on political violence in post-conflict studies keeps the “problem space” of transitional justice centered on spectacles of good versus evil, rather than on the complicated everyday interactions through which justice is interrogated and transformed.

To re-imagine the “problem space” of transitional justice in Rwanda, I draw on studies of ideology to rethink what some claim to be the “paradox” of post-conflict reconciliation: the injunction to simultaneously “forget” violence and reconcile, while purposefully “remembering” violence so that it may happen “never again.” Rather than viewing these demands as an impasse, or as a mask for political violence (Meister 2010), I explore them as constitutive contradictory directives of a “post-genocide ideology” which shapes the field of political possibility in Rwanda. Moving beyond understandings of “ideology” as merely a coherent doctrine to be adhered to or refuted, I follow political theorist Lisa Wedeen to consider post-genocide ideology as “a set of embodied, affectively laden discourses” which gain hold precisely because of the ways in which they both reproduce and gloss over the contradictions they contain (Wedeen 2019:20). Unlike “genocide ideology”—a phrase deployed by the Rwandan state which suggests a rigid, coherent, and totalizing discourse of ethno-racial antagonism—I use the idea of *post-genocide* ideology to refer to the sets of discourses that structure everyday practice and which hold up a particular vision of post-genocide harmony while smoothing over historical legacies and contemporary political practices that perpetuate material and symbolic violence. As I will explore,

and as a mirror of the transitional justice paradigm, one key way that “post-genocide ideology” operates is through the discourse of ubunyarwanda, which demands that Rwandans remember their affective attachments to the ethnic violence of 1994, yet simultaneously forget their attachments to the ethnic categories that motivated that violence.

Instead of asking whether or not political violence persists in Rwanda, I interrogate the ways in which young political actors engage post-genocide ideology (and its complementary discourse of ubunyarwanda) in order to redress historically rooted problems such as persecution, oppression, and erasure. Wedeen argues that when political subjects play with or distort genres and registers that uphold an ideological regime—such as established scripts of nationalist sentimentality—they hold the power to engender forms of ideological critique.<sup>7</sup> That is, by disrupting the ways in which ideological contradictions are managed, actors open avenues to engage in political judgment and explore “alternative bas[es] for political solidarity” (Weeden 2019:135). Congolese philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe came to similar conclusions in his work on the transformative possibilities of creatively engaging “traditional” political registers in post-colonial African artistic contexts, which he refers to as “*reprendre*.” *Reprendre* (which Mudimbe claims resists translation, but which we may think of here as to re-apprehend, take back/again), is a critical political praxis which involves “taking up an interrupted tradition, not out of a desire for purity, which would testify only to the imaginations of dead ancestors, but in a way that reflects the conditions of today...” while simultaneously “evaluating the tools, means, and project [available] within a context transformed by colonialism...” (Mudimbe 1994:154). Rather than positing engagements with hegemonic “traditions” as either the refutation or reproduction of pre- and post-colonial power structures, *reprendre* gestures towards the alternative imaginaries which arise when collectives rework “tradition” in order to meet the demands of the contemporary moment (Mudimbe et al. 2016; Wai 2020). *Reprendre*, I argue, is an apt lens through which to understand the ways in which Rwandan youth, such as the members of Talented Youth United, sometimes engage ubunyarwanda to build a more inclusive horizon of political possibility in Rwanda, playing with and reconfiguring an historically laden discourse to suit the political needs of the present.

### **Remembering to Forget: Ubunyarwanda as a Rwandan Strategy of Transitional Justice**

As members of the post-genocide generation, the young men and women of Talented Youth United matured learning that how they related to “ubunyarwanda”—to particular state-authored visions of Rwandan history, identity, and culture—would carry meaningful stakes for their personal lives and their country. These stakes were established when the generation was in its infancy. In April of 1995, one year after the Genocide Against the Tutsi, the Rwandan Ministries of Education held a conference to discuss what would



become of the nation's decimated educational infrastructure.<sup>8</sup> Bringing together 1,200 representatives from various sectors of society, the central issue at stake in the 1995 Conference was how to grapple with the (widely perceived) role of the country's former education system in fostering thinking and behaviors which contributed to genocide. At the time, it was increasingly accepted that adults formerly in power, particularly teachers, inculcated children with ethnic hatred and built an "ideological" foundation upon which Hutu youth militias, the *interahamwe* killing squads, joined together in 1994 (Gasano 2004; Purdeková 2015). Worried about youth's vulnerability to divisionism, the conference leaders concluded that there should be a temporary moratorium placed on teaching national history until education leaders produced "a manual on the History of Rwanda that is able to rehabilitate certain historical truths which were sacrificed in profit of *ideological manipulations*."<sup>9</sup> With this ruling, the 1995 Education Conference put into legislation a conceit which shaped the relationship between youth and history throughout the Post-Genocide Period: that genocide ideology can be taught and that young Rwandans are particularly vulnerable to its effects.

During the thirteen-plus years in which national history curricula were absent from schools, the state stepped in to teach youth and re-educate older Rwandans about what they saw as the "right" elements of Rwanda's past. Conveniently, the history moratorium coincided with a number of restructuring projects taken up by the Rwandan government during the second half the 1990s and early 2000s, which gave the RPF multiple platforms through which they could develop national civic education programming. Responding to widespread economic insecurity and ethno-political polarization in the wake of the Genocide, the RPF overhauled old governmental ministries, reformed the Constitution, and established the National Unity and Reconciliation Council (NURC, est. 1999) in order to promote national harmony and equality (Kimonyo 2019). In the early 2000s, the NURC also put in place a series of widely accessible "homegrown" civil society programs intended to teach citizens about Rwandan culture and traditions.<sup>10</sup> The guiding conviction of these reforms—a conviction on which the RPF's political platform was built in the 1980s—was the notion of the trans-historical unity of the Rwandan people (Kimonyo 2019; Rusagara et al. 2009).

Through state-sponsored commemorations, "cultural" events (plays and concerts), and news media (television, radio, and newspapers), Rwandans learned that harmonious relations between Rwandans under the monarchy had been destroyed by Belgian colonists, who introduced ethnic divisionism into the country and laid the foundations for genocide (Jessee 2017; Vidal 2004; Wolfe 2014). Against this backdrop, the RPF emerged as not only the "liberating" force of a nation possessed by colonial ideology, but also the reincarnation of the benevolent pre-colonial polity. Beyond the media and commemoration season, Rwandans also began to participate in more structured civic education programs, such as the *Ingando* national civic education training program (later *Itorero ry'Igihugu*), which circulated standardized stories about Rwanda's "good kings" (Jessee & Watkins 2014), traitorous



colonists, genocidal leaders, and heroic RPF “Liberation” soldiers of 1994. Through this exposure, by the time the government announced a new official national history curricula in 2008, Rwandans of all ages, and particularly youth, had already become experts in ubunyarwanda.

As noted, the Rwandan state’s deployment of ubunyarwanda refers to the revitalization and democratization of monarchic oral histories, values, and practices in the present day. The emphasis on the monarchy represents what Mudimbe might characterize as the RPF’s desire to embody a “pure” uninterrupted political tradition; by placing itself in parallel to the centralized, highly militarized, and ostensibly peaceful regimes of the past, the RPF asserts its ability to restore order to the nation of Rwanda (Kimonyo 2019; Rusagara, Mwaura, and Nyirimanzi 2009). At the same time, although it evokes the pre-colonial monarchy, the discourse of ubunyarwanda often mobilizes *updated* definitions of traditional “values” (*indangagaciro*) in ways that actually deviate from their historic usage. For example, while most young people learned from their parents that *kirazira* (taboos) pertained to etiquette and relationships between clans, the *kirazira* taught by the national civic education program *Itorero ry’Igihugu* and other state institutions discourages Rwandans from habits antithetical to socioeconomic development, like being late to work or being dishonest with one’s peers (GoR 2009).<sup>11</sup> Most importantly, however, having ubunyarwanda means rejecting ethnic identity and embracing Rwandanness, loving the Rwandan nation, and endorsing the official narrative that Rwanda was peaceful before the influence of colonialism, which led to genocide. These practices stand in contrast to having “genocide ideology,” which means encouraging ethnic divisionism (*amacakubili*), speaking out against the state, and denying or trivializing the genocide (*guhakana* and *gupfobya*).

Over time, I have learned that many young inhabitants of Kigali believe that in order to signal their ability to contribute to Rwanda’s future, as well as to demonstrate their refutation of genocide ideology, they must publicly enact ubunyarwanda. On one level, youth from all backgrounds perform ubunyarwanda to ward off suspicions that they are engaged in the kinds of negative activities—such as drinking, sexual promiscuity, or idleness—that are associated with genocide ideology and implicitly the genocidal *interahamwe* killing squads. On another level, many elite and upwardly mobile youth engage in highly spectacular performances of ubunyarwanda as a means of gaining positive attention from the RPF and private industry leaders. These performances reach a climax every year during the annual commemoration period of one hundred days, throughout which droves of young people participate in organized rituals of community service, cultural arts (such as dance and theater), and intergenerational dialogues. Through these events, young people strategically enact ubunyarwanda by demonstrating their knowledge of certain aspects of Rwandan history and embody values such as charity and graciousness.

For youth who have financial resources and/or social ties to the RPF, the commemoration period is a time to perform extraordinary acts of service—

viewed either in person or through social media—which strengthen their connections and could potentially gain them professional leverage. Interlocutors from across social classes commented on this phenomenon with both distaste—with regard to the ways elite youth used this somber period to their advantage—and mild jealousy. Some, for example, complained about the attention received by select (predominately Tutsi) young men and women who accompanied President Kagame near the head of the annual Walk to Remember and who appeared in photos and on television behind Kagame, genocide survivors, and other dignitaries. At the same time, my interlocutors repeatedly stressed that *many* young Rwandans engage in performances of *ubunyarwanda* during this time, mostly through dialogues or public service events (*umuganda*) organized by state-funded and/or school-based anti-genocide youth clubs across the country. As my research assistant put it, wherever one may be in life, “everyone has a club they return to during the commemoration.”

In many ways, *ubunyarwanda* is a discursive formation that embodies the global transitional justice paradigm as it has been translated into post-genocide ideology. On the one hand, *ubunyarwanda* responds to the injunction to “remember and forget” ethnicity/ethnic violence by voicing a trans-historical unified ethnic identity grounded in a shared ancient past and a shared capacity for socioeconomic progress in the future. On the other hand, *ubunyarwanda* has inscribed within its order the notion of (ethnicized) victimhood and perpetration because it casts “genocide ideology” (and therefore Hutu “perpetrators”) as the antagonistic force against which it seeks to fight.<sup>12</sup> Considering these two points together, many scholars have argued that, like many other “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), *ubunyarwanda*’s depoliticized language of historical unity elevates a rosy vision of the Tutsi monarchy that glosses over centuries of dissent based on ethnic, clan, or class-based associations, encouraging Rwandans to embrace a superficial language of togetherness while erasing a history of internal conflict and historical violence. Specifically, scholars who have studied Rwandan civic education programs argue that youthful performances of *ubunyarwanda* reflect an uncritical uptake of a discourse of “tradition” at the expense of real social cohesion (Mgbako 2005; Nzahabwano & Horsthemke 2017; Sundberg 2016; Purdeková 2015).

And yet, many of my interlocutors were invested in carefully interrogating the meaning and value of different aspects of *ubunyarwanda* and how this traditionalist discourse serves the contemporary moment. For example, a group of university students once told me that most members of their generation learned about kirazira taboos in their homes or from elders as clan taboos. Despite this discrepancy, the students nonetheless accepted (with some amusement) that the term had been re-appropriated by the government in the name of “Rwandan” development and reconciliation. At the same time, other interlocutors have expressed to me the potential harm they see in a historical arc that moves from glorifying the monarchy to glorifying the RPF. As an elite female student asked me in 2020,

(paraphrased) “why do we have to start a conversation about Rwandan history with the monarchy when you know that can create issues?” While youth were hesitant to explicitly express why “starting with the monarchy” can be problematic, based on our conversations I take that it is because this move forces all Rwandans to identify with an implicitly ethnic legacy as they struggle to overcome ethnic attachments. Thus, young intellectual critics of ubunyarwanda may have chuckled at benign appropriations of older terminology, but they were upset by the ways certain aspects of this new historical framework prodded still-active historic wounds felt by many members of society.

However, although some of my interlocutors voiced such issues in private, they unanimously stood by their responsibility to perform their knowledge of and reinforce ubunyarwanda and the national history regime in public and even semi-public spaces. For many of them, while the need to perform ubunyarwanda stemmed from state pressure, they also saw it as the only way forward as a society recovering from ethnic genocide; they acted as if performing ubunyarwanda will bring unity and reconciliation (Wedeen 2015), while at the same time understanding the kinds of symbolic violence such performances may entail. The possibility for Rwandans to hold critiques of ubunyarwanda yet still believe in its public necessity, I argue, raises the question of how ubunyarwanda may be evolving beyond the space of formal civic education in the everyday practices of Rwandans who have various relationships to this controversial discourse. In the remainder of this article, I explore the evolution of the youth organization Talented Youth United as an exemplary case study of how a group with a complicated relationship to ubunyarwanda ultimately began working to transform this discourse in subtle yet politically meaningful ways.

### **Talented Youth United: The Prestige and Disillusionment of Performing *Ubunyarwanda***

From 2013 to 2017, Talented Youth United (TYU) was a group, like many other state-sponsored youth organizations and school clubs, invested in embodying ubunyarwanda through civic engagement and commemoration. TYU was established in the Eastern Province by several upper-middle-class young men in the post-genocide generation with family members in the RPF. Unlike elite youth who belong to well-financed state organizations and NGOs, TYU’s founders saw their ambitions to one day be local political and economic leaders as precarious and contingent on their ability to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the ruling party through innovative projects.<sup>13</sup> When I began working with TYU in 2015, the group claimed that the most important and most marketable aspect of their work was their ability to reproduce “Rwandan” values and traditions endorsed by the government through inter-generational talent shows that typically combined contemporary culture—hip hop dancing, pop music, and fashion modeling—with traditional arts such as *intore* (dancing), *amazina y’inka* (songs of cow criers/herders), and storytelling led by distinguished (elder) guests. TYU events also often

celebrated the “heroes” (*intwari*) of the RPF Liberation War against the genocide, some of whom were distant relations of TYU’s members. From 2015 through 2018, the board members of TYU tried to leverage their intergenerational talent shows to gain celebrity sponsors, corporate donors, and recognition from RPF military and government officials—networking to the advantage of the organization, as well as the personal advantage of the top board members. However, although the group was able to draw on their socioeconomic positioning to garner success early on, in 2017 TYU began to collapse due to a lack of sustained social and financial capital. Ultimately, this intersection of privileges and constraints is what shaped the ways in which TYU’s members have both reproduced and critiqued ubunyarwanda over time.

The first TYU event I attended was nothing short of ubunyarwanda in action. The event was a concert titled “*Ubutwari Iwacu*,” or “Heroism at Our Home,” which joined over two hundred young people and distinguished elder guests in a large aging hotel conference hall near the mixed-income neighborhood of Kabeza. The concert opened with performances of global pop hits, entertainers in their late teens and early 20s belting out songs and breakdancing to Ed Sheeran, John Legend, and Alicia Keys. While young audience members cheered, their android phones flashing photos, older guests remained reserved. However, when a new group of youth performers took to the stage and began to play traditional songs and songs of the 1994–95 RPF Liberation War against genocide, elders also rose to their feet, singing and clapping in unison with the youth attendees. Later, those same elders gave speeches on the Liberation War and the Rwandan monarchy and took questions from younger audience members. As the founders intended, *Ubutwari Iwacu* strategically brought state-approved memories into the present, bridging the contemporary interests of young people with those of elders to perform the transmission of ubunyarwanda across generations.

A few weeks after the concert, I had my first and only formal interview with TYU’s president, Andrew, who was twenty-two at the time. It became clear that the aim of concerts such as *Ubutwari Iwacu* was not only to teach young people ubunyarwanda by discussing Rwandan history and honoring RPF celebrities, but also to prove to distinguished elders that TYU was invested in carrying the state discourse into the future. For example, Andrew had been particularly excited about the ways TYU’s events were giving youth a new appreciation for music from the Liberation War, which celebrates the RPF and the rebirth of Rwanda after genocide. “I know there [are] many youth who attend those event[s] who [are] starting to like those oldies’ songs—like Mariya Yohana,” he told me. “Those people [were] celebs in... their generation. And now, for us, we don’t like [their music] anymore. But when they [are] coming and they sing together—the youth know who this is and start putting [her] songs on their iPod and everywhere.” Mariya Yohana, who attends TYU’s events often as a “mom” or “mentor,” is a popular RPF musician whose songs are played regularly on the radio during the yearly commemoration season. Although many young people treat Mariya Yohana and her

contemporaries as celebrities, Andrew underscored that TYU's job was not merely to promote such "superstars" but also to remember the accomplishments of these elders in the correct way (for more on Liberation War celebrity, see Sundberg 2016:120). By bringing Mariya Yohana to their events, by keeping her music on their iPods and thereby taking her with them everywhere, TYU members guaranteed that the artist's messages and those of her contemporaries would live on.

Not only did TYU's members gain a sense of personal satisfaction and meaning through such intergenerational exchanges, but they also strove to capitalize on their performances of ubunyarwanda. TYU's board garnered positive recognition from RPF officials, as well as some economic sponsorships from state and private organizations. Andrew led this charge, parlaying his experience with TYU into a district-level youth leadership position, while many others have leveraged their experiences in TYU as a means of gaining favors from politically and financially well-positioned members of their extended families. This validation sometimes fueled a kind of arrogance about the ways TYU could be invaluable to the post-genocide state. "In Rwanda, having 2000 youth is like having money," TYU's secretary Patrick boasted to me once, as he explained the appeal of the group to the government on a bus ride we shared in 2017. "Youth are strategic," he continued, matter-of-factly; "they have high numbers within the population, they are energetic, and the government needs to sensitize them more than others." He added, "They are like the market for the government." Echoing other comments made by TYU's leaders which portrayed the group's followers as human capital, Patrick's comments struck an uneasy resonance with critiques of ubunyarwanda, suggesting that the discourse is merely another technique of state power. This impression was voiced by several other interlocutors who, upon hearing stories of my interactions with TYU, characterized the group as "children of the state" (*abana ba reta*) who were only endorsing ubunyarwanda as a way of empowering the RPF and shoring up their socio-economic position at the top of Rwandan society.

However, as I learned with time, TYU's socioeconomic and political positioning was somewhat precarious, and this complicated their relationship with state discourse. Unlike elite youth and youth survivors who belonged to the state organizations and well-financed NGOs that receive media visibility during the commemoration period, TYU's members were only adjacent to state power and the genocide vis-à-vis their relatives in the RPF and/or relatives who were survivors. This meant that although TYU's leaders were able to leverage those relationships to garner social and economic support at first, they did not truly have the adequate social, economic, or educational capital to produce regular events or garner the publicity necessary to sustain membership and sponsorship. In the years that followed TYU's early rise to success, the group gradually lost members and struggled to gain official certification as an NGO (a task managed handily by wealthier independent clubs), and spent time and money on projects that failed to pan out. By 2019, the group's ambitions had become more modest—the board

members put less time and energy into trying to put on spectacular shows and more effort into supporting one another in their independent careers. However, the dozen or so core members of TYU continued to meet regularly, and affectionately began to refer to TYU as their “family” (*umuryango* or *famille*).<sup>14</sup>

With each hardship they faced, TYU’s *famille* grew closer, increasingly broaching difficult questions about issues such as youth unemployment and socioeconomic disparity, as well as the ramifications of ethnic censorship. Indeed, as the opening vignette of this article illustrated, although the members of TYU were invested in crafting strategic performances of *ubunyarwanda* and generating material and symbolic support from the RPF, they were not uncritical of the post-genocide state of affairs. When Gatera carefully addressed the issue of ethnicized election rigging in 2018, he was adding to numerous other sensitive claims group members by that time regularly raised about issues that were not supposed to exist in the New Rwanda, but which worked against the aims of unity, reconciliation, and equality that the group advocated. In the final section of this article, I turn to conversations that transpired over the TYU group chat during the co-occurrence of the first week of the 26th annual genocide commemoration and the first weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. The group chat illustrates how, as authorized agents of *ubunyarwanda*, TYU mobilized the ideals of post-genocide ideology to undercut the ways in which that ideology has fostered the mistreatment and marginalization of particular Rwandans.

### “To Generalize is Not Fresh”: The Reprendre of *Ubunyarwanda*

In order to explore further the ways in which TYU’s members came to grapple with the kinds of contradictions *ubunyarwanda* entails, I examine how they engaged familiar scripts—about genocide trivialization, the history of the genocide, and inter-generational trauma—during the 26th annual genocide commemoration period in 2020. While most commemoration periods are preceded by a kind of general anxiety, the 26th anniversary was exceptional. On March 29th, after one week of lockdown under COVID-19 and one week before the anniversary of the genocide, the Rwandan National Commission Against Genocide announced that activities for the annual mourning period of one hundred days would happen virtually. Rather than attending public ceremonies or visiting memorials, Rwandans would be expected to remember (*kwibuka*) with their families at home, as well as watch, read, or listen to a schedule of official speeches and dialogues about the nation’s history presented across national broadcasting networks. I was not in Rwanda during this time, but I was able to use Whatsapp to communicate with interlocutors about what it would mean to commemorate from home. While some news outlets broadcast messages about how to help folks experiencing traumatic re-enactments, most people I spoke with told me that they were more concerned for families who do not often talk about the past. Many Kigali parents (especially those with attachments to genocidaires) normally



do not discuss Rwandan history with their children, and the responsibility to remember at home weighed on them. In contrast, TYU immediately took this responsibility up with gusto, announcing a schedule of virtual historical conversations to be led by board members during the first week of the commemoration.

TYU had no scheduled historical discussion for the first day of the commemoration period; however, the group chat was lively. In the evening, one member circulated a cartoon that was making the rounds on social media depicting two Rwandans wearing facemasks and holding candles above the slogan “*Kwibuka 26*” (To remember for the 26th time). A few hours later, another member reposted the picture with the caption: “[Anti-genocide organizations] IBUKA and CNLG and AERG and GAERG and AEGIS-Trust said that this photo trivializes Genocide. If there is someone you know who is using this, warn them!” “To trivialize genocide” (*gupfobya jenoside*) is a serious accusation associated with genocide ideology, punishable by law. Rather than accept this information, the TYU secretary Patrick questioned the original poster with a pointed response a few minutes later:

*Do u wanna tell me about this? The [people you got this from] gave what reason? They explained it how? Just because a person says that a thing trivializes genocide it doesn't suffice, because like now I don't see how it is trivialization and it's more like art, so clear this and point out the trivialization you see so that we may get along with others! Thanks.*<sup>15</sup>

The conversation continued, with most members advocating that they too believed that artists shouldn't be punished for others reading hurtful and unintended messages into their images. A member who now lives abroad, James, extended the insight, arguing that the government should study the word “*gupfobya*” (to trivialize) because, as he said “*some time* I see it used where it is not fitting (some time *mbona rikoreshya aho ritagikwiye*).” Ange made a more personal plea: “*And plz guys be careful... those words all of us do not take them the same during these times we are in thx.*”<sup>16</sup>

Ange's comment “*those words all of us do not take them the same during these times we are in*” alludes to the different ways in which members of the group may relate to accusations of *gupfobya*. As Jean-Paul Kimonyo highlights, the imprecision of laws against discrimination marked the period roughly between 2001 and 2013 with numerous criminal accusations of *gupfobya*, negationism, and genocide ideology (2019:193–94). Notably, in 2014 the famous pop star Kizito Mihigo was arrested during the commemoration season by the government for writing a commemoration song which suggests that all deaths (Hutu and Tutsi) which occurred during the genocide were equal (Mwambari 2020:9). This period of juridical imprecision also overlapped with the *gacaca* grassroots genocide trials (from 2002 to 2010), which, despite giving many survivors a sense of justice (Clark 2010), also directly and indirectly exposed many Rwandans to corrupt and paranoid practices of persecution (Chakravarty 2016; Geraghty 2020; Ingelaere 2016).



During this time, the members of TYU were in primary and secondary school, and although they likely did not attend events such as *gacaca*, they watched these politics unfold in their neighborhoods and in the Rwandan community more broadly. While anyone related to a genocide perpetrator in the group might very likely have a family member who faced persecution under such charges or may even be in jail, the same is true of members closely related to survivors.

Rather than using the language or logics of *ubunyarwanda* to bolster persecution in the TYU group chat, members driving the conversation used *ubunyarwanda* to implicitly protect those who might be hurt by an accusation of *gupfobya*. James made this kind of defensive move again a few days later in the chat, during a formal “historical” conversation about the genocide led by a member named Maurice. After Maurice had several times emphasized that “Hutus” committed genocide, James chided him: “I agree but there are a lot of people who didn’t get into that... to generalize is not fresh (*kugénéralisa si fresh*).”<sup>17</sup> Maurice immediately agreed, “Yes, it was not all who got into that for sure!”<sup>18</sup>

These conversations in the Whatsapp group resonate with the event at which Gatera subtly called out local elders for ethnicized election rigging. In both instances, members of TYU engaged *ubunyarwanda* as a way of empathizing with and fighting for individuals who have in the course of their lifetimes experienced material or symbolic violence as a result of the institutions of post-genocide ideology. While in the election-rigging incident, they consider Rwandans who have lost opportunities due to the ongoing covert ethnicization of politics and the private sphere, in the Whatsapp conversation they consider Rwandans touched by persecution, notably those associated with genocide perpetration. Across all of these examples, TYU’s members work to create a space of inclusion for those who may implicitly or explicitly feel excluded from *ubunyarwanda*, recognizing struggles which extend beyond the genocide and rather emanate from transitional justice mechanisms put in place after the conflict. In doing so, they re-appropriate (*repandre*) the values of *ubunyarwanda* (Rwandan unity) against the practices that they have watched elders in power deploy in the course of their lives (such as covert representative politics and persecution). Rather than using *ubunyarwanda* as justification for persecution, TYU members make an effort to critically engage with the ideas of unity and inclusion that *ubunyarwanda* extolls. I illustrate this dynamic with a final example from the TYU 2020 Whatsapp Commemoration Chat.

In the days that followed the *gupfobya* conversation, the TYU group chat filled with presentations and discussions on Rwanda’s kings, colonization, the role of colonists and post-independence leaders in the genocide, and the genocide itself. These conversations were moderately attended and did not stray far from official discourse. In a final conversation, however, on “How Youth Build Rwanda” a long-time member named Elijah interjected into Ange’s planned presentation on how youth “remember” the genocide so that they do not make the same mistakes of youth in the past. Moving the group

away from Ange's comfortable script, and evoking concerns I had heard from other Rwandans about the virtual commemoration, he sent a voice note asking what TYU could do to help "parents ashamed of telling their children what happened [in the past]." Although Ange replied that a child can help a parent open up, Elijah disagreed, arguing that it would be better for TYU to provide the Rwandan community with examples of how "developed" intergenerational communication can help alleviate "divisions" and "shame" felt by Rwandans who have a fraught relationship with the events of 1994 and the years that followed:

...*At this time...* there are still parents who hide what happened, right? But if [that parent] sees that there is a youth association... having conversations that are developed... every parent is touched by that... he can say "eh... let me tell my child what happened and be open"... (Pause).... It will also be necessary to find some young people who have issues with the fact that their parents hide the truth from them, because of the shame they have of things they have done. Because we are bringing people together so that we all become one Rwandan people (*umunyarwanda umwe*), we no longer divide ourselves because some did this... *no!* This trauma (*ihungabana*) is happening to kids whose parents haven't told them what they did... what they did to their fellow Rwandans... and if you analyze well, it is that trauma which is mostly present. (Pause). So that's why I asked what can be done as youth so that [TYU] becomes like a mirror, or that parent can find the courage to find his kid and explain [what happened]...it's a great thing we can do which is better than... going to help someone by bringing bags of rice [but] tomorrow he gets hungry again. *Yes...*we can do something that will stay in the hearts of people that will keep helping people...<sup>19</sup>

On the last day of the TYU commemoration dialogues, Elijah pointed toward a problem that has been increasingly discussed in Rwanda as the post-genocide generation comes of age—how to deal with intergenerational trauma within families tied to ethnic violence. Notably, although it is more common to discuss problems faced by the "children of perpetrators" (Benda 2019), RPF soldiers also deal with shame at having killed other Rwandans, and the mental health of RPF veterans has long been a topic of concern for the military-adjacent members of TYU. Implicitly referencing this complicated history, Elijah emphasized how he hopes TYU will do more than just perform superficial acts of ubunyarwanda, "helping someone with a bag of rice," but rather help address different kinds of "trauma" (*ihungabana*) which affect families. Twisting TYU's initial purpose of "sensitizing" youth to Rwanda's official history, he argued the organization would now do better to demonstrate sensitive and difficult conversations to peers and elders as a way of combatting exclusion so that they may become "one Rwandan people" (*umunyarwanda umwe*).

Across these examples, TYU members disturb the symbolic logic of ubunyarwanda by playing with the meanings attached to its central values—such as *urukundo* (love), *itera mbere* (progress), and *umunyarwanda umwe*

(one Rwandan people)—and even the forces which antagonize it, such as *ubupfobya* (trivialization). State voicings of “love,” “progress,” and “one Rwandan people” frame these concepts as qualities of an already-unified Rwanda which must be protected at all costs, sometimes through harmful practices of persecution. However, Gatera, Patrick, Ange, James, Elijah, and other members of TYU implicitly argue that *ubunyarwanda* is only achieved through the recognition of the disunity that has been reproduced by post-genocide institutions. In this way, I argue that what we see in the work of TYU is what Mudimbe might refer to as the *reprendre* of *ubunyarwanda* to suit the particular post-genocide moment they occupy. Troubling the idea of trans-historical ethnic unity, TYU members rework the historically laden ideological framework of the post-genocide moment into a narrative of struggle for inclusion in the present. On one level, we can see the meanings of these terms as still tethered to post-genocide ideology, because they are mobilized in opposition to ethnic antagonism. However, on another level these terms are simultaneously being reconfigured toward a new ideological project that creates space for critical reflection about the differences that have historically divided Rwandans as well as about the ways in which post-genocide ideology perpetuates such differences in the present. Such reconfigurations work toward more substantive inclusion, even if the effects of that work are yet to be seen, felt, or articulated.

### Conclusion: Justice as an Ongoing Struggle

Complicating the question of whether or not transitional justice has been “achieved” in Rwanda, Talented Youth United offers a modest but powerful example of some of the careful yet potentially transformative political work being performed by young Rwandans today. Crucially, the organization illustrates how, even if contradictory demands of transitional justice discourses which urge individuals to “remember” ethnic violence yet “forget” ethnic identity may exacerbate structural inequalities and political impasses (Meister 2010), that is not all they do. In the case of TYU, it was precisely these frictions within post-genocide ideology which mobilized core members over the years to work through sensitive issues which affect their families and the families of their peers. Although the organization first aimed to embody the discourse of *ubunyarwanda*, over time members began to develop critiques of post-genocide ideology from within. Stretching and reconfiguring the meaning of *ubunyarwanda* to reach those citizens it had historically cast aside, they played with and repurposed the discourse in an act of political *reprendre* intended to address injustices perpetuated by post-genocide reforms.

It is important to note that many of the longer-term effects of TYU’s actions remain unclear. My work with TYU was conducted in public and semi-public contexts, and it is difficult to comment upon the more intimate ways in which TYU’s members felt seen or alienated by the group, even as leadership strived for inclusion. It is also difficult to speculate as to whether TYU’s members will continue their nuanced approach to *ubunyarwanda* as they

mature into adulthood. For example, although TYU's president Andrew remains committed to building civic programs which address youth trauma, other board members have moved on to comfortable corporate jobs, at which their critical engagement with ubunyarwanda may slip. Rather than overstating the conclusions of the TYU case study, I present these observations as a complement to other studies on Rwanda which highlight the intimate tensions of everyday life in the post-genocide world. At the same time, I want to highlight that while TYU is one case study, in the two years I conducted research across Rwanda, I commonly saw other youth organizations, university students, policymakers, and mental health advocates creatively engage ubunyarwanda in their efforts to improve the lives of those touched either by the genocide or its ramifications. These observations suggest that challenges to institutional and ideological mechanisms introduced in the post-genocide era are not only leveled from counter-hegemonic spaces. Many of these challenges are leveled from within the confines of censorship and with the aims of inclusion in mind.

As engaged anthropologist Leslie Dwyer (2010) notes in her work on intergenerational activist groups in Indonesia, when we take a longer-term view of post-conflict contexts, we find that generational differences in the imagined sociopolitical effects of structural and historical violence often become the grounds on which political debates occur years after conflict. Indeed, TYU is an important case study not only in transitional justice, but also in the role of youth and generations in post-conflict political transformations. Exploring the evolution of ubunyarwanda over time, we are able to see how the logics of transitional justice become embedded in and transformed through ideological practices across generations. Although the future pathways of TYU's members remain uncertain, their engagement with politically salient forms of remembering and forgetting has given them the capacity to remain in critical conversation about local struggles for justice, in the present, on the terms that suit the moment.

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## Notes

1. Due to the sensitive nature of this research, names of interlocutors and non-governmental organizations are pseudonyms.
2. Italics within translated quotes represent English speech; all Kinyarwanda translations are my own, reviewed by Rwandan research assistants. Original quote: "Ubu twabayeye abantu bakuru ntayo tukiri babantu bo kwereka ibirongo na ba mama bacu cyangwa ba data bacu...ubwacu turi abantu bafite ubushobozi bwo kwihitiramo inzira yo kunyuramo...hari abantu bakundanyeye ubu right now turacyakundana... turubakishye, turukoreshe....byaba bimbabaje cyane ugikurikiza ibya nyoko akubwira cyangwa so.... So rero wamuntu we wicaye hano waje wizanye ntayo wazanywe na nyoko cyangwa so urumva tugamije kwiteza imbere. Ntadutegereje gutezwa imbere na bamarume cyangwa badata."



3. *Ubunyarwanda* belongs to the abstract noun class (*ubw-*) and therefore refers to a generalized state of being “of Rwanda” (*-nyarwanda*), and is often translated in official documents as “Rwandanness” (e.g., NURC 2011).
4. I conducted over 19 months of fieldwork in Kigali in 2013, 2015–16, 2017, 2018, and 2020. I subsequently conducted 12 months of fieldwork in 2021–22, primarily in Gisenyi. My work with TYU was concentrated in 2015–18 and 2020, with follow-ups in 2021–22.
5. While this English term is used in newspapers and English-language events, its Kinyarwanda equivalents are: *abavutse nyuma ya jenocide* (those born after genocide) and *urubyiruko buvutse nyuma ya jenocide* (youth born after genocide).
6. TYU’s membership fluctuated between roughly 25 and 150 members over the seven years I worked with them. However, because most members only attended TYU events sporadically, my research focuses on board members who consistently attended meetings and events. All ethnographic materials represented in this piece were gathered according to IRB protocols, with explicit consent from participants. I was introduced as a researcher, and TYU members were made aware when I was recording meetings. I treated consent as an ongoing process, frequently referencing the public-facing nature of my research.
7. Specifically, in her work on contemporary Syria (2019), Wedeen locates these “critical alternatives” to nationalist ideological management in genre-breaking cinematic works that grapple with the effects of the civil war.
8. At the time, the *Ministre de l’Enseignement Primaire et Secondaire* (MINESPRISEC) and *Ministre de l’Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche Scientifique et de la Culture* (MINESUPRES).
9. “Que dans les meilleurs délais, les bureaux pédagogiques, l’Institut de recherche scientifique et technologique et l’Université nationale du Rwanda collaborent à la publication d’un manuel d’Histoire du Rwanda qui permette de réhabiliter certaines vérités historiques qui ont été sacrifiées au profit des manipulations idéologiques.” (MINEPRISEC & MINESUPRES, 1995, p. 48; my emphasis).
10. Following its inauguration in 1999, the National Unity and Reconciliation Council (NURC) established a series of reconciliation programs inspired by Rwandan traditions, including: *umuganda* (community work), *ubudehe* (development schemes), *abunzi* (mediation committees), and *gacaca* (grassroots courts) (Gatwa & Mbonyinkebe 2019; Purdeková 2015; Sommers 2012; Straus & Waldorf 2011).
11. Although ethnicity is censored, it is acceptable to speak about lineage-based clan groups in Rwanda.
12. Geraghty (2020) argues that during the *gacaca* trials “genocide ideology” became synonymous with “Hutu,” and through such a lens we could cynically understand how ubunyarwanda’s aim to “fight genocide ideology” has ethnic implications.
13. While TYU’s members are likely in the top 10 percent income bracket of Rwandans nationally, in the more affluent city of Kigali, I categorize them as “upper middle class,” not “elite”: TYU’s leaders attended public schools and less prestigious universities (none attended top colleges like University of Rwanda); some had relatives living in Europe or the United States, but were not able to get there themselves; and although some had a sense that their family would help them secure jobs, while studying they worked at white collar jobs to save money and to build their CVs. Although youth survivors of genocide could join popular state-sponsored student associations such as AERG (*Association des étudiants rescapés du génocide*), at the time I was working with TYU, those born after 1994

- were not able to join. I had several conversations with the TYU president about the fact that organizations such as TYU were creating a space for members of the post-genocide generation who did not identify as “survivors” or “perpetrators” to invest in ubunyarwanda, to learn about Rwandan history, and to fight genocide ideology as unified Rwandans. Although one might assume that the group was predominately Tutsi because of its ties to the RPF, the group did not publically discuss ethnicity, and it was not designated as a “survivor” (Tutsi) organization.
14. The Kinyarwanda *umuryango* can today be used to refer to both a “group” or “organization” as well as a “family” or “enclosure”. TYU members emphasize that they associate the familial meaning of this term with TYU by using it interchangeably with the French *famille* or English “family.”
  15. Punctuation was added to Whatsapp messages for clarity, as it is uncommon to use punctuation while texting in Kinyarwanda. (Original quote): Do u wanna tell me about this? *Batanze mpamvu ki? Babisobanuye gute? Just kuko umuntu avuze ko ikintu gifobya jenocide ntago bihagije kuko nkubu nyje sindabona neza uburyo iyipfobya nacyane ko Ari art so clear this and point out Aho iyipfobya tubone uko twahuza abandi ! Thanks.*
  16. And plz guys be careful to those words *twese ntabwo dufata ibintu kimwe cyane muribi bihe turimo thx.*
  17. *Yegooo rwose ariko hari na benshi batabigiyemo kugénéralisa si fresh.*
  18. *Yego sibose babigiyemo kbs [kabisa]!!*
  19. ... at this time *ndabihamya neza, hari ababyeyi bagihisha abana babo ku bintu byabaye sibyo? Ariko abonye hari nk'ishyirahamwe ry'urubyiruko, nk'uwo mubyeyi noneho rimwe akabibona ari ibiganiro wenda bimaze no gutera imbere ... buri mubyeyi atushwa nk'icyo kintu...ati nanjye reka nyje kubwira umwana wanjye koko nirekure (pause) byaba na ngombwa tugashaka bamwe muri rwa rubyiruko noneho rwugarijwe n'icyo kintu cy'ukuntu iwabo batabumva, bagitewe ipfunwe n'ibyo bakoze kuko coz' turi guhuza abantu wenda mu buryo bumwe kugirango twese tube aba umunyarwanda umwe, ntago tukiri muri bya bindi byo kwicamo ibice ngo ko mwakoze ibi no! Iri hungabana ririmo riraba ku bana bagize ababyeyi batigeze bababwira ku byo bakoze bakoreye abanyarwanda bagenzi babo kandi nimujya no kugenzura ahanini niryo hungabana ahanini ririho(pause) Niyoye mpamvu rero nabazaga nti ese ni nk'igiki gishobora gukorwa twe nk'urubyiruko noneho tukaba nk'iyonye ndorerwamo cyangwa iki wa mubyeyi we bikamutera kuba azaganiriza wa mwana... hari ikintu twakoze kandi kinini kiruta kujya hariya ukavuga ngo ngiyeyi gufasha umuntu muhaye imifuka y'imiciri ejo arongeye arashonje yes tugakora ikintu kizahora mu mitima y'abantu bizakomeza gufasha abantu...*