

Rwandan Women:  
A Critical Trauma Studies Approach

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the 1994 Rwandan genocide with a specific emphasis on the rape of Tutsi women as a weapon of genocide. From the perspective of scholarship in trauma studies, an account of the conflict and colonialism leading up to the genocide is offered in order to demonstrate the historical making of the ground of collective trauma in Rwanda. Further, this thesis examines the discursive means of the perpetuation of collective trauma in the form of the Hutu demonization of Tutsi women. Shortcomings in the justice system emerging from the genocide are also discussed as a perpetuation of trauma. Finally, projects of justice and healing among Tutsi women are examined in an account of survival and resiliency. In conclusion, women that survived the genocide have navigated through societal and governmental systems to provide better lives for themselves, their families and the society.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to my wonderful family who have always provided me with their love and support throughout my endeavors. I would specifically like to thank my wonderful husband, Chris, for his support of me continuing my education even though distance has kept us apart while I completed my work. I would also like to thank my wonderful munchkin, Caity, for her love and support all of these years while I have been in school. I could not be the best student I could have been without her amazing ability to cope with the trials that have faced us, and her personal resiliency in all things, and for taking care of many of the mundane tasks that families face, while maintaining her own high academic standards. I love you all.

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## Introduction

This study examines the experiences of Rwandan women who survived rape and genocide from April to July 1994, and the more pervasive systems of traumatization after the genocide. Traumatic events have the ability to define individuals, groups and states. Traumatic events can include the loss of loved ones, natural disasters and their aftermath, as well as events that are human-inflicted. The repercussions of any traumatic event can be physically, psychologically and socially catastrophic to the survivor both during the ordeal and after. The effects of the trauma manifest within the self and within society, establishing a sociological space of 'haunting,' as it is theorized by sociologist, Grace Cho. In her work *The Haunting of the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*, Cho defines trauma in terms of a haunting that impacts those who are affected by acts that they have survived, and also describes how trauma impacts future generations. Cho describes the Korean *yanggongju* as the ghosts in her account of multiple generations of Korean women, but this example can also be used to tell the story of genocide and genocide-rape survivors.

I am particularly interested in the effects  
of this multiplicity when the apparent

absence of violence is the result of another act of violence, such as a subjugation or explicit erasure. The ghost that haunts this project lies at the crossroads of multiple forms of violence—the social and familial, the psychic and epistemic. Such a critical juncture invites us not only to explore the past that produced the yanggongju but also to consider what new things this alchemy of violence allows her to produce (31).

Haunting impacts not only the individual, but the societal structures in which these 'missing bodies' (Casper and Moore) live. Casper and Moore describe these 'missing bodies' in terms of a process through which "certain places, spaces, policies, and practices in contemporary society, particularly in the United States, exhibit and celebrate some bodies while erasing and denying others" (3).

When a group of citizens of a country blatantly disregard the human rights of another group, the victimized group can also suffer from collective trauma. "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in a fundamental and irrevocable way" (Alexander 1). An extreme example of traumatic events was



seen in 1994 in Rwanda when Rwandan Hutus violently acted against their friends, neighbors and family members who they identified as Tutsi or moderate Hutu<sup>1</sup>.

In 1994, Rwanda existed in the midst of uncontrollable violence. This began after a plane carrying Rwanda's president, Juvénal Habyarimana and Burundi's president, Cyprien Ntaryamira, crashed, killing them both. The presidents were returning after signing the Arusha Accords, a peace agreement which was hoped to end the decades of violence between the two groups, Tutsi and Hutu. Within twenty-four hours of the announcement of the deaths of both of the presidents, mob mentality began to rule in Kigali. According to the existing political system, the Prime Minister of Rwanda would ascend to power; however, the prime minister had successfully worked on the negotiations of the Arusha Accords and was a member of the Republican and Democratic Movement (MDR), which was in political opposition to Habyarimana. Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the Prime Minister, and her husband were murdered by the presidential police before she could speak to the residents of

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<sup>1</sup> One was classified a 'moderate Hutu' by the extremists holding governmental authority in some capacity. A moderate Hutu was one who was friendly towards Tutsi, or during the genocide, refused to participate in the bloodshed and violence.

Rwanda in a planned radio broadcast. Uwilingiyimana recognized late in the night that both she and her family were in imminent danger and sought the protection of the United Nations (U.N.) peacekeeping troops. Confronted with armed presidential police, the U.N. peacekeepers laid down their weapons and allowed the compound to be searched. It was because of this search that Uwilingiyimana and her husband feared for the safety of their children and hid them within the U.N. compound; they then exited the safety of the compound into the hands of the presidential guard. They were both murdered.

Instead of the possibility of peaceful reconciliation and cooperation between the two groups hopefully signaled by the Arusha Accords, the country erupted into genocidal violence. Systems which had been in place since colonialism came to the forefront in violence; the dream of peaceful reconciliation was destroyed. While signing a peace agreement does not indicate that there would be complete peace within the region, the signing of the Accords set into motion a legal impetus to work with varying groups towards ending tensions that existed between the Hutus and the Tutsis. The Arusha Accords negotiated by the Government of Rwanda and Rwandan Patriotic

Front<sup>2</sup> (RPF) meant to end the hostilities that began in 1990. In the agreement, both sides “resolved to eradicate and put a definite end to all the root causes which gave rise to the war” (Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front).

During the genocide, Hutu men raped women and girls, and also tortured and killed moderate Hutu and Tutsi men and women of all ages. Propaganda from those with control of various governmental and societal organizations was only one of many reasons that the extremists took such drastic actions, but these acts of violence and dominance over women were merely a physical demonstration of the power that men held over the women.

In times of conflict, rape can be used as a form of control over another group. Hogg states, “Such discourse continued throughout the slaughter with the systemic use of rape as a weapon...rape was utilized as a means to humiliate and control the entire Tutsi population” (38). Rape as a means of control is also described by Finley, “The mass rape of women during

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<sup>2</sup> The RPF, a militant group, consisted of Tutsi refugees who had fled the country beginning in the late 1950’s when acts of violence began occurring to them by the Hutus.

conflict is a systematic tool used to destroy the morale, the population, and the culture of the enemy” (17).

In the instance of the Rwandan genocide, rape was determined to be a crime against humanity, and an act of genocide.<sup>3</sup> Violence was not the only form of control and power that was exerted against women prior to, during and after the genocide of 1994. In fact, it was in response to various forms of control in post-genocide Rwanda that women were forced to redefine themselves in response to traumatic events that occurred against them physically, emotionally, and socially. Women have responded to and adapted within a societal haunting that pervades the culture within Rwanda, and have managed to achieve some degree of resilience. Alexander states “The objects or events that trigger trauma are perceived clearly by actors, their responses are lucid, and the effects of these responses are problem solving and progressive” (3).

In the political arena, power is exerted by a nation-state to citizens in the forms of statutes and other mandates set by those who control the government, or various departments within. This

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<sup>3</sup> On September 2, 1998, the International Crimes Tribunal Rwanda (ICTR) issued a ruling in which Jean-Paul Akayesu was convicted of Crimes Against Humanity and Genocide. Rape as a form of genocide was established by the ICTR in this case.

form of power establishes who has the authority to rule others. In Rwanda, this control of governmental power was one of the strategies through which some men created traumatic situations that have deeply impacted the country. In Rwanda, the majority of the citizens are Hutus. The government prior to the genocide was run by Hutus. Because of this power structure, Hutus were politically in positions to make decisions that had a direct impact on all of the citizens. Juvénal Habyarimana was the president of Rwanda prior to his death in 1994. He became leader of the country after he seized control of the government in a military coup, from another Hutu, Grégoire Kayibanda. Under both Kayibanda and Habyarimana regimes, discrimination against the Tutsis was widespread. Many Tutsis who had lived in Rwanda fled the country to Uganda and Burundi for safety, and while in exile, they formed the RPF. During the Habyarimana regime, in 1990, the RPF entered Rwanda in an attempt to regain control of the government. This became known as the Rwandan Civil War. Because of two years of fighting, in which the RPF maintained control of territory in Northern Rwanda, and the inability of the Rwandan army to regain control of the territory, Habyarimana's authority in the country waned. The impact of the civil war and

continued violence between the groups led the Habyarimana administration to work with their political opposition groups towards the establishment of a cease fire between the Rwandan army and the RPF. This became the Arusha Accords that were signed in Arusha, Tanzania in 1994.

The genocidal use of rape cannot be cogently understood outside the context of Rwanda's patriarchal society. Rwandan men, both Hutu and Tutsi control the family, land, and other assets. Women are expected to serve the men and occupy roles within society that limit their ability and freedom to protect themselves from violence and other forms of domination. From a state perspective, power is demonstrated in control of the government, establishing legislation, and determining which group holds preferential treatment within the system. In the case of the Rwandan genocide, the struggle for control of the government, resources, and status also manifested itself in the physical acts of rape, mutilation, and murder of neighbors, friends and family members based on an arbitrary identity that was established during colonization by the Belgians. (Smyth 19, Taylor 42, Gourevitch 54).

Rwandan ethnicity was established along patrilineal lines, and since the establishment of formal identity cards, one's identity could not be changed. This is important because prior to the formal identification cards, Hutus and Tutsis could move from group to group based on wealth and marriage.

Even after the genocide and after the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) had gained control of the government, the power exerted against women who survived the violence, further objectified them through continuous sexual, psychological, and cultural traumatization. This traumatization came, in part, through societal ostracization of those women who bore children after being raped, raised those children, and attempted to aid in the prosecution of men who had committed crimes.

The common perception that female survivors stand to lose more from testifying than men is largely due to the shame and stigma burdening victims of sexual violation in Rwandan society. Victims fear that testifying and consequently exposing their experiences of sexual abuse will lead to community ostracism, inability to marry and other secondary harms not similarly associated with the disclosure of non-sexual wartime assaults. (Wells 185).

Women were further traumatized through governmental structures that disenfranchised them: they did not have the legal

capability to own land or to inherit the land that their husbands or fathers had owned, or to enter into contracts to secure financial funding to provide for their families. Their psychological traumatization was thus exacerbated by their social location. In many instances, the women were raped in public, and women who survived these rapes were forced into the eye of the public through providing testimony in the various legal trials. This public acknowledgement of what occurred to them removes the crime from being exclusively personal, though committed on the individual body, and opens the wound to the public for all to see. Mark Seltzer states, "the opening of relation to others (the 'sympathetic' social bond) is at the same time the traumatic collapse of boundaries between self and other (a yielding of identity to identification)" (9). They are individuals who have survived catastrophe, yet they are collectively identified in a classification of the 'other'. Because of the public stigma associated with rape, the women who survived are now viewed as being outside of the society. Their experiences are individual, yet collectively, they constitute the 'other'.

This thesis seeks to explore the situations of women in post-genocide Rwanda in regards to their use of structures to



enhance their collective resilience. Since the genocide, women now hold governmental positions<sup>4</sup>, there have been some changes to the land laws which now enable women to own land in order to support their families, and collectives of women have organized in support of one another through the various problems that they face. In order to understand collective trauma in Rwanda, it is important to understand the historical context that led up to the genocide, the genocide itself, and the cultural and governmental systems that have suppressed women, as well as those that have aided them. For women, the lack of ability to enter into contracts without a man's signature or authorization, the inability to inherit land that they have lived on throughout their lives, and societal systems that subject women to 'home' work are a few of the structures that women in post-genocide Rwanda have had to overcome. The structures that existed fostered a continuing environment of trauma for the survivors through which they attempted to negotiate their existence; governmental and other institutional structures contain within them the potential to allow violent history to recreate itself. At the same time, changing the structures,

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<sup>4</sup> Some of the positions that women now hold within the government are mandated by changes to the constitution.

including women's social location to create and sustain their empowerment, can help to negate the legacy of trauma.

The first section of this thesis explores trauma theory and the implication it has on our understanding of the situation for women. Scholars have written on the impacts of the genocide, but much of the work related to trauma theory refers only to psychological trauma. My thesis will instead explore genocide through the lens of social trauma theory. The second section will explain the history of Rwanda and the volatility of Rwandan society due to such practices as ethnic identity cards, colonization, and favoritism through which governmental power has shifted. Finally, the last section addresses women's resilience in the environment of societal trauma.

### Critical Trauma Theory

"Over the last 25 years, trauma has become established as a unique way of appropriating the traces of history and one of the dominant modes of representing our relationship with the past" (Fassin and Rechtman 15). Fassin and Rechtman claim that trauma can be used within the "restricted sense...in the mental health field" and also within the "popular usage (an open wound in the collective memory)" (2). Within the burgeoning

field of trauma studies, there are various, and sometimes competing methods for analyzing the impact that disastrous situations have on people. These perspectives include, for example, medical, sociological, individual, and collective approaches. This paper will examine the sociological trauma to the collective. The use of individual incidents demonstrates how widespread violent acts against women across Rwanda can be viewed as a collective trauma.

When trauma is of human origin and is intentionally inflicted... it not only shatters one's fundamental assumption about the world and one's safety in it, but it also severs the sustaining connection between the self and the rest of humanity. Victims of human-inflicted trauma are reduced to mere object by their tormenters: their subjectivity is rendered useless and viewed as worthless. (Brison 40).

While Brison discusses the self, the implication is that 'human-inflicted trauma' applies to the women, collectively, that were raped during the genocide. The actions taken against them, while done individually, were systemically committed against a group similarly situated within the culture and society.

Collective trauma refers to an effect on a group, of any size, that has a shared identity. These events can be witnessed

by the group, such as the case in 9/11, or the collective can be the group against which an act was carried out, such as Tutsis and moderate Hutus during the Rwandan genocide. The traumatic acts, whether they are witnessed or experienced bodily create an environment in which the collective group can lead to mass actions, such as the RPF entering Rwanda to end the genocide, and incremental or even massive societal shifts. In the case of the Rwandan genocide, there have been a number of societal shifts; some of them are perhaps designed to alleviate the pain, alienation, societal discomfort, and lack of access to legal services that women experience. While some actions have had collective benefits, women that were targeted, raped, brutalized, and yet still survived continue to be haunted through the ghosts of what was. "The surfacing of ghosts yielded an intensification of haunting in which the *yanggongju* became overinvested with conflicting feelings of grief, hope, shame and rage" (Cho 7). In the situation of the *yanggongju*, the ghosts remained with them throughout their lives; in Rwanda, the women that survived the rapes and genocide also must reside with these ghosts.

When an individual or a group is targeted and objectified, this enables the ability of the attackers to commit further atrocities against the 'other'. During the German Holocaust, one of the first things that occurred was the dehumanization of the subjects. Jews were forced to wear stars identifying their status, later moved to ghettos, and then to concentration camps where they were only identified by numbers, not as humans. Similarly in Rwanda, Tutsis were not identified by their given names, but as *inyenzi* (cockroach) or *inzoka* (snake). The use of these terms to describe a group of people creates an atmosphere in which the subject loses his or her personal identity and becomes objectified. According to [genocidewatch.org](http://genocidewatch.org), the loss of personal identity and dehumanization is one of the steps that lead towards a projected genocide.

Rape during the genocide is considered to be an act of genocide. The ICTR established in its trial of Jean-Paul Akayesu, that the systemic utilization of rape as a means of destruction of the Tutsi people is an act of genocide (UN). Rape was used to maintain control of the existing structure and for Hutu to exert their dominance over Tutsi. It created a system in which male dominance was exerted over women. Surviving a life altering

event can create difficulty allowing the self to return to what was once considered 'normal' life; however, trauma does not stop with the initial assault or violent action. Susan Brison writes "trauma not only haunts the conscious and unconscious mind, but also remains in the body, in each of the senses; ready to resurface whenever something triggers a reliving of the traumatic event" (Brison x). Collectively, the trauma that was exerted against women manifested itself in a variety of manners. Initially, prior to the genocide, Tutsi women were systemically portrayed as the demons, and the justification for discrimination. Hutus, especially those in power, used terms such as *inyenzi* (cockroach) or *inzoka* (snake). The use of the term *inzoka* has historical and cultural references that aided in fueling the desire to rid the country of Tutsis. "*Iyo inzoka yizilitse ku gisabo ugomba kikimena ukabona uko uyica* literally means in killing a snake curled around a gourd, you break the gourd if you must to kill him" (Farrell). This folkloric story from Rwanda represented the death of the Queen Mother, who was killed because it was believed that she was with child, a snake, a Tutsi. With the utilization of such degrading language, the Hutu were capable of creating a reality for themselves in which Tutsi were not human,

but animalistic. And as being such, Tutsi did not deserve to live, but to die the same as other dangerous animals. The dehumanizing metaphors of the terminology was one of the means of subjugating Tutsis prior to the genocide. In addition, the use of words to construct social status continues to create a space which targets victims, continually repeating a cycle of verbal dominance and chronic mental anguish.

#### Pre-Genocide Rwanda

As with any sovereign nation, the history of the state is not written in black and white, but shades of gray. There are multiple versions of the country's history, and based on who is providing the information, there can be biases towards one group in the telling. These biases can manifest as information being omitted from the official records, or as mundane as only one perspective of the same story being provided as historical fact. The lack of all the 'truths' that surround the history of Rwanda up to the present day creates a discursive, societal space, a haunting, that women must negotiate.

To understand the history of Rwanda is to understand the complexity of the 'haunting' that permeates the historical culture. The history of Rwanda is full of traumatic events, Hutus

and Tutsis in conflict with each other during various points in their history. Much of what is formally recorded has been since the intrusion of western civilization into a foreign culture. During the colonial era in Rwanda, the systematic subjugation of one group over the other has proceeded in cycles; initially Tutsis held governmental power of Hutus. This was solidified by the use of identity cards, establishing one as either Hutu or Tutsi. Many of the traumatic events that have occurred stem from western interference; though not all of the violence, some comes forward through differences between the groups.

While knowledge of the history of Rwanda is necessary to understanding what led up to the genocide, the country profile is also necessary in understanding the land distribution and how it affects women<sup>5</sup>. The country of Rwanda is centrally located in Africa. It is a land-locked country that is also known as the 'land of the thousand hills' and is bordered by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda, Tanzania, and Burundi. On the country's western border with the DRC, lies Lake Kivu.

During the Kayibanda and Habyarimana regimes, episodes of violence erupted against Tutsi males. These men fled the

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<sup>5</sup> The impact of land availability for women will be covered later in this paper.



country to neighboring lands which are also comprised of Tutsi and Hutus. In Uganda, Rwanda's northern neighbor, the RPF was established, and Uganda was the entry point for the RPF to enter Rwanda in an attempt to retake the government control during the Rwandan Civil War.



Figure 1: The Great Lakes Region of Africa (Kritz 3)

"Rwanda is a country of only 28,338 sq km but with a population of nine million. This population density of over 300 people/sq km is the highest in Africa" (Rwanda). This densely populated area has witnessed strife for land conflicts that have plagued the

country for generations. However, the land conflict is not perceived to be one of the precursors to the 1994 genocide in which an estimated 800,000 to one million persons were slaughtered, but instead was an effort to control the government. (Zrally 127-129). "The Rwandan genocide builds on decades-old processes of political legitimization and decision-making, deep entrenched images of ethnicity and cultural practices..." (Uvin 97). Control of the government for generations has been sought after by both Hutus and Tutsis, and each group has, at varying points in history, maintained control.

"In the immediate aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the population of Rwanda was 70% female. As of 2004, ten years after the genocide, women comprised approximately 54% of the Rwandan population" (Kritz 4). It is suggested that the change in women's population over the decade is because of HIV/AIDS related deaths, along with the repatriation of Rwandans from neighboring countries where families have lived in exile, some since the violence that occurred in the 1950's. The change in family structures due to the violence has created a large number of matriarch-led households. Until current changes in Rwandan legislation, many of these households did not have

access to land or financing and continued to be victimized by a society in which they felt abandoned, haunted by the ghosts of a society which they once belonged to, thus furthering their traumatization.

### Pre-colonial History

The relationship of the groups to one another has continually been that of one group's dominance over the other. Thus, this is important for understanding how the contemporary terrain of trauma and its reproduction in Rwanda was created within a greater history of conquest and domination. Colonialists did not enter into Rwanda until the late 1890's. This is important because prior to this, the three ethnic groups which reside in Rwanda did so in a manner which allowed for members of one group to move into another group, based on either marriage or by economic position. In pre-colonial Rwanda, as in current day Rwanda, there were three ethnic groups that lived on the lands: the Tutsi, the Hutu and the Twa. The Twa are the smallest minority of the population constituting approximately one percent of the population. Tutsi constitute approximately 14% of the population while Hutus make up the remaining 85% of the population (Kritz 4). "The land was originally inhabited by the

Twa people, pygmylike hunter-gatherers, until the arrival several hundred years ago of the Hutu, a Bantu migrant people who settled on small plots of land and became farmers. Sometime in the fifteenth century, the Tutsi arrived.” (Richburg 102).

Upon the arrival of the Hutu, they began to clear the lands in order to cultivate it for crops for their sustenance. The destruction of the lands that once provided nourishment for the Twa disappeared and became ‘owned’ by the Hutu who used it for farming. When the Tutsi migrated to these lands several hundred years ago, they brought with them their livestock, and have taken and utilized the land to provide nourishment to their livestock. As the area of land available for all has diminished, the need for control of the lands has become pivotal and has led to conflicts between the groups. It was also during this time, up to the time of Belgian control of the region, that one could move, or advance between the ethnic groups. This was based on the financial mobility of the individual involved, and could also be accomplished through marriage. (Gourevitch 47).

Prior to the entrance of the Germans, the kingdom of Rwanda, under King Rwabugiri, established various administrative reforms. These reforms were intrinsically

designed to suppress the advancement of Hutus, and maintain Tutsi power in the region. Some of what was established were *ubuhake*, similar to serfdom; in which some privileged Hutus were allowed access to cattle. The other key administrative move at this time was the establishment of *uburetwa*, or forced labor. By forcing citizens to labor (akin to slavery), this establishes a pattern of trauma against those that do not hold governmental power. (Gourevitch 57).

### Colonization to Genocide

The colonization of Rwanda began with the arrival of the Germans in the 1890s. Because of discontent and skirmishes between the Hutu and the Tutsi, the missionaries and other Germans took the opportunity to take control of the lands, and supported the existing governmental structure of the region. The Germans placed German citizens in the court of the ruling king to ensure that the current system remained intact. Entry of foreigners into the region and into the governmental systems set the stage for greater conflict between the groups, for power and control of the resources. Because of the distrust of the Belgians, who controlled Burundi at the time, the royal court felt that it was safer for the country and the people to accept the Germans

in their country. It was also during the era that the Europeans became fascinated with the 'Hamatic' myth and put into practice the race-ethnic theory of John Speke<sup>6</sup>; the Germans identified members of the each tribe by utilizing physical characteristics to assign an identity to each. "Speke found a 'superior race' of 'men who were as unlike as they could be from the common order of the natives' by virtue of their 'fine oval faces, large eyes, and high noses denoting the best blood of Abyssinia' – that is Ethiopia" (Gourevitch 52). By identifying a "superior race", the Germans supported the Tutsi in power. They provided them with governmental positions, and education; which was systemically denied to Hutu.

After World War I, the Belgians took control of Rwanda from the Germans. (Gourevitch 54). However, the geographical makeup of Rwanda was different at that time. Under Belgian rule, they brought other surrounding kingdoms under the control

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<sup>6</sup> John Speke was an explorer from Great Britain. He was known for his work that said that Africans that were taller and that had more distinct features were from the lineage of King David, and therefore superior to other Africans.

of the mwami<sup>7</sup>, and the existing Rwandan government. Also during the time of the Belgians, they formally established the use of identity cards to ensure that every Rwandan was assigned to their ethnic group.

In governing the Rwanda protectorate, Belgium's policy was explicitly racist. Early in its mandate, Belgium declared: "The government should endeavor to maintain and consolidate traditional cadres composed of the Tutsi ruling class, because of its important qualities, its undeniable intellectual superiority and its ruling potential. Belgium instituted apartheid like identity cards, which marked the bearer as Tutsi, Hutu or Twa (pygmy). And Belgium only educated male Tutsi. (Smyth 19).

This action effectively tied each individual to an ethnic group, and movement between the groups was no longer possible. The act of formal identity cards codified a societal power struggle that moved based on which group was in control of the government. It also established favoritism based on socially constructed identities. Each person's identity was based on physical measurements of the person and followed patrilineal

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<sup>7</sup> The mwami is a title given to the leader, often translated in English as a king. "The Mwami himself was revered as a divinity, absolute and infallible" (Gourevitch, 49).

lines. By doing this, the Belgians created groups, Twa, Hutu and Tutsi, while they were all Rwandans, they also had a separate identity. The Belgians also continued the preferential treatment of the Tutsi to the Hutu by maintaining a Tutsi mwami, and providing education to the Tutsi while providing a separate, substandard educational structure for Hutus. While in control of the government, Tutsis maintained a high standard of living that was made possible by the governmental power.

In the 1950s and 1960s, across the African continent, many countries began seeking independence from those countries that had colonized them, or ruled over their lands. These revolutionary ideals did not escape the people of Rwanda, and they too sought their independence from the Belgians, and other Western influences within the country. Colonialist "rule in Africa was more successful in destroying indigenous African political structures than in destroying African culture as such" (Salhi 11).

In 1959, the seated Tutsi mwami died from an allergic reaction to a medication he was receiving. At the same time, the Catholic Church in Rwanda began supporting changes that would include Hutus being in control of the government. This support



was in opposition to *ubuhake*, which was system in which those with power and money established a patron-client type relationship between Tutsis and Hutus. The client was given access to a resource in exchange for their labor. (Zraly 111). This system created an environment that was a traumatic suppression of the Hutus by the minority Tutsis.

Because of the support of the church, the Belgians also began to modify their support, and in turn, shifted to supporting Hutus in power. This shift in power, coupled by decades of discrimination and (what are viewed today as) human rights violations from Tutsi to Hutu, escalated into a violent repression of Tutsis.

Since colonialism and even before, ethnicity, class, and politics have been wound tightly together in Rwanda. While the colonialists privileged the Tutsi minority, the situation changed in 1959 when the Belgians threw their support behind the so-called Social Revolution, which flipped Rwanda's political, economic, and social order. During this period, Hutus killed an estimated twenty thousand Tutsi civilians with impunity, sending a wave of Tutsis into exile (Rettig 29).

During this period of violence, men were the targeted group for violence. Also, this episode of systemic violence was a precursor

to violent episodes that would continue throughout the decades, leading up to the genocide. The traumatic events that occurred through the lens of colonialism cannot be accurately viewed with understanding the economic situation that aided in perpetuating a system of trauma.

After its independence in 1962, Rwanda's relations with Belgium, its former colonial power, and with international financial donors became exceedingly complex. The catastrophic impact of structural adjustment policies dictated by the IMF and the World Bank, along with the fall in coffee prices on the global market (linked to the adjustment policies and to the International Coffee Organization), played a key role in establishing the socioeconomic context within which the Rwandan crisis emerged. (Rothe, Mullins, and Sandstrom 9).

The financial sector of Rwanda, and the manner in which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank proceeded to issue loans, and subsequently structural adjustment policies (SAP), also played a key role in the violence that escalated within the country. The country was now independent of Belgium but was still dependent on Western views of monetary matters. In the 1970's and 1980's, Rwanda saw high poverty levels, which predominately affected those that resided in the countryside. At the same time, nearly 70% of the

population produced coffee for export for the subsistence. This continued for many years, until 1987, when there was a larger amount of coffee available for sale than there were consumers. At this time, the coffee that was produced was sold through the International Coffee Organization (ICO), but because of dramatically increasing debt payments needing to be met, some coffee producing countries resorted to selling their coffee outside the ICO, and flooding the market. Simultaneously, the IMF and the World Bank were encouraging countries that were recipients of funding to increase their production. For Rwanda, they resulted in increasing the amount of coffee production for sale. This overproduction of the crop globally resulted in the collapse of the market.

Because of the collapse of the market and the inability to meet debt payments, the government of Rwanda cut nearly 40% out of their budget, reducing the social services that were available. Those impacted the greatest were the ones with the greatest need, the poor, residing in the countryside, with no alternatives for income. This was coupled with high tax rates on the citizens.

Many Rwandan citizens left the country to look for better opportunities, and for the ability to support their families. As these citizens left the country, the government continued to seize the lands “for the World-Bank funded Gebeka Project, which benefitted the regime and included the seizure of the last primary growth forests in Rwanda” (Rothe, Mullins and Sandstrom 8). With the country near collapse, the Habyarimana regime turned to the international community for assistance. This resulted in the IMF setting a SAP for the country, including devaluing the franc by 50%, placing further economic strain on the citizens of Rwanda. This reduction led to mass inflation in the country on goods and services, yet the citizens could not adjust the price of the coffee that they sold. The price had been set by the IMF and could not be changed. (Rothe, Mullins and Sandstrom 8-10).

Some of the poorest of those impacted chose to participate in Habyarimana’s *interhamwe*, “The regime’s hardliners channeled the massive social discontent resulting from the devastating economic conditions into implementing their plan for genocide” (Rothe, Mullins and Sandstrom 10). Through examining the economic situation prior to the genocide, it can be

argued that conquest, both from colonial Belgium and the international community banking system, laid the foundation for further trauma and instability within Rwanda.

After the death of the mwami, Grégoire Kayibanda, a Hutu was chosen to lead the country. Even after Kayibanda took office, there continued to be violence between the Tutsi and the Hutu, though not at the same levels that had been seen, or would be seen in 1994. Fearing for their lives, approximately 150,000 fled their homeland and sought refuge in neighboring countries. This flight of Rwandans created a tension along the borders of Rwanda, where those fleeing sought refuge. The lands in which they came to live were already inhabited by both Tutsi and Hutu, and an influx of Tutsi led to hostilities between the groups, furthering the ethnic difficulties that existed because of colonization and the establishment of identity. In 1959, in Burundi, with the influx of Tutsis due to the trauma that they faced at home, violence erupted. This led to a three-year long battle that resulted in Hutus fleeing Burundi into Rwanda for their own security. With the rise of violence, extremist ideologies became the platform that would eventually provide the justification for genocide.

More violence between the groups continued to erupt, between 1959 and the genocide of 1994. In 1963, in an attempt to return to their homeland and secure control of the government for the Tutsis, the RPF entered Rwanda and the violent conflict resumed. The Rwandan Tutsi guerillas that entered from Burundi began their advance towards the capitol, and came within ten miles of Kigali, but were forced to retreat due to the Rwandan Hutu military. Because of the attack on Hutus, and its perception as an attack against the Rwandan nation-state, the Rwandan government declared a state of emergency to combat the counterrevolutionaries. At this time, the Hutu government designated a minister to organize Hutu self-defense units, charged with the task of "clearing the bush." The term, clearing the bush, was an order to kill Tutsis and destroy their homes. (Gourevitch 64).

### The Trauma of Genocide

While the genocide began quickly, within hours of the deaths of Habyarimana and Ntarayamira, and ultimately lasted 100 days, the years leading up to that time were fraught with violent messaging about the evils of the Tutsi, especially the Tutsi women. They were targeted because of their perceived

physical attributes, and thought to be the demise of the Hutu. Though rhetoric treated Tutsi women as evil, in reality, many Hutu men continued to covet and take Tutsi women as their wives or lovers.

A brief description of inter-ethnic relationships in Rwanda places in context the preoccupation with gender evident throughout the genocide. Although not the norm, conjugal unions between the Tutsis and Hutus were not uncommon in the decades preceding the genocide. Marriages between Tutsi women and Hutu men, however, were much more common than marriages between Tutsi men and Hutu women. Since ethnicity was determined along patrilineal lines, the offspring of Tutsi women and Hutu men were legally Hutu. As such, these marriages "conferred the full benefits of Hutu citizenship to progeny who were perceived by many as racially impure. (Green 746).

Historically, Tutsi women were not the first to be desired by men who treated and spoke ill of them. For example, in the United States, it was not uncommon for male slave owners to treat their slaves with brutality, physically and verbally, but in private, to use the women sexually or form intimate relations with them. Tutsi women were objects to be desired sexually, but not in any public, social manner that would suggest a common humanity. This subjugation of women of certain groups

is a means men have used to justify their violent attacks on the female body.

The newspaper, *Kangura*, in 1990 published the "Hutu Ten Commandments". Within these 'commandments', there was an established pattern of hostility towards Tutsi women in degrading them through what the Hutu felt was important.

These commandments that targeted women are stated:

Every *Muhutu* (Hutu male) should know that wherever he finds *Umututsikazi* a female Tutsi), she is working for her Tutsi ethnic group. As a result every *Muhutu* who marries a *Mututsikazi*, or who takes a *Mututsikazi* for a mistress, or employs her as a secretary of a protégée is a traitor.

Every *Muhutu* should know that our *Bahutukazi* (female Hutu) are more worthy of, and conscious of their roles as woman, spouse, and mother. Are they not pretty, good secretaries, and more honest!

*Bahutukazi* (Hutu women), be vigilant and bring your husbands, brothers, and sons back to the path of reason. (Reggy 24).

In addition to the publication of the Hutu Ten Commandments, prior to the genocide in 1994, several of the Hutu leaders promoted a large number of propagandist activities that targeted Tutsi women.



Tutsi women were said to be tall, slender, light-skinned and the epitome of beauty. Basically their pro-colonial social status (as superior femininity) was enhanced even further under colonial rule and they were therefore coveted by Hutu men; not unlike Fanon's (1967) description of black men's desire to be initiated into 'authentic' manhood by going with white women (Daley 53).

Tutsi women became the targets of the Hutu extremist ideals because of the positionality between the groups. Tutsi women were "socially positioned at the permeable boundary between the two ethnic groups" (Taylor 42). This societal positioning provided the rationale for such an attack on Tutsi women by Hutu men. Taylor argues that "The Rwandan genocide was not simply a battle for political supremacy between groups of men, it was also about re-configuring gender" (42). This re-configuring of gender that Taylor writes of was, in his view, due to "gender relations ... falling into a state of decadence and disorder as more women attained positions of prominence in economic and public life, and as more women exercised their personal preferences in their private lives"(Taylor 42). Historically, women held their lives in the home; they tended the children and gardens. They were not expected to support the family, and did

not have the means to; they could not enter into contracts without the approval of the man of the house, could not own land, and were not dominantly in the public domain. With the cultural shifts, some women were positioned to exercise power not only in the home, but also in the public domain (Burnet).

Upon notification of the death of the president, the military seized control of the government. This began the nearly immediate violence and destruction that would kill between an estimated 800,000 and one million moderate Hutu and Tutsi. In addition to those that were killed, there were attacks in which some of the victims survived. Jean Hatzfeld interviewed several Hutus who were incarcerated for their participation in the genocide. In one of the interviews, Pio, one of the incarcerated said,

Many Tutsis showed a dreadful fear of being killed, even before we started to hit them. They would stop their disturbing agitation. They would cower or stand stock still. So this terror helped us to strike them. It is more tempting to kill a trembling and bleating goat than a spirited and frisky one, put it that way (38).

Rape, torture and dismemberment were some of the physical actions taken, however the mental trauma inflicted on the

survivors continued to occur after the bloodshed ended. The women survivors have been systematically retraumatized through the judicial system, governmental structures, and societal pressures that turned them into outcasts.

In 2009, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) stated,

The Committee is concerned that women's participation and involvement in the post-conflict reconstruction and social-economic development may not be fully realized owing to the deep-entrenched stereotypes and gender-based violence, as well as other forms of discrimination against women. Aware that many women and girls were victims of sexual violence, including rape, and sexual torture, during the genocide, the Committee also expresses concern that equal access to justice and appropriate protection and support may not be guaranteed for all women and girl victims within the framework of the comprehensive process of prosecution of perpetrators which is ongoing at international and national levels.

The physical violence against the Tutsi was only one form of brutality. The trauma impacted the individual, the family structure, and the fabric of Rwandan society.

In order to understand the collective trauma of Rwanda, it is necessary to establish a "successful process of collective

representation" (Alexander 12). Alexander asks four questions that must be answered to determine this. The first question is "The nature of the pain. What actually happened-to the particular group and to the wider collectivity of which it is a part" (13). In Rwanda, the physical attacks were on Tutsis and the coercion of Hutus to participate in killings who did not seek to act violently against their neighbors, friends, and family. These actions prove traumatic for both groups; those who suffered the brutality, and those who 'unwillingly' participated out of fear for their own lives and the lives of their families.

Alexander's second question addresses "The nature of the victim. What group of persons was affect by this traumatizing pain? Did a singular and delimited group receive the brunt of the pain, or were several groups involved?" (13). Within the genocide, Tutsi men were targeted for murder, but the Tutsi women were specifically targeted for greater harm. Tutsi women were raped publicly, in some instances in front of their husbands or children. Tutsi women, and Hutu women that were married to Tutsi men, if they were pregnant, faced the prospect of having their unborn child cut from them; witnessing the death of their child while slowly dying themselves.

Alexander would also have us inquire into the “[r]elation of the trauma victim to the wider audience....To what extent do the members of the audience for trauma representations experience an identity with the immediately victimized group?” (14). To answer this, one can ask, did the brutality that traumatized Tutsi women “create identification among” (Alexander, 14) Hutu men who participated in the systemic rapes and killings? Some who participated in the genocidal actions did so because of coercion from the *interhamwe*. In order to save their own lives, they took lives; and in some instances, some of the Hutus that were committing the killings were also hiding Tutsis in their homes or other relatively safe environments away from harm. This appeared to be done to appease their conscience.

The fourth question that Alexander asks addresses,

Attribution of responsibility. In creating a compelling trauma narrative, it is critical to establish the identity of the perpetrator, the ‘antagonist.’ Who actually injured the victim? Who caused the trauma? This issue is always a matter of symbolic and social construction (15).

To answer this question fully, it is necessary to look at the colonial history of Rwanda. Belgians disestablished the Rwandan identity, replacing it with constructed identities of either Hutu

or Tutsi, offering preferential treatment of Tutsi, thus creating an 'us vs. them' mentality. Because of the establishment of arbitrary identity, Tutsis seized the opportunity to repress Hutus societally. When the culture shifted, and Hutus seized power, they acted violently against their previous oppressors. Within all of this, Tutsi women were societally positioned between the two groups. They were objectified as evil, yet desired by Hutus. Those who married or had children of Hutu men, still maintained their individual Tutsi status, and were in some instances targeted for violence, but their children would be identified as Hutu and be protected. Both Tutsis and Hutus have been traumatized by one another. Both groups have experienced oppression at the hands of the other, at various points in history, one group, then the next, fleeing its country for safety.

Years before the genocide in Rwanda, Habyarimana "sought to transfer the peoples' dislike and unpopularity toward him, to the minority Tutsi population.... (he) did this by instigating early Tutsi propaganda in an effort to ensure his continued incumbency" (Ferril 340). In addition, Habyarimana established youth groups, *interhamwe*, "so that they could defend partisan interests" (Ferril 340). The moment that the

killings began, the communities began to participate. "The actual fighting could not be contained after President Habyarimana's plane was mysteriously shot down. This event incited radical Hutus, who were a part of the *Interahamwe* and *Impuzamugambi*" (Ferril 340). They used machetes to chop their victims, clubs with nails embedded in them,

"Big, flat wooden clubs, smaller at the handle end and rounded at the top. They reminded me of the all-purpose clubs Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble used to carry in the old TV cartoon. But with one small difference: To make the clubs more deadly on impact, the Hutu militiamen drove long nails into the end. That's what Rwanda has become, I thought. The country has reverted to prehistoric times, to a kind of sick version of Bedrock. And could these be fully evolved humans carrying clubs and machetes and panga knives and smashing in their neighbors' skulls and chopping off their limbs, and piling up the legs in one pile, and the arms in another, and lumping the bodies all together and sometimes forcing new victims to sit atop the heap while they clubbed them to death too? No, I realized, fully evolved human beings in the twentieth century don't do things like that. Not for any reason, not tribe, not religion, not territory. These must be cavemen" (Richburg 91).

The scene which Richburg describes is what took place throughout Rwanda during the genocide. The sheer brutality that existed with Hutu killing Tutsi, who often had been a friend, neighbor and in some cases, family members is accurately described by Richburg as barbaric. In some instances, Hutus, who would not have participated in the violence, did so in order to protect themselves from being portrayed as a moderate Hutu, accused of aiding or hiding Tutsis, and thus protecting the lives of themselves and their Hutu family members. Pancrace, one of the incarcerated that Jean Hatzfeld interviewed said "The eyes of the killed, for the killer, are his calamity if he looks into them. They are the blame of the person he kills" (Hatzfeld 22). By analyzing the killings and the impact that it had on both groups, it can be argued that there was complete societal breakdown, in addition to the traumatic suffering that occurred on both sides. According to Fassin and Rechtman, "By applying the same psychological classification to the person who suffers violence, the person who commits it, and the person who witnesses it, the concept of trauma profoundly transforms the moral framework of what constitutes humanity" (21). Those who killed to save themselves were traumatized by the actions they took;



witnesses have these images burned into their memories, and the victims themselves carry the physical scars of brutality, as well as the emotional scars of surviving.

The murders were not the only form of violence that occurred in Rwanda; Tutsi women were specifically targeted. They were repeatedly raped. Other times, children were brutally killed while the mother was forced to witness their infant child being grabbed by the feet and slammed into walls or other hard objects to crush their skulls, sometimes being thrown into water ways or outhouses to drown. In some instances, women were impaled with a spear from vagina to the throat. While providing testimony before the ICTR, witness KK described a scene in which a man and a woman had been killed, but the woman was “not exactly dead” (111). “She described the *interhamwes*<sup>8</sup> forcing a piece of wood into the woman’s sexual organs while she was still breathing, before she died” (Prosecutor versus Jean-Paul Akayesu 111).

In the case of Prosecutor versus Jean-Paul Akayesu, several witnesses described the rapes and other forms of trauma

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<sup>8</sup> The *interhamwe* were the paramilitary organization that supported Hutu power, and were responsible for carrying out Crimes against humanity during the Rwandan genocide.

that were forced upon them. "Even pregnant women, including those of Hutu origin, were killed on the grounds that the fetuses in their wombs were fathered by Tutsi men, for in a patrilineal society like Rwanda, the child belongs to the father's group of origin"(36-37). During the trial, witness JJ testified about what she had lived through and witnessed,

She explicitly specified that the rapist, a young man with an axe and a long knife, penetrated her vagina with his penis. She stated that on this occasion she was raped twice....She was raped twice by one man. Then another man came to where she was lying and he also raped her. A third man then raped her, she said, at which point she described herself as feeling near dead....Witness JJ testified that she could not count the total number of times she was raped (109).

Testimony in the case of Prosecutor versus Akayesu included several women who were at the scene. Some of the women were subjected to the same violence that witness JJ described in her testimony.

"A traumatic event is one in which a person feels utterly helpless in the face of a force that is perceived to be life-threatening" (Brison 39). Violence beget violence; with the rush of Hutus killing Tutsis, this created a situation in which the RPF again entered their home country and fought, using violent

methods against the Hutu, for control of the country. With the RPF forces continually advancing through the country, the genocide ended with nearly two million Hutu fleeing Rwanda into neighboring countries seeking safety of refugee camps being established there. Many of those fleeing were the perpetrators of the violence and sought to avoid both violence and possible, subsequent legal justice. In addition, many of these Hutus feared not only legal justice, but the possibility of being killed by the RPF for the acts that they had committed. Brison describes this as “[T]he immediate psychological responses to such trauma include terror, loss of control, and intense fear of annihilation” (39). Since that time, similar violence has occurred against Tutsi within the regions in which Hutu are situated in their new environments. The conflict between the Hutu and the Tutsi has not ended, but it has instead spread throughout the region and retains the ethnic cleansing mode as the means of action. (Ferril 340).

#### The Lives of Women in Rwanda

Women have historically been denied access to basic rights that are afforded to males within Rwandan society. Women have not had the right to own land, control their finances within the

banking industry, or enter into contracts without the consent of their father, husband or guardian. This creates a situation in which Rwandan women are a subclass of citizens within the society. "But [trauma] is a testimony that also bears witness to the persistence of the human even in those extreme situations that threaten to dehumanize the victims" (Fassin and Rechtman 20). The subjection of women as a subclass of citizens within Rwandan society as a whole helps to understand the pattern of trauma that was inflicted on women, specifically because of their gender.

In Rwanda, similar to other parts of the African continent, there was also gender hierarchy. The value of a woman was gauged by how well she took care of her husband and children. Moreover, women were culturally prohibited from certain practices such as milking cows, or fixing the roofs of their houses. Women's sleeping arrangements were also restricted; men, as the protector of women and children, slept on the side close to the door. Also women were not allowed to eat eggs and certain parts of the cow.

Additionally, women had few social and political rights, for instance, they had limited decision-making power....In spite of these classist and sexist attitudes that existed in Rwanda, studies on pre-colonial Rwanda society...find no evidence of systematic violence between

the ethnic groups, or the extreme acts of violence against women that were carried out during the country's 1994 Civil War. (Reggy 10-11).

Women are expected to tend to the home and raise the children, always deferring to the male dominance within the home. For Tutsi women, this discrimination goes further; they were targeted during the genocide because they are women, and mothers. As mothers, they produce the next generation of Tutsi, which were also seen as *inyenzi* or cockroaches

The Hutus decided that killing Tutsi men could not truly exterminate the Tutsi population. Thus, women were targeted as victims to perpetuate the Hutu population by forced pregnancies and to eradicate the Tutsi population by murdering women and children, the symbols of the next generation. (Ferril 340).

As previously stated, the discursive foundations for trauma existed long before the 1994 genocide. Tutsi women were targeted by Hutu propagandist ideas:

Although not the norm, conjugal unions between the Tutsis and Hutus were not uncommon in the decades preceding the genocide. Marriages between Tutsi women and Hutu men, however, were much more common than marriages between Tutsi men and Hutu women. Since ethnicity was determined along patrilineal lines, the offspring of Tutsi

women and Hutu men were legally Hutu. As such, these marriages "conferred the full benefits of Hutu citizenship to progeny who were perceived by many as racially impure. (Green 746).

Tutsi women, because of their ethnicity and gender became subjected to greater hostility by governmental propaganda that allowed for sanctions against women for their sexuality. Propagandists presented Tutsi women as sexual objects. The language that was used to systemically demoralize Tutsis, and Tutsi women in particular can be cited as hate speech. Kuntsman uses Judith Butler's theory of injurious language in arguing that speech is a foundation for future actions. "Extending her theory of gender performativity as the constitutive reiteration of norms to the domain of assaultive language, Butler notes that to be called a name is one of the first forms of linguistic injury, but also 'one of the conditions by which the subject is constituted in language'" (265).

In a society in which men dominate women in all aspects, the impact of the genocide on women in particular creates an environment hostile to physical and mental healing for survivors of trauma.

...Rwandese women were coerced into participating in the killings. Before the

genocide, Rwandese women were the moral fiber of the community; they were *Nyampinga*, 'the ones who welcome those who are tired.' The genocide destroyed this special role that women once had within Rwandese society. Berry and Berry include a quotation by Jeanne Kadaliya Ukonkunda of Profemme Twese Hamwe who says during the genocide, 'women could do nothing to stop the killing but were solely victims of torture and trauma.' They further argue that women were 'powerless to resist' the genocide; they had no decision-making power and therefore had no choice but to participate or face severe consequences such as rape or death. There is an old Rwandese saying that states 'the hen does no crow in the presence of the cock' to illustrate how disempowered Rwandese women were. (Reggy 32).

During the genocide the killings began with killing all males, ages two and up. This was thought to prevent the exodus of Tutsi males out of the country to later come into the country and defeat the Hutu power (ostensibly in the form of the RPF as during the genocide). However, shortly thereafter, women became targets of violence, yet this violence was not limited to the mutilations and killings such as were happening to the males in the society.

In a 2000 working paper, the United States Agency for International development (USAID) estimated that at least 200,000 Rwandan women suffered

sexual violence during the genocide. In many cases, such sexual assault preceded the killing of the victim....Those that survived were told they were being allowed to live only so that they would then die of sadness from the trauma and stigma of sexual victimization. Sexual victimization did not only consist of rape and other similar crimes, but took the form of sexual slavery as well. Threats and coercion were utilized as means to force such victims to submit to the sexual advances their captors. In some cases, these so-called forced 'marriages' lasted the entire duration of the genocide, or longer. Cases of sexual mutilation were also common, performed with machetes, sticks, boiling water, and acid. (Kritz 6-7).

Not only were women the targets of such violent offenses, but these acts of brutality often occurred in the presence of their family members. In addition, thousands of women became pregnant as a result of the rape. While some chose to have abortions, which are illegal in Rwanda, others did not. Some chose to have and to raise the children. These women are further ostracized by the community; many are called wife of the *interhamwe*. According to Cho, transgenerational trauma "does not die out with the person who first experienced it. Rather, it takes on a life of its own, emerging from the spaces where secrets are concealed: '*The phantom which returns to haunt*



*bears witness to the existence of the dead buried within the other*” (6). The new generation of Rwandans is impacted by the actions of those that came before. Children born from rape experience societal and maternal ostracism, while the children of those that committed the acts live with the knowledge that they are part of a culture in which their parent(s) committed acts against other Rwandans.

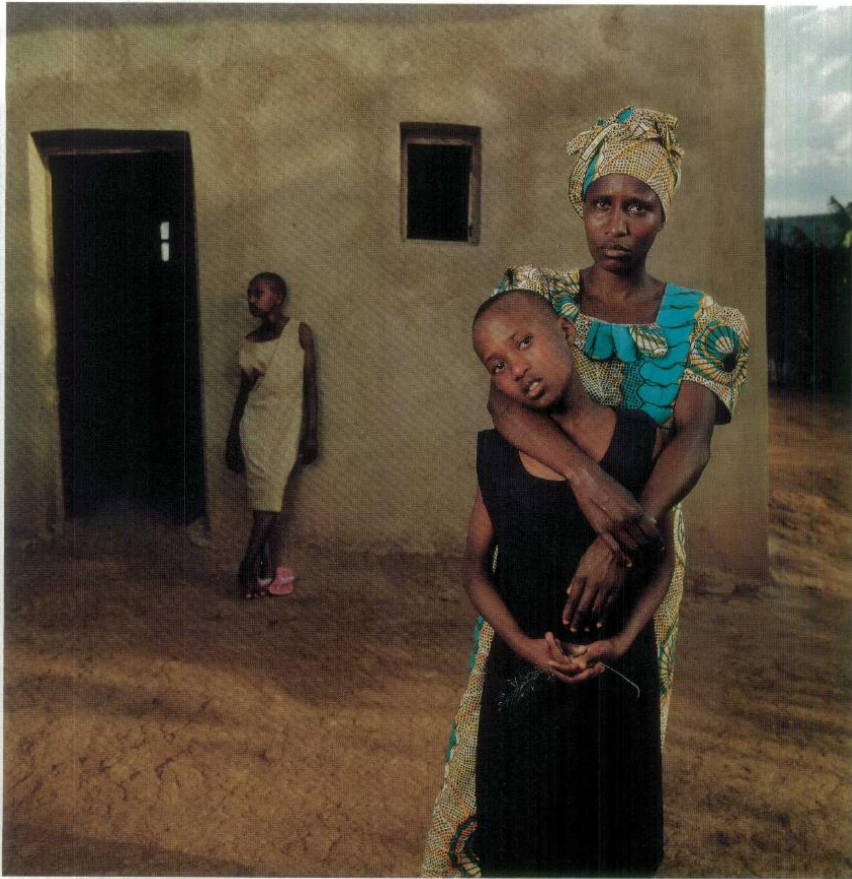


Figure 2: Valerie with her daughters: Amelie and Inez (Torgovnik 2).

In his research, Jonathan Togovnik interviewed rape survivors, and the impact that having a child born of rape had on their lives. In his picture entitled: Valentine with Her Daughters, Amelie and Inez, he quotes Valentine,

“I love my first daughter more because I gave birth to her as a result of love. Her father was my husband. The second girl is a result of unwanted circumstance-I never loved her father. When the younger girl was a baby, I used to leave her crying. I fed the older one more than the younger one....My love is divided, but slowly I am beginning to appreciate that this other one is innocent.

Valentine is not the only woman that has faced this internal conflict. Josette describes her feelings towards her son, “I never loved this child. Whenever I remember what his father did to me, I used to feel the only revenge would be to kill his son”. Beatrice also describes her experiences with the two children conceived during rape, but her experience also demonstrates the trauma that these children feel.

I’m not happy being a mother-I have two children as a result of rape. These children have distorted my life. The experience of rape has thwarted my ambitions. My children don’t have a family and their future is not clear. I don’t know where they belong. They don’t know where they belong...They

don't belong anywhere. They are not recognized by the community.

While the quotes from Valentine, Josette and Beatrice describe a situation that many women faced after the genocide, there are some instances in which the women embraced the children that were born to them. Annet says of her son, "I love him so much. He is a gift; he is my consolation" (Torgovnik 47).

Physical violence is not the exclusive form of gender subjugation. Women have been systematically denied access to the services that would enable them to provide fundamental necessities to the family to ensure stability. "Because women could not ordinarily inherit land from their parents or husbands, they could not apply for agricultural credit or loans...each woman's land rights were always contingent upon the goodwill of her in-laws or consanguineal family members (mostly fathers or brothers)" (Rose 210). The land that has been sought by women is for the sustenance and support of the family. With approximately 35% of the households headed by women (ten years after the genocide), and with land scarcity, the right to attain land seems daunting.

The legal system that women had to work within after the genocide was not without its trials. Women were still perceived

to be the weaker sex, though nearly 70% of the population immediately after the genocide consisted of women. In 2003, a new constitution was signed into law. Within this new legal document, women were guaranteed positions within the legal bodies of the government. The changes to the constitution have received praise from countries around the world as being one of the most progressive towards women. However, even with a mandate to grant a voice to women within the government, the voices of women still go mostly unheard. The positions created are seemingly symbolic because of the lack of progress on women's issues within the country.

#### Women's Access to Justice

Immediately after the genocide, Tutsis, who seized control of the government called for justice to be served. But does justice and remediation of the actions eliminate or lessen the trauma inflicted by the actions themselves? To answer this, an examination of the legal system that emerged from the genocide is required.

The country was in upheaval from the deaths of Tutsis and the subsequent flight from the country by Hutus. This destruction decimated the existing governmental infrastructure

and the systems that existed. It not only destroyed the physical fabric of the countryside and locations, but there also occurred the deaths of many who had once led the country, or the flight of their educated leaders. To begin rebuilding the country, Rwandans turned to the international community for assistance. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, called for reconciliation. Kagame announced to the country to allow those who had committed atrocities in their communities to have a chance to return to the society that was their home. In order to accommodate this, there was the creation of a judicial system.

The United Nations established the International Criminal Tribunal Rwanda (ICTR) in 1994 as a judicial measure to try those that were accused of the most serious of crimes including instigation of the genocide. From the beginning, the ICTR had problems. It was fettered by Western ideals of justice, and questions about who should be tried or not tried. In addition, information gathering, accuracy of charges, and providing safety for the witnesses was difficult. With the ICTR, Western conceptions of legal action, justice and reparations were in variance from the traditional culture of Rwanda. Western ideals were thus once again forced on Rwandans, perpetuating

systems of colonialism. One of the first people to be tried in the ICTR was Jean-Paul Akayesu. "He became the first man in history to be found guilty of genocide by an international tribunal....And his case became the first in which rape – one of the most ancient of war crimes – would be held by a court of law to be an act of genocide and a crime against humanity" (Neuffer 272).

Elizabeth Neuffer was able to interview one of the witnesses, JJ, who testified against Akayesu. In her conversations with JJ, the witness provided information that demonstrated the problems for women attempting to access justice. She described how she had to sneak away from her home and community to testify because she feared the societal backlash against her. Witness JJ was not alone in her fear of societal ostracism not only for testifying before a court, but being identified as a victim of rape. She testified that Akayesu, a strong community leader before the genocide, stated "*Ntihzagire umbaza uko umututsikazi yari amaze, ngo kandi mumenye ko ejo ngo nibabica nta kintu muzambazo ngo ejo bazabica*: Never ask me again what a Tutsi woman tastes like. Tomorrow they will be killed" (Neuffer 284). Witness JJ also provided support for

other women who were scheduled to testify against Akayesu, and told them to speak the truth, that while it was frightening, it was also healing to speak about the atrocities. Akayesu was not convicted of committing the act of rape himself, however from his position of power, he knowingly allowed members of the *interhamwe* to take the women away from the center's shelter and rape them in public. His actions demonstrated his disregard for the lives of those he should have protected as the bourgmestre<sup>9</sup> of the town.

While the ICTR was hearing cases, there was also a court system established in Rwanda to deal with those who had committed lesser crimes and would not be tried by the ICTR. This court was established to lessen the burden on the ICTR and to allow for quicker access to justice for both the victims and the accused. However, due to lengthy procedural times, in 2001, the Rwandan government reestablished their *gacaca* system of justice. By reestablishing the *gacaca* system, this alleviated the dependence on the traditional judicial system, and allowed for the nearly 135,000 Rwandan citizens imprisoned for the actions during the genocide to be brought to justice. This action did not

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<sup>9</sup> The bourgmestre is essentially the mayor of the village, town or city.

eliminate the established judicial system, nor did it abolish the legal cases brought before the ICTR; however, it did bring those that were charged with lesser crimes, quicker access to justice.

The newly reestablished government of Rwanda passed the laws necessary in order to complete the trials of those accused of committing crimes. To accomplish this, the crimes needed to be categorized to ensure that justice was effectively meted out, and that victims had the chance for healing. The four categories of gravity of crimes were established: "category one included leaders, organizers, and the most notorious killers, category two included killers and rapists, category three included those who killed or inflicted bodily harm without the intention to kill, and category four included those who stole or damaged property" (Law and Reality 15).

The *gacaca* system, as used in post-genocide Rwanda, was established in 2001 to help alleviate the case overload that faced the court system. The hope of the *gacaca* trials was to allow for those that were charged with lesser crimes, those that participated in the genocide, but were not classified as leaders in the conflict, a chance to repent for the crimes that they had committed. The accused were to attend the trial, which is held



on a weekly basis, and they are to face those that accuse them of the crimes. In order for reconciliation, the accused must confess to the crimes that they committed and name those who were accomplices with them. Access to justice for the victims through this process has been difficult, because the burden of proof is laid on the victims. Many of those that suffered at the hands of violence or could provide testimony to support a fellow victim cannot because many of them were in hiding at the time of the crimes perpetrated. The inability to testify furthered the trauma against the women that were raped. They were forced to continue to suffer in silence, and their voices remained unheard in a judicial system which was expected to provide the opportunity for healing. These women become the 'missing bodies' in the society, and this creates another societal 'haunting'. "How does one tell a story about the figure of a woman who has been both very present and often hidden... relations, particularly when that figure embodies a trauma that forecloses memory" (Cho 5). Many Hutu, who could provide testimony, would not because of the implication of complacency that it provides against them and their families. This furthers the

silence and erases the women who suffered from the official record, and thus renders them socially invisible.

If it is determined that the accused has confessed of the crimes that they have committed and has adequately apologized to their victims, they are allowed to return to the society and are sentenced to provide community service to demonstrate their willingness to return to the society. However, if it is determined that they have not met the requirements set, they will be returned to prison to complete their sentence.

While some people speak highly of *gacaca*, other-often in hushed tones-tell of its more insidious impact on the community. Some trials end with the community largely satisfied; others leave survivors, prisoners, and their families frustrated. (Rettig 33).

In a 2009 report to the UN General Assembly from the Secretary General, there were lingering problems with Rwandan development because of residual genocidal hostilities.

8. Access to economic and social services by genocide survivors remains limited, as evidenced by the low school enrollment rate of the children of genocide survivors. Most of the survivors' families lack access to adequate housing and safe water, and suffer from discrimination in accessing bank credit as well as economic opportunities in general.

9. Moreover, the right to security of the genocide survivors is threatened and there is a lingering genocide ideology, as shown by the recent destruction of a banana plantation owned by genocide survivors in the district of Rusizi and attacks on genocide survivors who testified in court in the Northern Province of Rwanda. (UN).

In addition, the societal ostracism against the survivors adds another level of trauma to them; they must now live, grow, and raise families within a societal area of haunting. Within this space, women must negotiate a new sphere of living while still being haunted by the ghosts of the past. They have learned to support each other, to work collectively to promote change, and to better their own lives and the lives of their children. They do this, often while facing personal demons, such as attending the trials of those that killed their family members, stole their lands, raped them, impregnated them, and left them disfigured, or carrying the burden of disease (HIV/AIDS).

#### Rwandan Women's Resilience

"To survive after violence, societies...need support, stable collective identity, functioning infrastructure and economy, as well as hope for a better future generated by help in building it" (Drozdek 13). After the traumatic events of 1994, the society

and the country needed to rebuild. The government set about to ensure that the traumatic actions of the past did not occur again, and that women, who suffered greatly during this time, were protected. In order to accomplish this, the government of Rwanda has begun to make steps towards reconciliation between the groups, while bettering the lives of women. "...interventions of 'healing' applied in a post-war period should target both the collective, societal level and the personal level of the survivor" (Drozdek 13).

The Rwandan government has made strides in addressing the problems that led to the genocide, and the violent oppression of women during this time. However, even with the governmental changes, women are still subjected to male dominance. Some of the most important changes that occurred for the betterment of women were changes that the government made to the Rwandan constitution. The revised constitution, adopted in May, 2003, created governmental leadership positions that are to be held by women. "Title One of the constitution also establishes, as one of its 'fundamental principles', the equality of Rwandans. This respect for equality is to be ensured in part by granting women 'at least' 30 percent of

posts 'in all decision-making organs' (Powley 155). Women hold positions in the legislative and executive branches of the government and are responsible for shaping the future of Rwanda. Because of the constitutional changes, after the election in October 2003, women made up nearly 50% of Rwandan elected officials. Rwanda women in government are casting votes, and they are also writing legislation that will help women in what is still a male-dominated society.

In addition, with the deaths of so many Tutsi men, and the flight of Hutu men from the country to avoid prosecution, women constituted nearly 70% of the adults in Rwanda immediately following the genocide. Traditionally, as previously mentioned, women were not given access to land, their ancestral lands, nor their husband's property. Because of the societal demographics of Rwanda, land is one of the scarcest commodities. The ability to own land and to inherit land has become a key to the success of women. Following the genocide, many women were not allowed to return to their lands because others had claimed the land as their own. However, with the assistance of legislation and the hard work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women now are able to own lands, and inherit lands in certain

instances. The legislation was changed to allow women who were widowed, or their children to inherit the lands of their husband. Formal marriage in Rwanda is cost-prohibitive to most of the citizens, so many of the marriages are common-law marriages. Because of this, the women are not eligible to inherit the lands. In addition, for the children to inherit, there is no formula to divide the land if there is more than one child of the family. The government has demonstrated that changes are necessary to aid in the resiliency of women. Governmental actions demonstrate that "[R]epairing the social fabric and providing security do not necessarily heal a distorted mind, but they provide an important foundation for healing to take place" (Dyregrov et al 139).

While the government was busy restructuring in a manner to prevent atrocities from occurring again, and simultaneously rebuilding and reestablishing governmental organizations, women began working together in manners to help them through the turmoil through which they lived. NGOs came in to help women process the trauma mentally, emotionally, and physically. These organizations worked with the women to understand what their needs were and assessed the situation to

provide them the best possible care with the resources that were available. According to Zraly, more than 200 NGOs came to provide aid in Rwanda after the genocide, but “a very limited amount of resources that rushed into Rwanda after the genocide were contributed to address genocide-related sexual assault” (135). In addition to the international aid that came to the country, women began to empower themselves and to demonstrate their own resiliency in light of the traumatic events that had occurred. One such organization, AVEGA AGAHOZO (Association des Veuves de Genocide), has partnered with companies to sell items made by Rwandan women, with the proceeds going towards programs that help the women. AVEGA was established by widows who survived the genocide, but the founders recognized that there were many women and children that needed the same assistance they did. The organization “started creating projects to generate funds and create sustainable livelihoods” (What is Avega?).

In one instance, AVEGA AGAHOZO (AVEGA) has partnered with Macy’s department stores. Within Macy’s, they sell baskets that are made in Rwanda. Boldly written in the Macy’s advertisement, they write “in the aftermath of the genocide

Rwanda's women began to rebuild with strength and resilience" (Macys.com). In addition, Macy's describes their Path to Peace program as "Focused on trade, not aid, the Rwanda Path to Peace program puts the power of opportunity into the hands of the women of Rwanda, providing not only income but the chance to take an active role in shaping their future" (Macys.com). In the partnership with Macy's, over 2,500 women have had the opportunity to provide for their families. According to the Macy's Rwanda baskets website, they claim, "Amazingly, every group consists of both Hutu and Tutsi weavers, women from both sides of the 1994 conflict. These women sit with each other, talking and laughing, while their children play nearby. By weaving together, they are slowly but surely healing themselves and their society."



**FREE SHIPPING**  
with \$125 online purchase  
[get your promo code here](#)

★ **macy's** way to shop®

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**an ancient tradition**  
For years, the women of Rwanda nurtured a unique heritage of weaving. A centuries-old tradition, these exquisite handmade crafts were an essential thread in the fabric of a peaceful nation. In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda's women reclaimed this ancient art form.

**“in the aftermath of the genocide Rwanda's women began to rebuild with strength and resilience”**

**the path to peace**  
Determined to build a Rwanda that would be known as a place of peace, a small group of widows overcame their despair and together formed the AVEGA widows association. Drawing strength from their common history and artistic heritage, they worked with widows in the Butare province – masters of traditional Rwandan weaving – and began the Peace Basket project. Providing more than financial stability, the production and sale of these unique baskets has given the widows an active role in the healing and reconciliation of their country. Today, AVEGA has 25,000 members, and provides health, housing and financial guidance to over 100,000 adults and children.

Inspired by AVEGA's peace basket project, the Gahaya Links Association organized 500 weavers in the Gitarama region of Rwanda. Reinterpreting traditional Rwandan designs with bright, energetic colors, the Gahaya Links baskets celebrate Rwanda's future, while honoring its rich past. Now, in once-traumatized communities across the country, ~~weavers are creating their own future, weaving a new Rwanda where peace prevails.~~

**a bright future**  
The Rwanda Path to Peace project is a major step in the establishment of a viable, sustainable and environmentally friendly export business. And, perhaps even more importantly, it reconnects the people of Rwanda, especially the widows of the genocide, to the world community. Providing both economic stability and the chance to create an environment of peace and reconciliation, the sale of Path to Peace baskets will change the future of the tiny nation of Rwanda, and directly impact the lives of its 8 million citizens.

**“weaving a new Rwanda where peace prevails”**

**the baskets**  
Truly unique works of art, each basket is made entirely by hand and draws heavily on the culture, traditions and countryside of Rwanda, the Land of A Thousand Hills.

**“stories” ornaments**  
Inspired by a Rwandan tradition of using baskets to carry messages, this set of four ornaments is perfect for holding your warmest wishes for friends & family.  
**buy now ▶**

**“peace” basket**  
This pagoda-shaped basket – so unique to Rwanda that it is included on the national seal – has been woven by Rwandan villagers for centuries.  
**buy now ▶**

**“the proceeds from the sale of one woven item can support an entire family for a month”**

**“forward” fruit bowl**  
An open fruit bowl with a clean two-color arrowhead design that points the way to Rwanda's future.  
**buy now ▶**

**“joy” basket**  
This covered basket features an ancient Rwandan “wing” design, reinterpreted in energetic, uplifting color.  
**buy now ▶**

Figure 3: Macy’s Rwanda Path to Peace advertisement (Zraly 181). This advertisement, and the manner in which the information is portrayed on the Macy’s website demonstrates a ‘philanthropic consumerism’ in Western countries. This is best described by Talley and Casper, “But of course, she (Oprah) is not the only celebrity claiming to speak for Africa. Indeed the entire continent has become a trend, an accessory, a

destination, and a cause du jour for celebrities seeking good PR and a mission”.

The work that AVEGA has done to enable women to provide for themselves is empowering to them and to their future. While the implication of working within a global economic structure that unintentionally helped to create the societal conflict that led to the genocide is real, the women now have the ability to provide for their families. The consumers that are purchasing the baskets are from Western countries, yet Western influence and domination in the society led to the conflicts that still exist in the region. The intention of the grass-roots organizations is to help women in their time of need.

Not all of the grass-roots organizations in Rwanda have made large-scale economic connections with Western companies, but the goals are the same: to better lives. The Akilah Institute for Women provides women an opportunity for education and a chance for jobs within economically viable markets, like tourism, in Rwanda. The Rwanda Women’s Network works towards peace and reconciliation for the country. For women, they provide health care, education and legal rights awareness.

Towards resilience, women are also turning to their culture, and taking ownership of it. In an article from the *Utne Reader*, the author writes about women in Rwanda forming drumming groups. Jacqueline Umubyeyi remained traumatized after the genocide, and she decided to drum to help her through the pain. It has since become her mission, and that of the instructor, Odile Gakire Katese. The implication that women have taken an art form that is viewed as authoritarian and masculine provides women the opportunity to openly allow themselves to heal.

### Conclusion

Tutsi and moderate Hutu women, victims and survivors of the genocide, and many who were raped have endured lasting traumas that impact their daily personal lives. Women have endured the brutal crimes of witnessing their family members killed at the hands of their neighbors, repeatedly raped, had their home lands taken from them, yet they have endured. The lasting contributions of women in the society provides testament that collectively, women can organize, work with the systems that have diminished their importance through reforming not only governmental legislation, but challenging societal norms.

They have established legislation that benefits women, made land-reform laws to allow for women to provide for their families, and have participated as witnesses in the prosecution of those that committed crimes against them and their families.

Rwandan women currently reside in a space that provides a temporary reprieve from the crushing trauma of the past. They have developed grass-roots organizations to provide aid to those who have suffered similarly to them. Yet, these women are the missing bodies within the culture; they are infected with HIV/AIDS, have raised children that were conceived in rape and not accepted societally. The women are ostracized by the community for raising these children. "Out of the ruins of catastrophic loss and evacuated memory emerged...a symbol of a divided nation, and a ghost that haunts the diaspora" (Cho 125). Within this realm, some of the women provide labor to make objects that are sold in Western countries, satiating a collective philanthropic consumerism while feeding into global economic structures that helped create the very situations that, in part, led to the genocide. The transgenerational trauma impacts not only those that survived, but also future generations of Rwandans. The women who survived, through their struggles

in the wake of violence against them, are the face of genocidal violence, in equal measure haunted and hopeful.

She is a traumatized figure, but the radical potential of trauma is that it is force independent of the will of the subject of trauma. Her haunting is distributed to all those who have tried to repress her and to those who have been complicit with or unaware of the erasures. But this is a matter not just of uncovering something that was previously unseen but of how the haunting produces something new that was not there before (Cho 160).

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