

## 2      Rewriting History in Post-Genocide Rwanda

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To contest the past is also, of course, to pose questions about the present, and what the past means in the present. Our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. Contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward.

– Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Rodstone, “Contested Pasts”

In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, the government put into office in Rwanda by the victorious Rwandan Patriotic Front undertook a wide-reaching program of social reform aimed, in part, at preventing future ethnic violence. Among their social programs, the post-genocide government placed a major emphasis on promoting education, believing that low levels of education and high illiteracy had fostered ignorance in the population that increased its vulnerability to manipulation by those who wished to foment ethnic violence. A better-educated population, government officials reasoned, would be more capable of seeing through the false consciousness that, from the perspective of Rwanda’s new rulers, ethnicity represented. The government thus sought not only to increase enrollments in schools from primary through university levels but also to increase the quality of education by revamping the curriculum and raising standards for teachers.<sup>1</sup> The results are impressive, with rates of enrollment by primary-age children rising from 66 percent in 1991 to 96.5 percent

<sup>1</sup> From 2001 to 2003, I worked with a team of researchers headed by Sarah Freedman of the University of California, Berkeley School of Education on a project called “Education for Reconciliation,” part of the Communities in Crisis program that I directed in Rwanda. The information about the schools in this chapter is drawn from that research project. An analysis of this research can be found in Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Déo Kambanda, Beth Lewis Samuelson, et al., “Confronting the Past in Rwandan Schools,” in Eric Stover and Harvey Weinstein, eds., *My Neighbor, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 248–264.

in 2012, and enrollment in secondary schools rising from 8 to 28 percent of eligible youth during the same period.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, however, the Ministry of Education struggled over the appropriate content of education, particularly in the area of history. Shortly after taking power, the government placed a moratorium on the teaching of history in schools. Believing that distorted historical narratives promulgated by schools since the colonial era had promoted the anti-Tutsi ideology that drove the genocide, the Ministry of Education determined that history courses would be removed from the secondary school schedule until a new curriculum could be developed that corrected the distortions of the previous history curriculum.<sup>3</sup>

Writing a new history for Rwandan schools proved to be a challenging task. History in post-genocide Rwanda is a highly sensitive topic in which the government has expressed a clear vested interest. Those who endeavored to write history entered a political minefield in which their analysis was constrained by the government's expectations of a "correct" version of history. Yet even those historians who shared the government's vision of the past were confronted by the sheer magnitude of the task of developing a new narrative entirely at odds with ideas previously accepted as fact by the majority of Rwanda's people. Although a group of both professional and amateur historians had dedicated considerable attention since 1994 to publishing new interpretations of Rwanda's past, when conferences were held at the National University of Rwanda (NUR) in 1998 and 1999 to begin the process of developing a definitive history of the country, participants felt that insufficient scholarly groundwork had been laid.

The research project that I participated in from 2001 to 2003 to study Rwandan secondary schools found that participants in both individual and focus group interviews – whether teachers, administrators, parents, or students – uniformly expressed a strong interest in bringing history back into the schools. But when we received funding to work with the Rwandan government to develop a new history curriculum and launched a curriculum development project in 2004, we confronted a contradiction inherent to official attitudes toward history in Rwanda today. The desire to foster critical thinking skills that would allow students to reason for themselves and thereby be capable of resisting manipulation ran into direct conflict with the idea that there was a "correct" version of Rwandan history that anyone who supported the ideals of reconciliation and peace must adopt. In two years of working with a diverse group of

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "UIS Statistics in Brief: Education in Rwanda," [www.stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF\\_Language=eng&BR\\_Country=6460](http://www.stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=6460); and UNICEF, "Rwanda: Education," [www.unicef.org/rwanda/education.html](http://www.unicef.org/rwanda/education.html).

<sup>3</sup> Freedman, et al, "Confronting the Past in Rwandan Schools."

high school teachers and students, education and history professors, government officials, and civil society activists, we found repeatedly that the articulated support for the idea of history as a series of problems and opportunities for debate collided with the reality of a highly authoritarian society. Participants appreciated the idea of free discussion of history, but most did not feel sufficiently free in Rwanda's contemporary political climate to challenge the newly developed orthodox version of Rwandan history. Debate could be tolerated, but only if it led to pre-determined answers.<sup>4</sup>

### Memory, History, and Identity

That national histories are not sets of established facts but rather socially constructed narratives of the past is widely accepted in academic circles today. Popular historical narratives are not unbiased descriptions of events but subjective accounts shaped by the present needs and interests of societies. While history may be "a fable agreed upon,"<sup>5</sup> the manner in which historical narratives are constructed has social and political significance. The process by which societies collectively develop and accept myths about the past that become their national history is not benign. The statement attributed to Winston Churchill that, "History is written by the victors," emphasizes the ways in which the powerful shape history for their own political purposes. Not only do the victors in great wars interpret history in a way that ennobles their cause and vilifies their defeated enemies, but social victors – the rich and powerful who dominate societies – write history to justify their domination and undercut the pretensions to power of society's losers.<sup>6</sup> The construction of historical narrative thus has a coercive nature.

Scholars have employed the concept of collective memory to enlighten discussions of historical narratives and their social impact. Maurice Halbwachs first developed the idea of collective memory in the 1920s, arguing that an individual's memories are developed in a social context that shapes the content of memory.<sup>7</sup> Applying the lens of social

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Warshauer Freedman, Henry M. Weinstein, Karen Murphy and Timothy Longman, "Teaching History after Identity-Based Conflicts: The Rwanda Experience," *Comparative Education Review*, 52, no. 4, 2008, 663–669.

<sup>5</sup> This quote is attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte by Ralph Waldo Emerson in "History," *The Essays of Emerson*, vol. 1, London: Arthur L. Humphries, 1899, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> George Orwell, "As I Please," February 4, 1944, for example, asserted in reference to the Spanish Civil War, that, "if Franco or anyone at all resembling him remains in power, the history of the war will consist quite largely of 'facts' which millions of people now living know to be lies."

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 40.

psychology, Halbwachs contended that, “the mind reconstructs its memories under pressure of society. ... Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess.”<sup>8</sup> Even events that we have personally experienced are shaped by the society within which we live.

The concept of collective memory gained new currency in the 1980s when Pierre Nora applied it to the study of nationalism, looking at the “sites of memory” – the memorials, holidays, anthems, and other symbols – that helped shape French Republican identity.<sup>9</sup> Nora’s analysis contributed to a growing literature that regards nationalities as “imagined communities,” in which people are tied together not by any real fundamental social, cultural, or historical unity but rather by the *idea* that they share a common connection.<sup>10</sup> Eric Hobsbawm argued that nations cannot ultimately be defined by racial differences or such cultural differences as language or religion but rather by a sense of shared history, “the consciousness of having belonged to a lasting political entity ... a ‘historical nation.’”<sup>11</sup>

Developing a collective historical memory is key to developing national identities, but the process carries coercive tendencies. To build a shared national identity, a population must be re-educated and may ultimately need to be forced into accepting a particular vision of the past. Karl Deutsch’s classic study of nationalism in the aftermath of the Second World War noted that nationalism involves, “processes of social learning and control which are particularly subject to risks of pathological developments and trends to self-destruction.”<sup>12</sup> Those engaged in a nationalist project seek to promote a particular collective memory about the past that serves to support their definition of national identity. Such nationalist projects are notoriously intolerant of open debate and discussion. As Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Rodstone argue in the epigraph, arguments about the past reflect conflicts over the present.<sup>13</sup> Nationalists

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Vols. 1–3, Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1992.

<sup>10</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New York: Verso, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1953, p. 163.

<sup>13</sup> Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Rodstone, “Introduction: Contested Pasts,” in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds., *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1–21, citation p. 1.

who seek to marshal the past to promote a unified national identity do so ultimately to achieve a particular political goal, and as such they generally cannot tolerate individuals and ideas that seek to complicate the past or challenge aspects of the proposed collective memory.

In Rwanda, the post-genocide government has actively sought to shape collective memory, using a focus on the 1994 genocide as a focal point for constructing a new national identity. In subsequent chapters, I explore the various mechanisms being used to build collective memory, such as genocide memorials and genocide trials. In this chapter, I focus on the more obvious aspects of shaping collective memory, the development and promulgation of a new historical narrative. I first review the ways in which historical narratives served to justify the Rwandan genocide. While the historical myths central to the genocidal ideology did not push most people to participate in the violence, historical narratives did serve to delineate the distinctions between Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa without which the genocide could not have occurred, and for a small core group, the ideas that Tutsi did not belong in Rwanda and that Hutu needed to redeem their besmirched honor motivated participation. As I then analyze, since taking power in 1994, the RPF regime and its supporters have undertaken a major project to re-write Rwandan history. They have completely rejected previous historical narratives and sought to develop new ones; but these are no more based on historical fact than those that preceded them. Just as previous history overemphasized the centrality of ethnicity, the more recent history overemphasizes the historical unity of Rwanda's population, inaccurately denying any historic social significance at all to ethnicity. More problematic is the attempt to re-imagine the RPF in heroic terms, seeking to expunge from popular memory abuses carried out by the RPF and portray RPF violence as motivated exclusively by the attempt to end genocide and bring peace and democracy to Rwanda. As I will develop in later chapters, this portrayal of the RPF – which is directly at odds with the lived experience of many Rwandans – ultimately undermines the public's willingness to embrace the new official historical narrative.

### **History, Ideology, and the Rwandan Genocide**

History played a key role in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. The ideology used to justify the genocide drew on a historical narrative developed during the colonial period that saw Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa as clear and distinct racial groups and characterized Tutsi as recent arrivals in the region which had conquered and dominated the other groups. Based on

this narrative, the instigators of the genocide asserted that Tutsi were foreigners who had no right to be in Rwanda and needed to be feared and opposed because of their history of dominating the majority Hutu.<sup>14</sup>

While the exact meaning of the categories “Hutu,” “Tutsi,” and “Twa” in pre-colonial Rwanda remains contentious, most scholars today agree that they were not ethnic groups in the modern sense. Current scholarship indicates that the terms reflected a status difference even in pre-colonial times,<sup>15</sup> but the groups shared a common culture, spoke the same language, Kinyarwanda, and lived in integrated communities or in close proximity. Furthermore, Hutu and Tutsi were somewhat flexible categories, since intermarriage was possible and a family’s status could change as their fortunes rose or fell.<sup>16</sup> The identities emerged as centralizing monarchies sought to extend their control by implanting a Tutsi aristocracy throughout the territory as representatives of the crown.<sup>17</sup> Patterns of migration within the region were complex, and each group included both recent migrants and those long in Rwanda.<sup>18</sup> Hutu or Tutsi were only one of a number of significant identities for Rwandans along with lineage, region, clan, and sub-clan.

When European missionaries and colonial administrators arrived in Rwanda around the turn of the twentieth century, their perspective on Rwandan society was shaped by then-contemporary European ideas about race and identity. Ignoring the actual complexity of identity within Rwanda, they believed that the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa identities were paramount, regarding them as three distinct ethnic, or even

<sup>14</sup> Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror*, pp. 147–179, provides a helpful review of the meta-narratives represented in the ways in which Rwandans inside and outside the country have discussed Rwandan history since 1994.

<sup>15</sup> The majority of scholars today argue that Hutu and Tutsi were status differences that were gaining in significance even before the advent of colonialism. C.f., Catharine Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda, 1860–1960*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988; Catharine Newbury, “Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda,” *Africa Today*, 45, no. 1, January–March 1998, 7–24; Jan Vansina, *Le Rwanda ancien: Le Royaume Nyinginya*, Paris: Karthala, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Alison Des Forges, “The Ideology of Genocide,” *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, 23, no. 2, 1995, 44–47.

<sup>17</sup> Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression*, provides an excellent study of how ethnic differentiation was used to extend central court control into an outlying region of the Rwandan kingdom. “[T]he categories of Hutu and Tutsi assumed new hierarchical overtones associated with proximity to the central court – proximity to power ... More than simply conveying the connotation of cultural difference from Tutsi, Hutu identity came to be associated with and eventually defined by inferior status” (p. 51).

<sup>18</sup> Des Forges, “The Ideology of Genocide,” writes, “the elite that we now call Tutsi encompassed a number of competing lineages who had arrived in Rwanda at different times over a period of centuries and who had different interests as well as varied backgrounds. In the same way, the masses that are now known as Hutu included both peoples long resident within Rwanda and those who had just arrived from Zaire or Uganda” (p. 44).

racial, categories. Influenced by ideas of social Darwinism, that considered identity not merely social but biological, with each ethnic and racial group naturally possessing specific talents and characteristics, they saw in the Tutsi a superior Hamitic group, distant relatives of Caucasians who were more intelligent than their fellow countrymen and therefore natural rulers. They regarded the Hutu as a Bantu group, sturdy and simple, best suited for physical work such as farming, while they considered the Twa a Pygmy group, inferior, lazy, and untrustworthy, never having evolved beyond hunting and gathering.<sup>19</sup>

The Tutsi elite played on European prejudices to their own advantage, helping develop a historical narrative of Rwanda's past adapted to European racist assumptions. As Des Forges wrote:

Not only did they use European backing to extend and intensify their control over the Hutu – whose faults they exaggerated to the gullible Europeans – they also joined with the Europeans to create the ideological justification for this exploitation. ... In a great and unsung collaborative enterprise over a period of decades, European and Rwandan intellectuals created a history that fit European assumptions and accorded with Tutsi interests.<sup>20</sup>

According to this history, the Twa, the region's original inhabitants, were subdued by Hutu who migrated from the west at the beginning of the first millennium. The Tutsi supposedly arrived from the northeast over a millennium later bringing with them cattle and a complex, centralized political system and, because of their natural intelligence and military superiority, subdued the other groups.<sup>21</sup>

Far from being merely of academic interest, this ideologically shaped historical narrative became a basis for public policy. The German and Belgian administrations established a system of indirect rule that left the Rwandan monarchy in place to facilitate their administration of the

<sup>19</sup> For the definitive explanation of the development of the ideas of a Hamitic race, see Edith R. Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis: Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective," *Journal of African History*, 10, no. 4, 1969. For more general discussions of the application of European racial ideas to Rwanda, see Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, especially chapter three, and Eltringham, *Accounting for Horror*, pp. 1–33.

<sup>20</sup> Des Forges, "The Ideology of Genocide," pp. 44–45.

<sup>21</sup> Examples of this historical narrative can be found in Louis de Lacger, *Le Rwanda: Aperçu historique*, Kabgayi, 1959; Alexis Kagame, *La Poésie Dynastique au Rwanda*, Brussels: Institute Royal du Congo Belge (IRCB), 1951; Alexis Kagame, *Le code des institutions politiques du Rwanda précolonial* Brussels: IRCB, 1952; Alexis Kagame, *L'histoire des armées Bovines dans l'Ancien Rwanda* Brussels: ARSOM, 1963; Jacques J. Maquet, *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda: A Study of Political Relations in a Central African Kingdom*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961; Albert Pagès, *Un Royaume Hamite au Centre de l'Afrique: Au Rwanda sur les Bos du Lac Kivu*, Brussels: Van Campenhout, 1933.

territory. At the same time, they reshaped the existing system, consolidating Tutsi social position and centralizing the power of the monarchy, eliminating existing vestiges of Hutu power. Much of Rwanda, and particularly the Hutu, experienced what Catharine Newbury has called “dual colonialism” of both the colonial administration and the central court.<sup>22</sup> Both the government and Christian churches reserved most educational and salaried employment opportunities for Tutsi. In the 1930s, the colonial administration required all residents to carry identity cards that listed their ethnicity, hence administratively fixing group identities and eliminating their flexibility.<sup>23</sup> These policies effectively increased the salience of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa identities over other social identities, since they helped determine life chances, while the ideology provided different historical imaginaries for the groups that ultimately helped to convert them into ethnic identities.

For much of the colonial period, the myth of Tutsi conquest and superiority served successfully to justify the group’s privileged position. But following the Second World War, colonial administrators and missionaries influenced by social democratic political ideas began to change their sympathies to the Hutu, whom they now characterized as an oppressed working class who had suffered under the yoke of Tutsi domination for centuries. The same erroneous historical narrative that had been used to support Tutsi dominance was now used to support the emergence of a Hutu counter-elite and justify a shift in political control to Hutu hands following anti-Tutsi violence in 1959. The democratic principle of “majority rule” got distorted in Rwanda to mean rule by the Hutu ethnic majority, and after independence, the government of Kayibanda continued to draw on the historical narrative of Tutsi conquest and exploitation of the Hutu to justify his own consolidation of power as the defender of Hutu interests.<sup>24</sup> The false histories of migration as the source of ethnic differentiation in Rwanda and of Tutsi as the long-time oppressors of Hutu continued to be taught in schools after independence.

After Juvénal Habyarimana became president in a 1973 coup, he sought to quell ethnic violence by implementing an ethnic quota system that limited Tutsi access to education and employment, but the

<sup>22</sup> Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression*.

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Longman, “Nation, Race, or Class? Defining the Hutu and Tutsi of East Africa,” in Joseph Feagin and Pinar Batur-Vanderlippe, eds., *The Global Color Line: Racial and Ethnic Inequality and Struggle from a Global Perspective*, JAI Press: Bingley, UK, 1999, pp. 103–130.

<sup>24</sup> The best source on the 1959 “revolution” and the early independence era is René Lemarchand, *Rwanda and Burundi*, New York: Palgrave, 1970. See also Jean-Paul Kimonyo, *Rwanda’s Popular Genocide: A Perfect Storm*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2016 on the conflation of majority rule with Hutu rule.



basic ideology of Hutu majority rule remained unchanged. When both an internal movement for democratization and the invasion by the Rwandan Patriotic Front challenged the Habyarimana regime in the early 1990s, his supporters returned to the ideology of the Kayibanda years and sought to regain popular support by recasting themselves as the defenders of the Hutu majority against an attempt to re-establish a minority Tutsi dictatorship. They used targeted violence against the Tutsi to heighten ethnic polarization<sup>25</sup> and undermined their critics by portraying them as traitors to Hutu interests. This strategy of using ethnic violence to mobilize Hutu support ultimately culminated in the 1994 genocide.<sup>26</sup>

The ideology used to justify the 1994 genocide and inspire popular participation drew heavily on the historical narrative developed during colonial rule. The message was promulgated as propaganda through meetings of Habyarimana's political party, the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (*Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement*, MRND), and even more extreme Coalition for the Defense of the Republic (CDR), extremist publications, and both the official radio station, Radio Rwanda, and the ostensibly independent Radio-Television of the Thousand Hills (*Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines*, RTLM), founded by MRND and CDR supporters. The ideology claimed that Tutsi were aliens who did not belong in Rwanda. In a notorious November 1992 speech to an MRND meeting in Gisenyi Prefecture recorded on a cassette and much replayed, Léon Mugesera, the prefecture's party vice-president, said of members of the largely Tutsi Liberal Party, "I am telling you that your home is Ethiopia, that we are going to send you back there quickly, by the Nyabarongo" [a tributary of the Nile].<sup>27</sup> Another major theme was the history of Tutsi conquest and the need for Hutu to revenge their humiliation and emasculation at Tutsi hands. Mugesera asserted that, "At whatever cost, you will leave here with these words ... do not let yourselves be invaded. ... I know

<sup>25</sup> Research by both a team of international human rights investigators and a leading Rwandan human rights group revealed that ethnic massacres that occurred between October 1990 and February 1993 were not, as they were portrayed, spontaneous expressions of popular anger but rather actions undertaken by government officials with the approval of higher authorities. Africa Watch, Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), Union Inter-Africaine des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples (UIDH), et al., "Rapport de la Commission Internationale d'Enquête sur les Violations des Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda depuis le 1er Octobre 1990 (7-21 Janvier 1993)," Paris: FIDH, March 1993; Association Rwandaise Pour la Defense des Droits de la Personne et des Libertés Publiques (ADL), "Rapport sur les Droits de l'Homme au Rwanda," Kigali: ADL, December 1992.

<sup>26</sup> On the early 1990s, see Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, p. 85.

you are men ... who do not let themselves be invaded, who refuse to be scorned.”<sup>28</sup>

For those authors who regard the 1994 Rwandan genocide as a mass uprising in which huge portions – perhaps a majority – of Hutu participated, the genocidal ideology and its historical narrative are key to understanding popular support for the killing campaign. Mahmood Mamdani, for example, portrays the Rwandan genocide as unique because of its mass nature and extensive popular participation.<sup>29</sup> He seeks in his text to “make popular agency ... thinkable,”<sup>30</sup> and contends that the genocide was deeply rooted in the history developed in the colonial era. What happened in Rwanda, “was a genocide by those who saw themselves as sons – and daughters – of the soil, and their mission as one of clearing the soil of a threatening *alien* presence.”<sup>31</sup> Jean-Pierre Chrétien emphasized the role of hate radio in disseminating the message that the Hutu needed to defend themselves against Tutsi trying to re-establish feudalism.<sup>32</sup>

My own experience in Rwanda just prior to the genocide and my subsequent field research on the genocide (particularly the research I conducted in 1995–1996 for the book *Leave None to Tell the Story*), convince me that the level of popular participation in the genocide is commonly over-estimated and the role of ideology is exaggerated. Relatively small groups of committed (and trained) killers carried out most of the major massacres at churches, schools, and other central locations before mandatory participation in security patrols and roadblocks implicated a larger portion of the population. Many Hutu men participated in the patrols and roadblocks quite reluctantly, and most of those who participated were not involved in killing. Even those who did participate in the killing, however, were not necessarily driven by a deep hatred of Tutsi whipped up by the genocidal ideology. My own research confirms the findings of Scott Straus’s interviews with confessed genocide perpetrators that people participated primarily out of fear created by the RPF invasion of the country and fear of the consequences of resisting orders by authorities to kill.<sup>33</sup> Lee Ann Fujii emphasizes the importance of social networks to

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, pp. 3–7, implies that nearly every Hutu man participated. He quotes one survivor as saying, “There were about 5,000 in our *secteur*. Of the 3,500 Hutu, all the men participated,” (p. 4).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Pierre Chrétien, ed., *Rwanda: Les médias du génocide*, Paris: Karthala, 1995; Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *Le défi de l’Ethnisme: Rwanda et Burundi: 1990–1996*, Paris: Karthala, 1997.

<sup>33</sup> Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.

explaining participation in the genocide, another factor where the ideology mattered little.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the historical narrative about Rwanda's past and the ideology that drew upon it were significant to the genocide in several ways. Straus's conclusion that "an 'ideology of genocide' did not drive participation in the genocide"<sup>35</sup> seems accurate for the vast majority of Rwandans involved in the genocide, but many of the core group of committed killers and those who organized the genocide seem to have been influenced by ideas about a history of oppression and humiliation. For political and social leaders who found their authority slipping away in the early 1990s, the idea of a Tutsi conspiracy made sense. Like other African leaders, Habyarimana developed a neo-patrimonial structure in which he gained support from powerful individuals – principally Hutu from his home region in the north, but also others who were willing to back him – in exchange for opportunities, such as the chance for personal enrichment through embezzling public funds. When the democracy movement challenged this patrimonial elite, their response was not to admit to their own corruption, incompetence, and brutality but to question the motives of those who threatened their power. Because of discrimination, Tutsi were mostly excluded from the elite and widely supported the opposition. Leaders of the regime could thus dismiss the reform movement as a Tutsi conspiracy, particularly when a largely Tutsi army, the RPF, was invading the country. While some Hutu Power leaders may have embraced the ideology of genocide cynically as a tool to motivate popular support, many intensely hated Tutsi. They sincerely believed in the history of Tutsi conquest and domination and deemed themselves the defenders of Hutu interests against a malevolent power-hungry foreign presence on Rwandan soil. The anti-Tutsi ideology's historical narrative may not explain most popular participation, but it does seem to have motivated many elite participants.

The historical narrative made an even more significant contribution to the genocide, however, in defining the very identity of victims and perpetrators. For scholars, the constructed nature of identities in Rwanda is particularly obvious. Hutu and Tutsi share the same territory and have a common language and culture. Even if claims of physical distinctions between the two groups had historical merit, which they do not, the historic flexibility of group membership and the frequency of intermarriage would have eliminated the reliability of judging individuals

<sup>34</sup> Lee Ann Fujii, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

by their appearance. What distinguishes the two groups, ultimately, is the idea that they have different historical origins. The fact that historical and anthropological research disproves the assertion that the groups originated through separate migrations<sup>36</sup> was politically less significant than the fact that people *believed* that the two groups were distinct. Jan Vansina's claim that, "an ethnic group is a group of people who believe *erroneously* that they share a common history,"<sup>37</sup> is quite telling in the Rwandan case. The belief that Hutu and Tutsi had different histories ultimately served to distinguish the groups from one another. Long after any occupational differentiation had disappeared, long after Tutsi had lost the reins of power in Rwanda, what separated them from Hutu was a belief in their difference rooted in the historical narrative of separate origins. Colonialists did not invent Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa as categories, but they worked with Tutsi elites to develop a history that endowed the groups with distinct origins and made it possible to think about them as separate races. This distinction, rooted in a historical narrative, ultimately made the genocide possible by delineating the boundaries of group membership.

### The Official Historical Narrative

After the RPF swept to power in July 1994, tens of thousands of Tutsi who had been living as refugees, primarily in Uganda, Zaire, and Burundi, began flooding back into Rwanda. These repatriated Tutsi, widely known in Rwanda as the *rapatriés*, or returnees, had varying experiences abroad. Many had lived in exile for more than three decades, and a large portion was born abroad and had never set foot in Rwanda. Many refugees grew up in the limited confines of camps – particularly in Uganda – but some enjoyed considerable opportunity and prospered in their adopted lands, as in Congo where many Tutsi made successful careers in trade. Despite their diverse backgrounds, most Tutsi refugees shared, to at least some extent, a common vision of Rwanda and its past that was at sharp variance with the historical narrative widely accepted within Rwandan territory at the time. As Liisa Malkki has demonstrated through her perceptive study of Burundian Hutu refugees in Tanzania, the constructed memory of their homeland can be a powerful social force among refugees.<sup>38</sup> In the perspective of the Tutsi refugees, the Rwandan

<sup>36</sup> David Lee Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Change in the Great Lakes Region to the Fifteenth Century*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.

<sup>37</sup> Personal communication, 1993.

<sup>38</sup> Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

population had been unified prior to colonialism, and the colonial state and the Catholic Church were largely to blame for the persecution and exclusion of the Tutsi. Corrupt post-independence governments worked in league with foreign powers to manipulate the uneducated and gullible population to prevent the return of Tutsi to their rightful place in Rwandan society. The idea of Rwanda as homeland remained central to the refugee community's identity, and the desire to return was powerful, particularly during periods when the Tutsi faced discrimination because of their outsider status, as in the second Obote regime in Uganda in the early 1980s.<sup>39</sup> As Gerard Prunier wrote, "As the years passed and memories of the real Rwanda began to recede, Rwanda slowly became a mythical country in the refugees' minds."<sup>40</sup> For the young who had no personal experience of Rwanda, "Contrasting an idealized past life with the difficulties they were experiencing, their image of Rwanda became that of a land of milk and honey. Economic problems linked with their eventual return, such as overpopulation, overgrazing or soil erosion, were dismissed as Kigali regime propaganda."<sup>41</sup> As Malkki suggests, the context in which refugees live affects the degree to which they are driven by collective memory.<sup>42</sup> The RPF had its roots in the refugee camps of southern Uganda, where life was hard and refugees faced repression. The experience of persecution and limited opportunity shaped the refugees's view of their own past and the conditions that had forced them to flee into exile. Those who emerged to lead the RPF were motivated by a vision of the past in which the Tutsi were unjustly persecuted.

When the RPF took power in Rwanda, the returned refugees viewed Rwanda through the framework of the collective memory they had developed abroad but found a population whose understanding of the past was quite different from their own. The RPF and its supporters correctly perceived that history had been distorted and used to mobilize the population and enable the genocide.<sup>43</sup> To achieve a durable peace, they recognized a need to re-educate the population about the country's history and replace the previous historical narrative with a new narrative

<sup>39</sup> On the Tutsi refugees in Uganda and the formation of the RPF, see Catharine Watson, *Exile from Rwanda: Background to an Invasion*, Washington: US Committee for Refugees, February 1991; Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, pp. 61–74; and Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, pp. 159–184.

<sup>40</sup> Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Malkki, *Purity and Exile* found that memories of violence were a driving force for Burundian Hutu refugees living in refugee camps, but for refugees who had integrated into local communities, the memories were less important.

<sup>43</sup> Josias Semujonga, "Le discours scientifique comme porteur du stereotypes: Le cas de l'historiographie rwandaise," in *Rapport de Synthese du Seminaire sur l'Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998.

in which Tutsi were not foreign invaders but sons and daughters of the Rwandan soil. Immediately after taking power, the government placed a moratorium on the teaching of history in Rwandan secondary schools, while a group of repatriated intellectuals – including government officials, professors, and other intellectuals, such as priests – began to work on revising Rwanda’s formal history. Scholars with strong international reputations, such as Paul Rutayisire, Gamaliel Mbonimana, Faustin Rutembesa, Célestin Kalimba, and Déogratias Byanafashe, most of whom had been professors in Burundi or Zaire, sought to introduce their ideas to a new Rwandan audience.<sup>44</sup> As Jean Nizurugero Rugagi asserted, “The current and urgent task for the historian is to place before the eyes of Rwandans and before international opinion the authentic course of Rwandan history to better denounce the manipulation that it experienced.”<sup>45</sup> Dominican Father Bernardin Muzungu founded a quarterly journal, *Lumière et Société*, focused on correcting understandings of the Rwandan past, the Center for Conflict Management at the NUR in Butare undertook research on issues such as the migration of people into Rwanda and the historic sources of ethnic conflict, and major conferences on the history of Rwanda were organized at the NUR in 1998 and 1999. Government officials in their public addresses, the national radio in both news reports and special programming, and various newspapers and magazines have regularly discussed both Rwanda’s recent and more remote history, using the same historical narrative as the historians.<sup>46</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the major themes raised in both the academic historical works and official government discourse.

### **The Essential Unity of the Rwandan People**

The fundamental unity of Rwanda’s people in pre-colonial times is a major theme of the new historical narrative. The scholarship generally does not pretend that the region was entirely peaceful, as kingdoms rose and fell and various individuals and groups vied for political power,

<sup>44</sup> One could also add to this list Joseph Gahama who, though Burundian, moved to Rwanda in the late 1990s and participated in the new historiography.

<sup>45</sup> Jean Nizurugero Rugagi, “Decolonisation et democratization du Rwanda,” *Cahiers Lumière et Société*, no. 7, October 1997, 43–54.

<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, until recently nearly all of the academic work was in French, since the Francophone territories of Burundi and Zaire allowed Tutsi to become professors, while discrimination in Uganda limited opportunities for educational and social advancement for Tutsi refugees. By contrast, most of the political discourse is in English or Kinyarwanda, as the RPF emerged in Anglophone Uganda and remains dominated by former Ugandan refugees.

but conflicts did not occur along lines of identity. In fact, the narrative challenges the idea that ethnic divisions have a historic basis. Scholars draw on linguistic analysis and archeology to demonstrate that patterns of migration into Rwanda were complex and do not explain the emergence of the country's ethnic groups.<sup>47</sup> The fact that clans cut across ethnic lines is raised as proof of the historic unity of the three groups.<sup>48</sup> The shared use of the Kinyarwanda language is offered as evidence of the cultural unity of the Rwandan people,<sup>49</sup> as is the unifying belief in a high god, Imana.<sup>50</sup> President Kagame has often asserted the unity of pre-colonial Rwandans, as in a 2003 speech in San Francisco, in which he stated, "The Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa were Banyarwanda until the colonial adventure."<sup>51</sup> Pre-colonial Rwanda was effectively a nation state, because it had a single national identity and clearly defined territory,<sup>52</sup> which is said to have been considerably larger than the boundaries of Rwanda set in colonial times, encompassing much of eastern Congo and southern Uganda, a fact used to justify modern incursions into Congo.<sup>53</sup>

The narrative contends that while the categories Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa existed before colonialism, they emerged within Rwanda rather than through migration. Oral sources are cited to suggest that Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa come from common descent. According to Rwandan

<sup>47</sup> Misago Kanimba, "Peuplement ancien du Rwanda: à la lumière de récentes recherches," *Cahiers du Centre de Gestion des Conflits*, no. 5, ND, 2003, 8–44, for example, explains that many groups migrated to Rwanda "with different languages, Khoi-san, Sudanic, Cushitic, and Bantu. This last linguistic group progressively assimilated the other linguistic groups that were part of more scattered communities and thus less bound together. They had to adopt the language of a more stable group. The long coexistence of these groups (autochthonous and immigrant) ended in the fusion of cultural and linguistic elements as well as genes" (p. 37).

<sup>48</sup> Bernardin Muzungu, "Ethnies et Clans," *Cahiers Centre Saint-Dominique*, no.1, August 8, 1995: "There are no clans of a single ethnic group: the three are found in each clan."

<sup>49</sup> Alexis Gakuba, "Le Kinyarwanda: Instrument de l'Unité Nationale," *Les Cahiers Evangile et Société*, no. 3, June 1996, 59–67.

<sup>50</sup> Gérard Nyirimanzi, "Les solidarités traditionnelles," *Cahiers Lumière et Société*, no. 14, June 1999, 19–41, p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> President Paul Kagame, "Beyond Absolute Terror: Post-Genocide Reconstruction in Rwanda," Speech to the Commonwealth Club of California, San Francisco, March 7, 2003.

<sup>52</sup> Gamaliel Mbonimana, "Le Rwanda état-nation au XIXe siècle," in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l'Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998.

<sup>53</sup> Célestin Kalimba, "Rwanda: Les frontières," in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l'Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998. The idea of a "Greater Rwanda" was a key justification for the incursions in Congo in 1996 and 1998, since it suggested that territories under threat of anti-Tutsi ethnic violence were a Rwandan concern rather than something purely internal to Congo. A map of pre-colonial Rwanda that suggests the borders included not only all of modern Rwanda but also most of North Kivu and a large section of southwestern Uganda was widely circulated in the mid and late 1990s, particularly in the period just preceding the invasion of Zaire in 1996. It appeared, for example, inside the cover of several issues of *Cahiers Lumière et Société* in 1999.

myths, the three social groups are descendants of the children of one father. Imana (God) gave them each milk to guard. Gatwa drank his milk, Gahutu spilled his, and only Gatutsi kept his milk safe, which is why Imana put Gatutsi in charge of his brothers. The story “shows that in the ancestral tradition, what we currently call ethnicities are not a question of race but of ‘wealth and social rank.’ In effect, the story speaks of three brothers, not of three races.”<sup>54</sup> In pre-colonial Rwanda, the three groups lived in harmony, and their relations were not grossly unequal, with each fulfilling a defined social and economic function. In particular, the relationship between Hutu and Tutsi was not feudal, as colonial scholars purported, because relations were reciprocal and mutually beneficial.<sup>55</sup> Many writers argue that Rwanda was like a large extended family with diverse members nevertheless intimately tied together. “It was on this natural line that national unity was grafted as a larger extension of the family. In this way, the king was considered not only as the political chief, but above all as the ‘supreme patriarch of all families.’”<sup>56</sup>

The idea that the monarchy served to unify Rwandans of all groups is key to the narrative. The royal Nyiginya clan gradually centralized its rule over the Rwandan population in the centuries before colonialism. “The result of this centralization and this increased uniformity of the management of the country was a consciousness of the unity of the population. One king, one law, one people – such was Rwanda in this pre-colonial ‘Nyiginya’ period. This step of development of the country was the supreme realization of Rwanda as a family whose members were named the Rwandans or Rwandan people.”<sup>57</sup> The king was above ethnicity. As a presidential commission on Rwanda’s national unity concluded, “The King was the crux for all Rwandans. ... [A]fter he was enthroned, people said that ‘he was no umututsi anymore,’ but the King for the people. ... In the programme of expanding Rwanda, there was no room for disputes between Hutus, Tutsi and Twas. The King brought all of them

<sup>54</sup> Bernardin Muzungu, “Les Mythes,” *Cahiers Lumière et Société*, no. 5, Mayu 1997, 23–36, citation p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> Faustin Rutembesa, “A propos de l’usage du concept ‘féodalité’ dans l’étude de la société rwandaise,” in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l’Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Nyirimanzi, “Les solidarités traditionnelles,” p. 23. Michaël Kayihura, “Composantes et relations sociales au Rwanda pré-colonial, colonial, et post-colonial: Hutu, Tutsi, Twa, Lignages et Clans,” in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l’Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998, provides a nice summary of all of these arguments about the historic unity of the Rwandan people.

<sup>57</sup> Dèogratias Byanafashe, “La famille comme principe de cohérence de la société rwandaise traditionnelle” *Cahiers Lumière et Société*, no. 6, August 1997, 3–26, citation p. 21.



together.”<sup>58</sup> In sum, “The Rwandans constitute one ethnicity, not three, and have the same origin, a common biological relationship due to the numerous intermarriages over the millenniums.”<sup>59</sup>

### The Divisive Role of Colonialism

If Rwandans were historically a unified people, the narrative clearly blames colonial rule for dividing the population, particularly along ethnic lines.<sup>60</sup> As Gérard Nyirimanzi writes, “The current crisis has a cause exterior to our past: the racism inculcated in our united people for centuries by the colonizer.”<sup>61</sup> The Catholic Church began the practice of ethnic segregation by establishing schools for Tutsi,<sup>62</sup> and the colonial administration then adopted the idea of ethnic differentiation.<sup>63</sup> Missionaries and others developed a historical narrative that sought to explain the different ethnic groups but that actually created the myths that gave the divisions social meaning. “Colonial historiography not only created cleavages between three social categories but, more seriously, conferred on them an ancient existence. The differences between these entities, rather falsified and unduly important, are explained in reference to the different historical origins.”<sup>64</sup> The colonial idea that Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa were three separate racial groups that migrated into Rwanda at different times became the basis of colonial policy, and priests, teachers, and administrators ultimately duped the Rwandan population into

<sup>58</sup> Republic of Rwanda, Office of the President of the Republic, *The Unity of Rwandans: Before the Colonial Period and Under Colonial Rule; Under the First Republic*, Kigali, August 1999, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Jean Nizurugero Rugagi, “Les facteurs favorables à l’identité citoyenne dans l’histoire du Rwanda des origines à 1900,” in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l’Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> According to Helen Hintjens, “Post-Genocide Identity Politics in Rwanda,” *Ethnicities*, 8(1), 2008, “For the current regime, only one account of Rwandan history is acceptable, which is that all was well among Rwandans until the colonizers created pseudo-racial, later ethnic identities, in order to quite deliberately divide Rwandans against one another,” (p. 15).

<sup>61</sup> Nyirimanzi, “Les solidarités traditionnelles.”

<sup>62</sup> Gamaliel Mbonimana, “Ethnies et Eglise Catholique: Le remodelage de la société par l’école missionnaire (1900–1931),” *Cahiers Centre Saint-Dominique*, no. 1, August 8, 1995, 52–67.

<sup>63</sup> Rugagi, “Décolonisation et démocratisation du Rwanda,” writes, “The Belgian administration, despite its preferences for the *Hutu*, preferred to align with the thesis of Mgr. Classe who affirmed that *the Batutsi have an innate sense of command. He affirmed at the same time that the Bahutu were only good for manual labor, because they had a base spirit*” (p. 46) (emphasis in original).

<sup>64</sup> Misago Kanimba, “Le peuplement du territoire rwandais: à la lumière archéologiques,” *Les Cahiers Lumière et Société*, no. 5, May 1997, 68–79, citation p. 79.

believing the veracity of the racial origins of Rwanda's differences.<sup>65</sup> As Michaël Kayihura states, "The Western historians, ethnographers, and anthropologists accustomed us to a certain number of physical, moral, social, and cultural stereotypes, about which the least that one can say is that they have had a long life, since they still remain in the work of certain post-colonial authors."<sup>66</sup>

The power and benefits that came to the Tutsi during the colonial period were not due to their own actions but part of the colonial strategy of domination. Once the Tutsi began to seek to wrest control of their country, the colonial rulers switched support to the Hutu in a cynical bid to retain as much power as possible. The Europeans in Rwanda created an "exacerbation through words and acts of the differences between Hutu and Tutsi, by the colony and the mission. The Roman tactic of 'divide et impera' (divide to better manipulate) was chosen to prevent the independence of Rwanda. To do this, it was necessary to raise up the Hutu who didn't ask for it against the Tutsi who demanded it."<sup>67</sup> Cynical colonial manipulations cast the Tutsi as arrogant, dominating foreigners. "After the alliances were changed, the Tutsi were abandoned by the colonizers for having committed the fault of demanding the independence of their country, what were previously Tutsi qualities became faults or, more exactly, the opposite of an asset."<sup>68</sup>

Even well-meaning colonials, such as progressive priests, acted out of a misunderstanding of the Rwandan situation. Flemish priests saw in the Hutu a working class like the Flemish and equated the Tutsi with arrogant Walloons who had historically dominated Belgium. They saw their fight for the Hutu as a fight for justice. "In this hope for justice, these young Flemish forget the great majority of Tutsi who lived in a low social condition at the same level as the Hutu."<sup>69</sup>

### **The History of Genocide and Post-Independent Governance**

According to the official narrative, the uprising of 1959 was not, as previously contended, a "revolution" but instead the first instance of genocide

<sup>65</sup> Muzungu, "Ethnies et Clans," writes, "Bantu, Hamite, and Pygmoid. These three races would be the source of our so-called three ethnic groups: Hutu, Tutsi, Twa. No one can ignore the political and colonial impact that weighed on these theories" (p. 25).

<sup>66</sup> Kayihura, "Composantes et relations sociales," p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Octave Ugirashebuta, "L'ideologie du Tutsi oppresseur," *Les Cahiers Evangile et Société*, no. 4, December 1996, 57–67.

<sup>68</sup> Bernardin Muzungu, "Le prejugué de race," *Les Cahiers Evangile et Société*, No. 4, December 1996, 20–29.

<sup>69</sup> Nizurugero, "Décolonisation et democratization," p. 48.

in Rwanda's history.<sup>70</sup> This first instance of ethnic violence in Rwanda's history was due directly to European manipulations, as colonial administrators, missionaries, and others feared losing their control to a radicalized Tutsi political class who would not have allowed neocolonial domination. A key idea in the narrative is that colonial and post-colonial manipulation distorted democracy in Rwanda. Majority rule came to be understood not as government by the political majority but as rule by the ethnic majority, the Hutu. "The identification of the mass as only the Hutu was the fatal error for the country. This logic culminated in negating purely and simply the nationality of all Tutsi and ignored the existence of the Twa. We already have here the premises of the genocide of 1994."<sup>71</sup>

The First and Second Republics are understood as pawns of neocolonial authority. The Hutu who took power were handpicked by the Europeans and betrayed the interests of the Rwandan people for their own personal benefit. "The two first republics were simply extensions of colonization by imposed 'natives.'"<sup>72</sup> "The Rwandan social order created by colonization endured more than 30 years in the two first republics."<sup>73</sup>

Violence against Tutsi began in 1959, and the governments of both Kayibanda and Habyarimana must also be understood in light of this violence. Nyirimanzi's reference to, "the catastrophe that befell our country beginning in 1959 and the culmination of which took place in 1994,"<sup>74</sup> is typical in regarding the period of 1959–1994 as a continuous time of violence against the Tutsi, gradually and inevitably building toward the 1994 genocide.<sup>75</sup> Failure to hold anyone accountable for the earlier violence made possible the genocide in 1994. The anti-Tutsi ideology and policies of the regimes completely overshadow any other policies, such

<sup>70</sup> Pierre Mungarulire, "Le revolution de 1959 au Rwanda," in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l'Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998, writes "This so-called 'Revolution of 1959,' even baptized by others as the 'Popular Revolution of 1959,' I call the 'so-called' revolution, because in my opinion ... the bloody events that took place in Rwanda, as in November 1959, were not at all a revolution, much less a popular revolution." See also, Pierre Kamanzi, "Révolution ou Régression?" *Cahiers Lumière et Société*, no. 16, December 1999, 61–72.

<sup>71</sup> Rugagi, "Décolonisation et démocratisation," p. 48.

<sup>72</sup> Byanafashe, "La famille comme principe," p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> Bernardin Muzungu, "A qui profitent nos malheurs?" *Cahiers Lumière et Société*, March 1999, 35–54.

<sup>74</sup> Nyirimanzi, "Les solidarités traditionnelles."

<sup>75</sup> One speaker at a conference in Butare in preparation for the national week of mourning in 2003, for example, declared, "Even if the true genocide began on April 6, 1994, just after the death of Habyarimana, the genocide really began in 1959." Quoted on Radio Rwanda, April 2, 2003.

as the focus on economic development.<sup>76</sup> Issues not related to ethnic violence are glossed over or entirely ignored. For example, Jean-Damascène Ndayambaje writes that, “Violence by the Parmehutu Party against the Tutsi marked the entire period 1959–1973,”<sup>77</sup> ignoring the actual periodic nature of the violence and the general absence of ethnic violence between 1965 and 1973. The history of both republics is reduced to the aspects relevant to ethnic discrimination and ethnic violence, as though nothing other than identity issues were politically relevant.<sup>78</sup> As Kagame has said, “The period of 1959 to 1994 is indeed a history of genocide in slow motion.”<sup>79</sup>

### The Centrality of the Genocide

The genocide is the focal point of Rwanda’s current historical narrative. Much as the previous regimes referred endlessly to the 1959 “revolution” to justify their actions and interpreted contemporary history in light of this uprising against Tutsi and colonial oppressors, the RPF regime has identified the genocide as the key event against which all Rwandan history before and since must be considered. Colonial history is seen as laying the groundwork for genocide,<sup>80</sup> and the First and Second Republics are understood to have built inevitably toward the 1994 genocide. President Kagame and other politicians regularly refer to the genocide as the primary source of Rwanda’s ongoing challenges and as justification for many current government policies. Kagame began his 2003 San Francisco speech with the line, “There is no greater crime than genocide,”<sup>81</sup> using the genocide to frame all of his subsequent remarks. The RPF claims considerable moral authority for having stopped the genocide, and the threat of renewed genocide justifies many ongoing government policies.

<sup>76</sup> For example, according to Radio Rwanda the participants in a 2002 meeting of former government officials in Ruhengeri, “found that the regimes that followed the colonial regime did nothing to correct these errors [of ethnic division], but rather they aggravated things to the point that the divisions launched the 1994 genocide.” Radio Rwanda, Morning News, September 19, 2002.

<sup>77</sup> Jean-Damascène Ndayambaje, “Le genocide des Tutsi: Genese et execution,” in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l’Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998.

<sup>78</sup> C.f., Ferdinand Kayobokey, “Le M.D.R. Parmehutu et la 1ère République,” in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l’Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998; Médard Rutijanwa, “Le MRND et la IIème République Rwandaise: Essai d’Analyse critique du Système Politique et Idéologique du MRND,” in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l’Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998. In addition to ethnicity, both authors discuss the relevance of regional discrimination among Hutu in the two regimes.

<sup>79</sup> Kagame, “Beyond Absolute Terror.”

<sup>80</sup> Muzungu, “A qui profitent nos malheurs?” writes, “Historically speaking, the Hutu-Tutsi antagonism was created by colonization” (p. 39).

<sup>81</sup> Kagame, “Beyond Absolute Terror.”

The historical narrative offers an interpretation of the genocide that emphasizes its mass popular nature and its brutality. The government and its supporters have consistently insisted on the largest possible number of victims – usually over one million – to emphasize the very serious nature of the genocide.<sup>82</sup> The editors of *Cahiers Lumière et Société* assert (without supporting evidence) that since 1959 two million people have been killed in Hutu–Tutsi violence in Rwanda.<sup>83</sup> Along with a large number of victims, the narrative portrays the genocide as an event in which nearly every Hutu in the country was caught up and that involved extraordinary depravity. This emphasis implies that anyone in Rwanda at the time of the genocide is tainted by the violence. Only those who lost their lives opposing the genocide can be known to have truly challenged the violence. Survival implies cooption; one has to have done something to survive. Hence, not only all Hutu who survived are suspect, even if they seemed to actively oppose the genocide, but also by implication, so are Tutsi survivors.<sup>84</sup>

The narrative attributes the genocide to sources both external and internal to Rwanda. International responsibility for the genocide is assigned not simply to the role that colonialism played in creating ethnic divisions, but also to ongoing failures by the international community.<sup>85</sup> France is singled out in particular for having supported the Habyarimana regime, cooperated with the FAR in combating the RPF, trained and armed the militia groups that carried out the genocide, and helped the Rwandan army and militia members escape into Zaire by establishing the Zone Turquoise.<sup>86</sup> Kagame writes, “I hold the French government, in particular, responsible

<sup>82</sup> Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, p. 16, offers an interesting discussion of the conflict over numbers of victims.

<sup>83</sup> “Conclusion Generale,” *Cahiers Lumière et Société*, December 1999, 73–76.

<sup>84</sup> In a speech to commemorate the Day of Heroes, a national holiday created by the RPF to focus on those who have resisted ethnic violence, President Kagame declared, “The most essential things is to remember these heroes, because they are no longer living. It is unfortunate that they are no longer living ... But their work, resting on their ideologies that they put into application, is not erased. This [commemoration] keeps them among us. We must follow their example.” Paul Kagame, Speech on the Day of Heroes, Nyange, Kibuye, broadcast on Radio Rwanda, February 1, 2003. The idea that those who opposed ethnic violence, the “heroes,” are all dead implies that those still living did not oppose ethnic violence. I develop the idea of collective guilt more fully in Chapter 4.

<sup>85</sup> Benoît Kaboyi, representative of the survivors’ group IBUKA, speaking at a “Solidarity Camp” for recently released prisoners, Nkumba, Ruhengeri, broadcast on Radio Rwanda, April 2, 2003, declared, “I don’t want to speak about the role of the colonizers, the French who trained the Interahamwe, the sellers of arms, etc.”

<sup>86</sup> The culpability of France was a point of particular emphasis for the RPF leadership, as the French government is among the only international governments to challenge the RPF’s interpretation of the genocide and its moral position. The Rwandan government accused France of supporting the genocide (c.f., Jeevan Vasagar, “France Blamed as Rwanda Marks Genocide Date,” *The Guardian*, April 8, 2004), while the French government has accused the RPF of inciting the genocide by assassinating Habyarimana

for helping to arm and train the militias that dispersed throughout the country to wipe out the Tutsi population.”<sup>87</sup> The rest of the international community bears responsibility for failing to stop the genocide. Kagame asserted, “The UN and the international community as a whole abandoned Rwanda in 1994.”<sup>88</sup> Gasana Ndoba, the president of the National Commission for Human Rights, asserted that, “the genocide was prepared and executed in the view of and with the knowledge of the international community.”<sup>89</sup> In his speech on the ninth anniversary of the genocide, President Kagame, asked, “Fifty years ago they said, ‘Never again,’ but what did they do so that this would not be committed in our country?”<sup>90</sup>

The narrative attributes blame within the country in two distinct ways. Responsibility lies first with the elite, particularly government officials, who selfishly used their power for personal gain and served foreign interests rather than the national interest. Bad governance is a common theme in discussions of the genocide. The leaders of both the First and Second Republics are regarded as having set the stage for the genocide with their abuse of power and their ethnic discrimination. The discourse pays scant attention to the internal process of democratization from 1990 to 1994 other than to note that many politicians formerly in opposition ultimately re-aligned themselves with President Habyarimana and the Hutu-Power movement. The Democratic Republican Movement (*Mouvement Démocratique Républicain*, MDR) is particularly singled out for having maintained the anti-Tutsi values of its predecessor party Parmehutu.<sup>91</sup> A few Hutu, such as Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, are recognized as martyrs, but the narrative sees most Hutu as having in fact been complicit in the genocide.

by shooting down his plane. The French ultimately issued warrants for the arrest of top RPF officials for their involvement in the assassination (“France Issues Rwanda Warrants,” BBC News, November 23, 2006). The tension ultimately led to a severing of diplomatic ties between Rwanda and France in November 2006 (“Rwanda Cuts Relations with France,” BBC News, November 24, 2006).

<sup>87</sup> Paul Kagame, “Preface,” in Phil Clark and Zachary D. Kaufman, eds., *After Genocide: Transitional Justice, Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Rwanda and Beyond*, London: Hurst, 2008.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ndoba Gasana, reported on Evening News, Radio Rwanda, April 2, 2003.

<sup>90</sup> Paul Kagame, speech given at the national commemoration of the ninth anniversary of the 1994 genocide, Mwurire, Rwangana, Kibungo, broadcast on Radio Rwanda, April 7, 2003.

<sup>91</sup> Reyntjens, “Rwanda 10 Years On.” In April 2003, the Transitional National Assembly voted to ban the MDR after a parliamentary commission reported that the party had supported the genocide and retained a genocidal ideology. République Rwandaise, Assemblée Nationale, *Rapport de la Commission Parlementaire de controle mise en place le 27 decembre 2002 pour enquerer sur les problemes du MDR*, accepted by the National Transitional Assembly, April 14, 2003.

Elites outside the government are also condemned for their complicity. Members of civil society – even human rights organizations – are said to have participated in the genocide, indicating the total bankruptcy of the intellectual class. Paul Rutayisire makes a stinging critique of the Catholic Church and its complicity in the genocide, both for its historic and contemporary role, a perspective embraced by many of the former refugee intellectuals. “In the process that led to genocide, the Catholic hierarchy was complicit, as much in its behavior as in its teachings, in broadcasting the evil that ate away at Rwandan society. Even the most unconditional defenders of the Catholic Church do not contest this fact.”<sup>92</sup> In general, the educated in Rwanda, whether in the government or outside, are considered to have led the country down the road to genocide.

The narrative walks a fine line between blaming the Rwandan population and vindicating them by blaming the international community and the national leadership. The masses are regarded as having participated widely in the genocide, but mostly because of their severe poverty and ignorance that made them vulnerable to manipulation by ill-intentioned elites. The masses were deceived by “an ideology of discrimination,”<sup>93</sup> that claimed not only that the Tutsi were foreigners and that Rwanda belonged to Hutu,<sup>94</sup> but that all Tutsi in Rwanda were enemies of the Hutu; killing Tutsi was therefore self-defense.<sup>95</sup> The low level of education within the population limited the masses’ capacity to critically assess the false ideas being fed to them.<sup>96</sup> Poverty is also considered a major cause of the genocide, as the wretched lives of the masses made them respond to promises of economic opportunity.

Given its centrality, the genocide must be highlighted and commemorated in order to prevent it from recurring. As the regional representative of the survivors’ group IBUKA reported in a radio interview, “Some people have even said that remembering [the genocide] does not coincide with the process of unity and reconciliation of Rwandans. This is

<sup>92</sup> Paul Rutayisire, “Le catholicisme rwandais en proces,” in *Rapport de Synthèse du Séminaire sur l’Histoire du Rwanda*, Butare, December 14–18, 1998, p. 16. See also, Paul Rutayisire and Bernardin Muzungu, “L’ethnisme au Coeur de la guerre,” *Cahiers Centre Saint-Dominique*, no. 1, August 8, 1995, 68–82.

<sup>93</sup> JB Habyarimana, president of the National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation, cited on Radio Rwanda, January 21, 2003. “The genocide is the result of several influences that come together and the points of departure are social conditions, grave economic problems, conditions that drove toward the troubles, political problems, but equally the psychological conditions that were created by an ideology of discrimination.”

<sup>94</sup> Bernardin Muzungu, “Un Mensonge politique,” *Cahiers Lumière et Société*, no. 10, May 1998, 26–46.

<sup>95</sup> Rutayisire and Muzungu, “L’ethnisme au Coeur de la guerre.”

<sup>96</sup> The fact that those who were educated are blamed for the genocide does not diminish the degree to which ignorance is considered a key cause.

not a good idea. People holding this opinion only take account of their own interests. ... He who doesn't know where he is coming from, doesn't know where he is going."<sup>97</sup>

### The RPF as Agent of Peace and Democracy

The narrative depicts the RPF as Rwanda's saviors who reluctantly used military force for the benefit of all Rwandan people. Rwanda was suffering under dictatorship and violence, and the Habyarimana regime was unwilling to accept real democracy or allow refugees the right to return to their homeland. "The RPF had to develop an armed wing, because the Rwandan regime did not understand the language of peace."<sup>98</sup> The goals of the RPF were the repatriation of refugees, the overthrow of the dictatorship, and the "elimination of the virus of divisionism."<sup>99</sup>

The narrative portrays the RPF as serving a noble cause and acting out of self-sacrifice, and their invasion is called the "War of Liberation." The beginning of the war in 1990 is commemorated as a national holiday annually on October 1, known as the Day of Patriotism. In a speech marking the holiday in 2002, President Kagame claimed, "[T]welve years ago to the day, Rwandans began to struggle against injustice in Rwanda and to proceed with the general reform of the bad politics that scatter the Rwandan people. ... This day ... reminds us that Rwandans who love their country whether in the interior or the exterior rose up to struggle against the bad leadership that existed in the country."<sup>100</sup> While the War of October, as it was known within Rwanda, was extremely unpopular within the country at the time, the RPF has attempted to use the Day of Patriotism to recast the war as a struggle not *against* the Rwandan people but *by* the Rwandan people against corrupt authoritarian governance and ethnic violence. Ignoring the pro-democracy movement that had begun months earlier, the narrative treats the RPF invasion as the beginning of efforts for reform.

The idea that the RPF stopped the genocide is a crucial element of the historical narrative. While the international community utterly failed to act on the promise of "never again," the RPF acted boldly, renewing its attack on Rwanda with the sole purpose of stopping the genocide. According to Bernardin Muzungu, "While the machete and other

<sup>97</sup> Benoit Kaboyi, representative of Ibuka, Radio Rwanda, April 2, 2003.

<sup>98</sup> Tito Rutaremara and Bernardin Muzungu, "Qui liberera le Rwanda de l'idéologie divisionniste?" *Les Cahiers Evangile et Société*, no. 3, June 1996, 46–56, citation p. 49.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Kagame, "Speech on the Occasion of the Day of Patriotism," Radio Rwanda, October 1, 2002.



instruments of death made the law in Rwanda and the international community waited with arms crossed, the RPF-Inkotanyi threw its youth into the fire. The dispersal of the killers was total.”<sup>101</sup> The attack on Rwanda that the RPF renewed in April 1994 is reinterpreted as an “anti-genocidal campaign.”<sup>102</sup>

According to the narrative, the RPF has devoted itself since taking power to correcting the mistakes of the past and reforming Rwanda so that ethnic violence will never recur. As Kagame said, “When the RPF took over, Rwanda was in utter anarchy. ... We quickly realized that our task was to restore hope to the Rwandan people and to return power to the population. We have restored trust in the judiciary and have therefore been able to avoid revenge. The long established culture of impunity, which made possible the 1994 genocide, has at last been broken. People now have complete security of life and property.”<sup>103</sup> The RPF fought against ethnic discrimination and “divisionism,” establishing a multi-party, multi-ethnic “government of transition.”<sup>104</sup> The mention of ethnicity was removed from national identity cards, and positions in schools and government employment are now determined by the principle of merit. Many articles on the history of ethnic violence include a statement on how the current regime has broken with the practice of discrimination. For example, Kayihura writes, “Today, four years after the genocide, the Government of National Unity is striving, against winds and tides, to restore the Rwandan society in a context of beneficial national reconciliation.”<sup>105</sup>

A corollary of the narrative depicting the RPF as noble and self-sacrificing seeks to obliterate any public memory of RPF abuses during and after the 1990–1994 war. As heroic saviors of the country, the RPF cannot also be villains. The idea that the RPF bears any responsibility for the genocide itself, for having attacked the country without regard for the consequences for Tutsi still within Rwanda, is categorically rejected.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Bernardin Muzungu, “Les signes d’espoir,” *Cahiers Lumière et Société*, no. 11, August 1998, 7–20, citation p. 14.

<sup>102</sup> Kagame, “Preface.”

<sup>103</sup> Kagame, “Beyond Absolute Terror.”

<sup>104</sup> Muzungu, “Les signes d’espoir,” writes, “As an antidote against ethnic exclusion and racism, a Government of all Rwandans and all political formations, except the *génocidaires*, is at work. Alas those who would combat it and want to return us to the fire of tribalism” (p. 14).

<sup>105</sup> Kayihura, “Composantes et Relations Sociales,” p. 30.

<sup>106</sup> Rene Lemarchand, “Genocide in the Great Lakes: Which Genocide, Whose Genocide?” *African Studies Review*, 41, 1, April 1998, 3–16, asks, “Would the genocide have occurred if the RPF invasion had not taken place, threatening both the heritage of the 1959–62 Hutu revolution, and the state born of the revolution? Why should the genocide of the Tutsi, and their presumptive allies among the Hutu population, mask the countless atrocities committed by the RPF in the course of their military operations in Rwanda?” p. 4. Rutayisire and Muzungu, “L’ethnisme au Coeur de la guerre,” completely reject this idea.

Furthermore, any apparent abuses during the war and its aftermath are either unfortunate casualties of a just war (generally seen as misunderstood or exaggerated) or the actions of rogue individuals who operated outside the approval of the RPF leadership. As Kagame said, “We acted to stop a genocide, but you cannot stop individuals from committing crimes individually.”<sup>107</sup> His point is that any violence carried out against civilians by the RPF or its soldiers was incidental and not systematic. The idea of a “double genocide” advanced by some regime critics is vociferously rejected as a form of genocide denial; if both sides committed genocide, then blame is shared and the crime is less serious. As Kagame said in response to a question about potential indictments of RPF officials at the ICTR, “What in Rwanda we are opposed to is equating inequitable situations. ... Don’t divert from the main purpose of the Tribunal, and that is to try those involved in the genocide.”<sup>108</sup> Rwanda’s two incursions into the DRC in 1996–1997 and 1998–2002 were necessary for Rwanda’s security, particularly to prevent a recurrence of genocide. The troops “showed their courage and their sacrifice based on their patriotic love [of Rwanda]”<sup>109</sup>

Criticism of the RPF is treated as revisionist support for the “double genocide” theory. An article on the double-genocide theory equates criticism of the RPF with both genocide denial and support for the *génocidaires*.<sup>110</sup> Those in the international community who criticize the RPF regime are hypocrites, since they did not oppose the regime that carried out the genocide but now dare to condemn the RPF, which stopped the genocide.<sup>111</sup> Those Rwandans who criticize the RPF demonstrate their continuing adherence to genocidal ideologies. For example, when former President Bizimungu’s political party was banned for promoting “*divisionism*,” those who supported the new political party that he formed were accused of supporting genocide.<sup>112</sup> A few months later, the MDR was similarly criticized for having, “always supported the divisions that

<sup>107</sup> Kagame, “Beyond Absolute Terror.”

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Kagame, “Speech on the Occasion of the Day of Patriotism.”

<sup>110</sup> “La nouvelle stratégie du ‘double génocide,’” *Cahier Lumière et Société*, no. 9, March 1998.

<sup>111</sup> “The humanitarian associations, many of which are linked to the churches and share their malaise, as well as organisms of the press that are close to them, believe themselves obliged to be all the more vigilant, demanding and scrupulous in the respect to human rights for the current government, when they were complaisant or passive in the past.” “La nouvelle stratégie du ‘double génocide.’”

<sup>112</sup> For example, the mayor of Gikondo in Kigali held public meetings with his constituents in July 2002 to denounce the party for sowing disorder. “The first problem concerns the political party PDR-Ubuyanja that wanted to form and that was stopped after its ethnically divisive teachings.” Radio Rwanda, Mid-Day News, July 28, 2002.

have beset our country,”<sup>113</sup> and its presidential candidate, former Prime Minister Twagiramungu was accused of having denied the genocide.<sup>114</sup> The parliamentary committee ultimately concluded that the MDR should be suppressed, because the ideology of the party was merely a continuation of Kayibanda’s anti-Tutsi Parmehutu and the leadership was both implicated in the genocide and continued to support a genocidal ideology.<sup>115</sup> Critics of the regime are also commonly accused of putting their own interests first and indulging in corruption. As one governor declared in a public meeting, “The ethnic divisions that have characterized Rwanda are hidden behind people who would simply fill their stomachs – for selfish interests.”<sup>116</sup> In short, the RPF has the best interests of the country in mind, and those who would criticize the party and government hold only selfish interests and have yet to give up the divisive racist thinking of the past.

President Kagame’s forward to a book on transitional justice in Rwanda amply demonstrates the various points about the RPF that I have outlined here:

A new phenomenon has emerged in the form of individuals and groups who seek to revise history for their own gain, including many who deny outright that genocide took place in Rwanda in 1994. These revisionists, including Rwandan and non-Rwandan ideologues, academics, journalists and political leaders, now claim that the genocide was a myth; that what occurred in 1994 was simply a civil war between two equal sides or the spontaneous flaring of ancient tribal hatred. Even worse, some of these sources accuse the RPF, the force that halted the genocide, of seeking to exterminate the Hutu population. This is an absolute falsehood, sheer nonsense. While some rogue RPF elements committed crimes against civilians during the civil war after 1990, and during the anti-genocidal campaign, individuals were punished severely according to the RPF’s internal procedures of the day. To try to construct a case of moral equivalency between genocide crimes and isolated crimes committed by rogue RPF members is morally bankrupt and an insult to all Rwandans, especially survivors of the genocide. Objective history illustrates the bankruptcy of this emerging revisionism. The fact that there was no mass revenge in the post-genocide period – which could have easily occurred – is evidence of the clarity of purpose of the Rwandan

<sup>113</sup> Evening News, Radio Rwanda, December 12, 2002.

<sup>114</sup> A dissident MDR leader declared on Radio Rwanda that Twagiramungu, “dared to say to the ICTR that there was no genocide in 1994, the very genocide that he planned and that [former MDR Prime Minister during the genocide Jean] Kambanda as well as other genocidaires have themselves recognized and have accepted to be punished for.” Radio Rwanda, December 12, 2002.

<sup>115</sup> I discuss the suppression of the MDR in greater detail in Chapter 5. See “Rapport de la Commission Parlementaire sur les problèmes du MDR,” Kigali, March 17, 2003, available at [www.cnl.gov.rw/fileadmin/templates/documents/MDR\\_RAPPORT\\_PARLEMENT\\_2003.pdf](http://www.cnl.gov.rw/fileadmin/templates/documents/MDR_RAPPORT_PARLEMENT_2003.pdf).

<sup>116</sup> Boniface Rucagu, Governor of Kibuye, Radio Rwanda, September 19, 2002.

leadership that actively mobilized the Rwandan population for higher moral purposes than the revisionists contend.<sup>117</sup>

### **The Official Narrative and Constraints on Historical Debate**

I have attempted above to provide as accurate as possible a summation of the official historical narrative advanced by the RPF and its supporters with little commentary.<sup>118</sup> My goal in this chapter is not to assess the accuracy of the historical discourse but rather to understand its main points in order to appreciate the major themes of the collective memory that the RPF has sought to promote. In fact, many of the points in the current official narrative diverge from or directly contradict the conclusions of most historians and other scholars outside Rwanda. The need to emphasize unity and reject the significance of ethnicity has led to distortions of historical reality. The narrative exaggerates the unifying role of the monarchy by denying the fluid nature of political boundaries in pre-colonial Rwanda, ignoring both the presence of autonomous Hutu kingdoms within the territory and the tenuous ties of peripheral areas to the central court. Placing the genocide at the center of Rwandan history treats the past hundred years as a linear progression toward that signal event, ignoring much of the actual complexity of events in both the colonial and post-colonial eras. The official interpretation of the genocide conceals the facilitating role of the RPF invasion and ignores atrocities committed by the RPF itself.

In promoting a singular narrative, Rwanda's new elite seeks to develop a unified collective memory for the Rwandan population, one they hope not only creates a propitious environment for their continuing social, economic, and political dominance but will also ultimately reshape what it means to be Rwandan in a way that will prevent future ethnic violence. If, as I have argued, the belief in distinct historical origins made the genocide possible by delineating Hutu from Tutsi and Twa, then developing a belief in a unified history, it is hoped, will eliminate the basis for

<sup>117</sup> Kagame, "Preface."

<sup>118</sup> My account of the RPF narrative is consistent with Thomson's summary of the post-genocide "official history" in *Whispering Truth to Power*. "The RPF-led government presents the genocide as a clear-cut affair: Hutu killed Tutsi because of ethnic divisions that were introduced during the colonial period (1890–1962) and hardened to the point of individual action during the postcolonial period (1962–1994) ... Ethnicity is a fiction created by colonial divide-and-rule policies. Ultimate blame for the 1994 genocide therefore lies with Rwanda's colonial powers, who instituted policies that made the Hutu population hate Tutsi. Divisive politics grounded in decades of bad governance resulted in deep-rooted ethnic hatred of *all* Tutsi by *all* Hutu" (pp. 81–82).

inter-group violence. Whatever their merits, the distinctly political goals of the effort to rewrite history leave little room for dissent and debate.

In the project that I helped direct to develop modules for a history curriculum for Rwandan secondary schools, we sought to encourage an alternative method of approaching history as a set of questions and problems rather than a list of facts.<sup>119</sup> In the course of this project, however, my American colleagues and I witnessed exactly how the official narrative serves to constrain discussions of history even among trained historians. Two small incidents serve as examples. The first involves the choice of focus for the working group on pre-colonial Rwanda. David Newbury, a prominent historian of Rwanda, participated in the project as a consultant and advised the pre-colonial group. Newbury has written extensively on clans, and in a definitive work on the topic published in 1980, he argued that clans were not, as earlier histories had maintained, the most important social identifier in pre-colonial Rwanda. While clans were significant for the organization of power in the central court, for most people in what is today Rwanda they were less significant as social identifiers than region and lineage. In fact, the expansion of the clan structure throughout Rwanda was actually part of the process of the extension of central control by the monarchy.<sup>120</sup>

The official post-genocide narrative, however, has treated clans as a central aspect of Rwandan history. The fact that clans in Rwanda are multi-ethnic, most including all three groups, is used in the official narrative to support the ideas that the Rwandan people were historically unified and that ethnicity was an artificial creation of the colonial state. Furthermore, clans were important to competitions for power in the Rwandan royal court, even into the colonial period. Tutsi who fled Rwanda beginning in 1959 came disproportionately from the political elite, and in exile, particularly in Uganda, clan identity remained important to them. Inside Rwanda, clans diminished even further in importance, serving little purpose other than limiting marital choices (since Rwandans marry outside their clans). The refugees who returned to Rwanda beginning in 1994 brought with them the perspective that clans were central to Rwandan society. (President Kagame is from the clan of the queen mother, the Abega, and many people have said that his rise to power represents the final victory of the Abega over the Nyiginya

<sup>119</sup> For this project, we brought in the US-based NGO Facing History and Ourselves, which develops teaching materials and trains teachers on confronting difficult histories to help students develop critical thinking skills and develop skills for responsible citizenship.

<sup>120</sup> David S. Newbury, "The Clans of Rwanda: An Historical Hypothesis," *Africa: Journal of the International Africa Institute*, 50, no. 4, 1980, 389–403.

clan.) Thus, despite the advice from the pre-eminent expert on clans in Rwanda that the pre-colonial working group focus on a topic less distorted by ideology, the pre-colonial group insisted on choosing clans as their focus and presented clans in a fashion consistent with the official narrative – though they did include a few references to the work of Newbury to indicate that there were divergent perspectives.

Another example from our project of how politicized history has become in Rwanda involved the working group charged with treating the post-independence period. The group included in the initial draft of their materials a section that sought to implicate one of Rwanda's most respected Hutu human rights activists, Father André Sibomana, in a notorious case of anti-Tutsi discrimination in the late-1980s, the "Muvara Affair." In 1988, the Vatican appointed as bishop Father Félicien Muvara, a Tutsi priest, but just days before his installation, he withdrew, claiming "personal reasons." In fact, rumors quickly spread that he had been pressured to withdraw by leaders in both the government and the church after a "whispering campaign" falsely accused him of fathering a child out of wedlock.<sup>121</sup> The materials presented by the post-independence group asserted that Sibomana had instigated the rumors against Muvara.

I strongly believe that the accusations against Sibomana were driven not by the actual events related to Muvara but rather by a contemporary attempt to discredit Sibomana in the post-genocide context. I personally knew both Muvara and Sibomana and researched the Muvara affair during the period just prior to the genocide. Muvara was the curé of one of the Catholic parishes where I conducted research in 1992–1993, and I interviewed him several times, including an extended interview focused specifically on his abandoned appointment as bishop. The evidence that he and others provided me painted a very different picture that directly implicated the archbishop, a close ally of President Haybarimana.

Sibomana, meanwhile, had played an important role in inspiring opposition to the Habyarimana regime and encouraging support for democratic political reform as editor of the Catholic newspaper, *Kinyamateka*, beginning in 1988. He also became the founding president of the human rights group ADL in 1990, one of the most important human rights organizations in the period leading up to the genocide. During the genocide, death squads targeted Sibomana as an opponent of both the regime and the genocide, but he survived by going into hiding. After 1994, the Vatican named Sibomana acting bishop of Kabgayi, and he was widely expected to be named bishop. He earned the wrath of those in power, however, by continuing his advocacy for human rights, particularly by

<sup>121</sup> I discuss this case in Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, p. 96.

publicly denouncing the terrible condition of the prison in his diocese, where prisoners were dying in large numbers from dysentery and other diseases related to the unsanitary conditions. As a result, Sibomana ironically became himself an object of a “whispering campaign” by allies of the RPF regime who accused him of being anti-Tutsi and participating in the genocide – despite the reality that he was himself targeted by it. Ultimately, the Vatican passed him over for bishop, naming a mild-mannered Hutu unlikely to challenge the government. Sibomana returned to the editorship of *Kinyamateka* and his work with ADL, but he faced harassment and intimidation, and his health fell into decline. He died in 1988 after the government denied him the right to leave Rwanda for medical treatment.<sup>122</sup> In response to international criticism surrounding his death, the government stepped up its campaign against him, seeking to discredit him posthumously and thereby justify their own hostility to him.

Having worked with Sibomana as director of the HRW and FIDH office in Rwanda, I was consistently impressed by his courage and principles, and I found the accusations against him poorly supported and inconsistent with widespread testimonies that I heard from Rwandans. Furthermore, the source for the section in our curriculum accusing Sibomana in the Muvara Affair was a notoriously unreliable, pro-RPF and anti-Catholic French press, *Golias*. Since the accusations against Sibomana were not essential to the text and seemed to serve no useful purpose, I spoke with the professor directing the project and urged that they be edited out. Nonetheless, in the final version, the accusations against Sibomana remained. These accusations served the purpose of discrediting a prominent moderate Hutu who had criticized the RPF government and had suffered as a result. Discrediting Sibomana helped to protect the image of the RPF as a supporter of human rights and democracy and also to promote the impression that Hutu elite were almost universally implicated in the genocide.

These are but two minor examples of the ways in which the official narrative constrains historical discussion, but they occurred in an academic setting that included the top Rwandan historians and education specialists in a project in which participants had committed themselves to developing more democratic approaches to the teaching of history. If even the country’s best historians are unwilling to complicate their discussions of the Rwandan past and allow for alternative perspectives, how much more difficult must it be for common citizens to articulate

<sup>122</sup> André Sibomana, *Hope for Rwanda: Conversations with Laure Guilbert and Hervé Deguine*, London: Pluto Press, 1999.

divergent narratives? As I demonstrate in the next several chapters, the main themes of the historical narrative developed here are reinforced through a variety of means. Genocide memorials, trials, political reform, and other government policies support the official narrative and seek to advance a collective memory that will both promote national unity and justify RPF rule. Given these political goals, alternative perspectives cannot be tolerated. In post-genocide Rwanda, the RPF and its supporters are clearly the ones who claim the right to speak for the past, and their aggressive political agenda does not allow contests over the past to challenge their dominance of the present.