

United, Divided, and on a Path Back to Reconciliation: The Introduction of Ethnic Division during Colonialism and Its Effect on Post-Colonial Rwanda

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Presently the terms Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa are defined as ethnic groups in Rwanda and Burundi, although it has become socially and politically incorrect to refer to someone based on ethnicity due to the tensions it has caused in the past. The categorization of the Rwandan people based on height, width and protrusion of nose, and other anatomical features, came about when Belgians colonized the territory after Germany lost its colony at the end of World War 1. This outcome referenced a hypothesis first written by John Hanning Speke, the “Hamitic hypothesis”.¹ He tried to explain why a race, considered as inferior, was able to maintain an advanced culture and a centralized kingship similar to that of European monarchies.² The terms Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa, already existed in precolonial Rwanda, however, their meaning and significance within the political structure of the kingdom of Rwanda and societal identity, changed over time. From misconceptions behind its causes, to its literal or interpretative and implicatory denial, the chaotic 100 days of murder targeting mainly the Tutsi, some neutral Hutu, by Hutu militia, has a hazy beginning around its causes and more falsity towards its end. This, on no account, has anything to do with a lack of proof or sufficient studies. On the contrary, there are plenty of the latter; testimonies, confessions, studies by Human Rights Watch and other NGOs³, as well as archive collections of various implications have helped contest literal denial but has left room for fake news and inaccurate interpretations. Thus it becomes crucial to seek and learn about the truthful history of Rwanda surrounding the identities in its society.

Comparable to other precolonial African societies, Rwanda had clans believed to have been established by patrilineal lineages.⁴ This assumption, however, proved to be inaccurate because a clan would consist of different castes. Both clans and castes were not fixed nor restricted to a certain lineage at a certain point in time, notably in the 1800s when Hutu and Tutsi were used as political and social distinctions.⁵ The clans mentioned were Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. These determined the social class one belonged to; farmers that tilled the soil became Hutu, cattle herdsman called themselves Tutsi and Twa were hunter-gatherers. Contrary to popular belief, the

¹ A. Phillip Cantrell, “The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda: False Narratives of a Disputed Past,” in *Revival and Reconciliation* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022), 16.

² Cantrell, “The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda,” 16.

³ Helen Hintjens and Jos van Oijen, “Elementary forms of collective denial: The 1994 Rwanda Genocide,” *Genocide Studies International* (2020), *International Institute of Social Studies*, <https://www.iss.nl/en/news/elementary-forms-collective-denial-1994-rwanda-genocide-0> (accessed March 13, 2022).

⁴ Newbury David, *The Land Beyond the Mist: Essays on Identity and Authority in Precolonial Congo and Rwanda*, Ohio University Press (Athens, Ohio: 2009), 201.

⁵ Cantrell, “The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda,” 21.

term *hutu* did not simply emerge because neighboring countries like Eastern Congo or Western Tanzania also adopted the word, yet, their meanings differed.⁶ On one hand, “Hutu” in Rwanda came about due to a small number of cattle herdsman in the northeast of Rwanda who identified as Tutsi, or more commonly at the time, Hima. Farming clans owned a small number of cattle and migrated west, southwest and towards the center of Rwanda to seek for better land for cattle to graze on. As they cultivated the soil for crops like bananas, they settled to yield more food.⁷ On the other hand, Hima occupied a region north of precolonial Rwanda which is now part of Uganda. Ruganzu Ndori, a Hima cattle herdsman, founded the Rwandan Monarchy around the 17th century.⁸ To solidify his power as the *mwami* (king) of what would later be central Rwanda, Ndori popularized the Gihanga myth. Gihanga, a mythical king, is said to be a conqueror from northern pastoralist clans and a descendant from 12 gods, who founded the first monarchies. Ndori was able to proclaim himself as the legitimate king by claiming himself as Gihanga’s descendant.⁹ Ndori’s dynasty, the Nyiginya clan, adopted the word Tutsi to distinguish political elites from the Hima commoners. Tutsi soon became associated with prestige and Hima commoners adopted the term as well.¹⁰

Cattle became a sign of wealth among the Tutsi and as the Nyiginya Tutsi clan expanded political dominance in central Rwanda, the relations between Tutsi cattle herders and farming clans, strengthened with *ubuhake*, a system of clientship.¹¹ This consisted of a client lending one or more cows in exchange for agricultural goods or labor from the debtor.¹² Consequently the debtor became the client’s *hutu*, originally defined as “servant” or “slave” in Kinyarwanda. Comparable to the word Tutsi, Hutu “gradually developed amongst the peasant population to denote their social position”.¹³ Through a process called *kwihutura*, a Hutu that had accumulated a great number of cows could become Tutsi and conversely, a Tutsi destitute of their cattle would become Hutu, *gucupira*.¹⁴ “Before colonization the king could have, could take many Tutsis who were not responding to his duties and obligations and call them Hutus. Take all their cows, because the wealth in Rwanda was always measured in terms of cows”, says Paul Rusesabagina, a former

⁶ Deborah Mayersen, “‘A European Under Black Skin’: Precolonial and Colonial Rwanda,” in *On the Path to Genocide: Armenia and Rwanda Reexamined* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 99–120 at 102.

⁷ Cantrell, “The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda,”15.

⁸ Cantrell, “The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda,” 23.

⁹ Cantrell, “The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda,”24.

¹⁰ Cantrell, “The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda,”21.

¹¹ Mayersen, *Precolonial and Colonial Rwanda*, in *On the Path to Genocide: Armenia and Rwanda Reexamined*, 101.

¹² Newbury, *The Land Beyond The Mist: Essays on Identity and Authority in Precolonial Congo and Rwanda*, 203.

¹³ Cantrell, “The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda,”21.

¹⁴ Mayersen, *Precolonial and Colonial Rwanda* In *On the Path to Genocide: Armenia and Rwanda Reexamined*, 101

politician and hotel manager who sheltered 1268 Hutu and Tutsi refugees, as he describes the changes in identity distinction overtime in an interview.¹⁵

The social and political distinction between Tutsi and Hutu became more prevalent under the reign of mwami Rwabugiri (1853-95) who enforced *ubuletwa* (forced labor) and exerted an unfair form of clientship constituting of manual work for residing in the land, and only Hutu were subjected to this treatment.¹⁶ Hutu commoners in central Rwanda became a marginalized group, slaves to the wealthier Tutsi elites as attested by Richard Kandt, first German resident in Rwanda.¹⁷ The coexistence between the two identities had been considerably harmed but this must not be considered as a contributing factor, on its own, that led to the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994; most Hutu commoners became independent of the rule of the Nyiginya royal court after Rwabugiri's death.¹⁸ Instead, light should be shed on the combination of false reductionist racial views and migration theories introduced by colonizers, together with the subjugation of the Hutu under Rwabugiri's reign taken out of context. What was an exploitation of a poor social class by a wealthier, ruling class, turned into a racial quandary. Moreover, the false narrative of Ndori's Gihanga cult had been replaced by the Hamitic hypothesis, creating a build-up of ambiguity surrounding northern conquests/migrations and racial difference.¹⁹

At the arrival of the Germans in 1894 and Belgians in 1916, the sight of African centralized kingship with a sophisticated court and culture, surprised the invaders. According to Darwinian "Race Science", to which many scholars and other white Americans and Europeans adhered to at the time, the African man, especially the black African, was inferior, unable to form advanced political structures, and have a progressive culture.²⁰ With the contradiction of their spurious beliefs and what they saw in central Rwanda, colonists sought for an answer that would fit their made up belief, and it was given by Speke. The British explorer who traveled in East Africa claimed that the Watusi (indicating Tutsi in Rwanda) were descendants of the Abyssinians (Ethiopians) who migrated south and conquered Rwanda.²¹ This hypothesis was further developed by Charles Gabriel Seligman, a former professor and ethnologist at University of London, who claimed that Hamites (ancestors of Abyssinians) were the only reason there could be any social structure, centralized monarchy, and even ironworking, in the Great Lake Region including

¹⁵ Martin Michael, " 'An Ordinary Man' Navigates Rwanda's Genocide", (April 10, 2006), *npr*, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5334369>, (accessed April 2, 2022).

¹⁶ Cantrell, "The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda," 16.

¹⁷ Mayersen, *Precolonial and Colonial Rwanda In On the Path to Genocide: Armenia and Rwanda Reexamined*, 103.

¹⁸ Cantrell, "The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda," 17.

¹⁹ Cantrell, "The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda," 25.

²⁰ Cantrell, "The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda," 16.

²¹ Cantrell, "The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda," 17.

Rwanda.²² Hamites are supposedly descendants of Ham, youngest son of Noah in the Bible, who migrated to the horn of Africa after Noah cursed Ham's son, Canaan. "When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers", Genesis 9: 24–25.²³ This scripture along with the notion spread by Europeans, Arabs, and Jews in the 6th century, claiming Hamites were Africans, was used to justify slavery after the 16th century.²⁴ "The mechanism of the origin of the negro-Hamitic peoples will be understood when it is realized that the incoming Hamites were pastoral Caucasians... but it cannot have been long before a series of peoples combining Negro and Hamitic blood arose; these superior Negro, would be regarded with disdain by the next incoming wave of Hamites and be pushed further inland to play the part of an incoming aristocracy vis à vis the Negroes on whom they impinged"²⁵; an extract of Seligman's book *Races of Africa* that was widely used as a recognized and valid study of the diverse African society until the 1970s.²⁶ Thus in Rwanda's case, the Tutsi political elites were regarded as racially superior to the Bantu descendants, Hutu, due to their alleged mix with a branch of the Caucasian race. This extremely invalid and unfounded hypothesis was accepted as fact to justify the supposed inferiority of the Bantu-Negroid (Black African said to no be mixed with Caucasian or Asiatic). To prove the falsity of the hypothesis, researchers conducted studies and found that cattle herdsman clans and farming clans, their complex social structures, and ironworking were long in precolonial Rwanda before the Nilotic (Abyssinians) migrations, that never invaded Rwanda in the first place.

Using the deceptive genetic and physical distinctions, German and Belgian colonizers justified the superiority of the Tutsi over the Hutu (now used as racial distinctive terms). For instance, the greater height of Tutsi or the greater ability of Hutu to resist malaria, were seen as racial markers which is illogical given centuries of Tutsi northern cattle herdsman and Hutu farming clans inbreeding among themselves way before the 1800s.²⁷ Furthermore, the Tutsi pastoralists diet consisted mainly of protein whereas Hutu agriculturalists ate more plant-based foods. These crucial aspects were neglected which lead to a fictitious conclusion. Belgian colonizers looked for "Caucasian physical characteristics to describe one as Tutsi, a "European under black skin".²⁸ "And also, when colonizers also made it again worse when they started measuring noses. Taking some Hutus as Tutsis in some, because they had what are thin noses and taking some Tutsis as Hutus because they had wide and short noses", explains Rusesabagina. Only

²² Cantrell, "The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda," 17.

²³ King James V, Holy Bible, Genesis 9:24–25.

²⁴ Cantrell, "The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda," 17.

²⁵ Seligman G. Charles, "Races of Africa" 1930, *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/RacesOfAfrica/page/n3/mode/2up> (accessed April 2, 2022), 158.

²⁶ Cantrell, *The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda*, 17.

²⁷ Cantrell, *The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda*, 18.

²⁸ Mayersen, *Precolonial and Colonial Rwanda*, in *On the Path to Genocide: Armenia and Rwanda Reexamined*, 99.

5 to 10 percent of the ruling class were found to be ethnic Tutsi. With this division by ethnicity, roughly 85% of the population was Hutu, Tutsi made up roughly 15% and Twa, categorized as pygmies, accounted for the remaining estimate of 1%.²⁹

“The Mututsi of good race has nothing of the negro, apart from his color. He is usually very tall 1.80m at least, often 1.90m or more. He is very thin, a characteristic which tends to be even more noticeable as he gets older. His features are very fine: a high brow, thin nose and fine lips framing beautiful shining teeth. Batutsi women are usually lighter-skinned than their husbands, very slender and pretty in their youth, although they tend to thicken with age. Gifted with a vivacious intelligence, then Tutsi display a refinement of feelings which is rare among primitive people. He is a natural-born leader, capable of extreme self-control and calculated good will”, a Belgian Minister of Colonies recounts as he writes his report.³⁰ Compared to the Tutsi, Hutu were described as “short and thick-set with a big head, a jovial expression, a wide nose and enormous lips. They are extroverts who like to laugh”.³¹ Twa were “a small, chunky, muscular, and very hairy; particularly on their chest. With a monkey-like flat face and a huge nose, he is quite similar to the apes from whom he chases in the forest.”³² This apparent high esteem that German and Belgian colonizers had for Tutsi compared to Hutu and Twa, explains the inequity the latter two ethnic groups were subjected to compared to the former during colonialism.

As the European settlers became more acquainted with the area, cultures, and customs of Rwandans, they weakened and restricted the power of the mwami and chiefs.³³ Germans helped round up the few isolated regions ruled by Hutu farming clans, unaware of racial distinction of Tutsi and Hutu, under the central governance of the Nyiginya kingship.³⁴ Belgians practiced indirect rule through appointed Tutsi chiefs. Belgian colonists viewed Rwandans from a purely ethnic perspective and rapidly many Tutsi and few Hutu elites who learned about the Hamitic hypothesis accepted it as fact. Under Belgian rule, Tutsi were significantly treated unequally, although some regions with poor Hutu and poor Tutsi experienced similar treatments.³⁵ Belgian and Tutsi dominion over Hutu made the inequality much worse than at Rwabugiri’s time.

Domestic establishments that once created a coexistence between Tutsi pastoralists and Hutu farmers, were abandoned; unjust *ubuhake* practices reinforced ethnic discrimination,

²⁹ Cantrell, “The Anglican Church and the Politics of Rwanda,” 16.

³⁰ King Elisabeth, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 40.

³¹ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 40.

³² King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 40.

³³Byanafashe Déo. *The Teaching of History in Rwanda: A Participatory Approach* (Oakland, California: The Regents of the University of California, 2006), 115, *Berkley Law*, https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/HRC/Rwanda_resource_book_for_teachers_version_10_rwandan_history_book.pdf (accessed March 11, 2022).

³⁴ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 41.

³⁵ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 42.

umuganura (harvest celebration) no longer occurred, *ubwiru* (royal secrets) and *ibisigo* (oldest literary genres similar to poems describing historical events) that were verbally conveyed, all nearly got lost. Other forms of traditional education systems such as *amatorero* or *ibitaramo* were excised.³⁶ Belgian colonists found it easier to reinvent history as they erased a lot from the past. The exploitation of Hutu by both whites and Tutsi elites started creating an animosity towards Belgians, but mostly “all Tutsi”, rich or poor, because they were the “superior race.”³⁷

Amidst a growing awareness of themselves as a marginalized group, Hutu elites rose and sought out equality regarding education, political and social standing, as well as distribution of wealth.³⁸ As a response to the wave of independence in the 1950s, Tutsi elites requested independence to become a ruling government, whereas Hutu elites demanded a democratic state first. Belgian colonists switched sides after the independence request of the Tutsi and pressure from the UN regarding human rights violations. Given the vast enrollment of Tutsi in official ranks, and still an extensive control by colonists in Rwanda, Hutu political elites soon considered independence as a solution to liberate themselves from both Belgian and Tutsi dominance.³⁹

Acquiring independence for the rule of one identity as opposed to the other became a cause of rivalry between the two ethnic groups and tensions quickly sparked. In 1959, young Tutsi militants attacked a Hutu leader and his supporters retaliated leading to about 200 deaths.⁴⁰ Through propaganda on radios, Hutu leaders expressed the need for the Hutu to unite and advocate for their benefit as the majority of the Rwandan population, *rubanda nyamwinshi*.⁴¹ Ethnic tensions worsened and the 1959 Hutu Revolution resulted into the removal of Tutsi monarchy, replacement of Tutsi leaders and extensive attacks against Tutsi. The rancor of the Hutu ran so deep that Tutsi elites no longer became the only targets of attacks. Even poor Tutsi were killed resulting in 20,000 deaths and 300,000 refugees fleeing to other countries between 1959 to 1962. In 1961, during the elections of Hutu parties, an ideology had been spread through the media now that Hutu elites had reached the political ranks; Rwanda will be ruled by its legitimate people, the Hutu. Through all the turmoil and conflict between 1959 and 1961, the Hamitic hypothesis spread to the uneducated Hutu and Tutsi through the media. Neighbors, friends, and even family members, began to see each other as foe. The notion that “the superior race” that invaded Rwanda in precolonial times, was the reason the legitimate Rwandans had been treated unequally for so long, was a doctrine also taught to children. Past classification, according to clans or class no longer existed and the youth increasingly became unaware of their history.

³⁶ Byanafashe, *The Teaching Of History In Rwanda: A Participatory Approach*, 115.

³⁷ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 43.

³⁸ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 43.

³⁹ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 44.

⁴⁰ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 44.

⁴¹ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 45.

1962 marked the start of a shift in dominance as Rwanda gained independence from the Belgians, and the first Hutu president Grégoire Kayibanda was elected with great support from the Belgians. “It’s the Belgians and the Hutu that were placed into power. At the time as you know as well, when we sang their song called Kamarampaka”, recounts Sebasoni Jérôme an elderly man who lived through the colonial times. During his rule, Kayibanda favored Hutu elites in central and southern Rwanda whilst Tutsi were discriminated against. This time round, Hutu received more education, better job opportunities but that did not apply to most poor Hutu. Kayibanda ‘s government increasingly became corrupt and the poor Hutu that had placed faith in him expressed their dissatisfaction and assaulted the wealthy. Facing reprisals and criticism from an opposing northern party in 1973, mainly by Juvénale Habyarimana, he began inciting ethnic rampage in schools and universities and many died. Habyarimana’s party then took over in a coup d’état on the 5th of July 1973. During Habyarimana’s regime, ethnic violence diminished, although Tutsi were still discriminated against and attacked in the workplace and schools. Hutu and Tutsi mostly lived peacefully in the outskirts of the country and intermarriage amongst the two identities became more frequent.⁴²

This sociability did not last long as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF also known as *Inkotanyi*, Rwandan diaspora, most of whom were Tutsi, that fled after the Hutu Revolution) invaded Mutara (northern Rwanda) in 1989. Many propaganda messages spread through radio stations across the uneducated public. “The objectives of the *Inkotanyi* consist only in ruling by the sword in Rwanda, sowing the seed of death and desolation until they take over power. They would then rule by the sword, that is their objective. We may therefore wonder how people who came with the confessed objective of shedding blood in Rwanda ca deceive the population by claiming to bring democracy and freedom. How anyone claim to bring salvation to the Rwandans when he or she entered the country massacring with swords and guns and shedding blood of Rwandans? That is nothing but a lie. No one has the nerve to claim to bring democracy to the people; that does not happen; it is only imaginable by people who do not think or who think the wrong way like the *Inkotanyi*. The people choose for themselves their form of democracy. Rwandans have thus chosen their democracy at their own initiative on 28 January 1961.”⁴³ Anastase Gasana, former Hutu Minister of Affairs, paints the picture, in a radio interview on October 21st 1990, of the RPF as anti-patriotic foreigners that want to destroy the efforts of democracy Rwanda has reached. The question amongst elites became which ethnicity would have political dominion. On August 3rd 1993, the Rwandan government signed the Arusha Accords to establish peace between themselves and the RPF.

⁴² Jefremovas Villia. *Brickyards to Graveyards: From Production to Genocide in Rwanda*, State University of New York Press (Albany, New York: 2002), 72–73.

⁴³ Anastase Gasana, Interview with Rwanda Radio, (October 21, 1990). *Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies*, http://migs.concordia.ca/links/Rwandan_Radio_Transcripts_RadioRwanda.htm (accessed April 2, 2022).

To put aside the ethnic tensions in the midst of political discord and seemingly good Hutu-Tutsi relations, would be extremely careless. Tutsi rebels, referred to as *inyenzi* (cockroaches), carried out armed invasions in 1963 and 1964.⁴⁴ After the 1989 raid, the RPF was also referred to as *inyenzi* and falsities spread about them invading to restore “Tutsi dominion”. Discussions on radio stations got more radical as Hutu politicians reiterated the Hamitic hypothesis and how *all* Tutsi were monarchs that oppressed the Hutu. ‘...of some people among Rwandans who have decided to be lackeys of the RPF’, says an unidentified speaker on Radio Rwanda.⁴⁵ When confronted with a crisis or threat identities consolidate; in 1993 to 1994, Hutu youths were encouraged to join the Interahamwe (Hutu militia) and fight the RPF and other Tutsi that stood in their way. “The true Interahamwe are the ones fighting on the battlefield, the youth defending the republic are the ones who are on the battlefield, not those who are busy looting. I kept telling you that after looting – and the problem is that when you are looting, you use the gun we gave you to fight – you spend the night guarding the things you have looted instead of going on night patrols to stop those Inyenzi from infiltrating our areas. In that case, there is no difference between you and the Inyenzi.”, says Ananie Nkurunziza on Rwanda Radio, April 2nd 1994.⁴⁶ Moreover, France provided firearms for the Hutu regime under Habyarimana, ignoring the warnings of from the RPF; “The Tutsi are convinced that if there were to be an absolute victory of those presently in power, the departure of French and Belgian troops would result in greater control and increased persecutions and would lead to the total annihilation of the Tutsi”, states a report titled Cooperating Activities of the French Army.⁴⁷

The hate-filled message against the Tutsi echoed even more when Habyarimana died in a plane crash on April 6th, 1994, and the RPF were accused of the crime. All Tutsi population, rich or poor men and women, children, and even the elderly all became *inyenzi*. “They will be struck with misfortune, they will be struck by misfortune, they will indeed be struck by misfortune. And you have clearly heard that those who desired it, those who desired and provoked it, are themselves

⁴⁴ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 46.

⁴⁵ Idrissa Balinge, Interview on Rwanda Radio, January 4, 1993, *Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies*, http://migs.concordia.ca/links/RwandanRadioTrascripts_RTLM.htm, (accessed April 2, 2022).

⁴⁶ Ananine Nkurunziza, Interview on Rwanda Radio, April 02, 1994. *Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies*, http://migs.concordia.ca/links/Rwandan_Radio_Transcripts_RadioRwanda.htm (accessed April 2, 2022).

⁴⁷ Genocide Archive Rwanda, “Activités de Coopération Militaires Françaises (Noroit D’ami) Qui Était Déployée au Rwanda” October 07, 1990. *Genocide Archive Rwanda*, [https://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php?title=Activités_de_Coopération_Militaires_Française_\(Noroit_D_%27ami\)_Qui_Était_Déployée_au_Rwanda&gsearch=](https://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php?title=Activités_de_Coopération_Militaires_Française_(Noroit_D_%27ami)_Qui_Était_Déployée_au_Rwanda&gsearch=) (accessed April 2, 2022).

being struck by misfortune, they themselves are being struck by misfortune, Kanyarengwe, the Hutu, has just died, Pastor Bizimungu, the Hutu, has just died. Whatever made them go and sign a blood pact with those who will exterminate us? What prompted them to do so? Whatever prompted them to do that? Aren't they the ones who have just killed them? Aren't they responsible for killing them? However, they themselves are being struck by misfortune at this moment, at this very minute, at this hour, at this moment I am talking to you! You the people living in Rugunga, those living over there in Kanogo, those living in Kanogo, in fact, those living in Mburabuturo ...Look carefully, check, see whether there are no Inyenzi inside", says Noël Hitimana on Radio Télévision des Mille Collines.⁴⁸

Thus began the bloodshed that took the lives of one million Tutsi (75% of the Tutsi population) and some moderate Hutu that refused to participate in the killings or protected the Tutsi. Interahamwe militia rallied Hutu young men with the message to avenge their president and protect their land from Tutsi invaders. Men, women, children and the elderly were murdered by their neighbours, classmates, co-workers and even family members. "There was someone an old man that came from here, we had reached there at the Ntaramo sector. We were there at the Ntaramo sector. Further there. Then I stabbed him, hit him with my machete, I stabbed him, he fell down", says Bonaventure Karekezi as he describes the crimes he committed.⁴⁹ "They came in the schools down there...there is not a single person that escaped from the schools there. Every person that was in those schools, they died.", adds Angélique Uwase a genocide survivor, as she explains how she escaped from militia by hiding in the dense forest. "So, the U.N. never did anything. They simply turned backs, closed ears and eyes, and didn't want to see. Didn't want to take responsibilities."⁵⁰

During the Rwandan genocide, when U.N. left, it was a clear message sent to killers, telling them that, listen, you guys, you are stronger than us. Telling the killers that you are stronger than us. Go ahead. Do your job. We have failed. We can't face you. So, that was the message and that encouraged killers much more to kill many more than earlier. That time when the U.N. just turned backs and ran away, we saw priests killing their church members. Church members killing priests. Husbands killing wives and wives killing husbands. We saw people killing people, piling dead bodies on the road, making road blocks and drinking beers. We saw a lot of disasters in that country. And yet, many people who had fled, many people had fled their houses, had gathered in schools, had gathered in churches, under the U.N. protection, but when they just decided to leave them, they simply left, and those people were just begging, telling them that, please, do take us

⁴⁸ Noël Hitimana, Interview on Rwanda Radio, April 6, 1994, *Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies*, http://migs.concordia.ca/links/RwandanRadioTranscripts_RTLM.htm, (accessed April 2, 2022).

⁴⁹ Karekezi Bonaventure, "A testimony of Bonaventure Karekezi," March 12, 2014, *Genocide Archive Rwanda*, <https://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php?title=Perp1&gsearch=> (accessed March 11, 2022).

⁵⁰ Uwase Angélique, "A testimony of Angélique Uwase," February 28, 2014, *Genocide Archive Rwanda*, https://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php?title=Uwase_angelique&gsearch= (accessed March 11, 2022).

with you. Because if you don't, these guys are going to kill us. So you can imagine seeing the United Nations evacuating all the foreigners, including their soldiers, their so-called peacekeepers being evacuated, leaving victims on their own, abandoning, actually, victims.”, explains Rusesabagina⁵¹. When the UNICEF interviewed children after the genocide, they found out that 80% “experienced a death in their family, 91% thought they would die, 86% saw other children participating in violence, and 16% percent had, at some point, hidden under dead bodies.”⁵²

Nevertheless, after the horrors the Rwandan population had witnessed, there was a glimmer of hope. The RPF improved political stability, removed ethnic identification cards, and restored national courts named Gacaca (pronounced gachacha) ‘judgment on the grass’, to mitigate prison congestion and promote reconciliation.⁵³ Justice could not be given by just punishing people, a reassessment of the ideologies taught had to be addressed as well.⁵⁴ Today, Rwanda becomes one of the leading African countries in a quick developmental transition.

Although the genocide is still a sensitive subject almost 28 years later, not knowing about the history leaves space for false narratives from inside and outside sources and the accumulation of lies can be very costly within a society. This was the case of Rwanda; internal and external influences on identities dramatically changed given the narrative at one point in time. For grief and sorrow in Rwanda, still lingers even after extensive unity and reconciliation efforts within the society. However, Hutu-Tutsi distinction is still present among the escaped perpetrators and other former politicians that have sought refuge in other countries like France. If the settlers never invaded Rwanda, would have conflict of such magnitude erupted, given the existing social class inequality between the wealthy Tutsi and poorer Hutu? What if Hutu and Tutsi had united and figured out the dividing tactics of the settlers? As much as the conversation is heartfelt and hard to talk about, the only way to avoid a repetition of previous actions in discrediting history is to talk and learn the truth about it.

⁵¹ Martin Michael, “ ‘An Ordinary Man’ Navigates Rwanda’s Genocide”, April 10, 2006. *npr*, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5334369>, (accessed April 2, 2022).

⁵² King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 112.

⁵³ King, *From Classrooms to Conflict in Rwanda*, 112.

⁵⁴ C. Kristin Doughty, *Remediation in Rwanda: a Harmony and Punishment in Grassroots Legal Forums*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 3.

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