

The Politics of History and Memory: Memorials, Memories, and the State-Sponsored History of
the Rwandan Genocide (April-June 1994)
Research Thesis

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Introduction

This research paper is organized into three sections: “Historical Overview of Rwanda,” “The Politics of History and Memorialization,” and “Alternative Approaches to History and Memory.” Part I analyzes the history of Rwanda from the 17th century to the present utilizing various scholarly sources.¹ Part II first examines theories of individual and collective memory. It then compares the scholarly history of Rwanda (as laid out in Part I), the “official history” promoted by the Rwandan state, and individual memories of Rwandans in the 21st century. This section uses Erin Jessee’s *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda: The Politics of History* (2017) and my own research and observations living in Rwanda (2022). Part III suggests alternative ways the Rwandan state could remember its history via examining transitional justice mechanisms employed in other post-conflict states such as South Africa and East Asia.

Memory, whether individual or collective, is a complex and subjective phenomenon that is constantly evolving and being shaped by present-day contexts and those in power. This research paper seeks to explore the construction of the collective memory of Rwanda’s history leading up to the genocide as promoted by the Rwandan government in the 21st century. It will argue that the manipulation of history by the Rwandan government serves as a potent tool for legitimizing its political repression and past and ongoing atrocities. Ultimately, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the interaction between history and memory in contemporary Rwanda, with the hope of offering remembrance alternatives.

Part I: Historical Overview of Rwanda

¹ I primarily use historians of Rwanda Alison Des Forges and David Newbury’s work. The use of mostly Western historians in this paper is due to accessibility; most Rwandan historians of Rwanda write in French.

A) Pre-Colonial Rwanda (17th-18th centuries)

In any discussion of pre-colonial Rwandan history, it is important to keep in mind that although the historical information is more complete than other East African pre-colonial histories because of the structured and standardized traditions of history keeping by the Rwandan dynastic Court, this means that the information is aimed at serving Court purposes and glorifying Court power. An example is the official Rwandan Court claims depicted all Rwandan battles as victorious and resulting in permanent annexation; other perspectives showed the history as more complex and progression as less linear.² In the following sections, I will analyze the period before the emergence of dynastic rule in the Great Lakes region, aim to understand clan and ethnic identities, and describe the development of “Court Culture” under different dynastic *mwamis* (kings). Then, I will present in chronological order the rule of significant dynastic *mwamis* and finally explore the consequences of the arrival of European missionaries, German colonists, and Belgian administrators. I will end by discussing the events directly leading up to, during, and after the genocide, with the goal of shedding light on its causes by examining the discrepancies between Rwandan state history and scholarly history.

B) Early History of Rwanda: Pre-Dynastic Rule (Early 18th Century)

In general, the three major geographical categories in the region that would be dominated by the kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi beginning in the eighteenth century, distinguished by altitude, topography, and precipitation, are the eastern grasslands, the western highlands, and the dry

² David Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists: Essays in Identity & Authority in Precolonial Congo and Rwanda* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 316.

lowlands along the eastern Lake Tanganyika shoreline. The eastern grasslands enjoyed open plains suitable to pasturing with little rainfall resulting in lower population densities. The mountainous highlands to the west experienced reliable rainfall and soil suitable to agriculture, allowing higher population densities. The dry lowland areas, called the Imbo, differed ecologically, economically, and epidemiologically from the east and west and will be considered “the cradle of resistance” later by the kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi.³ Due mostly to the geographical differences, the regions developed distinct political, social, and cultural elements. In the western highlands, people lived in small-scale political sectors in agricultural societies where lineages controlled land and allowed others to reside on their land in a client relationship. In the lowlands, political organizations focused on ritual polities rather than family ties, enjoyed a high degree of population mobility, and relied on a matrilineal succession system. The cultural exchange between differing socio-political groups in the Great Lakes region can be shown through its extensive trading system.⁴

In the early eighteenth century, three distinct geo-political traditions emerged, similar to the structures described above, in what would become the kingdom of Rwanda: kinship relations in the northwest, small polities based on ritual power in the west, and clear hierarchical dynastic traditions in the east.⁵ In the east, on the open plateaus west of the Kagera River, the Nyiginya clan emerged among several small political units in the mid to late seventeenth century with the reign of Ruganzu Ndori (1770-86), who will establish the kingdom of Rwanda. Other political

³ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 285-288.

⁴ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 65-83.

⁵ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 307.

groups in the east did not see themselves as subject to the Nyiginya clan, and neither did those in the north nor the west.

In the north, political organization was based on land-owning lineages—the land-holding elite allowed non-landowners to reside on their land in a client relationship. To the west, political organization was focused on ritual claims connected to productivity of the land and the well-being of the population. These policies are important to the political history of what would become Rwanda, as they will define kingship and connected ritual to political power in the east.⁶ The Nyiginya clan under Ndori began the centuries-long struggle of dynastic, colonial, and post-colonial powers attempting to combine these regions together to form one political entity.⁷ The formation of the kingdom of Rwanda was not linear, it was discontinuous, contested from within, and challenged from the outside.⁸

C) Ethnic and Clan Identities: Evolution and Complexity

The relationship between ethnic identity, clientship, and state building varied over time, differed from one region to another, and will be substantially altered by the colonial state.⁹ The social and political meanings of the terms “Hutu” and “Tutsi” changed significantly over time and varied by region, and it was not until the expansion of Court power, specifically under *mwami* Rwabugiri (1860-1895), and later the colonial administrations, that the categories “Hutu” and “Tutsi” became rigid.¹⁰ However, what is now considered “ethnic identities” of Hutu and Tutsi can be

⁶ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 316-317.

⁷ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 303-340.

⁸ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 319.

⁹ Catherine Newbury, *The Cohesion of Oppression: Clientship and Ethnicity in Rwanda, 1886-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 10.

¹⁰ For example, in Kinyaga, the identity of “Hutu” was used but had very little political importance and being classified as “Tutsi” depended on the control of wealth (particularly in cattle) and power. It was not until

generally understood in pre-colonial times as a socio-economic definition. Tutsi was associated with possessing wealth and power, and this “elite” status could change. As the Rwandan kingdom expanded, Hutu people became increasingly aware of their shared experiences of oppression, leading to a growing sense of ethnic consciousness.¹¹

David Newbury in *The Land Beyond the Mists: Essays in Identity & Authority in Precolonial Congo and Rwanda* in 2009 challenged previous historical explanations of Rwandan clan structures and ethnic identities. Rwandan clans and ethnic identities are complex and admittedly difficult to understand—clans and ethnic groups are both thought of as descent-based identifications, but within clans there are different ethnic groups and different ethnic groups include members of all clans. Newbury proposed that clans were not solely based on biological descent, but rather a social identity associated with the extension of royal Court power in the region. The eighteen major clan groups over the three regions were used as tools to incorporate people into the political domain of Rwanda. Clan identity therefore became one of the several levels of individual identity that people drew on in particular contexts, marking it as a social and political identity.¹²

Adding further to the complexity of the meaning of ethnic identities is the now-discredited “Hamitic Hypothesis” used first by Europeans in the mid-1800s, the Tutsi dynastic powers in the 1900s, and Hutu extremists during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. The anthropological theory

the imposition of royal Court rule on Kinyaga that “Hutu” and “Tutsi” identifications became salient and “Tutsi” lineages was associated with wealth/cattle/power and “Hutu” lineages associated with lower statuses. For more, see Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 8-12.

¹¹ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 11.

¹² Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 189-190.

postulated a superior “Hamitic” race of Tutsi, believed to have originated in northern Africa, that migrated to the Great Lakes region to civilize the “inferior” Hutu and Twa populations. This theory was used in the 19th and early 20th century to justify European colonization and imperialism in Africa and then as rhetoric to continue European support of a Tutsi monarchy as Tutsis were “born to rule.”¹³ The Hamitic Hypothesis was again used during the Rwandan genocide as propaganda to demonize the Tutsi minority. Hutu radicals claimed that Tutsi were not “true” Africans but instead descended from Hamitic peoples and therefore foreign invaders who did not belong in Rwanda.¹⁴ This shows the danger of not questioning pervasive historical narratives, as they can be weaponized to achieve political aims.

D) Royal Court Culture

During the reigns of *mwamis* Ndori, Rujugira, Gahindiro, and Rwabugiri from 1770 to 1895, there was continual expansion of the Rwandan Court and codification of its culture through etiquette, dress, dance, style, and values, distinctly separating “Royal” culture from “common” culture.¹⁵ The central kingdom, where the Court’s influence dominated the most, was socially and culturally different than the outlying regions, as the people in the center adopted the Court’s “sophisticated” culture. Since central Rwanda contained a far larger number of Tutsi (about 10 to 15 percent of the population in the late eighteenth through the nineteenth century) and Tutsi occupied most Court positions, the culture that was linked to wealth and power became

¹³ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 51-52.

¹⁴ Phillipe Denis, *The Genocide Against the Tutsi, and the Rwandan Churches: Between Grief and Denial* (Suffolk, England: Boydell & Brewer, Limited, 2022), 24-27.

¹⁵ Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, 80-83.

synonymous with a Tutsi identity, creating a dichotomy with the Hutu identity.¹⁶ The origins of a distinct Court culture are tied to the military expansion of the kingdom, specifically beginning with *mwami* Rujugira's creation of *ngabos* (permanent standing armies) on its borders in the early seventeenth century. These armies are better understood as "social armies" in that they facilitated the extension of Court influence to new areas.¹⁷

E) Dynastic Rule: The Emergence of the Nyiginya Dynasty

The consolidation of military power and territorial expansion under Ruganzu Ndori (1510-1543), Cyilima Rujugira (1675-1708), and Yuhi Gahindiro (1746-1802) led to the centralization of power through military campaigns and incorporation of local elites into pre-colonial Rwanda.¹⁸ Rujugira engaged in intense competition with eastern rival dynasties to gain control of valuable pastureland, codified Court culture, and shifted the political center towards the Congo-Nile divide by incorporating local elites into the state through military cooperation and appointments in administrative structures. His expansionist agenda and wars in the east resulted in the displacement of many who fled westward, carrying with them elements of Court culture, which would later become known as Rwandan culture. Rujugira seized this as an opportunity to assert his authority over the western regions, legitimizing Rwandan refugees land holdings through appointments to administrative positions.¹⁹ Gahindiro in 1746 replaced Rujugira and again oversaw the consolidation of Court power by constraining the power of Tutsi elite families, subsequently increasing factional competition.²⁰

¹⁴ Alison Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News: Rwanda under Musinga, 1896-1931* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 12.

¹⁷ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 326.

¹⁸ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 303-307.

¹⁹ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 310.

²⁰ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 316-321.

Kigeri Rwabugiri (1865-1895) utilized continual military campaigns to increase the concentration of power and unintentionally internal conflicts. However, despite claims of a well-established state, the arrival of Europeans in 1895 revealed otherwise. As a result of Rwabugiri's campaigns, regions were either fully incorporated, occupied militarily, or subjected to raids. Rwabugiri continued the reduction of aristocratic lineages' power by dismissing and executing army leaders from land-owning Tutsi families and replacing them with Hutus or Twa. Rwabugiri transformed Rwandan kingship by being the sole elector of political positions and directly challenging entrenched power of aristocratic lineages. Booty from his continuous campaigns was used to reward political favorites, linking internal politics with external warfare. His continual campaigns also put strains on the Rwandan state's food, livestock, construction materials, and personnel.²¹ The Court's power was real on a daily basis near the center, but elsewhere it was "rather theoretical and episodic, such as when an army (*ngabos*) was in the immediate area."²²

F) German Colonialism: The Arrival and Consequences (1895)

During the six months of Rutarindwa's rule in 1895, his authority was challenged by the Belgian officer Georges Sandrart and several hundred Congolese troops, leading to the Battle of Kivumu in southwest Rwanda that year. Despite deploying several thousand troops, Rutarindwa's forces were defeated by the Europeans' superior weaponry, resulting in the loss of some of the kingdom's best warriors and symbolizing supremacy of Western power. However, the Europeans

²¹ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 332.

²² Thomas Turner, *Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth, and Reality* (New York: Zed Books, 2007), 59.

did not conquer the area as a result of this battle.²³ This weakness eventually contributed to the overthrow of Rutarindwa in December 1896 by Yuhi Musinga and the Bega clan.²⁴ Following this defeat, the German officer Captain von Ramsey was sent to open the area to German trade. The Court was suspicious and reserved when welcoming him, but eventually agreed to accept the German flag in exchange for protection from Belgian incursions.²⁵ Meanwhile, both German and Belgian officers established outposts in the southwestern corner of Rwanda in 1897 and 1898, but the elites generally obeyed the Court's orders and avoided contact with Europeans.²⁶

G) The Arrival of the Roman Catholic Church (1899)

Roman Catholic missionaries of the *Société des Missionnaires d'Afrique* aimed to spread Christianity in Rwanda, starting with local leaders, arriving in Rwanda in 1899.²⁷ The Court agreed to have the missionaries, known as the "White Fathers," settle at Save but were only allowed to preach Christianity to Hutus and Twa, not Tutsi, further entrenching differences between these groups. The Court allowed this because of the Fathers' association with the Belgians, who had the advantage of superior weaponry. However, the Court quickly began to feel challenged by the Catholic missionaries due to their alarming success in attracting Hutu allegiance and responded with threats and force to decrease Hutu conversion to Christianity.²⁸ Hutus' relationship with the missionaries depended on their perceived power, and many

²³ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 15.

²⁴ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 16-17.

²⁵ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 18-19.

²⁶ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 15.

²⁷ David Newbury, *A History of Modern Rwanda* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018), 32.

²⁸ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 45-69.

converted for protection out of fear of Tutsi elite.²⁹ For example, the Kinyarwanda word for conversion is *gutura*, which literally translates as “to select.” Many others converted for protection from the Fathers against the Court representative notables.

The Germans originally permitted the Fathers to establish missionaries in the late eighteenth century as it was a cheap and efficient means to spread European control over Rwanda, but this relationship changed when the Germans realized the missionaries were starting problems by challenging the Court’s power over Hutu and poor Tutsi.³⁰ The Fathers served as judges, established schools, and owned land and cattle, dispensing both to clients, and causing many disputes for not understanding the complexity of politics and land. The Fathers’ power grew alongside their followers’ power who yielded their own gains through association with the missionaries.

H) German Rule and the Rise of Yuhi Musinga (1896-1931)

The number of political coups that plagued the pre-colonial era demonstrated the fractional competition and unstable political entity of the kingdom. Yuhi Musinga, overthrowing Rutarindwa via a coup orchestrated by his dominating mother Kanjogera in December 1896, never ruled independently, partly dependent on his mother’s influence and partly on his maternal uncles’ widespread support from influential and wealthy notables. Musinga turned to the

²⁹ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 51-55.

³⁰ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 60.

Europeans to strengthen his power over the kingdom, becoming the first and only person at Court to learn Swahili, the most common African language spoken by Europeans in East Africa, by 1905. Musinga and Rwandan notables strategically utilized their relationships with German colonial officials to navigate conflicts with the Catholic Fathers. Despite tensions between the Court and the Church, Musinga did not completely sever ties with the Fathers and instead used them when advantageous.³¹

Rwanda in the early 1900s experienced increased colonial interest and tensions between the Court and the Germans. After the visit of the Duke of Mecklenburg in 1907, more than six hundred German soldiers and porters met with the Court, marking an increased colonial interest in the kingdom.³² German officer Richard Kandt was granted a permanent position as colonial governor and (against Musinga's protests) moved the capital from Nyanza to Kigali in 1907, greatly increasing the number of traders coming to Rwanda. To further tensions, the Germans who served in Rwanda (besides Kandt) did not learn Kinayarwanda or understand the culture, utilizing force instead. The resulting tensions between the Court and the Germans were not overt, and both parties reciprocated polite behavior, but the Tutsi did not respect the Europeans and the Europeans were quick to use force when orders were disobeyed.³³

³¹ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 71-97.

³² Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 82.

³³ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 83-97.

In 1911, the International Delimitation Commission between Germany, Belgium, and Great Britain agreed on the boundaries of their Central African land, including Rwanda.³⁴ The cession of Rwandan-conquered Ijwi Island and the northern tip of Lake Kivu to Belgium and territory in the northeast to Britain furthered distressed the Court as it was a continuation of the last decade of encroaching European power.³⁵ However, to administer the north and northwestern land conquered by his father Rwabugiri that was now “officially” part of Rwanda, Musinga subdivided the domains and appointed notables from the Court to command, imposing obligations on Hutu who previously faced little-to-no Court administrative rule. Most of the Court’s attention was directed to the northern regions due to the wealth in the area, fear of northern revolts, and the continuous raids by Twa into the area.³⁶

Resistance to Court expansion continued in north-central Rwanda, this time around a new leader, Ndunguste, who promised people relief from the control of notables, and he was soon seen as a legitimate challenge to Musinga’s authority by the end of January 1912. Musinga relied on help of the Germans to suppress the resistance, executing a joint Court-German brutal “demonstration campaign” destroying crops and settlements, massacring people, and kidnapping women through the regions that supported Ndunguste. Gudvious, the German leading commander of this

³⁴ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 118-120.

³⁵ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 118.

³⁶ Basebya, a Twa leader, attracted enough clients by 1909 to establish a legitimate rule in the north-central Rwanda. Musinga, in his efforts to defeat Basebya, sought German aid. However, a six-week campaign led by German and Musinga’s troops to extend royal control over the area failed; For more see Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 103-109.

successful campaign, demanded Musinga to publicly exhibit his most prized cattle, the *inyambo*, before him, humiliatingly symbolizing the *mwami*'s clientship to the Germans.³⁷

I) Transition of Power: Germany to Belgium (1916-1952)

Amid the First World War in 1916, the British and Belgians raided Rwandan territory, pillaging livestock and produce to feed their troops, increasing the Court's contempt towards both and heightening German presence.³⁸ The Belgians asked to meet with Musinga, but since the notables did not understand Swahili, the officers interpreted this as an act of defiance and fatally shot two Court notables. Musinga immediately accepted the Belgian flag and promised to cut ties with the Germans. Instead of ruling through the Court, the Belgians divided Rwanda into an eastern sector ruling from Kigali and a western sector ruling from Gisenyi the same year, exerting power through notables in each region. The new colonial power with their Congolese troops used brutal force against disobeying notables.³⁹

The Belgians used Catholic missionaries to guide them on how to administer Rwanda. In Father Léon Classe's document written in 1916, he stated that Rwanda's political regime "can be assimilated rather exactly to the feudal regime of the Middle Ages" in Europe. In the later 1920s and 1930s, the Belgians carried out reforms placing each chiefdom and sub-chiefdom in the

³⁷ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 125.

³⁸ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 130-155.

³⁹ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 135.

hands of Tutsi representatives, after finding the multiple networks of chiefs counterproductive.⁴⁰ The Belgians tried to win the support of Hutus by excusing them from traditional obligations to notables and promising them control over their land and labor. However, many Hutus came to resent the arrival of the Belgians, as the latter's demands for produce and labor multiplied, they rarely kept promises of less taxes to the notables, and officers robbed and raped at will.⁴¹ The conflict between the Belgian authorities and Musinga's Court and notables resulted in power struggles and tensions that contributed to the broader instability and violence that marked Rwanda's colonial history.

The administrators often ended up giving orders to individuals who had little actual power or influence in each area, leading to an inability to establish a clear and efficient system of governance.⁴² The Belgians are given formal rule of Rwanda in May 1919 by the League of Nations and chose a policy of "indirect rule," partly influenced by the failure of direct administration in the Congo and admiration of what Germans described as the "type of perfectly organized society" in Rwanda.⁴³ The Belgian approach to Rwanda was contradictory however, wanting to rule through the Court while aiming to "civilize" Rwanda. Complicating matters was the Belgians' trouble determining who was actually in charge of governing different regions of the country, as the traditional Rwandan system was complex and involved many different levels

⁴⁰ Turner, *Congo Wars*, 59-60.

⁴¹ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 134-142.

⁴² Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 157-183.

⁴³ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 204-228.

of authority. This was partly deliberate, as notables sought to evade burdensome duties imposed by the colonial administrations.

After Belgian threats of placing Hutu and Twa in positions of power, Musinga conceded to European education for young notables under the conditionality of secular schools unassociated with the White Fathers.⁴⁴ The Belgians also continued their “civilizing” process of Rwanda by prohibiting executions and physical punishment, controlling administrative appointments, and proceeding over the judicial system. They collected taxes and imposed forced labor, *akazi*, at a much greater rate than the Germans. This was done through notables, mostly Tutsi, who in turn placed a great burden on their subordinates, mostly Hutu, to meet the Belgian quotas. Belgians implemented discriminatory policies against Hutus, including reserving school spots for Tutsis.⁴⁵

Out of frustration with the Court’s repeated disregard for their orders, the Belgians began shifting their policy to economic development by putting greater pressure on Hutus for labor in 1923. The Court’s loss of European support became apparent towards the end of 1924, as Europeans controlled the distribution of wealth and power. The Belgians then prohibited all rituals apart of the sacred code of the Court, symbolically weakening Musinga’s support.⁴⁶ Following the devastating famine between 1927 and 1929, the Belgians removed Musinga from power. He spent the remainder of his life in exile on Lake Kivu, where he died in 1944.

⁴⁴ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 162-163.

⁴⁵ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 171-178.

⁴⁶ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 187.

Musinga's son Rudahigwa was chosen to succeed him and was proclaimed *mwami* with the name Mutara on November 16, 1931.⁴⁷

In the late 1920s into the 1930s in the central regions of Rwanda, many Hutus escaped their rulers by fleeing to British-occupied East Africa, while Hutus in the northeast began to take up armed resistance.⁴⁸ During this time of political unrest, the colonists eliminated small units of command and consolidated larger ones, vigorously supporting new, young, European-educated notables.⁴⁹ This led to the administrators to accept more rigidly the myth of superiority based on the Hamitic Hypothesis of the Tutsi and to justify increased demands on the Hutu, with the belief that Tutsi were "born to rule" and the Hutu to labor.⁵⁰ The simplification of the hierarchical structure made it easier for the notables to rule more oppressively, exploiting their subjects in various ways, including distorting traditional law and customs.

Belgians implemented identity cards in 1931, formally identifying Rwandans as either Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa.⁵¹ This is during the height of the Western eugenics movement as scientists aimed to "understand" the relationship between Hutu and Tutsi by measuring their heads, noses, skin

⁴⁷ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 188-191.

⁴⁸ The Bakiga clan found a leader in Semaraso, who was able to unite the group in a more organized movement against the Europeans and chiefs. Semaraso proclaimed himself the leader of a crusade against the oppression faced by Hutu. He attacked chiefs and killed a dozen Tutsi, burned the residences of forty more, and stole one hundred cattle. In retaliation, the Tutsi elites killed several dozen people, jailed thirty more, and destroyed the homes and harvests of one thousand Bakiga. The Belgians occupied the region with troops for three and a half years to prevent a similar rising from occurring in the future; Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 129-232.

⁴⁹ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 211-213.

⁵⁰ See the section of this paper "Ethnic and Clan Identities: Evolution and Complexity."

⁵¹ Catharine Newbury, "Ethnicity and the Politics of History in Rwanda," *Africa Today* 45, no. 1 (1998): 7-24.

color, height and body shape to explain “scientifically” why Tutsi held more positions of power and wealth, concluding it was because of Tutsis more “European” features, tying back to the Hamitic Hypothesis of Northern descent.⁵²

J) Post-World War II Independence (1952-1990)

In 1952, amid the aftermath of World War II, the newly formed United Nations decreed Belgium to prepare Rwanda for independence, and Belgium’s post-colonial vision of the nation was shaped by the Catholic Church, Flemish Democrats’ ideals of democracy, and economic goals. In the late 1940s, a new generation of missionaries from Belgium that Ian Linden described as a “different breed from the old royalist White Fathers,” dominated Rwanda.⁵³ This younger generation prioritized issues of social justice and liberation and largely identified with Hutu grievances and desire for emancipation.⁵⁴ The Belgian administration facilitated the emergence of multiple political parties and supported the Hutu majority, once they realized a marginalized majority would not align with ideals of a democratic Rwanda. This was influenced by the growing dominance of Belgium’s Flemish Christian Democrats who also identified with the political struggles of the Hutu population, further motivating Belgium’s shift of support from the Tutsi monarchy to the oppressed Hutu.⁵⁵ Grégoire Kayibanda, a Hutu raised by the Catholic Church, formed the Hutu-supported *Parti du Mouvement de l’Emancipation Hutu*

⁵² Timothy Longman, “Identity Cards, Ethnic Self Perception, and Genocide in Rwanda,” in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World*, ed. Jane Caplan and John Torpey, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 345-358.

⁵³ Ian Linden, *Church and Revolution in Rwanda* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 266.

⁵⁴ Peter Safari, “Church, State and the Rwandan Genocide,” *Political Theology* 11, no. 6 (2010): 877.

⁵⁵ Gregory Mthembu-Salter, “Overview of the conflict: mediation and genocide in Rwanda,” *Track Two: Constructive Approaches to Community and Political Conflict* 11, no. 5 (2002): 1-3.

(PARMEHUTU) in October 1959 that opposed the Tutsi monarchy, while many Tutsi elites supported *Union Nationale Rwandaise* (UNAR).⁵⁶ Economic motivations for the shifting support was another consideration. The Tutsi monarchy was reluctant to embrace modernization and political reform and the Hutu majority was seen as a “potential economic powerhouse” that could be “tapped into” by switching alliances.⁵⁷

Following the death of *mwami* Mutara in July 1959, the Belgians decided to move forward with their plans for Rwandan independence and organized communal elections. On November 3, 1959, a youth group associated with UNAR attacked the popular PARMEHUTU figure, Dominique Mbonyumutwa, leading to PARMEHUTU attacking members of UNAR and killing two Tutsi notables. These incidents began a wave of violence between the two political parties, with PARMEHUTUs pillaging and burning nearly 5,000 UNAR huts and UNARs killing multiple PARMEHUTUs. By November 14, the administration restored order, but a serious refugee problem persisted and by April next year there were about 22,000 Tutsi refugees living in government refugee centers. These are the first events of the Hutu Revolution of 1959-62 and were sustained through political, moral, and logistical assistance of the Catholic Church and Belgian colonists, with the result being a radical shift of power from Tutsi to Hutu and the exodus of thousands of Tutsis into neighboring countries.⁵⁸ Kayibanda was elected President of

⁵⁶ Erin Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda: The Politics of History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 7; Linden, *Church and Revolution in Rwanda*, 877.

⁵⁷ Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*; Richard Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); African Studies Center, “Rwanda – History,” n.d., accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.africa.upenn.edu/NEH/rwhistory.htm>.

⁵⁸ René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 81.

the Republic on October 26, 1961, and Rwanda was granted internal autonomy and independence that year.⁵⁹

The Kayibanda regime in 1961 faced a deeply divided country. The administration legitimized their rule through the common threat of the so-called *inyenzi* (cockroach) incursions, referring to the established Tutsi rebel group in Uganda. Kayibanda responded to these attacks by imprisoning political moderates in Rwanda, training and arming local militias, and massacring an estimated 10,000 Tutsi civilians between 1963 and 1964, resulting in some more 130,000 refugees.⁶⁰ This threat of *inyenzi* invasions was made more believable after the 1972 genocide in Burundi which resulted in about 300,000 Hutu refugees to flee to Rwanda, bringing stories of the brutality they endured by the Tutsi.⁶¹

Major General Habyarimana overthrew Kayibanda on July 5, 1973 and Rwanda became a single party dictatorship under the national party *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement* (MRND), continuing Tutsi discrimination and refusing the now over half a million Tutsi refugees to return. Initially, Habyarimana held public support due to his proposed commitment to end corruption and ethnic divisionism, but this faded due to criticisms of favoring northern Hutus, economic decline and famine from drought and crop failures, and his inability to diplomatically settle the restless refugees in Uganda.⁶² The coup that brought

⁵⁹ On 1 July 1962, Rwanda was officially independent after the General Assembly voted to terminate the Trusteeship Agreement; African Studies Center, "Rwanda – History," n.d., accessed March 3, 2023, <https://www.africa.upenn.edu/NEH/rwhistory.htm>.

⁶⁰ Gérard Prunier, "The Geopolitical Situation in the Great Lakes Area in Light of the Kivu Crisis," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1997): 1-25.

⁶¹ Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, *The Path of a Genocide: The Rwandan Crisis from Uganda to Zaire* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1999).

⁶² Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 9-10.

Habyarimana to power's key political objective was to take power away from southern Hutu to northern Hutu. Northern Hutus feared the RPF might ally with southern Hutus and undo everything accomplished by the 1959 revolution.⁶³

Meanwhile in Uganda, the mostly UNAR Tutsi refugees had formed the Rwanda Alliance for National Unity (RANU, later renamed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1979), and a small cohort formed an alliance with Yoweri Museveni, founder of the leftist political group the Front for National Salvation, to overthrow the then Ugandan President Milton Obote in 1985.⁶⁴

Afterwards members of RANU were rewarded with key posts in government, business, and the army for their military aid to Museveni, prompting anti-Tutsi sentiment amongst Ugandans. For fear of losing civilian support, Museveni asked Habyarimana in 1988 to allow the return of the Tutsi refugees. The RPF then demands a power-sharing agreement with Habyarimana, but when not given an answer, invaded northern Rwanda on October 1, 1990, triggering a civil war.⁶⁵

K) The Rwandan Civil War (1990-1994)

After the October 1990 invasion, some one million Hutu refugees from the north fleeing the RPF brought stories of the atrocities committed by the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), radicalizing many Hutu political elites and the general public against the RPF. In the first three years of the

⁶³ Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 83.

⁶⁴ Britannica, "Yoweri Kaguta Museveni," February 28, 2023, accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Yoweri--Museveni>.

⁶⁵ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 10-11.

Civil War (1990-1993), there were deliberate attacks against civilians by the invading RPF.⁶⁶ However, the numbers of civilians killed is highly disputed and wildly vary, due to political repression, lack of credible sources, and observations taken by untrained observers. Human Rights Watch's report stated the RPF "killed numerous civilians" and Amnesty International believed the RPF killed "scores of unarmed civilians," both, however, not providing exact numbers of casualties, although others have attempted to estimate numbers.⁶⁷ The so-called Gersony Report, a UN-conducted inquiry into Rwandan refugee camps in neighboring countries, estimated between 25,000 and 40,000 civilian deaths by summary executions, revenge killings, and massacres at "meetings" between April and August 1994 by the RPA.⁶⁸ Journalist Stephen Smith, reporting in Rwanda in 1996, concluded the RPF was responsible for killing an estimated 150,000 Hutus between 1994 and 1995.⁶⁹ Alison Des Forges, a historian and human rights activist, estimated the RPF may have been responsible for as many as 25,000 killings during the conflict, close to Jean-Marie Vianney Higiroy, a Rwandan political scientist, estimation of 30,000 killings.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Scott Straus, "The Limits of a Genocide Lens: Violence Against Rwandans in the 1990s," *Journal of Genocide Research* 21, no. 4 (2019): 504-524.

⁶⁷ Amnesty International, "Rwanda: Human rights abuses in the context of the conflict," 1995, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/rwanda/report-rwanda/>; Human Rights Watch, "Rwanda: The Search for Security and Human Rights Abuse," April 1, 2000, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2000/04/01/rwanda-search-security-and-human-rights-abuses>.

⁶⁸ Amnesty International, "Rwanda: Reports of Killings and Abduction by the Rwandese Patriotic Army, April-August 1994," October 14, 1993, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr47/016/1994/en/>.

⁶⁹ Stephen Smith, "Rwanda in Six Scenes." *London Review of Books* 33, no. 6 (2011).

⁷⁰ Alison Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 572; Jean-Marie Vianney Higiroy, "Rwanda Revisited: The Role of the RPF in the Humanitarian Disaster of 1994." *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 51.

At the urging of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and some Western European governments to end the Civil War, Habyarimana signed the Arusha Accords on August 4, 1993, agreeing to integrate the military and government with other political parties, including the RPF, and permit all Rwandan refugees to return. Philip Gourevitch described this decision as “political suicide” for Habyarimana, as the “Hutu Power” movement, the radical wing of the MRND, had enjoyed exclusive power for the last twenty years and would not accept this agreement.⁷¹ The now-alienated Hutu Power movement began training youth militias, the *Interhamwe*, and investing in anti-Tutsi propaganda through the *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* and the popular newspaper *Kangura*.⁷² The extremist outlets projected an image of the Tutsi as both alien and clever, alienness disqualifying them as Rwandan and cleverness turning them into a permanent threat, similar to how Jews were portrayed during the Holocaust.⁷³

The United Nations Assistance for Rwanda (UNAMIR) was deployed to Rwanda in 1993 to oversee the implementation of the Arusha Accords. However, the mission was grossly understaffed and under-equipped, lacking experienced men, and permitted the peacekeepers only to use force in self-defense. UN headquarters in New York strictly enforced these restrictive rules, and many Rwandan soldiers and militia believed the UNAMIR soldiers would not fire, a

⁷¹ Philip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: stories from Rwanda* (London: Picador, 1999), 65.

⁷² Jesse, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 10.

⁷³ Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 82.

weakness which Human Rights Watch later described as “emboldening” Rwandans into committing genocidal acts without international interference.⁷⁴

L) The Rwandan Genocide (July-April 1994)

In the weeks following the October 1990 invasion, an estimated 300 Tutsi were massacred in Kibilira, in January 1991 at least a thousand Tutsis were killed in Bagogwe, and in 1992 hundreds of Tutsi were killed in Bugersera. The indifference of the international community allowed the regime to continue its organizational capacities and by 1992, the institutional apparatus of genocide was in place.⁷⁵ The assassination on October 21, 1993 of Hutu President Melchior Ndadaye of Burundi at the hands of an all-Tutsi army “rationalized” genocide further. Tens of thousands of Hutu refugees from Burundi were now in the south-central regions of Rwanda, angry and able to be mobilized by MRND hard-liners.⁷⁶ Important to note here is the assistance the genocidal regime received from the French in the months preceding the genocide. The French considered the RPF invasion in October 1990 “a clear aggression by an Anglophone neighbor on a Francophone country” and actively supported the genocidal regime through deploying weapons, advisors, and military generals.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda,” 1999, accessed March 16, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno15-8-01.htm>.

⁷⁵ Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 84.

⁷⁶ Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 86.

⁷⁷ Linda Melvern, “France and genocide: the murky truth,” *The Times*, August 8, 2008, accessed March 16, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20110604230457/http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article4481353.ece; Extensive records on Rwanda’s arms deals were found in the French embassy offices, but none concerning Rwanda’s relationship with France, as the documents were destroyed by Colonel Sebastien Ntahobari, Rwanda’s military attaché in France.

On April 6, 1994, President Habyarimana's plane was struck by a missile, killing him and Cyprien Ntaryamira, the President of Burundi, thus creating a power vacuum.⁷⁸ Within the hour of the crash, youth militias began setting up roadblocks in Kigali and murdering political opponents based on pre-established lists.⁷⁹ These killings were targeted at anyone Hutu radicals deemed political opponents, mostly moderate Hutu politicians and Hutu and Tutsi opposition leaders.⁸⁰ Political scientist René Lemarchand believed that by instigating ethnic violence on a substantial scale, the Hutu extremists knew they could prevent the implementation of the power-sharing Arusha Accords. The killing of Tutsi civilians was “the quickest and most ‘rational’ way of eliminating all basis for compromise with the RPF.”⁸¹

After disposing of potential political traitors, violence spread across Rwanda with Hutu Power radicals encouraging the murder, torture, and rape of unarmed Tutsi civilians. The “efficiency of the machete-wielding death squads” in systemically killing people was unsettling— first breaking victims’ ankles, then their wrists and arms, and finishing by smashing their skulls and necks with clubs, sticks, or machetes. The French were aware of Rwanda’s history of systematic manipulation of ethnic identities, mob killings of Tutsi over the past decades, and incitements to violence by the government, all pointing to potential for genocide, yet continued providing military assistance to the Rwandan government.⁸²

⁷⁸ It is still unknown who launched the attack; the RPF blames Hutu extremists in Rwanda, while the MRND claimed the RPF launched the attack to prompt their invasion, see Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 86.

⁷⁹ Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families*, 49.

⁸⁰ Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 86.

⁸¹ Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 84.

⁸² René Lemarchand, “Rwanda: The Rationality of Genocide,” *A Journal of Opinion* 23, no. 2 (1995): 8-9.

René Lemarchand described the genocide as an “almost unthinkable crime [that] is like a black hole, swallowing past, present, and future in its unfathomed enormity.”⁸³ Over the next three months, from April to July 1994, an estimated 800,000 to one million people were shot, hacked to pieces, drowned, speared, and beaten to death with clubs.⁸⁴ The atrocities were extensive, personal, and brutal, leaving behind a highly traumatized society plagued by immense personal loss and destruction. The scale of this violence feels wrong to describe in academic words, so I quote part of Juliane Okot Bitek’s poem “100 Days”:

*“What indeed
constitutes
the criminalizing function
of language in media?”*

*Stuffed
Hacked
Punched
Pumped full of bullets
Slaughtered
& left to rot on the street
Pigs
Dogs
Cockroaches*

*People murdered
Calculated and rated on a per hour basis
& sometimes exacted to ethnic & tribal
differences
struggles
divisions
clashes*

*Never people you know
Until they are”⁸⁵*

M) A Silent World: The Preventable Genocide

⁸³ Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa*, 88.

⁸⁴ Africa Rights and Redress, “Survivors and Post-Genocide Justice in Rwanda: Their Experiences, Perspectives, and Hopes,” 2008, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/rwanda/survivors-and-post-genocide-justice-rwanda-their-experiences-perspectives-and-hopes>.

⁸⁵ Juliane Okot Bitek, *100 Days* (Alberta, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 2016).

The day after the plane crash, the United States decided to withdraw all its diplomats and citizens. The day after, on April 8, 1994, the United Nations-deployed Canadian peacekeeper Roméo Dallaire sent a cable to UN headquarters in New York reporting that Tutsi individuals were being targeted in a systematic and premeditated campaign of violence and described the killings as “well-planned, organized, [and] deliberate.” On April 10, Dallaire telephoned New York again asking for 5,000 additional troops and informed the UN of the massive crimes against humanity occurring in Rwanda. His request for troops was denied and he was told to make the evacuation of internationals his priority. In the three days that followed, 4,000 foreigners were evacuated by over 1,000 deployed troops. In those three days, an estimated 20,000 Rwandans were murdered.⁸⁶

The Western world knew the extent of the mass killings as soon as the genocide began. Joyce Leader, the deputy chief of African affairs in the US State Department, stated “by 8 a.m. the morning after the plane crash, we knew what was happening, that there was systematic killing of Tutsi.”⁸⁷ During the 100 days of genocide in Rwanda, the mass media in the US provided accurate and detailed reports on the severity of the violence. However, it was largely written off as another case of “Africans killing Africans” because of “ancient tribal hostilities.” As Samantha Powers wrote, “even after the reality of the genocide in Rwanda had become

⁸⁶ Samantha Powers, *“A Problem from Hell”: American and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2013): 499-503.

⁸⁷ Powers, *“A Problem from Hell,”* 504.

irrefutable, when bodies were shown choking the Kagera River on America's nightly news, the brute fact of the slaughter failed to influence US policy except in a negative way."⁸⁸

The United States and the international community refused to call what was happening in Rwanda "genocide." The word genocide, defined as the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group" is reserved to describe the worst crime against humanity, but the US refused to describe the Rwandan genocide as "genocide" because that would oblige action under the 1948 Genocide Convention. A discussion paper for genocide investigation in Rwanda on May 1, 1994 (in the middle of the genocide) by the US Office of the Secretary of Defense stated, "Be Careful, Legal at State was worried about this yesterday—Genocide finding could commit [the US government] to actually 'do something.'"⁸⁹ It was not until May 21, six weeks after the killing in Rwanda began, that the UN agreed to use the term "genocide." However, in the US, government officials were only authorized to publicly state "acts of genocide" had occurred and not a "genocide."⁹⁰ The post-genocide Rwandan state's relationship with the international community is largely shaped by their lack of action during the genocide and subsequent refusal to recognize the extent of the tragedy.

⁸⁸ Powers, *"A Problem from Hell,"* 510.

⁸⁹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Secret Discussion Paper: Rwanda," May 1, 1994; Powers, *"A Problem from Hell,"* 515.

⁹⁰ Powers, *"A Problem from Hell,"* 515.

N) The RPF and Post-Conflict Governance

On July 18, 1994, the RPF gained control of Rwanda and effectively ended the genocide. The Government of National Unity was sworn in under the new President Pasteur Bizimungu, who joined the RPF in 1990. He was widely rumored among Rwandans and the international community to be a puppet president with the Vice President and Minister of Defense Paul Kagame, commander of the RPA and current Rwandan president, holding decision-making authority.⁹¹

After the genocide ended in 1994, two million Rwandans fled to eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) forming a refugee population of ordinary Hutu civilians and perpetrators of the genocide. The perpetrators, or *génocidaires*, formed a group named *Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda* (FDLR) in September 2000 with the goal of eventually launching a military invasion of Rwanda.⁹² RPF-led Rwanda violently secured control of these refugee camps and forced between 500,000 to 700,000 Hutu refugees to return home between November and December 1996. During these months, as many refugees evaded the RPA and fled westward, the Rwandan army committed systematic massacres, with estimated death toll around 230,000, with most victims being children, women, and elderly people, although again estimations are

⁹¹ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 11.

⁹² Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 11-12

highly debated and vary greatly.⁹³ There is a highly politicized debate about whether this also constitutes a “genocide.”⁹⁴

O) Managing Life After Genocide (2000-present)

Amid allegations of corruption, Bizimungu resigned in 2000 and Kagame assumed presidency in 2003 with 95% of the vote. Since 2000, the Kagame regime has used general repression and targeted assassinations to suppress political challenges. However, Rwanda has enjoyed an impressive amount of development and international success, attracting international donors and investors, implementing education reforms and healthcare initiatives, adopting gender equality polices, and transforming the nation into an information technology hub.⁹⁵

The UN established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in November 1994 to prosecute orchestrators of genocide. Out of frustration with the slowness of this tribunal (there were an estimated 150,000 alleged *génocidaires* awaiting trial) the RPF reinvented the pre-colonial *gacaca* courts in 2001 based upon mediation by community elders, and an estimated two million genocide cases were tried through *gacaca* by 2007.⁹⁶ The trials were presided over

⁹³ Kisangani Emizet, “The Massacre of Refugees in Congo: A Case of UN Peacekeeping Failure and International Law,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 2 (2000): 163-202.

⁹⁴ Lemarchand, René. “Genocide in the Great Lakes: Which Genocide? Whose Genocide?” *African Studies Review* 41, no. 1 (1998): 3-16.

⁹⁵ Timothy Longman, *Memory and Justice in Post-Genocide Rwanda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁹⁶ Mark Geraghty, “Gacaca, Genocide, Genocide Ideology: The Violent Aftermaths of Transitional Justice in the New Rwanda.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62, no. 3 (2020): 588-618.

by elected judges and involved victims and community members in the process of determining guilt and punishment, but remains controversial for their handling of evidence and potential corruption.⁹⁷ The Kagame regime invests heavily in nationalized mourning and commemoration practices, through state-funded memorials, the national mourning period, and establishment of various government organizations newly consolidated to the Ministry for Unity and Reconciliation (MINBUMWE). Similarly, the state has promoted initiatives such as *Ndi Umunyarwanda* (“I am Rwandan”) in November 2013, which promotes the exclusion of ethnic identification with the goal of reconciliation.⁹⁸

Part II: The Politics of History and Memorialization

A) Introduction

The RPF regime since assuming power (June 1994) has promoted an “official” history of Rwanda to reinforce the party’s political legitimacy and promote national unity, which different Rwandans internalize and interpret in different ways.⁹⁹ Based on my research at Rwandan memorials, conversations with Rwandans, and multiple historical sources, I will define this state-sponsored collective memory.¹⁰⁰ In general, the narrative begins with an idyllic, pre-colonial society that is violently interrupted by German colonialism, the “inventors of ethnic identities,” disregarding the socially stratified and at times violent pre-colonial history of Rwanda.¹⁰¹ This

⁹⁷ Lars Waldorf, *Gacaca Courts in Post-Genocide Rwanda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁹⁸ Jesse, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 12-15.

⁹⁹ Jesse, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ MGMC and the KGMC, authors observations and interviews, Rwanda, September-November, 2022; For more on the MGMC, see Genocide Archives of Rwanda, n.d., accessed April 14, 2023, https://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php/Murambi_Memorial; “Part I: Historical Overview of Rwanda” of this paper discusses the pre-colonial history of the region, for more see David Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists* and Alison Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*.

¹⁰¹ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*.

Rwandan history then oversimplifies “Tutsi victims” and “Hutu *génocidaires*” and silences discussion of non-Tutsi targeted violence.¹⁰² The international community is blamed as bearing special responsibility for the genocide, ignoring the many factors that made genocide possible, including the RPF’s invasion in October 1990.¹⁰³

In this part of the thesis, I will aim to understand the difference between history, individual memory, and collective memory. I will then analyze how the state promotes an “official history” of Rwanda through memorials, political discourse, and punitive measures, discuss counter-narratives based on scholarly historical consensus, and understand the incentives for promoting a certain view on history. Subsequently, I will define memory and analyze how different groups of Rwandans remember these events chronologically.

B) History vs. Memory

There are concrete connections and tensions between history and memory. Although there are distinctions between individual and collective memory, for this section when comparing memory to history, I will just use memory, referring to both.¹⁰⁴ Memories are obviously needed for history, but memory alone is “insufficient, limited, and particularistic,” while history can be “biased, propagandist, and elitist.”¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Hansen distinguished history from memory as the

¹⁰² Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 46.

¹⁰³ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 54; Genocide Archive of Rwanda, n.d., accessed April 14, 2023, https://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw/index.php/Murambi_Memorial.

¹⁰⁴ For the difference between individual and collective memory see, the section of this paper “Part II: The Politics of History and Memorialization.”

¹⁰⁵ Nick Sacco, “Understanding the Differences Between History and Memory,” January 12, 2013, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://pastexplore.wordpress.com/2013/01/12/understanding-the-differences-between-history-and-memory/>.

former is the reconstruction of the past based on critical examination of sources, while the latter is a constantly evolving representation of the past in the present.¹⁰⁶ Memory is subjected to human's psychological inabilities to be completely objective and are shaped by the realities of individuals' present. It is an emotional response to the past influenced by personal experiences, cultural traditions, and social contexts.¹⁰⁷ History has more checks on reliability, such as primary sources, debates with other historians, and is an academic discipline with a methodology.

Over the past several decades, the relationship between memory and history has been subject to intense debate among historians and scholars in related fields. The traditional approaches to history have been challenged, which often focused on the accumulation of factual knowledge of the past. Memory studies have emphasized the importance of individual and collective memory in shaping our understanding of the past, leading historians to consider ways in which memory is constructed, contested, and negotiated. In 2000, Paul Hutton proposed that while memory and history are distinct, they are also connected: memory shapes the way we approach history, and in turn history shapes the way we remember the past.¹⁰⁸ Similarly in 1997, David Lowenthal called to recognize the strengths and limitations of both history and memory, and to bridge the gap between them through greater dialogue between historians, cultural institutions, and the public.¹⁰⁹ It is important to remember that multiple, competing histories exist, just as it is important to recognize the limitations of personal memories and memories of others when

¹⁰⁶ Jonathan Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 2.

¹⁰⁷ David Lowenthal, "History and Memory," *The Public Historian* 19, no. 2 (1997): 30-39.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Hutton, "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," *The History Teacher* 33, no. 4 (2000): 533-548.

¹⁰⁹ Lowenthal, "History and Memory," 30-39.

thinking of the past. There are strengths and weaknesses of history and memory, and the solution lies somewhere in the middle—incorporating memory into history and history into memory with a nuanced and critical approach.

The catalyst behind this research and these questions was after visiting the Murambi Genocide Memorial Centre (MGMC), where the representation of the “history” of Rwanda sharply contrasted with agreed upon scholarly Rwandan history I read previously. This made me question definitions of history (something I felt I should be able to answer as a history undergraduate). I am not unique in this questioning, as James Young’s research in 1994 on Holocaust memorials found that sites of memory can be used to spark debates about how the past is interpreted, as memorials are physical spaces where individual memory, collective memory, and history interact.¹¹⁰ What made historians of Rwanda such as Alison Des Forges and David Newbury right and the history displayed at the MGMC wrong? Multiple histories do exist, yet these two histories clash too clearly to allow both; one must be right (or at the least “more right”) and the other wrong. To determine this, using the nuanced and critical approach suggested previously, one could look at the sources used and who the historians are (biases, previous work, stake in how the history is portrayed, etc.). Alison Des Forges, whose book *Defeat is the Only Bad News* I used in Part I of this paper, was an American historian and senior adviser for Human Rights Watch’s Africa division for 20 years, spent much of her adult life in Rwanda, investigated abuses of civilians in Rwanda from 1990-93, spent four years interviewing organizers and

¹¹⁰ James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

victims of the genocide from 1994-98, and testified before the ICTR.¹¹¹ For her book, Des Forges used colonial archives in Brussels and Kigali, Catholic Church archives in Belgium and Rwanda, private correspondence and diaries of colonial administrators and missionaries, and official reports from Rwandan monarchy and the colonial government.¹¹² The Kagame administration, in control of Rwanda's eight national memorials including the MGMC, are a state tasked with rebuilding a post-genocide country. The regime has a stake in what is remembered and what is not, and some part of their power rests upon Rwanda's history and Rwandans' memories.

This paper is not trying to claim that the former's history is completely correct, and the latter is completely wrong, but when comparing a well-researched historian's information and an authoritarian state government with a past of human rights abuses, the differences and incentives are obvious. After establishing the differences and their underlying motivations, my paper aims to understand the harm in the Rwandan state's history promoted in memorials, official discourse, and legal codes. This section will argue those whose individual memories are not included in the state-sponsored official history experience feelings of exclusion and marginalization, which exacerbate tensions, particularly dangerous in a state with a history of ethnic and inter-state violence. As one survivor told me, "It's not good to keep reminding people that have already received forgiveness of their crimes... it's a way of torturing."¹¹³

¹¹¹ Sewell Chan and Dennis Hevesi, "Alison Des Forges, 66, Human Rights Advocate, Dies," *The New York Times* February 13, 2009, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/14/nyregion/14desforges.html>.

¹¹² Des Forges, *Defeat Is the Only Bad News*, 255-306.

¹¹³ Anonymous, interview by author, Remera, Kigali, November 21, 2022.

C) Colonialism and Ethnic Division in Rwanda

The state-promoted history of Rwanda begins with colonialism, placing blame on Europeans for creating ethnic identities and divisionism in a previously homogenous society. At the MGMC, the museum begins under the title “Colonial Times” and below states that “colonialism and its mode of governance” is what “brought ethnic divisions and roots of hatred.” Subsequent sections titled “Independence” and “Discrimination” feature a prominent photograph of a Belgian identification card and describe the emergence of Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa ethnicities because of the colonial categorization system.¹¹⁴ At the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre (KGMC), the exhibit does begin with Rwanda’s pre-colonial history, but depicts the nation as peaceful and prosperous under a monarchy. The outdoor Garden of Unity at the KGMC further depicts pre-colonial times as utopian with the audio tour stating, “Rwanda of ancient times, when the country was united and at peace.”¹¹⁵ The problem is not so much that this is incorrect, but rather that it is incomplete.

In reality, the period prior to colonization was marked by constant territorial expansion through military campaigns, internal power struggles, fractional competition, and political coups.¹¹⁶ Ethnicity was not an institution but an identity and therefore contextually defined, not as biologically distinct racial groups, but as broad collective identities based on descent, occupation, class, and personal characteristics. However, the Rwandan kingdom was still a highly stratified society, based on regional divisions, clan structure, and political

¹¹⁴ MGMC, observation by author, Gikongoro, Rwanda, November 21, 2022.

¹¹⁵ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 48.

¹¹⁶ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 316-321.

particularities.¹¹⁷ There are reasons to question the Eurocentric, primordial, racial-ethnic model, as well as the Rwandan homogenous, “one Rwanda” framework.

The image of a homogenous, peaceful pre-colonial Rwanda is utilized to aid in reconciliation, unity, and legitimize the RPF’s political rule. The state’s history is purposely aimed to show Rwandans had once lived together peacefully to aid in reconciliation.¹¹⁸ Therefore, reconciliation by the state is understood as erasing the pre-colonial and colonial differences that existed between different regions, tribes, and socio-economic groups (Hutu and Tutsi). However, reconciliation could be understood as acknowledging that differences exist, as ethnic groups have been treated differently in all of Rwanda’s history and learning ways to connect across these differences. National unity is difficult to achieve after inter-state violence, especially considering the brutal and personal nature of the Rwandan genocide. By pointing to a period of “one Rwanda,” the state can make the argument that peace and unity is possible, while also being able to blame outside actors (colonists) for the divisionism.¹¹⁹

D) “Tutsification of the genocide”¹²⁰

The state-sponsored history presents the genocide as an event that specifically targeted the Tutsi, silencing discussion of the systematic killing of non-Tutsi Rwandans through official and unofficial political repression, public discourse, and lack of judicial accountability.¹²¹ Offering critical or broader accounts of history outside the state’s narrative is criminalized as “genocide

¹¹⁷ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 301-302.

¹¹⁸ Maurice Mugabowagahunde. interview by author, Kigali, Rwanda, November 21, 2022.

¹¹⁹ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 303-340.

¹²⁰ Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*, 3.

¹²¹ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 51.

denial” and “geocide ideology.”¹²² The Constitution of Rwanda, enacted in 2003, lists that the State of Rwanda is charged with “preventing and punishing the crime of genocide, fighting genocide negationism and revisionism, eradicating genocide ideology and all its manifestations...”¹²³ The head of the research department at the Rwandan Governance Board stated that although Rwanda’s “key imperatives [is] consensus democracy... above all political ideology is [the] unity of Rwandans.”¹²⁴ Victoire Ingabire Umuhiza, leader of the opposition party *Forces démocratiques unifiées* (FDU), was sentenced to eight years in prison by the High Court of Kigali after her speech at the KGMC on 16 January 2010 criticizing national commemoration to only memorialize Tutsi victims of the genocide.¹²⁵ After meeting with MINBUMWE, the director of research and policy developments urged me and my cohort to fight genocide ideology back in the United States because of the “lack of political will for some countries to enact law[s] that criminalize denial of [the] genocide against the Tutsi.”¹²⁶

The consequences of Rwanda’s punitive measures and criminalization of genocide ideology have resulted in a limited scope of freedom of expression, which instills a sense of apprehension among Rwandans regarding dissenting opinions against the government’s official stance. Furthermore, it prolongs discord and animosity between people while also posing a challenge to historical research and academic independence in Rwanda.

¹²² Straus, “The Limits of a Genocide Lens,” 521.

¹²³ Republic of Rwanda, Rwanda’s Constitution of 2003 with Amendments through 2015, Preamble, 4.

¹²⁴ Félicien Usengumukiza, lecture at the Rwandan Governance Board attended by author, Kigali, Rwanda, October 6, 2022.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Rwanda: Eight-Year Sentence for Opposition Leader,” 30 October 2012, accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/30/rwanda-eight-year-sentence-opposition-leader..>

¹²⁶ Jean-Damascène Bizimana, lecture at MINUBUMWE, Kigali, Rwanda, September 28, 2022.

When the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda (ICTR) began to investigate RPF crimes, the Rwandan state suspended cooperation with the tribunal.¹²⁷ There have been an extraordinary amount of justice procedures concerning genocide crimes with the ICTR internationally and *gacaca* trials domestically, yet other episodes of mass violence by the RPF have not been condemned through either or any judicial processes.¹²⁸ The effect of this is that those who have suffered violence in Rwanda that does not align with the classification of “genocide against the Tutsi” have been denied justice and acknowledgement. This lack of redress is contributing to the exacerbation of ethnic tensions within the state.

Although the Rwandan genocide in 1994 was the most extensive experience of mass violence through the 1990s in Rwanda and neighboring Zaire (renamed the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1997), it was not the only episode of violence. Scott Straus, a political scientist focused on violence, human rights, and African politics, described three major patterns of large-scale “Rwandan on Rwandan” violence related to the power struggles of the 1990s—the “systematic and widespread violence” against Hutu civilians before, during, and after the genocide in Rwanda¹²⁹, the mass killing of an estimated tens to hundreds of thousands Hutu refugees in the DRC after the invasion of October 1996¹³⁰, and the counterinsurgency campaign in 1997 and 1998 against political dissents in northwest Rwanda.¹³¹ Alison Des Forges estimated the RPF

¹²⁷ Colum Lynch, “U.N. Waters Down Genocide Charges against Rwandan Forces in Congo,” *Foreign Policy* 2, October 2010, accessed March 1, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/10/02/u-n-waters-down-genocide-charges-against-rwandan-forces-in-congo/>.

¹²⁸ Straus, “The Limits of a Genocide Lens,” 505.

¹²⁹ Straus, “The Limits of a Genocide Lens,” 512.

¹³⁰ Kisangani Emizet, “The Massacre of Refugees in Congo: A Case of UN Peacekeeping Failure and International Law,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 2 (2000): 163-202.

¹³¹ Amnesty International, “Rwanda: Ending the Silence,” September 23, 1994, accessed April 6, 2023 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr47/032/1997/en/>; Amnesty International, “Rwanda: Civilians trapped in armed conflict,” December 19, 1997, accessed April 6, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/afr470431997en.pdf>.

was responsible for a minimum of 25,000 to 30,000 “widespread, systematic” killings between April and July 1994, although estimations vary wildly between sources.¹³² After August 1994 into 1995, the RPF committed massacres in Rwanda, the most well-known taking place in Kibeho in April 1995 where several thousand Hutu civilians were killed.¹³³ These are just some examples of the multitude of state-sponsored violent acts committed by the RPF that is not included in official discourse. The Kagame regime does not admit atrocities perpetrated by the RPF and RPA for political legitimization, to continue receiving international aid, and to discredit any political opposition. It is unsurprising that the RPF government would not take punitive measures against its own and manipulate history to dichotomize Hutu perpetrators and Tutsi victims. As Straus explained, the RPF shapes memory of the genocide “to remove its main political opponents in the name of the rule of law, and to avoid justice and accountability for its own.”¹³⁴

E) Blaming the International Community

The international community is blamed as bearing special responsibility for the genocide through historical accounts at memorials, building upon the narrative of ethnic identity creation by colonizers. At the MGMC, the entirety of the last room is dedicated to the international community’s role (or lack thereof) in the genocide with sections titled “Action to Stop the Genocide,” “International Response,” and “Operation Turquoise.” The tour narrative and evidence highlighted the role of the French soldiers in encouraging the genocide. There are two plaques dedicated to the French, one describing their refusal of RPF troops into the area and

¹³² Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 558.

¹³³ Human Rights Watch, “Rwanda,” n.d., accessed April 14, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/WR96/Africa-08.htm>.

¹³⁴ Straus, “The Limits of a Genocide Lens,” 520.

another of survivor alibi Olive's testimony of French soldiers gang-raping Tutsi girls who sought refuge at the technical school.¹³⁵ The international community is rightly accused of failing to intervene at the first signs of ethnic violence and standing by the sidelines aware that millions were being brutally murdered.¹³⁶ However, this official narrative only accounts for part of what made the genocide possible.

Family/community memories and historical/political narratives played a significant role in shaping attitudes and actions of Rwandans. Approximately one million northern refugees fled to southern Rwanda after the October 1990 invasion, bringing stories of brutality and violence they endured by the RPF.¹³⁷ Further, stories of oppression under the Tutsi monarchy have been passed down generationally, mobilizing many Hutu civilians to regard the RPF invasion as a catalyst for the Tutsi monarchy to reclaim power.¹³⁸ This fear was a significant factor that contributed to the ease with which many Rwandans were mobilized into committing acts of genocide. Another significant factor was the 1972 genocide in Burundi, where the Tutsi targeted and killed many Hutus. This led to a mass exodus of Burundian Hutu refugees into Rwanda, bringing stories of brutality at the hands of Tutsi.¹³⁹ These stories further fueled the fear and resentment of Tutsi among Hutu civilians, creating a context where acts of genocide could occur.

In sum, while the failure of the international community to intervene in the Rwandan genocide is a well-documented issue, it is essential to recognize these other factors in creating a context of

¹³⁵ MGMC, observations by author, Gikongoro, Rwanda, November 10, 2022.

¹³⁶ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 79.

¹³⁷ Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 10-11.

¹³⁸ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 80.

¹³⁹ Lemarchand, "Genocide in the Great Lakes," 3-16.

fear, mistrust, and resentment, which contributed to the mobilization of many Rwandans into committing acts of genocide. The support of a simplified narrative blaming the international community for the genocide promotes national unity through a “common enemy” while encouraging political legitimization of RPF by not recognizing their deployment of violence. Similar to the colonial narrative of a homogenous pre-colonial society, utilizing an “other” to place blame makes forgiveness of your neighbor more possible. By focusing on an outside actor, the RPF also successfully eliminated its atrocities from the national narrative.

F) Understanding Memories

In 2003, Jeffrey Olick defined memory as “the central faculty of our being in time; it is the negotiation of past and present through which we define our individual and collective selves.”¹⁴⁰ However, as Robert Eaglestone argued the following year, memory constructs our identity, and our identity impacts the construction of our memory.¹⁴¹ Jessica Auchter found that maintaining a sense of unique identity is crucial in post-conflict societies, as it is often linked to personal survival.¹⁴² However, this attachment to one’s identity can lead to the creation of dividing lines between different groups, fueled by the fear of threats that challenge one’s sense of self. In essence, by valuing and holding onto individual identities, people may inadvertently contribute to the creation of intergroup tensions.

¹⁴⁰ Olick, “Introduction,” in *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection*, ed. Jeffrey Olick (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 15.

¹⁴¹ Robert Eaglestone, “Remembering, Forgetting and Surviving: Memory and Identity in Liberal-Democratic Societies,” *Textual Practice* 18, no. 3 (2004): 72-96.

¹⁴² Jessica Auchter, “Ghostly Politics: Statecraft, Monumentalization, and a Logic of Haunting,” (PhD diss., Arizona State University, Tempe, 2012), Graduate Supervisory Committee.

Dividing lines between identities are both a product of memory and create memory. Duncan Bell in 2009 stated that collective memory “is the product of conflicts, power struggles, and social contestation, always fragile and provisional.”¹⁴³ Recalling the past is a process that is never fully complete, so the way we remember the past also shapes our present.¹⁴⁴ Memory is a social construction of the responses of individuals and groups to events that includes an emotional response to said events.¹⁴⁵ Memory serves as a retroactive tool that continuously shapes our understanding of the past, while purporting to create a fixed truth of that same past.

In 1989, Primo Levi described this change in individuals’ memories from factual truth to interpreted truth is not because of malicious “bad faith,” but because moving off memories creates a comforting reality.¹⁴⁶ People tell this substitution to themselves and others, often enough where one believes this created memory as truth. The “duty to remember” is often eclipsed by the “labor of memory,” which is the task of thinking and questioning individual and collective memory and the relationship between the two.¹⁴⁷ Without awareness to question the past narratives you and others believe, individual memories will be eclipsed into one collective memory.

Individual and collective memories are not static, but rather constantly being shaped by the present context and individual identities. As a result, memories vary and are influenced by the

¹⁴³ Duncan Bell, “Introduction: Memory and Violence,” *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 2 (2009): 351.

¹⁴⁴ Andreas Huyssen, “Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia,” *Public Culture* 6, no. 1 (1994): 5-32.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Eaglestone, “Remembering, Forgetting and Surviving: Memory and Identity in Liberal-Democratic Societies,” *Textual Practice* 18, no. 3 (2004): 459-476.

¹⁴⁶ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Summit Books, 1989).

¹⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

unique circumstances and personal experiences of the rememberer. It makes sense that despite the pervasive official history in post-genocide Rwanda, people still hold onto their individual memories, and competing accounts exist from how the pre-colonial period to the present periods are remembered.¹⁴⁸ Erin Jessee interviewed three general groups of people from 2007-08 and 2011-12: “returnees” (Tutsi in exile that returned after the genocide), survivors (Tutsi who stayed in Rwanda during the genocide), and *génocidaires* (Hutus in Rwanda during the genocide). She compared each of their memories, the RPF-official narrative, and historians agreed upon historical narrative. Jessee found that the competing accounts highlighted the “critical tensions... between the RPF’s ambitions for the New Rwanda and the needs of ordinary civilians.”¹⁴⁹ I will discuss these differing narratives below in chronological order by period along with my own conversations and interviews with Rwandans in 2022. It is important to note that the terms “survivors,” “returnees,” and “*génocidaires*” along with Hutu and Tutsi are generalizations.

G) Competing Narratives: Survivors, Returnees, *Génocidaires*

a) Competing Narratives: Pre-Colonial Rwanda (17th-18th centuries)

Based on Jessee’s interviews, Rwandan survivors and returnees upheld the RPF’s official narrative of an idyllic, unified Rwanda under the Tutsi monarchy. One returnee working in the memorialization space stated that the history at memorials aid in reconciliation “by showing that all Rwandans are the same people, lived together for many years, and all have the same history.”¹⁵⁰ *Génocidaires* characterized the pre-colonial era as a period of slavery and oppression for the Hutu majority that only benefitted the Tutsi elites. *Génocidaires* also equated the pre-

¹⁴⁸ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 237.

¹⁴⁹ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 237.

¹⁵⁰ Maurice Mugabowagahunde. interview by author, Kigali, Rwanda, November 21, 2022.

colonial Tutsi monarchy with today's RPF-led government in that they are only interested in serving the Tutsi minority and denying corruptness and discrimination faced by Hutus.¹⁵¹

As we saw earlier, historians disagree with the RPF/returnees' narrative and found Rwanda's pre-colonial days marked by high social, political, and regional stratification, constant military campaigns and territorial expansion, and coups and political fragmentation.¹⁵² Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa identities existed in pre-colonial times, although clan and regional identities were more salient identity markers, and ethnicity (Tutsi, Hutu, Twa) was seen as a socio-economic definer.¹⁵³ As the Tutsi-dominated Royal Court expanded its power territorially and quantitatively, the Tutsi socio-economic class became one associated with dynastic rule and Court culture, which was largely rejected by Hutu outside central Rwanda.¹⁵⁴

Survivors and returnees descended from Tutsi families who benefitted the most politically, socially, and economically in pre-colonial times, therefore passing on stories of the days under a Tutsi monarchy. They also may be seeking to emphasize the positive aspects of their pre-genocide lives. While *génocidaires*, largely Hutu, were limited in socio-economic and political power in the pre-colonial era. They may also be attempting to justify their actions during the genocide by portraying the Tutsi as historically oppressive towards Hutus.

b) Competing Narratives: Rwanda Under European Influence (1895-1961)

¹⁵¹ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 121.

¹⁵² Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 3-23.

¹⁵³ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 4.

¹⁵⁴ Newbury, *The Land Beyond the Mists*, 281-339.

From Jessee's research, returnees and survivors reinforced the RPF-narrative of colonial powers bringing Rwanda's "glory days" to end and inciting anti-Tutsi violence. However, survivors also recognized that social and political inequalities did exist between Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa before the arrival of the Belgians, and the colonial powers exploited these to their advantage.

Génocidaires generally had little negative to say about the Belgians, since they did not see much difference between pre-colonial and colonial times. Some *génocidaires* felt positively about the Belgians due to their support of independence in 1959.¹⁵⁵

Historical work on colonial Rwanda disagrees with both returnees and *génocidaires* memories, and instead stated that the Rwandan Royal Court worked with European powers (the Germans, the Belgians, and the Catholic missionaries) to expand its power, increase political legitimacy, and enjoy stricter power over the Hutu majority.¹⁵⁶ Alison Des Forges found that many Hutus resented the transition from German to Belgian colonial power, as the latter's demands for produce and labor multiplied, promises of less taxes were not kept, and robberies and rape were common against Rwandans.¹⁵⁷

Returnees' and survivors' agreement with the RPF-narrative can be attributed to their adherence to the official party line that absolves the predominantly Tutsi Royal Court of exploitation and collaboration with European powers in subjugating the largely Hutu lower class. The discrepancy between survivors and returnees in remembering pre-colonial socio-political disparities, based on generational stories, could stem from not all Tutsi being powerful and wealthy in pre-colonial times. However, historians generally agree that the Tutsi-dominated

¹⁵⁵ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 239-240.

¹⁵⁶ Des Forges, *Defeat is the Only Bad News*, 99-100.

¹⁵⁷ Des Forges, *Defeat in the Only Bad News*, 135.

Royal Court collaborated with European powers to consolidate its power and impose tighter control over the Hutu majority, why many *génocidaires* recalled this time as a continuation of oppression. Interestingly, most *génocidaires* did not remember the increase in Court control over the Hutu majority, which historians confirm to be the case. This could be attributed to a lack of available information or desire to fully implicate the Tutsi elite in the oppression of the Hutu majority.

c) Competing Narratives: Post-Independence under Kayibanda (1962-1973)

Jessee found that survivors agreed with the RPF-narrative of a corrupt, anti-Tutsi Kayibanda regime, but remembered that if physical violence did happen, it was against Tutsi political elite and not civilians. Survivors did condemn the regime for corruption by limiting Tutsi access to government positions and education. However, *génocidaires* remember this as a happy time and marking liberation from an oppressive Tutsi monarchy. They felt the ethnic quotas for Tutsi were necessary to undue the centuries of discrimination against Hutus under the Tutsi monarchy and allegations of corruption are exaggerated.¹⁵⁸

Historians tend to fall in the middle of both accounts. Kayibanda was not as corrupt as alleged by returnees and the RPF, but most Rwandans did not live a prosperous life as claimed by *génocidaires*. Claudine Vidal, a historian of Rwanda, described the country under Kayibanda as “one of the poorest in the world and lacked almost everything.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Des Forges, *Defeat in the Only Bad News*, 240-241.

¹⁵⁹ Claudine Vidal, “*La commémoration du génocide au Rwanda: Violence symbolique, mémorisation forcée et histoire officielle*,” *Cahiers d’études Africaines* 175, no. 1 (2004).

Again, memory disparities between survivors/returnees and *génocidaires* can be attributed to a change in their families general socio-political and economic opportunities and position with the change in regime. Those who benefitted from ethnic quotas may hold a more positive view, contributing to the disparity. *Génocidaires* historically-disproved romanticization of life under Kayibanda may also stem from personal biases or a belief that life under his rule was comparatively better than under the Tutsi-dominated Royal Court and European powers.

d) Competing Narratives: Habyarimana Regime (1973-1994)

Jessee's interviews concluded that the state-sponsored history and returnees felt the Habyarimana regime was an extension of the Kayibanda regime—marked by corruption, anti-Tutsi rhetoric, and policies to unify and distract the Hutu majority from Rwanda's "real problems." Survivors and *génocidaires* felt the transition to Habyarimana was a positive change in political leadership and ethnic tensions were minimal. Survivors did note that differences in ethnicity was taught in school and a negative Tutsi monarchy was highlighted, but this rarely resulted in violence.¹⁶⁰

Historians described the Habyarimana regime as authoritarian but more accommodating than Kayibanda's. His coup was met with dissent among political elites and there was widespread dissatisfaction among ordinary Rwandans due to decreased civil liberties and forced participation

¹⁶⁰ Des Forges, *Defeat in the Only Bad News*, 241-243.

in public works programs. Generally, historians disagree with survivors and *génocidaires* that Habyarimana ruled over a strong, stable, supportive nation.¹⁶¹

It is important to note that returnees were living in exile (mostly in Uganda) under the Habyarimana regime, one explanation for seeing Kayibanda-Habyarimana as a continuous, corrupt regime. An explanation for the discrepancy in perception from survivors/*génocidaires* and historians around life under Habyarimana can be attributed to the human tendency to idealize the past before the traumatic events occur. The enormity of the genocide may have caused people to view the pre-genocide period in a nostalgic and idealistic light, disregarding the well-documented less favorable aspects of life under Habyarimana.

e) Competing Narratives: The Civil War (October 1990-April 1994)

All three groups in Jessee's research agreed that with the RPF invasion on October 1, 1990, there was a sudden, dramatic shift in the nation's overall political climate. Returnees, agreeing with the RPF-official narrative, described the civil war as the "war of liberation" and felt it necessary to free Rwandans from the oppressive regime. Returnees said the invasion was met with little civilian resistance and generally welcomed by Rwandans. *Génocidaires* condemn the RPF for triggering the civil war and plunging Rwanda into ethnic conflict. They emphasized the widespread atrocities against Hutu civilians in the north and how Hutu Power extremists linked this violence to mobilize Hutu civilians into killing. Survivors marked the start of the civil war as the start of ethnic segregation, arrests, and violence, some feeling that the RPF knowingly sacrificed Tutsi living in Rwanda to return home.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Des Forges, *Defeat in the Only Bad News*, 243.

¹⁶² Des Forges, *Defeat in the Only Bad News*, 243-246.

Most historical accounts uphold the image of the invasion and civil war to have a dramatically negative impact on most Rwandans' lives. Catharine Newbury argued this promoted Hutu extremist political elites to train and arm youth militias and promote anti-Tutsi propaganda. Newbury estimated from the start of the invasion until 1993, 2,000 Tutsi civilians were murdered across Rwanda. Overall, Newbury and most historians agree that the RPF is not responsible for these murders, but the invasion "provided a pretext, context, and a means for engaging in such abuses."¹⁶³ Historians also emphasized regional differences in Rwandans' experiences during the civil war. In the north, where the RPF first invaded into, there is ample evidence of systematic violence and massacres against Hutu civilians. In the south, particularly in the Bugesera region in March 1992, there were civilian atrocities against Tutsi civilians by Hutu Power extremists.¹⁶⁴ Interestingly, the RPF narrative excludes the invasion in October as being a factor at all in the genocide, and "civil war" does not predominate discourse. Yet, all three groups acknowledged the significant impact of the invasion on their lives. The competing narratives between the RPF and returnees/*génocidaires* (opposed to the agreeance with all other narratives of the past) can likely be attributed to individuals having actually lived through the event and forming their own memories. This differs from recollections of pre-colonial/colonial life and under the Habyarimana and Kayibanda regimes, which were largely based on communal and generational stories.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Catharine Newbury, "Background to Genocide: Rwanda," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 23, no. 2 (1995): 14.

¹⁶⁴ Jesse, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 245-246.

¹⁶⁵ Communal storytelling describes the sharing of narratives that highlight individual human experience of health, illness, and social/cultural contests within a group. Generational storytelling is broader, defined as stories passed between population cohorts demarcated by birth date range and formative contexts, beliefs, and values; See Andrea Charise, Celeste Pang, and Kaamil Ali Khalfan, "What is Intergenerational Storytelling? Defining the Critical Issues for Aging Research in the Humanities," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 43 (2022): 616.

f) Competing Narratives: The Rwandan Genocide (April-July 1994)

Jessee found that the RPF-narrative paints the genocide as a continuum of anti-Tutsi violence that would inevitably plague Rwanda. All three groups remembered the genocide as distinctly different than any other times of violence. Survivors described being shocked that women, children, and the elderly were targeted and murdered. Survivors also consistently acknowledged the difficult circumstances faced by Hutu civilians during the genocide and that many acted as rescuers at great personal risk. *Génocidaires* rarely regarded the violence of 1994 as genocide, but instead saw it as the climax of the civil war initiated by the RPF.¹⁶⁶

An entire wall at the MGMC is titled “Propaganda” dedicated to describing how the government manipulated the mass Rwandan people into genocidal acts.¹⁶⁷ The objective of this narrative is to assign responsibility to the previous government to promote forgiveness among Rwandans towards individuals who committed violence, thereby fostering peaceful coexistence in present-day Rwanda. Survivors I interviewed in 2022 felt that the history explained at national memorials (which uphold the RPF-narrative) helped them understand that this was a state-sponsored genocide, making it easier to forgive individual people.¹⁶⁸ Another survivor stated that learning the history helps survivors understand that perpetrators “are not bad people but were brainwashed and trained to be killers.”¹⁶⁹ The purpose of memorials therefore is to enforce this narrative through showing the propaganda of radicals into coercing civilians into genocide.

However, Jessee argued the RPF-narrative implied participants in the genocide (civilian Hutus)

¹⁶⁶ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 246-250.

¹⁶⁷ MGMC, observations by author, Gikongoro, Rwanda, November 10, 2022.

¹⁶⁸ Simon Lyarwema, interview by author, Remera, Kigali, November 21, 2022.

¹⁶⁹ Dieudonne Nagiriwubuntu, interview by author, KGMC, Kigali, Rwanda, November 22, 2022.

had intent to annihilate the Tutsi, which *génocidaires* deny.¹⁷⁰ The discrepancy in analysis could be caused by her interviews being conducted in 2007-08 and mine in 2022. Although both sets of interviews were conducted with people who lived during the genocide, the passing of a generation changes people's feelings towards their past; feelings of distrust, hatred, and fear have probably lessened with time.

Historical accounts agree that the 1994 genocide was distinctly different than other periods in Rwanda's violent history, emphasizing the shift from targeting political opponents to ordinary Tutsi civilians with the intent to annihilate the ethnic group. There is no debate on whether the violence between April-July 1994 constitutes a genocide— Hutu Power extremists acted with the intent to eliminate a distinct ethnic group, the Tutsi.¹⁷¹ There are no socio-political advantages the RPF has in accusing the entire Hutu population of genocidal intent, but there are benefits in reconciliation and political legitimization (of the RPF regime in comparison to Habyarimana's regime) by explaining the state orchestrated the genocide.

This narrative also contradicts the Western world's interpretation of the genocide caused by "ancient tribal hatred," a narrative the Rwandan state has been battling since 1994. The Western media and many Western governments characterized the conflict as a "tribal war" which "obscured the political and economic roots of the conflict and placed blame for the violence on ancient hatreds."¹⁷² The Rwandan government has been actively promoting a narrative that emphasizes the political and economic factors that led to the genocide. In a speech to the UN

¹⁷⁰ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 248.

¹⁷¹ Jessee, *Negotiating Genocide in Rwanda*, 249-250.

¹⁷² Scott Straus, *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons for the Rwanda Experience* (New York: Lexington Books, 2000), 77.

General Assembly in 2016, President Kagame said, “the genocide was not the result of ancient ethnic hatreds... it was the result of a deliberate, well-planned strategy to divide and conquer.”¹⁷³

H) Conclusion: The Politics of History and Memory

History and memory are competing and complimentary forces, exemplified clearly in this study of Rwanda’s past. Individuals’ memories aligned with their group identity and their groups’ present realities. Memories are too subjective and fluid to be synonymous with history, but that does not mean the latter is separate or cannot use the former in its analysis. How individuals or groups remember a certain time is useful for historians to understand how people perceived what was happening then and now, which can be used to understand/predict peoples’ past/future decisions. Further, its more useful to consider competing memories not in terms of right or wrong, but as a way to be reminded of the nuances of history and memory and challenge the stagnation of both.

Part III: Alternative Approaches to Representations of History

A) Introduction

In the last section of my thesis, I will discuss alternative methods opposed to the pervasive state-sponsored official history Rwandans could utilize for a more inclusive reconciliation process. Ultimately, however, the solution to silenced narratives and state-sponsored history must come from Rwandans. The purpose of these suggestions is to start the discussion of alternative transitional justice mechanisms that include a wider discussion on history: bringing history back

¹⁷³ Paul Kagame, “Remarks to the General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace,” United Nations, September 21, 2016, accessed March 18, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14659.doc.htm>.

in,¹⁷⁴ decentralizing heritage management,¹⁷⁵ and encouraging person-to-person reconciliation.¹⁷⁶ It is crucial to note that these proposals are not intended to provide a comprehensive solution but rather to facilitate the exploration of alternative options.

Definitions of transitional justice as an academic field vary, but all generally agree it is an attempt to deal with past violence in societies undergoing some form of political transition. This field has had a “dramatically compressed trajectory of fieldhood.” The term itself (“transitional justice”) was first used in the mid-1990s and by 2009 it has become a widely studied multidisciplinary subject with its own political significance.¹⁷⁷ The need for a separate study on post-conflict accountability emerged in the 1990s in the context of the ongoing fight against impunity in Central and South America.¹⁷⁸ Neil Kritz in 1995 first used the term “transitional justice” to map out an area of study that included commissions of inquiry, trials, restitution, and reparations.¹⁷⁹ The discourse broadened with the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in 1993, the ICTR in 1994, and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1995.¹⁸⁰ Post-conflict accountability expanded, and by 2000 the term “transitional justice” had included not only societies transitioning to democracy but also addressed transitions in a range of societies, mostly including those

¹⁷⁴ Gillian Mathys, “Bringing History Back In: Past, Present, and Conflict in Rwanda and the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo,” *The Journal of African History* 58, no. 3 (2017): 465-487.

¹⁷⁵ Annalisa Bolin, “Rwandan solutions to Rwandans problems: Heritage decolonization and community engagement in Nyanza District, Rwanda,” *Journal of Social Archeology* 22, no. 1 (2020): 3-25.

¹⁷⁶ Mark Frost and Yosuke Watanabe, “Methods of Reconciliation: The “rich tradition” of Japanese war memory activism in post-war Southeast Asia,” in *Remembering Asia’s World War Two*, ed. Mark Frost, Daniel Schumacher, and Edward Vickers (London: Routledge, 2019), 247-277.

¹⁷⁷ Christine Bell, “Transitional Justice, Interdisciplinarity and the State of the ‘Field’ or ‘Non-Field,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3 (2009): 7.

¹⁷⁸ Diane Orentlicher, “Settling Accounts: The Duty to Prosecute Human Rights Violations of a Prior Regime,” *Yale Law Journal* 100, no. 8 (1991): 2537-2615.

¹⁷⁹ Neil Kritz, *Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1995).

¹⁸⁰ Bell, “Transitional Justice,” 8.

attempting settlement after social conflicts. Christine Bell argued the founding of the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) in 2000 marked a paradigm shift in the field, as policy makers began to view transitional justice mechanisms as a tool for political and social goals beyond accountability.¹⁸¹

Historical dialogue must be included in the processes of transitional justice to develop an intersubjective history of victimization that includes different actors' viewpoint in the conflict. Elazar Barkan, a scholar on Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, argued that blurring victim and perpetrator leads to contested victimhood. He suggested when talking of memories to emphasize the context in which the past occurred and avoid the cult of victimization.¹⁸² Lavinia Stan, a professor of Political Science, researched the intersection of transitional justice and memory in Romania. She found the most important challenge transitional societies must overcome is finding common ground to accept the past when different groups compete against one another to validate their interpretations of the past.¹⁸³ Aledia Assmann, professor of English and Literary Studies, suggested a model of memory for post-conflict societies that would establish a shared understanding of the past by different individuals and groups.¹⁸⁴ Although reconciling memory across groups affected differently by violence in transitional justice is recognized as important by scholars across academic fields, many questions arise on how to practically achieve this. Who would control the process of discussing the history? What is the distinction between impartiality and intersubjectivity? How to determine the willingness of the

¹⁸¹ Bell, "Transitional Justice," 9.

¹⁸² Monika Żychlińska, "Legal Frames of Memory: Transitional Justice in Central and Eastern Europe," *Polish Sociological Review*, no. 184 (2013): 536.

¹⁸³ Żychlińska, "Legal Frames of Memory," 537.

¹⁸⁴ Żychlińska, "Legal Frames of Memory," 536.

conflicting sides to alter their memories of the past? In the following sections, I will offer possible methods for reconciling memory within transitional justice that aim to answer these proposed questions.

B) The Return of History

Instead of a singular historical narrative, Gillian Mathys in 2017 suggested the Rwandan state could “bring history back in” and focus more on the way identities and territories acquired the meanings they have today.¹⁸⁵ By having a more objective, academic focus on the history of Rwanda and trying to understand the layers and nuances of history, Rwandans would be positioned away from blaming individual people or certain groups for past violence. Rwandans could learn a more complete history that includes the violent pre-colonial dynastic Rwandan state plagued with inter- and intra-state violence, how the dynastic Court utilized ethnicity and worked with and against colonial actors, the multitude of catalysts for the genocide, and the episodes of mass violence against Rwandans and other Africans in the region by the current government. By allowing more freedom of expression and encouraging a wider historical discussion, the narrow official history would be replaced with histories more Rwandans (and hopefully all) could see themselves in.

Encouraging historical debate with multiple narratives that can talk to each other and find points of interest is also a preventative measure for reoccurring violence. As Mathys stated, a pervasive state-sponsored history “mobilize[s] a distinct historical component to reconfigure the present. Such discourses reframe reality, in order to make certain actions seem more acceptable.”¹⁸⁶ The

¹⁸⁵ Mathys, “Bringing History Back In,” 465-467.

¹⁸⁶ Mathys, “Bringing History Back In,” 486.

“victimization discourses” that posed Rwandan Hutus as the victims of a Tutsi monarchy roused Hutus into violence and was one of the factors that made the Rwandan Genocide possible.¹⁸⁷ This sounds all too similar to the present-day victimization discourse of the Tutsi “survivors” when regarding Hutu “perpetrators” violence during the genocide. Introducing multiple historical narratives and understanding the historical processes that shape these narratives will make more Rwandans aware of the potential manipulation of history to cater to political needs; binary thinking must be avoided.

The practicality of this approach is limited, as the state does not have much incentive to promote a more inclusive history. The government would have to claim accountability for acts of violence the RPF has committed, opening the door to potential contestations for power and political instability. Rwandan civilians also have a complicated relationship with freedom of speech, as media and propaganda were critical tools used to mobilize people into committing the genocide. When living in Rwanda, multiple Rwandans argued that my American ideals of freedom of speech are not applicable in their post-genocide society, something I as an American do not feel qualified to challenge. However, the new generation of Rwandans are “not as haunted by the media [and] the genocide,” media is harder to regulate with new social media platforms, and hence more Rwandans are straying from self-censorship.¹⁸⁸ Rwanda enjoys a “more vibrant media space” today than ever before,¹⁸⁹ a hopeful sign in eventually allowing for more inclusive conversations around history.

¹⁸⁷ Mathys, “Bringing History Back In,” 479.

¹⁸⁸ Journalist at *The East African*, September 26, 2022.

¹⁸⁹ Journalist at *The East African*, September 26, 2022.

Yet currently, the Rwandan media environment is incredibly repressed. Anjan Sundaram lived in Rwanda from 2009 to 2013, educating and working with Rwandan journalists in a program funded by the European Union.¹⁹⁰ In his book, *Bad News: Last Journalists in a Dictatorship*, Sundaram documented “how [Rwandan] dictators destroyed countries to gain power: they destroyed the capacity for independent speech, then independent institutions – and ultimately independent thought itself.”¹⁹¹ He described the intimidation, harassment, beatings, torture, and murder of journalists and how living in Rwanda distorted his own sense of reality. Government repression of free speech through violent means is a persistent problem in Rwanda, as “a society that cannot speak is like a body that cannot feel pain.”¹⁹² Despite the challenges faced by the Rwandan media environment, there are hopeful signs of progress with new generations of Rwandans, however the government lacks incentive to promote a more inclusive history due to their potential loss of power from claiming accountability for its acts of violence.

C) Localizing Heritage Management

Another potential solution is described by Annalisa Bolin in 2022 as engaging communities in heritage management to ensure Rwandans are the ones most connected to their heritage, benefit the most from it, and learn about their history on their terms. Heritage management decisions in Rwanda follow a top-down approach led by the state, as heritage is mobilized for peace and social cohesion to establish a unified national identity. The state uses heritage to bind Rwandans within an identity from a supposedly pre-colonial, pre-ethnic past to today.¹⁹³ The guides at

¹⁹⁰ Michael Busch, “The Last Journalists in a Dictatorship,” July 5, 2016, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://africasacountry.com/2016/07/the-last-journalists-in-a-dictatorship>.

¹⁹¹ Anjan Sundaram, *Bad News: Last Journalists in a Dictatorship* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

¹⁹² Sundaram, *Bad News*, 42.

¹⁹³ Bolin, “Rwandan solutions to Rwandans problems,” 3-25.

Rwandan national memorials do not choose which memorials they work at and are moved around to fit administrative needs. One guide at the MGMC said he worked at memorials located in Nyamata, Ntarama, and Bisesero, and expressed nostalgia for his former workplace in Nyamata. His fondness for Nyamata was attributed to his personal history of surviving the genocide and his familial ties to the area. He still lives in Nyamata with his wife and child, and the distance between Nyamata and the MGMC is approximately three-and-a-half-hours by car.¹⁹⁴ Bolin's interviews in 2022 found that many Rwandans felt there was a gap between their local communities and the heritage management system, demonstrating the need for an alternative to the state-led approach.¹⁹⁵

Allowing local communities to lead heritage management, including maintaining genocide memorials, while having many benefits, could also facilitate the emergence multiple historical narratives in different regions organically. This could show the multitude of histories from region to region and how Rwandans can be both unified and different and build across those differences. Encouraging local communities to be the ones that decide how their history is portrayed at genocide memorials for example, would steer Rwanda away from a state-led singular history with the emergence of different histories in different places.

The feasibility of this approach is limited, as all states, and especially post-genocide ones, have a higher stake in memories dealing with the trauma of survivors and preventing future atrocities.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Stanley Mugabarigira, interview by author, MGMC, Gikongoro, Rwanda, November 10, 2022.

¹⁹⁵ Bolin, "Rwandan solutions to Rwandans problems," 3-25.

¹⁹⁶ Catherine Brown, "Memory, Transitional Justice, and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An Overview of Current Debates," In *Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding on the Ground: Victims and Ex-Combatants*, ed. Chandra Sriram, John King, and Julie Bunck (New York: Routledge, 2015), 45-63.

Today's RPF-led regime would be highly unlikely to adopt this approach, as allowing "free reign" of history would implicate them in crimes. However, decentralization of heritage management does not have to follow an all-or-nothing approach. The state could lessen their oversight on the specific narratives portrayed at cultural sites and instead give the local community more power over the sites while still retaining some authority of not allowing certain aspects of history to be portrayed. While I do believe the long-term stability of Rwanda depends on eventual "full truth," I can recognize this approach must be a slow process and people have apprehensions. This is why I think small steps, such as keeping guides within the region they live in and providing greater autonomy to local communities on heritage site design, is an approach that could facilitate the emergence of multiple narratives without causing drastic destabilization.

The application of participatory management has had varied success in the field of heritage management. Goals involving local communities in decision making about heritage resources often fall short from having too ambitious of intents due to the over-generalization of communities, competing interests among local communities and professionals, and inconsistencies between history and the current socio-political environment.¹⁹⁷ However, there are some examples of success in post-conflict societies. In post-apartheid South Africa, the District Six Museum was built in 1994 to remember the story of District Six, an area of Cape Town where 60,000 people were forcibly removed from and their homes demolished in 1982. The goal of the museum is to promote candidness of victims of District Six, and its former residents have seen the museum as a space "where stories can be told, where the layers of

¹⁹⁷ Shadreck Chirikure, Munyaradzi Manyanga, Webber Ndoro, and Gilbert Pwiti, "Unfulfilled promises? Heritage management and community participation at some of Africa's cultural heritage sites," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 30-44.

memories can be uncovered in an ensemble of hope.” The sense of community belonging in the museum is created through its emphasis on oral histories and sharing memories by having exhibitions of what people remember rather than material evidence. For example, all visitors to the museum are encouraged to write their reactions on the exhibition panels alongside the museum text, as to create a “living” museum.¹⁹⁸ The space gives individuals an opportunity to share their past without the museum disputing any singular memory.

D) Person-to-Person Reconciliation

A final approach is person-to-person reconciliation that involves direct interaction and communication between members of opposing groups. Mark Frost and Yosuke Watanabe in 2019 looked at Sino-Japanese reconciliation after Japanese atrocities committed during the Second World War (1931-1945) as being firmly in state hands and presented as an end and attainment.¹⁹⁹ Using Tessa Morris-Suzuki’s conceptualization of reconciliation, Frost and Watanabe looked at reconciliation as “compromising a web of locally rooted” method for “better common understandings of history.”²⁰⁰ They examined war remembrance initiatives pioneered by three individual groups from Japan to China: monks, students, and high school teachers. Following the outbreak of the Japanese textbook controversy in 1982 (where Japanese textbooks excluded or downplayed its war crimes during the Second World War), Takashima Nobuyoshi, a high school geography teacher, mobilized 30 of his fellow teachers to join him on a study tour of Southeast Asia to uncover Japan’s wartime past in the region. The annual “Takashima tours”

¹⁹⁸ Elizabeth Crooke, “Dealing with the past: Museums and heritage in northern Ireland and Cape Town, South Africa,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 11, no. 2 (2005): 131-142.

¹⁹⁹ Frost and Watanabe, “Methods of Reconciliation,” 247-277.

²⁰⁰ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Morris Low, Leonid Petrov, and Timothy Tsu, *East Asia Beyond the History Wars* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

originally began with historical research, but this changed in 1986 to incorporate reconciliatory efforts with Chinese survivors at transnational remembrance ceremonies. Overlapping and offshoot reconciliatory events emerged globally after the “Takashima tour” became a regular remembrance event, such as the Malay Peninsula Peace Cycle (1994) and Canada’s “Peace and Reconciliation Study Tours” (2004). This demonstrated a successful individual, grassroots initiative that challenged Japan’s official history and inspired others globally to do the same. Although this is an example of transnational remembrance, it can still be applicable to the Rwandan context. By giving people the space and resources to pursue their individualized memory journeys, remembrance can spread in an apolitical and inclusive way.

Further, state-led approaches to reconciliation are not effective alone because they usually do not address the underlying causes of conflict and often prioritize political stability over justice and accountability. The Rwandan *gacaca* trials that combined retributive and restorative justice and traditional and contemporary legal methods receive copious criticism—the judges are lay persons engaged in complex legal decisions, the accused have no right to legal representation or to appeal to higher court, and survivors are pressured by the government to have them opt for expediency (for faster trials) over reconciliation (survivor compensation).²⁰¹ The ICTR, created by the United Nations in 1994, is also criticized for its location outside of Rwanda (in Arusha, Tanzania), its lack of reparations for victims, and the relatively small number of individuals indicted considering the its length of time and its high operating cost (93 individuals over 21 years with a budget of USD \$200 million).²⁰² The most significant failure of both the ICTR and

²⁰¹ Coel Kirkby, “Rwanda’s *Gacaca* Courts: A Preliminary Critique,” *Journal of African Law* 50, no. 2 (2006): 94-117.

²⁰² United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, “The ICTR in Brief,” n.d., accessed April 5, 2023, <https://unictt.irmct.org/en/tribunal>; Hollie Brehm, Christopher Uggen, and Jean-Damascène

the local *gacaca* trials was its unwillingness to prosecute war crimes committed by the RPF.²⁰³ State-led approaches are limited by political constraints, such as the need to maintain political power and influence vested interests. These approaches are insufficient on their own and should be complemented by person-to-person reconciliation that prioritize the needs and perspectives of local communities and individuals.

This work on reconciliation demonstrates the importance of differing, local narratives, and open dialogue for peacebuilding in Rwanda and the Rwandan diaspora. The singular state-led history is not adequate to address the needs of healing individuals, just as singular state-led reconciliation processes are not tailored enough to address the perspectives of individuals and local communities. However, questions of how this is practically implemented poses a problem. The Rwandan government could support community-led initiatives that prioritize the needs and perspectives of local communities and individuals by providing resources and funding for grassroots organizations separate from the government. Increasing freedom of speech and of the press would allow Rwandans to question their own memories and understandings of history safely, and hopefully result in a similar “Takashima tours,” that breaks from the state-sponsored remembrance and inspiring individuals to build connections across dividing groups.

E) Conclusion: Alternative Approaches to History

Gasano, “Genocide, Justice, and Rwanda’s Gacaca Courts,” *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 30, no. 3 (2014): 333-352.

²⁰³ Human Rights Watch, “Rwanda: International Tribunal Closing Its Doors,” December 23, 2015, accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/23/rwanda-international-tribunal-closing-its-doors>.

In sum, the solution to the silencing of narratives and state-sponsored history in Rwanda must come from Rwandans themselves. Although there are potential alternative approaches to promote a more inclusive reconciliation process, they have their limitations. Bringing history back in, engaging communities in heritage management, and encouraging person-to-person reconciliation could facilitate the emergence of multiple historical narratives and prevent the recurrence of violence. However, the state has little incentive to promote a more inclusive history which would implicate the ruling party. Nonetheless, promoting open historical discussions through increased free speech rights and democratization is a lengthy and difficult process but will eventually benefit Rwandans in building across differences and contribute to reconciliation. Ultimately, the success of these alternative approaches depends on the willingness of Rwandan state to allow its citizens to participate and engage with each other in the process of building a more inclusive history.

Conclusion

Rwanda's history, like every history, is complex and nuanced. It was marked by competition for power between *mwamis*, the Royal court, aristocratic families, Catholic missionaries, and Germans and Belgians colonists, that resulted in a long history of violence and socio-economic stratification that is characteristic of the Great Lakes region. Although careful not to imply the 1994 genocide was inevitable (because it was not), analyzing Rwanda's pre-colonial, colonial, and regional history makes the incomprehensible tragedy somewhat more thinkable. This is important for preventing the reoccurrence of violence in Rwanda and other parts of the world. After generally understanding Rwanda's history, I compared it to the official history promoted by the Rwandan state today and individual memories of Rwandans. I concluded that individual

memories diverge from the collective memory, regardless of its prevalence in Rwanda's authoritarian state, often converging along identity lines. Excluding groups of people from national remembrance is dangerous, as feelings of marginalization encourage tensions and prevent reconciliation (which is ironically the goal of the state's memory policies). I conclude my paper by suggesting alternative transitional justice mechanisms to the history/memory problem. Rwanda, through freedom of speech and the press, could allow the dissemination of scholarly understandings of Rwanda's history and encourage person-to-person reconciliation. It could also localize heritage management to organically produce regionally different narratives of the past. The Rwandan state, although not alone in its manipulation of history and exclusion of memories, has a history of utilizing historical narratives for political goals. My final suggestion is for Rwandans to question their own memories, others' memories, and the history promoted by those in power.

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