

# Rwanda and the Politics of the Body

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## About the Author

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## Abstract

Since the Rwandan genocide of 1994, scholars and policy think-tanks have produced an impressive number of macro-level studies and theories to explain the seemingly inexplicable: how and why did this happen? Yet these studies, most often based on global level analyses, tend to simplify complex social relations at the local level which likewise contributed to the genocide. This article examines 'micro-level' testimonial evidence collected in human rights reports to shed light on one particularly under-theorised realm and approach, that of gender and the politics of the body. I suggest that the 1994 genocide was an extreme attempt not only to purge the 'Hutu nation' of the Tutsi, but also to actively engender a vision of the 'Hutu nation' in the minds of an otherwise diverse and fragmented local populace. Women's bodies, gender and sexuality became highly contested terrains for scripting this vision of an imagined nation in the years leading up to the genocide and throughout the 100 days of murder. In the post-genocide period, Rwandan women play a considerably different but no less critical role in re-imagining the new Rwanda.



## Introduction

There is a temptation, in writing about genocide, to tell a story of good and evil (LeMarchand 2000, 18).

It is the human body that serves as the ultimate tablet upon which the dictates of the state are inscribed (Taylor 1999, 146).

Since the Rwandan genocide of 1994, academics and policy think tanks have produced an impressive number of macro-level studies and theories<sup>1</sup> to explain the seemingly inexplicable: *how and why did this happen?* Up to 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu murdered in just three short months. Parallel to this literature, journalists and human rights groups have documented in meticulous detail the specifics of the genocide: who was involved, their plans and how they implemented these plans.<sup>2</sup> These literatures are less than theoretical, but they are rich in ‘micro-level’ empirical evidence. It is therefore surprising that a lacuna exists between the macro-level theoretical scholarship and the “details of the genocide as a series of acts of violence” (Uvin 2001a, p. 98).

Still fewer analyses examine the genocide in terms of a gendered, nation-building process<sup>3</sup> inscribed on the physical body<sup>4</sup>, despite the visceral role bodies play in any genocide narrative. As a result, certain acts remain under-theorized, such as why Hutu extremists raped and murdered women — persons historically conceptualized as ‘sexed’ and not ‘ethnicized’ in Rwandan nationalist discourses. Together, these gaps point to under-analyzed realms of genocidal violence in Rwanda — that of the body and the private sphere (the home, the family).

In the spirit of working papers, I strive to open debate on these gaps in the literature. I look outside the typical centres of politics and power, and within presumably non-political realms, such as the home and family. In tracing the interconnections between the public and private spheres, we might begin to understand the genocide as a strategic attempt to “link or articulate individual bodies with the body politic” (Nelson 1999, p.6). I suggest that Hutu extremism was inscribed so violently on the bodies of an imagined enemy in order to fuse an ‘imagined’ Hutu nation in the minds of an otherwise regionally and class-divided Hutu populace. Entering the realm of the familiar and personal, and likening it to the national, Hutu extremists sought to smash ambiguity of local identities, and create a unified, national collective identity. Because the private sphere became a central site of nation-building, a particularly useful starting point is to ask how nations have been scripted in the reproductive and sexual control of women’s bodies, violated and murdered in gender specific ways throughout the genocide. By starting here, we might begin to map some linkages between the personal and macro-political in Rwanda.

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<sup>1</sup> On international explanations see for example, (Barnett 2002; Jones 2001; Kuperman 2000; Melvern 2000; OHCA 1997; Uvin 1998) and on national explanations see for example, (Lemarchand 1995; Mamdani 2001; Newbury 1998; Newbury and Newbury 1997; Prunier 1997; Taylor 1999).

<sup>2</sup> See for example, (HRW and DesForges 1999; HRW 1996; AR and Rakiya 1995).

<sup>3</sup> The one exception I am aware of is (Taylor, 1999). Adam Jones (2002) contributes an important empirical study of the genocide, breaking down acts of violence on the basis of male and female sex. However, his article lacks a sustained historical analysis, often taking ‘sex’ or ‘gender’ out of the ethnic and class contexts. Likewise, Jones tends to reiterate the discursive separation of men and women, privileging men while failing to provide a sustained analysis of masculinities. Taylor on the other hand, provides a sophisticated gender analysis, but fails to incorporate acts of violence against men as gendered violence (although he does offer theories of masculinity). This paper focuses on the private realm and sexed body. Because women are considered non-political or private-sphere actors, I take a particular interest in how nationalist discourses are inscribed on their bodies.

<sup>4</sup> After reading Diane Nelson’s, *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quintessential Guatemala*, I began to think about the 1994 genocide and nation-building in post-1994 Rwanda from the perspective of body politics. Nelson’s text is a compelling exploration of binary discourses on nationalism in post-conflict Guatemala that center on the body. She likens the nation as a metaphor, but given the mass displacement, torture, rape and murder, the material body too is viewed as a *site of inscribing a vision of national unity on an otherwise ambiguous body politic* (1999). Her work thus is an inspiration to the subject of this working paper. I draw on feminist geography conceptualizations of the body as a metaphor of the nation, and the material body as a site of reproducing national identities (Yuval-Davis and Anthias; Domosh and Seagar 2001; Sharp 1997). I do not take a psycho-analytic approach, despite interesting insights.

The working paper unfolds in four parts. In the first, I draw from and expand upon Mahmood Mamdani's work to (2001) problematize and historicize the Rwandan state. I map the historical evolution extremist Hutu nationalist discourses, starting in the colonial period when one's biological 'race' determined citizenship.<sup>5</sup> Despite sharing the same culture, language and even class positions, the Hutu were rigidly differentiated from the Tutsi by colonialists. This difference was based on a combination of theology and race science and assigned by physical attributes of the body and mind: the shape the nose, height, beauty and intellect. Tutsi were described as an alien and superior 'race' that had conquered the Hutu in pre-colonial times. Mamdani argues that this later idea was institutionalized in the apparatus of the post-colonial state to justify the 'purging' and repression of Tutsi from the Hutu nation in the post-independence era. While Hutu extremists rejected the idea that the Tutsi were a superior race, there is evidence today that much of Hutu inferiority was internalized. I therefore explore how extremist Hutu nationalist imagining took place both within and outside of formal structures, to operate at the level of the physical body, inscribed in gendered and racial meanings.

Second, using descriptive materials available, I examine the radicalization of Hutu nationalism at the onset of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invasion of Rwanda in October 1990. The physical body was a site of cementing national imaginings — where women were controlled as sexual and cultural markers of national boundaries, and where dissidents' murdered bodies relayed that the single-party *Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement* (MRND) state perceived itself as the only legitimate protector of the Hutu nation. Hutu extremists demonized the Tutsi as invaders and pollutants to the Hutu body politic, in need of eradication. Meanwhile, the democratization of the country and internal opposition and regional tensions challenged the MRND's claims to be the rightful protector of the nation. Political contestation was once again played out on the body, where everyday Rwandans were forcibly 'liberated' (*kubohoza*) from the MRND to join the opposition. This internal dissension fuelled a growing need to make an apocalyptic strategic move to recapture the reigns of power, and the loyalty of everyday Rwandans.

Third, I analyze the strategy, patterns and types of violent acts employed during the genocide, drawing on the 'micro-level' empirical evidence provided in human rights accounts. Here is perhaps the most tragic but rich evidence of how power operates at the personal and political level of the body towards nationalist aspirations.

Fourth, I turn to the post-genocide period, and the counter-narrative of the nation touted by the Tutsi-dominated Government of National Unity. I briefly examine how discourse again inscribes men's and women's bodies as critical sites for reconstructing the future of the Rwandan nation. I finish the paper by problematizing the oppositional constructs reproduced by Hutu and Tutsi extremists, and in some academic literatures and medias in the post-colonial period, and consider the potential for thinking past these binary oppositions.

## I. Historicizing Rwandan 'Nations'

Even with the colonial power gone, we keep on defining every citizen as either a native or a settler! (Mamdani 2001b, 659).

All nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous...in the sense that they represent relations to political power and to the technologies of control (McClintock 1995, 352).

Perhaps in a country that has no seeming unity, that is so bitterly divided, it seems odd to speak of nationalism as a discursive mode driving violent, genocidal acts. Yet Rwandan nationalism is very much alive within competing, contradictory Hutu and Tutsi narratives regarding the origins of the two 'ethnicities', and more recently, over the origins/causes of the genocide. These competing sets of explanatory frameworks are productive fictions, with very real material costs.

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<sup>5</sup> Obviously, Rwandan history started long before the colonial period, as did the differentiation between Tutsi, Hutu and Twa. However, competing interpretations of difference focus on that of origins, where Hutu except the colonial explanation that Hutu and Tutsi are different races, and the Tutsi reject this. Moreover, the colonial period was when identities of Hutu and Tutsi became static, as opposed to fluid and changeable identities earlier on. Hence, I use this period as a starting point for discussion, recognizing some of its limitations in starting here rather than earlier.

Mahmood Mamdani (2001a, 2002) contends that the main difference between Hutu and Tutsi is first and foremost a political one rooted in the legacies of the colonial state. He makes a compelling argument that in Rwanda, politics have been racialized, and race politicized. The colonizer, having ‘found’ a sophisticated kingdom in Rwanda (first under German colonization in the 1890s and then Belgian in 1918) wherein Tutsi held high level rank in military and political life, drew on the Hamitic hypothesis<sup>6</sup> to explain socio-economic relations in the region. Later, the observations that the Tutsi were foreign-born and more like Caucasians than the inferior ‘native’ Hutu was reinforced by race sciences popular in the day. Instruments were used to measure skull sizes (supposedly measuring intelligence), height and bone structure. On this basis, the Belgian colonialists issued the first ‘ethnic’ identity cards in Rwanda in 1926, and distinctions based on ethnicity became rigid and static.

Belgian colonialists indirectly ruled Rwanda through the Tutsi, entrusted with the power of the state and military. The racialization of politics afforded Tutsi privileges associated with being of a more worthy biological race, such as the ability to escape hard labour paid to the state — a task reserved for Hutu and the minority Twa, the third ‘ethnic’ group in Rwanda whom the colonialists considered ‘wild’ and less evolved due to their small physical size and economic life of foraging in the forests.<sup>7</sup> In a word, the colonial period inscribed the body as a site of political identity and belonging to historical nations. These biases were likewise upheld by the hierarchical Catholic church, popular in Rwanda in the colonial period.

The mass popular movement towards independence beginning in the late 1950s challenged Tutsi privilege and colonial power. To consolidate the growing Hutu social movement towards ‘equality’, Hutu intellectuals reproduced colonial histories of the ‘alien’ Tutsi and ‘indigenous’ Hutu. They sought retributive policies to ensure Hutu access to the economic, political and social realm, and to check Tutsi access to resources. In essence, the Hutu social movement that culminated in independence in 1961, and consolidated with elections in 1963, was one that sought to eject both the colonialists and the Tutsi from a native Hutu nation.<sup>8</sup> The Catholic Church, in the meantime, had switched sides even before colonialists and were now fully supportive of the Hutu social movement.

Tutsi elite contested, and continue to contest, this view. They point to commonalities between Hutu and Tutsi, and argue any differences were socio-economic. Colonialists distorted traditional socio-economic relations between the two groups through race analysis. Thus, the central opposition between Hutu and Tutsi is grounded in a common pre-occupation with origins. These oppositional narratives were institutionalized in the post-colonial state, and continued to reproduce ‘racialized’ and politicized bodies.

Despite this contestation over history, it has been the legacy of the colonial state to institutionalize ethnic privilege. A historical timeline has been assembled below outlining key periods leading up to the 1994 genocide.

Rwanda Timeline*	
1918	Rwanda-Urundi is made a U.N. protectorate to be governed by Belgium. Indirectly ruled under Tutsi monarchy, the Tutsi are privileged.
1926	Belgians introduce ethnic identity cards.
1959	Hutu elite and masses rebel against Belgian and Tutsi elite; 150,000 Tutsi flee.
1961-62	Belgians withdraw. A Hutu revolution installs President Gregoire Kayibanda; 1000s of Tutsis are forced to flee.
1973	General Juvenal Habyarimana seizes power, pledging to restore order after more than a decade of Tutsi massacres and incursions by refugees.
1975	Habyarimana's political party, MRND, is formed and Northern Hutu from the President's home area are given preference in public service and military jobs. Exclusion of

<sup>6</sup> In the Old Testament of the Bible, Ham, son of Noah, was outcast after looking upon his father drunk and naked. As punishment, his children would be born slaves to their uncles, having black skin.

<sup>7</sup> Both Hutu and Tutsi held this view prior to colonialism: the Twa were greatly mistreated and subject to racial discrimination. They were also considered ‘untouchable’ and ‘impure’ — like diseases to the body of the kingdom.

<sup>8</sup> According to this view, the Tutsi had arrived from Ethiopia and conquered the Hutu and cast them into servitude long before the colonialists had arrived. Here the Hutu nation is imagined and claimed for the ‘native’, as the Hutu Manifesto calls for a “double liberation of Hutu from both ‘Hamites’ and ‘Bazungu’ (whites) colonization” (quoted in Mamdani 2001, 116), and positioned the Hutu elite as the protector of this nation.

	Southern Hutu and of the Tutsis continues throughout the '70s and '80s.
<b>1986</b>	In Uganda, after assisting Museveni's army in overthrowing the dictator Milton Obote, Rwandan exiles form the RPF, a Tutsi-dominated organization.
<b>1989</b>	Coffee prices collapse, causing severe economic hardship in Rwanda.
<b>1990</b>	RPF guerillas invade Rwanda from Uganda, displacing one in seven Northerners.
<b>1990/91</b>	Youth militias, the Interahamwe, are trained throughout Rwanda. Extremist rallies and propaganda occur with greater frequency throughout the country.
<b>1993</b>	After a renewed offensive, the RPF and Habyarimana reach an agreement. The Arusha Peace Agreements outline the conditions for transition to powersharing in Rwanda.
<b>April 1994</b>	President Habyarimana's plane is shot down, killing the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi and unleashing the genocide. UN peacekeeping troops withdraw.
<b>July 1994</b>	RPF liberate Kigali and end the genocide.

\* Assembled from PBS Frontline

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/rwanda/etc/cron.html>

Mamdani (2001a) suggests that the Rwandan state leads society, infusing racial hatreds in the world-views of everyday Rwandans. Boundaries between the state and society appear to be seamless, as though one constitutes the other symbolized by the omni-presence of post-colonial authoritarian chiefs/officials whose power are traceable and uncontested all the way up to the President. The Catholic Church was extremely sympathetic to Habyarimana, and many religious institutions were key supporters of extremists. With widespread propaganda, and in an insecure economic and conflict environment, poor rural peasants were given incentives – coercive and based on reward – to participate in the genocide. Pervading each Hutu's agency was a deep seeded fear of the MRND, and of some distant memory of Tutsi 'overlords,' kept afresh by Hutu extremists.

But if the state was so centralized and strong, what was the logic behind the genocide that killed unarmed civilians? Why were civilians forced to kill? Does awakening some historical memory of racism alone lead neighbour to kill neighbour? As Desforges (HRW and Desforges 1999, NP) argued, "shattering bonds between Hutu and Tutsi was not easy.... They lived next to one another, attended the same schools and churches, worked in the same offices, and drank in the same bars. A considerable number of Rwandans were of mixed parentage, the offspring of Hutu-Tutsi marriages." And yet within days of the onset of the 1994 genocide, literally thousands of bodies began to fill the streets, churches and to clog major rivers. Tens of thousands lay where they were slain, at roadblocks, in their homes and places of supposed refugee, sending visceral images to the public and opposition. Bodies filled the nation. And as bodies filled the nation, so too did Hutu extremists attempt to inscribe the nation on the body, a point I return to in a moment.

These puzzling events require we stand back and make sense of how power operates outside 'formal' political institutions in Rwanda, as elsewhere. To be sure, the one party Rwandan state was powerfully centralized, authoritarian and drew on customary and civil laws to secure obedience and privilege Northern Hutu. But how did power operate outside these formal laws and institutions, to discipline the everyday Rwandan who attempted to avoid a largely pernicious state, did not benefit directly from it, and often did not 'buy' into racial stereotypes propagated by it? (See Uvin 1998). For example, how did women – non-citizens under the law and subjects under customary laws – embrace and represent the envisioned Hutu nation? How would poor rural peasants – who largely gave to the state but who received little in return – seemingly conform to this agenda?

In contrast to typical descriptions of African politics, Lemarchand (1992) argued that the African state at large is better understood not as a set of institutions, laws and policies, but rather – following Timothy Mitchell – a set of 'disciplines.' Power is modal, operating in and throughout society and state by a variety of administrators, but also, the church, school, the military, communal defence councils and so on. Social roles are regulated, and one conforms to them in a panoptic sense. An elaborate network of incentives to conform and disincentives to disobey exist. As such, "the state should be examined not as an actual structure, but as a powerful, metaphysical effect of practices that make such a structure appear to exist" (Mitchell, quoted by Lemarchand 1992, 181).



One mode of 'discipline' is exercised through social roles and the rules, norms and regulations of behaviour, inscribed on the body. I agree with Anne McClintock that nations are more than just 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991), they are constitutive of social identities. Nations are...

...historical practices through which social difference is both invented and performed. Nationalism becomes, as a result, radically constitutive of people's identities through social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered....nations are contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimize people's access to resources of the nation-state (1995, 353).

Through repetition of symbols and traditions, monuments and ceremonial events, the national identity is inscribed in the minds of the populace, becoming "naturalized, its creation hidden so that it becomes an unquestioned facet of everyday of life" (Sharp 1997, 98). Moreover, gender identity is reproduced through performance, a set of repetitive acts (Butler 1999, 33). Sharp explains:

Like national identity, gendered identity takes on its apparently 'natural' presence through the repeated performance of gender norms. In the performance of identity in everyday life, the two identifications converge. The symbols of nationalism are not gender neutral but in enforcing a national norm, they implicitly construct gender norms (1997, 98).

The body is a central site of inscribing national and gendered identities. Because one's body is so personally familiar, in touch and in presentation, it is a critical site of power, with ascribed and value-laden identities shaping material consequences, including access to resources. So, for example, denying the female body access to the public sphere in some times/places, or slavery has been justified on the basis of superiority. Still, gender and race are mutually constitutive, they intersect and contradict, or they are mutually constitutive.

Independence for Rwandans was not only a struggle over legitimate claims to state but to citizenship, and therefore access to resources (Mamdani 2001a and 2002). The Hutu Social Revolution attempted to push out Tutsi from institutionalized positions of privilege. They did so with force, leading to mass exile of Tutsi elite in the 1950s and 1960s and the repression of 'moderate' Hutu opposition parties. Eventually, the one party state – first under the control of Southern and then Northern Hutu – claimed to be the only official protector of the Hutu Revolution.

This claim was scripted on the Rwandan body. Hutu and Tutsi peasants were required to work for the state and towards the good of development. At least one day a week, men had to provide free obligatory labour, the practice called *umuganda*. Many Rwandans received little to no benefit for this work. Rather, in a population dependant on agricultural subsistence, it increased the burden on families to subsist. An emerging elite in Rwanda, known as '*evolues*', escaped this labour.

Furthermore, Rwandans were required to attend 'animations' where they would repeat slogans in support of the state and nation. 'Animations' were large gatherings of local communities throughout the country, where songs and dance paid tribute to the national struggle and to the MRND as the defender of the Hutu Revolution. Here, enthusiastic Rwandans were rewarded for their vigour to repeat nationalist slogans, often identified for specific community tasks and resultantly political rewards. A more pernicious fate awaited those who were less enthusiastic, in particular for those who opposed the ideology of the national party.

The violence of Tutsi rebel incursions into Rwanda in the 1960s and 70s was soon associated as the intentions of all Tutsi. Kayibanda and the army then, targeted domestic Tutsi males — massacring tens of thousands. Tutsi cadavers were displayed to send a message to the Tutsi population within Rwanda and any opposition. This in turn drew sharp boundaries around political participation. All Rwandans continued to be required to carry ethnicity cards in the post-independence period, a continued basis for discrimination in access to the resources on the basis of ethnicity.

The Hutu Nation was 'produced' in social spaces, including in the private sphere and in the location of the female body, most highly valued by the ability to reproduce. Motherhood is a critical social identity and esteemed status for Rwandan women. At a symbolic level, a woman's fertility in Rwanda is culturally intertwined with her bodily fluids — her ability to bleed (menstruation), to secrete vaginal fluid, and to produce milk.<sup>9</sup> Christopher Taylor, in his work as a medical anthropologist in Rwanda, argues that Rwandan

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<sup>9</sup> Milk is also a symbol of prosperity and fertility — deriving significance from historical associations with wealth and status, but also ethnicity. Historically cattle were associated with Tutsi, and thus privilege (Taylor 1999). It is also associated with promise of marriage and children — cattle are often the preferred bride price.

women draw analogies between illness located in their bodies (such as infertility, inability to lactate and so on) and other domains in their social life such as their husband, in-laws or Hutu and Tutsi in their community and country. Using an example, he retells the story of a patient attempting to pass roadblocks erected to obstruct fleeing Tutsi in 1973, on the way to hospital to deliver a child prematurely. She claimed that her in-laws, sorcerers, had poisoned her. The roadblocks were part of this magic. “Her narrative moves from the body, to the household, to the extended family, to the nation in a seamless series of symbolically logical leaps, for all are posed in terms of bodily and social processes whose movements or obstruction are cause for concern” (119).

While Taylor explores how Rwandan rituals and symbols echo in the nation, he does not explore how politically these socially defined roles attempted to discipline women’s sexuality and behaviour for the good of the nation. Historically, women in Rwanda have on average nine children. Relegated to the domestic sphere, rural<sup>10</sup> Rwandan women are responsible for care and management of the home, children and local agriculture crops. Their interaction with the state or market is regulated and limited by her father or husband (Baines Forthcoming a). As such, women are the primary biological and cultural reproducers of the nation. This fact was not lost on nationalists.

The social construction of an ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ boundary is an impulse of any nation-building project (Radhakrishnan 2002). It is also a highly gendered process, where women tend to mark the ‘inner’ sanctum of a nation, what is natural and pure, what is to be protected from pollutants exterior to the nation, “As bearers of a country’s sacred values and – literally – of its children, women are often constructed as the authentic, inner country whose purity, sexuality, and traditional roles must be secured” (Domosh and Seagar 2001, 164). According to Hutu nationalists in the struggle for independence, both the colonialists and Tutsi constituted the ‘outer’ boundary to the Hutu nation. This marking played out on women’s bodies and sexual practices.

For instance, while many refer to the high level of ‘mixed’ marriages prior to the Rwandan genocide, only one percent of such marriages were unions of Hutu women and Tutsi men. In pre-colonial and early colonial days, when ethnic identities were less static, wealthier Hutu could marry Tutsi women as a means of social advancement. This practice was referred to as *kwihtura*, “to cease being Hutu, to become Tutsi” (Taylor 1999, 167-68). Children would then be considered Tutsi. After independence, this marital practice continued, although children were subsequently considered Hutu, not Tutsi.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Hutu women continued to protect the ‘racial purity’ of the Hutu nation, and were refused marriages to Tutsi men by their fathers.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon understands the colonial space as dichotomously ‘black’ (native) and ‘white’ (settler). The insipid power of colonialism was both material and psychological, where the native internalized inferiority. Thus, the native is envious of the settler, and wishes to possess what he possess — including ‘his’ women. Although he acknowledges how power operates in gendered terms, Fanon was primarily speaking about men when he wrote: “when my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.” As McClintock observes, “For Fanon, both colonizer and colonized are unthinkably male, and the Manichean agon of decolonisation is waged over the territoriality of female, domestic space.” (1995, 354).

To draw a parallel, the Tutsi woman was constructed as more beautiful than the Hutu woman in colonial discourse. She was thus something to be coveted and desired.<sup>12</sup> We shall see in the following sections how this notion of reaching for the settler’s wife – for the Tutsi wives of the former elite associated with colonialists – played out powerfully during the conflict and genocide, for it was a central site of smashing ambiguity toward the idea of a racially pure Hutu nation.

Finally, the state, community and family were highly dependent upon women to carry out free labour, and to reproduce the population. Social control was maintained by regulating sexuality, in addition to denial of basic citizenship rights — such as land ownership. To control women’s economic and agricultural surplus, varying modes of discipline operate. Villia Jeffremovas (1991) identifies one pervasive mode as “the language of public morality” regarding women’s sexuality. Women could participate in the public sphere, but only so long as they did not challenge or jeopardize their role as mothers. Thus ‘virtuous’ wives were given room in the public sphere to participate but when their participation threatened men or contradicted concepts of

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<sup>10</sup> Over 90 percent of the Rwandan population live in rural areas, and are dependant on subsistence agriculture.

<sup>11</sup> Presumably, colonial constructions of beauty continued into this era (Malkki 1995, 82-87). Marriage to Tutsi women is still considered a status symbol, affirming Hutu masculinity. Even hard-line Hutu were known to have Tutsi mistresses.

<sup>12</sup> On a Rwandan listserv, a number of respondents emotively argued that Tutsi women were ‘more beautiful’ than their Hutu sisters. Other explained that Hutu men wanted Tutsi women because it was a social sign that they “had arrived”. These views indicate that colonial ideas continue to persist today in the minds of some Rwandans (Rwanda-L September 2002).

atavistic women, they were often forced out by being labelled 'loose.'<sup>13</sup> Rules of sexuality were reinforced by the Catholic Church, to which the majority of Rwandans subscribed. Family planning and abortion were both illegal.

The construction of the post-colonial Hutu nation dialogically competes with that of the Tutsi nation. As a result, for either radical Hutu or Tutsi, "no other political reality was more definitive than that of the other" (Mamdani 2001a, 76). These imaginings centre on the question of origins and lead to divergent interpretations of who has access to resources and claims to citizenship within the nation. They are scripted on the body, and as will be demonstrated through an analysis of the conflict and genocide, this scripting is a process both violent and gendered, entering into the most personal realm when the power of Hutu extremists was most threatened by loss of power to both the external other and internal opposition.

## II. Radicalization of Hutu Nationalism, mid-1980s-April 1994

Women are not equal to the nation but symbolic of it (Sharp 1994, 99).

My Rwanda, land that gave me birth...Brothers all, sons of this Rwanda ours, Come, rise up all of you, Let us Cherish her in peace and in truth, In freedom and in harmony! (Rwandan National Anthem 1962).

Factors leading up to the Rwandan genocide in 1994 is by now well known and documented, if contested. These include the onset of the conflict with the RPF invasion in October 1990, the economic recession and hardship of Structural Adjustment Programmes, mass displacement because of the war and unemployment, the radicalization of Hutu Power politics in response to the perceived threats by the RPF (and as negotiated in the 1993 Arusha Agreements), pluralization of opposition parties under the process of democratic liberalization and finally, international failure to intervene effectively to stop the genocide. I recognize that these factors all play critical and coincidental roles, but seek to understand how power operated outside of these structural factors, at the level of social relations and roles; that is, the 'modal' level, the level of the body and personal and in the realm of the private sphere.

The economic downturn had devastating impacts on young boys and men who comprised at least 30 percent of the population.<sup>14</sup> This situation was compounded by the mass internal displacement of Rwandans during the conflict — 1 out of 7 fled advancing RPF forces. As a result, gender relations among rural youth were disrupted:

Youths faced a situation where many (perhaps most) had no land, no jobs, little education, and no hope for the future. It was increasingly difficult for young men to acquire the wherewithal to get married; hence, the path to social adulthood was blocked since the minimum legal requirement for marriage was that a young man have a house where he and his bride could live (Newbury and Newbury, 1999, 302).

By 1993, Hutu extremists – largely Northern elite Hutu, disgruntled politicians and military officers – had recruited between 30-50,000 displaced and unemployed boys and young men to join the *Interahamwe*, 'those who work/attack together', the youth wing of the dominant political party which later formed the basis of the militias that carried out the genocide. Hutu Power warned Hutu men that their land would be confiscated by returning refugees under the Arusha Peace Accords, and urged them to take up arms to protect their indigenous claim to Rwandan land.<sup>15</sup>

While generally Tutsi men were blamed for loss of employment, educated, single women with respectable employment increasingly became the target for gender specific attacks, particularly in Kigali where Tutsi women were accused of 'tricking' employers into hiring them (see Taylor 1999, 161-63). Policing a different kind of boundary, codes of morality regarding sexual practices were evoked. Single urban Tutsi women were incarcerated for looking 'too stylish' (Western) or having European boyfriends, who were considered to be sexually perverse. The Rwandan Catholic Church closely aligned with Habyarimana, helped

<sup>13</sup> In contrast, sexual deviance would be encouraged among Hutu men leading up to and during the genocide as a way of reaffirming masculinity, superiority and control over the seeds of the imagined alien threat.

<sup>14</sup> DesForges (1999, 1:pp) estimates that at the onset of the Rwandan genocide, 60 percent of the population were under the age of 20.

<sup>15</sup> As Mamdani argues, those Hutu who participated in the genocide did so because they believed they were being threatened by an external 'other', reproducing the logic of colonial state.

police women's bodies by banning contraceptives and becoming increasingly vitriolic on morality and sexual behaviour in this largely Catholic country. By attacking women in this way, extremists reinforced boundaries of the Hutu nation, reproductive and cultural. "Because for male nationalists, women serve as the visible markers of national homogeneity, they become subjected to especially vigilant and violent discipline. Hence the intense emotive politics of dress" (McClintock 1995, 365).

In the years leading up to the genocide, the concept of 'Hutu Power' underlying extremist doctrines became a more frequent theme of public rallies and animation groups. Inflammatory speeches appealed to Hutu to vigilantly guard the nation from infectious *Inyenzi* or cockroaches, a term used to describe Tutsi rebels who attacked at night. Here the body of the nation was feminized, and in need of protection:

Women are seen as the 'mothers of the country' and therefore their sexuality is heavily monitored and controlled by the state to preserve the 'purity' of the nation. Governments that are attempting to unite a country against a former colonial ruler often use women to represent the 'true' and 'authentic' nation, untouched by imperial powers, and therefore their sexuality is controlled in order to secure national 'purity'. In these cases, no form of 'deviant' sexuality for women is tolerated (Domosh and Seager 2001, 172).

Hutu women were called upon to protect the home, and the home became a central site of contestation over the nation. Like the National anthem indicates, the nation was feminine, and its citizens male: "My Rwanda, land that gave me birth...Brothers all, sons of this Rwanda ours, Come, rise up all of you, Let us Cherish her." (Rwandan National Anthem 1962). The economic crisis and internal regional challenges to the power of the Northern elite<sup>16</sup>, led by the *Akazu*, spurred on anti-Tutsi discourse as a means of diverting attention from class and geographic tensions in the country. Hutu were required to unite to protect the nation from foreign invaders, and internal enemies: male Hutu dissidents and their female Tutsi conspirators.

The *Hutu Power Ten Commandments*, widely distributed before the genocide, spoke primarily to Hutu men to protect the boundaries of home and nation. Central to its protection was regulation of men's sexual practices, and casting Tutsi women as sexual predators.

1. Tutsi uses two means against Hutu: money and Tutsi women.
2. Tutsi sold their wives and daughters to the Hutu authorities. Tutsis tried to marry their wives to Hutu elite in order to have spies in the inner circle.
3. Hutus must know that the Tutsi wife wherever she may be is serving the Tutsi ethnic group. In consequence, any Hutu who does the following is a traitor: a) Acquires a Tutsi wife; b) Acquires a Tutsi concubine; c) Acquires a Tutsi secretary protégé.
4. No military man (i.e., FAR soldier) may marry a Tutsi woman. (Kangura, No. 6 quotes in Prunier 1997)

Over the same period, hate literature played on moral codes of sexual conduct. The extremist magazine *Kangura* (Wake Up!) ridiculed UN peacekeepers, ironically perceived to be sympathetic to the RPF, for their gullibility to Tutsi women. For example, General Dallaire was depicted with two Tutsi women and the caption, "Tutsi women, the reason why whites took the side of the FPR" and peacekeepers were portrayed as engaging in sexually taboo acts with Tutsi women (Taylor 1999, 172-73). Agathe Uwilingiyimana, Vice-President of the Transitional government, was shown in bed with a senior political figure, suggesting she slept her way to the top. In this instance, Hutu male insecurity is revealed: "Uwiringiyimana threatened the regime as an anti-ethnicist, a southerner, and as a highly educated and articulate person, but the fact that she was also a woman potentiated all these factors" (Taylor 1999, 164).

With the onset of the conflict, the state had named and identified local Tutsi as the enemy of the Hutu nation, drawing on racial stereotypes that Tutsi were intelligent and tricky, thus they would innately betray the Hutu. Tens of thousands of men, mainly Tutsi, were rounded up and placed in prisons, suspected of treason.<sup>17</sup> Others were massacred in Northern Rwanda, perhaps to prepare Hutu militias for the planned genocide to come. Repeatedly, the biological difference of the Tutsi was referred to, despite the ambiguity of Hutu-Tutsi differences. As Diane Nelson (1995) argues poetically in her analysis of body politics:

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<sup>16</sup> A central network in the Northern elite was the *Akazu*, or little house, referring to the economic clique surrounding Habyarimana's wife, Agathe.

<sup>17</sup> The assumption is that, as men, they posed the greatest threat to the state, given men are primarily political and public sphere actors.

The tendency to lean on the material body – the desire to find an absolute, ‘natural’ difference...or sameness – seems born of ...an attempt to counter the ambivalence in the very formation of the nation. But bodies cannot prove to be such absolutes, and this may be one reason that states attempt to violently inscribe one singular meaning on them through torture, wounding, death. The splattered body – as the photographed torture victim, and as the cadaver left by the counter-insurgency on the side of the road – is deployed to ground these identifications (p.242).

The inner and outer sanctum sharply separated those who belonged to the nation from those who threatened it. Here, Hutu opposition and dissenters were almost constructed as far more insidious than the local Tutsi. Simon Bikindi, Rwanda’s most popular pop singer, composed a song that would play repetitiously throughout the genocide: “I hate these Hutu, these de-Hutuized Hutus, who have renounced their identity” (quotes in McNeil 2002, NP). In other words, Hutu who did not ascribe in an absolute sense to Hutu Power were enemies of the nation, and worthy targets of hate and violence.

In some communes, Hutu were forcibly recruited into evolving right wing parties. The practice of *kubohoza* included beatings, robbery and even murder to coerce people to join political parties that would go on to play an active role in the genocide. *Kubohoza* is used ironically in Kinyarwanda, it means to ‘liberate’. In the years proceeding the genocide, local authorities unsympathetic to Hutu Power ideas were forcibly replaced by strong-armed opponents in some communes (Wagner 1998).<sup>18</sup> Quietly and violently, genocide networks were being established all over the country.

### III. The Genocide, April-July 1994

In contrast to the totalizing claims of proponents of the Hutu or Tutsi nation, the Rwandan populace enters the national imagination incomplete. They inter-marry. They live side by side. They are friends and lovers. They are both poor. They are both professionals. They are both subjects of a post-colonial, centralized state.

Knowing this, and witnessing both endo- and exo-genous challenges to their power, the *Akazu* and Hutu militants became extremely vulnerable indeed by late 1993. The successive murders of the first Hutu Burundian Prime Minister Melchior Ndadaye in 1993<sup>19</sup> and then President Habyarimana in 1994 provided the catalyst to and perceived rationale for unfolding the genocidal plan and finally uniting the country around a single Hutu national identity. To do so, Hutu extremists battled it out in the territory of the domestic space (the home, the church) and personal relations (wives, husbands, children, neighbours, parishioners, patients and so on).

Therefore, the genocide was not only political as Mamdani suggests, but it was also intensely personal. It required the spilling of blood by every ‘pure’ Hutu. As Mamdani himself describes of a Hutu man reluctant to participate in the killings, “after killing [his Tutsi] wife, he became a convert” (2001, 4).

In the thousands of pages of documentation on the genocide, its strategy, patterns, perpetrators and victims, the intention to fuse the national body politic is found. For example, the strategy of setting up thousands of roadblocks across the country seemed redundant; some were only a few hundred meters apart. From a military-strategic perspective, this made little sense. Instead of concentrating military forces or recruiting men to combat the rapidly advancing RPF, ‘man-power’ was dispersed throughout the country to guard the infamous road blocks used to both catch and murder fleeing Tutsi or known members of the Hutu opposition.

Every highway road and footpath was blocked. Ethnicity cards were used to identify Tutsi for massacre. When such cards were ‘lost’, judgements were often made by one’s physical attributes (Taylor 1999, 131). Reports document that after years of inter-marriage, many Hutu were killed for their Tutsi features and conversely, some Tutsi were spared because they didn’t *look* Tutsi (HRW and DesForges 1999; AR and Rakiya 1995).

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<sup>18</sup> A distinct regional pattern emerged: the practice of replacing political officials was most prevalent in the South, where persons were far more ambivalent towards Hutu Power ideals. In the north, murder and disappearance of Tutsi was embraced more enthusiastically.

<sup>19</sup> The first democratically elected Hutu President in Burundi, Ndadaye, was murdered by extremist element of the Tutsi military. Under Tutsi authoritarian control, the Hutu majority has been subjected to violent oppression since independence. Sharing the same language and other attributes of Rwandans, Hutu extremists sometimes referred to Burundi as their accursed ‘Siamese Brother’, again in reference to the metaphor of the nation as a body.

This system of blockage insured the systematic regulation of people fleeing, including ordinary Hutu seeking to escape the bloodshed. Yet it also became areas where 'rites of passage' of Hutu into the imagined Hutu nation took place. Local men were forced to 'man' the roadblocks and kill to prove their loyalty. Other Hutu fleeing the violence were forced to first kill Tutsi before they were allowed to pass through. Taylor (1999, 132) argues this macabre act was a means of passing guilt from executioners to the populace as a whole. To re-imagine the nation, the limits and foundations of the old order – including moral codes of sexuality – were violently transgressed.<sup>20</sup>

The genocide was a blatant exercise to de-humanize the Tutsi and humiliate them precisely because they were perceived to be superior to Hutu. Tutsi bodies were left exposed to the sun. To leave a body uncovered in Rwanda goes against tradition, and is a deep insult. Horrified neighbours who attempted to cover others were sometimes murdered themselves for this act. Many accounts of the genocide retell with horror of dogs eating the corpses of the dead — again, a symbolically powerful message to the living. Women and men were encouraged to loot the possessions of the dead, including picking through the clothing on corpses. Bodies were dumped into latrines, an obvious message that the Tutsi and Hutu traitors were excrement.

The bodies of the naked and dead reveal the psychosis of Fanon's envious 'native' and internalized inferiority. As Christopher Taylor concludes, colonialism "is in the hearts and minds of every ethnic extremist, every Tutsi and Hutu and Twa, who imagines him or herself superior or who feels the need through the force of arms to overcome an imagined inferiority" (1999, 95). The imaging of a Hutu nation *was* evoked and deepened with each act of violence. Fanon refers to the colonization of the mind and internalization of inferiority that persists long after colonial powers have physically left. Acts throughout the genocide expose this internalization of Hutu inferiority, and internal struggle against it.<sup>21</sup>

Yet the violent acts of those 100 days of horror cannot be explained in relation to colonial legacies and elite manipulation of racist national ideas alone. Documentation also points to a gendered pattern to the violence. Tutsi men and boys, including male infants, were among the first to be killed along with Hutu opponents. The rationale was that men were most likely to be aligned with the RPF. Tutsi boys, even newborn babies, represented the future enemy. As Desforges brusquely wrote, "This explanation, voiced uniformly throughout the country, carried the idea of 'self-defence' to its logically absurd and genocidal end" (HRW and Desforges 1999, 297).

Women and girls were 'spared' until the final stages of the genocide, initially on the grounds that they posed no threat. "Sex has no ethnicity", one killer told a Tutsi woman in Gikongoro (quoted in HRW and Des Forges 1999, 296). But by mid-May, after most men and boys had been killed, national organizers of the genocide argued it was necessary to kill women and girls too, based on the idea that Tutsi women reproduced the alien other. As Mamdani writes, "killings came to be referred to as *umuganda* (communal work), chopping up men as 'bush clearing' and slaughtering women and children as 'pulling out the roots of the bad weeds'" (2001a, 194).

Before death, it is estimated that most women were raped, and higher-level officials gave orders to rape (see Landesman 2002). Women were raped individually and in collective gang rapes. This act may have been a form of 'initiation' of Hutu men to the nation, but it was also arguably an insidious means of extending humiliation to the entire family related to the woman, and ensuring that reproduction was terminated. In Rwanda, as elsewhere, rape carries an enormous social stigma, and women are often rejected from their families after rape. Rapes were intended to prolong suffering, and destroy the root of the Tutsi family: "rape sets in motion continuous suffering and extreme humiliation that affects not just the individual victim but everyone around them" (Robert Jay Liften quoted in Landesman 2002, NP). In repeated accounts and testimonies, women expressed deep perplexity over the transgression of motherhood: "try to imagine a mother raped by young boys" (See Coomaraswamy 2002, NP).

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<sup>20</sup> Where resistance to the genocide was strongest, as in Butare, a largely mixed prefecture with a high percentage of Tutsi, youth militias were sent in to 'animate' the local population. In the case of Butare, the prefecture Jean-Baptiste Habyalimana vocally opposed orders to kill and tried to calm the population. Habyalimana and his family were killed. Some communes where Hutu and Tutsi fought off attackers together eventually broke down under threat and enticement of militias to join the attack. These instances of the local population resisting defy the claim that all Hutu were deeply ingrained with a racial hatred towards the Tutsi, a subject we will return to later.

<sup>21</sup> Burundian refugees participated in great numbers in the genocide in South of the country. Most had fled in 1988 after the massacre of Hutu by the Tutsi dominated paramilitary, and again in 1993 after the murder of Ndayaye. They are reported to have been the most vicious of torturers, cutting Achilles heels and inflicting extreme and cruel, slow deaths. This might provide some evidence to the claim that the greater the internalization of inferiority and resentment of the Tutsi, the more callous the violence.

Stigmatized and stripped of opportunity for motherhood, many survivors described their life as 'a living death.' For too many, infection with HIV due to rape will in fact lead to a slow death. Hutu extremists reportedly intentionally forced carriers of HIV to rape. In this way, HIV becomes a form of "biological warfare" to annihilate "the procreators" and ensure "the killing continues and endures" past generations (Charles Strozier in Landesman 2002, NP).

While rape was both a political strategic tool to torture, demoralize and humiliate the 'enemy', it also reflected a complex set of gender relations engendered in the identity of some Hutu men, both privileged and poor, based on colonial racism.<sup>22</sup> "[S]tereotypes...portrayed Tutsi women as being arrogant and looking down on Hutu men whom they considered ugly and inferior" (HRW 1996). Rape was used to remind Tutsi women of their proper place, in subservience to Hutu men. Propaganda continued to feed the idea that Tutsi women thought themselves beautiful and better than Hutu men (AR and Rakiya 1996, 410, 439). Before, during and after rape, militias repeatedly referred to the arrogance of Tutsi women with disdain. Recounting the words of her rapist, one survivor said that: "If there were peace, you would never accept me", and another recalled his words of "You Tutsi think you are too good for us" (quoted HRW 1996, 18, see also pp. 39-65).

The complexity of male hierarchical relations in Rwanda then, manifest perversely in this strategy of mass rape. Men in the lowest ranks were often forcibly compelled to rape Tutsi women. Women who were gang raped were often 'given' to men "unwashed and dressed in rags". In the context of Rwandan social relations, this "was intended as a humiliation" to Tutsi women (AR 1995, 422), but also reflected a belittling of men by men.

Women were often raped in public places<sup>23</sup>, or made to march naked through public places. Rape victims were mutilated, often with spikes inserted into their vagina, at times fully impaling the victim and causing death. Such gender-based forms of torture, including rape, inscribed 'Hutu-ness' and reaffirmed Tutsi difference: "...Rape in warfare does not simply constitute attacks on already formed nations and women/men...[The] productive power of rape is that it forms and reinforces national and gendered identity. While wartime rapes on one level serve to destroy the nation, at another level, they simultaneously inscribe the nation they aim to erase" (Hansen 2001, 60). This productive power of rape and violence is revealed in the testimonies of many rural Rwandans, who stated that before the genocide, they did not even *know* that they were either Hutu or Tutsi. The genocide erased this ambiguity.

A perplexing side of the genocide was that a number of Hutu militiamen had wives or mistresses that were Tutsi, and protected them throughout the genocide. By May, all mixed marriages were decreed to produce "Tutsi children", regardless of Hutu fathers and therefore Hutu men were called upon to kill their wives and children, and in some cases, they did so to protect their own lives. Yet Hutu militia continued to 'take' Tutsi 'wives'<sup>24</sup> up until and past this point. Documentation also points to a fascination with the female Tutsi body, and reveal that biologically, many believed Tutsi were 'different'. Thus, remarks about the 'taste' of Tutsi and acts to 'see the inside' of Tutsi are recorded (Landesman 2002, NP).

There are numerous accounts of Hutu men offering 'protection' to Tutsi women in exchange for 'marriage', or rape. At times this was with viciousness, "You Tutsi women, you have no respect for Hutu men. So now, choose between death and marriage to a Hutu *Interahamwe*" (quoted in AR 1995, 415). In other instances, it was a sadistic sense of peer pressure to enforce norms of heterosexuality and masculinity: "...the old woman continued to pester her son to take me. She kept saying that I was the only Tutsi woman with a man without being turned into a wife. The old lady, her friends, his age-mates who had already abducted Tutsi women, began to taunt him publicly about being impotent" (quoted in AR 1995, 416).

Finally, there were also instances where men 'took wives' but were seemingly sincere in their desire to protect them. After the law was passed that each Hutu man kill Tutsi 'wives', many men expressed regret that they "had no choice" but to hand 'their' women over to be killed. The selectivity and ambivalence of Hutu men towards Tutsi women riddle the seemingly clear ethnic 'othering' that on the surface characterized the genocide. Yet it reveals the politics of desire. Transgressions of sexual and national boundaries are power-laden realms. Through such transgressions – that is, when a Hutu man covets a Tutsi woman – "bodies come to matter..." and is at the intersection of power and desire that these bodies are "raced, gendered and sexualized" (Nelson 220). In the private sphere, male internalization of Tutsi beauty and unavailability fed a desire to possess and control Tutsi women. Double-edged, the same beauty of Tutsi women posed a threat to the Hutu nation.

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<sup>22</sup> The total number of women raped is unknown, although estimates vary between 250,000-500,000 (HRW 1996, 24).

<sup>23</sup> Although rape in 'private' spaces of the home was equally symbolic of the invasion of the personal realm, thought to be outside politics.

<sup>24</sup> The term wife and marriage are used in Rwandan testimonies in reference to situations of forced marriage, rape and sexual slavery.

By the end of a three-month period, 800,000 Rwandans were dead and an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 had been raped. Their bodies clogged the rivers flowing North — symbolically dumped into major rivers to send Tutsi ‘Hamites’ back to where they were thought to have originated, Ethiopia. The RPF’s final offensive forced Hutu militias to flee and they in turn forced up to 2 million Hutu to flee with them, their bodies to act as a human shield against anticipated retaliation. In this unprecedented movement of people, Hutu extremists sought to deprive the RPF of a nation; “Even if the RPF has won a military victory, it will not have the power. It has only bullets, we have the population” (Hutu Army Chief of Staff, quoted in Martin 1998, 159).

## IV. After Genocide: The Government of National Unity

The Rwandese speak one language, have one culture, it’s a homogenous society....so all we need here is just responsible leadership and things are going to change (Aloysie Inyumba Minister for Unity and Reconciliation in UNHCR 2000).

In the shadows of the 1994 genocide, the new, RPF controlled, Government of National Unity (GNU) strives to re-imagine the Rwandan nation. To foster unity and move beyond racial and ethnic ‘fictions’ of the past, the GNU has destroyed all ethnic identity cards and labels of Hutu and Tutsi and forbidden from public discourse. Radical new social, economic and political policies are being pursued. For instance, a National Unity and Reconciliation ministry has been created, a traditional and legal justice system is slowly evolving, solidarity camps have been created and an ambitious effort to liberalize the economy and decentralize power to the grass-roots level are underway. Animation continues under the GNU, preaching economic independence and national unity. History is being re-written: the root of the problem between ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ was always colonialism. Hutu and Tutsi are the same people. They are both Rwandans. They are both of the same body, the Rwandan nation. In theory, that is.

RPF nationalist aspirations, like those of the Hutu Power movement before it, are also gendered. Curiously, the GNU national narrative relies on both an ‘atavistic’ and ‘modernized’ construction of women. The remainder of this paper will analyze these opposing constructions for what they tell us about the RPF’s efforts to belie ethnic difference, while simultaneously reproducing Tutsi elite privilege and control over the reigns of power.

### On Atavistic Women

Rural Hutu and Tutsi women have a particular role to play in symbolizing ‘hope’ for a united Rwanda, a representation found in both national and international narratives (See Baines Forthcoming a & b). For example, a story circulates around donor circles in Rwanda, and also appears at the end of Philip Gourevitch’s journalistic account of the genocide and aftermath, that links women and girls in a particular way to prospects for peace, based on their traditional gender roles.

In 1997, Hutu militias woke a small group of teenage girls in a North Western boarding school in the middle of the night. Asked to separate themselves into Hutu and Tutsi, the girls refused and were subsequently all murdered. Gourevitch, and others I met in Rwanda, rested his hope for the future of Rwanda on these brave girls who “could have chosen to live, but instead chose to call themselves Rwandans” (1998, 353).

Likewise, many donors and international organizations often proudly point to the capacity of women to seemingly move beyond ethnic or racial hatreds, to work together in fields and cooperate in public forums. Here, conceptualizations of women as mothers, daughters and wives help move beyond the ethnic question in Rwanda, and promise hope for Rwanda. “Whereas in the past, peace talks could rarely move past the ethnic divide, a focus on men and women could be a starting point for moving forward” (Barten in WCRWC 2001, 5).

Female survivors of the genocide in particular receive a great deal of sympathetic attention, and their efforts have resulted in financial and moral support from the international community. No less than three large-scale international initiatives with Rwandan women have been created in post-genocide Rwanda.<sup>25</sup> These

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<sup>25</sup> These are UN Refugee Agency’s The Rwandan Women’s Initiative (1996), the UNDP’s Women’s Trust Fund (1996) and the US Agency for International Development’s Women in Transition initiative (1997). See WCRWC 2000 and Baines forthcoming a.



initiatives seek to empower rural women and support government initiatives to promote gender equality in post-genocide Rwanda. The sexed body is a powerful political symbol of the imagined future nation.

On closer examination, however, such women-focused initiatives and images tend to distort power dynamics based on ethnicity, geography and class in Rwanda today. The majority of international, national and civil society led women's empowerment programmes focus on gender discrimination, rooted in culture, as the main source of tension facing Rwandan women — as evidenced in the following statement by a GNU official:

The Rwandese social structure is largely patriarchal. Culture promotes gender imbalances and gender discrimination. The position of women is that of subordination to men. Customary laws based on cultural norms and values limit women's rights and status. Culture gives men leadership and management roles at all levels. Women's roles are restricted to reproductive work and domestic management (Republic of Rwanda 1999, 2).

Here, 'gender' is elided with the category of women and discursively separated from ethnic, class or geographic identities and sources of discrimination. Yet as McClintock has illustrated, these categories "do not exist in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they simply be yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other" (1995, 5).

Situating gender discourses of the RPF in the context of nationalist discourse, we discover that ethnicity, class and geography do matter in the post-genocide period, despite official discourse otherwise. New social categories, framed in reference to the genocide, produce the only politically correct categories to guide state policy or programmes. These categories include: *survivors* or *rescapés* (Tutsi survivor of genocide); old-caseload returnees or *59ers* (Tutsi returnees since the 1959 independence movement); and, new-caseload returnees (Hutu returnees from exile post-1996).

Survivors are defined exclusively as Tutsi, based on the logic that the genocide was not aimed at all Hutu, only those Hutu who opposed the genocide. As Mamdani argues, "[t]he flip side of this assumption is that every living Hutu was either an active participant or passive onlooker in the genocide. Morally, if not legally, both are culpable. The dilemma is that to be a Hutu in contemporary Rwanda is presumed a perpetrator" (Mamdani 2001a, 266).<sup>26</sup>

The bodies of mainly male Hutu prisoners are a visceral reminder to all Hutu men to comply with the ideals of the new regime and avoid any association with guilt. Overcrowded prisons are locations of sick bodies, largely held without being informed of the charges against them, nor access to legal council. In many prisons, lack of space means literally standing room only. Dressed in pink uniforms, their guilt is marked in dress. From time to time, prisoners are released to do communal work. There are relatively few guards or safeguards against their escape. But chances of a prisoner running are slim; they are marked as perpetrators, and there are few options as to where one could go. Truckloads of prisoners pass through communities, reminding Hutu of the threat of association with the genocide, and Tutsi that the RPF are there to protect them.

In contrast, women are associated with relative innocence — at least in official discourses. Memory, for example, is gendered. Today, memorials to the victims of the genocide riddle the country. In churches, tombs and fields are the remains of those murdered: tens of thousands of skeletons neatly stacked inside underground chambers, the decomposed remains of bodies lay where they fell at sites of massacres. While victims are generally not individualized, in a church in Kigali-Rurale, two victims are given special treatment and buried together in a coffin at the church's centre. The bones of tens of thousands are entombed outside the church. The corpses in the coffin are of a mother and her child, found in a pit latrine after the RPF won the war. The woman had been raped with a stake, but was found with her arms still tightly wrapped around her baby. The mother and her child are symbolic of innocence and good. These graphic memories also tell a story of guilt and innocence in Rwanda: the guilt of all male Hutu and of the international community, and the innocence of the RPF, liberators of Rwanda, and of most women.<sup>27</sup>

Yet the country is divided on how to remember the genocide. Memorials and ceremonies to commemorate the genocide are symbolic of different things to different groups of Rwandans. While survivors

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<sup>26</sup> As Mamdani remarks, the assumption here is that every Hutu who opposed the genocide was killed.

<sup>27</sup> A subtext emerges in the commemoration of the dead: genocide must never again happen. The RPF assumes the role as ultimate protector of the Tutsi, and are quick to remind the international community and Tutsi in the region that they have been victims of a merciless world before. The Tutsi nation calls for a return of all Tutsi and Hutu from the Diaspora to build a strong and united future — one that is economically prosperous and democratic. Not all Hutu buy this argument, and many are fearful of returning and being accused of genocide. This fear is not unwarranted when one looks to the tens of thousands of Hutu awaiting trial in over-crowded prisons (Uvin 2001b, 181).

seek justice, the RPF leadership in the GNU have demonstrated a propensity to want to put the past 'to rest'.<sup>28</sup> As the Minister for Unity and Reconciliation, Aloysie Inyumba, stated: "...people have suffered enough. They don't want to talk about genocide, the deaths, the killing. People are looking more into the future: 'how can we change our situation?' That's the preoccupation today" (quoted in UNHCR 2000). This view causes tremendous tensions among survivors who still grieve the loss of family members bear the scars of torture and rape, and who continue to wait for justice.

Any gender analysis of post-genocide Rwanda then, must consider the intersections of gender, ethnicity, class or geography, where women are not 'outside' new political categories of correctness, and where, as illustrated in the following section, some women have gained greater access to privilege and resources than others; a source of further tensions within Rwanda today.

## On The Modern Woman

Rwandan women are considered critical actors in the neo-liberal economic agenda of the RPF. Aspiring to modernize the economy, the RPF dominated GNU has introduced a series of meticulous neo-liberal economic reforms and policies to attract foreign investment and stimulate the diversification of the economy. 'Villagization' programmes (*imidugudu*) has been a strategy, modeled after Uganda, to relocate rural peasants into central locations — freeing up land use and facilitating the delivery of socio-economic services. The Ministry of Women in Development and Gender Equality (MIGEPROFE) has been given good support by the GNU, on the justification that women play a critical role in the economic development of the country. MIGEPROFE has led a successful campaign to introduce legislative and institutional changes to 'bring' women into otherwise male dominated political, economic and social structures.<sup>29</sup>

While progressive legislation and initiatives to empower women may seem like nothing but a positive advancement for Rwandan women, the majority are still not full citizens in the state. In fact, the empowerment initiative tends to rest on women's volunteer work and time and demand she act and behave in new ways. Further, when one applies the genocide framework to assess access to resources, it appears that most Hutu women and new caseload returnees fall short to that of Tutsi and old-case load returnees (Baines Forthcoming b). Women and men are obligated to attend meetings, solidarity camps and animation, form committees and 'volunteer' their time to help 'develop' and empower other Rwandans. 'Mothers' become key to reproducing the idea of a new nation, and filling this nation with new nationals. Their body is again the site of national identity, with men and women assigned tasks in building that nation.

In contrast, the Ministry, their implementing partners and women's committees created by the Ministry to facilitate women's grass-roots participation, are largely composed of elite businesswomen or politically affiliated women, many of whom have returned after long years in exile. Many of these women have assumed high-level political positions and develop strategic plans for action, but in doing so they differentiate themselves from their sisters, considered backward and rural. The GNU assumes responsibility for their 'liberation', and it is here that the dichotomy of modern vs. atavistic women becomes most apparent.

As a result, economic and social tensions have also emerged between Tutsi female survivors and old-caseload female Tutsi returnees. Survivors feel that the *59ers*, forming the majority of the government and emerging elite in Kigali, monopolize the state, military and economy. *59ers* are also suspicious of survivors as complicit in the genocide. "There is always an unspoken question that is asked of survivors", noted Annunciata Nyiratamba [of the widow's association AVEGA], "What did you do to survive? Who was a killer? Who was not? Those questions are always there and it creates its own dynamic between the survivors and the [new case load] returnees" (quoted in AR 1995, 3).

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<sup>28</sup> For example, the flag and national anthem were changed because they were too closely associated with the MRD and genocide, bearing the colours of the party's flag and lines in the anthem that celebrate the 'Hutu' independence of 1963. The new flag, in contrast, was designed to inspire hope for the future. The new national anthem makes no mention of the genocide, based on the logic it would simply be like "thrusting the [a] knife into the wounds" (Local Government Minister Desire Nyandwi in *Flags of the World*). I was informed that the new colours of the flag – blue, yellow and green – are the same as that of the RPF.

<sup>29</sup> For example, a number of critical changes in policy and the constitution have been enacted, including the right of women to inherit and own property, and a gender policy to facilitate gender sensitivity in all government operations. A vast network of women's committees have been organized at every level of government, reserving seats for women inside each level of government authority for women, including 2 seats at the national level.

Group differences and the varying allocation of guilt and innocence, citizen and non-citizen continue to contribute to ethnic extremism in Rwanda. Alienation from the promised nation flows from unequal access to resources, violent repression of dissent and political exclusion, exemplified by the resignation and in some cases murder of Hutu members of government. The RPF leadership have virtually 'hunted down' Hutu refugees and *genocidaires* in the Congo, and violently forced the closure of internal displacement camps and orphanages, as well as forcibly relocated rural peasants into *imidugudus* (villages) (See Dorsey 2001; ICG 2002; Sidiropoulos 2002).

For rural and urban women, pressure to conform to new social constructions articulated by the GNU and international community, policies and programmes is high. While women are 'encouraged' to participate in political and economic forums, they know that non-participation can be pernicious to their welfare and that of their families. When one sees Hutu and Tutsi women working side by side in Rwanda today, one cannot help but wonder how genuine this reconciliation is, given that lack of space in which to articulate anger and/or opposition. This is not to suggest that all women's peace initiatives – local or national – are disingenuous. Rather, it is to suggest that an uncritical acceptance of these roles and activities only serves to reproduce the idea that the atavistic or modern woman in Rwanda is united and homogenous — an assumption that fails to challenge post-genocide narratives that silence, often violently, division and difference. In a word, the institutionalization of race/ethnicity, and the violent scripting of the gendered nation on the body have not been transformed in the wake of the genocide.

## Beyond Good and Evil? Some Concluding Remarks

At this distance we think about the Rwandan genocide as a singular horror, a truth reducible to two unbelievable figures: one hundred days, eight hundred thousand deaths. But for every Rwanda involved – and there was hardly a Rwandan who was not, in one way or another – the genocide meant the particulars of his or her own experience. Jean Marie Mbarushimana told me that he wanted to make a film about the genocide to show Rwandans how it happened everywhere in the country. I said that most foreigners only understood it as a whole; what we had more trouble understanding, and perhaps did not want to understand, was how it happened in this or that corner of Rwanda (Packer 2002, NP).

This working paper has explored dichotomies of extremist Hutu and Tutsi discourses for how they play into competing national visions and in turn, mark the body. For the extremist Hutu, the body is a marker of biological, racial difference that marks an internal and external boundary of the Hutu nation. For the RPF, the body is of one origin. Rwandans are one people and belong to one nation. While such discourses appear to be oppositional and binary, they both lean on the material body to tell some absolute truth about an imagined nation. The (often violent) marking of the body then, is an attempt to inscribe a singular meaning on bodies and the body politic (Nelson 1995, 208-09).

It is in the narrative of the 'absolute' or singular that academics and international policy makers often tend to analyse, speak, negotiate and imagine.<sup>30</sup> When a gender analysis is applied, we can begin to imagine how scripting the nation implies different acts of violence on men and women, or why reproductive capabilities and myths of feminine beauty mark some for extreme forms of gender violence over others. Further, by reading the nation historically, we can begin to understand why the 1994 genocide was targeted against men and women, opposition and Tutsi, as a means of eradicating the 'external other' but also to identify and mark the Hutu nation within the minds and bodies of each Hutu.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Based on such macro-level understandings, the international community have been divided in their official relations to Kigali. On the one hand, governments agree that there is need for a heavy hand in Rwanda given security threats of a Hutu extremist reprisal, and that some Hutu inside Rwanda have linked up with extremists in the Diaspora. Here, international sympathies lie with the new Rwandan elite. On the other hand, there are those critical of President Kagame's policies, particularly given the new government's poor human rights record. These states argue Kagame uses the genocide as an excuse or cover-up for its authoritarianism. As Peter Uvin argues (2001b), these contrasting and contradictory perspectives guide policy and donor practices in the country, with incoherent messages sent to the new government and people of Rwanda. Fundamentally, they reproduce simplistic understandings of the social dynamics in Rwanda today, including gender dynamics and how power operates at the personal level, in the realm of the private.

<sup>31</sup> Thanks to Jennifer Hyndman for pointing out that a geographical approach would also enhance our understanding of the complexities of social relation inside Rwanda, where some communities had higher levels of Tutsi or Hutu based on past migrations and local histories. As Hyndman argued, such an analysis – outside the scope of this paper – would make for an interesting insight into the 'body' politic.

But bodies are not absolute, nor singular. Rather, they are “produced in complex and often contradictory ways” and often act in complex and contradictory ways (Nelson 1995, 209). Power relations are constantly negotiated, shifting and changing, through everyday acts of (often bodily) resistance. There were many instances in Rwanda when a person would kill one person, but save another. Where some killed enthusiastically, and others did so with reluctance and sadness, casting ambiguity on the claim that all Hutu hated and feared all Tutsi to the point of murder. Some refused to kill members of their family, but would kill strangers. Some saved the lives of strangers at great risk to their own lives (DesForges 1999). Some communities formed local defence forces to fight back attackers, or carved out ‘interahamwe-free’ zones (AR 1995, 619-20). Neighbours hid neighbours in their ceilings, in holes in the ground or latrines. Strangers looked the other way upon seeing a Tutsi person hiding in the bush. Some went to considerable trouble to bring food and empty waste for those hiding.

These acts collectively fly in the face of the Hutu extremist attempt to create two categories of Rwandans: the killers and the killed (AR 1995, 627). This third category, as Africa Rights argues, is one not recognized enough by the international community, with the result of affirming the Tutsi two-pronged category that generally follows the Hutu logic: the division of innocent and guilty. “The genocidal extremists have not succeeded. The credit for the extremists’ failure does not lie with the international community: it lies with the Rwandese. The Rwandese have a reason to be proud” (AR 1995, 627).

To counter the tendency to erase complexity and ambiguity in the genocide, I have suggested we might begin with the everyday acts of violence and work towards more macro-level theories of the genocide and beyond. This might involve going outside obvious structures of power – the international political economy, or the institutions of the state – to ask how power operates at a social level, producing nationalist identities and obedient bodies. This paper suggests a connection between the private and public realms, an inter-connection that requires closer analysis and study in genocide narratives. Linking nationalist discourses as contested in the realm of the private, and violently inscribed on the body is one possible means of thinking through the genocide, and potentially beyond it.

For instance, by starting with the ‘everyday’, might one be able to begin moving beyond current obsessions with the good and evil contributing to ethnic extremism in Rwanda today? What if scholars and policy makers focused on the everyday Rwandan, or communities of Rwandans who refused to participate?<sup>32</sup> What can be learned about power in Rwanda from more ambiguous and ambivalent cases of those who participated in the genocide? How are communities working together today to move beyond the still bleeding wounds of the genocide? In a word, what if we invested in an understanding of humanity, instead of reproducing images of ‘Africans in chaos’? How are discourses of extremism silently challenged by Rwandans who reject them, who in fact do not identify with nationalist binaries at all? Does the breakdown of good and evil binaries lie with those Rwandans who live side-by-side, work together, sing together and go to school together, but who are erased in nationalist discourses and most macro-level genocide narratives?

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<sup>32</sup> John Janzen (2000) interviewed several community members of Giti, including the former mayor. Giti was the only commune known to have resisted the genocide successfully. His article provides fascinating insights into the local context and factors which contributed to the successful resistance.

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